

# **Spiritual Writings of Emmanuel d'Alzon**

**Founder of the  
Augustinians of the Assumption**

**and of the  
Oblates of the Assumption**

Translation of *Écrits Spirituels du Serviteur de Dieu Emmanuel d'Alzon*, Maison  
Généralice, Rome, 1956.

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## Preface

Our Congregation, born on Christmas Eve 1850 with the vows of the first religious, has recently had the joy of celebrating its first centennial with fervor and solemnity. This event inspired many academic and religious meetings whose profound studies illustrated the thought and work of the Founder. With great enthusiasm on all continents, our religious saw in these celebrations a providential invitation to deepen their understanding of the entire spiritual and apostolic heritage that was transmitted to us by Fr. d'Alzon. From a practical point of view, this prompted the desire to put at the disposal of all the religious, especially those involved in various ministries, the writings of our Founder which are extremely rich in suggestions and directives, always precise, perceptive and perfectly adapted to all aspects of the modern apostolate.

Several works, for example the *Circulars* and *Meditations*, needed to be re-edited. But the occasion seemed favorable to publish at the same time a good number of unpublished texts which contain much inspiration for our Assumptionist life.

It was already a fortunate consequence of the Centennial that Fr. Henri Bisson published, in his elegant series *Les Cahiers d'Alzon*, the spiritual works of Fr. d'Alzon designed for all those who are seeking perfection and substantial nourishment.

But at a time when we are actively promoting the cause of beatification of Fr. d'Alzon, when we are officially reviewing his writings, when we are scrutinizing the secrets and the motives of his spiritual life and of all of his activity in order to draw from them lessons of supernatural heroism, the General Council deemed it opportune to group into a single practical volume (which will remain very easy to handle despite its 1500 pages, something that will be particularly appreciated by the priests whose ministry obliges them to move about) a selection of writings that are directly intended to guide the formation and the activity of Assumptionist religious. Other texts may be gathered subsequently in another volume and arranged as daily meditations for devout souls.

Fortunately, we were able to entrust the choice and editing of these texts to Fr. Athanase Sage. Well acquainted with Fr. d'Alzon's thought and life thanks to his previous research, he was able to profit from his stay in Rome to directly check the original documents in our archives and to collaborate with the Postulator of the cause of Fr. d'Alzon, Fr. Aubain Colette and the other Fathers of the General Curia. Also, I would like to express here my religious gratitude to Fr. Athanase for the filial love and

critical sense with which he carried out his work.

In thanking Divine Providence who made it possible for us to carry out this project, I rejoice at the thought that his volume will become for all the religious of the Congregation a bedside book spurring them on to greater perfection, to an always more active study of our spirit, and to a constantly renewed dedication to the service of the Church.

Rome, January 18, 1956

Wilfrid J. Dufault, A.A.  
*Superior General*

## Foreword

*On several occasions during the time of Frs. Picard and Emmanuel Bailly, the publication of the complete works of Fr. d'Alzon was seriously considered, but the difficulties of the time and the vastness of the undertaking discouraged these projects. During the generalate of Very Reverend Fr. Gervais Quénard, Fr. Siméon Vailhé published the correspondence of Fr. d'Alzon. The letters from 1822 to 1850 admirably helped us understand the early years of the Founder's life, for which we are grateful.*

*The aim of the present Spiritual Writings of Fr. d'Alzon is more modest. In the absence of his complete works, they offer the Assumptionists to whom they are especially directed a large selection of known and unpublished documents. However, they do not reflect all of the literary activity of the Founder. His correspondence from 1851 to 1880 has hardly been touched. Some day it will need to be published, at least large extracts of it, because the Souvenirs Intimes of Fr. Gervais Quénard have already whetted our desire for it. The same holds true for the writings concerning controversies that recall so many activities undertaken for the cause of the Church.*

*Part I of this volume contains the Directory and the more official writings of the Founder: addresses to the chapters, circulars, and meditations whose earlier editions are now out-of-print. We have added documents which, from different points-of-view, deal with the purpose and spirit of the Assumptionists. The plan of Part II follows the order of the three major objectives the Founder gave the Congregation: piety, institutions, and struggles. It begins with intimate notes and personal secrets extracted from Fr. d'Alzon's correspondence which demonstrates, if need be, that all of his directives emanated from a religious and apostolic life lived in an exemplary fashion.*

*Every choice is obviously open to criticism. Some will be disappointed that this or that document, which they consider to be more revealing of the spirit of Fr. d'Alzon, has not been included. They should know that we deliberately excluded documents that have already been published and that can be easily obtained, like the Instructions du samedi (the Saturday Talks), the Instructions aux Tertiaires de l'Assomption (the Talks to the Assumptionist Tertiaries) whose editions are far from being exhausted, or that are already found in the Cahiers d'Alzon collection now in progress. Certain documents in this book are incomplete and might seem useless, but more often than not they were kept because they*

*mark a step in the development of our spirituality and will be appreciated by the religious who are interested in the more intimate history of the Congregation. Finally, many less-known documents are addressed to Religious Sisters: the Religious of the Assumption and the Oblates, or to pious laypersons. May the Assumptionists not be offended by this. Instead, they should regret that our first Fathers did not transcribe with the same filial piety even more numerous talks that Father gave these people by way of improvisations that charmed them with ideas that were original, often full of humor, always broadminded and profound. Fr. d'Alzon, out of a special devotion to Mary, promoted the vocations of virgins. He counted especially on the help of their prayers and encouraged their fervor with sustained energy. They inspired some of his best works.*

*The publication of these documents, many of which will be a welcomed revelation, does not put in question but rather confirms from all points-of-view our traditional concept regarding the basic principles of the Congregation. Fr. d'Alzon had so intensely imbued them in his first disciples that they very faithfully transmitted them to us. Hopefully, the new generations, which have neither seen nor heard him, will find some fresh ideas in these Spiritual Writings of Fr. d'Alzon that we are making available for the first time.*

*Fr. d'Alzon was constantly searching for catchy phrases that could be easily remembered and that would constantly remind us to be fervent. In 1858, in a letter addressed to Fr. Picard, the visibly inspired expression that already contained the seeds of our entire Directory appeared for the first time: "Remember that the spirit of Assumption is the love of Our Lord, of the Blessed Virgin, his Mother, and of the Church, his Spouse." In 1868, in his address to the General Chapter, he enriched the threefold love by calling it the principal love, the love of the three awe-inspiring Persons of the Holy Trinity about whom he was thought to be more fervently concerned in the final years of his life.*

*Our spirit is linked to our purpose. The purpose of the Assumptionists was already stated at the time of the foundation in our motto: *Adveniat Regnum Tuum* (Thy Kingdom Come). It became more precise in the First Constitutions. But beginning in 1868, out of love for God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and in the midst of the joys and trials of the Church, Fr. d'Alzon explored all of its richness. The vigor of our own religious life, the search for and the improved formation of new vocations, the more permanent organization of the Institute, the promotion of the Third Orders and of elite Christians in view of more effective action, the battles he engaged in for the defense of the Church as he confronted the triumphs of the Revolution and the advent of modern democracies, all these objectives of supreme importance became clearer as he sought to*



*develop the meaning of our motto.*

*May these Spiritual Writings of Father d'Alzon become a bedside book for the Assumptionist Religious! May it help them to keep alive their desire for greater perfection and their fervent zeal for the holiest of causes: the Church of Jesus Christ!*

Rome, November 21, 1955.

Athanase Sage, A.A.

## **Editor's Note**

*Fr. d'Alzon reworked for his Religious the Directory he had composed in 1859 for the Ladies of the Assumption. The Constitutions that were then in effect in the Institute already contained a number of spiritual directives. Out of respect for these official texts in which the spirit of Assumption was already becoming clear, Fr. d'Alzon inserted them in the second and third parts of his Directory as headings of the chapters that treated these same topics. The present edition will underline these two series of texts.*

*The brief commentaries which introduce each chapter as well as the divisions and subtitles are not from Fr. d'Alzon.*

# PART I.

## PURPOSE AND SPIRIT OF THE ASSUMPTIONISTS

# I.

## **DIRECTORY OF THE AUGUSTINIANS OF THE ASSUMPTION**

*The Directory must be the usual subject of  
our meditations and of our self-  
examinations.*

Fr. Picard

*The references (Ref. ES-0000) found at the end of each chapter of this Directory are to the original French text in the Ecrits Spirituels published by the Assumptionist General House in Rome in 1956. However, the English text and the footnotes provided therein are from its English translation (Directory of the Augustinians of the Assumption, NY, 1969), originally translated by Patrick Croghan, A.A., revised and edited by Joseph Grenier, A.A. and Aimé Deschamps, A.A., and further revised by present editor.*

*The biblical quotations are from the St. Joseph Edition of the New American Bible (NAB), except, as indicated, where it was necessary to quote another version in order to respect the French text and its translation of the original Latin quotation.*

## PREFACE

In his preface, Fr. d'Alzon indicates the originality and scope of the Directory, and the manner of its use.

My Dear Sons in Christ,

### **The Originality of our Directory**

The Directory which I now offer you results from the observations and reflections of several years. I have been impressed by certain providential events<sup>1</sup> which, I believe, have helped to give a more specific direction to the development of our Congregation: we take the same holy vows as all other religious, yet we have a distinctive character as religious of the Assumption.

This is not surprising. If, as you surely believe, the existence of our little family has been willed by God, it must have its own specific purpose, and for this purpose it must work.

It is by studying the thought that went into our foundation that you will advance in the perfection to which you are called. The Directory we are putting into your hands will tend to facilitate this work of a lifetime.

### **Preliminary Observations**

The following remarks will reveal the usefulness of these pages:

The first is that the Directory should be nothing more than a practical commentary on the Rule; any deviation from the Rule would be contrary to what we proposed.

Second, its purpose is to instruct you above all on the spirit and dispositions which you should bring to your duties, so that you may always animate them by a supernatural motive.

Third, the Rule is directed to the Congregation in general, but the Directory approaches each religious as an individual, penetrating deep into his soul to make him conscious of the feelings that should animate him and the virtues he must acquire through secret effort and in intimacy with Our Lord.

### **Presentation of the Directory**

The chapters, which are very short, lay down certain principles from which practical conclusions are drawn in the form of an examination of conscience. Those who use this book should find its clear exposition a helpful guide in acquiring the virtues they may lack and in correcting their

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<sup>1</sup> By "providential events," Fr. d'Alzon meant, among other things, the attempts made to unite with other congregations, all of which had collapsed before the originality of the new institute.

faults. It will facilitate the inner activity of personal reflection, for without this, the noblest ideas are worth nothing.

This *Directory* is divided into three parts: part one deals with the *spirit of the Congregation*; part two with the *virtues of religious life*; and part three with the *means of sanctification* offered by the more perfect life you have adopted and the supernatural intention you must bring to the observance of the Rule.

A rapid reading of the *Directory* will contain a certain amount of repetition. If, however, you meditate on its teaching, you will realize that repetition is at least useful, if not necessary, for making you reflect on the basic ideas of religious life.

May Our Lord, of whom you are more particularly the imitators and the instruments,<sup>2</sup> and his divine Mother bless these words, and use them to enkindle in you the desire to attain the full holiness to which you are called.

E. D'ALZON

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<sup>2</sup> In their edition of the *Directory*, the women religious were always called the “spouses of Christ.” To characterize our own relationship with Our Lord, Fr. d’Alzon used the terms “servants,” “imitators,” or “instruments.”

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## **Part One of the Directory:**

# **THE SPIRIT OF ASSUMPTION**

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### **Chapter One.**

## **THE ASSUMPTIONIST SPIRIT**

Basically, our Congregation is consecrated to Christ. Its profound devotion to him naturally includes a love for Mary, his Mother, and for the Church, his Spouse. This threefold love of Christ, Mary, and the Church, is for Father d'Alzon, a particular characteristic of an Assumptionist religious.

The spirit of our Congregation can be expressed very briefly as: love of Our Lord, of the Blessed Virgin, his Mother, and of the Church, his Spouse.<sup>3</sup>

#### **Love for Our Lord**

As a religious, I am the servant of Jesus Christ in a very special way. All the affections of my heart, all the powers of my being must be directed toward him. That is my life: “*Mihi vivere Christus*; For me, ‘life’ means Christ” (Phil 1:21).

Is Jesus Christ everything to me?...Is he the single object of my desires?...Am I prepared to sacrifice everything to him?...Is he the only one for whom I long?...Is my heart completely free, attached to nothing else?...Or do my affections embrace some person or thing which could stifle the love I have for Jesus?

Unless and until my heart is completely free, I cannot be a true Assumptionist.

#### **Love for Mary and the Church**

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<sup>3</sup> Fr. d'Alzon probably was aware of a passage in a letter from Mother Marie-Eugénie de Jésus to Abbé Combalot, in 1837, two years before the canonical erection of the Ladies of the Assumption: “Jesus Christ, Mary, the Church; this is our motto. Why seek another?” Nevertheless, as his writings show, it was only gradually that Fr. d'Alzon arrived, about 1858, at the formulation now found in our *Directory*.



Not only must I avoid everything that might prevent me from loving Jesus wholeheartedly, but at the same time, I must love for his sake everything that was dearest to him. On earth, his two great loves were Mary, his Mother, and the Church, his Spouse, which he purchased with his own blood.

What is my devotion to Mary? Can I call myself her son? Up to now, what have I done to honor her, not with mere formalism or barren emotion, but in a concrete way??...Do I have a sound idea of the wonderful relationship which, through Jesus, could exist between Mary and myself?...

After his Mother, Jesus loved nothing as much as the Church, which is his Spouse and his Mystical Body. What does the Church of Jesus Christ mean for me?...Until now, has she inspired me with feelings of love?...What is the depth of my devotion to her?...What is my gratitude to her?

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## **Chapter Two.**

### **LOVE OF OUR LORD**

Our Lord is the perfect model of all spiritual life— first as God, since to live spiritually is to participate in the very life of God; then as man, since his humanity reflects the infinite perfection of God.

Love of Our Lord involves:

1° Adoration of the Holy Trinity because, as God, Jesus is of one and the same nature as the Father and the Holy Spirit; 2) constant awareness of the presence of God; 3) study of the life of Jesus as man, so that I may be of one mind with him; 4) devotion to the Blessed Sacrament

of the altar in which Jesus, true God and true man, is always present.<sup>4</sup>

### **Adoration of the Blessed Trinity**

Loving Christ means first of all loving God, and to love God means to adore him, as creatures must. We adore the Father in the Son who reveals him to us, and in the Spirit of love given to us: Father, Son and Spirit are pleased to share with us their intimate divine life.

Am I deeply convinced that Jesus Christ is my God?...If so, why am I not filled with awe at the gulf between the fullness of his being and my nothingness?...Why am I still so given to pride before such a Master?...

### **Adoration of the Father**

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<sup>4</sup> As first prepared for the Religious of the Assumption, a newly-founded congregation of Sisters of which Fr. d'Alzon was the spiritual father, the *Directory* bore the following order of chapters for Part I:

1. The Assumptionist Spirit.
2. Love of Our Lord.
3. Awareness of the Presence of God.
4. The Mind of Jesus Christ.
5. Love of the Blessed Virgin.
6. Love of the Church.
7. Desire for Perfection.

When Fr. d'Alzon adapted the *Directory* for his own Congregation, he revised the order of chapters as follows:

1. The Assumptionist Spirit.
2. Love of Our Lord.
3. Love of the Blessed Virgin.
4. Love of the Church.
5. Desire for Perfection.
6. Awareness of the Presence of God.
7. The Mind of Jesus Christ.

This second order of chapters, which we follow in the present translation, is the order used in the edition of the *Constitutions* of 1865, where the *Directory* was inserted between the two sections of the *Constitutions*. Fr. d'Alzon maintained it in every successive revision of the *Directory* in order to insist, it appears, on the unity of our love: our love for Christ is a total commitment that extends to Mary, his Mother, and to the Church, his Spouse.

The last three chapters of this part then bring out the implications of the all-embracing love of Jesus Christ. It urges us on to desire the fullest perfection possible to us, and it is nourished in us by the awareness of the presence of God and by the study of the mind of Jesus Christ.

It is also fostered by devotion to the Blessed Sacrament, as Fr. d'Alzon made clear in introducing this chapter on the love of Our Lord, but the chapter he thus announced was in all probability never written.

Later editions of the *Directory*, following the death of Fr. d'Alzon, reverted to the first order of chapters outlined above.

Jesus Christ is my God, and he became man only to reconcile the world with its offended Creator and to teach me to worship his Father in spirit and in truth. What is my attitude toward God the Father, the author and source of all good and of every perfect gift?...What do I think about the reverence, worship, gratitude and honor that I owe him, in union with the adoration and glory given him by his Son Jesus?...

#### **Adoration of the Son**

The eternal life of the angels and saints consists in knowing the one true God and Jesus Christ whom he sent to make himself known to us. How can I ever thank my Divine Savior for giving me such a great vocation?...How have I shown him any gratitude until now and how shall I show him some from now on?...“God so loved the world that he gave his only Son” (Jn 3:16). When do I intend to give myself to God entirely, undividedly and without reservation, in union with his Son and in the love that Jesus enkindles in me through his Holy Spirit?

#### **Adoration of the Holy Spirit**

The love between the Father and the Son is God himself, and it is through this love, which is the Holy Spirit, that I can love God, “because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us” (Rom 5:5). God the Father has given me his Son, who in turn has given me both himself and the love between him and his Father. He has made my heart a temple, a holy place, in which is enshrined the love which is God. What then must I have in my heart? Could it ever harbor any thought which cannot be set ablaze with the love of God?

#### **Conclusion**

After creating me, God the Father gave me his Son. God the Son gives himself to me so that I may learn to know and adore his Father. The Son also gives me his Spirit, who is God, and who will make up for my ignorance and will cry from within me: “Abba, Father” (Rom 8:15). But when will I begin to enter fully into this new life?...When will I surrender to the torrent of love which the Holy Trinity pours into me?...When will I go to the Father, to the Son and to the Holy Spirit through Jesus Christ, with him and in him?...When will I offer to Almighty God the honor and glory he is entitled to, both in time and in eternity?<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Reacting against the human tendency to revolt, Fr. d’Alzon insisted more and more, as time went on, on the spirit of adoration. In all its forms – whether addressed to the Blessed Trinity, or to the rights of God, or to the Blessed Sacrament – adoration is an essential characteristic of our spirituality. This spirit of adoration of the Blessed Trinity, among other influences, inspired Fr. d’Alzon with his most profound and most original ideas on prayer, education, the modern apostolate, and devotion to the Blessed Sacrament.

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## **Chapter Three.**

### **LOVE OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN**

Our love of Mary flows from our love of Christ: we love her because she was the first one Jesus loved on earth. She was given to us as a model perfectly suited to our human condition and as a mother overflowing with tenderness and power. Her love gives our love for Christ its freshness, its thoughtfulness, and its apostolic zeal.

In his very merciful condescension, Our Lord did not content himself with being our sole model, either as God or as man. He also wanted to give us another model to imitate in the person of the Blessed Virgin, his Mother, who is also our mother, and the most perfect of all God's creatures.

Mary is for me both a model and a mother. She is my model: I must strive to imitate her as much as a religious in pursuit of perfection is capable of imitating the Queen of heaven and earth. Since she is my mother, I must look upon her tenderly and place absolute confidence in her.

#### **Mary, my model:**

Even if I knew about the virtues of the Blessed Virgin only through the Gospel, that would satisfy my needs and I would not need anything else.

#### **a) In the mystery of the Incarnation**

I marvel at the prudence of her question to the angel sent to greet her in the name of God. Her obedience and faith are no less obvious when she says, "I am the servant of the Lord" (Lk 1:38). This faith is the source of all the wonderful things accomplished through her, and this is what Elizabeth points out when she says to her: "Blest is she who trusted that the Lord's words to her would be fulfilled" (Lk 1:45).

#### **b) In her Magnificat**

Mary's hidden depths are revealed in the way she answers her cousin: "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord" (Lk 1:46). Mary's purpose in life is to give glory to God. She finds happiness in serving him and in making known her gratitude for the gifts she received. In Mary's hymn, I find evidence of all that God does for the one who is faithful, and of hope and confidence amid the greatest difficulties.

#### **c) In the details of her life**

I will follow her to Nazareth where she worked quietly at home

with Joseph; to Bethlehem where, in a stable, she gave birth to the Son of God; to the Temple where she offered him to God; into Egypt, where she fled to save him from the wrath of Herod; in Jerusalem where she lost Jesus for three days; in Joseph's workshop, where for eighteen years, she led a hidden life until the time came when Jesus left to preach the Gospel and to die on Calvary. What a wealth of wisdom and inspiration is contained in these details of her life!

**To imitate Mary: a) at the Annunciation**

Do I have Mary's prudence on important occasions in my life?...Am I prudent in my usual relations with others?

Do I obey like her as soon as I see the will of God made known to me either by my Superiors or their representatives?...

Is my faith such that I would accept even the most difficult orders?...Am I willing to develop a serious interior life so that Our Lord can bring to fruition the destiny he has in store for me?...Am I not afraid?...Do I not have doubts? Do I not act cowardly regarding everything that is expected of me?...

**b) In her Magnificat**

Is the glory of God the sole purpose of my life?...Do I dedicate my energies to this end?...

Is God the one source of my real happiness, or do I seek this among created things?...Am I deeply imbued with a purity of intention that goes directly to God, without deviating, either to the right or to the left?...

Have I ever given any consideration to all that God would accomplish within me if only I would let him act?...How quickly would he rid my heart of impurity, vanity and pride, if I did not fear to let him reign supreme!

**c) In the details of her life**

In times of difficulty, do I put all my trust and confidence in my Sovereign Master? Have I relied only on him?...Am I poor like he was in Bethlehem? Do I work like he did in Nazareth?...Have I really dedicated myself to God?...Have I given him my all, as Mary did to Jesus?...Do I like the hidden life?...Have I accepted generously to be separated from persons I love, as Providence has demanded or could demand of me every day?...Have I accepted to be separated even from Jesus?...It is in meditating on the life of this admirable model that I will acquire the spirit of a true religious.

**Mary: my mother**

But Mary is not just a model, she is also my mother. It was on Calvary, at the foot of the cross of her Son, that she adopted me. She accepted me as her child, when, so to speak, she was still covered with the blood of Jesus which was poured out for me, and despite the revulsion she

must have had for me, since it was for my sins that her Son died. From now on, I am her child.

What an honor to have such a mother! What a joy to be part of this divine arrangement?...What a debt of gratitude and what tenderness do I not owe her?...But what are these qualities worth, if I belie them every day by a life completely contrary to that of Mary?

If I love her, I must prove it by doing the things that please her. I must banish from my heart and mind every thought or feeling unworthy of her. I must act toward her with a love so tender that it will prove that I am a true son of hers. Does my way of life prove this?

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## **Chapter Four.**

### **LOVE OF THE CHURCH**

We also love the Church because Christ loved her. Our love of the Church broadens our love of Christ to the dimensions of the whole world. Fr. d'Alzon insisted that we be deeply attached and totally dedicated to the Church.

This love is the reason for the vow which the Religious of the Assumption are permitted to make after a certain time. It consists in dedicating one's self to the extension of the reign of Jesus Christ in souls.<sup>6</sup>

#### **I. Why should I love the Church?**

##### **What the Church is:**

###### **a) For Our Lord**

What is the reign of Jesus Christ if not his continued presence in the Church? To know the extent to which he loved her, I must consider all that he did for her.

For the Church, his Mystical Body, he came down from heaven and became man, was born in a stable, and spent thirty years working obscurely and laboriously as a poor man. He was slandered, persecuted and insulted, and after suffering most atrociously, died on the Cross.

If I love Jesus, how must I not love what he loved most?...

###### **b) For me**

Furthermore, what is the Church for me?...She is my mother. In her and through her, I was born into a new life in the waters of holy Baptism. Through her, Jesus Christ fosters his divine life in me by means of the sacraments which the Church dispenses. Through her, my mind is enlightened with the eternal truth she teaches with infallible authority. Through her, I receive unending assistance and encouragement to lead a good life. Through her is blest the little Congregation to which I belong, this family I have chosen in order to love and serve Our Lord more perfectly. Without her, I would not know as well and I could not serve as devotedly the God to whom I have consecrated myself.

###### **c) For everyone aspiring to perfection**

The Spouse of Christ par excellence, she calls on all privileged

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<sup>6</sup> This vow was proposed at the foundation of the Congregation, but permission for it was not granted by the Holy See. It shows both the unremitting zeal for the Church the Founder required of his religious and the wide apostolate they were to embrace.



souls to become spouses also, and in the fire of the Holy Spirit, invites me to complete that incomprehensible union between creatures and their Creator. What Jesus Christ loves most in his Church are those who sanctify themselves in it. All do not attain the same degree of perfection, but all are called. In his infinite kindness, Our Lord does not wish to work alone at converting and sanctifying souls. That is why he instituted the priesthood. But he also encourages all Christians, according to their position, their strength, and the graces they have received, to work toward the same end.

## **II. How should I love the Church?**

### **a) As my homeland and my mother**

I must love the Church as my spiritual homeland, for it is the society through which I am united to God. I must also love it as my mother, for I am a child of God. The same sacrament that makes me a child of God also makes me a child of the Church.

### **b) In all her members**

Since I should love everything that allows her to live, I must love her visible head, our Holy Father the Pope, who, since the days of Saint Peter, is the unshakable rock upon which the Church is built. While my love must particularly embrace Christ's Vicar on earth, it must also include the entire hierarchy of the Church for whom I must pray earnestly so that its members will receive all the graces they need to fulfill their mission.

I must love those members, who in the flames of purgatory, are now being purified in order to become worthy of seeing God. I must also love and call upon the saints in heaven who are reigning with Christ in the Church Triumphant. My love must bring together these three different parts of the same Church.

### **c) With total dedication**

It is, however, of the utmost importance that I devote myself, to the best of my ability, to the interests of the Church Militant. My prayers and acts of self-denial must be characterized by a special fervor when I remember that I can contribute to the salvation of souls. My general bearing, my actions, my words, my teaching, and indeed any task assigned to me that is directly or indirectly related to this same purpose, must be imbued with the same outlook and the same love.

### **Examen: a) Out of love for Christ**

Do I love the Church because I love Jesus?...Have I thanked my Good Master for all he did to found the Catholic Church to which I fortunately belong?...Have I ever reflected on all the weariness, humiliations and sufferings he endured in order to establish it?

**b) As my mother**

Do I, a child of the Church, love the Church as my mother?...Am I grateful for the new life given me through the Church, for the graces which are my spiritual food, and for the incomparable happiness of being able to nourish myself with the body and blood of my God?

**c) In all her members**

Am I upset by the persecutions of the Church??...Have I asked God often enough to grant it the peace and freedom it needs? ...Have I prayed fervently enough to the saints in heaven to come to our help?...Have I prayed as I should for the souls in purgatory? Do I have enough compassion for these poor souls?...Have I prayed for our Holy Father the Pope, asking God to help him govern wisely?...Have I prayed for the bishops and the priests dedicated to the salvation of souls?...

**d) With total dedication**

In mortifying myself, have I been fervent enough to obtain the conversion of souls, especially of the people with whom I am regularly in contact or who have been particularly entrusted to me?...Do I have that fiery love which caused King David to grieve so much when he saw sinners offending God?...Have I tried hard enough to be kind, thoughtful, and gentle in dealing with a soul in need of conversion and whom I failed to reach because I did not have the courage to become better myself?

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## **Chapter Five.**

### **DESIRE FOR PERFECTION**

Fr. d'Alzon lived in the radiance of the love of Christ, Mary and the Church; from it he drew clear and practical conclusions. Love seeks likeness: Our Lord, his Blessed Mother and the Church urge us continually to be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect.

#### **Consequences of our love of Christ, Mary and the Church**

Lovers seek to please the ones they love. If my heart belongs entirely to Jesus, I must seek to please him, and this desire must be on a par with my love for him. What he desires most is that I be holy. Therefore, if I have only a weak desire to be perfect, it's that I love him too little.

God alone is absolutely perfect, yet Our Lord directs me to imitate him: "You must be made perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt 5:48). The holy human nature of Jesus is also my model. Mary too is a model I must imitate. Therefore, when do I plan to get down to it seriously?...Is not religious life the way of perfection?...

Do I have a precise idea of the perfection God expects from me?...Have I studied this perfection to which I must strive in the perfections of God himself and of his Son, and in the virtues of Mary?...Do I realize the full extent of my duties and of all their implications?...Rather, am I not a lukewarm, lazy and bored religious?...Do I pay attention to that small inner voice which reproaches me for my perpetual weakness?...Have I given up all that holds my heart captive?...Have I removed the obstacles that hinder my spiritual progress? Have I tried to figure out what these obstacles are?...Have I ever seriously got down to work on this?...Perhaps I have not even taken the first step?...

#### **Holiness and dedication**

Perfection and dedication are, in a sense, one and the same thing. Am I dedicated, am I passionate about doing what is right?...Am I willing to sacrifice everything in order to attain the perfection Our Lord expects of me?

I may not be capable, at first, of making great sacrifices, but can I not start with small ones? This indication of my goodwill can only move God to strengthen me and give me the final mastery over my unruly human nature.

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## **Chapter Six.**

### **AWARENESS OF THE PRESENCE OF GOD**

Adoration of God's infinite perfections and contemplation of his marvelous handiwork create in us a habitual awareness of his presence. This is the sign of real love of Christ and sure proof of spiritual progress.

I must think constantly about what I love most. If I love Our Lord, I must constantly think of him. But since he is God, it is especially as God that I must keep him ever present in my mind and heart.

#### **Perfection of Christ as God**

Jesus is my God and, as God, he is the fullness of being: "It is he who gives to all life and breath and everything else...In him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:25, 28).

He is infinite perfection and beauty itself, and he has marked our souls with the beauty of his being: "Let the light of your countenance shine upon us" (Ps 4:7). Sin, however, has stained this soul created in his likeness. The best way to restore this lost beauty is to acknowledge my nothingness and to leave myself open to the divine influence of grace by paying constant attention to the presence of God.

God is my supreme good. I must therefore seek to get closer to him. My happiness should be to possess him.

#### **Living in the presence of God:**

##### **a) He is the fullness of being**

Am I generally aware of the presence of God?...When I am, do I realize that I owe him everything?...Am I convinced, as much as I can be by faith, of the fullness of his being and, so to speak, of the fullness of my nothingness?...Do I realize that my body, my senses, my heart and my mind all come from him, subsist in him, and would disappear at the merest bidding of his infinite will?

I do not touch anything that is not the work of God and that does not belong to him. Everything around me reminds me, or at least should remind me, of him.

Am I attuned to this voice of all creatures which redirects me to their creator?...Do I stand respectfully in the presence of a God who sees me always?...To what extent do I stand lovingly and gratefully in the presence of a God who has given me everything that I possess?

##### **b) He is infinite beauty**

God is infinite beauty. He wanted my soul to reflect this beauty,

but original sin once destroyed this gift, and personal sin destroys it every day. In his ineffable goodness, he wants his grace to restore this pristine beauty in me. He also wants me to cooperate in this work through my own efforts. But to do so, he wants me to get closer to him, and, by reflecting on his perfections, to reproduce them in myself, insofar as I can, by the virtues I must acquire.

Am I doing this work?...Are my eyes fixed on my divine model so that, by imitating him, I may repair my damaged soul?...Have I tried to unite myself to God in such a way that, by attaching myself to him, I shall be, as the Apostle said, "*of one mind with him*" (1 Cor 2:16)?

**c) He is the ultimate good**

God is goodness itself; in fact, he is the ultimate good. My happiness should consist in longing to be with him throughout eternity. But if I am happy about having such a great gift, why am I not more preoccupied about it here on earth?...Why do I not think about it constantly?...Why does my mind wander elsewhere?...Why, in order to possess this perfect gift, do I not become perfect myself?

Lord, grant that I may always walk in your presence and, in so doing, become perfect!

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## Chapter Seven.

### THE MIND OF JESUS CHRIST

Our souls are made to resemble the Blessed Trinity through the holy human nature of the Son of God. If the first characteristic of perfection is to adore God, the second is to reflect in our souls, through Jesus Christ, his beauty and perfections. We must constantly and lovingly study the teaching, the mysteries and the actions of Our Lord, in order to know and appreciate his mind and heart.

Before I can love Jesus Christ, I must know him, and to know him I must study his perfections which are revealed in the Sacred Scriptures, of which he is the ultimate fulfillment: “Christ is the end of the law” (Rom 10:4).

I may study Jesus Christ either in his teaching, or in his mysteries, or in his actions here on earth.

1° *His Teaching*—I can find his teaching either in his own words or in the writings left by the apostles and the evangelists. As God, Jesus is the eternal truth and the transcendent word. The more I meditate on divine truth, the closer I shall come to Jesus Christ, to God himself.

Since Jesus became man to bring me the light and strength I need in order to go to God, how do I revere his teaching? [I must direct all my efforts to consummating this union with God, which is my supernatural destiny and which will be achieved by the graces I receive from my Savior.<sup>7</sup>]

What respect have I had until now for the teaching of Jesus Christ? How do I read the Gospels, and what importance do I attach to them?...Do I appreciate the merciful kindness of God, who, not content with becoming man, clothes himself in human words so that I may understand them?...What use have I made of such clarity?...What value do I give to the explanations of Christ’s words given me by his ministers?...What effort have I made to meditate on this teaching, to apply it to myself, and to make it my own spiritual food? If I attach no or little importance to these things, need I wonder that my outlook is so earthbound, and that I have so little understanding of heavenly matters?...

2° *His Mysteries*; The divine aspect of the life of Jesus Christ concerns infinite things, and is therefore full of mysteries. But these mysteries, undoubtedly beyond my understanding, are the object of my

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<sup>7</sup> This sentence, included in the 1935 Ed., is not found in any of the manuscripts of the men’s *Directory*.

faith and a wonderful lesson for me. Their human aspect captivates me because it can be more easily understood; their divine aspect lifts me up and transports me into a most intimate relationship with God.

I should study these mysteries throughout all my life because it is through Jesus Christ that I can learn how to know God inasmuch as he is knowable here on earth. But, since they follow one upon the other in the life of Christ, I can, according to what appeals to me, become attached to one or the other: the incarnation, the nativity, the hidden life, the preaching, the sufferings and humiliations, the death and the resurrection. Or, if I have an inner urge to do so, I can concentrate for a time on a particular mystery which seems to provide me with the most suitable spiritual nourishment.

What do I think of these mysteries? Are they no more than objects of curiosity for me, or do I examine them lovingly as blessings bestowed by Christ?...Have they aroused a sense of adoration<sup>8</sup> in me, or have I found them distasteful?...Do I not find it easier to say that I cannot understand them, than to try to draw from them, in humble faith, the particular lessons Jesus placed there?...

3° *His Actions*—All that Jesus did on earth was for our instruction. There is not an instance in our own life which cannot be related to his divine life, each detail of which teaches his followers how they should live.

There is no word, no request, and no emotion which we cannot sanctify by uniting them with those of Christ. Our Divine Master fulfilled all justice in order to teach us how to do it ourselves. To do this, I need only to accompany Jesus in spirit throughout the years of his earthly life.

Have I sought to model my own life on that of Jesus Christ?...How have I studied the details of that life, the model of my own?...Am I convinced that no aspect of my life is too small to be enhanced by a supernatural thought?...“What I just did was to give you an example: as I have done, so you must do,” says Jesus (Jn 13:15).

My life should therefore be a facsimile of the divine original. Is it?...If not, why not?...Am I afraid that I might discover something that would condemn me or force me into the practice of virtues that frighten my natural instincts?...When am I going to decide, once and for all, to follow Jesus wherever he wishes to lead me?

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<sup>8</sup> A single manuscript (the first manuscript of the women's *Directory*) reads “admiration” which seems to be more in keeping with the context.

## **Part Two of the Directory:**

### **THE VIRTUES**

*Fr. d'Alzon paid particular attention to those virtues which flow more directly from our love of Our Lord and of the Blessed Virgin and which the Church demands above all from his apostles. The life of an Assumptionist, which should be the blossoming of the threefold love, is a life based on the theological virtues. We unite ourselves with God and we serve him in faith, hope, and love. Each of these three virtues is accompanied by related virtues, typically Christian, which are more perfectly suited to our dual goal of personal holiness and apostolic service.*



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## Chapter One.

### FAITH

Because it is linked to our love of Christ, faith is of prime importance. From it flow hope and charity, just as love of Mary, his Mother, and love of the Church, his Spouse, proceed from our love of Christ. Among the virtues, faith is the first characteristic of the Assumptionist spirit.

Faith is a virtue by which I believe all the truths that the Church proposes for my belief, because God, the infallible truth, has revealed them.

#### **Faith attracts Jesus into my soul**

In a sense, Jesus, the origin and of my faith, cannot be my model in the practice of the faith. But I have Mary, who became the Mother of God when, by the most sublime act of faith that a creature can make, she cooperated wholeheartedly in the mystery of the Incarnation. Faith can bring about a similar mystery within me.

What is the object of my faith? Is it not divine truth? And is it not through the light of Jesus Christ, the eternal Word and infinite Truth, that I believe?...By faith, I attract Jesus into my heart where he lives in me, as Saint Paul desired: “May Jesus Christ live in your hearts through faith” (Eph 3:17).

How strong and vigorous is my faith?...Do I realize how fortunate I am to have the faith and to be a Catholic Christian?<sup>9</sup> Do I appreciate the teaching of the Church, which enables me to know God as I should?...Meditation on the chief mysteries of my faith should be my staple spiritual food: do I often make acts of faith in these mysteries?...Am I sufficiently grateful to God for having made me a son of his Catholic Church?...Do I try, as a religious should, to gain an ever-deeper knowledge of the great truths of our faith?...

If I have had the occasion to teach them, have I not sometimes substituted my own ideas and personal interpretations for the doctrine of the Church? Is this because I am too attached to my own ideas, or because I have been influenced by the faulty thinking of certain pious individuals who believe that, because they follow certain practices of the Church, they are experts in theology?

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<sup>9</sup> The next sentence in the 1935 Ed: “Do I have any idea about the value of truth?” was deleted by Fr. d’Alzon.

**Faith introduces me to the supernatural order**

The first consequence of faith is to introduce me to the supernatural order and to enable me to enter into it, if I so desire. Faith shows me how God himself sees and evaluates things, at least those that have a direct bearing on my salvation.

Have I sought to appreciate things just as God does? Have I tried to draw from the mysteries of the Trinity, the Incarnation, the Redemption and the life of Our Lord, the practical guidelines they contain? If so, have they succeeded in giving a meaning to all my actions by linking them to God and to the intentions of his Son who became man for me?

Have I, perhaps because my education was not particularly Christian, had too little esteem for the truths the Church teaches, the practices it encourages, and the objects it venerates? Have I not, in matters I considered of little importance, opposed my own judgment to that of the Church, and even taken a certain pleasure in raising objections?

Finally, would I be ready, like the martyrs, to shed my blood rather than renounce my faith in Christ and in his Church? Indeed, on occasion, even among my brothers, have I not been ashamed to do something that expressed my desire to live by the faith because I feared to be ridiculed?

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## Chapter Two.

### HUMILITY

In the light of faith, two virtues emerge: humility and obedience. As Assumptionists, we have our own way of understanding and practicing these virtues which form us in the likeness of Christ, the foundation of our religious life, and which confer on us a distinctive spiritual character.<sup>10</sup>

#### I

##### **Its practice at Assumption**

Of all the virtues, humility is surely the most indispensable to an Assumptionist religious, because if it is true, as St. Paul says, that knowledge puffs up, then we are bound to be exposed to very grave temptations arising from the type of work we will be doing. The danger will lurk in the very good expected of us. Therefore, we must constantly strive, by being humble, to perform all our actions with the purest of intentions, lest we substitute self-satisfaction for the glory of God, which should be our sole objective. Consequently, we must constantly lift our thoughts toward him who should be the source and goal of all our actions, for fear of finding our reward in the personal satisfaction we had in accomplishing them, as good as they were in themselves, but which we might not have sufficiently directed toward God.

##### **Foundation of our religious life**

Humility will rid us of seeking only ourselves. Good works done for personal gratification, and not simply to please God, expose us to the danger of hearing these terrifying words: “Look, you serve your own interest on your fast day” (Is 58:3).<sup>11</sup>

Humility will be the principle on which our obedience is based, no matter how difficult the sacrifices demanded of us, because our lack of self-confidence will make us understand our need to be led, and being aware of our own weakness will increase our trust in God.

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<sup>10</sup> The Constitutions of 1855 contained many spiritual considerations, especially on the Christian virtues. In accordance with the desires of Rome, all of them were removed from the text of the Constitutions of 1865. To preserve these developments, already approved by five general chapters, Fr. d’Alzon incorporated them into the corresponding chapters of the second and third parts of the *Directory*. In the present edition, they are placed under the Roman numeral “I.”

<sup>11</sup> New Revised Standard Version of the Bible (NRSV). This translation is closer to the original Latin and French texts as quoted by Fr. d’Alzon than the one found in the New American Bible.

Humility will be the principle on which is based our openness of heart toward our Superiors when we discuss with them our faults, our temptations, our difficulties, our needs, in fact, all our spiritual ailments. It will help us to accept all orders, all assignments, even the lowliest, and the most disgusting situations. It will give us a reverence for the time-honored traditions of the community, even when their meaning escapes us. It will curb our tongue and promote the seriousness that befits a religious. It will give rise to the modesty he must have in his relations with his brothers and with other people.

Finally, with humility constantly reminding him about how contemptible he is, it will lead him to accept contempt out of love for Our Lord who suffered so many insults, and he will have the strength to become, in the hands of God and his representatives, a docile instrument, ready to do anything that will contribute to the extension of the Kingdom of God.

## II

### **Humility proceeds from faith which shows me:**

#### **a) My nothingness**

The light of faith shows me the perfection of God and my own nothingness. God by himself is everything, and I by myself am nothing. The more I seek to study God with the help of faith, the more I am overwhelmed by his glory, and, by comparison, my nothingness seems to fade, so to speak, into deeper insignificance.

If I am convinced of this, how can pride fit into my life?...It simply cannot and, for that reason, pride is insufferable, whether it takes pleasure in itself or seeks to win the approval and applause of others, or gives in to its arbitrary whims and demands, or retreats into solitary and gloomy selfishness.

If God is everything, I am nothing; I must attribute everything to him and never seek my own glory. Yet I am proud, vain, demanding, and susceptible. Though these faults do not all manifest themselves in me at the same time, I either discover them successively, or my soul is particularly tarnished by one or another of them.

#### **b) My sin**

Not only am I nothing in terms of where I come from, but my being is tarnished by sin. Sin introduced in my God-given being an incalculable disorder. Sinner that I am, I deserve only the anger and just punishment of God. Despite the fact that he has forgiven me and purified me in the blood of his Son, I repay his kindness by rebelling against him every day. My sins have turned me into a rebellious monster.

Nothingness, sin, ingratitude, that is the truest definition of what I am before God.

### **Examen**

When I recollect myself, do I at least know how to humble myself, to stay where I belong, and to be ashamed of my situation?...In short, am I humble?...Am I aware that, because of my sins and ingratitude, I owe something to the just and loving God who has been offended? Do I know how to abase myself?...Am I ashamed of my sins?...Do I keep my place, which is the last place of all?...In order to rid me of my pride, Jesus subjected himself to every kind of indignity; do I try to imitate my Master by accepting those inevitable and humiliating blows to my self-esteem?...Do I welcome and even seek opportunities to destroy my pride and vanity?...Demanding as I am, do I realize that I have a right to nothing?...Sensitive, do I accept with good grace whatever irritates me?...Selfish, am I finally convinced that everything is not centered on me?...

Once again, am I humble?...Do I perform acts of humility?...Do I welcome humiliations in order to be humble like Jesus?

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## Chapter Three.

### OBEDIENCE

Through faith, our religious obedience is modeled on the eternal obedience of the Son to his Father.

#### I

##### **Christ the model of our obedience**

A religious gives up his right to worldly possessions by his vow of poverty; he surrenders his body and his senses by his vow of chastity; and he makes a gift of his entire self to God by his vow of obedience. This vow is the primary bond of religious life and completes the total gift of himself. Its *raison d'être* lies within the adorable Trinity, in the eternal obedience of God the Son, the uncreated Word, to the will of his Father.<sup>12</sup>

This is why Jesus wanted to be known from the very beginning of the world as the Lamb of sacrifice; he himself says, through the Prophet, “To do your will, O my God, is my delight, and your law is within my heart!” (Ps 39:9 Vulgate).

In the prayers of Holy Week, the Church repeats what Saint Paul teaches us, namely that Christ became obedient for us even unto death on the cross.

If our obedience is to be acceptable to God, it must be humble, gentle, prompt, and faithful, without complaint or negligence.

#### II

##### **Homage to the rights of God revealed through faith**

Faith is an act of the intelligence by which we accept the truth revealed by God. It teaches us what we are to believe, and consequently, how we are to live. In making known the relationship between God and ourselves, it points out our duties toward him. God is the sovereign Master of all things and we are his servants; by grace, he makes us his children. On both counts, we are absolutely dependent on him.

But our eagerness to acknowledge this situation can go beyond what is actually commanded; we can seek to discover his wishes and turn them into laws for ourselves. Obedience then takes on a special note of perfection and love which manifests itself in the taking of a vow, the first bond of religious life.

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<sup>12</sup> From all eternity, the three divine Persons together decided the Incarnation, and the Son who was to become man accepted the divine decree. See Fr. d'Alzon's meditation on the excellence of obedience.

In this sense, obedience is the sacrifice of my will to do only the will of God, which is made known to me through my Superiors.

#### Examen

I have made the vow of obedience; how have I kept it, up to the present time?...Have I completely given up my own will, so that I obey without reservation or distinction?...Do I not quite often criticize inwardly the authority and the rights of my Superior and the extent of his powers?...Do I submit my judgment, even regarding the Rule?...Have I not sometimes discussed with my brothers the decisions taken by the authorities?...Am I obedient to the Superior placed over me, or to those in charge of the various tasks to which I am assigned?...Have I the attitude that led Mary to say, “I am the servant of the Lord. Let it be done to me as you say” (Lk 1:38)?

When tempted to disobey, have I remembered that Jesus Christ, who was God, accepted orders from his Father<sup>13</sup> and became obedient unto death, death on a cross, though he was not obliged to do so?

Am I convinced that, though strictly speaking, I am obliged to obey only formal orders, true obedience accepts even the slightest indications of the wishes of my superiors?...Do I not, in fact, have to be told the same thing over and over again?...Have I not been profuse in alleging all types of reasons for obtaining permissions which my Superior does not wish to grant me?...Have I not sidestepped and quibbled over orders or even over some text of the Rule?

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<sup>13</sup> 1935 Ed.: “accepted the orders of his Father.” None of the manuscripts of the men’s *Directory* has this expression.

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## Chapter Four.

### HOPE

Like Mary's intercession, hope is a virtue of mediation, founded on the merciful omnipotence of God. It sustains us in all our trials, assuring us of the help of divine grace.

Hope is a virtue by which we firmly believe that, by basing ourselves on the merits of Our Lord Jesus Christ, and by making good use of the graces of God in this life, we will possess him for all eternity in the next.

#### I

##### **Its practice at Assumption**

We shall therefore place our trust in God alone, never in any created thing. Evangelical poverty will be the external proof of our hope, from which we shall also draw the true spirit of humility, with its distrust and contempt of self. Hope will give us the spirit of prayer, leading us to ask for the graces we need to observe the law of God and his counsels, convinced as we are that whatever is not God, or does not relate to him, is not worthy of us.

##### **The effects of hope**

Practiced in this way, hope will give rise to a deep gratitude to God for his gifts and will help us to always keep in mind the words of the Apostle in which he recommended that we thank God for everything that happens to us: "Give thanks to God the Father always and for everything" (Eph 5:20).<sup>14</sup>

Hope will be the reason why we place complete trust in Jesus amid all our difficulties. Before his Passion, he said to his Apostles, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, trust also in me"<sup>15</sup> (Jn 14:1). No matter how great our trials might be, we know that he will never desert us if we remain loyal to him, for he promised us persecution along with victory: "If they persecuted me, they will persecute you too. In the world you will have hardship, but be courageous: I have conquered the world"<sup>16</sup> (Jn 15:20 and 16:33).

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<sup>14</sup> This paragraph was deleted by Fr. d'Alzon when he last edited the *Directory*, but it was reinserted in the 1935 edition.

<sup>15</sup> New Jerusalem Bible translation (NJB).

<sup>16</sup> New Jerusalem Bible translation (NJB).



### **Predispositions inspired by hope**

In view of all this, the religious of our small family should remember:

1° Never to pray for anything that is not directed to the greater glory of God.

2° Never to ask to be relieved of the trials which God permits to come our way, unless being delivered from them will contribute to the further extension of the Kingdom of God.

3° While searching to be relieved of their temporal afflictions, they should seek only what will facilitate the service of God, to which they should be entirely dedicated.

4° To find their happiness, their strength and their rest in the love of the Cross by which Jesus saved the world.

Finally, our religious should be deeply convinced that their trials are nothing when compared to those endured by Our Lord Jesus Christ. If they love this good Master, they must forget their own hardships in light of those he endured himself and of those to which the Church, his heavenly spouse, is exposed to every day. They must do like a child who quickly forgets his little aches and pains if his mother becomes seriously ill. It is in this spirit that the religious of the Assumption, while completely forgetting themselves, will offer up their hearts and their capacity for suffering, both during the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and before Jesus present in the tabernacle, to atone for the crimes committed against God and the Church.

## **II**

### **Hope reaches out:**

#### **First to God**

Hope shows us God as the goal of all our striving. On our own, we cannot reach him; it is only by his grace that we can possess him. God is the supreme good toward whom we aspire, thanks to our innate desire for happiness. Even when we do not know him, he wants to give himself to us as a reward: "I am your shield; I will make your reward very great" (Gn 15:1). By faith, we learn what God is and what we owe him; by hope, we reach out to him as the source of all richness and perfection, and as the infinite beauty, the splendor of eternal glory, the author of all love and joy, and the goal of all our efforts.

#### **Second to grace**

Not only can I can possess God, but I must hope to do so one day, if I use the means his kindness has put at my disposal. On my own, this would be impossible, but in him who strengthens me with his grace, I can do all things. Indeed, hope is based on the grace which Jesus Christ merited for me. Without grace, I am powerless, but with grace all things are possible to me. Two very important practical consequences follow

from this:

1° Since I can achieve nothing without grace, I am presumptuous if I imagine that I can achieve something on my own. Grace is all I need, but I do need it. I must make every effort to receive it, and I must count on it in all the circumstances of my life.

2° Since I can do all things with the help of grace, I am foolish and ungrateful if I ever give way to discouragement or despair. The Lord is with me; whom shall I fear? I must never allow either of these feelings to enter into my heart.

Therefore, I must have a very high esteem for the grace won for me on the Cross by my divine Savior. It was purchased with his blood, and will get me into heaven. If I cooperate with it and allow God to bring to fruition through this grace the plans he has for me, then it is my greatest treasure here below, just as God himself will be my treasure in heaven.

#### **Examen:**

##### **a) About God, the first object of my hope**

Is hope firmly fixed in my heart as it should be for a religious?...Is my only desire to be in the presence of God in heaven?...Have I tried hard enough to understand that I will find complete happiness in God alone, and that he is my eternal inheritance?...Do I realize that in giving my heart to anything created, I am turning aside from my true destiny?...

Do I understand the folly of letting myself become attached to created things that serve as a bond tying me to earth and that stop me from reaching out to heaven?...Have I ever put all my trust in God alone?...Have I asked God for his grace?...Have I relied only on his grace?...Have I not been presumptuous at times?...In the bottom of my heart, have I not thought that I am the source of my own goodness?...I may undoubtedly have uttered some humble words on occasion, but did they express my innermost thoughts?...Is it not because I overestimated my own strength that God has often allowed me to fall?...

##### **b) About grace, its second object: Confidence**

Do I really believe that grace can help me?...Inclined to discouragement, my nature has often been used by the devil to convince me that I was no longer capable of any good, that I had abused too much of the graces given to me, or that God had either refused to give me any more or to give me enough. Have such ideas not often brought me to the brink of despair?...

#### **Esteem**

Finally, have I treated the grace of God with all the respect it deserves?...Did I receive it properly?...Have I scorned it?...Did I not find it too demanding?...Have I not been distracted from the pious thoughts that have come to me from my readings, my meditations, and my communions?...Have I not feared that I would have to take many more steps if I were to do what they were suggesting?...Have I not been

terrified by the thought of all I would have to give up if grace ever took full possession of me?...

**Abandonment**

Where do I stand today?...Have I definitely resolved not to place any obstacles to the grace of God in my soul?...Am I finally convinced that, when God offers himself to me as my everlasting happiness, and when Jesus Christ helps me to reach that goal, offering me the grace he paid for with his blood, the least I can do is abandon myself unreservedly to all the holy demands of that grace, in the hope of receiving the divine recompense it will bring me?...

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## Chapter Five.

### PRAYER

Prayer is a cry of hope. Though we can do nothing without grace, prayer provides us with grace, and the initial grace of prayer is never refused. Our best spiritual weapon is prayer.

#### I

##### **Prayer directs us to God in all things**

The life of Assumptionist religious must be one of prayer and recollection in the presence of God.

Prayer must be their most effective weapon in resisting temptation, in combating the enemy of salvation, and in surmounting all of the obstacles opposed to good works. They will be pleased to find that they have made spiritual progress. Since prayer is the principal means by which they can make that progress, they must walk constantly in the presence of God in order to become perfect. This awareness of God's presence will be the reason why they are recollected and modest.

They will make every effort to pray to God everywhere in order to be able to adore him, to thank him for his gifts, and to atone for the scandals that surround us on all sides. They shall pray especially for the intentions of Our Lord, happy to unite their prayers to those which the eternal High-Priest offers constantly to his Father on behalf of sinners. As loving children of the Church, they shall pray for all its needs, and in so doing, they shall quicken their zeal to extend the reign of Jesus Christ.

If the spirit of faith pervades their prayer, as it should for all religious, they can be sure that it will be more powerful than anything inspired by human prudence. They shall undertake nothing without commending themselves to God, mindful, at the same time, that gratitude is the most efficacious means of obtaining further graces. They must thank Our Lord for everything that happens to them, be it good or evil. St. Paul tells us that all things cooperate for the greater good of those who love God, and he reminds us that we should give thanks for everything: "Give thanks to God the Father always and for everything" (Eph 5:20).

#### II

##### **Prayer in the light of hope**

Our hope of attaining heaven is based on grace, a gift that God freely bestows on us without our asking. He nevertheless wants us to ask

him for all the graces we need, even the one to be able to pray better day after day. "Ask and you will receive," he says (Jn 16:24). We must ask, and the more we ask, the more we will receive, provided we know how to ask. God is only too eager to shower his graces upon us. If we do not receive them, it is because God sees our attitude to be such that, if he granted our request, we would merely add ingratitude to our other sins. He wants us to desire and request his grace, and to dispose our hearts to receive it profitably.

Considered in this way, prayer is my yearning for God, the cry of my poverty and misery. It comes from the depths of my sinfulness and rises to the throne of divine mercy. It is primarily a petition, but it is also an act of atonement that can purify me. It thanks God for favors received, and thus merits receiving others more abundantly. It is a worshipping of God, the sovereign Lord of all good things, who is himself the Supreme Good. However, from the point of view of hope, prayer is first and foremost a petition. I must approach God profoundly convinced that I have nothing and that I must look to him for everything. This admission is pleasing to God who loves to answer the cry of the poor.

#### **Examen**

How have I prayed until now?...Have I considered grace, which will enable me to possess God, as the most valuable of all gifts?...Have I been careful not to waste any of those I have received?...Has my prayer been accompanied by all of the purity of intention needed to make it pleasing to God?...Have I sincerely desired that my prayer be answered?...At times, have I not been afraid of grace, and therefore afraid of asking for it?...Have I prayed with perseverance?...Have I not very often become weary of asking because I had the impression that I was not being answered?...Is my prayer respectful?...Have I not let my imagination fill me with distractions and lull me into indolence?...And I'm surprised that God does not hear me!

Do I really want to possess God, to be united with him and to enjoy him forever?...Am I ready to make all the sacrifices he will demand of me so that I can obtain from him the intimacy which he grants to those who are faithful to his grace, and which is one of the most certain guarantees of my eternal union with him?

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## Chapter Six.

### POVERTY

Poverty is the reverse side of hope. It detaches us from earthly things and, following the example of Christ, places us at the service of the poor. It brings us back to the ways of the poor, which are the only ones which receive God's blessings. Poverty puts us to work, strengthens our character, and provides us with the freedom we need to carry out our apostolate.

#### I

##### **By poverty we imitate Christ**

The richness of our religious family must consist in the most complete detachment from material possessions. Our Lord said, "The foxes have lairs, the birds in the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head" (Mt 8:20). We should be ashamed of the unnecessary comforts with which we surround ourselves. Though Jesus did not practice any excessively big public mortifications during his apostolic life, we should at least imitate his detachment from everything. Similarly, we should be scrupulous about the use of our time. Like the poor, we must work to earn a living.

#### II

##### **Poverty in the light of hope**

The desire I have to possess God must make me disdain everything that is not God, or that does not refer to him. It is true that I can detach myself from worldly goods while still retaining them, but it is better to give up everything and to sanctify this renouncement with a vow. Consequently, I cannot dispose of anything without the permission of my Superiors. Whether I gave great sums of money to the Congregation, or whether I merely gave it my person and my work, I own nothing.

If I am a good religious, this poverty will make me happy. I must not only practice it according to the prescriptions of the Rule, but also interiorly to the extent that my love of God inspires me to do so. No man can serve two masters. Interior asceticism is the best way to allow God to take complete possession of my soul. It is therefore up to me to determine the extent to which I am poor in spirit.

Do I not sometimes look back with regret at the good things money can buy?...Am I not attached to some object, as small as it may be?...Have I really given up everything?...Do I not continue to desire or

miss certain things which I no longer have?...Is my poverty that of Christ, whether in the manger in Bethlehem, at work in Nazareth, or during his public life when he did not have a stone upon which to rest his head?...Does the holy poverty of my Master so attract and charm me that I long only to live as he did?...Does my spirit of poverty lead me to be particularly careful of objects, books, clothes and the other things that have been entrusted to me?...

**Poverty implies work**

Poverty implies work. If I am poor, I must work to earn my living. Just as work is the punishment for sin, it is part and parcel of a poor life. How have I made use of my time? Scrupulously?...Am I not lazy?...Have I not often drifted sluggishly?...Do I not become so easily bored with work that I simply waste my time?...How will I render an account of it one day? How will I use it from now on, keeping in mind that by losing my time in useless conversations and otherwise, I am offending poverty and causing my brothers to do the same?...In this regard, have I not many bad examples to reproach myself, and how will I make up for them?

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## Chapter Seven.

### CHARITY

Charity is the total gift to God of our capacity to love. When practiced in the Church, it perfects our resemblance to Christ who gave himself completely. For Fr. d'Alzon, it is also a great mystery of unity: the spiritual unity of all the holy people of God; the ineffable unity of the soul with its Creator; and the cordial unity of the members of our religious family.

#### I<sup>17</sup>

Charity, for us, includes especially: a love of the Blessed Virgin, the Mother of Jesus Christ and our special patroness; a love of the Church whose interests we make our own; a devotion to the holy angels, and especially to the guardian angels of our brothers; and a deep regard for the souls that have been entrusted to our care.

Our love of neighbor will manifest itself in the kindness with which we endure the evil he might possibly inflict on us, in our readiness to render him all the services that our vocation entails, in our cordiality and frankness, but above all in the zeal we have in everything we do for the salvation of souls.

Finally, charity will make us discover that spirit of unity which Our Lord asked of his Father after he had instituted the Holy Eucharist and when he was about to offer his life for the redemption of mankind: "May they all be one (Jn 17:21?...so that your love for me may live in them, and I may live in them)" (Jn 17:26).

Since God is love, as St. John tells us, and since he who abides in love abides in him (Jn 17:21), we must constantly appeal to the Spirit of love, who proceeds eternally from the Father and the Son, to unite us in a perpetual bond to God, to Jesus Christ, to his Church, to our brothers, and to all those entrusted to us.

#### II

##### **Union with God through charity**

I must not only hope to possess God, but by the grace of Our Lord

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<sup>17</sup> Taken from the Constitutions of 1855, the first three paragraphs of this section were originally placed at the beginning of this chapter. However, Fr. d'Alzon deleted them when he last edited the *Directory*, but they were subsequently restored in the 1935 edition.



I must love him with all my heart and soul, and become united with him in charity. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God and God in him. This is the sole purpose of my life: to abide in God through charity.

By myself, I am nothing and I can do nothing. But by the grace of God, I can expand the capacity of my heart and obtain the grace given to Solomon about whom it is said that God gave him “a heart as vast as the sand on the seashore” (1 Kgs 5:9, NJB). By his grace, my heart can contain the ocean of love. I can be united to God and perfected by that unity, according to the expression of our divine Savior.

This union is undoubtedly a mystery. But each day, as the priest mingles water with wine in the chalice, he asks God to make us “share in the divinity of Christ, who humbled himself to share in our humanity.” That is exactly what I must do. All my thoughts, desires and aspirations should be directed toward this sublime objective.

While hope represents God to me as my ultimate good, charity represents him as the sole object of my love: I say to the Lord, “You are my God” (Ps 30:15 Vulgate). He is the one, and that’s all I need. I should be ready to give him all that I am. And if every Christian must love God above all things, what must it be for the religious, his consecrated servant! O how pure my heart must be, how aflame it must be with love, and how ready I must be to sacrifice everything that is not God!

Is my heart entirely pure?...Does God alone reign in the depths of my being?...Does charity command all my thoughts and actions?...Have I not sometimes taken back certain parts of my heart and given them over to created things?...Between God and me, are there any barriers?...

#### **Obstacles to charity**

Mortal sin destroys the love of God in the soul. Without insisting on the terrible thought that I have destroyed my love of God by mortal sin, must I not admit that I have too often undermined that love by venial sin?...Have I not some sinful habit which, though venial, tarnishes my soul in a very dangerous way that jeopardizes the love I owe my God?

God’s is a jealous love. Have I always submitted to the holy demands it makes on me?...Have I not secretly dreaded these demands and taken refuge in countless pretexts to avoid understanding and carrying out the imperious requests of the Holy Spirit within me?...

The love of God is like a flame that dies out when it is not nurtured. Have I sufficiently nurtured the flame of divine love in me?...Can I say that it becomes a little brighter in me from day to day?...Have I culpably allowed myself to become lukewarm?...What has become of my first fervor?...What have I done to preserve and increase it?...In a word, faced with God’s love for me, can I truly say that I love him?...

### III<sup>18</sup>

#### **Fraternal charity**

If love of souls is a distinctive characteristic of our little family, the religious must love especially their brothers and their Superiors, just as the Superiors must have a particular affection for the religious entrusted to their care. Everyone should therefore have for each other a charity full of tenderness, esteem, respect and seriousness, and must consider the members of our small Association as living images of Christ, temples of the Holy Spirit and children of Mary, the mother of us all. They should avoid all undue familiarity, all particular friendships which are the bane of common life, all animosities which loosen the bonds of holy friendships, every word that could wound, and any relationship that could give rise to scandalous talk. When necessary, they should correct one another fraternally. And, unless some action is public knowledge, they should avoid repeating what they would have seen and that might scandalize others, except to the persons who have a strict right to be informed so that the evil might be repaired as quickly and effectively as possible, without too much damage being done to charity.

In their ongoing relationships, the brothers will remember that their greatest affection, after Jesus Christ, the Blessed Virgin, the Church and our Holy Father the Pope, is our little Congregation. But they must love it in God, without any of the exclusiveness that would see good only in what we do ourselves.

Their conversations should be useful and edifying, and should avoid malicious gossip, angry arguments, and everything that could offend modesty and proper religious behavior. They should not visit each other's rooms without permission. They should avoid anything that could hurt brothers from other countries. Finally, they should strive to become worthy of what the Holy Spirit said of the first Christians: "The community of believers was of one heart and one mind" (Acts 4:32).

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<sup>18</sup> This section, like the first three paragraphs in section I, is taken from the Constitutions of 1855.

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## Chapter Eight.

### THE SPIRIT OF SACRIFICE

Love helps us to make daily sacrifices.

#### Calvary, model of my sacrifice

Just before going up to Calvary, where he offered his life on the Cross for the redemption and salvation of mankind, Jesus said to his Apostles: “What I just did was to give you an example: as I have done, so you must do” (Jn 13:15).

This sacrifice of himself, which Christ renews unceasingly on our altars, must be the model of my own. I must sacrifice myself for God. The heart-felt tenderness I have for him to whom I have consecrated my life means little, if I am not always ready to give up my own interests for his.

If I do not offer God the weaknesses of my nature which constantly reappear, if I am not totally dedicated to his service, if I am calculating, if I place restrictions on what I am asked, if I am not willing to take on the difficult tasks assigned to me, then I am not worthy of him.

After so many Masses where I shared in the sacrifice of the Cross, and after so many communions where I received the divine Victim in my heart, have I yet acquired the spirit of sacrifice, have I yet become a sacrificial victim? I can become one in so many ways: by obedience, charity, mortification, zeal, and by all the virtues that a religious should practice to the highest degree.<sup>19</sup>

In a word, have I sacrificed myself? Have I, once and for all, placed myself on the altar of sacrifice, saying to my Savior: “Make of me a sacrificial victim, just as you offered yourself, so that I can prove my love for you, as you have proved yours for me?...”

Am I really a victim?

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<sup>19</sup> This paragraph is not found in Fr. d’Alzon’s final manuscript of the men’s *Directory*. It was included, however, in the first copy of that manuscript. To all appearances, it was not deleted by Fr. d’Alzon but was omitted through the error of a copyist; it was restored in the 1935 edition.

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## Chapter Nine.

### CHASTITY

Chastity is dear to us because it is the strongest proof of our love for Christ and for his Virgin Mother. It is also the most perfect fruit of our worship of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament.

#### I

##### **Chastity and union with God**

It is in their devotion to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and in their filial love of the Blessed Virgin that the members of our small family will draw the strength they need to keep this vow of chastity. They must avoid useless and dangerous conversations and try to be fully occupied at all times. They must always be ready to answer for their actions, and they must remember that the apostolic life is, after all, the life of the angels whose virtue of chastity they must practice. Unless their hearts are transparently innocent, they can never hope to enjoy an intimate relationship with him who is the eternal and pure image of the Father.

Superiors have the special obligation not only to make sure that this virtue is observed by their brothers, but also to anticipate the occasions and eliminate the circumstances which could damage their reputation.

The religious must remember that, since the goal of their vocation is God and to be with him eternally, it is only by being completely pure that they will achieve their goal. As Our Lord said: “Blessed are the pure in heart: they shall see God” (Mt 5:8, NJB).

#### II

##### **Chastity in the light of charity**

I can offer God no greater proof of my love for him than to renounce even lawful affections, by practicing chastity.<sup>20</sup> I should treasure this virtue, which makes me more completely the child of Mary and the friend of Jesus.

Need I say more about chastity, which prepares me to see God face

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<sup>20</sup> Fr. d’Alzon had deleted the translation of the Gospel verse, “Blessed are the pure in heart?...” which had been quoted in Latin in the preceding paragraph; the 1935 edition restored it.

to face? Is it not better for me to remain silent and to regret, from the bottom of my heart, any thought, word or action, which might have tarnished, even slightly, the beauty of this delicate flower?

As I kneel before the Blessed Sacrament, I will ask my Divine Master to give me a great love of virginity, and I will ask the holy angels, who surround his throne, to make my heart and soul as pure as theirs.

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## Chapter Ten.

### MORTIFICATION

Our charity will bear fruit, according to Fr. d'Alzon, to the extent that we are willing to suffer. It was by suffering in union with her divine Son that Mary, the purest of all creatures, cooperated with him in the mystery of our redemption.

#### I

##### **The spirit of self-denial**

The religious should know that by entering the Congregation, they have sacrificed their life to God. This life no longer belongs to them. Whether it be long or short, their only desire should be to devote it to carrying out God's will. Consequently, they cannot plead ill-health as an excuse for not doing what has been commanded; likewise, if they are told to take care of themselves, they must obey, so as to do what is most pleasing to God.

The religious is a soldier who must fight or lay down his arms, according to what his commanding officer tells him. He must never lose sight of the ultimate goal of his calling, which is victory over himself and over the world, and the preaching of Christ crucified. Penance is necessary in order to achieve self-mastery, but it should be in keeping with the spirit of our Institute. It will consist especially in the practice of poverty, prayer, study, patience in the apostolate, regularity, and the support of one's neighbor.

Fasting and other corporal austerities are not as necessary as they are in other congregations, because our apostolic work for the salvation of souls will take its toll on our bodies. Though extraordinary penances are by no means forbidden, they are nevertheless recommended.

One of the reasons that will encourage us to make use of a few extraordinary penances will be to obtain either the success of our work or the conversion of sinners, or to make reparation for the scandals afflicting the Church. To spur us on, we will frequently meditate on the Passion of Our Lord, Jesus Christ.

#### II

##### **Penance in the light of charity and chastity**

"My beloved is like a lily among thorns," says the heavenly spouse (Sg 2:2). If I want the flower of my chastity to retain its radiance, I must

surround it with thorns, that is, with the spirit and practices of mortification. Though mortification of the flesh is not one of the special characteristic of Assumption, it is part of all Christian living, a protector of my chastity, and a proof of the fervor that should inflame a minister of Jesus Christ.

As a Christian, I must remember that I am a sinner and that by means of penance I must make reparation for my sins. As the friend of Christ, I must try with all the zeal I can muster to preserve my greatest treasure. As a religious, I must share all of the feelings of Jesus and bring about within myself what is lacking in his Passion.

#### **Examen**

For me, mortification will serve to atone for my sins, to safeguard my chastity, and to deepen my love for the suffering Christ.

##### **a) Atonement**

Do I realize the debt I have incurred by my sins?...If I were to die, do I have any idea of the length of time I would spend in Purgatory, or of the suffering I would have to undergo?...And yet I cannot tolerate even the least embarrassment or inconvenience. I cannot put up with anything. It is only with great reluctance that I offer up the innumerable hardships that life provides and which could be, if I choose, mortifications of great value.

##### **b) Safeguard**

What have I done to maintain my virtue of chastity? What precautions have I taken to protect it from the slightest impurity?...Have I nothing to banish from my conversations or my readings?...Do I try to control the wanderings of my imagination, or the things I look at?...How have I reacted to the austerity of religious life?...Have I not carefully avoided everything that would inconvenience or tire me?...Have I not dreaded these thorns of mortification which Jesus nevertheless expects me to put around my heart?...

##### **c) Love**

Since I am especially consecrated to the service of the altar, it is unthinkable that I should stand before my Divine Master without pleading with him to have pity on his people, and without offering myself as a victim to appease his anger. What am I willing to add to my petition so that it will be heard?...Jesus won the salvation of sinners on the cross, amid the most atrocious sufferings of body and spirit. What can I offer for sinners, in union with Jesus?...

If I am leading an especially contemplative life before Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, that life must be one of mental prayer and penance. What have I done until now to live such a life and to prepare myself for it in the spirit of the Rule?

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## Chapter Eleven.

### ZEAL FOR THE SALVATION OF SOULS

Spurred on by our vocation and our motto, “Thy Kingdom Come,” we spend ourselves in the service of mankind. Our zeal for the salvation of souls is the outstanding consequence of our charity; it is also the crown of the virtues we cultivate and underlines their apostolic orientation.

#### I

##### Total dedication to mankind

Since the spirit of our Order<sup>21</sup> is especially apostolic, we must endeavor, insofar as it depends on us, to acquire the virtues demanded by such a sublime vocation. For that reason, we shall remember that Our Lord became man, not to be served, but to serve, and we shall make every effort to consider ourselves as humble dependents of those we are called to serve. They have rights over us, and the only one we have over them is the one Jesus granted us so that we might guide them, with the means at our disposal, toward their own perfection.

This attitude of dependence gives rise to a respect which will be a safeguard for them and for us. It is in Christ that they are dear to us, and it is the love that Jesus Christ showed them by shedding his Blood for them that will be the measure of the efforts we must make to lead them to the holiness to which they are called.

Although each religious should be willing to undertake any assignment suggested by his Superiors, within the limits of our Institute, the Superiors should nevertheless weigh carefully the various aptitudes, the natural talents and especially the graces which each religious has received, so as to appoint them to the work in which they are most likely to succeed.

##### Qualities of our zeal

All our activities must be characterized by as much disinterestedness as possible, and by an absence of vainglory. We shall rejoice over the good done by others and which we were not considered worthy of doing. And whenever others have done God’s work, even something we thought we had a right to do, let us say with Moses: “Would that all the people were prophets!” (Nm 11:29).

In our zeal we shall be humble, mindful of the words of Christ to

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<sup>21</sup> The word “Order” indicates Fr. d’Alzon’s desire to take solemn vows and to found a real order of monks.



the apostles: “When you have done all you have been commanded to do, say, ‘We are useless servants. We have done no more than our duty’” (Lk 17:10).

We must also be persevering, for Holy Scripture gives countless examples of the way in which God’s plans succeeded, even when they seemed to be hopeless. The less man relies on his own resources, the more God supplies for what is lacking.

## II

### **The goal of our religious life**

For us, contemplation and action are always united toward the same goal: working toward the extension of the reign of Jesus Christ by praying in silence like Mary, our Mother, or by engaging in works that contribute to the welfare of the Church. Regardless of the community in which I find myself, I am therefore always working to bear witness to my personal love for Jesus Christ and to attract souls to him.

### **Personal traits required by the fourth vow**

I will pursue especially the following goals,<sup>22</sup> but, before God, I must first reflect on the outlook of a religious who is about to make, or has made, his fourth vow:<sup>23</sup>

1° I must adopt the thinking of Jesus Christ when he was born: “I have come to light a fire on the earth. How I wish the blaze were ignited!” (Lk 12:49). I must be determined to ignite this divine fire in souls, and my life must be constantly focused on this goal.

2° I must always bear in mind the sufferings of Jesus during his lifetime. His work, his exhaustion as he traveled from town to town, his bathing in sweat; the rebuffs, contradictions, persecutions and ingratitude he met with; his prayer and his agony in the Garden of Olives, the anguish of his Passion, the tortures, the thirst, the abandonment by everyone at the time of his death: all these things will give me an idea of the love our Savior had for souls and the price he paid to redeem them.

3° I must love souls and constantly devote myself to them. I must love the souls of the just because of their virtue, hoping that their holiness increases more and more for the consolation and glory of Our Lord. I must also love those who have sinned, longing with my whole heart for their conversion, so that the sacrifice on Calvary will not have been in vain for them.

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<sup>22</sup> In the original text, intended for the Religious of the Assumption, Fr. d’Alzon had just enumerated the various works of the Sisters. When he revised the text for his Congregation, he retained only what could pertain to his own religious.

<sup>23</sup> This is in accordance with the desire expressed in the Constitutions of 1855 and 1865. Permission for this vow was denied by the Holy See.

#### **The exercise of our zeal**

In this respect, my zeal will be tempered by prudence, if I am in charge of children, or of retirees, or of anyone who needs my help. It will also be guided by obedience. I must remember that, in trying to do too much or to act too quickly, I may find that my efforts are amounting to nothing, or are being poorly carried out. Still, my enthusiasm should be as intense as my Master's, and I must be ready to do all in my power for the salvation of souls, according to the guidelines of my Rule and my Superiors.

If I am assigned to a novitiate, it will be by prayer and penance, with due permission, that I must show my love for souls. Before the Blessed Sacrament, I will pour out my longings and my tears for the sanctification of the just, for the conversion of sinners, for the triumph of the Holy See, for the holiness of the clergy, for the freedom of the Church, for the embarrassment of the enemies of God, and for the victory of Jesus Christ, even in this world.

This should be my outlook, but is it, as a matter of fact?...Is my piety not self-centered?...Is there not something exclusive about my activities, whereby I have attached myself to this or that person, not for God's sake but for the sake of that person?...Is my heart eager to love Jesus Christ and all that he loves?...Am I willing to pray, to suffer, and to fight?...Weak as I am, do I still want to be an apostle of his?...

## **Part Three of the Directory:**

### **MEANS OF SANCTIFICATION**

*From his treatment of the virtues which supernaturalize the way we act, Fr. d'Alzon turns to the actions in our daily life which put them in practice and develop them. Honesty and faithfulness, so frequently recommended by the Founder, must characterize our way of life.*

*The first three chapters describe the atmosphere of any life of perfection: a life of discipline, under the supervision of superiors, wrapped in silence.*

*The fifteen chapters which follow put forward, from rising promptly and eagerly to going to bed “where I am doing my apprenticeship of the grave,” the interior dispositions which should inspire everything we undertake. Chapters 19 to 22 deal with the means of control and purification which are required of an Assumptionist vowed to perfection.*

*Finally, the chapter on “the interior life” is presented as the natural conclusion of our Directory.*

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## Chapter One.

### THE RULE

The Rule is a commentary on the Gospel and is meant to guide the day-by-day unfolding of our religious life.

The Rule may be considered from two points of view: its contents, and its spirit.

#### **Its contents**

The contents of the Rule are all of laws laid down by the Church to determine the general obligations of religious life; and to these must be added the general observances of the Congregation. Experience, time, the prudence of the founders, and the approval of the Church have shown themselves to be most useful in sanctifying souls. Since I have the good fortune of being called to religious life, particularly for the sanctification of my soul, I must always have the greatest respect for the Rule.

#### **Its spirit**

The spirit of the Rule, however, is more important because it is a commentary of the Gospel that points out not only what is necessary to go to heaven, but also what is recommended to become perfect. Additionally, it is a commentary adapted to the needs of my soul in terms of my personal vocation. No Rule could ever take into account every single approach to sanctity: ideals differ among individuals. But what all the Rules insist on is following the Rule according to its spirit.

Where do I stand in this regard?...Do I not break the Rule quite often for the flimsiest of pretexts?...Am I not often incredibly weak in complying with its demands?...Have I not often been pharisaical in the way I live it?...Have I not grumbled about it and rebelled against it?...When will I decide to follow it lovingly, for my own sanctification and the edification of my brothers?...When will I realize the harm I am doing and the scandal I am causing by not following the Rule?<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> One of the early manuscripts adds the following paragraph, separating it by a dash from the preceding text: “Our Lord Jesus Christ followed a Rule point by point during his mortal life, fulfilling all that the Prophets had said of him: ‘We must do this in this way if we would fulfill all of God’s demands’” (Mt 3:15).

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## Chapter Two.

### SUPERIORS

We must be guided in our religious life, not only by the Rule but also and especially by our Superiors, in whom faith sees the representatives of God.

The Letter to the Hebrews says: “Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over you as men who must render an account. So act that they may fulfill their task with joy, not with sorrow, for that would be harmful to you” (Heb 13:17).

In fact, who are my Superiors? They are God’s representatives, responsible to him for my salvation and for the Congregation, or that part of the Congregation which has been entrusted to them. They are answerable for my soul, and this is one of the strongest reasons I have for obeying them. Even if I act on my own, I still cannot relieve them of their responsibility for my soul, because the vow that binds me to them, also binds them to me. I am a member of a society; I am not free, any more than my Superior is free. Since he received his authority from the Congregation, he is held to exercise it. According to his position, he must watch over the common good, either of all the communities, or of the particular one to which he is appointed. Just as I have no right to disturb order and peace, he has no right to allow them to be disturbed.

Have I not often caused grief to my Superiors?...Have I not blamed and criticized them, and felt that the government of the communities, the offices, the classes, and the religious would operate much more smoothly if I had been consulted?...Have I not communicated my opinions to others?...Have I not taken pleasure in pointing out the weaknesses and failings of my Superiors?...What has this achieved except to flatter my spirit of independence?...And what has my perfection gained from all these revolts, and from the bad humor, whims and sulkiness in which I have sometimes over-indulged?...I have grieved my Superiors, and spread gloom in the community; I have been lacking in obedience; I have loosened, if indeed I have not broken, the bond of my vows.

Will I ever be simple, meek, flexible, and considerate in obeying those who are in charge of me? Since their responsibilities increase according to the greater number of religious entrusted to them, they must be able to find joy in offering to Jesus Christ, whom they represent and whom I should see more often in them, fervent servants the Good Master wants to give them in order to guide them through his representatives.

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## Chapter Three.

### SILENCE

“Without silence, there can be no recollection; without recollection, there can be no interior life.” In today’s world more than ever, periods of silence are necessary for a true religious life.

#### I

##### **Interior and exterior silence**

The more we are required to live in the world, the more necessary it becomes for us to be alone from time to time.

Every year, the Brothers will make a ten-day retreat, and every month they will have a day of recollection, according to what the Superior has arranged. However, they should remind themselves that it is especially by recollecting themselves that they will be able to maintain their union with God and their love of Our Lord Jesus Christ, who must be the constant subject of their efforts.

Insofar as their duties allow it, they shall observe the rule of regular silence, always trying to withdraw within themselves in the midst of the distractions which their duties sometimes impose on them. Thus, it will be obvious that when they do break silence, it is because they are absolutely obliged to do so.

#### II

##### **Its importance**

Silence is one of the greatest strengths of the religious soul. According to the Prophet, “Your strength lies in silence and in hope” (Is 30:15), that is, in prayer. These two great means of sanctification are complementary: without silence, there can be no recollection; without recollection, there can be no interior life. If I talk too much, how can I expect to hear the voice of the Lord my God within me?...How can I hope to be united with him?...How can I prepare for this union, either by recalling the past, which would make me detest my sins and purify my soul, or by carrying out acts of loving adoration, which require great peace and solitude?...

##### **Breaking silence**

Why do I break silence? When I look for answers, I find several. First, there’s my fickleness that makes me unwilling to concentrate; little by little, I begin to dislike serious ideas which tire me and wear me out; I

find them too burdensome. There's also my imagination which is inclined to stray, and to discuss its meanderings; my curiosity which wants to know everything and questions everything, whether it concerns me or not; my spirit of criticism, whose tribunal is always set up to judge everything that is said and done around me.

Then, there's my independence which always comes up with a thousand objections for not doing what I am told, though it would be a lot better if I said nothing, obeyed in silence, and followed the example of Jesus and Mary. Additionally, I'm afraid to look at myself as I really am, which leads me to busy myself with everything except my own faults. I feel the need to talk at length about the way I feel in order to justify myself, when it would be much simpler for me to admit openly that I am proud, that I am a coward, that I am disagreeable, or any other fault that I might have.

Will I learn to imitate the silence of Jesus during his Passion or in the Blessed Sacrament?...When will I learn to speak a little less to creatures and to listen a little more to God?

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## Chapter Four.

### RISING

To rise habitually at a fixed hour helps prepare a day truly consecrated to God.

The first sacrifice to offer to God in the morning is that of my sleep. Since my health is often used as a pretext to rest a little more, obedience alone must settle the question between laziness and imprudence.

As I get up, after having first offered my heart to God, I must remind myself that I am getting out of bed as Our Lord came out of the tomb, that is to say, with my energies renewed and determined to begin a new life.

St. Paul tells us to “put on Christ,” and so I ask Jesus to clothe me with his virtues and his grace. I will put on my religious habit and wear it as an armor that will remind me that, in spite of my weaknesses, my life is dedicated to the service of the Church. If any thoughts of vanity cross my mind, I will remind myself that, in God’s eyes, clothing is the humiliating sign of the sin in which I was born. Finally, I will pray to the Blessed Virgin, my guardian angel, and my patron saints, and I will try to prepare myself for whatever awaits me throughout the day.



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## Chapter Five.

### MENTAL PRAYER

For Fr. d'Alzon, there are three exercises of prime importance that must begin our day: mental prayer, the Mass, and Holy Communion.

#### **A long struggle**

In mental prayer, the soul struggles with God until it is captivated by him and purified by all the trials that he sees fit to send us, and until it reaches a perfect union with him, at least insofar as this is possible here on earth between our nothingness and his infinite Being. I need not be surprised, then, if this form of prayer tires me, wearies me, arouses distaste and is accompanied by dryness and suffering. However, I must rise above these difficulties and go to God in the way he wishes.

Do I arrive on time for morning meditation?...Am I not often present there as if I were not?...Have I not wasted my time and allowed my mind to wander?...I have spent time there, but what was I doing?...Do I concentrate on what is useful, or do I lose myself in fruitless, impractical contemplation?...

#### **Conditions for its success**

If I do not conclude my prayer with a deeper sense of faith, hope, charity, humility and sorrow for my sins, it might very well be that the time I spent in prayer was so much time lost. If I do not become more holy every day, if my faults do not disappear, if my character does not improve, and if my religious virtues do not develop, then have not even my longest and apparently most fervent prayers been sterile?

What resolutions have I taken at the end of my prayer?...And after so much time spent in meditation, what has become of these resolutions?<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Here again, an early manuscript adds a paragraph, separating it by a dash from the preceding text: "Unless the soul is completely purified here on earth, it will inevitably pass through purgatory. I must therefore choose between a merciful, earthly purgatory, in which my soul is cleansed through mental prayer, and the purgatory of justice after death. If I do not choose prayer, do I not show contempt for God's proffered graces?"

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## Chapter Six.

### THE MASS

The Mass is the very center of my religious life. It is the moment in which I must renew, in union with Christ, my total consecration to God.

The Mass reproduces without bloodshed the sacrifice of the Cross. It is the moment when I should offer myself as a sacrificial victim to God.

If each day, when I am present at Mass or am celebrating it, my mind went up to Calvary and I stretched myself out on the Cross with my divine Master, entering in spirit into his sufferings, his offering of himself, and the death he underwent for me; if I expressed once again the burning love I would like to have for him; if, in union with his sufferings, I accepted unreservedly those he chooses to send me; if I prayed for all these intentions: for sinners, the souls in Purgatory, our Holy Father and the Church; if I offered him my entire life and all that it involves; if I then withdrew like Mary coming down from Calvary, with all the thoughts that filled her mind in that terrible, solemn moment, what would my life be like the remainder of the day after everything that my faith had shown me and after the promises I had made?

How have I attended mass until now?...What has been my attitude? ...Has it been half-hearted and just a matter of routine?...What distractions have I not had!...What resolutions have I taken?...were they energetic, and how have I kept them?

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## Chapter Seven.

### HOLY COMMUNION

I could not remain faithful to my religious consecration if Christ did not come within me to give me the strength I need.

If Holy Communion is the most precious moment in the life of every Christian, it must be even more so for a religious, who must have a very special love of his divine Savior?

I receive this Sacrament several times a week, or every day if I say Mass. How is it that I have not yet become another Christ? Yet, herein lies the very mystery of communion: to enable me to become one with him.

How do I prepare myself for his coming “under my roof”?...Is my heart pure?...How keen are the flames of my love?

What happens when he is within me?...Do I acknowledge him as my sovereign Master?...Do I ever refuse him anything?...Can he peer into the depths of my innermost being without my being ashamed of what is hidden there?...Do I want my soul to be crystal clear so that the light he brings can shine through it?...Have I given myself completely to him, as he has given himself completely to me?

After communion, what type of thanksgiving do I make?...What results has this had?...Since I have been nourished with God’s own body and blood, my life should reflect God. Has it in fact changed enough to bear witness to the coming of God within me? <sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> This last paragraph is found only in the women’s *Directory*.

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## Chapter Eight.

### STUDY

Education in all its forms is the strongest means we have of extending the reign of Christ. Study, therefore, is one of our most important obligations.

When God expelled Adam from paradise, he said to him: “By the sweat of your face shall you get bread to eat” (Gn 3:19). Though these words refer primarily to work in general, they can have a special meaning for me, if I am called upon to pursue further studies. I must never forget that all work is considered a punishment and a penance. That should prompt me to study courageously even subjects I do not like. This is a strict obligation, not a matter of taste.

The farmer does not choose the work he does, and it is not up to me to choose mine. I have simply to accept that part of the field of knowledge that I have been asked to study. Also, since Jesus sanctified work during his stay of eighteen years in Nazareth, I should follow in his footsteps. Because he worked out of love for me, the least I can do is work out of love for him.

Since God is the God of knowledge, and knowledge is one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, I can unite myself in a very special way to this divine Spirit by studying with faith and humility, which he will give me if I ask for them.

How have I studied?...Have I not avoided the studies that were assigned to me?...Have I not sought to choose them according to my fancy?...Have I not wasted my time by studying useless subjects?...Have I worked with a spirit of penance and mortification?...Have I studied in union with Our Lord when he was in Nazareth?...Have I studied with the help of the Holy Spirit by invoking him as I begin to study?...Have my studies not discouraged me?...Have they not puffed me up with pride?...Do I work to please God, or simply for my own satisfaction?...In studying, have I searched for God, the eternal Truth who is present in all truth?...Have I tried to find him in everything I study, mindful of these words of Scripture: “Christ is the end of the law” (Rom 10:4)?

If I love my divine Master, it will be my delight to discover him in whatever form he appears to me. Studying with a spirit of faith is certainly a means of uniting myself to him.

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## Chapter Nine.

### MANUAL WORK<sup>27</sup>

The Son of God worked for many years with his hands. Manual work can help me better understand and love the workers and the poor, to whom I must bring his message.

It may be that my contribution to the Congregation is the work of my hands, for example, as sacristan, infirmarian or lay brother, etc.; but this is no reason for me to underestimate my state of life.

What did the Blessed Virgin and St. Joseph do during their lifetime? How did Our Lord himself spend the first thirty years of his life? St. Joseph worked to earn a living for himself and his family. Mary looked after the household for Jesus and Joseph. Jesus himself, from his earliest years, helped his mother and his foster father. What wonderful company I keep, if I work in union with them, if I nourish myself with the thoughts that must have preoccupied them, if I try to enter into their intentions, if I imitate their recollection and silence, and if I work the way they worked.

There is no work that cannot be modeled on that of Jesus, Mary and Joseph. All three were familiar with toil that was difficult, lowly, and not particularly appreciated by men. Joseph worked laboriously to feed the Son of God, just as I work to feed the servants of Jesus Christ. Mary took care of the most humble details of the material upkeep of the home, just as I should in order to promote the good done by the Congregation to which I belong. Jesus himself, in taking on very arduous tasks, teaches me that nothing should seem difficult to me if I wish to be like him.

When I am engaged in manual work, do I have the habit of placing myself in the company of the Holy Family?...Have I not grumbled about what I am told to do?...Have I brought to my work a spirit of penance, humility, and love?...And if I have not sanctified my work with thoughts inspired by my faith, should I not fear that, in his eyes, I labor in vain?

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<sup>27</sup> In all the early manuscripts of the men's *Directory*, this chapter follows immediately the one on Study. When Fr. d'Alzon adapted the sisters' *Directory* to his own religious, he was thinking especially in terms of the novitiate. At that time and until recently, manual work was the primary occupation of the lay brothers and corresponded to the studies of the choir religious. During the novitiate, all the novices, whether choir brothers or lay brothers, had to become aware of their essential obligations. He therefore placed the chapter on Manual Work immediately after the one on Study. The new order of the two chapters was meant to bring this out more clearly.

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## Chapter Ten.

### TEACHING AND SUPERVISING STUDENTS

By my teaching, I help to form Christ in the souls of my students and to bring to maturity the fruits of their baptism, thereby sharing in the teaching mission of the Church. Teaching is complemented by supervision. If anywhere, it is in this most thankless aspect of education that a true supernatural spirit is necessary.

#### I. Our purpose in teaching

We seek to extend the reign of Jesus Christ especially through teaching understood in the broadest sense of the word, including junior and senior high schools, seminaries, and higher studies. We will not engage in primary education, except if we do so free of charge.

We will strive to form Christians who are deeply attached to the Church, and to point out the absolute necessity of a living unity, not only in doctrine, but also in discipline, with an ever-growing respect for the authority of the Sovereign Pontiff.

In fact, one of the greatest evils of modern times is the spirit of separation which tends to dissolve the bonds between society and the human intelligence. Accordingly, one of the reasons for the existence of our little Congregation is found in the efforts of its members to bring minds and hearts ever closer, through teaching, to the common center which Christ has given to his Church.

#### II. The attitude I must have as a teacher

Teaching, then, is one of the most efficacious means of fulfilling the vow to extend the reign of Jesus Christ.<sup>28</sup> Whether my relation to this task is direct or indirect, I should be happy to be considered worthy of such an honor.

Yet, how have I prepared myself for teaching?...Have I courageously studied the subjects I must teach, however difficult and dry they may be?...Have I given sufficient thought to the fact that, without a great spirit of faith and humility, I could very well be teaching my own ideas, not those of Jesus Christ, and that, unless I always remain faithful to the influence of the Holy Spirit, I could at any moment let my own ideas take the upper hand?

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<sup>28</sup> See note, Part I, Chapter 4.

In class, have I not been too elated by my successes, and too dejected by my failures?...Have I not taken undue personal credit for the pleasure the students derive from my good teaching?...Have I not attributed their boredom during my classes to all sorts of things except to myself, when in final analysis the cause is my own poor teaching?...

In what spirit have I taught?...Is it to impart knowledge of Jesus Christ and love of the Church?...Am I sufficiently concerned with the progress of my pupils?...Have I not deemed myself better than others when I succeeded in doing them some good?...Have I not been jealous of the good that others have done to them?...

#### **The most important attitude**

This is not the place to reflect on the great principles of Christian teaching, but is it not obvious that, independently of all theories, there is a practical lesson to be drawn from a teacher's gift of himself to his students, out of love for God, and that attracts them, not to the one who is teaching, but to Him on whose behalf he teaches. Do I have this universal attitude of selflessness?...Am I solely concerned about Jesus Christ reigning in the hearts of others?...And if I am not, should I be surprised that, until now, I have done so little good, and that my teaching has produced so little fruit for eternal life?...

Have I taught with the gentleness recommended by Saint Paul, or during class have I not allowed the weaknesses of my character to appear, so that the students have been able to see in me the knowledge that puffs up, but not the charity that edifies?...

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## Chapter ??.

### SUPERVISION OF CHILDREN

However, merely teaching class at fixed times is not sufficient. If we want to train the children, we must watch over them at all times. This is, perhaps, the hardest and most formidable aspect of education.

To be sure, it is difficult to supervise children closely enough so as to prevent them from doing something wrong and to brush aside anything that could jeopardize their innocence; to get them to love the teacher who is supervising them; not to make their life too difficult, even though a watchful eye is constantly taking in their every movement; to introduce into this ongoing relationship the type of initiative and enthusiasm that will prevent them from thinking about anything else except the good ideas that are being suggested to them; to stop certain abuses among the more mature, without awakening still dormant imaginations; to make discipline pleasant, but also to make it felt if need be, so that they will become familiar with the rule, the performance of duty and, if possible, the love of effort; to study their characters and to train them to the extent to which one is responsible for them. This is the difficult job I am given every time I am asked to supervise the children.

What difficulties I encounter and what a constant watch I must keep upon myself so as to do as much good as possible, without making a wrong move or getting angry, which would bring discredit upon me!

Are the children convinced that I am devoted to them out of love for Our Lord?...Do they sense any favoritism on my part?...Do they find my moods unpredictable?...In their eyes, am I sufficiently edifying?...Do I have a good influence on them as much as I am able to have one?...Briefly, can I say that I have the patience of St. Paul, who sought to give birth to Christ in those to whom he was sent to preach the Gospel?...In how many people have I helped to bring forth Our Lord by the way in which I performed my supervisory duties?<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> In all the manuscripts of the men's *Directory*, this chapter grouped together the contents of what later became two separate chapters, one on Teaching and one on Supervising Students. This made for 22 chapters instead of 23 in the third part of the *Directory*. The present publication follows the procedure used in the old manuscripts.



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## Chapter Eleven.

### MEALS

My body must be a docile instrument of the good I am called to do. With that principle in mind, I must both nourish it and avoid pampering it.

#### I

##### **A warning**

The religious must remember all that the great servants of God have said about the dangers to which food can give rise. It was this approach that Satan used in tempting the first man; it was about food that the Jews in the desert so often drew down upon themselves the anger of God; it was when the Son of God was hungry that he allowed the devil to tempt him.

On the other hand, Jesus warns us that it is only by prayer and fasting that can we triumph over certain demons. Religious should be extremely careful when at table to maintain the moderation and self-denial that befits their state of life.

#### II

##### **Sanctifying my meals**

My vocation does not require those frightening austerities and continual fasts we read about in the lives of the early religious. However, without pretending that we should imitate their terrifying abstinences, it is nevertheless true that there is a real struggle between the flesh and the spirit, and that the two will eternally be at odds. Which one triumphs in me?...

What has been my attitude when I eat?...Do I, like St. Bernard, go to the refectory as to a torture chamber?...Am I content to eat what I am served?...Am I not imprudent, and have I not endangered my health by indulging in tasty food or in taking what I know to be harmful to me?...Have I practiced mortification by following a strict diet, if one has been prescribed for me?...Have I not allowed myself a certain amount of sensuality as compensation for the niceties that my religious state denies me?...Do I pay attention to the reading?...Do I arrive on time for meals?...Have I not looked for excuses to come to the second sitting, when I could have come to the first?...Has it ever happened that, without need, I have I eaten between meals, and without permission?...In a word,

have I mastered the whims of my appetite?

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## Chapter Twelve.

### RECREATION

Our recreation must afford us both relaxation and joyful community fellowship, allowing us to bring to our work afterwards a greater zeal and a deeper supernatural spirit.

#### I

The recreations of the religious will be of two types: those they spend with the students and those they spend among themselves.

##### **Recreation with the students**

The recreations with the students must be given very special consideration. The religious must avoid all familiarity and brusqueness. They may play with them; in fact, they should even do so to get them started. They should see to it that the boys do not talk too much among themselves, and that they do not break up too often into groups. They shall keep an extremely watchful eye on those about whom they have doubts. They must avoid using uncouth words and any conversation bordering on slander or grumbling. They will occasionally speak to them about God, but always unaffectedly. They must be very cordial to them. They must avoid dealing with them evasively in order to win their trust. It is during recreation that they can often do the most good to the students, as well as the most harm, because in these moments of relaxation they are most easily influenced for better or for worse.

##### **Recreation in community**

Recreations spent in community provide an opportunity for strengthening the bonds of fellowship and of showing that deep mutual regard which should make these moments spent together a precious time of rest. The Superior should be present, as often as he can, during the recreations of the religious. During these moments of relaxation, there is often a danger of offending charity and obedience by expressing opinions that are not very Christian. The mere presence of the Superior should check such abuses. Nobody should be absent from recreation without asking permission, which should be granted only for serious reasons.

#### II

##### **Sanctify my recreations**

I can sanctify my recreations just as much as my other daily exercises. As I take a needed rest, I can always give the good example in various ways: by my religious behavior, because, during such times, one is naturally prone to neglect it; by maintaining my self-composure, for it is often during such moments of relaxation that I easily become irritable; by frequent acts of kindness and thoughtfulness, without going beyond the bounds of Christian courtesy; finally, by being tolerant of the trifling annoyances which arise almost automatically from being together for a long time.

The ideal attitude is either to remain silent or to speak, as is fitting: to listen when others are speaking, yet remaining ready to take up the burden of the conversation if it shows signs of flagging. I should be convinced that one of the most pleasing offerings I can make to Our Lord is the kindness I extend to his friends, so as to make them happy in his service and to help them return with a greater zest to the more serious activities which follow recreation.

#### **Examen**

How do I act during recreations?...Am I not too easily carried away by my dissipation?...Do I not talk too much?...Do I like to think that people only listen to me, or am I not too wrapped up in myself?...Have I not often brought gloom and ill-humor to recreations and maintained a contagious silence?...Have I not shown my whims, my antipathies, my darker moods and my sullenness?...Have I always been charitable, kind, gentle, humble and thoughtful of others during recreations?...Have I made recreations a really relaxing time for others and for myself, in view of preparing myself to better serve Our Lord during the rest of the day?

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## Chapter Thirteen.

### RELATIONS WITH OTHERS

“Thy Kingdom Come.” This motto should inspire the unselfish and supernatural spirit I must bring to my relations with others.

#### I

##### **Good example and modesty**

In all their dealings with others, the Brothers must remember that they can influence them for good or be a source of scandal, depending on whether or not they are behaving as true religious.

Modesty should characterize the demeanor, dress and furnishings of the religious; it should be especially felt in their relations with others. They should remember that modesty lets others know that they are masters of themselves, living images of Jesus Christ, and that their demeanor is often more eloquent than anything they might say.

#### II

##### **Sanctifying those relations**

My life is not to be spent in a cloister. Since I am called to have a certain number of relations with outsiders, I am obliged by the fourth vow to sanctify these relations as much as I can. What saint who has loved Our Lord has not ardently desired to draw souls to him by prayer, by penance, or by word?

The immediate repercussion of my words will obviously be limited. But if, with those who visit me, I were to speak more of things that concern eternal happiness, I would ward off many dangers and avoid losing my time in useless conversations. Of course, I can discuss things other than religious matters, but perhaps I forget only too often that if religious matters do not characterize the speech of a religious, his lay visitors will be amazed at first, but will then be pleased by the way a mundane conversation, held in the parlor of a religious house, justifies their usual conversations. The conclusion they draw will certainly not contain respect for the one who, by his own example, sanctioned a type of conversation which only too often ends up by being anything but Christian.

On the other hand, if in dealing with others I am concerned about the good of souls and the triumph of Our Lord Jesus Christ, how inspiring

and useful I can be to them, without seeming to do so! What noble ideas I can diffuse, simply by being a true religious; how many uncharitable judgments I can stop, simply by remaining silent!

To be sure, I may not have the gift of speaking eloquently about God, but at least I can have the virtue of remaining silent. And if there is any hope that my influence will be effective, why does my zeal for Our Lord and his Church not suggest to me some means of doing good to the people I must meet?

#### **The members of my family**

It is especially to the members of my family that I can do some good. Since they are coming to see me, may I not benefit from my position to speak to them affectionately, to be sure, but forcefully about their eternal welfare? In any case, I must realize that their affection for me will make them very demanding, and that the least flaw they discover in my behavior will be considered like some sort of subtle compensation for the reluctance they might have had to let me enter religious life.

Have some visits not softened my heart by their length, or by conversations that were both long and useless?...Have I not yielded to curiosity and asked questions which overstepped the limits of religious discretion?...

#### **Need for prudence and guidance**

The good I can do and the evil I can commit in these relationships with outsiders prove to me the need for prudence and the importance of letting myself be guided by my Superiors. Everyday experience demonstrates that wanting to do things too well often leads to doing them badly. For this reason, unless my Superiors have assured me that they have confidence in my ability to act as I see fit, I should look to them for advice and discuss frankly with them my contacts with others as, in point of fact, I am required to do by the Rule.

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## Chapter Fourteen.

### SPIRITUAL READING

To commune with God in prayer, I must deepen my knowledge of him through spiritual reading.

I have often been told that in prayer I speak to God, while in sermons and in my spiritual reading, God speaks to me. To profit from this, I should keep the following in mind as do my spiritual reading:

1° An obedient acceptance of the choice of books which are given to me. In receiving them from the hand of my Superiors, I am closer to the voice of God.

2° A faith that leads me to consider the things I read from a supernatural point of view and that keeps me away from questions that would simply satisfy my human curiosity. Jesus Christ is the end of the law. Everything in my reading should bring me back to him, and if it does not lead me to this eternal truth, my time has been lost, and perhaps dangerously spent.

3° A simplicity which interprets things plainly and clearly, without the scrupulousness of a narrow mind.

4° A sincerity that safeguards me from illusion and enables me to profit from the knowledge I can gain from these spiritual readings, in order to make me go where God is pushing me and where I do not want to go.

5° A serious attention which helps me, like Mary, to keep in my heart whatever has struck me, and to meditate on it as she did, in order to draw from it the practical lessons it contains that will enhance my spiritual progress.

Do I read in this fashion?...Is not curiosity my motive for reading?...Have I always sincerely accepted the enlightenment it provides?...Have I sought only Jesus Christ and his teaching?...Since, in my spiritual readings, I have studied the principles and means of perfection; to what extent have I made progress?

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## Chapter Fifteen.

### THE ROSARY

Mary, Mother of the Church and my Mother, will guide me to her divine Son, as I meditate on the divine mysteries.

The Rosary reminds me of the principal mysteries in the lives of Jesus Christ and his divine Mother. If I recite it with attention and recollection, I will discover that it contains excellent material for meditation, provided that I follow the order of the mysteries and that I know how to apply them to myself in a useful way. In this regard, the Rosary will become for me a kind of review of the religious virtues wherein I examine how I practice them, how I lack them, and ask for the grace to acquire those I do not yet have.<sup>30</sup>

It is with Mary, my mother, that I talk about these virtues, of which she is my model, and about the perfections of her Son. The Rosary should help me to penetrate the lives of Jesus and Mary in a more intimate way.

How have I carried out this pious exercise?... Was it not by routine, without paying attention, and with all the distractions I found along the way?... Has the Rosary been a true exercise of devotion for me, and often has it not been something I did rather mechanically?... What respect have I had for the Blessed Virgin whom I was invoking, for the greatness of the mysteries on which I should have been reflecting, and which could have proved so beneficial had I done so fervently?

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<sup>30</sup> In the first surge of inspiration, Fr. d'Alzon was not able to perfect the preceding sentence and he never succeeded in correcting it. The 1935 edition gives the following noteworthy variant: "If I recite it with attention and recollection, I will find it provides excellent material for meditation. For this, however, I should follow the mysteries in their order and know how to apply them practically to myself. Thus, the Rosary becomes for me a kind of review of the religious virtues, in which I can see how faithfully I cultivate them and in what I am lacking. Then, I must ask for the grace to acquire the virtues I do not yet have."



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## **Chapter Sixteen.**

### **THE DIVINE OFFICE**

After the devotion to the Holy Eucharist, the great liturgical prayer of the Divine Office is the most perfect expression of our life of prayer. It is the school of Christ, in which our minds and hearts are imbued with a supernatural spirit.

#### **I**

##### **Our interest**

When we recite the Divine Office in common, we intend it to be:

1° A mortification for ourselves, due to the added fatigue that the Office may impose on us.

2° A source of edification for the students in our schools where the Office is recited.

3° An opportunity to arouse in those around us a deep regard for the great prayer of the Church which is more important than a host of pious practices, which we do not condemn, but which we consider less important than this solemn prayer which is the public prayer par excellence.

#### **II**

##### **Beauty of the Office**

The Office here on earth parallels the function of the angels in heaven who praise God with the inspirations he gives them. And so do I when I praise God with the words of Scripture and with prayers authorized by the Church. I should, therefore, bring to my recitation of the Office an angelic preparation.

The word “office” means “duty.” In a certain sense, the Divine Office is the paramount duty the Church has toward God: that is, public adoration, prayer, and universal worship.

When I recite the Office, I should make my own all the intentions of the Church which, as a community of saints, is discharging its obligations to God and asking for the perseverance of the just and the conversion of sinners. The Church itself prays only in the name of Jesus Christ, whose prayer it continues on earth, just as this High-priest unceasingly offers the prayers of the Church to God his Father in highest heaven. I pray in union with Jesus Christ, and if, indeed, I am united to

the Divine Mediator between God and man, my prayer will be heard.

**Examen**

With what respect, until now, have I recited the Office?...Have I appreciated the privilege of belonging to a Congregation in which the great prayer of the Church is recited in common?...How have I shared in the intentions which are implied in this prayer?... How earnestly have I united myself to the choirs of angels and saints in heaven who praise God without ceasing?...Have I tried to become one with Jesus Christ, forever living to plead for us?...Have I not often surrendered myself to idle thoughts, distractions, or boredom?...Has not this truly heavenly life, to which the recitation of the Office invites me, been a source of disgust and irreverence for me?

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## Chapter Seventeen.

### SLEEP

Sleep reminds me of death. Like Our Lord, I must be ever ready to offer to God, at the moment of death, the supreme token of my faith and love.

Some day I must die; and each time I lie down, I am doing my apprenticeship of the grave. One day, I will not get up again; I will be laid to rest in a grave to await the eternal awakening.

Each time I go to sleep, can I be sure that I will wake up in this world and that the Bridegroom will not surprise me as he did the virgins of the parable?...Is my lamp ready?...On the contrary, is it not on the point of going out?...Is it not completely out?...This is what I should ask myself each time I go to bed. Oh, if, instead of the bell, it were, as it will be one day, the Trumpet of the Last Judgment that roused me from sleep, how would I appear before the Just Judge?...Am I ready?...If I am not, how do I have the courage to fall asleep when my conscience is not at peace?...

The silence of the night can be a holy and useful thing for me. "I was sleeping, but my heart kept vigil" (Sg 5:2), says the Bride in the Song of Songs. There is real quiet there, which I can use to unite myself more closely with my Divine Master. In this silence, I can pray with greater recollection. "As soon as I lie down, I fall peacefully asleep" (Ps 4:9), and this separation from created things, demanded by the weakness of my nature, can be for me like a test-run of the more complete separation which, once awake and very willfully, I will undertake tomorrow in order to find my rest in God alone.

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## Chapter Eighteen.

### PARTICULAR EXAMEN

If I am to advance on the path of holiness, I must know myself well. Through the particular examen, I seek this self-knowledge in the light of my own conscience.

I shall know myself well only if I study myself constantly. The particular examen is an exercise especially useful for giving me this self-knowledge. It will reveal to me my nothingness, my sins<sup>31</sup>, and my faults, which are the mainsprings of my sins, and it will help me discover, along with their root causes, the remedy I should apply to them.

What efforts have I made to achieve a real knowledge of myself?...With what sincerity and rigor have I made my examen?...Do I detest the cowardice and the daily falls<sup>32</sup> which this examination makes known to me?...Have I not often neglected it?...Do I examine myself with the vigorous resolve to root out all the defects I see in myself?...Have I imposed upon myself some useful penance when I became aware of my frequent relapses into the same faults?...Or do I not remain just the same because I dread the light that would show me my defects, and I lack the courage needed to uproot them?

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<sup>31</sup> Variant: “my thoughts.”

<sup>32</sup> Variant: “and the struggles.”

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## Chapter Nineteen.

### CONFESSION

Progress in holiness requires frequent confession, which keeps alive in my soul horror for sin, true humility, and the desire to love God more deeply.

I am a sinner, and God in his mercy offers me unceasingly the blood of his Son in order to purify me in the pool of repentance. With what respect should I not approach a sacrament in which I receive pardon for my sins through the merits of the blood of a God!

My examination of conscience must be serious; my confession, frank and sincere, which will make it short. I must pay special attention to my contrition because if, through the grace of God, I generally have only venial faults to confess, it is not so much the detailed enumeration of them that is important, but the sorrow with which I confess them and the firm resolution I must have not to commit them again.

What type of confessions do I make?...Are they not the narration of stories rather than accusations?...Have I not often enjoyed adding irrelevant details?...Have I received the sacrament of Penance solely to obtain the forgiveness of my sins, and not simply to unburden my heart from a human point of view?...Have I only thought of my Master as waiting to forgive me in the Tribunal of Penance?...

Have I always had sincere contrition?...Have I learned how to see in the gift of forgiveness and in the sting of remorse a further reason for loving Our Lord, who laid down his life for me as a proof of his love? How have I fulfilled the penance I was given?...Have I not often done it half-heartedly, instead of performing it with all the fervor that I was capable of, thanking God for taking so gentle a revenge for the sins I had just accused?

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## Chapter Twenty.

### PERSONAL SHARING WITH THE SUPERIOR

Frank and sincere discussions of my religious life with my Superiors will help me to gain a deeper knowledge of myself, and consequently of the manner in which I must strive to progress in holiness.

One of the most powerful means of sanctification in religious life is, undoubtedly, this exercise in which I freely open my heart to my Superior. But in order for it to produce the desired results, it should be performed:

1° In a spirit of faith. Although the one to whom I speak is not exempt from making mistakes, he represents God for me. It is not only him whom I should see, but God, from whom I seek help, light and advice.

2° With simplicity, clarity and precision. The equivocations with which I evade the issues are, after all, only subterfuges of self-love, stupid attempts at trying to be clever, the result of an excessive need for personal attention, or the consequences of a confused mind.

3° Without giving useless explanations and endless excuses. Experience shows that, as a rule, these end up by being a big waste of time. The time of my Superiors is precious, and, in houses where there are many religious, what I needlessly take for myself, I take from the needs of my brothers. Frankness is not lengthiness. As a rule, and provided I am doing it for the right reasons, the briefer I am, the franker I will most likely be. And if I am lacking in frankness and openness, this exercise will be completely useless.

If, under the pretext of saying everything, I must avoid constantly rehashing the same subjects, thereby making my manifestations of conscience to my Superiors interminable, it is also obvious that when necessary, I should take all the time I need. The best rule to follow in this regard is simply to let my Superiors decide. When they will have understood, they will tell me, in which case it will be absolutely futile to try to prove to them that they do not understand. That would expose them to the temptation of giving me, for the sake of peace and quiet, the answer I want, and which, under the circumstances, will rarely be the answer of Our Lord.

If these faults are avoided, this exercise will certainly be of great benefit to me. It opens up and gives rest to my soul, and it puts it more peacefully into the hands of those to whom it has been entrusted. It sheds light on my doubts; it strengthens, encourages and urges me to show more

generosity and initiative. Finally, it brings me closer to the heart of Our Lord whose words, I believe, are coming from the mouth of those who direct me.

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## Chapter Twenty-One.

### THE CHAPTER OF FAULTS

Whatever form the Chapter may take, I must see in it a means of fostering both the life of my community and my own spiritual life.

The Chapter of Faults was instituted to train me in humility. It is an exercise repugnant to human nature which takes little pleasure in admitting its faults. At the same time, it offers me an opportunity to practice charity in the remarks I am called upon to make there.

This highly important practice of religious life can be for me just a meaningless and ridiculous formula, a source of interior revolt, or a deep humiliation, if I take part in it with merely natural dispositions. It can have the most fruitful results if I come to it with faith, charity, and humility.

At the Chapter, faith can unite me with Our Lord, humiliated before the tribunals of Jerusalem. Charity may require that I be given admonitions that will cause me some pain, but that I can accept because of my supernatural disposition. Finally, humility will encourage me to accept the counsels I receive, as well as to admit my faults in such a way as to help me to correct them.

What has the Chapter of Faults been for me?...With what dispositions have I admitted my failings?...Have I accepted the advice and penances the Superior found it necessary to impose on me?



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## Chapter Twenty-Two.

### THE INTERIOR LIFE

The Directory has but one purpose: to exhort us to live the life of Christ. This life is given to us from Above, but God will grant it to us to the extent that we renounce and detach ourselves from the things of this life. This concluding chapter of the Directory places us clearly on the demanding path to holiness.

#### **Its unavoidable conditions**

Religious life, strictly speaking, is but the more perfect life of Christ within us. It can flourish only if we die completely to ourselves. To do that, we must:

Die to our senses, subduing them to the extent that they are completely under control and exercise no dominion over us.

Die to our desires. As long as I wish for anything other than God or for anything that does contribute to his glory, I have not died to my desires.

Die to our affections. The word of God penetrates more deeply than a two-edged sword and can even divide the soul. God [who is a jealous God] wishes to be the sole master of my heart.<sup>33</sup>

Die to created things. Since I became a religious, the world is dead to me and I am dead to the world. As long as there is something to which I have not renounced, I shall be living by human standards and cannot achieve interior perfection.

Die to ourselves. This is what is most difficult, but it is something that must be attained. Undoubtedly, this death will not take place without great suffering. It means undergoing something like an agony during which the soul is purified, and it includes weariness, tedium, dryness and temptations of every kind. Such are the conditions of the interior life.

#### **Examen**

Am I willing to go through all of this?...Am I willing to renounce my senses and shake off their tyranny?...Am I willing to have no other desires than for heaven?...Have I tamed my desires and mastered my affections? ...Is my heart totally consumed with the love of God?...What do creatures mean to me?...Am I not still preoccupied about them?...Have I given up everything around me and within me?...Do I have the courage to accept all the implications of this complete stripping of myself and of

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<sup>33</sup> The words between brackets are not found in the women's *Directory*.

this nakedness of soul which I must undergo, if I wish to put on Jesus Christ?...Have I died so that my life may be hidden with Christ in God?...

But I cannot love Jesus Christ without wanting all creatures to love him. This is the reason why my life must be apostolic.

**Final prayer**

Such, O Lord, is the purpose of my life: to be stripped and separated from everything, in order to be clothed with your Divine Son and to be eternally united with you. Give me light to see what I lack and strength to acquire the virtues I do not possess. Give me the grace to follow my vocation, so that, as a true son of the Church and of the Blessed Virgin, I may be a not-too-unworthy follower of Jesus, my Master.

O my God, let my union with you, begun here on earth, be brought to completion throughout eternity in the immensity of your mercies, your love and your infinite perfection. Amen.



**II.**

**CLOSING ADDRESSES  
TO THE GENERAL CHAPTERS  
OF 1868 AND 1873**

**AND**

**FOUR LETTERS  
TO THE MASTER OF NOVICES  
(1868-1869)**

## First Address

*The address given on September 17, 1868, at the closing of the General Chapter, and the “Letters to the Master of Novices” written in 1868-1869 are very closely linked to the Directory that had just been officially approved. Like the Directory, the address develops the theme of the threefold love of Our Lord, of the Blessed Virgin, his Mother, and of the Church, his Spouse. And it already reminds us of the importance of the Adveniat Regnum Tuum. From the very beginning of the foundation, the second petition of the Lord’s Prayer was adopted, almost instinctively, as our motto. The idea of the threefold love was developed only later, during the period of Fr. d’Alzon’s illness in 1854-1858, as a kind of spiritual deepening of the A.R.T.: the chivalrous service of the Kingdom presupposes an unstinting love of Christ. Fr. d’Alzon wanted to introduce into the Directory the theme of the Kingdom, but found it preferable to deal with it separately and at greater length at some opportune moment. That is what he did in a more intimate but no less profound way in his “Letters to the Master of Novices,” in response to a desire expressed at the Chapter of 1868.*

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## Closing Address of 1868

at the General Chapter  
of the Augustinians of the Assumption  
September 17, 1868

*“Solliciti servare unitatem spiritus in vinculo pacis. Make every effort to preserve the unity which has the Spirit as its origin and peace as its binding force” (Eph 4:3).*

This instruction, which was quite skillfully, and almost totally, slipped into Fr. Picard’s 1884 edition, is a particularly competent commentary on the First Part of the Directory. From our motto Fr. d’Alzon insists on the most fundamental characteristics of our love of Our Lord, of Mary his Mother, and of the Church his Spouse, and still from our motto draws out the principal apostolic activities that, in the face of the current trials the Church is experiencing, are demanded of us and go completely hand-in-hand with the three-fold love.

Dear Fathers and dear Sons,

*Thanksgiving for having the Chapter*

I gladly borrow these words of the Apostle because I think they summarize our work and the valuable meetings that we conclude today: a spirit more energetically united in principles more clearly expressed; the bond of charity grown stronger, more intimate, more fruitful, thanks to the fraternal exchanges in which we tried to give to our minds and hearts the transparency of crystal, because we had nothing to hide, nothing to silence. For this we will long be grateful to the Father of light, from whom all perfect gifts flow and from whom we have received such abundant favors during these blessed days.

*Fr. d’Alzon’s purpose*

As we take leave of one another, I want to entrust to you, if I may put it this way, the legacy of our common thoughts and of our common

feeling, by reminding you once again and probably for the last time, on what foundation Assumption is built, and by what means we want more than ever to develop Assumption.

I will undoubtedly reveal nothing new to you. I will tell you nothing that you haven't already thought about better than I can express it. Still, what we are now celebrating will give greater weight to my words. Because of our imminent separation, the words will show signs not only of sadness but also of confidence because of the bonds that unite us, for nothing so much as separation teaches brothers how much they can love one another.

## I

### **The Foundation on which Assumption Is Built**

#### **The A.R.T. and the threefold love**

Our spiritual life, the essential things we have to offer the world, our *raison d'être* as Augustinians of the Assumption, is expressed in our motto: "*Adveniat Regnum Tuum, Thy Kingdom Come.*" The coming of the reign of God in our souls, by the practice of the Christian virtues and of the evangelical counsels in keeping with our vocation; the coming of the reign of God in the world by the struggle against Satan and the conquest of souls ransomed by Our Lord and yet still immersed in error and sin; what could be simpler? What could be more ordinary than this form of love of God? If, to this basic love, you add the love of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of the Blessed Virgin his Mother, and of the Church his Spouse, you will know in its briefest expression the spirit of Assumption.

#### **We are simply Catholic through and through**

But what is so special or characteristic about this? Are we not describing here what any true Christian would accept? What notion, beneath these basic ideas, can help distinguish us from other religious families? Do not religious and Christians repeat every day in the Lord's Prayer the words that we want to make our battle cry: "Thy Kingdom Come"? Do not all Christians and religious have to love Our Lord, the Blessed Virgin and the Church? Once again, why claim as our own that which is the legacy of all?

To begin with, we must recognize this first trait of our Institute: simplicity of means. It is often said that the least common thing in the world is common sense. Would it be a paradox to say that in the Catholic world the rarest thing is Catholic common sense? That is why we claim this for ourselves as an original trait. We are quite simply Catholic, but as Catholic as it is possible to be. We are Catholic through and through. And because today there are many half Catholics, fashionable Catholics, Catholics by compromise, Catholics who think they are Catholic, we, who

are completely Catholic, are considered by most to be men apart, perhaps even extraordinary. This is the first aspect of our character as Augustinians of the Assumption.

**a) Our love of Our Lord**

Our character reveals itself even more if we speak of our love of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Besieged on all sides, this Divine Master is a fool as far as the “learned” men of our day are concerned.

Who nowadays has any time for Jesus Christ? By whom is he not scorned? “This is the stone,” said the Prince of the Apostles to the inhabitants of Jerusalem fifty days after the Savior’s death, “this is the stone rejected by you the builders which has become the cornerstone” (Acts 4:11). Yes, it is always the same terrible stone of which the Savior himself said, “The one who falls upon that stone will be smashed to bits; and the one on whom it falls will be crushed” (Mt 21:44). Yes, it is on this stone that, following God’s example, we want to build because it is the foundation of our faith, “Let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, who inspires and perfects our faith” (Heb 12:2). For us everything is renewed in Jesus Christ. This is our only message, “We preach Christ crucified” (1 Cor 1:23), because he is our only wisdom, “The only knowledge I claimed to have was about Jesus, and only about him as the crucified Christ” (1 Cor 2:2). Through him and only through him do we go to the Father, “No one comes to the Father but through me” (Jn 14:6). Nobody comes to the Father except through me” (Jn 14:6). And it is in him that “every treasure of wisdom and knowledge is hidden” (Col 2:3). In him resides all the fullness of perfection, “absolute fullness resides in him” (Col 1:19). We have seen him full of grace and truth: of truth to dispel our darkness; of grace, to free us from evil. We need listen to no other teacher. He has the words of eternal life. “Lord, to whom would we go?”

**We love him all the more that he is little known and rejected**

Yes, we go to Jesus Christ. We affirm Jesus Christ against those who deny him, or hate him, or abandon him. The denial of the unbeliever, the hatred of the impious, the neglect of the indifferent or of the traitor are for us so many reasons to surround Jesus with a love that is more ardent, more active, more tender and more solemnly demonstrated. In him, we love God. And, although we are unworthy, we proclaim his divinity. We love the man, i.e. the most perfect model and the dearest of friends. We love the God-man, i.e. the peace-maker of heaven and earth, the doctor of the true law, “Christ is the end of the law” (Rom 10:4). He initiates us to the supernatural world; and by cleansing us in his blood, he transports us by his power and his mercy into the higher spheres which no one wants today because they are the true domain of a Sovereign whom, all the more so, no one wants today, precisely because of his blessings. Yes, we love him because he gives us true light and true benefits. We love him with the same kind of love as did the early Christians because he still faces the



same enemies he faced then. We love him with the love that made the Apostle say “If anyone does not love the Lord, let a curse be upon him” (1 Cor 16:22). This may not be very tolerant, but you know that those who love much tolerate little. Strictly speaking, true love reveals itself in the strength of noble and frank intolerance. Nowadays, since people lack the energy either to love or to hate, they do not see that their tolerance is just another form of weakness. We claim to be intolerant because we draw our strength from our love of Jesus Christ. This is another clear-cut trait which separates us from many people.

**b) Our love for Our Lady our closest model**

The love of the Son leads us to the love of the Mother. Our tenderness for the most holy Virgin knows no limits, no more than does her own tenderness for us. Jesus Christ is for us the most perfect of models, but Jesus Christ is God. Mary, a mere creature, is also a model for us, but if I may say so, she is less discouraging for us to imitate. She is a model to be imitated by her adopted sons who want to follow her along the way of holiness and in all the virtues which sanctity entails. She is a model for all Christians, especially for those chosen souls who are seeking a more perfect, more pure, more self-sacrificing life, and who come to us for direction.

**In the trials of the supernatural life**

The life of Mary, beginning with the privileged beauty of her spotless conception and up to the almost divine transformation of her triumphal assumption, shows us to what heights a creature can rise by humiliation, sacrifice, suffering, abandonment, and intense suffering of the heart. This life shows us the unrelenting demands that God imposes on chosen souls. In this way, he helps us understand the perfection, the gentleness, and the trials of the supernatural order. We must then bring this teaching to all those who want to see in one soul all the kindness that God showed toward his most beloved creature.

**In the hardships of the apostolate**

The incomparable innocence of Mary and her no less incomparable suffering give us in their apparent contradiction the key to a mystery the world cannot understand: that of the joy of demonstrating one's love by suffering and of the power of sacrifice rooted in love. Cannot Mary, the mother of Jesus, also be a model for us in the mystery of the Incarnation? Yes, there again, she will be a model for us by the ardor with which she inspires us and by the desire to give birth to souls for Jesus Christ and to give birth to Jesus Christ in souls: “You are my children,” says Saint Paul, “and you put me back in labor pains until Christ is formed in you” (Gal 4:19). This is the cry of apostolic anguish which for us as for Mary begins at the crib and ends only at the cross. But this kind of piety is undoubtedly very far from the kind of devotion which pretends to be tender but is weak, which fears scandal because it lacks energy, and whose daily

concessions and betrayals only show the cross surrounded with flowers and perfumes, with Calvary hidden behind vague clouds of vapor.

**c) Our love for the Church**

What shall I say about our love for the Church? The Church is something so admirable that the expressions used by the sacred writers seem powerless to capture her greatness, her riches, her power, her beauty, and her glory. Listen to them as they describe the Church as the tabernacle of God among men, the pillar and the unshakeable foundation of eternal truth; as the mystical body and final perfection of Jesus Christ; and again as his very beautiful and spotless spouse. For her sake, the Son of God came down to earth and united himself to humanity. He wants to extend her influence. She is the city where God chooses to dwell. She is the army with which he will rout his enemies. Of all these titles applied to the Church, the most touching one for us is that of spouse. She is the object of the very jealous predilections of her Divine Spouse. We love the Church because Jesus Christ loved her. And our love has three characteristics: it is supernatural, bold, and disinterested.

**Characteristics of this love:**

**Supernatural in the face of modern naturalism**

First of all, *it is supernatural*. The supernatural order fills us with admiration for the Church. Everything has been done for the elect who continue to exist only in the Church. If ever the struggle between good and evil, truth and error, Jerusalem and Babylon, heaven and hell, the Church and the Revolution has been made clear, it is certainly today. Listen to man repeating after Satan: "I will not obey. I will rise above the clouds; I will be like the Most High; *Non serviam, in coelum conscendam, et similis ero Altissimo*" (Is 14:14). Man goes so far as to deny the existence of God because he finds God a hindrance that imposes upon him the yoke of conscience, duty and virtue. The only way man can break this yoke is to say, "God does not exist." In the face of such blasphemy, we can only say with the leader of the heavenly hosts, "Who is like God? *Quis ut Deus?*" Satan, in order to overthrow the Church, is trying his hand at overthrowing the entire social order. The fifty or sixty thrones that have fallen during the last century are the result of his latest efforts to overthrow the throne of the Vicar of Christ on earth, because Satan is powerless to overthrow Jesus Christ's own throne in heaven. "*Nolumus hunc regnare super nos*. We do not want him to reign over us," cry the infernal cohorts, and after them, the mob of unbelievers, the impious, the disordered of all kinds, and the immoral. These are all slaves of the harlot whom the Apostle John saw seated on the beast covered with blasphemous names (Rv 17:3). She was dressed in purple and was holding a gold cup filled with the abominable and sordid deeds of her lewdness. And on her forehead was written this name: "Mystery! Babylon the Great, mother of harlots and of all the world's abominations" (Rv 17:3-5).

Can you find a more prophetic, more accurate picture of the Revolution? This is the great enemy of God and his Church. Our love for the Church will find its measure in the zeal we bring to combating the Revolution. We love the Church because she holds all the treasures of the supernatural order which were entrusted to her by her heavenly spouse and which the Revolution hates. In her, we find the preaching of truth, the perfect law, and the seed of all virtue. In her, we find the true Kingdom of God on earth, and the assembly of the saints and disciples of Jesus Christ. In her, we contemplate stability in the midst of societies that are crumbling. Because of her, we have the divine hope of happiness that man cannot attain by himself. Because of her, we experience the strength to fly from this earthly exile toward heaven, our eternal and glorious home. But all this is beyond human nature. All this belongs to the divine order, to which we are initiated by Christ only through his Church. It is for this reason that our love of the Church is first and foremost supernatural.

#### **Bold against a too-human prudence**

Furthermore, *our love of the Church is bold*. When dangers are so imminent, when chasms threaten to engulf us, when the hopes of hell reveal themselves in the deadly cries of savage joy that we hear each day, it is more than cowardice to follow the prudent theories of the flesh, i.e. of human concerns and political schemes. It is treason; it is sacrilege. We are accused of taking too many chances, and this is to our glory. Oh prudent men! I suspect that you found Jesus Christ terribly foolhardy when he risked the life of the Church by dying on a cross. The martyrs were crazy too, and the Apostles insane, when they very courageously gave witness to the resurrection of Christ during the persecutions by Jews and pagans. In our madness, we envy the boldness of the martyrs and the audacity of the apostles. So it is with such boldness that we claim to love the Church, to serve it with all our might, not overly concerned about the contradictory judgments of men, but mindful especially that the world was saved by the folly of preaching and the imprudent boldness of preachers.

This was the kind of love that was held in common by the Prince of the Apostles and the great Doctor of the Nations. Needless to say that so bold a love is rare today. But, by the same token, it gives us an original character. It is an added reason for us to be what we want to be.

#### **Disinterested love**

Finally, *our love is disinterested*, I dare not say chivalrous, like that of all the great religious institutions at their beginning. It is sad to see how quickly man tends to make his own the little bit of good he is capable of doing, how much he aspires to be the only one doing it, and to prevent others from doing it when he cannot do it himself. My brothers, may we never yield to this temptation! Let us love the Church enough to rejoice at whatever good her children do for her triumph. Let us not exclude any

form of holiness or charity. We cannot do them all ourselves. Let us love, admire and encourage in others what we are incapable of doing ourselves. May the general good be our sole preoccupation. Let us say with Moses: "Would that all the people of the Lord were prophets!" (Nm 11:29). The victories of the Church would be more numerous and our love for her more consoling, if we left aside all petty and personal considerations and made the triumph of the Church the sole desire of our hearts. I cannot recommend enough to you such disinterested love. If you tell me that it is rare, I will repeat once again that in possessing it in all its breadth and generosity, we will be more easily distinguished and recognizable on the path we wish to take.

Let us love the Church supernaturally, boldly, and generously, and you will see what blessings here below and what rewards in heaven God has prepared for our work. And if we are not found to be very clever, like some people, at least we will have nothing to be ashamed of.

## II

### How to Develop the Assumptionist Ideal

Now, let me tell you in very few words the practical conclusions to be drawn from the basic ideas I have just presented to you.

#### A zealous and selfless apostolate

From our motto, "*Thy Kingdom Come*," it evidently follows that we are an apostolic institute. The zeal we should have for God's rights on earth and for the salvation of souls is the essential expression of our charity. Abnegation and the forgetting of self are above all imposed upon us. We put everything that concerns us to good use "as long as Christ is being proclaimed" (Phil 1:18). We try to pay no attention to those internal dissensions among the children of God which, under the guise of rights or of Christian dignity, divert our useful efforts from the battle against our common enemy and cause us to waste time with struggles among brothers. When Christians and their leaders no longer want us in one country, we shall move to another. That is Our Lord's precept (Mt 10:23) which, when properly applied, will give us the freedom that apostles need.

#### a) Our love of Our Lord requires that we study his perfections

"*Ignoti nulla cupido*. We cannot desire what we do not know." To be loved, Jesus Christ must be known. We must study him especially in the inspired books. Jesus Christ will be for us the prized treasure sought under the veil of the Sacred Letters. We shall strive to know him as God, as man, and as the author of the supernatural gifts which reconcile us with the Father. Saint Augustine, our Patriarch, will be our principal guide. His treatise *On the Trinity* and his admirable books, which have won for him from the entire Church the title of Doctor of Grace, are the guidelines for our study on these important questions. We also add the *Letter to*

*Volusian* in which he treats of the Incarnation; and, as an introduction to true philosophy, the treatises *Against the Academicians*, *On Free Will*, and the *Letter to Dioscorus*.

**In order to make them known through preaching and education**

Jesus Christ, as we come to know him, is the message we want above all to communicate, first by preaching: “What we preach is Christ crucified” (1 Cor 1:23). This is the distinctive characteristic that sets us apart from the empty, purely human, naturalistic preaching, in which one hardly dares to preach Christ, and especially dares not speak of his cross. Our second means is education and teaching. If someone asks us what education means for us, we reply that education is the formation of Jesus Christ in souls, just as teaching is the enlightenment of souls by the splendor of Jesus Christ. This is the guiding principle in the schools that we establish. And if we ever have a Catholic university, we will inscribe on its façade, “May they know you, the one true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent” (Jn 17:3).

**b) Our Love of Mary invites us to a greater perfection**

The love of Jesus and of Mary, his Mother, is for us a summary of all knowledge regarding the mystical life. The perfections of Jesus Christ as manifested in the New Testament, and the virtues of Mary, which are gradually grasped by a religious soul despite their veil of humility, are like two volumes inviting us to meditate on the sanctity to which we are called.

**And to promoting the vocations of virgins**

Love of the Blessed Virgin also inspires us with another love that is perpetuated in the world through the devotion to the Mother of God. I speak of the love of purity and chastity. From the very beginning, it has been one of the outstanding traits of apostolic men, and Church historians tell us that the immediate cause of the martyrdom of Saints Peter and Paul was the constant effort of these two apostles to form virgins in pagan Rome and even in Nero’s palace.

We wish to help Mary, our Queen, in leading many virgins to the immortal King of the Ages: “Virgins will follow her into the king’s presence” (Ps 44:16 Vulgate). Sensing that there is something beautiful and inspiring about a chaste and pure soul helps to lift us, as on the wings of angels, toward the throne of the spotless Lamb. And if we are chided for fostering religious vocations too much, our answer should be that our sole regret is that we have not fostered them enough.

**c) Our love of the Church prompts us to defend it in these trouble times.**

Lastly, our love of the Church offers us a new horizon in these present times. Look around you. Do you not realize that the abyss is becoming deeper, that the ruins are piling up, and that catastrophes are on the way? In the midst of all these upheavals, the Church, stable upon its rock, sees the old world sinking, just as on the banks of Hippo St.

Augustine watched the Rome of the Caesars being submerged by the rushing waves of the barbarians.

His book, the *City of God*, is for us like a second revelation, and the more we study it, the more we may find in it, by analogy, the secret of the future. What sadness and discouragement came from the immense ruins brought about by the sword and the torch of an Attila or a Genseric? Somehow, however, it was God who was sweeping away a rotten society in order to prepare a new one. The bishops of Gaul in particular were not deceived. Let us have the intelligence of our forefathers. They welcomed and transformed feudal barbarism; let us welcome and transform democratic barbarism. Undoubtedly, some of our old Gallo-Roman pontiffs regretted losing some of the grandeur that had disappeared, but they nevertheless rebuilt France as bees rebuild a hive. Let us do the same. Without uselessly regretting the past, and without entertaining too many illusions about the future, let us carry on with the work God proposes to us. Possibly, it will be even more successful with re-Christianized peoples than it was with the barbarians torn from the grossness of a savage world.

At this juncture, two questions arise: Who will be our guide? What will be our work?

#### **With the Pope as our guide**

Who will be our guide? The Pope. It can be said that since the time of Philip the Fair<sup>34</sup>, politics have been one massive conspiracy against the papacy. Kings no longer wanted the Pope; we see what is happening today: peoples no longer want kings. Where are we going with this anti-monarchy hatred? But what difference does it make? Though some authority is necessary, it need not be in the hands of someone wearing a crown. God considered it an insult when the sons of Jacob requested a king. I need not insist, but why deny it? It is evident that the democratic tide is rising every day, and that it is on the verge of spilling over into revolutions. Who knows what minor incident will set the storm off? As for me, I see the Church and what she has done in the past, and I wait.

I am neither excessively sad nor overly hopeful. The essential is to be confident in Jesus Christ, in Mary, in the Church, and to keep working. All the rest doesn't matter. But I am wrong. Who can say that our efforts will not bring joy, as long as they are intelligent efforts? And with that, I begin to answer the second question I asked: what works should we undertake?

#### **In order to re-Christianize both the rich and the poor**

Beyond those I have already mentioned, our works include all those that will improve the life of people, educate them, teach them to lead

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<sup>34</sup> King of France, 1285-1314.

good ethical lives, all of which will help Christianize democracy. You can already imagine what possibilities are open to us when we visit the sick, evangelize the poor, direct orphanages, disseminate good books, and do other works that I cannot enumerate because new possibilities arise daily. But we do all this under one condition: that the material aid we give out be the means for providing spiritual aid. We tend to the bodies of people so that we might have the right to penetrate as far as their souls. The few coins we place in a poor man's hand are a prelude to the great treasures of faith that can be poured into souls that thirst for truth but who no longer sense a need for it because of the hardships they endure.

Through this work with the poor, we reach the rich. Experience has shown that they can be reached more easily and in a manner more worthy of ourselves and of Our Lord if we meet on the common ground of charity.

#### **By foreign missions**

Love of the Church stirs up another love in our hearts. The apostles were commissioned to preach Christ's message not only in Jerusalem but "to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Yes, our ambition extends also to foreign missions. It is such a providential grace to be given so many missionaries when we are still in fact not very numerous! But at the same time, look at the auxiliaries we have called upon to assist us. In the past, virgin women consecrated to the Lord were hidden behind very strict cloister walls. Today we are telling them: "Daughters, you will go beyond the seas."

This has been a tremendous change, thanks to the mercy of God and to the great devotion of his spouses who want to sanctify themselves, as we do, by a great apostolic love for the Church. From this point of view, their spirit in a way deepens our own.

#### **In complete faithfulness to the directives of the Church**

Certainly, all this is very serious. The issues that I have briefly discussed and that are intimately linked to what is characteristic of our vocation could be very disturbing, if we did not see the head of the Church calling together the bishops from the four corners of the globe and inviting them to confront these same problems in a most solemn manner, problems that preoccupy all mankind and to which the Church alone can provide the last word.

We must await these important solutions, but by assimilating all that the Roman Pontiffs have always taught, we should not hesitate to foresee in which sense these very difficult questions will be resolved. There may be some ruffling of susceptibilities, but these should not worry us too much. Let us simply make an effort to diminish the pain by being patient and charitable. Let everyone enjoy the freedom granted by the Church, but also remember to defend the doctrine she teaches, the truths she defines, the laws she promulgates, the condemnations she pronounces.

The Church has always acted to promote the life and happiness of people. Our glory should be in carrying out, even in our weakness, the work that the Church proposes, without worrying about the obstacles to be overcome, or the enemies to be defeated, or the consequences we may have to suffer for devoting ourselves to her cause. As a consequence, we may want to accentuate a bit more the part we intend to play.

**Conclusion: United in heart**

Now, Fathers and Brothers, our work is finished. Praise God for having inspired us with a common vision, and for the forceful resolutions we now promise to develop and maintain with fervor and good judgment. Let us always have for each other the affection of true religious, based upon respect and our need to remain strongly united. May we form but one body in the sincerity of our hearts and in the steadfast honesty of our relations. May our indissoluble bond be Jesus Christ.

**Around the Eucharistic throne**

The Apostle said, "Because the loaf of bread is one, we, many though we are, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf" (1 Cor 10:17). Let the altar be our center, because it is there that we find Jesus Christ. It should also be for us the throne of our King. You have noticed that recently this Victim par excellence has received even more universal homage in the sacrament of his love. This is only fitting. Is it not good that when the throne of the King's representative appears shaken, the throne of the Sovereign himself be more resplendent because of our praise? It is no mean honor for us that we have been able to contribute even if only slightly to the promotion of this practice of making reparation. There indeed we again find Jesus, our love, giving himself to us and teaching us to give ourselves to him and to the service of the Church for him. Let us pursue our goal with joy and confidence. In this way, after our efforts to build up the Kingdom of God on earth, we will be worthy of delighting in that same Kingdom of heaven for all eternity. Amen.



## **Four Letters to the Master of Novices**

*These four letters were composed at the request of the General Chapter of 1868. The letter of introduction was written at Lavagnac and is dated October 8, 1868. The first two letters were received at Le Vigan, where the novitiate was then located, on November 22, 1868. The third letter, which was certainly received at the novitiate, was not recopied with the first two and was not included in the 1912 edition of Fr. d'Alzon's circulars. The fourth, which was discovered only in 1926, was begun in July 1869, but wasn't completed. From then on, Fr. d'Alzon was totally taken up with preparations for the Council (Vatican I).*

*These letters complement our Directory from a new point of view. A spirit, in order to be completely understood, must be considered from many angles. The spirit of Assumption is presented here in the light of our motto, "Thy Kingdom Come." The four letters constitute a valuable development of the theme of the Kingdom, which dates back to the origin of the Order.*

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## INTRODUCTORY LETTER

My very dear Brothers,

### **The purpose of these letters**

The General Chapter we have just held invited me to address to the novitiate a series of instructions in which I would summarize as well as I can the spirit of the Congregation. I will try to do this by outlining the different ideas on which our work is based. I have already established a few guidelines in the *Directory*, but it would perhaps be appropriate to develop what is said there. Furthermore, as the same ideas are presented from different points of view, they can more easily reach the minds of those who probably did not understand them initially. It therefore strikes me as very useful to offer you a series of considerations which, I hope, will lead you to a truer notion of your duties as Augustinians of the Assumption.

### **Their presentation**

I have chosen the letter as the form for these instructions because this will allow me a more direct rapport with you. Since I cannot speak with you, I can write to you and thereby have you more present to my mind and heart. What I have to say will probably have more life this way, and by the same token it will profit you more. I shall divide the work into four principal parts, each of which will in turn be subdivided according to the scope and number of considerations required by the key ideas.<sup>35</sup>

I shall begin by establishing the principles on which our spirit is based. I shall then point out a few practices useful in acquiring it and treat of the virtues that are particularly necessary for you. Finally, I shall examine the apostolates in which we must be engaged and the means by which we must exercise them.

I place this project under the protection of Our Lord, the Most Blessed Virgin, St. Augustine and all our patron saints, so that my words may instruct, edify, and fire you with the desire to work for the glory of God, even as you strive more ardently for your personal sanctification.

*[Lavagnac,] October 8, 1868*

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<sup>35</sup> Fr. d'Alzon has in mind a plan that he will only partially follow. The first letter considers only "what concerns our personal sanctification"; the second considers "the external action we must pursue"; the third considers "the means we must use in pursuing such actions." The fourth letter began a new series on "the virtues which we especially need."

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FIRST LETTER:  
Principles of the Congregation

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*The Coming of God's Kingdom within us*

*My very dear Brothers,*

The principles of our Congregation are found, properly speaking, in our motto, "Thy Kingdom Come." These words from the Lord's Prayer express for us the total perfection for which we must strive, the apostolic life in which we must be engaged, and the zeal we must bring to our relationships with our neighbor.

Today I would like to consider our personal sanctification.

**I.**

Our motto asks us to establish the reign of God first of all in our hearts:

**By working personally on our sanctification**

"The Kingdom of God is within you," the Apostle tells us. There is no need to seek it elsewhere. What then is the Kingdom of God? It is the intimate relationship which we must establish with God, taking into consideration who God is and who we are. But God, who is infinitely perfect, is unchangeable. It is not on his part that change can occur; it must be on ours. Insofar as we try to rid ourselves each day of our faults and our bad habits, we become less unworthy of the ineffable communications that God deigns to grant by this grace to those souls who sincerely and generously apply themselves to giving him absolute power over themselves.

**With the help of the light of Christ**

As a soul purifies itself of its faults, Jesus Christ, the true light which enlightens every man coming into this world, shows him in a more admirable manner both the perfections of God and the soul's debt in his regard. At the same time, God gives it greater energy to accomplish its duties, which it now perceives more clearly. As it acquires a greater knowledge of God and his perfections, the soul wants to know him better and love him more. It proclaims more joyfully the rights of God and

surrenders more fully to his supreme power.

**With generosity, promptitude and courage**

This work is accomplished more or less quickly according to the generosity of the soul, its promptness in responding to the call, its enthusiasm in obeying all that is commanded, and its courage in overcoming its trials. But if the soul advances, and if, in order to be closer to God, it detaches itself from creatures and from its own self, it senses God drawing closer and uniting himself to it in an ineffable way. It is then that the Kingdom of God is fulfilled, as much as it can be here below, in the most secret recesses of one's heart and in the very depths of one's being. Then the soul can say with St. Francis of Assisi, "My God and my all." But to reach that point, one must struggle a lot and suffer much. We advance slowly. We sometimes think that we are not advancing at all. God seems to withdraw. Satan tries to discourage us. Resolutions eagerly taken at moments of spiritual uplift are not always kept through weakness of the flesh. Such is the cause of so many downfalls, more or less serious, that impede the interior growth of the Kingdom in souls that had nonetheless been most blessed by God's sovereign goodness.

**And with the desire to attain perfection**

Also, my very dear Brothers, I could not possibly overemphasize the need for serious reflection before you get down to work. If you feel called to perfection, do not hesitate. But remember that once you have put your hand to the plow, you must not look back. Once you are enrolled in the army of Christ, to desert would be an eternal shame for you. All are not called to the same perfection, and I do not pretend that the Kingdom of God imposes the same obligations on all. There are many rooms in our heavenly Father's house, but the religious, who by the sanctity of his state of life is called to enter the secret chambers of the great King, must constantly remind himself that as long as he has not reached the summit of perfection he has done nothing. Let him also remember that he can reach the summit, because this perfection is nothing but the perfect imitation of the virtues Our Lord exemplified for us during his earthly life.

## II.

The Reign that God wishes to establish in us is something he is entitled to by virtue of:

**A) His right to our obedience**

The Kingdom of God within us therefore consists in the most absolute dependence of our being and of all our faculties on the intimate action of God. God is the master; we are his subjects: "I am your servant, the son of your handmaid" (Ps 116:16 or 115:16 Vulgate). If God is our king and if he has the right to command us to the full extent of his power,

of his intelligence, and of his love for us, we are held to obey him to the full extent of our gratitude for his blessings and of our understanding of his rights and his gifts, and with all the faculties which he himself has placed at our disposal. What do we have that does not belong to him? What do we possess that we ought not to consecrate freely and voluntarily to him? Since freedom is probably the most precious of all his gifts, and since he has a right to what is most excellent in us, it is especially by surrendering our very freedom that we honor him most. Admirable mystery, in which God gives us ever greater freedom to the extent that we allow him to reign more perfectly over us and in which the perfection of our obedience is the source of the very perfection of our freedom.

Let us therefore seek this Kingdom of God, my very dear Brothers. Let us proclaim it with all the fullness of our freedom and love. God does not want to reign over slaves, but over free souls. He wants to reign over sons whom he is able to love with paternal tenderness and whom he can place on his throne to reign with him in his Kingdom.

#### **B) Our duties as Creatures, Christians, and Religious**

As creatures of God, we are created out of nothing by his almighty power and his infinite mercy. Everything in us, down to the smallest atom in our body, to our most secret thoughts, and to the most delicate feelings of our heart: everything belongs to him in the most absolute and sovereign manner. As Christians redeemed by the blood of his Son, he is entitled to all the gratitude of which we are capable and to the most devoted observance of the law he has revealed to us. As religious called to evangelical perfection, we must not only carry out his orders but anticipate his very desires. Finally, as sons called to the glory of an incomprehensible and unending union with God, we must allow all our life to be transformed here below by dependence, adoration and love, so as to merit for all eternity a share in his Kingdom and his glory.

Such a goal is admirable. But what efforts, struggles and battles are necessary to attain it! It is precisely the test of our entire life. That is why we must work without ceasing and not lose a single moment.

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## SECOND LETTER

### *The Coming of God's Kingdom around us*

*My dear Brothers,*

It is not only within ourselves that we must struggle to bring about the triumph of the reign of God. It is also by what we do around us.

#### I. Timeliness of Assumption

##### **Raison d'être of the ancient Institutes**

Note well that the existence of all religious families had a *raison d'être* at the time when God called them forth. What is the reason d'être of our own Congregation? Who can deny that evil has made frightening advances in our day? Who can deny that God, in his mercy, always wants to erect new barriers to block the invasion of evil, which continually reappears under new forms? When the barbarians appeared in order to annihilate the Roman Empire, Saint Benedict fled with a group of religious to the solitude of the forest in order to preserve what remained of Christian perfection. When the Albigenses tried to bring back pagan ideas and ways, Saint Dominic and Saint Francis came forth to sustain the threatened Church and to defend it by their preaching and holy self-denial. Later, against the Reformation, God brought forth the great family of the Clerics Regular.

##### **Present needs of the Church**

Today, it is with the Revolution that we must deal. God has been driven out of modern society by Satan, the head of the Revolution. We can scarcely recognize God in the form of some vague notion of Providence. But the idea of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is barely maintained at the beginning of some diplomatic treaty in which the signers seem to invoke this Divine Trinity in which several no longer believe, as if to prove that their international agreements are no more than a pack of lies.

It is becoming clearer each day that God has been driven out of governments, society, family life, and morality. Consequently, if the laws of Divine Providence have not changed, the most terrible punishment threatens us unless God in his mercy impresses upon the hearts and minds of the guilty a spirit of repentance and conversion.

##### **Greatness of our vocation**

From this point of view, if it is true, as we believe it is, that God calls us, then our vocation is admirable, both by its timeliness and the greatness of its goal. It is important, however, to have a clear and precise vision of that goal. This will allow us to discern clearly the most efficacious means of attaining it without wasting our time on activities which might be useful and even excellent in themselves, but which in fact would distract us not only from the path we should walk, but also from the efforts we should be making and from the success we should be striving to attain with God's grace.

## **II. The Requirements of Our Vocation**

### **A) Consecration to the service of God**

“As for us,” St. Peter said, “we shall consecrate ourselves to prayer and the ministry of the word” (Acts 6:4).

#### **Detachment from material preoccupations**

This freedom from human preoccupations strikes us as indispensable. That is why we shall be neither mendicant friars like the sons of St. Francis, nor tillers of the soil like the sons of St. Benedict. Before all else, we shall be apostles. For that we shall seek the freedom and independence that come from the absence of material preoccupations. What is said in our Constitutions about poverty must be understood in this way. We shall love this virtue as one of the conditions of all moral freedom. The man who desires earthly goods is the slave of those that can satisfy him, while the man who wants nothing but his daily bread and shelter is very strong in the battle against obstacles and seductions. Apostolic poverty is for us the guarantee of greatness and of dignity of character. The apostle who does not have a great and beautiful character will never be a true apostle, because he will lack the influence that comes from unselfishness, without which he will never convert anyone.

I implore you then, my dear Brothers, to shun the love of wealth and to protest in this way against this tendency to seek material well-being, which is one of the greatest degradations of our time and the destruction of all aspirations to Christian perfection and the supernatural order.

Instead of loving gold and silver, love souls. Hunger and thirst to conquer as many as you can for Our Lord Jesus Christ. You will then deserve to be his apostles.

#### **Acceptance of trials**

Do not deceive yourselves. If you want to extend the reign of God, you will have great deceptions, great persecutions, and great suffering: “You will suffer in the world” (Jn 16:33). The apostle who has never suffered, what is he doing? And the one who has never been tempted,

what does he know? Having courage is an absolute necessity. And you must remember this: if you want to work for the Kingdom of God, you must retain your joy even when you are insulted or ill-treated: “The apostles for their part left the Sanhedrin full of joy that they had been judged worthy of ill-treatment for the sake of the Name” (Acts 5:41). Yes, joy in the midst of trials and humiliations, because this is the surest apostolic means you have of extending the Kingdom of God.

**B) Apostolates more directly oriented toward the coming of the Kingdom**

Preaching, teaching, spiritual direction, and works of charity will be our principal activities. You will combine them so as to obtain, by means of strongly united action, the best final goal we have set for ourselves. You will strive to march as an army whose strength resides in the unity of its command and whose defeat is certain when each soldier fights according to his whims. May the beauty of the Kingdom of God enrapture you! Why was the world created, if not for the Kingdom of God? Why did Our Lord become man, if not to repair the ruins of this Kingdom, devastated by Satan?

Undoubtedly an unfathomable mystery, it is nevertheless one that is full of divine excitement for those who consider all passing things as worthless, and whose ambition reaches out for something infinite like eternity and divine perfection.



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## THIRD LETTER

### *The Coming of the Kingdom of God*

#### A few means

*My very dear Brothers,*

**At the very outset: a concern for the coming of the Kingdom of God**

The purpose that God seems to want to give to our little Congregation is becoming clearer every day by the variety of work that comes our way without our taking any initiative. Our activity is very diverse: a college in Nîmes, a residence in Paris, missions in rural areas, preaching in large cities, Associations of laypeople such as those promoting Sunday observance and nocturnal adoration, a school in Philippopolis, a seminary in Adrianople, missions in Australia, the Congregation of the Ladies of the Assumption, the Oblates, and the Nurses of the Poor. Should we not fear that by expending our energy in so many directions, we may be spreading ourselves too thin and diminishing our effectiveness? This is why I consider it important to remind you, in a more positive and precise way, that our life is built upon a broad vision which must nourish our common life and serve as a bond that brings together all our various efforts.

#### I.

#### **The reign of the three persons of the Holy Trinity**

Our motto, “Thy Kingdom Come,” provides us with this main idea. To the utmost of our ability, we wish to work towards the coming of the reign of the three persons of the Holy Trinity, and in so doing, we will struggle against the three major errors of modern times. We want to help bring about:

1° *The reign of God the Father.* No one wants God anymore! His existence is denied. Moral codes with no reference to him are in vogue. Divine Providence is rejected. All this has profoundly shaken society. Our first task is to proclaim the rights of God and his sovereign dominion over all creation.

2° *The reign of God the Son.* God’s Son became man and as man he is King of a regenerated society. His reign is that of revealed truth. His

Kingdom is the Church, in which Jesus Christ, the eternal Word, lives among us in three ways: in the preaching of the truth, in the Blessed Sacrament, and in his Vicar, the Sovereign Pontiff. Take note that a second series of duties flows from these principles: the defense of revealed truth, worship of the Eucharist, and dedication to the Holy See.

3° *The reign of the Holy Spirit.* By grace the Spirit introduces us to the supernatural world of sanctity and proposes to us the most perfect human model of this sanctity, the Blessed Virgin, his Spouse. From this flows, a third series of duties we must assume if we want to be faithful to our motto: the proclamation of the supernatural order, the imitation of the virtues of the Blessed Virgin, and ministry to the Congregations of women which request our help and support.

The reign of God the Father in the universe, the reign of God the Son in the Church, and the reign of the Holy Spirit in souls; such is, it seems to me, the central idea which must inspire the Assumptionist family.

## II.

### The Position of the Church in Today's World

To these general considerations,<sup>36</sup> I shall add two others, which, with your permission, I shall constantly come back to: 1. the position which the Church should take toward societies that are disappearing; and 2. the attitude of the Church toward advancing democracy.

1° *The Church's position toward societies that are disappearing.* The Church has always upheld the principle of authority. It is one of her fundamental principles and she cannot surrender it without ceasing to be what she is. She must not work for the ruin of anything. Rather, she must respect what is established, even when she suffers from it. This is the way God thinks. A careful study of the Books of Maccabees gives us striking examples of this. The Jews remained loyal, even to the princes who had enslaved them. But when wars freed them from tyranny, they either gave allegiance to the conqueror or held on to their newly restored freedom.

The Church does likewise. She desires the downfall of no one. But if upheavals do occur, she allows events to take their course and tries to take advantage of them. Here is an example. Revolutions destroyed the concordats in Italy, Austria, and Spain. Did the Church have anything to do with this? Of course not! But once these things had happened, without her and in spite of her, why should she not seek to take advantage of them? After such a violent and revolutionary separation between herself

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<sup>36</sup> Up to the words, "To these general considerations," the text is transcribed by some unknown hand. Everything else after these words is on the same page of a copybook passed to the Oblate Sisters in 1869 and is in the handwriting of Fr. d'Alzon, who personally gave the letter its title.

and the State, why should she not draw whatever good she can from a State which has become less perfect, in absolute terms, but relatively better, by using her freedom?

In short, the Church did not bring about this divorce, but once it had taken place despite her efforts, why blame her for making the best of it? What will happen in point of fact? Corrupt societies will fall, and the Church, freed from all its ties to these corpses, will forge with younger institutions new ties adapted to their new situation...which brings me to my second remark.

2° *The attitude of the Church toward advancing democracy.* Kings have gone. Aristocracies are disappearing or have disappeared. The bourgeoisie is very weak against the incoming tide. It is obvious that democracy is advancing more strongly and irresistibly each day and will continue to do so unless, in the plans of Divine Providence, it is crushed by some unheard of despotism. Must the Church despair of the future? No, a thousand times no. However, I cannot repeat it often enough, my dear Brothers, we must be all things to all men. That is why we must make every effort to have as much contact as possible with the common people. And that is why it seems to me that we must also do all we can to engage in popular apostolates. The evangelization of the world began with the evangelization of the poor. In this respect, let us be faithful to our vocation.

### **III. Our More Specific Purpose**

We can even say this: each religious order in the Church has had a purpose, and when this purpose was attained, its mission seemed to come to an end. Well, our purpose is this:

1° To help the Church, as much as we can, in her struggle against the satanic principle of the Revolution;

2° To let the old order of society disintegrate; then, respecting the reservations mentioned in the *Syllabus* regarding the great and unchanging principles of authority, to accept freedom straightforwardly and loyally for a period of time no one can yet foresee, and to point out to democracy all that Christianity has given the world in terms of fraternal and universal equality. For we must not forget that as Christians we believe in incomparable equalities to which political equality can never come close: equality of birth, which those who deny the unity of race can never hope to enjoy; equality, no doubt, in original sin, but also equality in redemption; equality in adoption; equality in the nourishment of the Eucharist; equality in the call to perfection, since Our Lord declared this a question of personal choice: "If you seek perfection" (Mt 19:21), notice the words "If you seek"; equality in hope; equality at the final judgment. There, it is true, will begin the eternal inequality based on merit.

These thoughts, my very dear Brothers, should encourage you to aim high. You have wonderful things to accomplish in order to bring about the Kingdom of God in keeping with your motto.

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## FOURTH LETTER

### *Our Love of Our Lord*

My letter on the coming of God's Kingdom is finished. Here is what I have to say about our love of Our Lord.<sup>37</sup>

*My very dear Brothers,*

Because the love of Our Lord is a fundamental characteristic of our Congregation, it is of utmost importance that I speak to you about the most effective means of developing it.

I don't know of any that are more powerful than meditation on what Our Lord did for us during his life on earth?

The Assumptionist religious cannot have a more perfect model. The life of Jesus Christ is his living rule of life. And, at the same time, he finds in each detail of this admirable life, along with the proof of Christ's love for him, the most fruitful reasons to love him undividedly in return.

I shall focus on the principal circumstances of the mysteries of God the Son made man, and I shall try to highlight very rapidly the most practical teachings on religious perfection that flow from these mysteries.

### **The Annunciation**

#### **The mission of the Angel**

The fullness of time has come. The angel of the Lord is sent to Mary. A God is about to become man in the womb of a virgin, a creature free from all stain, even from that of original sin. It is the greatest of all the privileges ever conferred on the children of Adam.

An angel has also been sent to me. God has placed at my disposal

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<sup>37</sup> Fr. d'Alzon refers here to the desire of the General Chapter of 1868: "Very Reverend Fr. d'Alzon will write to the Master of Novices a letter in which he will express the principles of the Congregation and the methods to be followed to teach the novices the practice of mental prayer." The first three letters are grouped under the title "Letter on the coming of God's Kingdom." Then, in a fourth letter, the Founder addresses the second topic. He deals first – other letters were undoubtedly to follow – with love of Our Lord, which urges us to work for the coming of the Kingdom, in us and around us, by all the means best suited to the times in which we live. As requested, he speaks of Our Lord in a way that can facilitate for the novices the practice of mental prayer.

one of those ministering spirits, sent to help me inherit salvation (Heb 1:14).

Moreover, he has given me a guide to help me carry out my daily duties, to help me form Jesus Christ in me. He has purified me of the stain of original sin. He calls me to acquire on earth the perfection of the angels.

#### **The Angel's greeting**

Mary is greeted with these words, "Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you" (Lk 1:28). Am I not also filled with heavenly graces, not only as a Christian, but also as a religious?

To be sure, the capacity of Mary's heart to receive grace is a million times greater than mine, but cannot my heart, under the influence of this same grace, acquire incomparable proportions?

"The Lord is with you." Is this not the very meaning of religious life, that Christ should be formed in me in a most perfect manner?

What is my novitiate meant to be, if not a period similar to the one Jesus spent being formed in Mary's womb? Not that the Divine Master was not a perfect man from the very first moment of his conception, but, in order to be a model for me, he wanted to submit exteriorly to all the laws of nature.

#### **Mary's reaction**

Mary is troubled (Lk 1:29). She asks for an explanation, and the adorable Trinity is revealed to her. Here we see the person of the Incarnate Son, the action of the Holy Spirit, and the power of the Father: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you" (Lk 1:35).

God the Son asks Mary to give him a body so that, through her, he can come into this world. To accomplish such a wonder required infinite love and divine omnipotence working together.

The same wonder applies to me.

Jesus Christ wants to be formed in my soul. This interior life of a religious is the very essence of religious perfection. Jesus Christ wants to come into the world through me, that is to say, he wants to be manifested, preached, and proclaimed by all my actions and all my words. In this lies the perfection of an apostle.

#### **The privileges of divine love**

Nothing less than God's divine love can bring this about, and indeed it does: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you."

It cannot be accomplished by merely human efforts. It requires the all-powerful hand of God: "And the power of the Most High will overshadow you."

Oh God, you give me your Son through your omnipotence. As a proof of your love, which at the same time forms him within me, you also give me the power of the Father, the humiliations of the Son, and the love of the Holy Spirit. This is what is being offered to me if I want to enter

into this divine life by participating, as much as I can, in the re-enactment of the mystery of the Incarnation in the depths of my soul.

#### **The revelations of the Trinity in heaven**

But what is the adorable Trinity saying when it reaches out to a sinner like me, to my nothingness? The angel announces a throne and an eternal kingdom for the Son of Mary. Jesus Christ will in fact be a king, and his kingdom will be the Church. He comes to reign, and among all his creatures no one as much as Mary will help him take possession of his kingdom.

Here again, I find the meaning of my vocation. I am a Christian, but especially a religious and a religious of the Assumption in order to bring about the reign of Jesus Christ in the world, following Mary's example.

The power of the Father, the Incarnation of the Son, and the love of the Holy Spirit: it is in these that the adorable Trinity of heaven manifests itself.

#### **The Trinity on earth**

Jesus, Mary, and the Church: these constitute, if I may say, the manifestation of another Trinity on earth. Even if this expression is not absolutely correct, it is nonetheless true that Mary and the Church are inexpressibly united in Jesus and, so to speak, are one with him. Mary, his Mother, gives her purest blood to form the humanity of Jesus; and the Church, the bride of Jesus Christ, is completely one with her spouse.

And this is what I too must work at unceasingly: to form Jesus Christ within me, to form Jesus Christ in the Church. This is what is asked of me, just as Gabriel asked it of Mary.

#### **Mary's answer**

What is Mary's answer? "I am the servant of the Lord" (Lk 1:38): a word of obedience. Am I willing to obey? Am I willing to say "yes" to this marvelous and tremendous work by which Jesus Christ will take possession of me and become my intimate life? Am I willing to add, as Mary did: "Let it be done to me as you say"? In other words, am I prepared to accept that all my spiritual formation will be carried out under the direction of the guide who has been given to me?

#### **The Visitation**

Take note of the following: 1° *The good you can do in the simplest of all human contacts.* Mary's greeting to her cousin sanctifies John in Elizabeth's womb and prepares him to be one day the greatest of the children of men. So it is with the simplest actions of a religious, provided they are edifying.

2° *Mary's perfection and privileges* are explained to us by Elizabeth: "Blessed is she who believed...." The spirit of faith will enable

us to work wonders, will form Jesus Christ in us, and will make apostles of us. When we are ready, our faith will allow God to fulfill all his promises in us. “Blessed is she who trusted that the Lord’s words to her would be fulfilled” (Lk 1:45).

3° *Mary completes the explanation* by pointing out in her answer, which the Church has made its most beautiful hymn, the purpose of her life: “My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord”; she expresses her joy: “My spirit finds joy...”; the happiness of knowing she is nothing: “For he has looked upon his servant in her lowliness”; the divine plan regarding the proud and his mercy toward his servants: “His mercy is from age to age on those who fear him”; and all of this “forever” (Lk 1:46-55).

If I want to be perfect like Mary, I must work for God alone, direct all my aspirations toward him, take delight in my nothingness, uproot my own pride, devote myself to those who serve God and his Church, and do it forever.

### **The Birth of Jesus Christ**

Let us listen. “The Word became flesh” (Jn 1:14). Jesus had two births: the first was in the womb of his mother who laid him in a manger (Lk 2:7). But he was also born in a higher sense, says St. Ambrose: “*Ubi enim, secundum altiore rationem, nascitur Christus nisi in corde tuo et in pectore tuo?* / Where is Christ born, in a higher sense, is it not in your heart and within your breast?”<sup>38</sup>

It is to this deeper birth within my breast and in my heart that I want to turn all my attention. I especially want to concentrate on its effects in me. Today, I would like to speak about two of them.

#### **A) Its effects in me**

Jesus Christ takes flesh in me in order to make of me a new man and to make of me a son of God.

1° *He communicates his birth to me through Baptism.* By being born in me, he forces me to be reborn to the whole supernatural order. In the words of St. Leo: “*Universa summa fidelium, fonte orta baptismatis, sicut cum Christo in passione crucifixi, in resurrectione resuscitati, in ascensione ad dexteram Patris collocati, ita cum ipso sunt in hac nativitate congeniti* / Just as all the faithful who are born at the baptismal font are crucified with Christ in his Passion, raised up with him at the Resurrection, and seated with him at the right hand of the Father at the Ascension, so are they born together with him in this feast of the Nativity”<sup>39</sup>.

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<sup>38</sup> *Expositio euangelii secundum Lucam* (CPL 0143) - LLT-A-lib. 2, linea 534 (Ambrose & Treatise on the Gospel according to Luke & CPL & bk. 2, line 534)

<sup>39</sup> *Tractatus septem et nonaginta* (CPL 1657) - LLT-A-SL 138, tract. 26, linea 32 (Leo the Great & 97<sup>th</sup> Tractate & CPL & tractate 26, line 32)



This new birth obliges us to follow in the footsteps of Our Lord: “*Frustra enim appellamur christiani, si imitatores non simus Christi*/We are called Christians in vain, if we do not imitate Christ”<sup>40</sup>.

2° *He destroys sin in me. “Omni homini renascenti aqua baptismatis instar est uteri virginalis, eodem spiritu sancto replente fontem qui replevit et virginem: ut peccatum quod ibi vacuavit sacra conceptio, hic mystica tollat ablutio*/For every man at his new birth, the water of baptism is like the womb of the Virgin. The fountain is filled with the same spirit that filled the Virgin. Just as sin was abolished in view of Christ’s holy conception, so it is removed here by the waters of baptism<sup>41</sup>“.

3° *He makes me humble.* The same God who abased himself in the crib now abases himself in all the misery and defilement of my heart. “*Ipse vobis ostendat gratiam humilitatis qui coepit habitare in cordibus vestris*/Let him who begins to dwell in your hearts show you the grace of humility”<sup>42</sup>.

4° *In changing the purpose of our life,* he gives us the light and the strength to attain it: “Whatever came to be in him, found life, life for the light of men” (Jn 1:4).

What is supernatural life if not light, strength, and conscience? It is light that shows us the purpose; strength which gives us the means of attaining it; and conscience which results from this strength and this light and which gives us a sense of the obligation we have to pursue an infinite purpose. As a renewed man, I become a child of God: “Any who did accept him he empowered to become children of God” (Jn 1:12).

#### **B) A divine marvel**

How will this mystery come about? God will send his Son to be born in us.

With Jesus Christ dwelling in me, I am “born of God” (Jn 1:13). God has bestowed on me the privilege of a divine birth. The Eternal Word is in me, and when God sees his Son in me, I receive from him whatever a son is entitled to.

He gives me all the rights of adoption: “If we are children, we are heirs as well: heirs of God and coheirs with Christ” (Rom 8:17).

[Fr. d’Alzon’s manuscript ends abruptly with this quotation.]

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<sup>40</sup> *Tractatus septem et nonaginta* (CPL 1657) - LLT-A-SL 138, tract. 25, linea 154 (Leo the Great&97<sup>th</sup> Tractate&CPL&tractate 25, line 154)

<sup>41</sup> *Tractatus septem et nonaginta* (CPL 1657) - LLT-A-SL 138, tract. 24, linea 82 (Leo the Great&97<sup>th</sup> Tractate&CPL&tractate 24, line 82)

<sup>42</sup> St. Augustine, *In Iohannis euangelium tractatus* (CPL 0278) - LLT-A-tract. 3, par. 15, linea 8 (Augustine&Tractate on the Gospel of John&CPL&tractate 3, par. 15, line 8)

## Second Address

*Fr. d'Alzon took an active though unofficial part in Vatican I. This, along with the trials France underwent in 1870-71 and the resumption; beginning in Prussia; of the anti-Christian attacks which were to cast their shadow over the Church in France for so many years, stirred in Fr. d'Alzon's mind a whole series of reflections, projects, resolutions, and commitments which are found, elaborated and clearly explained in his closing address to the General Chapter of 1873. After painting a picture of the situation of the Church and of France, Fr. d'Alzon takes stock of the works undertaken by the Assumptionists since the last Chapter, and he energetically draws up a plan of apostolic activity and of a more definitive internal organization of the Congregation.*

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## **Closing Address of 1873**

**at the General Chapter  
of the Augustinians of the Assumption  
September 18, 1873**

*My very dear Brothers,*

### **Thanksgiving for the Chapter**

Once again, we have had another important meeting which has strengthened your religious life and stimulated your zeal. You have become more deeply imbued with the principles that define us. You see more clearly what you have to do and how you must go about it. As for me, I have been encouraged by your cooperation, your insight, and your admirable unity of mind and heart. I thank God for making me the father of a family which, though few in number, has gone through a purification that has resulted in a more exquisite choice of members capable of even greater good.

### **Fr. d'Alzon's purpose**

Now that we are about to go our separate ways and return to our various tasks, allow me to add a few brief remarks to what I told you five years ago. At that time, I spoke to you about the spirit of Assumption. Today, I would like to say something about the activity which that spirit must produce, and about how the past five years have been like a prelude to the years which lie ahead.

## **I. Looking Back**

*A.; The Church and Assumption Since 1868*

### **The democratic movement**

At the time of the last Chapter, we were mostly preoccupied with the democratic movement that was taking place and that seemed to dominate everything else. At the same time, the Sovereign Pontiff was convoking the bishops of the Catholic world to an Ecumenical Council. To him, the situation seemed critical, and the troubles besetting the Church

were great because infernal conspiracies had been cleverly hatched by declared enemies and by disloyal brothers. It seemed urgent to him that the fullness of truth confront this negative absolutism by which the Revolution, in all its forms, seeks to crush the various ways in which we affirm our faith. Preoccupied by this democratic invasion, you had already found it useful to participate in what is basically a proletarian work, the orphanage at Arras.<sup>43</sup> Its director, in joining us, brought along the wealth of his experience, his labors, and his initiative. He showed us how, by paternal affection, uncouth individuals can be polished, rough characters can be rendered more manageable, and the most rebellious souls can be sanctified. This was only a beginning, but a beginning which already pointed to the long road to be followed, the royal way of love for the little ones, the poor, and all the abandoned.

#### **The Council**

In the meantime, the bishops made their way to Rome, and I had the honor of accompanying mine. Like the leaders of other young congregations, I felt I had to go in order to find out what the Council would decide concerning the existence of these congregations. Events did not allow the Council to consider the questions dealing with religious families. Yet, it was easy to see that Roman wisdom, no matter what was said, did not want to jeopardize rights that had been acquired. Instead, the Council favored an approach like the one used in wartime, whereby leaders modify or improve their tactics, their weapons of destruction and the discipline of their armies, and make a science of their art of waging war. However, the comparable movement in the Church arose from its experience in struggling against enemies who were becoming increasingly stubborn, ferocious, and clever. Since the forces of evil were more numerous and better prepared, the Church wanted to have battalions that were stronger, more intelligent, and more energetic. Consequently, the newly organized recruits were surely of great help to these older monastic legions.

#### **The Papacy**

I was quickly reassured and became concerned solely with the big question of the papacy. What a source of emotion and anxiety! What subtleties, more or less theological! What diplomatic strategies, what threats, what panic sown in timorous hearts! If, as Pius IX said, a Council has three phases: that of man, that of Satan, and that of God, you can well understand that several feared that man and Satan were apparently about to have the upper hand. God was not about to appear, or so it seemed to our impatience. We do not know enough about how the action of the Holy

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<sup>43</sup> Abbé Henri Halluin, a diocesan priest, founder of the orphanage at Arras, joined the Assumptionists in 1868. In turn, the Congregation undertook to continue his good work.

Spirit shapes the conscience of a well-intentioned bishop, particularly when his natural inclination would be for him to see things from a worldly point of view and to reach decisions that are too human. Finally, your Father had the immense joy of attending that solemn session during which were proclaimed and commented, in all their richness, the words of the Savior: "You are Peter. I have prayed for you. Feed my sheep" (Jn 21:17). At that moment, I also saw storm clouds darkening the dome and vaults of St. Peter's. I heard the thunder that some compared to that of Mt. Sinai. These were signs foretelling the troubles, so easy to foresee, which God permitted in the wake of great councils, as if to strengthen their decrees by the trial of temptation. In the past, every covenant had its sacrifices. Each Ecumenical Council, which is a new covenant in truth between the spirit of man and the spirit of God, has always had its victims. Two months later, the Vatican Council had its mysterious immolations, and Assumption is proud to have contributed the blood of one of its finest sons.

#### **The defeat of France in 1870**

We must not forget, however, that Rome was captured because France had been defeated. Assumption saw fit to prove its fighting spirit by supplying this ill-fated war with as many military chaplains as we could, perhaps with more than we could spare. Sedan, Metz, Mainz, Paris saw you devoting yourselves on the battlefields, in the sorrows of captivity, in the horrors of sieges, exposed to the assaults of the enemies of France and, sad to say, to the bullets of her sons. You knew how to prove your bravery as religious. Nevertheless, under the bullets of the Prussians and of the army of Versailles, concerned Catholics were wondering whether revolutionary plots might not be resisted and thwarted by a Catholic League.

*B.; Sketch of Assumption's Work Since 1870*

#### **The Catholic League**

The idea of a Catholic League, inspired by the bloody massacres of the Commune, spread like wildfire. The Catholic Committee of Paris established branches throughout all of France. The Christian sap rose again very actively, a sure sign of the powerful vitality of the tree and of the merciful disposition of Providence even in the midst of our most painful humiliation.

#### ***Revue de l'Enseignement Chrétien* [Review of Christian Education]**

Part of the evil that is poisoning society surely comes from education. We tried in *Revue de l'Enseignement chrétien* to raise the cry of "*Delenda Carthago*. Carthage must be destroyed"; we tried to make people realize the urgent need for a prompt remedy. And despite the hesitations of people who were overly cautious, we were able to hold an

Educational Congress. A second Congress has not yet been held, which is what we want. When it does take place, we want to lay an even stronger foundation for the first developments of our future freedom. We would have been unable to do this to the extent we desired and with the same interest that such an important question legitimately requires, because of the political preoccupations of the moment.

#### **Collaborating with other Catholic projects**

While we tried, within our limits, to fight with the pen, we also paid attention to other Catholic projects: workers' clubs, social centers, youth centers. Did we do everything we could? Obviously not. We were too few, yet many of you gained valuable experience and shared the result of your work at those admirable meetings in which the membership of the Congress of Workers' Associations rose from sixty to three hundred, and from three hundred to one thousand.

#### **Notre Dame de Salut [Our Lady of Salvation]**

We needed financial resources in order to support some of our workers' projects that were just starting. We also needed prayers to appease God's wrath. Expiation by prayer, and expiation by intelligent almsgiving, such were the two aims merged into one which presided over the foundation of Our Lady of Salvation. The Association organized public prayers, so necessary for France, and revived a number of other works which had languished for lack of funds. From its inception, the Association gave a great impetus to pilgrimages, which touched the heart of God. The Mother of God was, so to speak, forced to renew her miracles. The pilgrimages also made popular those public acts of faith which, it was said, were no longer in style. My Brothers, this is only a very brief summary of what you have done, of the works in which, for five years, you have been more or less directly involved. To be sure, you weren't the only ones involved, but your cooperation, modest as it may have been, at least revealed your intentions, determined your orientation, and demonstrated your spirit.

## **II.**

### **A Plan of Action**

But what are these first attempts when compared to what you still have to do? As the angel said to Elijah, "*Grandis tibi restat via*; A long journey lies before you" (1 Kgs 19:7). What vast horizons are opening up before you! Let me try to provide you with a few ideas, with some kind of initial plans. To summarize everything in a few words, I would say that our purpose is to restore Catholic moral behavior by inculcating Christian principles.

*A.; External Activity:  
The Restoration of Christian Moral Standards*

Christian moral standards! They tended to disappear. Voltaire's sarcasm, the press and its obscenities, the conceit of science, impatience with the yoke of God and any other kind of yoke, the need to believe in nothing in order to affirm the right to do whatever we like: such are the basic principles upon which the new social order has pretended to build. To ridicule everything, to revolt against everything, to lay claim to everything: to gold, pleasure, and power, by resorting to stealing, orgies, and revolutions, and to proceed by hate, lies, and violence. Is this not a summary of these new rights? Either we perish or climb out of this abyss into which Europe seems to be sliding.

#### **1° The purifying aspect of pilgrimages**

What needs be done? Purify the air, poisoned by the miasmas of immorality. To this end, we commissioned steam locomotives to carry large caravans of pilgrims to numerous shrines. We sanctified these instruments of an often guilty industry and have used them to carry throughout France our repentance and our expiation. Such pilgrimages will obviously diminish in number, without stopping entirely, whenever other kinds of manifestations prove more opportune. They are, after all, no more than very big processions, longer and more efficacious because more penitential. By these pious journeys of her children, the Church regains possession of the public ground and of the open air. We now affirm ourselves in full daylight. Christians who affirm themselves are close to becoming triumphant Christians. Note that the troubles in France seem to have given Catholics the privilege of simply needing to show themselves in order to conquer. So we showed ourselves in Paris, Lyons, Lourdes, La Salette, Marseilles and other places too numerous to mention. We showed ourselves in Grenoble and were insulted. But let us remember that insults and contradictions are also of value to Christians.

#### **2° Increase in devotion to the Eucharist**

But, after having affirmed our faith by these purifying journeys, after having proclaimed our right to emerge from the sacristy, is it not appropriate to re-enter the sanctuary very shortly to offer greater adoration to the God who lives there and enlivens it? Devotion to Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament, nocturnal adoration, frequent communion, are these not customs to which we must return, because they bring weakened and exhausted souls back to the very heart of the Church, to the divine principle of its life on earth?

#### **3° Orphanages and agricultural schools**

I mentioned orphanages and agricultural schools. Oh, why do we lack workers! Think of how many poor little souls there are to be saved among the social class into which Jesus Christ himself was born. May God

send many workers into this portion of his vineyard. When it will have been adequately cultivated, revolutions will have become impossible.

#### **4° Social Work:**

##### **a) Workers' associations**

Another way to counteract the force of evil is by holding meetings of workers. A few moments ago, I spoke about associations of workers, but now I want to express certain reservations. Bringing working men together periodically, without giving them strong direction, is very imprudent in the eyes of those who do not want these meetings to become simply a means of satisfying someone's ambition. Leaders very soon either lose their popularity or retain it only by using means which they regret sooner or later. Experience shows that people band together in times of social unrest, but break up later on when there is no longer a need to protect themselves by being united, or to serve some political party. But it is at this time when the associations are falling apart—which I think is not far off—that we must start a number of new works.

##### **b) Military chaplaincies**

The reorganization of our armed forces creates new obligations for the clergy. Henceforth, all our young men will have to do their military service. Think of what evil or what good will ensue if we are faithful to our vocation! Those of you who have heard the confessions of, on average, eight to ten thousand prisoners of war, know very well that a soldier can be reached by a priest who knows how to speak to them in a language worthy of a soldier, and especially worthy of God. I repeat that we are too few to say that this ministry will be our own. But the sympathy you have inspired among those admirable officers who want to exercise not only military leadership but also an apostolate will help you to accomplish even more than you are able to do personally. As you know, an Assumptionist religious should be dissatisfied with himself until he has accomplished a hundred times more than he can. His rest must consist of trying to find out how to do a thousand times more. I urge novices to ponder this basic maxim of our Association. Accordingly, though we are fewer than fifty, we should be able to count ourselves by the thousands.

##### **c) Trade guilds**

Besides military chaplaincies, to which I draw all your attention, I would like to see the creation of trade guilds so that, sooner or later, they might replace the workers' associations. Who among you has never heard of these admirable families of workers that, under the protection of a particular saint or of a great mystery, created guilds? From apprentice to master craftsman, everyone found their place and their encouragement. I know there were abuses. I know about their arbitrariness, imposed upon them by a royal legislation that was too oppressive. Still, trade guilds must have had something excellent about them, because they became the prime targets of destructive revolutionaries.



Why not restore them? Learning from past mistakes, avoiding abuses, adapting them to present circumstances, why not imbue them with the divine element of faith, which cries out to God, "My Father!"; of hope, which counts above all on the things of heaven; of charity, which unites hearts against great social hatred, of which Paris still witnesses the devastation?

One of us used to say that there are some things that we can do and others that we can only suggest. We will form such guilds when we can, but let us also suggest them as often as possible. Advice may seem to be very little, but if dropped upon an active soul, it can be a very fruitful seed.

**The spirit of our work: a courageous affirmation of faith**

But all this activity which I am suggesting to you must be based on certain ideas: the fundamental principles of our faith. I know that today these principles are excluded from modern society, and to prove it, I need only point to the shameful treatment of the Sovereign Pontiff. Jesus Christ, in the person of Pius IX, is a prisoner of the Revolution. Kings have not wanted to admit that, ever since the Gospel began to be preached, their rights rest upon divine justice, and that the teaching of this truth, in its loftiest expression, is entrusted to the Apostolic See. Yes, the efforts I urge you to make are based upon a number of Christian ideas and on a doctrine which only yesterday was the object of a great decision, and which Prussia, unable to destroy it even after having vanquished France, has tried to persecute. Despite derision, despite persecution by the press, despite the bullets of the Commune, this doctrine has gained ground because God seems to have said, "The hour of your triumph is near at hand" (Lk 21:28).

**In social work**

These ideas must be disseminated; this doctrine must be made accessible to everyone. For this to happen, suitable means must be employed. One of us has successfully tried to give courses to workers. More should be given, by ourselves or by our friends. After the workers come the members of the bourgeoisie. Despite being more conceited, they are no less ignorant of their religion. The workers were educated by the [Christian] Brothers, whereas the bourgeoisie was educated in some lycée. We know well enough what the chaplains were able to teach them and what the professors then proceeded to unteach them. Therefore, if possible, you will begin classes for the bourgeoisie. Who knows? The fear they still have may cause them to rally round your word.

**In our schools**

What can I say about education except that, more than ever, we must hold fast to the principles of Assumption and very carefully ward off any twisted mind that would refuse to accept our point of departure, our plans, and our objective.

#### **In our publications**

I would say the same about the publications some of us have become involved in. We must admit that the *Revue de l'Enseignement chrétien* did not accomplish everything that it could have. I blame myself first, in order to have the right to blame others. This situation must cease, and for my part, I promise to do everything that I can. Yet, when all is said and done, did it not produce marvelous results? To the *Revue* we owe this first Congress which posited some very Catholic principles, despite the liberal moderating influence of many. We hope that the second Congress will take place soon, hopefully within a year. We must prepare it as well as we can. If the religious movement proceeds like other movements, we have reason to hope that the results will make up for the vexations of having had to wait so long. When will the day come when these many efforts will result in a Catholic University? Surely, the obstacles are many and the opposition is strong, but it seems to me that we have overcome more than that since the beginning of the century.

In 1801, the Church was captive, and then suddenly there arose a man sent to crush the Revolution, and who later consented to become its slave. He reopened our churches and freed religion from a thousand vexations. Since then, the Church of God has continually won greater freedom, has broken many shackles by herself, and will continue to break many more, if only we are determined to break them.

#### **5° The mission in the Near East—Paving our way to Russia**

I have not yet mentioned our foreign missions. Although Australia is temporarily set aside because certain contractual obligations have not yet been met, great work is being done in Bulgaria. There is an association of employers and apprentices, and a school with two hundred boys. The future of both looks good. Our Oblate Sisters have helped us very effectively by opening a hospital, a clinic, a boarding school and other schools. This is only a beginning, but it is a valuable outpost against the Greek and Russian schism! We will be accused of foolhardy ambition; how small we are when compared to the giant we are attacking!

The Church today has three great enemies: the Revolution, Prussia, and Russia. And Russia is not the least formidable. Yet, what an immense field of activity lies before us! As Jesus said to his unsophisticated disciples, I dare say to you: "*Messis multa*. The harvest is good" (Mt 9:37). Once the disciples became apostles, they conquered the world. Decide, my Brothers, whether you want to conquer Russia and bring its vast harvest into the barn of your heavenly Father. I tremble as I speak to you in this way. Yet, something is telling me that, if Assumption wants to, it can reap the harvest, with God's help.

*B.; Internal Activity:  
a More Definitive Organization of the Institute*

#### **1° Creating an aristocracy**

I have just been speaking about external action and about how we must prepare for it. But what preparation do we ourselves need? Like me, you have thought that the main objective of the Chapter was to establish an aristocracy of talent, knowledge, and virtue, placed at the head of our religious family. It may be presumptuous of me to speak in this way, when one is the leader of such a group as this. But I do not speak about what exists, but about what must come to be.

#### **2° Preparing our future members: the alumnists and other vocations**

Another point: the preparation of the members of the Congregation, accepted, if possible, when they are still youngsters. Adopted by the Council of Trent when, in those critical times, it dealt with the question of the transformation of the clergy, this idea is obviously supported by this precedent. We will receive in our alumnates [minor seminaries], from their early adolescence, all those young people whom our efforts and the charity of the faithful will allow us to welcome. How numerous these chosen ones would be, if only our financial resources were as abundant as their vocations!

Counting on Divine Providence, we have already begun, and God has blessed us. Our initial success invites us to continue. We will continue and thus be able to add our present students to those who, from various locations and age groups, will come knocking on our door, asking for a place in our home. Caring for them according to their need, we will welcome all of them in our house of discernment: first, those who, before coming to us, wanted to enjoy life but occasionally experienced its bitter side and ran into a storm or, alas a shipwreck; and then those who, eager to be a bit more like the younger brothers of the angels, did not think it necessary to go and stain their spotless baptismal robe in the world, at the risk of having to eat the tearful bread of repentance at some later date.

#### **A strict training**

With every passing day, the formation of both types will become stronger, more consistent, more attentive, and more rigorous. Experience has warned us, and we want to learn from its sad lessons. Today we are still a family; tomorrow we will be a people. Such a transformation requires very energetic supervision. We have no doubt that the transformation will be a happy one, but only if it takes place as does all religious growth.

#### **Serious study**

I have spoken of the need to revive Christian moral attitudes with the help of the great principles of our faith. Therefore, we need saints, but saints enlightened by Catholic knowledge. Consequently, after the

novitiate, for those who have already completed their classical studies, we require many years of study of Sacred Scripture, philosophy and theology, with frequent examinations. This will produce, we hope, men whom knowledge will not intoxicate, as sometimes happens, because they will have placed their knowledge in the context of religious holiness.

## **Conclusions**

### **1° Three pieces of advice**

I have summarized almost everything that we have done since the last Chapter. I have also indicated what we would like to do, which is practically infinite. Before I finish, let me give you three pieces of advice.

#### **A certain narrow-mindedness**

In a way, my first piece of advice springs from the present situation. Christianity is in full crisis. We have already suffered much, and now we see that victory at hand. Let us take advantage of it so as not to drive away those who wish to join our ranks. I know of some men who are so convinced of the perfection of their own way of doing things that they condemn everything that does not conform to it. This is a kind of modern Puritanism which, by a process of elimination, will become egocentric, like a clique. As for us, let us seek to attract, and let us avoid distrust which belittles. May trust be one of our principal means of bringing about the victory of the cause of truth. We are not owners of truth, only its servants. Isn't the cause of truth God's cause? And the cause of God is His alone.

#### **False optimism**

My second piece of advice is not to count too much on success. Open your history books. What do you see, if not victorious peoples rapidly falling into decadence? As things stand now, we can count on some immediate success. But they scare me. Let us be watchful and remain always in the true light: "*Dum lucas habetis, credite in lucem, ut filii lucis sitis*"; While you still have the light, keep faith in the light, and you will become sons of light" (Jn 12:36). The great evil of our day is darkness and lies. Let us remain in truth. Let us serve truth, witness to it, and spread it. Then we will have done our job, and will not have succumbed to illusion.

#### **False prudence**

My third piece of advice is that you shed a certain kind of prudence that is often a disguise for shameful laziness. "Prudent" sometimes means faint-hearted. Now more than ever is the time to repeat with Bossuet, "Faith is daring." Our faith must be bold, though some might call it foolhardy. Real prudence is the queen of the moral virtues; and a queen commands, acts, and, if necessary, fights. Some have transformed prudence into a frightened old woman. Such prudence wears

bed slippers and a dressing gown, has a cold, and coughs a lot. I want no part of conventional prudence. You must not heed such prudence. As far as I am concerned, I will always trust totally in God's Providence, even if I end up dying in a hospital, abandoned by all.

**2° To our young religious**

I cannot conclude these remarks, my young Brothers, without saying a few words to you. From what Assumption has already done, you can tell that, with God's grace, she can do still more. But that depends on you. Your elders have given you the example; you must follow it. Why not do as they have done? To be sure, they have more experience than you in doing good. But why not imitate their enthusiasm? They will share their experience with you. Your enthusiasm, placed at their disposition, will increase both their strength and yours tenfold. Is there anything in this world that is more noble, more beautiful, and more worthwhile than the future to which they invite you? For my part, I continue to look, but have found nothing greater.

So follow in their footsteps. If you outrun them, they will not be jealous. They have borne troubles that you seem destined not to experience, but so what? God will reward us all. No matter how many crowns there are, they will always be more numerous than we can expect. God will make them beautiful and glorious, not according to our merits, but according to his mercy and his love.

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### **III.**

## **CIRCULAR LETTERS**

# **ADDRESSED TO THE MEMBERS OF THE GENERAL CHAPTERS**

May 1874—September 1875

## INTRODUCTION

*In May, 1874, Fr. d'Alzon began to prepare the General Chapter of 1876 by sending the Chapter members an impressive series of circular letters in which he successively brought to their attention various topics which he considered of prime importance for the future of the Congregation. He requested their ideas and advice because he did not want to decide anything that did not have the approval of his first disciples. "Fr. d'Alzon," relates Fr. Picard, "rarely gives orders; he outlines a direction, for he knows full well that we are all disposed to accept it immediately.... He is the one who sees clearly and on whom rests all responsibility. But since he often consults us on these sensitive matters, he considers it important that the Major Superiors study them and form an opinion about them."*

*This third series of letters was written in the context of the First Vatican Council which providentially underlined the miracle of the enduring character of the Church in the face of the anti-Christian struggle which had once again broken out. These letters brought new insight into the spirit and activities of the Congregation. They pointed out that its spirit is formed in the crucible of prayer and study, that its special purpose is the defense of the Church, and that its major preoccupation is the training, by members of the Third Orders and education in all its forms, of an elite as concerned about its personal sanctification as about the main interests of the Church.*

*More than ever, the Church needs new warriors who are bold, generous and disinterested.*

*Athanase Sage, A.A.*

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**FIRST CIRCULAR:  
OUR SPECIAL PURPOSE<sup>44</sup>**

*Nîmes, May 24, 1874*

In carrying out the threefold apostolate to which the threefold love consecrates us, we should be particularly attentive to defending the Church in the anti-Christian struggle it is facing.

*My dear Brothers:*

**A Threefold Love Calls for a Threefold Apostolate**

As we established in the *Directory*, the spirit of Assumption is characterized by the love of Our Lord Jesus Christ, of the Blessed Virgin, his Mother, and of the Church, his spouse. We adore Our Lord, eternal Word and infinite truth, with a deep faith in revelation. We view our devotion to the Blessed Virgin—whose virtues we consider models of inner-life and prayer—in the context of hope. As for charity, we seek its growth through our zeal for the defense and triumph of the Church.

These three characteristics call for a threefold action and, as it were, for a threefold apostolate. The love of Our Lord Jesus Christ should instill in us the desire to make him known through teaching and preaching. The filial devotion to the Blessed Virgin should prompt us to help direct and sanctify those souls which are called to a certain degree of perfection, a work which seems to be far too neglected in our time.

I have already broached some of these questions with you. Moreover, the meditations I am presently composing should be of some use, at least to the younger ones among us, as examples of the ideas with which you should be nourishing yourselves and of the way in which you should make use of them later on to nourish the souls entrusted to your care.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> This circular has been referred to in various ways; it could be entitled: “Our Special Purpose: the Defense of the Church.”

<sup>45</sup> At this time, Fr. d’Alzon was writing his *Meditations on Religious Perfection*.



## **Defending of the Church**

What I would like to stress today, in the context of your love for the Church, is the need to dedicate yourselves to those apostolates which are best suited for countering the attacks to which she is particularly subjected. At the present time, the Church is attacked by: 1° incredulity, which appears under the guise of free-thinking and liberal ethics;<sup>46</sup> 2° the secret societies; 3° the Revolution whose errors are spreading more and more among the masses.

It follows, therefore, that if we want to work effectively, we must establish for ourselves a threefold purpose as the very reason for our existence as a congregation:

1.—Against incredulity, we must spread the faith, establish its proofs and communicate its spirit; we must preach the love of Jesus Christ, the head of the Church, of the Pope, his vicar, and of the bishops under the Pope; we must work for the unity of the Church and for a return to the practice of God's commandments, as explained in the Gospels. Preaching, colleges, adult education, Catholic universities should all be powerful means in helping us attain this purpose.

2.—Against the Secret Societies, we should give serious consideration to re-establishing a Third Order of men with whom we could, on the one hand, penetrate the various branches of human knowledge and, on the other, take over the trade unions and oppose them to the Secret Societies. In this way we could mobilize an army of good against the army of evil.

3.—Finally, because revolutionary ideas are troubling society and perverting it to its very depth by the inroads they are making among the masses, do we not have to accept as a matter of fact the advent of a hateful demagoguery and simultaneously consider whether we should not attempt to make democracy more Christian by increasing the number of worker apostolates we would found or encourage? We hear endless moaning about the progression of evil. I question what people are doing to stop it. Individual efforts are being made, but should these efforts be allowed to be frittered away? Besides, does the idea not come from God to give the Augustinians of the Assumption this specialized and coordinating purpose that I am suggesting?

## **Practical Conclusions**

1.—a) To begin with, we must study: we must prepare ourselves

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<sup>46</sup> The expressions "free thinking" and "liberal ethics" must be understood in the context of nineteenth century liberalism which was a movement away from religious dogma and religious moral teaching, both considered as shackles placed on the freedom of the human person.

by acquainting ourselves with the Truth.

b) Once the Truth is known, growth in piety<sup>47</sup> through the practice of the virtues.

c) Our apostolic character, concretized by our devotion to the Church.

The following apostolates are particularly consonant with our personal studies:

- Teaching, according to each one's abilities.

- The direction and formation of souls based on mystical theology, an outgrowth of scholastic theology.<sup>48</sup>

- The works of zeal which, in the words of our Constitutions, stem from our love for the Church and suppose teaching at all levels.

2.—The establishment of a Third Order of intelligent Christians, and of trade guilds.

3.—Finally, all forms of evangelization for the working class.

I have allowed myself these repetitions to help you better understand my thinking and to explain more fully the importance I attach to it. Please meditate on it. If the order or the focus of my development were to strike you, kindly note your comments and transmit them to me. They will be placed on the agenda of our next Chapter or at least of one of our coming meetings.

Rest assured, my dear Brothers, of my most respectful and fond attachment in Our Lord.<sup>49</sup>

E. d'Alzon

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<sup>47</sup> For Fr. d'Alzon, the word "piety" had no negative connotations. He understood it as a loving reverence of God.

<sup>48</sup> Fr. d'Alzon had just finished giving the Oblate Sisters and the Assumptionist novices a much appreciated course on Mystical Theology.

<sup>49</sup> This circular was outlined in 1874 on the famous poster entitled "Our Purpose" and is reproduced in translation at the beginning of Part II of this volume following the heading on the introductory page.

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## SECOND CIRCULAR: MEMBERS OF THE CHAPTER<sup>50</sup>

*Nîmes, June 1, 1874*

At the head of a militia for Christ which is especially committed to defense of the Church, there is a need for an elite group of religious who are faithful to their vocation, pious and well-informed.

*My dear Brothers:*

### **Need for an elite**

At the Chapter of 1873, we laid some of the foundations of the government of the Congregation when we decided who should be eligible to the General Chapters and to the more important positions. Because the question is important for our future, permit me to come back upon it.

Since the purpose of the Augustinians of the Assumption, as described in my circular of May 24, directs them in part toward the apostolates for the working class, it is to be greatly feared that someday the religious engaged in these works will succumb to the milieu in which they live and, under the pretext of charity, come to neglect the conditions which raise a religious Society to a higher level and which prevent it from yielding to commonplace ideas, the forerunners of decadence.

### **Qualifications of capitulants**

Accordingly, would it not be very important for us to state in approximately the following terms the qualifications required of the members of the General Chapters: 1° perseverance, 2° holiness, and 3° knowledge?

### **I.—Perseverance**

A religious must have proved himself, and permanently so. Although failings are certainly not reserved to a particular age-bracket,

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<sup>50</sup> In his correspondence, Fa. d'Alzon himself entitled this second circular "Assumptionist Aristocracy." The members of the General Chapter, a self-perpetuating body, were appointed for life. In between Chapters, they served, together with the Assistants General, as an able group of Consultors to the Superior General.

there are greater chances that a religious who has been edifying for a long time will continue to be so, than there are for a religious who has just started out on the road to perfection. We should have no regrets about some of the appointments we have made. You will recall how Blessed Jordan of Saxony was named Provincial of Lombardy two months after taking the Dominican habit and declared the immediate successor of Saint Dominic less than two years after entering the Order. Nevertheless, what might be considered a necessity when an Order is just beginning might well prove to be a serious drawback as the Order develops. Therefore, please consider if, in addition to the ten years now required before someone can be elected to the Chapter, we should not draw up some regulations, or at least a directory that would be more demanding in this regard.

## **II.—Holiness**

### **Need for holiness among leaders of the institute**

Surely, only God can probe the hearts of men. But there are times—for example when the general welfare of the Congregation is at stake—when charity requires that we make a judgment concerning our brothers. Unquestionably, we must rank among our most important duties our obligation to provide the Congregation with an always more intense and effective fervor, whether it be for ourselves, our brothers, or the souls we are trying to help. But the preservation and increase of fervor depend first of all on the leaders of the Institute. For this reason, in choosing those we should admit to the General Chapter, we should keep in mind that numbers are unimportant. What is essential is that these leaders be living models of religious holiness.

### **The holiness required of capitulants**

Our purpose does not call for severe austerities. What we do require is prayer, work, a generous and open personality, a supernatural spirit and, above all, the complete gift of self to God through the Superiors. Those, it seems to me, should be the criteria for judging which religious should take part in the government of the Congregation. I have not mentioned prudence, courage, firmness or initiative. These are obviously indispensable. Let us not require anything more of those who will be chosen by the General Chapter, but let us insist on everything I have just mentioned. At any rate, I will abide by your opinion if you think anything should be added to or subtracted from what I have said about the holiness required of our key religious. We should remember, though, that personal virtues are not sufficient; one must also have the ability to govern or to share in government.

### III.—Knowledge

Knowledge inflates. But when the spirit of knowledge and that of piety are joined together, they protect and support each other. For this reason, I think that, after holiness, knowledge is indispensable.

#### Need to study constantly

I recognize that some of our religious are not as knowledgeable as they should be, but, because they remain among us, they have the opportunity to learn every day. It is a situation which, incidentally, is quite different from that of secular priests to whom I have been administering the junior clergy examinations these last twenty-five years. I find that, as a rule, once they find themselves in a parish, they cannot forget fast enough what they learned in the seminary. Because religious priests, by virtue of their vow of poverty, have a strict obligation to earn their bread at the sweat of their brow, they should consider study an essential part of the work to which they are bound by their very profession. It is up to us to dispel the illusions that several entertain in this regard.

#### Rules regarding studies

In order to attain this objective, I think that, in addition to the courses we are beginning to offer, we should also require very strict examinations. The religious<sup>51</sup> charged with preparing a program of studies will submit a proposal in the near future concerning the overall means we should take to maintain sufficiently high standards within the Congregation.

Nevertheless, allow me a comment which I think important. Though we must make allowances for the inadequacies of some of our religious, inadequacies we will have to put up with because of our difficult beginnings, it would be very dangerous, as a rule, to allow the religious not to study.<sup>52</sup> On this question, I can make no concessions whatsoever. However, I do recognize that we have not always studied properly. Some individuals are lazy, incompetent or sickly. They are with us and we must bear with them and try to use them as best we can.

But when I look at all the work accomplished by the majority of our religious, I cannot accept the criticism leveled against us that we do not study, and even study a great deal. Obviously, studies must be directed and regulated in order to avoid indifference, a certain self-sufficiency and fuzzy thinking. That is why a program of studies is in the making. During

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<sup>51</sup> The religious in question was Fr. Charles Laurent.

<sup>52</sup> This criticism had been leveled against the nascent institute, especially in Paris. Father Picard thought that the studies of the religious needed greater control. Fr. d'Alzon preferred putting the question off until later, though, in broad terms, he did come back upon it in his fourth circular.

the last two and a half years, we have put part of the program into effect. It has already produced some very rewarding results and some well-founded hopes for the future. This I want to underline in order to allay certain fears which I find unwarranted and fraught with danger.

**Seriousness of studies**

In my opinion, I think we have reached that stage in our existence as a religious congregation when it would be wise for us to proceed with caution. We should stop to examine ourselves. Since most of the young people, whom we might be tempted to judge harshly, are still novices and therefore forbidden to pursue any formal studies, we should take strong measures against the ignorant, the lazy and the incompetent. Some should be punished, others warned, and still others dismissed, if need be. As a matter of fact, the Congregation would be better off if some were dismissed. In any case, these people will never be called to the Chapter. My dear Brothers, these, then, are the remarks I thought I should make in order to elicit your attention, comments and opinions on the very important subject of the formation of the religious who are called to roles of leadership.

Rest assured of my most respectful affection in Our Lord.

E. d'Alzon

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## THIRD CIRCULAR: THIRD ORDERS<sup>53</sup>

*Nîmes, June 8, 1874*

“The Church, which will always have new battles to fight, will always need new troops to fight them with.” Assumptionist Tertiaries must be as concerned with defending the Church as they are with their personal sanctification.

*My dear Brothers:*

### **I.—The First Third Orders**

One of the best intuitions of both St. Dominic and St. Francis of Assisi was certainly the foundation of their respective Third Orders.

#### **Religious life accessible to laity**

1° Through these Third Orders, they provided countless Christians, who could not otherwise enter religious life because of position, health or other legitimate reasons, with the possibility of living as much of the religious life as feasible. While the Order gave the example of more austere practices, more rigorous commitments and a more complete separation from the world, the Tertiaries tried as best they could to emulate their loftier models and sometimes attained a holiness canonized by the Church. Surely, it was a remarkable achievement to have instilled the spirit of the founders into all classes of Christian society and to have challenged its members, without imposing on them the bonds of the evangelical counsels, to undertake a life which encouraged them to go beyond the simple fulfillment of their Christian duty.

#### **Influence of Third Orders**

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<sup>53</sup> Fr. d’Alzon had promised Fr. Picard a circular letter “that would give more details concerning the purpose of the Congregation: teaching, preaching, direction of souls, Third Orders, seminars for the directors of worker apostolates, and education for the working classes. To me,” he added, “all this seems to hold together.” In complete conformity with their distant beginnings, the new Third Orders, according to the spirit of Assumption, were to dedicate themselves to the defense of the Church.

2° The Third Orders were, moreover, a practical form of teaching. The spiritual family to which they were affiliated had the right to be more demanding of its members. A rule imposed obligations regarding fasting, prayer and good works. Because these practices affected one's entire life, they influenced the lives of others through good example and necessarily improved the overall moral climate of the times. In this way, the striving for holiness, which originated in the cloister, reached the ordinary faithful through the Third Order. The rigorous, penitential life of the religious frightened some. The life of the tertiary made it possible for the weak to strive for greater virtue. The effects of these associations were felt even in the privacy of the home where a Christian mentality was able to develop, fear of the judgment of others receded, and Jesus Christ became more known, more obeyed and more loved.

#### **Defense of the Church**

3° More specifically, before the Third Order of Saint Dominic took on its penitential character, it was called the Third Order of the Knights of Jesus Christ. The title indicated its purpose: to defend the Church against certain claims made by the Lombards, claims quite similar to those raised against the Church today in Italy, Germany and elsewhere. All Christians were invited to join a new type of crusade. After those to the Holy Land and against the Albigensians in which Saint Dominic played such great role, it was thought very useful to lead another in the defense of the rights of the Church against the encroaching claims of the temporal power. Later on, however, the Third Order became merely a stricter and more pious way of living for certain Christians. But why not return to those dynamic forms which so advantageously establish strong bonds between people: "A brother aided by a brother is like a fortified city" (Prv 18:19). Oh, how we need these fortified cities on the frontiers of the kingdom of Jesus Christ to repel the attacks of the enemy and to prepare incursions into the territory he has stolen from us!

## **II.—Assumptionist Third Orders**

#### **Evils of modern society**

4° The brief comments just made explain the very legitimate reasons we have for wanting to bring people together to work for something which seems indispensable in our time, that is to say, a more active defense of the Church. It is painful to see efforts frittered away and to be deprived of the positive results we could otherwise obtain from a master plan intelligently drawn up. We will applaud heartily if the Third Orders of St. Dominic and St. Francis, the Congregation St. Ignatius, and so many other pious associations manage to give new life to their members. But, do we not have to undertake something of our own in the light of the vocation God has given us? As a matter of fact, what do we



see today in so many well-intentioned people? 1° a profound ignorance; 2° a knowledge perverted by erroneous ideas; 3° the results—let us be frank—of an extremely disappointing Catholic liberalism; 4° the ever-mounting dangers of the State University and of government-controlled education; 5° theories propounding disbelief or opposing social welfare; 6° from the religious point of view, the destruction of all piety because of soft-living and the inability to carry a burden; and 7° the loss of vocations because of a love of comfort, which in turn renders unthinkable the idea of living an austere life.

**Means of combating these evils:**

**1) Intellectual apostolates**

But how can we fight such evils? Would it not be useful to create a Third Order or some other association—which you can call by whatever name you please—that would bring together a group of intelligent men willing to help us set up?

a) Courses or planned conversations that would attract men of good will desirous of becoming better informed about the *Syllabus*, the Council, or the war now being waged against the Church from one end of the world to the other;

b) Catholic universities. Some universities are founded with a lot of money; others are founded with ideas, men, and little money—the money coming later, in due course. It would already be a great achievement if we could attain the latter. I am convinced that a Third Order would be extremely useful in bringing it about.

**2° Apostolates for the working class**

We could hope for even greater results if the Third Orders considered themselves as centers for all the worker apostolates with which it is so important that we be involved. What interesting studies could be conducted, what discussions could be organized, and what beneficial results we could derive from them! What a powerful way of kindling, maintaining and developing the zeal of these productive groups!

**Catholic Action**

Charity, to be effective, must be well ordered. Would the Third Orders not have the great advantage of being able to assure more of it and to settle many difficult matters through obedience? If some of our religious devoted themselves to directing these Third Orders, what great legions they could train for God's cause!

**Source of vocations**

There would be another advantage. By imposing a strict rule, the Third Order would automatically impose mortifications and sacrifices regarding the love of comfort and easy living. Though such a protest would itself be a form of preaching, could we not turn it into a source of religious vocations? From this point of view, instead of waiting, we should

in fact hasten to propose the Third Order to young people. It would be attractive to those whose minds and hearts are still fresh; they would find it enticing in their struggle against the flesh, in the victories to be won, and in the test of their strength. By speaking more energetically about a life of penance, we would stimulate a desire for it. When St. Paul stated that he felt no need to know anything else except Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ crucified, was he not determining standards for those devoted people who ultimately choose religious life?

#### **Conclusion**

It seems to me that, from the three points-of-view of the dissemination of Christian ideas, of the worker and social apostolates, and of the fostering of vocations, the Third Orders offer advantages we should seriously think about. Judging from the encouraging results we have had with our associations for women, we could certainly obtain similar results with a Third Order for men, be it for priests or for fervent laymen whom we would challenge to an even more austere way of life.<sup>54</sup>

More importantly, however, we would be setting up an organization to counter the Secret Societies.<sup>55</sup> Though I have already written about this in a previous circular, I hope that the present one will help you better understand my thinking on this subject. Please meditate on it and let me know your suggestions. Rest assured of my most respectful attachment in Our Lord.<sup>56</sup>

E. d'Alzon

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<sup>54</sup> As a matter of fact, Fr. d'Alzon did accomplish a great deal through his religious and tertiaries: cf. sub-division on Secret Societies in section entitled "Struggles."

<sup>55</sup> The Secret Societies, particularly free-masonry, were engaged in open warfare against the Church and against Christians.

<sup>56</sup> Two documents accompanied this circular: 1) the draft of a "Rule for the Third Order of the Augustinians of the Assumption," and 2) a "Rule for the Third Order of Priests of the Assumption."

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## FOURTH CIRCULAR: STUDIES<sup>57</sup>

*Nîmes, June 18, 1874*

Ours are the weapons of light; study is indispensable.

*My dear Brothers:*

At the last General Chapter, Father Laurent was asked to prepare a program of studies. I am confident he will submit it to you before the next Chapter, which, if my hopes are fulfilled, will take place within the next two years. In the meantime, however, I think it imperative to propose some guidelines concerning our duty to study.

### **A.—Our Obligation to Study**

#### **Means of salvation**

I.—Study is indispensable for the religious who is not engaged in manual work. It is his way of earning his bread at the sweat of his brow. Whoever does not work damns himself. Although study is not our only means of salvation, let it be understood that if ever the religious stop studying, it will mean that the Congregation has had its day and is cursed by God.

Study is a penance, an atonement, and a safeguard. It allows us to atone for our sins and, if we so desire, to acquire merits that will help atone for the sins of the souls we are called to evangelize. It also allows us to protect ourselves against the vices that come from idleness and to occupy our minds with higher concerns, a benefit which is particularly important if we are to react against the triviality and mediocrity of modern ideas. These truths are so obvious that it is useless to develop them here. However, I do encourage you to meditate on them often.

#### **Protection against temptations**

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<sup>57</sup> To put an end to the criticism that Assumptionists did not study enough, Fr. d'Alzon, who had just given the novitiate a strong impetus, exhorts his religious with lofty considerations on studies in order to become scholarly men capable of effectively defending the Church and extending the Kingdom of God in souls.

II.—Inasmuch as study becomes an occupation, it protects us against the temptations which await all who devote themselves to the service of God. From this point of view, I cannot encourage you enough not to lose a moment of your time, for use of the shortest moments is what yields the greatest results. We sometimes say to ourselves: I've only a few moments, it's not worth getting down to study. With such an attitude, we not only run the risk of not keeping our mind focused on the work before us, but we literally lose our time—which goes against the vow of poverty—and we open the door to the temptations which the devil arouses precisely in times of idleness.

#### **Requirement of the apostolate**

III.—Shall I speak about the ignorance to which even the finest minds succumb when they do not impose upon themselves the intellectual training required by their vocation? Gone are the days when a religious habit sufficed to command respect. It is respected now only when worn by men who are the first to respect it. I urge you to respect and win respect for your habit by the way you present yourselves to others, primarily, of course, through your virtues, but also through your knowledge of what will help the cause of the Church and of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

### **B.—Purpose of Our Studies**

IV.—But it is not enough just to study; we must also have a purpose in mind. For us, everything must be related to God, to Jesus Christ and to his Church.

#### **God**

First of all, to God, as he is known in the study of what theology calls the “Preambles of Faith; *præambula fidei*”: to God in his attributes, in his works which we call creation, and in the preservation of these works which we call Providence. In this sense, all sciences are related to God as to their source. Besides, what is there to study except God, the universe which he made, and the laws which govern it?

#### **Jesus Christ**

Secondly, to Jesus Christ: “No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, ever at the Father’s side, who has revealed him; *Deum nemo vidit unquam; unigenitus Dei filius qui est in sinu Patris, ipse enarravit*” (Jn 1:18). We should study him especially as the one “who inspires and perfects our faith; *auctorem fidei consummatorem Jesum*” (Heb 12:2). “Christ is everything in all of you; *In Christo omnia*” (Col 3:11), though in a revealed, renewed and super-naturalized state. Through him, faith introduces us to truths which reason alone cannot attain. In his doctrine, we become acquainted with a new world that is beyond the scope of our human investigations and whose lights, received as a free gift from God, are nevertheless reflected in the natural world and teach us to know and

judge it, as it were, from a more divine perspective. In Jesus Christ is to be found the knowledge of God in his essence, of fallen man who has been raised, reconciled and renewed, of the rights of God over man, and of the duties of man toward God. Let us study Jesus Christ in himself, in the law of which he is the end, in his truth which is no other than himself, in the truths which come from his hand and which are true only insofar as they originate in him. Let us study Jesus Christ in his power; *Christum Dei virtutem* (1 Cor 1:24). And since his work seems to be more subject to attack nowadays, let us be conscious of all that we must give him to be his ministers; *ut ministros Christi* (1 Cor 4:1).

#### The Church

Finally, to the Church. If God manifests himself in the universe (“The heavens declare the glory of God; *caeli enarrant gloriam Dei*” Ps 18:2 Vulgate), Jesus Christ manifests himself in the Church. Jesus Christ holds the key to all of human history, and this key is no other than the divine plan of the Church. The Church is a society, “God’s dwelling among men; *tabernaculum Dei cum hominibus*” (Rv 21:3), and everything in it is related to the elect of Jesus Christ: “All things are yours, and you are Christ’s and Christ is God’s; *omnia vestra sunt, vos autem Christi, Christus autem Dei*” (1 Cor 3:23). Such is the sequence and, if you wish, the last word. Though God “made everything for himself; *omnia propter semetipsum operates est Dominus*” (Prv 16:4), he forgot himself, as it were, and declared that he made “everything for the elect; *omnia propter electos*” (2 Tm 2:10). God, Jesus Christ, the elect: these are the last words on the Church, on its history, on the history of mankind, and on all historical and social sciences. Society and history have their origin in the society of the elect, the heavenly Church, which has its foundation in Jesus Christ “who is its cornerstone; *ipso summon angulari lapide Christo Jesu*” (Eph 2:20) and who himself comes from God: “Christ is God’s; *Christus autem Dei*” (1 Cor 3:23). I think that no Assumptionist could ever adopt a broader outlook than this one.

Undoubtedly, if a human being wants to acquire a profound knowledge of anything, he must study many supplementary subjects. Since each trade has its own tools, you can readily understand that the subjects we must learn in order to acquire the knowledge we have spoken about must necessarily be chosen in function of the goal we have in mind. For this reason and without blaming anyone, we have a right to include in our classical studies whatever will best prepare us for the ultimate purpose of our religious studies.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Taking part in the controversy of his time, Fr. d’Alzon thought that the Christian authors, particularly the Fathers of the Church, should be included among the classical authors studied.

### c.—Conditions under Which We Study

V.—Let us not forget that the studies of a religious are subject to a certain number of conditions. If these conditions are not met, studies are useless and even dangerous.

#### Supernatural purpose

Studies are useless if the religious is not constantly pursuing a supernatural purpose. The prophet once told the Jews what might well be said of the religious who does not continually enhance his studies with the thought of God: “You have sown much, but have brought in little; you have eaten, but have not been satisfied; you have drunk, but have not been exhilarated; have clothed yourselves, but not been warmed; and he who earned wages earned them for a bag with holes in it; *Seminastis multum et intulistis parum, comedistis et non estis satiati et non estis inebriati, operuistis vos et non estis calefacti, et qui mercedes congregavit misit eas in sacculum pertusum*” (Hg 1:6). Alas, how many busy lives go to waste because they are not directed toward God: “You have sown much, but have brought in little; *Seminastis multum et intulistis parum*”!

#### Humility

Studies can be dangerous if, in the words of the Apostle, the knowledge they help us acquire serves only to inflate us; *scientia inflat* (1 Cor 8:1). Oh, if only our studies brought us to a deeper appreciation of who God is, of his goodness, love and perfections; if we became better acquainted with “Jesus Christ and him crucified; *Jesum Christum et hunc crucifixum*” (1 Cor 2:2); if we understood how, in the history of the Church, the greatest obstacles to her triumph as well as the greatest dangers to her well-being came from “false brothers; *periculum ex falsis fratribus*” (2 Cor 11:26), that is, from unworthy priests and religious, we would learn to tremble, to humble ourselves, and to recognize that God is everything, that his creatures are nothing, and that the human instruments he sees fit to employ are weak, if not corrupt.

#### Apostolic charity

But, if knowledge inflates, “love upbuilds; *charitas autem aedificat*” (1 Cor 8:1). So let us study out of love, that is, out of love for God, for Our Lord and for the Church; the more we know them, the more we will love them. Let us also study out of love for our neighbor, that is, out of zeal for the salvation of the souls entrusted to our care. Let us endure the dryness, the boredom and the length of our studies by remembering that they will make us laborers who, like the disciple of Saint Paul, have “no cause to be ashamed; *operarium inconfusibilem*” (2 Tm 2:15). Study will increase our love, and love will increase our eagerness to study. Thus combined with knowledge, love will become its hallmark and its driving force. We will study because we love. Our study will be a form of prayer which gives greater glory to God, and to us

greater skills at saving souls.

#### d.—Sources of Religious Knowledge

VI.—In closing, I would like to say a few words about the sources of religious knowledge. I have often thought that having a large number of books is not necessary and very often is useless baggage.

##### Basic authors

As far as I am concerned, the principal books to be found in the library of our religious are the following: the Bible along with a good commentary (why not ask it of St. Augustine or St. Thomas?); the works of our patriarch; the two *Summas* of St. Thomas; a history of the Church by Baronius, Rohrbacher or Darras<sup>59</sup>, according to one's ability; Bourdaloue or Bossuet as models for preaching; Bossuet as a controversialist; a few ascetical authors like St. Bonaventure, St. John of the Cross, St. Francis de Sales, St. Alphonsus Liguori and his moral theology; and a few rare modern authors who have articulated the errors of the day, in order to refute them more easily.

##### Canonists

If I have not mentioned a canonist, it is because Canon Law is still being revised. In the words of an eminent canon lawyer, the *jus* (law) was drawn up during the Middle Ages, the *jus novum* (new law) at the Council of Trent, but we are still awaiting the *jus novissimum* (the latest law). When Cardinal Berardi pointed out to me in 1855 that the Code was being revised, he was far from suspecting that the revolution would in fact force the Vatican Council to lay the foundations of the latest revisions, which we do well to await. Canon Law must, therefore, be studied with these revisions in mind and must serve to attach us more and more to the

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<sup>59</sup> Cesare Baronio (1538 – 1607) was an Italian cardinal and ecclesiastical historian of the Roman Catholic Church. His best-known works are his *Annales Ecclesiastici*, which appeared in 12 folio volumes (1588–1607). Pope Benedict XIV conferred upon him the title of Venerable.

Réné François Rohrbacher (1789-1856) was an ecclesiastical historian. He became a member of the Congregation of St. Peter founded by Félicité and Jean-Marie de La Mennais and from 1827 to 1835 directed the philosophical and theological studies of young ecclesiastics who wished to become the assistants of the two brothers in their religious undertakings. When Félicité de La Mennais refused to submit to the condemnation pronounced against him by Rome, Rohrbacher separated from him and became professor of Church history at the ecclesiastical seminary of Nancy. His principal work is his monumental *Histoire Universelle de l'Église Catholique* (Nancy, 1842–49). Written from an apologetic point of view, the work contributed to the extirpation of Gallicanism in the Church of France,

Joseph-Epiphané Darras (1825–1878) was a Church historian. His *Histoire générale de l'Église* in four volumes, following the reigns of the popes, appeared in Paris in 1854. In the following years Darras published a *Histoire de Notre Seigneur Jésus-Christ*. His chief work was *Histoire de l'Église depuis la création*, the first twenty-five volumes of which appeared before his death.

papacy.

**Other authors**

I do not want to exclude other authors, but I am convinced that those mentioned are sufficient. I do not condemn those I have not listed, but if we wish to have our own spirit, we surely have the right to point out the doctors who can help us form that spirit in a more characteristic fashion.

**Conclusion**

Later on, in passing, I might come back on this subject of studies, but for the moment I prefer not adding to what I have said. By its brevity, this letter will have the advantage not only of being more precise but of reminding us of that broader context wherein the mind, while adhering to the truth, studies it from the threefold aspect of reason, revelation and history, and wherein the human and the revealed sciences come together without losing their identities. Please God that these guidelines will help you to become learned religious to the degree that Jesus Christ, our guide, our light and our life, deems it useful for the extension of his Kingdom!

Rest assured, my dear Brothers, of my fondest devotion.

E. d'Alzon

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## FIFTH CIRCULAR<sup>60</sup>

*Nîmes, June 27, 1874*

For the Religious of the Assumption, mental prayer is the study of divine Truth. They engage in it in order to know their obligations better and to fulfill them more lovingly for the greater good of the Church.

*My dear Brothers:*

At the General Chapter, you asked me to set down a few principles concerning mental prayer.<sup>61</sup> The more I ponder your request, the more uncertain I am as to what to say. So many spiritual masters have written on this topic that I hardly know what to add to what has already been said. What bothers me is not so much the subject matter as the specific choice of topics. Nevertheless, I shall try to furnish you with a few guidelines designed more to help shape, as it were, the spirit of our mental prayer than to cast it into a uniform mold that would eventually turn it into a mechanical operation.

### A.—SPIRIT OF OUR MENTAL PRAYER

#### Three unquestionable truths

Let me begin with three unquestionable truths:

I.—The purpose of a life of perfection is union with God, a union which is achieved in the glorious beatific vision in heaven but which begins here on earth by faith;

II.—The Holy Spirit breathes where he wills. To unite souls to himself, he chooses his own means, and nobody has the right to force any

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<sup>60</sup> After a long period of reflection, Fr. d'Alzon wrote this circular all in one stretch. Its inspiration, quite traditional and very noble, makes for a spirituality that is original and characteristic. In our spiritual life, we must be primarily concerned with contemplating God, not in order to transmit the fruit of our contemplation to others, as do the Dominicans – *aliis contemplata tradere*, says their motto – but in order to develop an intimate relationship with God as a prelude to heaven. If we ourselves are attracted to God, we will very naturally and instinctively attract others to him.

<sup>61</sup> Fr. d'Alzon used the term “oraison,” which, for want of an exact English equivalent, is rendered here by “mental prayer.”

on him;

III.—Nevertheless, there is a science of mental prayer, and consequently there is a method based on the teachings of Holy Scripture, on the doctrine of the Church, and on the experience of the Saints.

#### **Science of mental prayer**

On the basis of these principles, allow me to touch upon various aspects of the spirit of mental prayer, as I see it applying to us, and to suggest the result I would like to achieve.

#### **a) Method of mental prayer**

First, a method of mental prayer is indispensable. There are several of them, and I am not overly insistent on the choice you make. However, it may be desirable for the master of novices to suggest the method of Saint Francis de Sales, as described in his *Introduction to the Devout Life*. Sometimes, mental prayer can and must be practiced publicly before the novices in order to initiate them to the kind of reflection with which they must become familiar. As for topics of meditation, I hope to provide you with some very shortly for every day of the year. Meanwhile, I leave you free to choose those you want.

#### **b) Basic principles (St. John of the Cross & St. Francis de Sales)**

Moreover, there are certain basic principles to be studied by those among you who wish not only to practice mental prayer but to train others later on in this regard. I would recommend two authors: St. John of the Cross and St. Francis de Sales. I am not excluding others; in fact, it would be good to consult them. But the two I suggest have been canonized. One belongs to a contemplative order; the other lived an active apostolic life and was in contact with Christians from all walks of life. The Church, by placing them on our altars, has guaranteed the purity of their doctrine. A master of novices or a confessor who has assimilated their teaching can, without fear of going astray, lead souls to the highest degree of perfection both in the cloister and in the world.

### **B.—STEPS IN OUR MENTAL PRAYER**

But I sense this is not what you expect of me. You want something more precise. You want me to describe that which I hesitate to call the spirit of our mental prayer. I will try to do it briefly, to the extent that I understand this spirit.

Because our life must be one of prayer, because we leave souls free in their journey toward God, and because mental prayer is the means we have for the most perfect union with God, our only end, should our efforts not bear on going to God through the knowledge of his Son in the love of the Holy Spirit?

We must acquire a more perfect knowledge of God

and learn to accept generously all of its practical consequences.

I.—*We must go to God*, and to do this, we must live a life of faith: “*Quicumque vult accedere ad Deum, oportet credere quia est*; Anyone who comes to God must believe that he exists” (Heb 11:6). How we deceive ourselves in this regard! Let the humble craftsman and the simple workwoman be content with finding their way to God with the rudiments of the catechism! In a sense, we say, if God ever owed his creatures anything, he owed them that much. But it becomes unconscionable for a religious, whose life is dedicated to study, not to be primarily interested in the Supreme Truth and in the Supreme Being! Since we must all serve God according to our calling, and since the religious of our family are called to study and to study sacred subjects, there is no doubt that we are obliged to study God in his essence according to the principles of Revelation. Let us be perfectly frank about it! Why do we speak so little about God and so poorly? It is because we do not think of him. And we do not think of him either because we do not know him, or because we are too lazy to study him, or because we are afraid of knowing him too well.

#### **Understanding his rights and our duties**

A greater knowledge of God entails a certain number of terrible consequences for those who wish to cauterize their conscience. It is all too easy to avoid thinking about them, and it suits those who have come to terms with mediocrity because all they have to do is ignore the principle from which these consequences proceed. I am not saying that, under the pretext of knowing God better, it is necessary during mental prayer to raise those curious questions which do more to inflate the mind than to build up charity.

What I am saying is that the contemplation of God’s Being, of his infinite Goodness which is none other than God himself, of his perfection, of his power, of his justice, and of his mercy, will most certainly instill in us an appreciation of his rights over us and of our duties toward him. It will teach us to adore him, to humble ourselves before him, to thank him, to hate sin, and to wage war on whatever is evil within us. I maintain that the more we know God in whose image we were created, the more ardently we will desire to fulfill the precept: “*Estote ergo vos perfecti, sicut Pater vester caelestis perfectus est*; You must be made perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Mt 5:48).

When St. Paul spoke of God to the Athenians, he said: “*In ipso enim et vivimus, et movemur, et sumus*; In him we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28). This indeed is our natural relationship with God. What will it not be some day throughout eternity? But if we want that union to be the closest possible, we must, in faith, freely but efficaciously cooperate with grace. To do this, we must study God; we must study him

theologically so that we can study him practically in mental prayer and reap the fruit he wants to produce in us. We must become thoroughly acquainted with the attributes of God if we are to learn how to communicate with him and to carry out our duties toward him.

God is known to us perfectly only through Jesus Christ. He came down to our level in order to confer a divine imprint on all the details of our lives.

II.—We must go to God *through the knowledge of his Son*. In God, the eternal Word corresponds to his divine intelligence; and this “Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us” (Jn 1:14). Why? To adapt himself to our weakness, to teach us as much about God as we are capable of learning here below. Meditation without Jesus Christ is useless. On the one hand, Jesus Christ is God, but God expressed in terms we can understand, God known as much as we can know him through his Son *ipse enarravit*; who reveals him (Jn 1:18). But he became flesh to teach us how to divinize our lives. This is why it is so necessary for us to meditate on the life of Our Lord Jesus Christ. On the other hand, Jesus Christ is a man, but his person is divine. It is his divine Person who raises human nature to his own dignity. Since everything that Jesus Christ did here on earth was divine, we have only to model ourselves on him in order to give a divine character to our feelings, thoughts, words and actions. In this way, by modeling ourselves on a man, we can restore to our souls the image of God which was destroyed by sin.

#### **Way to the Father**

So this gives us much food for thought: how to get to know God better by getting to know Jesus Christ; how to resemble him more closely; and how to reconcile ourselves with him, since Jesus Christ in his humanity is the great mediator between God and man: “*Unus mediator Dei et hominum, homo Christus Jesus Dei et hominum*”; God is one. One also is the mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Tm 2:5). Can the human mind dwell on anything more sublime, more adapted to its nature, more sanctifying, more practical?

#### **Model**

As a result, all the mysteries of the Savior’s life unfold before your eyes. They are the details of the life of a man. Each detail contains a lesson about a virtue in the performance of a duty carried out with greater holiness. The infinite unity of God seems too mysterious for us to fathom, but here we have details, divine details. There is not an aspect of your lives which cannot be inspired by them. Jesus Christ, the perfect man, is always before your eyes. Know him ever more intimately; imitate him ever more divinely.

III.—We must go to God through the knowledge of his Son in the love of the Holy Spirit.

**Necessity of the gift *par excellence*:**

**a) a spirit of love and prayer**

Knowledge is not enough. Because of its insatiable desire for good, the soul perceives this good in God through the holy humanity of the Savior and loves it to the extent that it knows it. Once enlightened, the intelligence has a vaster horizon within which to contemplate the perfections of God and aspires to be united more intimately with them. But just as the soul is unable with its own light to see God as he is known through Revelation, so the heart is unable to love God in the way it will love him with the help of grace. That is why the divine Spirit comes to the aid of our weakness: “*Spiritus adjuvat infirmitatem nostrum*; The Spirit helps us in our weakness” (Rom 8:26). He is the one praying in us with “unutterable groaning.” In him, we are able to pronounce, as we ought, the name of our divine Master and pray through his all-powerful intercession. Through him, prayer becomes an act of love and a prelude to our eternal union with God.

**Role of our feelings**

Nevertheless, allow me an important comment. I ask you to reflect upon it and to send me your reactions. St. Thomas points out that the heart is the ultimate source of animal life and that, in God, love proceeds from the will. With man, however, the soul and the body are so intimately linked that bodily reactions influence our will, just as acts of the will produce bodily reactions, which St. Thomas sees as the instruments of the soul. From that you can see that whatever has to do with feelings, and therefore with the senses, is inferior to that which has to do with the will. Consequently, when it comes to mental prayer, we should not focus first of all on our impressions or feelings. Instead, although a soul can rise to God through creation, we must, upon reaching a certain degree of perfection, abandon whatever is physical and animal because the Apostle said: “*Animalis homo non percipit ea quae sunt spiritus Dei*; The natural man does not accept what is taught by the Spirit of God” (1 Cor 2:14). We must submit our will to the Spirit of God and to his love so that he might draw from it the purest love that we can offer him.

**Role of our intelligence and will**

That we use our senses to go to God is almost indispensable. But, in my estimation, what emerges from all that the saints have taught us is this: if we want to make our mental prayer more perfect and our love less unworthy of God, we must seek him in the nakedness of our intelligence and will. Since God is pure spirit, it is especially through these two higher faculties that we must adhere to his very essence to the fullest extent possible here below.

If all this is true, it follows that, though we must allow beginners

the use of their bodily senses which are more in harmony with their weakness, it is especially in the depths of our soul that we must go to God.

**b) Spirit of truth: for a more fruitful knowledge of God**

When Jesus was about to ascend Mount Calvary, he promised his apostles the Spirit of Consolation, who is at the same time the Spirit of Truth. And he goes on to say: “*Cum autem venerit Spiritus ille veritatis, docebit vos omni veritatem*; When he comes, being the Spirit of truth, he will guide you to all truth” (Jn 16:13). This can apply to the assistance which the Holy Spirit gives to the Church in its teaching as well as to the light he pours into the soul imbued with the truths of faith and striving to understand them better in order to live by their practical implications. In mental prayer, we perceive the truth, and we learn to practice it through charity: “*Veritatem in caritate facientes*; Let us profess the truth in love” (Eph 4:15). Mental prayer is therefore a study of divine Truth which enables us to know our duties better and to fulfill them with greater love through the grace of the Holy Spirit.

All the thoughts and desires of our soul are renewed by divine love. Little by little, through mental prayer we eventually become, as it were, one spirit with him: “*Qui adhaeret Domino, unus spiritus est*; Whoever is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him” (1 Cor 6:17).

**Effect on the apostolate**

The religious of the Assumption must pray, not just for himself, but also for others, hence, from another point of view, the need to base our mental prayer on sound knowledge of sacred doctrine. When the Manichean heresy was overtaking the southern part of France and Italy, Innocent III said that the strongest defense against the enemies of the faith was sound education. But these enemies were simply the predecessors of our secret and revolutionary societies. Sound education is therefore as necessary today as it was at the time of the Albigenses. However, it must be digested before being communicated. Unfortunately, it is too often given with “*In persuasibilibus humanae sapientiae verbis, et non in ostensione spiritus et virtutis*; In the persuasive force of ‘wise’ argumentation” and not with “the convincing power of the Spirit” (1 Cor 2:4). In order to do this, it must be prepared in mental prayer. This is one of the strongest reasons we have for meditating not only on questions of piety but also on dogmatic truths, for these, in final analysis, are the ones which produce, if not the most sentimental, at least the most solid results in terms of true perfection. The more you ponder in mental prayer the body of revealed truths, the more adept you will be at spreading that type of dynamism which will infuse new life, first into ourselves, then into whatever we do for others.

Mental prayer should lead us progressively to an habitual awareness of the presence of God.

### Conclusion

I would not want to conclude without speaking of that prolonged mental prayer which consists in being constantly aware of God's presence. Mental prayer should be something we do habitually. Our spirit invites us to avoid austere tension in our prayer as well as what I would call an exaggerated sense of recollection, so that we can seek God joyfully and be happy in his service. For this reason, we must live in his presence and surrender to him in utter simplicity all our thoughts, desires and actions. "*Ambula coram me et esto perfectus*; Walk before me and be blameless" (Gn 17:1). These words suppose on our part a great respect, one that is both filial and trusting. The constant thought of God helps us to recollect ourselves; it also makes us happy. It is with zeal that we must walk before him, but it is also with love and tenderness that we must work for our Father and in his presence. His watchful eye must inspire us with the most delicate thoughts of purity of intention and of all purity; it must be for us an encouragement to do better each day in order to please him.

Therefore, let us develop both the spirit and the practice of mental prayer. Let us remain always in the presence of God like faithful servants ready to obey him, like disciples interested in gathering all of his teachings, like soldiers awaiting the first sound of the trumpet to take up arms on his behalf. Let us seek God, the eternal purpose of our being; let us learn to know him in the light of his Son; let our hearts be set ablaze by his Spirit. By thus uniting us with the adorable Trinity, our mental prayer will give us a foretaste of what God is preparing for us in our heavenly homeland.

Rest assured, my dear brothers, of my fondest devotion.

E. d'Alzon

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## SIXTH CIRCULAR<sup>1</sup>

*Nîmes, July 2, 1874*

As democracy advances, politics is obtruding itself everywhere. More than ever, there is only one political stance that will allow us to bring the modern Towers of Babel under control: that of the Church.

*My dear Brothers:*

Social issues are presently in such a state of turmoil that the best minds seem to be losing their way in radically different directions. Opinions are at cross purposes; political systems denounce each other; we seem headed for the confusion of Babel. Yet, it is easy enough to know what road to take if only we are willing to leave aside political intrigue, party strife and personal ambition, to stand on the solid ground of religious truth and work wholeheartedly for the cause of the immortal King of the ages. Allow me to suggest a few guidelines that will always make it possible, if not easy, for you to find your way in the labyrinth of so many problems which, to the best minds, seem insoluble.

### I.—PRINCIPLES UNDERLYING SOCIAL ISSUES:

#### **God is the sovereign Lord of all things**

1.—God is the sovereign Lord of all things: “*Domini est terra et plenitudo ejus, orbis terrarum et universi qui habitant in eo*; The Lord’s are the earth and its fullness, the world and those who dwell in it” (Ps 23:1 Vulgate). The world and its inhabitants belong to him. The best thing these inhabitants can do is submit to his eternal Majesty. If people started from that principle to regulate their behavior, their social relationships and their politics, how many evils would be avoided! Since the Revolution is essentially a radical denial of the rights of God, does it not constitute a perpetual revolt of man against God, a revolt over which God, after

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<sup>1</sup> In the light of Revelation, of the teaching of St. Augustine in the City of God, and of the doctrine of Vatican I on the mystery of the Church, Fr. d’Alzon outlines in this circular letter a short but suggestive theology of history in order to give his religious a sense of purpose in the battles they were waging for the defense of the Church.



waiting patiently, will ultimately triumph? From this we must conclude 1° that the Revolution is committing a crime when it denies the rights of God, 2° that we have a strict obligation to defend these rights when they are attacked, 3° that it is possible for the wicked to triumph in the short run, though theirs is a triumph in which, as history so often points out, they ultimately find their providential punishment, were it only the dissolution of the society they poisoned by their doctrines and crimes, and 4° that God will certainly triumph in the end, even if he takes his time in passing judgment on justice itself: “*Cum accepero tempus ego justitias judicabo*; When I seize the appointed time, I will judge with equity” (Ps 74:3 Vulgate).

#### **Divine Providence governs all things**

2.—But God not only exercises mastery over the universe; he also governs it wisely. Those who plot all kinds of more or less cunning schemes are too inclined to forget that there exists a skill superior to theirs, that of Eternal Wisdom. At the sight of so many of these schemes, are we not left with the impression that people believe that divine Providence has abdicated? No, divine Providence has not abdicated. As Saint Thomas teaches, God’s infinite will, moved by his infinite intelligence, has the last word whenever spiritual activity is concerned. Infinite will and infinite intelligence: what can anyone oppose to such power? And is it not true that those who try to judge all things from the point of view of the divine and the providential run better chances of understanding reality than those who, in an effort to eliminate the miraculous from the world, see no further than the material and, consequently, no further than the futile activity of people whose only goal is the satisfaction of vain and selfish interests?

#### **Jesus Christ is Master of all nations**

3.—But try as we might to eliminate the miraculous, Jesus Christ re-emerges with all his divine authority and power. The miraculous! It is found in Jesus Christ, redeemer of the human race. Are men not born with original sin? Are they not by nature children of wrath? Did God not send his Son to redeem them? Did Jesus Christ not win humanity for himself by shedding his blood? Did God, sovereign master of all things, not say to his Son: “Ask of me and I will give you the nations for an inheritance? You shall rule them with an iron rod; you shall shatter them like an earthen dish” (Ps 2:8-9).

Jesus Christ is therefore the master of all nations. There are some which he must rule with a strong hand and shatter like earthen dishes. But the greatest miracle of all is our ongoing redemption: God became man, first miracle; the God-made-man died on the cross to save the human race, second miracle; this God-made-man was established by his Father as master of all nations, third miracle; the God-made-man ordained all things as he pleased, calling some people into his light and leaving others in

darkness, fourth miracle; this same God-made-man charged certain chosen servants to defend or extend his rule throughout the world and to the ends of the earth, fifth miracle. What is most surprising, however, is that these miracles, by dint of striking our eyes with their brightness, no longer surprise them.

#### **Consequences of Christ's lordship**

And yet there are conclusions to be drawn from these divine facts, miraculous and incontrovertible for Christians. First, we must judge all things, not only from the general point of view of divine Providence, but also from the more particular point of view of the miraculously supernatural character of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Second, we must recognize the ongoing social miracle wherever Jesus Christ decides to intervene. Finally, we follow with absolute faith the directions given by Jesus Christ, so that when he says to us, "*Laxate retia vestra*; Lower your nets," we can answer like Saint Peter, "*Domine, per totam noctem laborantes nihil cepimus; in verbo autem tua laxabo rete*; Master, we toiled all night and took nothing, but at your word I will let down the nets" (Lk 5: 4-5), and witness the most unexpected results for having obeyed the Savior's instructions.

Consequently, the miraculous cannot simply be brushed aside. One must either deny Jesus Christ and his supernatural influence over human beings or admit the miraculous permanence of his divine intervention in society. However, the miraculous is not always evident; it escapes the attention of the skeptical. When Jesus Christ appeared to his apostles after the Resurrection, many believed, but some doubted. The same situation exists today: there are doubts and denials, just as, at the sight of the risen Christ, there were doubts about his triumph over death. Is it surprising then that some doubt his victory over sin because he does not visit terrible destruction upon all sinners?

## **II.—THE CHURCH'S APPROACH TO POLITICS**

If Jesus Christ governs the world, there is a very simple policy that should be followed: that of Christ himself. This policy asserts itself especially and unimpeachably in the society he founded and to which must rally those who are more particularly his own. I am speaking of the policy of the Church.

### **A) Its goal**

4.—But does the Church have such a policy? The answer is unequivocally yes. And the goals of this policy, like those of the Church, are twofold: 1° to preach the truth and 2° to teach the moral law which comes from divine truth and which is none other than the law of God. Since the pursuit of these goals requires an authority, the policy of the Church is twofold: to preserve this authority as well as the hierarchy

which proceeds from it, and to guarantee to this sacred hierarchy whatever rights it needs in order to distribute God's gifts to men.

#### **1° Preaching the truth**

Today's society does not understand the matter in this way and, like Pilate, does not want the truth to serve as its bedrock. Ever since society ceased to rest on this doctrinal foundation, we can see from the resulting turmoil what further turmoil is to be feared. Our own policy is, above all, to defend the social truth of which the Church is the sole depository. Accordingly, it is our strict duty to re-introduce the notion of truth within a society that wants no part of it.

#### **2° Teaching the moral law**

But no less important is the defense of the law of God. It has been repudiated by human reason as an odious yoke to be broken. We must defend all that is connected with divine law, because any human law that contradicts this superior law is evil in itself, pernicious and subversive; it leads nations to their death. If we could only establish ourselves as the relentless defenders of God's law, what evils would we not ward off! How imminent and assured would be the healing of sick nations!

### **B) Miracle of the Church:**

#### **1° God's intervention**

We have chosen Jesus Christ as our king. Not only does all mankind belong to him, but his chosen Kingdom is the Church. And since Jesus Christ is a perpetual miracle, the Church's destiny is to live by dint of miracles: the miracle of its foundation by a crucified man; the miracle of the blood shed by a God, which became the seed of its expansion; the miracle of its conquests through "*per stultitiam praedicationis*; the absurdity of preaching" (1 Cor 1:2); the miracle of its preservation amidst the causes of all kinds of decay; the miracle of the sacraments, this ever miraculous outpouring of God's love; the miracle of the perpetuity of the promises made to the Church and of their fulfillment beyond all human understanding. After that, to deny the miraculous in the unfolding of human history is to deny not only Jesus Christ, but also the fact, as obvious as the sun, that the Church exists.

#### **2° Perpetuity of the Church**

Yes, from the sole point of view of reason, the Church is a reality at once so incontrovertible and so filled with apparent contradictions, an institution that is so different from all concepts of worldly wisdom, that to acknowledge her existence without recognizing the divine cause of her perpetuity is to accept that human nature carries within itself the greatest absurdity that is both permanent and triumphant. No greater insult could be directed against our human dignity.

### **C) Conclusion**

#### **1° Longevity of the nations according to the Church**

I shall not develop that point; as you can readily understand, it goes beyond the scope of my topic. Besides, it is obvious to you. But what should we conclude? Because the Church is eternal like the truth upon which it is founded, we must, in the face of the birth, sickness and death of nations, espouse the great cause of the Church with its miracle of perpetuity. I come back to this miraculous aspect because the fear on the part of certain Catholics of what people may say has become too reprehensible to be ignored any longer. I also insist upon it because even if no other society has been promised this miracle, those societies which adhere to the Church can, without receiving a promise of their own immortality, find in their contact with this indestructible institution some of the principles of longevity which, since the advent of Christianity, can be found nowhere else. In the center of the heavenly Jerusalem, the Apostle John saw the tree of life, whose fruits are meant for the elect but whose leaves are intended for the preservation or the recovery of the health of nations: "*Et folia ejus ad sanitatem gentium*; Their leaves serve as medicine for the nations" (Rv 22:2). The fruits are for the elect, the leaves are for those nations which are intent on maintaining their health, or on recovering it if they have been ill: "*Et folia ejus ad sanitatem gentium*; Their leaves serve as medicine for the nations." Our policy in political matters will be to gather these salutary leaves and offer them to the sick nations which are still capable of returning to health.

#### **2° The politics of the Church above all parties**

Viewed in this way, politics remains at a higher level that is more appropriate for religious who come from all parts of the world and hurts the national pride of no one. Our major preoccupation is to proclaim everywhere in the world the rights of God, of Jesus Christ and of his Church. Those who defend these rights are our allies; those who deny them are our enemies. Wherever the Church, the agent of God, allows freedom, we respect each person's freedom. Wherever she proclaims a duty, we proclaim it with her. Wherever she condemns, we condemn. Wherever she declares war, we fight without worrying about the outcome of the battle, for we are certain that the final victory will be ours, and we know with Saint Paul that if we fight the good fight we shall receive the crown of justice from the hands of the just Judge at the appointed time.

### **III. TWO FINAL COMMENTS**

#### **A) Union between the City of God and certain earthly cities**

5—Before concluding, I would like to make two comments. First, even if we keep our distance in relation to purely human questions, we cannot avoid being faced with some situations in which the cause of the Church and that of certain nations seem to be very closely linked. Several examples of this can be found in the Middle Ages. Was Constantine, the

first emperor to adopt the Cross as the standard of his armies, to be treated with indifference by Christians simply because it was in his own interests to assure the triumph of the Church? Since that time we have seen Church leaders who have sought assistance from civil authorities. Can we say that the Church was wrong? And if the Church was mistaken for so long a time on so important a question as the union of Church and State, what becomes, from the human point of view, of the promise of divine assistance to be with us “*omnibus diebus usque consummationem saeculi*; always until the end of the world” (Mt 28:20)? But if she was right then, why would she not be right today?

Consequently, let us remember that Jesus Christ does not forsake his Church; that the cause of the Church, being the cause of Jesus the king and therefore of God, is the cause of truth and good; and that every time we see a nation defending that cause openly and loyally, we can, with the Church, take the side of that nation.

**B) People are judged according to the ideals they live by**

My second comment is that nations are kept together either by selfish interests or by an idea. If by selfish interests, their people are no more than merchants tending their business; we need not be concerned about their profits or losses. Do they steal? If so, we must see to it that, as far as we are concerned, they do not despoil us too much, and that, as far as they are concerned, they must not be too dishonest. But some nations live by an idea. If the idea is evil, it must be fought relentlessly. If it is true, the nation defending it already enjoys the blessings of God. France had been favored in this way but, alas, what has she done with God's blessings? France! She was born the day Clovis accepted to fight for the divinity of Christ in the face of the old Roman world and of barbarism, both steeped in Arianism. She grew up on the plains of Poitiers, when Charles Martel drove back Islam which was menacing Europe. She was truly glorious when with Charlemagne she strengthened the papacy's external power. She reached her peak when St. Louis died on the shores of Africa while leading an expedition to recapture the tomb of Christ. Her mission has always been clear. Despite a few family quarrels, the eldest daughter of the Church has always known how to defend publicly the cause of her Mother. Has she now deserted her mission which is historically unique? From all appearances, it is to be feared that she has. And if another nation ready to take her place were to appear on the horizon, it would be for us a time of deep anguish. Fortunately, our successors in this noble work have not yet appeared. Our place is still there; let us recapture it and keep it. That is the only political stance we should take as French religious. It is one that any truly Christian person will certainly want to help us with, if we accomplish our task in a disinterested way, with faith, love and respect for Jesus Christ and his Church

Forgive me if I do not go into further detail. From the perspective I have chosen, I must allow you a certain freedom, provided you remain unyielding concerning the main ideas I have outlined.

Let us not forget that we must take the miraculous into account when considering the destiny of the Church. It evidently has a direct bearing on the protection and on the reward or punishment of nations, whether they are faithful, indifferent or hostile. From these heights, we can easily foresee many sad events as well as many consoling ones. Regardless, let us remember that we are, above all, subjects of Jesus Christ our King, citizens of the Church, our homeland, and that we owe Jesus Christ and his Church our fidelity, our service, our love and our life.

Please accept, my dear Brothers, the expression of my fondest and most respectful consideration in Our Lord.

E. d'Alzon

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## SEVENTH CIRCULAR

*Nîmes, July 13, 1874*

Education remains the best way of training the laity, religious and clergy to become an elite totally dedicated to serving the needs of the Church.

*My dear Brothers:*

I hesitated a long time on how best to organize what I have to say about education. Should I treat the education offered in our colleges and that offered in our alumnales<sup>1</sup> as two separate topics, or should I simply speak of education in general and treat what is common to both? After careful consideration, I chose to start with a few principles common to both. This will allow me to address in an orderly fashion the various aspects of the basic problems of Christian and religious education.

I shall therefore consider: 1° the aim of education, 2° the teacher, 3° the college,<sup>2</sup> 4° the first alumnae, and 5° the second alumnae.

### I.—THE AIM OF EDUCATION

#### **Formation of Jesus Christ in souls**

All Christian and religious education is summed up in these words of Saint Paul to the Galatians: "*Filioli mei quos iterum parturio, donec formetur Christus in vobis*; You are my children, and you put me back in labor pains until Christ is formed in you" (Gal 4:19). The formation of Jesus Christ in souls is indeed the sole aim of education. In view of the fact that Jesus Christ reached perfect manhood, we will have given our students the best possible preparation for life when we have provided them with the means of approaching the perfections of the God-Man. The ideal aim of education, it seems to me, is to transmit the following: a knowledge of Jesus Christ that takes into account all that he is and all that he does both as man and as God; a love of Jesus Christ based on the attractiveness of his gifts and of his beauty at once human and divine; a dedication to Jesus Christ in keeping with the sovereign rights of our King; an

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<sup>1</sup> The term Fr. d'Alzon used for the seminaries he founded at the secondary level.

<sup>2</sup> The French term Collège combines the U.S. equivalent of high school and the first two years of college.

awareness of the rewards to which he invites us; a desire to carry out the duties and to practice the virtues stemming from our relationship with Jesus Christ seen in this perspective.

#### **Jesus as model**

In order not to go astray, it behooves us to follow Christ step by step. We understand why the Son of God did not wish, like the first Adam, to come forth perfect from the hands of his Father. He preferred to be born of a humble woman, to put up with the swaddling clothes and the sickness of childhood, to grow little by little and so reveal himself gradually to humankind. The education of children was so important that the Child-Jesus wanted to propose himself as its model. The Christian teacher should meditate frequently on the mystery of the holy childhood and on the circumstances that surrounded it. Though these details might seem at first to have little bearing on education, many lessons can be drawn from them.

## **II.—THE TEACHER**

### **A) His life must be Jesus Christ**

“What I did,” said the divine Teacher to his Apostles “was to give you an example: as I have done, so you must do” (Jn 13:15). And elsewhere it is said that “*Coepit Jesus facere et docere*; Jesus did and taught” (Acts 1:1). Education is not pure speculation; it is, before all else, a practical training that takes place at every moment of every day. I fail to understand the Christian teacher who does not have in his heart rather than on his lips these words of the Apostle: “*Vivo, jam non ego, vivit vero in me Christus*; The life I live now is not my own; Christ is living in me” (Gal 2:20). When Jesus Christ lives in a teacher, it becomes quite easy for that teacher constantly to reflect the divine model, especially if he is mindful of these other words of St. Paul: “*Mihi vivere Christus est mori lucrum*; To me, ‘life’ means Christ; hence dying is so much gain” (Phil 1:21). The teacher for whom life means Jesus Christ is characterized by two things: a supernatural spirit<sup>3</sup> and selflessness.

### **Above all the miseries on earth**

If his whole life is Jesus Christ, if it is hidden in God with Jesus Christ, then it necessarily rises above the difficulties of this world and assumes in God, through Jesus Christ, a divine character. And if, for him, dying is a gain, it is because he holds to nothing here below; his reward is not on earth. Were he to seek that reward in perishable things, death could not possibly be a gain when it takes them from him. If, on the other hand, we sense in the teacher a contempt for that which passes, for fame, for marks of honor, for personal feelings, for money, for material advantages,

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<sup>3</sup> By supernatural spirit, Fr. d’Alzon meant that attitude which believes deeply in the supernatural and lives by it.



for comfort; if no human mire stains the crystalline purity through which Christ, living in him, radiates the gentle yet strong rays of his light and warmth, then, indeed, he will be strong, productive, fit to form Jesus Christ in the souls of his pupils. For their sake, he will lovingly accept to suffer the pains of some mysterious child-birth, the result of which will be a new incarnation of Jesus Christ in souls: “*donec formetur Christus in vobis*; until Christ is formed in you” (Gal 4:19).

#### **B) Grandeur of his mission**

To be sure, this means undergoing difficult labor pains, but what an honor for someone to be called by Jesus Christ to cooperate in the most worthy of tasks! What is the work of the six days, in comparison with Christian education? Since theology teaches us that the act of Redemption is far superior to the act of creation, what must we not conclude of the honor given us to cooperate in the salvation of mankind?

#### **Differences between a teacher and an apostle**

You might wonder if such comments apply to everyone entrusted with an apostolic function or mission. They certainly do, and it is already a source of glory to be compared with the apostles, which is what we really should be. However, a few qualifications are in order. The Christian teacher is an apostle by reason of his zeal, his virtues and his goal. However, the apostle strictly speaking has a broader field of action, while the Christian teacher is more narrowly focused. The apostle deals with the multitudes in the hope that saints will emerge; the Christian teacher must strive, even if he is not always successful, to form individual saints. He has fewer souls to mold, but he must work more painstakingly. He is not a sculptor who hastily carves from ordinary stone a great number of rough-hewn statues destined to be seen from afar; rather he chisels in marble a work destined to embellish the temple of God, perhaps even its sanctuary. He is duty-bound to aim for the perfection expected of him, as it were, because he is being asked to produce fewer pieces and more masterpieces. The apostle works in broader strokes, coming back on his work in only a few instances. The Christian teacher operates within a much narrower context. He works with individuals on a one-to-one basis because he truly wants to form Jesus Christ in the hearts of young people. He must root out the bad weeds one at a time before he can sow the seed of finest wheat, Jesus Christ, the seed of saints.

#### **Dedication**

That being said, I quite readily agree that the Christian teacher must be above all an apostle. What prayers, what tears, what penances must not accompany everything he does! A teacher who does not pray much, who does not suffer much for his pupils, who does not make education his overriding concern might be brilliant and distinguished, and might gather applause and success; but, in final analysis, he will be a mediocre and commonplace teacher, bearing no fruit for God; he will be a

hireling. May God preserve us from such teachers! The essential characteristic of a true teacher is summed up in a single word: dedication. One must know how to give one's self completely: "*Libentur impendam et superimpendar ipse pro animabus vestris*; I will most gladly spend and be spent for your souls" (2 Cor 12:15).

### III.—THE COLLEGE

#### A) Patience

It would be absurd to pretend that we can turn a college into the vestibule of heaven for all who come knocking at our door. To console us, Jesus Christ shed considerable light on the subject when he said: "*Nonne duodecim vos elegi, et unos vestrum diabolus est?*"; Did I not choose the twelve of you myself? Yet one of you is a devil" (Jn 6:70). No matter what we do, therefore, we will have devils among our students, but that should not prevent us from trying to make angels of them. Difficulties should never stand in our way. Did Our Lord not have to suffer much from the coarseness, the lack of intelligence, and the skepticism of the apostles themselves? At every turn, they were stupidly preoccupied about questions of precedence, dignity, ambition, and rivalry. Time and again, they failed to understand what was happening: "*Ipsi autem nihil horum intellexerunt*; They understood nothing of this" (Lk 18:34). Unquestionably, the Christian teacher must be patient, though he will never have to be quite as patient as his divine model.

#### Goal: formation of "the new man"

Let it be understood from the outset that the children entrusted to our care are not perfect. If they were, why would anyone entrust them to us? To teach them a smattering of Latin, Greek, history or physics? Hired professors who teach for nothing else but money would suffice in that case.

The Creator shaped the first man from a bit of clay. Yes, college students are this unformed mass, unfortunately muddy at times, into which the Christian teacher must, by imitating God, blow "*spiraclum vitae*; the breath of life" (Gn 2:7). But to transmit this breath, one must have it. What a pity that so many teachers do not have it and are not even aware that they lack it!

Please note the difference—all to the advantage of the Christian teacher—between the formation of the first man in paradise and the formation of the new man in the Church. "*Primus homo de terra terrenus, secundus homo de coelo coelestis*; The first man was of earth, formed from dust, the second is from heaven" (1 Cor 15:47). No matter what meaning you give the expression "*terrestris*; formed from dust," yours is the task of training "men from heaven" according to your model, Jesus Christ, who is within you and before you: "*Aspicientes in auctorem fidei et*

*consummatorem Jesum*; Let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus Christ, the author and perfecter of our faith” (Heb 12:2). To achieve such a noble goal, we have a lot of work to do.

**B) Means:**

**1° Knowledge of Jesus Christ**

We must know Jesus Christ. As I mentioned elsewhere, we can speak adequately only of what we know well. We discover Jesus Christ through study and through meditation. Without these two means, it is impossible to learn enough about him to speak of him fittingly. The study of Jesus Christ is something good in itself, but can be dry at times. On the other hand, meditation without formal study gets lost in a cloud of false mysticism. Together, study and prayer provide fruitful results. Sadly enough, experience shows that, if Christ is so poorly formed in the hearts of young people, it is because their formation has been entrusted to teachers who do not pray, or who do not study, or who all too often neither pray nor study.

**2° Love of Jesus Christ**

We must love Jesus Christ. This is a serious matter. Why is it that, as a rule, students love Our Lord so little? The reason would indeed be hard to accept if the answer were that they have lost their innocence and consequently can no longer bring themselves to love the one who enjoyed resting among the lilies of the field. This would constitute a sad state of affairs! Is it possible that students do not love Jesus Christ because their teachers love him so little? Since I must go to the heart of the matter in these personal reflections, let us admit shamefully that this is the real reason why our students lack fervor for the divine Master. When the Christian teacher is with his students, he should always keep in mind that scene when Jesus Christ questioned St. Peter just before conferring upon him the supreme teaching authority of the Church: “*Simon Joannis, diligis me plus his*; Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?” (Jn 21:15). Not once but twice does the Lord entrust to him the sheep of his fold. At the third questioning, Peter is saddened and in a burst of love cried out: “*Domine, tu omnia nosti, tu scis quia amo te*; Lord, you know everything. You know well that I love you” (Jn 21:17). Christ answered him: “*Pasce oves meas*; Feed my sheep.” The measure of our love for Jesus Christ should be, and in fact will always be, the measure of our influence on souls in the Church and in school.

**3° Prayer**

Love proves itself by deeds. If we succeed in forming Jesus Christ in the souls of our students, they will not only love him but pray to him. Let me confess something to you in the form of a question. Did I not set a bad example by not sufficiently encouraging you to train our students to develop a spirit of prayer? Could it be that we are not training them well enough because we ourselves fall so far short of being men of prayer?

Please think about it. Reflect on the terrible consequences this has for our students and on our responsibility in their regard. Because we do so little to develop in ourselves a life of prayer, it becomes practically non-existent in those around us. How then can we hope to form Jesus Christ in the souls of those entrusted to our care?

#### **4° Practice of the virtues**

Love proves itself by deeds. These deeds are nothing other than the practice of the virtues, each of which is a particular way of imitating the perfections of Jesus Christ. What a wealth of material on which to model ourselves! What an eloquent sermon for our students! It is really an opportunity for us to do as Christ did: act first, then teach!

#### **According to the spirit of the Assumption**

I need not recall the specific virtues which characterize the spirit of Assumption. Since I treated that subject elsewhere, I need not come back upon it here. Suffice it to remind you that we should emphasize both for ourselves and for our students a spirit of faith, frankness, sacrifice and initiative. Beyond that, we should allow them a certain freedom in their development and not crush them by trying to force them into a uniform mold.

#### **Summed up in the triple love**

At any rate, let us return to the three important principles that we must constantly try to inculcate in our students: love of Christ, love of the Blessed Virgin, the guardian of their purity, and love of the Church, that noble cause for which we must set them on fire. We can be sure that their interest in the Church's struggles will see them through the boredom of certain subjects and afford them wholesome distractions from the effervescence of youth and the enticements of the world and of Satan.

Think of the vocations that would then emerge almost on their own! Think of the great number of young people who would easily become heroes once they had been seduced by the greatness and beauty of our goal as well as by the dangers to be overcome in attaining it. Think of those who would respond to our threefold motivation: the love of Jesus Christ which we would have imparted to them, the love of the Blessed Virgin and of all the virtues which she conceals beneath her royal and heavenly mantle, the love of the Church in its struggles and in the persecutions to be endured for her sake! As a matter of fact, all this would be easy, but only on one condition: that we ourselves first become heroes for Jesus Christ.

#### **5° Correction of faults and the Eucharist**

I neglected to speak about the faults to be corrected and the abuses to be reformed. Both require constant attention and persistent effort. The love of Jesus Christ is the source of all good for the people he has redeemed. It implies hating evil and uprooting it from our hearts. God

himself spoke the last word on education when, in expelling Adam from paradise, he told him that the earth would produce nothing for him but “thorns and thistles; *tribulos et spinas germinabit tibi*” (Gn 3:18), that he would need bread to live on, and that he would have to earn it “*in sudore vultus tui vesceris pane*; by the sweat of his brow” (Gn 3:19). We too need bread, as do our students. It is up to us to provide it for them and, at the same time, to teach them how to provide it for themselves later on. That bread, which is so necessary for us and for them, is that super-substantial bread spoken of by St. Matthew. It is our touchstone. Let us push them toward this bread; let us give them a hunger for it. By our teaching and especially by our example, may our young people learn to earn it at the sweat of their brow, by struggling against their faults, their vices, and their sinful habits. Let us train them for these personal struggles. Let us show them this admirable bread, the strength of the weak, the sustenance of the strong, and the true bread of angels. The young man who, prompted only by the grace of God, often goes to communion on his own, carries within himself the seeds of perfection. When he leaves us, he will love us. Even if he forgets us—which matters little—our work will have been successful, for whatever is lacking in his training will be continued by Jesus Christ at communion. We will have made him a Christian; we will have formed Jesus Christ in his soul. When Jesus Christ returns to him in the Eucharist, he will take care of making him a saint.

**C) Two recommendations:**

**1° Respect differences**

Obviously, there are many topics I have not mentioned regarding education. I have said nothing about how a teacher must be attentive to what is special in each student, and how he must uproot certain vices, identify what is good in view of developing it, and mold character so as to give everyone a certain stamp, while respecting the individuality of each one. Jesus Christ is the epitome of all perfection; the saints, though reflecting the divine model in many ways, possess only certain virtues to an eminent degree. What is true of the saints is true of our students. The saints had to fight against certain innate tendencies and reject certain temptations, acquiring thereby their own special merit. The same holds true in the field of education. We must form Jesus Christ in our students, but according to the raw material at hand: gold, silver, bronze, marble, stone or wood.

All these considerations could be the object of a more thorough study. At any rate, what is certain is that when a teacher, through personal dedication and holiness, has acquired the confidence of his students, the one they will imitate most faithfully and easily is the teacher himself.

**2° Use models of Christian beauty**

It is not my purpose here to treat here the question of instruction. However, I do want to mention that the study of Jesus Christ, if well done,

can be the source of much Christian inspiration. What is more beautiful, more admirable than God coming within our reach and becoming one of us? What could be greater than the reflection of his divine beauty in the different forms of human beauty, nobility and moral sensitivity which are to be found in the saints? Because we absolutely must study these models, I wonder if we will have the time to study the pagan ones as well. This could even be the final answer to a famous controversy.<sup>4</sup>

We do not proscribe all non-Christian literature; we admit that it has the value that some of its supporters claim. But the Christian treasures to be exploited are so rich, the mine so inexhaustible, that we do not have the time to spend on anything else. When we will have exhausted the world of supernatural beauty, when we will have assimilated this admirable order, which revelation admittedly places beneath the heavenly realm but well above the terrestrial, we can then consider the beauty of nature as understood by the pagan world. But until we have reached that point, we will forego that study simply because it would be an unprofitable use of our time.

The notion of Christian beauty, studied in its highest form, is obviously a powerful means of education. Once someone falls in love with truth and experiences emotions of a purer order, he purifies himself, improves himself and discovers that he has less taste and drive for lower desires. It would take too long to explain here the relationship between Being, Truth, Good and Beauty as they constitute essential aspects of God and are revealed in Jesus Christ. Yet, we can find in these brief considerations whatever we need to develop a literature which is wholesome, invigorating, outstanding, and which can serve as a precious vehicle for the kind of education we would like to provide. I beg you, my dear Brothers, to think of “teaching” in these terms; you will be surprised by the results.

#### IV.—THE FIRST ALUMNATE

##### **Purpose of the alummates**

What I have said so far referred only to education in our colleges. Needless to add that the core of what I said applies also to our alummates. However, I find it useful to specify a little more that which applies to this

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<sup>4</sup> A debate raged in Fr. d'Alzon's time about the respective merits of the ancient Christian authors as opposed to the pagan authors in the school curriculum.

special institution.<sup>5</sup>

In establishing the alummates, our purpose was to educate youngsters destined for the priesthood in either the secular or regular clergy. We reached out to those families which, given their modest means, cannot pay the boarding school expenses of their children, leaving for the minor seminaries the youngsters whose parents can afford these expenses.

But, is it not dangerous to accept youngsters who, precisely because of their poverty, may not possess a certain nobility of soul? Our first reply to this objection was that Jesus Christ, our model, set up the first seminary, of which he was the Superior, with very poor and uncouth workers. We then pointed out that the education we intended to give in the alummates was geared precisely to obviating the problem which had been raised and which, unfortunately, is all too real in the major and minor seminaries.

#### **Distinctive characteristics**

Made up of youngsters who want to become priests and even religious but who are poor, the alummate must have distinctive characteristics:

- 1° Piety must be practiced with great simplicity and sincerity;
- 2° The life-style must be austere and rugged, as befits youngsters brought up in poverty;
- 3° Christian studies must figure almost exclusively in the program, especially the study of Latin and Greek, the two languages of the Church;
- 4° Manual labor must prepare future missionaries for their work;
- 5° The liturgical celebrations of the Church shall be its principal occasions for rejoicing. As a famous bishop once said, the youngsters must be men of the Church, especially by the ecclesiastical way in which they live;
- 6° The Superiors of the alummates must return to their families those youngsters who cannot reasonably acquire the spirit of the institution or submit to the common rule: "*Nonne modicum fermentum totam massam corrumpit*"; Do you not know that a little yeast has its effect all through the dough?" (1 Cor 5:6);

#### **Capacities required in students**

7° In order to qualify for the alummate, the youngsters must be endowed with a certain intellectual ability, hence the importance of the

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<sup>5</sup> Both the term and the concept of the alummates are attributable to Fr. d'Alzon. Conducted by the Assumptionists, these minor seminaries a) recruited youngsters from among the poor, and b) allowed the students to opt for the priesthood either in the diocesan or religious clergy. Over 4,000 priests received their early training in the alummates, most of them for various dioceses of Western Europe as well as for various religious and missionary orders.

entrance examinations. To be admitted they must, in addition to supplying the documents required on the application form, be in good health, possess above-average intelligence, and have a pliable character. Above all, they must be frank and very convinced of the greatness of their vocation. They must also demonstrate a sustained perseverance, a certain joy in serving the Lord, a promptness to obey, a fondness for the schedule, an open but serious mind, and, as is said in our Constitutions, a willingness to give of themselves unsparingly. If, after the first aluminate,<sup>6</sup> the youngsters move on to the second in possession of these same qualities, there is every reason to hope that they will continue to improve and that their strengthened vocation will prepare them to become fervent and serviceable priests as well as holy religious, in a word, real apostles.

## V.—THE SECOND ALUMNATE

### Screening the applicants

There is no need to discuss here the academic proficiency required to pass from the first to the second aluminate. The question is whether every student should automatically be transferred from one aluminate to the other without some sort of personal evaluation. The Superiors should be very much attuned to this question. A youngster who moves up to the second aluminate rises to a new world; he must therefore be evaluated very carefully. It is the duty of the Superior of the establishment to ascertain most diligently:

1° What is the character of the newcomer? What are his inclinations? What battles has he waged against his faults? What defeats has he undergone? What victories has he won? What virtues have begun not only to bud but also to blossom in his soul?

2° What intellectual disciplines does he prefer: literature, history, philosophy, religious studies, mathematical or natural sciences? How well can he express himself, orally and in writing? What is his intellectual capacity, his perseverance at work, his determination when confronted by obstacles?

3° What degree of piety has he attained? How often does he frequent the sacraments? What benefit does he derive from spiritual reading? How willing is he to practice mortification? What does he deny himself? How regularly does he visit the Blessed Sacrament? How disposed is he to a life of sacrifice?

4° Now is the time to instill in him the love of Our Lord, of the Blessed Virgin and of the Church. When he is praying, his heart should already be burning with love for all the things that pertain to God. The

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<sup>6</sup> The first aluminate corresponded to the four years of high school in the U.S. The second aluminate comprised two years called the humanities and corresponded to the first two years of college in the U.S.



locale and the number of teachers permitting, this is the moment to start training him to a life of prayer by encouraging him to make a few occasional retreats. It is also the time to make him more consciously aware of the beauty of his vocation, the importance of the goal he is giving to his life, of the goodness of God who is willing to make use of such an unworthy instrument as himself, of the profound realization of his own nothingness, and, above all, of the boundless zeal he must develop for the service of God.

5° The years spent at the second aluminate parallel those of the awakening of the passions. It is not surprising that the youngsters, who have now become young men, begin to experience at times a rebellion of the senses. In some instances, the rebellions will lead to painful departures; in others, they will become occasions, through wise direction, to draw good out of what might be considered an inevitable trial. During this critical period, important responsibilities rest upon the religious entrusted with these souls who are condemned to a crisis which can lead to so many disasters. Devotion to the Blessed Virgin, frequenting the sacraments, certain penitential practices, more intense studies can all become powerful means for achieving self-mastery. What is needed during this period is a boundless compassion, an understanding and fatherly heart, tenderness and firmness, prudence and daring, but, most of all, an intimacy with Our Lord and a deep purity of heart. It is a transformative period in their lives. This situation will undoubtedly continue throughout their novitiate. But, for the novices educated in our alumnates, I am certain that the novitiate will be much easier and its outcome more assured, no matter what path they choose in the sight of Our Lord. Regardless of where they serve, they will always have the same spirit and, when the occasion presents itself, they will always be easy to recognize.

#### **Picture of the young man as he finishes his studies at the aluminate**

I would now like to describe, not so much the schoolboy leaving the hands of his first teachers and passing rather naturally from the preparatory program of his classical studies to the theological studies of the seminary, but rather the young man who has been properly trained by aluminate superiors equal to the task. I can best sum up that ideal by saying that he should be like a rough sketch of Jesus Christ, ready to receive in the seminary or the novitiate features that are more clear, noble, delicate and characteristic. The desire for perfection should be apparent at first sight. He should have a certain freshness of virtue, an eagerness to give of himself, a passion for sacrifice, and generous dispositions which the novitiate will develop by regulating them. We must be able to say of the young man who has completed his aluminate what, in the Book of Job, the Holy Spirit says of the horse: "*Ubi audierit buccinam, dicit: Vah? Procul odoratur bellum*"; At each blast he cries, 'Aha!' Even from afar he scents

the battle” (Jb 39:25).

Do not think, dear Brothers, that I am engaging in flights of poetic fancy. The young man, who is about to enter the novitiate but who does not have the sacred flame of the love of Our Lord nor an enthusiasm for the struggles of the Church, might well become a good priest, pious, well-ordered and modest, but mediocre and very ordinary. He will never become a true son of Assumption. It is not that I expect him to have already attained perfection, but I would hope he has acquired the means of attaining it. How can he transmit the flame to others if he does not have it himself? How can he stir others to action if he has fallen asleep? How can he inspire important actions to be taken for the defense of the Church if he does not understand the less important ones? How can he lead others to sanctity if he is not a saint himself or, at least at this early stage in his life, capable of becoming one in the near future?

If God in his mercy sees fit to bless our efforts regarding the foundation of alumnates, we can be confident about the future. The Congregation will be able to turn to the Directors of these breeding grounds of religious vocations and say to them: “*Filii tui sicut novellae olivarum in circuitu mensae tuae*; Your children shall be like olive plants around your table” (Ps 127:3 Vulgate). The vigorous offshoots of these plants will belong not just to them but to our entire family.

#### **Duties incumbent upon us all**

This work, however, imposes duties upon us all. We must:

1° Be convinced that, by a providential turn of events, God has determined that the future of the Congregation lies in the alumnates. We were not thinking of this three or four years ago. The idea was sown like a stray seed by a bird of passage. But, thanks be to God, it has borne fruit. We should thank God for having made the seed so productive.

2° Pray a great deal for the Superiors of the alumnates. Their task and their responsibility are enormous. If what I have just said is true, the fervor or decadence, the growth or death of the Congregation depend on them.

3° Pray and have others pray for the students of the alumnates. They are worthy of our concern and affection. The alumnates are like the nests of our spiritual family. It is there that are reared the generations destined to receive our heritage. We must constantly commend them to God during our mental prayer, Office and Mass, as well as by our penances, our work, and our good deeds. Once again, whoever has been well trained at the aluminate will find the novitiate easy. Progress in religious virtue will come about almost of itself on the strength of the initial impetus which, if well given, will prolong itself well into the final trial years of the young religious.

4° Finally, obtain for our alumnates—because man needs bread, even if he does not live on bread alone—the material resources they need,

while simultaneously avoiding excessive worry and exercising the type of prudence which even abandonment to the will of God does not exclude. We do not seem to be lacking these resources. Every day divine Providence opens a more generous hand to our beloved houses. Let us not be too greedy, but as we think of these poor youngsters who are counting on us, let us say on occasion: “*Unde ememus panes, ut manducent hi*; Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?” (Jn 6:5). The youngsters need a roof over their heads, clothing and food. Let us ask God: “*Unde ememus panes*; Where shall we buy?” Let us always place our confidence in divine Providence and ask for help. God will do the rest as long as, in a spirit of religious poverty, we say with faith: “*Panem nostrum quotidianum da nobis hodie*; Give us this day our daily bread” (Lk 11:3).

#### Conclusion

If I have been long, my dear Brothers, do not reproach me too much for it. Is there anything more satisfying than to prepare souls for the perfection of the sanctuary or the cloister? Is it rash to think that, if the secular clergy is not all that it could be, the fault lies with the minor seminaries? Will we be fortunate enough to contribute to a reform which is indispensable if the salt of the earth is to stop losing its savor? Will the model of education we give in the alumnates have a positive influence on the renewal of the first years of ecclesiastical training?

But this concerns us only indirectly. What really matters is the renewal of our religious spirit.

Because we have a duty to prepare a generation of saints, we also have a duty to strive for greater personal sanctity. Since the example of the older religious is a factor in the training of the young, we must edify the students by providing them with more numerous examples of virtue. May Our Lord, whom they will know through us, reach into your hearts and minds so that whatever they see of you may serve as a constant formation of Jesus Christ in the very depths of their being.

Please accept, my dear Brothers, the expression of my most respectful affection in Our Lord.

E. d’Alzon

## FORMATION OF YOUNG RELIGIOUS

*The question of the formation of young religious became one of the major concerns of the day. The novitiate at Le Vigan had seen a skyrocketing number of vocations but older members regretted the defection of so many young religious. Fr. Hippolyte, who was combining the roles of general treasurer, master of novices with that of the superior of the Oblates in Le Vigan and who managed to get involved with any number of activities on the outside, was clearly overwhelmed. And this was the time that the alummates were producing their first precious contingents that a more or less hasty formation could undermine. In fact, it was the time to lay the very foundations of the Congregation.*

*A meeting of four influential leaders had been organized; Fathers d'Alzon, Picard, Hippolyte, and Emmanuel Bailly; and was to take place in Nîmes from October 26-28, 1874. In order to set the tone for these discussions, Fr. d'Alzon wrote this eighth circular in early October at Lavagnac. After the meeting in Nîmes it was addressed to the other member of the general chapters.*

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## EIGHTH CIRCULAR<sup>1</sup>

### *Formation of Young Religious*

*Nîmes, November 8, 1874*

*My dear Brothers:*

I am broaching here one of the most important topics we could possibly discuss, maybe the most important, inasmuch as all the fervor, even the life of our family depend on it. I would like to talk to you about the novitiate. I will divide the discussion into four main points:

- 1° The novitiate in general
- 2° The Master of Novices
- 3° The novices
- 4° The formation of souls at the novitiate

#### I.—THE NOVITIATE

##### **Concern for the novitiate**

From now on, the novitiate should be considered as our alma mater. All the religious should be happy to return to it as to the place of their religious formation. They should see to it that it prospers, either by sending suitable candidates or by helping to provide the resources it needs.

Kindly think about whether the novitiates ought to be separate institutions, or whether we ought to leave that up to Divine Providence. If the novitiates are not separate institutions, it would be useless to acquire property.

It is important to know if we should have several novitiates. It might be better to have only one, especially at the outset. A single novitiate would be the best way of fostering a spirit of unity, which would

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<sup>1</sup> The formation of young religious was becoming a major concern. A good number of recruits had gone through the novitiate at Le Vigan like lightning, and, sadly, several young professed had left the Congregation. Fr. Hippolyte Saugrain obviously had too much work: he was concurrently General Treasurer, Master of Novices and Superior of the Oblates at Le Vigan and, at the same time, did a lot of pastoral ministry on the outside. Also, the alummates were about to send their first precious groups which, it was thought, should not be ruined by a more or less hasty formation. It was time to solidify the very foundations of the Institute. Fr. d'Alzon decided to hold a meeting in Nîmes on October 26-28, 1874. Four religious attended: Fathers d'Alzon, Francois Picard, Hippolyte Saugrain and Emmanuel Bailly. In order to give some direction to their discussions, Fr. d'Alzon wrote this eighth circular letter at Lavagnac at the beginning of October. After the meetings in Nîmes, the letter was sent to the other members of the General Chapters.

be more difficult if we had several. The only advantage to having several novitiates is being able to transfer a candidate from one to another to test him anew. Experience tells us, however, that when a candidate fails in one place, he is not too likely to succeed elsewhere.<sup>2</sup>

The older religious in particular should have a special fondness for the novitiate. Without getting involved in its government, they should be seriously concerned about the suppression of any incipient abuses and about the development of both the fervor and spirit of the Congregation. To avoid gossip, however, they should limit themselves to advising the Superior General of whatever they pick up.<sup>3</sup> After verifying their information, he will use it with appropriate prudence at the opportune time. It is most desirable that the novitiate be so located that the Superior General can visit often in order to know personally what is best for the novices who live there as well as for the Congregation which has such a great need of young religious who are fervent and intelligent.

The period of the novitiate must be spent giving candidates a very serious formation to religious life. Also, as soon as we can begin having the two-year novitiate stipulated by the Constitutions, we must impose it on the novices.

#### **Running the novitiate**

The novitiate should be a place where the following are scrupulously observed:

1° Silence and recollection. Without regular silence, there can never be any interior life nor, for that matter, a life separated from the world, as befits a religious whose conversation should be in heaven;

2° Prayer. Though novices should be assigned various occupations, their most important one is to learn how to pray. They must be able to find in prayer the light and strength they will need later on when, as religious, they are confronted with the difficulties of the apostolic life to which they are called;

3° Obedience. The bigger the Congregation will become, the more necessary will be the bond of obedience. What is now done out of affection for the superiors will have to be done more out of faith, the basis of true obedience, and in a spirit of supernatural charity sometimes devoid of any tenderness. When they leave the novitiate, the young religious should have a will so trained that their only interest is to do God's will as manifested by their superiors;

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<sup>2</sup> The Minutes of the meeting of October 26, 1874, state that "the question of having one or several novitiates is tabled until such a time as the Congregation is divided into provinces. Nevertheless, in terms of personnel and spirit, the Committee stressed the advantages of having only one novitiate."

<sup>3</sup> The same meeting reminded the religious of the principle concerning the strict separation of the novices: the professed may not visit the novitiate without special permission. Fr. d'Alzon personally added: "Except in emergencies, this permission must be obtained from the Superior General."

4° Poverty of the most absolute kind, according to the spirit of the Rule;

5° Character training. No doubt, this is the work of a lifetime. Nevertheless, we can be sure that if it is vigorously pursued during the novitiate, it will be easier later on to apply these efforts to the details of daily life;

6° Religious customs. Each Order, each Congregation has its own. We are beginning to develop ours, though we certainly need to modify and improve them. It will be necessary to draw up particular rules. Even if I am not including them in this letter, I do want to state here the need for them;

7° A life of sacrifice and of rejection of all inordinate love of self. What is most odious is self-centeredness. We must try to discover it, pursue it, and break it through humility. Whenever we do not succeed, the question should first be referred to the Superior General, then the candidate mercilessly dismissed from the novitiate;

8° A cordial affection among the novices and a respect for their elders. We should love and respect each other a great deal. Our Lord strongly urged his apostles to develop this spirit;

9° Finally, the apprenticeship of perfection according to the spirit of Assumption. This says it all. Needless to say that we were founded for a specific reason and that it would be very dangerous if the novices were not trained according to the principles which presided over that foundation. We must never permit ourselves to stray, for whatever reasons, from these characteristic principles; without them we are nothing as a Congregation.

## II.—THE MASTER OF NOVICES

### Relationship with the Superior General

At the novitiate, the Master of Novices is the right-hand man of the Superior General. Ultimately, though, it is the Superior General who is responsible for the novitiate, for it is he who decides, even after the vote of the two committees required by the Holy See, whether or not to accept postulants and novices.<sup>4</sup> That is why the Master of Novices must keep him scrupulously informed about whatever details can help him become acquainted with the subjects.

### Responsibilities

The responsibilities of the Master of Novices are as follows:

1° He must draw up frequent and detailed reports on the novitiate and the novices, according to what will be said later on;

2° He must train to the highest possible degree of perfection the young men entrusted to his care;

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. *Collectanea* (MCMXX), p.6: “Rescriptum de Constitutione Novitiatus” (Dec. 11, 1857).

3° He must be most discerning and sincere in giving the reasons why a candidate should be admitted. These reports must be submitted to the Superior General who will transmit them to the Voting Commissions at the beginning and at the end of the novitiate.

#### **Virtues**

The Master of Novices must be the living rule of the novitiate. Yet he must understand that each young man has his own character which must be molded, not slavishly on his own but on Our Lord Jesus Christ of whom he should be a reasonable likeness. He must permit others to imitate different traits of Jesus Christ, though always in the overall context of the spirit of the Congregation.

#### **Reports**

On a quarterly basis, he must send the Superior General a report on the novitiate and another on each novice, according to a questionnaire that will be drawn up later on. In the meantime, he can be guided by the three main points mentioned above in the section on the novitiate in general and by those mentioned in the section below.

The reports sent to the members of the Commissions shall be detailed and accompanied by the required documents. The Master of Novices, using the questions stated in the Constitutions, shall examine very conscientiously each young man who presents himself. He shall apprise the Commission Members about which requirements have or have not been fulfilled, and he shall specify those which have not been.

#### **Principal duties**

If a serious problem arises, he must notify the proper authority. However, unless there is a danger of imminent scandal, he shall not expel anyone from the novitiate without notifying the Superior General. On his own authority, he does have the right to dismiss a postulant who has not yet been accepted for the novitiate. If novices on their own accord want to leave, he should prudently examine whether they are unsuited for religious life or simply undergoing a passing temptation. He should react appropriately either by encouraging them to leave or by affectionately urging them to stay.

Allowing himself very few exceptions, he is to preside over the common religious exercises, always over the Chapter of Faults, and almost always over the recreations. He should give frequent talks and make numerous remarks regarding infractions to the Rule, to the Constitutions and to the particular rules of the novitiate, as well as regarding the virtues, the spirit and the manners of a good religious, and the fervor and holiness which should permeate the life and every action of a man called to perfection.

He should make every effort to win over the heart of each novice, not by any dotting affection, but by an abundance of charity, drawn from the source of love which Our Lord has for all souls and especially for his



disciples.

He should live a supernatural life; his actions, thoughts and motives must be inspired by his faith. To put it simply, his model should be Jesus Christ living in the midst of his apostles and training them to the evangelical life.

As much as possible, he should receive the help he needs according to the number of novices he has.

*Question:* If the novices are numerous, would it be wise to have, in addition to the Master of Novices, a Superior who would be more particularly responsible for matters other than the formation of novices?<sup>5</sup>

### III.—THE NOVICES

#### Recruitment

It is to the advantage of us all to find and prepare the spiritual heirs to our work. Some founders of Orders or Congregations preferred to wait for those that Divine Providence would send them. As for us, we should remember that the Council of Trent charged the Bishops to prepare ecclesiastical vocations and laid down the general rules to attain that goal. We should also recall that Our Lord called his first disciples and said to them: “*Non vos me elegistis, sed ego elegi vos*; It was not you who chose me, it was I who chose you” (Jn 15:16). On the basis of these two authoritative sources, a general Council and Our Lord’s own injunction, we should make every effort to understand just how zealous and prudent we ought to be in seeking out, preparing and finally accepting religious vocations. We look for them before the novitiate; we prepare them during the novitiate; we choose them at the end of the novitiate. It is true that fostering vocations in our colleges and alummates and through the spiritual direction given young people in the world is an excellent apostolate. However, we must strive to make the right choices. In this regard, we cannot be too careful, too prudent, or too motivated by a spirit of faith.

#### Requirements

The Constitutions have already spelled out the requirements for admission to the novitiate. But let me stress a few essential points:

1° A supernatural outlook or at least a willingness to acquire it. More than ever, we have to wage war against “naturalism.” If we do not seek to form men capable of fighting for supernatural ideas, we are defeated before we even start because that would mean that we have given up on our goals;

2° Sincerity. There is nothing more deplorable than the lack of

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<sup>5</sup> During these meetings, Fr. d’Alzon asked Fr. Picard to become the Master of Novices. The choice underlined the importance Fr. d’Alzon was attaching to this responsibility. Because of the appointment, the novitiate was moved from Le Vigan to Paris.

sincerity which is sometimes found among aspirants to religious life. Why do they come to us? Is it a type of career which they have not sufficiently thought out? In it they see certain advantages which they would like to enjoy, but they refuse to accept certain difficult conditions which they would like to avoid. This leads them to all kinds of subtle and very human schemes which they think they have concealed because they have not spoken about them. The schemes are easily detected by a trained eye and should be dealt with mercilessly because there is only a short step between the lack of sincerity and hypocrisy;

3° The gift of self. This gift need not be complete at the outset. However, a postulant who is calculating, contriving, laying down conditions, asking for useless exceptions and exemptions is not a promising candidate. If after a short while—two or three months at most—he has not begun to take everything in stride, things like privations, sacrifices, humiliations, wounded feelings caused by the Superior and the other novices, he should then be irrevocably dismissed. Either he will never understand religious life because he is incapable of it, or he lacks the courage to do so because he is too lazy and too faint-hearted for us. We are better off getting rid of him as soon as possible;

4° I will not come back upon the entrance examinations to be administered before the novitiate. But let us determine that henceforth, in order to enter the novitiate, those who have not been educated in our schools must have the intelligence and schooling expected of our rhetoricians.<sup>6</sup> A transition will have to be made, but we hope it will be rapid and that exceptions in this regard will promptly cease;

5° The Master of Novices should carefully supervise the recreations and other moments when the postulants and novices are allowed to speak in order to observe how they think and to discover the warped minds, the eccentric, the undisciplinable, the argumentative, the taciturn, the stubborn, all of whom should be turned away because they are truly destructive of religious congregations;

6° He should demand above all a humble and cordial acceptance of correction, docility to the direction given, confidence in the superiors, joyous affection for the brothers, esteem for their vocation, and a desire to become ever more worthy of it by loving Our Lord, the Blessed Virgin and the Church.

#### IV.—THE FORMATION OF SOULS

St. Paul said: “*Imitatores mei estote, sicut et ego Christi*; Imitate me as I imitate Christ” (1 Cor 11:1). This should be the motto of the Master of Novices as he works to form religious. He must be constantly

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<sup>6</sup> Rhetoricians: students in the final year of their secondary education which, in the US, corresponded to the second year of college. In the French system of the day, it was followed by two years of philosophy.

vigilant because his life is an open book for the novices.

The formation of souls at the novitiate implies:

1° *A strict, intelligent and loving practice of the Rule.* It must be strict; otherwise there is no religious life. It must be intelligent and based on a spirit of faith; otherwise the practice of the Rule becomes a mechanical operation which cannot provide the inspiration and strength needed in times of trial. It must be loving, for if we do not love religious life, why embrace it? That would be tantamount to casting one's self wantonly into hell and running the risk, through scandal, of dragging down others who are called to wear the crown of holiness.

2° *A war against one's faults.* We all carry within us the seeds of certain faults, but the study of one's self, vigilance, prayer, penance, and especially humility are important ways of diminishing them, if not of eliminating them entirely. The Master of Novices, who is obliged to know those entrusted to his care, should work closely with each one of them, follow the advice of the spiritual masters, help the novices with their interior struggles, support them in times of danger, pick them up when they fall, and search for the reasons underlying their failures so as to treat the evil at its source and to support them, especially by inspiring them with trust in the goodness of God.

3° *An ever greater desire for perfection.* The novice's motto should be: "*Caritas Christi urget nos*; The love of Christ impels us" (2 Cor 5:14). Jesus Christ is his model and his love. The novitiate is a time of transformation and the novice should have only one desire: to transform himself into Jesus Christ. He should keep repeating with the Apostle: "*Mihi vivere Christus est*; For me, 'life' means Christ" (Phil 1:21). The Master of Novices must be perfect himself if he wants not only to ignite these flames, but also to preserve and increase them constantly. He who does not have a desire to be perfect will never be a true religious. It is up to the Master of Novices to foster the growth of that desire with every means at his disposal: special talks, a word in passing, legitimate emulation among the novices, more difficult practices which should be suggested prudently but never imposed. What is most important is that he awaken in them liveliness, eagerness and enthusiasm, without which everything withers away, freezes up, falls asleep and dies.

Communion is certainly the most powerful means to develop fervor. I only mention it here in passing because I have discussed it elsewhere.<sup>7</sup> I would simply like to remind the Master of Novices about the need to prepare his students for communion, about the benefit they can derive from it, and about the permissions he is allowed to grant on a more or less frequent basis.

4° *The deep conviction* that, when dealing with the working

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. the meditations on Our Lord in the Eucharist, for the season of Corpus Christi (Fr. d'Alzon's own note).

classes, the proletariat and pauperism, there is nothing more powerful for a religious than the imitation of Our Lord who had no place to lay his head, that is to say, the practice of poverty.

5° *A great openness of heart.* The novices must be trained to open themselves up. To oblige them in spite of themselves would have serious disadvantages. But if they do not open themselves up easily, if they do not learn to do so promptly, they will never acquire the spirit of the common life. They will retain their individualism, which later on can be a source of many problems and particularly of a nefarious independence of character. Susceptible people should either be broken or dismissed.

6° *Studies.* Strictly speaking, studies are not the purpose of the novitiate. Nevertheless, since novices must be taught Holy Scripture, Church history, mystical theology and liturgy, the Master of Novices, always according to the spirit of Assumption, must try to instill in them: a) The loftiest notions possible about divine worship, the recitation of the Office, the observance of rubrics, and sacred chant; b) A desire to know what rules of the ascetical life best apply to them so that they can make greater progress in it; c) A correct attitude toward the study of Holy Scripture and the history of the Church. He must teach them to study like true religious, not prompted by vain curiosity nor deterred by sinful laziness but motivated by a desire to deepen their knowledge of God and his creation, of Jesus Christ, of his love for men, of what he did to prove it to them, and of what he has done in the world. He must also teach them to discover what a religious can do for God and Our Lord Jesus Christ.

7° *Supervision by the Master of Novices.* The Master of Novices must exercise supervision in the chapel, where the behavior of the novices will reflect their interior dispositions; in the study hall, where their posture will reveal their laziness or their enthusiasm for work; in their cells, in the dormitory, where their modesty and even their morals can be judged; in the refectory, where they must be given frequent lessons in etiquette; in recreation, where the oft-forgotten rules of politeness must be taught and upheld.

8° *Training in cleanliness and good manners.* This is a very important point, especially for young men who perhaps may have been brought up in rough surroundings. The novices should be trained to be both modest and well-mannered. They must be made to understand that coarse and uncouth manners are generally characteristic of ill-bred and uncultured people who are too self-satisfied to ever do any good to others. Jesus Christ, meek and humble of heart, should be the model of the religious who seek to conquer souls. Nothing fosters Christian politeness like meekness and humility.

In any case, good manners are a form of respect, and respect is too endangered in our day not to be picked up in its Christian dimension by the Religious of the Assumption. The Master of Novices should seek to give them a notion of it and to inspire them to practice it seriously during

the novitiate. Forms of respect are burdensome at times; they can be difficult to submit to. Novices should become accustomed to them and turn them into a mortification, an edification, a way of attracting souls, and a means of spreading the Gospel. However, unfamiliarity with the forms of politeness should not be mistaken for a certain impoliteness which almost always denotes a propensity for being crude, a relish for the vulgar, a stupid vanity, and an inability to become all things to all people, which is a great obstacle to winning souls for Christ.

There would be a lot more to add, but I must limit myself. Experience will undoubtedly suggest many other important considerations. It seems to me, however, that with these ideas we can further develop the Directory of the Novitiate. Consequently, let this suffice for the time being and let it be the occasion for the novitiates to get off to a fresh start and acquire new fervor.

#### **Lists of questions**

In order to provide the Master of Novices with a basic procedure, I am appending herewith four lists of questions to be answered according to circumstances. The first will help him raise the right questions and give the proper advice in directing individuals. Here everything is optional. He may add or subtract as he sees fit. Nevertheless, he will find it useful to have guidelines which help him to know his people and to put them on the road to perfection. The second list is meant to determine the items the Master of Novices should touch upon in his quarterly report on the novitiate in general. The third indicates the points to be considered in the quarterly report on each novice or postulant. The fourth is an outline of the report to be submitted to the examiners on each candidate for the novitiate or for profession.

If the Master of Novices tries seriously to acquire the information he needs to answer the questions contained on these lists, it is impossible in the end for him not to know his subjects perfectly and not to be able to acquaint those entitled to be informed with this all-important information.

Rest assured, my dear Brothers, of my most respectful affection in Our Lord.

E. d'Alzon

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## **List of Questions**

## I.—DIRECTION OF NOVICES

### Questions:

1. Does the novice continue to think that he has a religious vocation?
2. What are his temptations in this regard?
3. How does he pray? Does he observe the presence of God?
4. How attracted is he to prayer? What topic does him the most good?
5. How prayerful is he during Office and religious exercises?
6. What are his thoughts concerning Our Lord, especially at communion time?
7. How energetic is he at work, in the study hall and elsewhere?
8. What is his attitude toward silence and recollection?
9. How does he observe the Rule?
10. Whom does he like and whom does he dislike?
11. How possessive is he?
12. His mortifications?
13. His aversions?
14. The objects of his zeal?

### Comments regarding:

1. Obedience
2. Laziness at work
3. Self-love, egoism, personality
4. Humility
5. Zeal for souls
6. Defects of character
7. Infractions to the Rule
8. Faults in relations with others
9. Religious behavior, posture, manners
10. Tepidity
11. Lack of sincerity
12. Progress or regression
13. Serious problems, if any

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## II.—QUARTERLY REPORT ON THE NOVITIATE IN GENERAL

1. What is the general spirit?
2. Has there been an increase in fervor?
3. What is the behavior at Office, mental prayer, Mass?
4. Is there an enthusiasm for study and the performance of duties?
5. How do the religious spend their recreations?
6. Is silence observed?
7. How good is the overall behavior and manners?
8. How energetic are the novices before a difficult task?
9. Are they open with the Master of Novices?
10. Are they sincere?
11. Are there little intrigues among them? Do they go looking for them?
12. Are humiliations accepted? In what spirit?
13. Have penances and austerities been requested?
14. Are the novices cordial among themselves?
15. Do they obey promptly?
16. Is the Rule observed under constraint or with joy?

17. Is there an overall enthusiasm? Does one sense a tone which is both supernatural and religious?

*Special comments:*

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### III.—QUARTERLY REPORT ON EACH NOVICE

1. Why does the postulant—novice want to be a religious?
2. What is his character?
3. What is his dominant fault? Is he fighting it? What success has he had?
4. His intelligence?
5. His education?
6. His progress in study?
7. His health?
8. His family situation?
9. His progress in the three virtues connected with the vows?
10. His piety, fervor or tepidity?
11. His practice of the Rule?
12. His religious behavior?
13. His posture during religious exercises?
14. His manners?
15. His style during recreations?
16. His friendships and antipathies?
17. His spirit of faith?
18. Is he edifying?
19. Is he humble, mortified?
20. Is he open and sincere?

*Special comments*

#### **Note.**

The Master of Novices need not answer each question every quarter. If he does not know the answer, he leaves a blank. If there is nothing new to add to what has already been said, he merely writes: cf. last report.

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### IV.—REPORT TO THE EXAMINERS

1. Has the postulant—novice been scrupulously questioned about the items specified in the Constitutions?
2. What were his answers?
3. Did he supply the requested documentation?
4. How long was his postulancy?
5. How long was his novitiate? Where did he do it?
6. Why does he want to be a religious?
7. Does he have the religious spirit?
8. What is the state of his health?
9. What is his character?
10. What is his dominant fault? Is he overcoming it?
11. How precisely does he practice the Rule?

12. What is his particular interest?
13. How intelligent is he?
14. What education has he received?
15. How successful have been his studies since he entered?
16. Is he made for community life?
17. Is he generous, willing to sacrifice?
18. Does he accept the fundamental principles of the Congregation?
19. What is his posture during the religious exercises?
20. Has he learned good manners in his relationships with others?
21. Does he love the Congregation? Does he manage to be liked?
22. His practice of the virtues connected with the vows?
23. How easily does he render account of himself?
24. Is he sincere?

*Any other special comments?*

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## DUTIES OF SUPERIORS

*The expulsion of a young religious, a professor at the Collège in Nîmes, brought to Fr. d'Alzon's attention, in June 1875, some distressing realities, unbeknownst to higher authorities, which had taken place at the novitiate in Le Vigan. In a fit of emotion, he wrote a circular letter that was only sent to a few religious. Fr. Hippolyte, who was particularly targeted, accepted it quite humbly. Fr. Picard found the substance of the letter to be excellent, but requested, in all simplicity, that the tone of it be changed. He feared that one might confuse; contrary to the spirit of the Assumption; "vigilance with inquisition, charity with weakness, transparency with the right to say anything, to do anything, and the obligation to hide everything, when one does not have a duty to make it known." Fr. d'Alzon took these remarks into account. He wrote on July 18 that he had rewritten the circular letter. It will possibly be a little softer, but it may also miss its objective." So, our current Circular Letter #9 is a second edition. The first one, on which Fr. Picard had so amply commented, was set aside and the new version sent out to all superiors.*

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## NINTH CIRCULAR<sup>1</sup>

### *Duties of Superiors toward individuals and toward the community as a whole*

July 1875

*My dear Brothers:*

The unfortunate events which have just filled us with sadness have prompted me to examine my own conscience and to ask myself to what extent I myself am not responsible for what happened.

Whatever was my responsibility in the past, it is now my strict obligation before God to examine the matter with you and to point out your duties as superiors. You must be all the more exact in carrying them out now that you can measure the consequences of neglecting them. Several among you failed to observe these consequences because of certain illusions regarding the outside apostolate. You can now readily understand how dreadful they are in light of the facts we are now so unfortunately lamenting.

Allow me then to set forth your duties as superiors and to entreat you to meditate upon them often, in fact very often, before God. It seems to me that your salvation depends upon it. I am obliged to burden your soul to save my own.

I have reduced these duties to sixteen major points.

1° *First, you must feel responsible.*—Since you cannot do everything yourself, you must see to it that things get done, and well done, in such a way that, personally, nothing keeps you from your main task of looking after your community. This is the principal criterion by which you

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<sup>1</sup> In June 1875, a young religious who was teaching at the Collège de l'Assomption in Nîmes was expelled. On this occasion, Fr. d'Alzon discovered that regrettable events, unknown to the Superiors, had happened at the novitiate in Le Vigan sometime before. Deeply upset, he wrote a circular letter which was sent to only a few religious. Fr. Hippolyte, who was the specific target of the letter, accepted it in all humility. Fr. Picard liked the ideas, but in all simplicity asked that the tone be changed. He feared that – contrary to the spirit of Assumption – “vigilance could be mistaken for inquisition, charity for weakness, honesty for the right to say and do anything, and the duty to hide everything when one does not have the responsibility to make it known.” Fr. d'Alzon took these remarks into consideration. On July 18 he wrote: “I have rewritten the circular. It will be a little sweeter but may not accomplish its purpose.” This ninth circular, addressed to all the superiors, is therefore a second edition, the first edition having been set aside after Fr. Picard had so strongly commented on it.

will be judged. are damning yourselves if your community is falling into decline and your religious are losing their souls. Consequently, their damnation will be laid at your door.

2° *Love of those souls of whom you are more particularly the fathers and brothers.*—You must live in their midst as did Jesus Christ in the midst of his apostles. For your consolation, there was a Judas among the twelve, though even he was the object of great love on the part of Jesus Christ. “*Bonus pastor animam suam dat pro ovibus suis*; The good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep” (Jn 10:11). Do you have for your religious that same tender, loving, persevering concern to watch over them day and night, as did Jacob over Laban’s flocks? Through obedience you are immediately responsible for these particular souls, not for any others. What good would it do to save many of these others, if outside interests keep you from properly watching over your own community?

3° *Good example.*—The duties of a superior dispense him from a good number of community exercises. But he cannot usefully supervise the religious if they know exactly when and where he will be busy elsewhere. Nevertheless, the members of the community must be able to say before all else: our Father does what he can, even more, to be our superior and to fulfill the obligations of his office. When, in a religious community, the superior merits such praise, his task has become quite easy. He is the living image of the one of whom it is said that he began doing before teaching.

4° *Prayer.*; The gospel presents Our Lord spending entire nights in prayer: “*Et erat per noctem in oratione*; He spent the whole night in prayer to God” (Lk 6:12, NJB). Why? To prepare for the selection of his apostles. He did so not because his human nature needed enlightenment—he is the very source of all light—but because he wanted to teach superiors one of their strictest obligations. If they want to act according to and in the spirit of Our Lord, they must meditate at the foot of the crucifix or before the Blessed Sacrament whatever remarks they are to make or steps they are to take.

5° *General remarks.*; Nothing is so easily forgotten as the essential elements of religious life, namely the principle of union with God, the bonds of charity, the spirit of self-denial, of sacrifice, of obedience, the supernatural regard for perfection, the holy desire—essential to religious life—to progress even further; all of this is quickly forgotten if it is not repeated constantly and on all occasions: in the refectory, during

recreations, at Obedience,<sup>2</sup> and at the Chapter [of Faults]. Did the Apostle not say: “*Insta opportune, importune*; Preach the word whether convenient or inconvenient” (2 Tm 4:2)? We must speak, warn and repeat these admonitions constantly.

6° *Personal remarks*.—Some people profit more from general remarks simply because the comments seem to be less directly aimed at them. Others, however, need personal remarks. They never take for themselves what is addressed to everyone. It is necessary to go to them and say, as did Nathan to David: “*Tu es ille vir*; You are the man” (2 Sm 12:7). Moreover, there are often wounds which need to be dressed discreetly. Pride sometimes revolts against a public disclosure of faults. Although it is not always necessary to take into account the touchiness of those who easily balk at everything, it is nevertheless true that gentleness can produce results which the Chapter [of Faults] cannot achieve because of its public character. It is up to the superiors to determine what is appropriate under the circumstances. But whether they do it publicly or privately according to the dictates of prudence, they remain duty-bound to warn people.

7° *Supervising everything and everyone*.—We can become squeamish about this obligation which is hated by inferiors who like to call it spying. Beware of a religious who complains about spies; he more than others needs close supervision. How annoying it is to have to supervise all the time and how much easier it is to let things and people slip toward decadence! But why has the Church given her pontiffs the name of bishops (overseers), if not because the first duty of those in charge is to oversee? Does not Saint Peter call Our Lord himself the “*episcopum animarum nostrarum*; overseer of our souls” (1 Pt 2:25)?

8° *Strictly maintaining regularity of religious exercises*.—From a certain point of view, religious exercises are nothing in themselves. For many they are a matter of routine. However, this routine keeps people fit and alert, and it furnishes the superior with the occasion—to take only this aspect—to observe the fervor and perseverance of his religious. But there are many difficulties! A superior cannot be everywhere at the same time. So he needs an assistant to report infractions. If, in some communities, one

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<sup>2</sup> In the Assumptionist tradition, the word “obedience” has had several meanings. In addition to the vow and virtue of obedience, it has also been applied to a religious exercise. From the time of Fr. d’Alzon until the post-Vatican II period, Obedience took place in the evening on a daily basis. It was usually held after the evening recreation, and marked the beginning of Major Silence during which one could not speak, except for emergencies, until the following morning after Prime, meditation and Mass. During this exercise, the Superior made a number of announcements or remarks, and the religious requested the current permissions they needed, they accused themselves of minor mishaps that had taken place during the day, such as the accidental breaking of community equipment, etc., and they occasionally made announcements of their own.

is not enough, then he needs several assistants. Moreover, it is possible to maintain perfect regularity even amid certain apparent irregularities. For instance, in our colleges, the monitors and professors will necessarily have to absent themselves from certain exercises, but regularity is no less real when maintained with schedules adapted to various functions, as well as with necessary dispensations granted for the greater good of the college. One can apply here the comparison St. Paul made between the body and the Church.

9° *Persistence in getting the religious to work hard.*—This is our spirit and one of our important safeguards. As the Constitutions point out, we do not require any severe austerities, but we do insist on hard work. Woe to the lazy religious! God's curse rests upon him. Woe to the superior who does not demand a great deal of work! Each religious is like a talent entrusted to him by the Father of the family. Through the work he imposes, he must not only bring in two more talents, but a hundred more. Naturally, it would be wrong for him to overburden anyone, but his duty is to make everyone work to full capacity. And since a laborer's output increases with proper direction, no one can say, on the one hand, how much work will be accomplished if the superior puts his mind to it, and on the other hand, what dangers will be avoided, what temptations overcome, what sins omitted, what virtues increased, what merits acquired if a laborer injects a spiritual thought into the work he does day after day. I am not saying that a little rest is not necessary; it is, provided it too is supervised by the superior.

10° *Instill zeal.*—What is the value of hard work if it is not accompanied by the thought of God? So here is a further obligation for the superior: *to maintain zeal according to the spirit of the Congregation.* When does a religious family begin to decline? When routine sets in. People come and go, but mechanically. Though the sacred fire is not extinct, it only smolders beneath the ashes. It is up to the superior to keep it going, either by finding new apostolates or by rekindling interest in old ones. He must think about this constantly and observe what is taking place. It does not suffice to deplore the progression of decadence. We must root out its causes; we must revive the spirit of God; we must throw wood on the fire. The superiors who complain about the lack of zeal of their inferiors without trying to break them of their routine are perhaps the least zealous of the community. I admit that this requires a certain gift of inventiveness, but I would like to add that the superior must focus his own zeal first on his religious before extending it to outsiders. I shall not enumerate here the means at our disposal for maintaining fervor; the Constitutions are sufficiently clear on this subject. But I want to respect initiative, in the sense that everyone's talents are different and that it would be dangerous to weigh the superiors down with too much uniformity.

11°—We have perhaps not sufficiently determined the degree to

which *the local superiors must give an account of their communities to the Superior General*. This topic will be examined at the next Chapter. At the present time, some superiors are exemplary in this regard, others think about it very little, and still others not at all. Until we establish a definite policy, all I can do is give you a general principle. Holding a local superior accountable in this way obviously forces him to reflect upon the authority entrusted to him and upon the manner in which he exercises it. Consequently, it obliges him to use it prudently, intelligently, actively and successfully.

12°—For a while, I am sure that the deplorable incidents which provoked this circular will continue to serve as a powerful warning. But if we do not pay close attention to the *precautions to be taken*, how long will our present attention, revived under trying circumstances, be able to continue? It is not wrong for superiors to entertain suspicions, even poorly grounded ones, provided they are inspired by charity. To be sure, we must curb a constantly suspicious mind, for repeated suspicions engender distrust and eventually destroy one's influence, but the facts are there. Obviously, if very serious faults were committed, it is because there was not enough supervision. On this occasion we happened to notice it, but on how many other occasions has proper supervision been wanting? We saw no evil because we did not take the necessary precautions to discover it. It is understood that we can never know all of the problems, not even all of the serious disorders that exist. But we must also be honest with ourselves. Is our supervision adequate and do we conscientiously try to eliminate all occasions of sin? Alas, who among us, starting with myself, is above reproach?

13° *Inspire a supernatural concern in order to avoid certain temptations*.—This is difficult, yet how many evils could be avoided if the superiors knew how to provide their religious with supernatural thoughts on a regular basis. At times, they will be found monotonous, because it is impossible to invent new ideas every day. But let us not get discouraged. Rather, let us be attentive to the many occasions offered by Divine Providence; let us have foresight and good will. I am convinced that Providence will provide us with numerous ways to keep the religious constantly alert

14° *Courage to give timely warnings*.—The world is full of people chained down by the fear of what others will say. Superiors are not always free from these chains; they do not always dare to speak up. It takes real strength to say to someone: "My friend, you are going off the deep end. Your backsliding is about to hurt you badly. You fall and you pick yourself up, but only to fall again. You are harming your soul. Be careful, lest the entire community be made to suffer the after-effects of your unedifying conduct." If a superior does not have the courage to warn in this fashion when circumstances warrant it, why is he superior? I realize that this sort of reproach unfortunately always applies to the same

religious. Already affected with gangrene, they find such observations insulting, unjust and slanderous. Very often the results are nil. Nevertheless, we must speak up anyway: “*Clama, ne cesses; quasi tuba exalta vocem tuam*; Cry out full-throated and unsparingly, lift up your voice like a trumpet blast” (Is 58:1). Spoken to the prophet, these words also apply to superiors

15° *Firmness in punishing minor misdeeds in order to avoid greater ones.*—There is nothing more annoying than having to punish constantly. Why do the old paintings of Saint Benedict always portray him rod in hand, if not to suggest the duty of a real superior? Religious are like a team of horses. A good driver who corrects the small mistakes of his animals avoids the bigger ones. He constantly holds a tight rein on the horses and does not have to strike them too often because at the least mistake they feel the touch of the whip on their backs. The comparison is humiliating but, admittedly, sadly appropriate! It helps us understand—as experience teaches us—how we could prevent the more serious misdeeds if we punished the less serious ones, thereby attacking evil in its roots.

16°—Finally, even with all the above-mentioned severity, the superior will accomplish little if the religious do not sense in him a *cordiality which encourages openness*. Voluntary avowal cures three-quarters of the offences religious commit. However, when the latter are allowed to remain hidden, they develop in darkness until, having become incurable, they break out into scandals which are all-too-often contagious.

So I beg you, my dear Brothers, to use the means I am suggesting with great love and fatherly concern. Be vigilant, but lovingly. Think of your responsibility. Using the word in its original meaning, I repeat with Saint Paul: “*Attendite vobis et universo gregi, in quo vos Spiritus Sanctus posuit episcopus*; Keep watch over yourselves and over the whole flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you the overseers” (Acts 20:28). Be overseers, but overseers as foreseen by the Holy Spirit and motivated by a love that springs from the heart of the Divine Master.

Please accept, my dear Brothers, the assurance of my deepest affection in Our Lord.

E. d’Alzon

P.S.—I am taking the liberty of sending this circular only to the local Superiors. Because I received so few comments on my previous circulars, I am afraid they have received too little attention. Nevertheless, they are, as it were, the agenda of the next Chapter. If they are not studied, the Chapter will not produce all the results we are entitled to expect from it.

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## TENTH CIRCULAR<sup>1</sup>

### *Four Questions to Be Studied*

*August 1, 1875*

*My dear Brothers:*

If we love God, everything will turn to our advantage. That is why, in the wake of the unfortunate incidents that have recently taken place, I am proposing four questions for your consideration. They should be placed at the end of our Constitutions:

1° What should we do to improve the supervision to which each local Superior is strictly held if he wants to save his own soul?

2° How can we increase the authority and influence of the Superior without making him a despot?

3° How can we prevent certain disorders?

4° Which sanctions in our legislation are the most useful to the Congregation?

### I.—IMPROVING SUPERVISION

How can we render more effective the supervision to which the local Superior is held, if he wants to save his soul?—It seems to me that the Master of Novices holds the key to facilitating supervision. He has two principal duties.

#### **a) To form the consciences of the young religious**

The first is to speak constantly about the need for a good conscience. It is easy to see how many bad consciences there are in the world. Poor education, bad example, and the tolerance of deviousness: these are some of the perilous blocks against which the consciences of young people in formation can be broken. If the Master of Novices is merciless in combating every sign of contempt for truth, if he refuses to admit any postulant or novice who is not truthful, if he instills a profound loathing for falsehood and for all that in any way smacks of hypocrisy, he will have accomplished a great deal. But he must especially make those under his care understand how much they need to strengthen their consciences. What makes a man is principally his character, and what is

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<sup>1</sup> Still reeling from the after-effects of the regrettable events which took place at Le Vigan, Fr. d'Alzon is searching for some practical means of avoiding such disorders in the future.



character without conscience? All the more must the one striving for perfection develop a conscience which is pure, straightforward, delicate and strong. Once a religious has been trained according to these principles, he hardly needs supervision. His best supervisor is his conscience. The Superior will learn from him all he wants to know; he need only ask.

**b) To use all the means foreseen in the Rule**

But can we expect all the newly professed to have such favorable dispositions when they present themselves to their local Superiors? Unfortunately, the answer is no. Let us admit that we have too often believed that certain people were conscientious, when in fact they were only acting out of fear. It is up to the Superior to study the character of his religious and to treat some of them with more confidence and others with more severity. Then, if the religious are generally convinced that the Superior should be aware of everything, those who remain silent in the presence of authority will come to understand that the openness of their brothers will inevitably expose them. Moreover, they will learn to halt their evil conversations, if only to avoid running the risk of being quoted.

The Master of Novices (and for that matter any Superior) must go further. He will, of course, avoid the spy-system. But by the frequency of his personal interviews with the religious; by his supervision of the people who come to see them, of their correspondence, and of the people they visit, in short, of all their personal relationships on the outside; by his oft-repeated prohibition to visit each other's rooms; by his strict enforcement of the practice of major and minor silence; by his frequent inspection of the rooms, he will necessarily come to know much more than do most superiors. And even if he does not know everything, he will always know enough to surmise many abuses and to prevent them, often through the simple fear people have of getting caught.

## **II.—INCREASING THE AUTHORITY AND INFLUENCE OF THE SUPERIOR**

How can we increase the authority and influence of the Superior without making him a despot?

**The authority of the Superior:**

**1) Requires a knowledge of the Constitutions**

Leadership is a gift which cannot be acquired. Those who lack it think they can compensate by the generous use of punishments. The Superior must certainly know how to punish, as I will say further on, but he must also know how to lead. At times, a glance suffices. There is nothing despotic about this; it is the moral authority of the Superior which comes into play. But to avoid all forms of despotism, the Superior must know the Constitutions by heart and be so imbued with their spirit that the religious can sense in whatever he orders, prescribes or prohibits that he is

simply applying the rule.

#### **2° Rests upon that of Superior General**

If his interpretations are not thought to be lawful, appeal can always be made to the major superiors. But if the local Superior shows that he does not fear an interpretation contrary to his own, and if he knows how to proceed vigorously, whenever necessary, as well as compassionately and mercifully when he notices more weakness than malice in someone who is guilty, he will be extremely helpful to the religious under his care. Still, he must not forget that weakness can be very reprehensible at times. In any case, this general attitude will strengthen his authority.

From experience, we know that there are religious who deny what they are justly accused of. They should be given a choice: either they tell us whatever they know, in which case we will treat them in a fatherly fashion, or they admit nothing or we proceed with the full force of the law. Very often they accept the fatherly procedure, and public scandal is thereby avoided. But, in these circumstances, it is important to advise the Superior General of all that has transpired, for if clemency is proper once or twice, it can later give rise to serious problems for which the local Superior does not have the right to assume responsibility.

As for the information the religious are obliged to divulge, information which must always reach the Superior General, we must remember that there is nothing worse than seeing the religious prefer the particular good over the general good and decide for themselves what should or should not be said. It is always possible for a local Superior, acting on the spur of the moment, to react too harshly. But there is a remedy for this, that of referring the matter to the Superior General, unless, of course, there is a serious scandal that requires immediate measures.

### **III.—PREVENTING DISORDERS**

#### **a) ceaseless diligence**

We can forestall disorders by putting a stop to abuses as soon as they arise, by not treating anything light-heartedly, by punishing minor infractions in order to avoid having to punish serious ones. It is not that we must always tell our inferiors of the fears we have in their regard. There are certain disorders which take on importance only because we give them an importance which they do not deserve. Nevertheless, the Superior must always keep his eyes open.

#### **b) vigilance imbued with charity**

This having been said, the local Superior must love his community. Only love will give him those tender apprehensions which will enable him to sense the sickness ahead of time and prompt him to search for the

means to combat it before it becomes incurable.

Superiors must therefore be vigilant; they must give close attention to any inklings of disorder, decadence or downfall. They must have a somewhat maternal love which does not exclude severity but which knows how to punish whenever necessary and to temper their reactions whenever appropriate. At the same time and for the common good, they must know when to advise the higher authorities, who have the overall responsibility of the Institute.

#### IV.—SANCTIONS

Which sanctions in our legislation are the most useful to the Congregation?

##### a) for the novices

I need not speak here of the novices. My circular on the novitiate says enough about this subject. Besides, with the novices, it is not just a question of punishing them for their shortcomings but of studying their faults to determine whether or not they can be corrected.

##### b) for the professed

But the professed religious are an entirely different matter. They have made a commitment for life and that commitment deserves respect. Yet, with our modern civil legislation, we have only one final sanction: expulsion. We must therefore place ourselves within the context of this ultimate measure.

Without going into details, I would ask you to study the following questions for the next Chapter:

- 1° The cases of expulsion reserved to Rome;
- 2° Those reserved to the General Chapter;
- 3° Those requiring a prompt decision on the part of the Superior General;
- 4° Those for which the Superior General must obtain permission from Rome;
- 5° Those for which he must leave the religious himself request his dispensation from vows;
- 6° The offenses whose punishment requires consultation with the Superior General;
- 7° Those for which the authority of the local Superior suffices.

I am asking you to give these topics serious reflection, so that in a year's time you can discuss them knowledgeably.

I pray that Our Lord will enlighten you in their regard. Our future may depend on them.

After your decisions, may we be able to say: "*Misericordia et veritas obviaverunt sibi, justitia et pax osculatae sunt*"; Kindness and truth shall meet; justice and peace shall kiss" (Ps 84:11 Vulgate). May God

grant us peace as we combine mercy, truth and justice!

Rest assured, my dear Brothers, of my respectful attachment in Our  
Lord.

E. d'Alzon

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## ELEVENTH CIRCULAR

*Nîmes, September 15, 1875*

*My dear Brothers:*

This is the last circular I intend to send you before the General Chapter, to which I am convoking you for September 1876.

In my preceding circulars, I indicated the main points of the discussions you will be having very shortly. Please add two more items which call for no preliminary work on my part.

### **Agenda of the next Chapter**

Accordingly, you will be asked to study the following subjects:

- 1° Ways of combating the Secret Societies and the Revolution
- 2° Prerequisites for being a good Chapter member
- 3° Practical ways of improving our mental prayer
- 4° Our Third-Orders
- 5° Our policy regarding politics
- 6° Studies
- 7° The Alummates
- 8° The Novitiates
- 9° Duties of Superiors
- 10° Ordinary sanctions and expulsions

### **Financial questions**

Fr. Hippolyte has asked to be relieved of his duties as General Treasurer. I have asked him to stay on for a year not only to give him the opportunity to submit to the Chapter a detailed report on his administration but also to press him for suggestions as to how the General Treasury should be permanently set up. I especially urge the professed religious in Paris to study this question with Fr. Hippolyte in order to learn from his experience and to offer him their comments. It would please me if, during the course of the year, Fathers Hippolyte, Picard and Vincent-de-Paul Bailly were able to provide us with a complete picture of this important subject.

Finally, it is indispensable that each local Superior submit a report which gives an overall view as well as specific details of the financial situation of his house.

During the year, God willing, I hope to regularize completely the situation of the house in Nîmes. From then on, everything should proceed normally.

Quite visibly, Divine Providence seems to be protecting us. We

should thank him for this, without tempting him anymore.

**Spiritual preparation of the coming Chapter**

Let me begin by telling you how pleased I am as I look forward to our coming meeting. If, since the last Chapter, we have suffered a lot, we have also received a superabundance of consolations. May the coming Chapter be for us an occasion of renewal. To make this possible, let us prepare ourselves by renewing our fervor.

Consequently, upon receiving this circular and until September 1, 1876:

1° The professed religious and the novices will recite daily the *Veni Creator* and the *Memorare* for the members of the Chapter;

2° They will impose upon themselves each day some small mortification and forgo dessert once a week;

3° During the year they will say at least six Masses or, if they are not priests, receive twelve communions, asking for the guidance of the Holy Spirit;

4° During the Lenten season of 1876, they will ask the friends of the Congregation to increase their prayers, penances and communions for the success of the Chapter;

5° During this same Lenten season, in all the houses of the Congregation, we will recite daily the *Miserere* to ask forgiveness for the offenses committed in the Congregation and for the scandals they caused.

My dear Brothers, may Our Lord grant you abundant light so that the Chapter, which I am hereby officially announcing, may become for each one of us the occasion to reform our lives.

Rest assured of my fondest affection in Our Lord.

E. d'Alzon

**Note**

*Essentially, the purpose of these eleven circulars was to guide the discussions of the Chapter of 1876. The agenda of the Chapter was based on them and was adopted at the first session on September 11. The Circulars were not reread, but the members of the Chapter were well prepared to discuss them. The topics chosen were especially the alumnates, the novitiates, and studies, but other questions which were not mentioned in the Circulars were also discussed: the division of the Congregation into three provinces, relations with the Congregations of women, etc. After the Chapter, as before, Fr. d'Alzon's Circulars remain precious directives for us.*

# PREVIOUSLY UNPUBLISHED CIRCULAR LETTERS

## *I. On Mental Prayer*

*At the first session of the 1876 Chapter, on September 11, at the time it came to fix the agenda for discussions, according to the Circular Letters of 1874-1875, it was said, "the Chapter does not think it need occupy itself with the question of mental prayer and left it to the care of the Superior General to develop what he had already written in one of his circular letters." Fr. d'Alzon carried out this task during the Chapter itself by giving a speech on mental prayer, reproduced here with the undoubtedly incorrect title of 11<sup>th</sup> Circular Letter on Mental Prayer, but which is justified by its context: it should not be separated from the first one. Other speeches, it seems, took place during the General Chapter. Unfortunately, they were not preserved. Nevertheless, one may take a look at pages 687 and 692.*

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## SECOND CIRCULAR ON MENTAL PRAYER<sup>1</sup>

1876  
(Previously unpublished)

*“Erat pernoctans in oratione Dei; Then he went out to the mountain to pray, spending the night in communion with God” (Lk 6:12).*

*My dear brothers,*

It is not enough for religious to draw up the wisest of rules and regulations, if they are not animated by a desire to become perfect. This is why, during this Chapter, I am suggesting to you a certain number of ideas on which I would like you to meditate so that, as we develop the legislation of our religious family, we may at the same time develop that spirit of fervor which will enable us to observe it more easily.

So today I will speak to you about prayer. In one of my circulars, I have already described the spirit in which we must practice mental prayer. Today I would like to speak about the conditions which will enable us to pray in accordance with this spirit. These are the conditions: we must 1° develop the habit of living in the presence of God; 2° be humble; 3° observe silence; 4° live austere lives; and 5° develop a devotion to the Holy Spirit.

### I.—Living in the presence of God

*“Ambula coram me et esto perfectus; Walk in my presence and be perfect” (Gn 17:1).* These words addressed to Abraham are the best possible recommendation of this practice, given as the means by which the great Patriarch could sanctify himself. Whoever constantly lives in the presence of God cannot do otherwise than become perfect because whatever he does will be done thoughtfully, respectfully and trustfully.

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<sup>1</sup> At the first session of the Chapter of 1876, on September 11, when the time came to determine the agenda for the discussions on the Circular Letters of 1874-1875, “the Chapter,” it is said, “didn’t think it necessary to consider the question of mental prayer and asked the Superior General to take care of this matter by developing what he had already written in one of his earlier circulars.” Fr. d’Alzon complied with this request during the Chapter itself in a talk on prayer, reproduced here under the undoubtedly improper title of the “Second Circular on Mental Prayer,” but which is justified by the context; it should not be separated from the first. Other talks were given during the course of the Chapter; unfortunately they have not been preserved.



**a) It will influence our prayer by making it:**

*Thoughtful.* By living in the presence of God, we accomplish the noblest act man is capable of: being with God, living with the one who is his final goal, his greatest possible reward.

*Respectful.* We are in the presence of our Creator. Woe to the religious who never thinks of this and who cheapens his holiest actions instead of always elevating them to a higher level.

*Trustful.* God the creator is also our father, and it is in him that we live and move and have our being. It is in him that we will be transformed; it is to him that we seek to be united. If we are aware of his presence, we will easily banish whatever distractions come to us during mental prayer.

**b) It will raise us to a level of continuous prayer**

After establishing that by faith, hope and charity we pray with a continual desire, St. Augustine urges us to make this a permanent desire. And he adds: “*Dignior enim sequetur effectus, quem ferventior praecedat affectus; ac per hoc et quod ait Apostolus sine intermissione rate; quid est aliud quam beatam vitam quae nulla aeterna est, ab eo qui eam solus dare potest, sine intermissione desiderare;* The more ardent our longing, the deeper our satisfaction. So when St. Paul urges us to ‘persevere in prayer,’ (Rom 12:12) what does it mean if not that we should desire without ceasing that everlasting life which God alone can provide?”<sup>2</sup>. And this does not contradict our Savior’s precept: “*In multiloquio;* In your prayer do not rattle on like the pagans. They think they will win a hearing by the sheer multiplication of words” (Mt 6:7). “We must distinguish,” says St. Augustine, “between multiplying words and prolonging fervor; *aliud est sermo multus, aliud diuturnus affectus.*”<sup>3</sup>

## II.—Humility

St. Augustine, writing to Dioscorus, says that the pagan philosophers vainly sought the truth in pleasure, ambition, and pride. To attain the truth which is Jesus Christ, there is only one way, the way of humility, and we can say of this virtue what Demosthenes said of the gift of oratory: it is the one and indispensable condition of success.<sup>4</sup>

The man who prays humbly is already in the truth because he stands before God as if he were nothing. But this conviction is ever so rare! Nevertheless, as soon as we realize that we are in God’s presence, humility emerges from the comparison between what we are and what

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<sup>2</sup> *Epistulae* (CPL 0262) - epist. : 130, vol. 44, par. 9, pag. 60, linea 11  
(Augustine&Letters&CPL&letter 130, vol. 44, par. 9, pag. 60, linea 11)

<sup>3</sup> Letter No. 130, 18-19 addressed to the widow Proba. The text was reconstituted by the Maurists, a French congregation of Benedictines established in 1621 and known for their high level of scholarship. Cf. Migne, P. L., 33-501. See also, *Epistulae* (CPL 0262) - epist. : 130, vol. 44, par. 10, pag. 62, linea 2.

(Augustine&Letters&CPL&letter 130, vol. 44, par 10, pag. 62, line 2)

<sup>4</sup> Letter 118, Migne, P. L., 33-431 (see also, Letter to Dioscorus, New Advent series, chap. 4-7, 14-15, 22).

(Augustine&Letters&Migne&letter 118)

God is, and our resolutions are strengthened when we consider our nothingness.

### III.—Silence

Without silence we cannot live a life of prayer. The religious who is too busy with the things of this world no longer finds time for the things of God. In heaven itself, adoration takes place in an atmosphere of silence. In the Book of Revelation, St. John speaks of the great silence that took place in heaven when the angels bowed down before the throne of God to adore him (Rv 7:11, 8:1). To talk a lot, if we are not talking about God, is tantamount to not praying at all. Moreover, nothing extinguishes the fire of the Spirit within us like slander and the sins against charity. It is impossible not to fall into these sins if we talk a lot. The fire of the Holy Spirit goes out and we cease to pray because it is the Holy Spirit who enables us to pray. Finally, we must not prevent our brothers from becoming men of prayer or place obstacles in their path, which is what we are always doing when we engage in useless and frivolous conversations which are against the Rule. So let us all learn how to master our tongue and to rigorously observe silence if we want to become men of prayer.

### IV.—Austerity

“Do you want your prayer to rise up to God?” asks St. Augustine. “Then give it two wings: fasting and almsgiving; *Vis orationem tuam volare ad Deum? Fac illi duas alas, ieiunium et eleemosynam*”<sup>5</sup>. Almsgiving is like the consequence of fasting, which represents here all of the deprivations that we impose upon ourselves. Austerity and prayer go hand in hand, to which we can add wisdom, which is a taste for heavenly things. Wisdom marvelously disposes us to prayer and at the same time bestows on us greater wisdom. And wisdom, the Book of Job reminds us, “*nec invenitur in terra suaviter viventium*; is not to be found in the land of the living” (Jb 28:13). It requires an effort to sever our earthly bonds and rise upwards towards God. Austerity enables us to do this.

St. Augustine depicts St. Paul advancing toward perfection: “It is not that I have reached it yet, or have already finished my course; but I am racing to grasp the prize if possible, since I have been grasped by Christ [Jesus]. Brothers I do not think of myself as having reached the finish line. I give no thought to what lies behind but push on to what is ahead” (Phil 3:12-13). “*Dicit se nondum esse perfectum...dicit se extendi, dicit se sequi ad palmam supernae vocationis. In via est...Nihil illi tam magnae morae est quam dissolve et esse cum Christo*; He says he is not yet perfect. He says he is concentrated and pressing on, with

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<sup>5</sup> Migne, P. L., 36-482, see also *Enarrationes in Psalmos* (CPL 0283) -psalmus 42, par. 8, linea 19.

(Augustine&Commentary on the Psalms&CPL&psalm 42, par. 8, line 19)

his eyes fixed on the prize that awaits him one day. He is on the road, and longs to be freed from this life and to be with Christ” (Phil 1:23).<sup>6</sup>

“*Quia est terrenus cibus, quo carnis infirmitas pascitur*; Human weakness needs earthly food.” St. Augustine goes on to say, “*est autem caelestibus pietas mentis impletur*; but there is also heavenly food which satisfies the yearnings of the soul. Each of these two foods maintains a different life: one is the life of human beings; the other is the life of angels. We can try to imitate the life of the angels by depriving ourselves of earthly food. *Gubernare itaque debemus nostra ieiunia*; We must therefore draw up a schedule for our fasting.” Note what he says: he is not talking about leading the life of angels or about the lives of those whose god is their belly (Phil 3:19), but *medietatis nostra res est*; about an intermediate state of austerity. *Qua vivimus secreti ab infidelibus, coniungi angelis inhiantes*; Set apart from the unbelievers, we aspire to the company of angels. “*Nondum pervenimus, sed iam imus*; We have not reached our journey’s end, but we are well on our way.”<sup>7</sup> Therefore, even though we are not called to live a life of rigorous austerity, we must not neglect certain penances. By thus drawing nearer to the angels, it will be easier for us to carry out their ministry of prayer.

#### V.—Devotion to the Holy Spirit

This is most important. If we do not address ourselves to God, we will not be able to pray to him because “*quid oremus sicut oportet nescimus*; we will not know what to ask for. *Postulat in nobis gemitibus inenarrabilibus*; It is the Holy Spirit himself who must pray within us.” We do not give enough thought to the fact that we possess him through baptism, confirmation and ordination. We are his temples and we must adore this God who lives inside each one of us, who is entirely present in all of us, and who will make us more and more aware of his presence as we get to love him more and more and open our hearts to welcome him. St. Augustine points out that, “*cum igitur ubique est non in omnibus habitat, etiam in quibus habitat non aequaliter habitat*; although God is everywhere he doesn’t live in everybody and in those in whom he does live, he doesn’t live in the same way. *Quamvis in quibus habitat, habeant eum pro suae capacitatis diversitate, alii amplius, alii minus, quos sibi dilectissimum templum gratia suae bonitatis aedificat*; He is entirely present in each one, yet those in whom he lives possess him according to the diversity of their capabilities: some more, some less, but all, by his infinite goodness, are called to become his holy

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<sup>6</sup> *On the usefulness of fasting*, Chap I, Migne, P. L. 40-708; see also *De utilitate ieiunii* (CPL 0311) -cap. 1,

linea <sup>43</sup> (Augustine&On the Usefulness of Fasting&CPL&ch. 1, line 43)

<sup>7</sup> Id., Chap II, see also *De utilitate ieiunii* (CPL 0311) - cap. 2, linea <sup>46</sup>. (Augustine&On the

Usefulness of Fasting&CPL&ch. 2, line 46)

temples.”<sup>8</sup>

God desires our cooperation. In the order of nature, it is his Providence that cooperates with our freedom; in the supernatural order, we are the ones who are called to cooperate with his grace. St. Augustine says, “*Quando enim cum Spiritu Dei operante spiritus hominis cooperatur, tunc quod Deus jussit impletur*; And when the Spirit of God operates and the spirit of man cooperates, then God’s commands are carried out.”<sup>9</sup>

So mental prayer will become easy for us if we allow the Holy Spirit to work within us and if we offer him a pure heart in which he can abide. Let us therefore pray to him in union with the Church: “*Tua nos, quaesumus, Domine, gratia semper et praeveniat et sequitur ac bonis operibus jugiter praestet esse intentos*; Lord, we entreat you, may your grace ever lead us on and follow us through, and make us very intent on doing good. Amen.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> *Letter 187*, 17 and 19. Migne, P. L. 33-838-839; see also *Epistulae* (CPL 0262) -epist. 187, vol. 57, par. 5, pag. 94, lineas 17, 19. (Augustine&CPL&Letters&letter 187, vol. 57, par. 5, lines, 17,19)

<sup>9</sup> *In Ps. 77-8*. Migne, P. L. 36-988; see also *Enarrationes in Psalmos* (CPL 0283) -SL 39, psalmus 77, par. 8, linea 36. (Augustine&Commentary on the Psalms&CPL&psalm 77, par. 8, line 36)

<sup>10</sup> Opening Prayer of the 16th Sunday after Pentecost (according to the missal in use at that time).

## **II. On the Ceremonial**

1855

*The Circular on the Ceremonial, reproduced here, presented to the emerging Congregation “several preliminaries to be developed and completed little by little.” Fr. Cusse had been given responsibility for this work; he invested so little effort in it that Fr. d’Alzon turned it over to Fr. Galabert in 1859.*

*At the Chapter of 1876, a discussion arose concerning the monastic forms presented to the capitulants and the Chapter decided, “During the course of the year, Fr. Germer-Durand will present a draft of the ceremonial to the Superior General, based on what is being used at the novitiate.” This ceremonial, promulgated by the Superior General, will be a requirement in all novitiates and alumnates and thus, over time, will become practice in the houses of professed religious.” Fr. Germer did in fact during the year present the ceremonial, including that on the refectory, as it is still in use among us.*

*In a letter to Fr. Picard dated 17 April 1856, Fr. d’Alzon writes: “What I mean by monastic practices is as follows: 1. the Office, 2. the Chapter, 3. the stricter practices in the dining hall, 4. the regular silence, 5. the whole set of minor practices which modern Orders and Congregations seem to simply ignore.”*

*These various documents show us the importance that Fr. d’Alzon attached to the perfect ordering of our monastic life.*

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## Unedited Circular on the Ceremonial 1855

Fr. Emmanuel d'Alzon, Superior General of the Augustinians of the Assumption, to the Fathers and Brothers of our Association, greetings.

The obligation of prayer—above all, of public prayer—is, beyond doubt, one of the fundamentals of religious life. So nearly all monastic Rules lay down minute details as to how this obligation must be met.

Our own Rule leaves, so far, much to be desired. This is why—in order to prevent bad habits from taking root among us, because it might be very difficult to eliminate them later on—we have decided to lay down certain basic principles to be maintained henceforth in the conduct of our ceremonial functions. And because, according to the thirteenth chapter of our Constitutions, we are obliged to follow the Roman Rite, it is on the liturgical books of the Holy Roman Church (Mother and Mistress of all the Churches) that we must base our prescriptions. Let us not forget, however, that we are monks—and as such you shouldn't be surprised to find certain customs which, though not contrary to the Rubrics (none of them are) are, nevertheless, additional to them. And the whole purpose of these prescriptions is to infuse us more and more with the spirit of monasticism—a spirit we do not yet possess half as much as we ought.

For the time being let us restrict ourselves to certain preliminary considerations—as time goes on we will be able to fill in the framework.

*Chapter One*, under the title of general rules, recalls our obligation as religious of reciting the Divine Office and attending Conventional Mass as laid down by Common Law. We need no comment here. We who tell others they ought to return to Common Law have no right to even considering exempting ourselves therefrom.

We then go on to recommend the recital or singing of the Office in two alternating choirs—this being the established by the masters of religious life, so often neglected nowadays. As for singing, we have set rules against the introduction in our midst of any disturbing variety. Take for example our rules about singing the “Credo”—the Faith is invariable, so must be its musical expression. All vernacular singing and all so-called “religious music” is to be banned—it is unworthy of that sublime simplicity which characterises a monastic choir. We tolerate regretfully the use of a pipe organ which is out of keeping with primitive notions of Poverty. But we forbid any other instruments, especially

violins. The use of a hebdomadary<sup>11</sup> is such an ancient custom in monastic Orders that it requires no justification.

*Chapter Two* describes how we should enter and leave the Choir. Here we intend to impose a genuine monastic ritual—the more annoying it may be, the more faithfully you must observe it, even if it’s just for the sake of obliging yourself to comply. This processional entry is deeply symbolic—and it has the additional advantage of forcing us to be punctual. The prayers which precede the Office are meant to introduce us to a spirit of recollection just as those which conclude the Office are meant to maintain this spirit. You will notice that this chapter contains a most essential clause about Lay Brothers. If we wish them to be what they are meant to be, they must remain in their proper place—we must never allow them to enter those precincts to which in the ancient monastic Orders they were always refused admission. Let us mention, now that we are on the subject, that Lay Brothers may be employed to assist the Sacristan—but they may not be allowed to touch the sacred vessels.<sup>12</sup>

In *Chapter Three* that deals with how we conduct ourselves in choir and in the following chapter that deal with several ceremonies, we only recall principal general rules of liturgical books. You must scrupulously observe these rules of the universal Church, especially that which prescribes that we must put our hoods up when we are seated, but uncover our heads when we are standing or kneeling. If some of these bother you, you must not forget that the Constitutions suggest that we recite the Office as a form of mortification. We have no business to dispute what the Church has ordained—all we have to do is accept it, and carry it out with due submission and humility., and that, besides, it’s not our prerogative to judge the prescriptions of the Church.<sup>13</sup>

In *Chapter Five*, we prescribe the establishment of certain traditional monastic sanctions, until such time as we have drawn up our own penitential code. If we wish to be religious, then we must be prepared to accept a few practices of humility, indeed, embrace humiliation with joy if we wish to follow the footsteps of our Divine Model.

In *Chapter Six*, we outline some rules for Communion. We will discuss these at a later stage.

These, then, are the general rules we consider it our duty to put before you this day—and we insist on their exact observance.

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<sup>11</sup> A member of a Roman Catholic chapter or convent appointed for the week to sing the chapter mass and lead the recitation of the canonical hours.

<sup>12</sup> Here d’Alzon makes reference to a Church document treating this matter.

<sup>13</sup> It should be noted here that the text jumps from Chapter Three to Chapter Five with no reference to a Chapter Four.

And in case any of you plead ignorance thereof, we hereby order all the Superiors, in the name of Holy Obedience, to summon their chapters without delay, to have these rules read out publicly, and put into immediate execution. We also order every Superior to provide himself with an unabridged copy of the Ceremonial within the next week. The local Superiors, in fact all the religious, are perfectly free to send us any observations they see fit to make. But until such time as we ourselves modify anything we have written, we must henceforth observe what we have established.

And if anything has been left undecided in our present enactments, we order each community to maintain its own customs—and permit no innovations, even with their local Superior’s consent.

Given at our Prioory of the Assumption of the Immaculate Virgin Mary, Nimes, in the year 1855<sup>14</sup>.

*There follow several chapters on the first Assumptionist ceremonial.*

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<sup>14</sup> Fr. d’Alzon leaves a blank space for the exact date of promulgation.



## IV. NOVISSIMA VERBA

*In 1877, Fr. d'Alzon began writing a large notebook which he entitled Novissima Verba, but he didn't get beyond the fifth page. The notebook contains four documents. The first three, to which Father attached a "critical importance," are already known; the fourth is published here for the first time.*

*In the same notebook, there are also, on loose sheets of paper, two notes of a very personal nature, from the end of Fr. d'Alzon's life. We have edited them and placed them here so as not to separate them from their context.*

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*March 1, 1877*

The month of St. Joseph has begun, and we have just recited the first Vespers of the feast of the Holy Shroud<sup>1</sup>.

What an opportune time to think about death, which St. Joseph makes peaceful for those who pray to him! And when the time comes to think about death, what better subject for a meditation than the shroud in which Jesus Christ wanted his dead body to be wrapped in!

I withdraw within myself. Since I don't know how much longer I have to prepare myself for my day of judgment, I'm wondering how best to spend my remaining days, which will pass quickly.

I recall the Assumptionist motto: "Thy Kingdom Come." In order to remain faithful to this motto, I intend to do especially three things:

1° To work for the restoration of Christian higher education, according to the principles of St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas.

2° To fight the enemies of the Church enrolled in Secret Societies under the banner of the Revolution.

3° To work for the unity of the Church by devoting myself to the extinction of the schism. From now on, that's it for me.

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*June 1, 1878*

*To my successor in the Congregation, whoever he may be.*

Here it is more than a year since I wrote the preceding page. It summarizes very well my thinking about the purpose of our Order. I am transcribing it here in order to stress its vital importance.

I recall the Assumptionist motto: "Thy Kingdom Come." In order to remain faithful to this motto, I intend to do especially three things:

1° To work for the restoration of Christian higher education, according to the principles of St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas. That's it for doctrine.

2° To fight the enemies of the Church enrolled in Secret Societies under the banner of the Revolution. That's it for social issues.

3° To work for the unity of the Church by devoting ourselves to the extinction of the schism. These are the three principal ways in which we are to carry out our motto.

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<sup>1</sup> Pope Julius II in 1506 originally declared 4 May to be the Feast of the Holy Shroud. This has since disappeared from calendars.

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*May 25, 1879*

*Anniversary of the death of Bishop Plantier<sup>2</sup>*

On this feast of St. Gregory VII,<sup>3</sup> I am praying that every religious of the Assumption will acquire a burning love for the Church and offer himself as a perfect victim for the salvation of souls and the extension of the reign of Our Lord.

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*Thoughts on reading Abbot de Rancé<sup>4</sup>*

In reading his commentary on the Rule of St. Benedict, I am struck by Abbot de Rancé's sharp mind, and especially by the admirable way in which he applies to religious what the Scriptures seem to apply only to the ordinary faithful. It is proof of the rule set down by St. Augustine when he explains the various but no less correct meanings of Scripture. What is simple advice for living a Christian life is suddenly transformed into a precept for a life of perfection.

The more I study St. Augustine, the more I am struck by the truth of what he says: that religious life is based on the evangelical counsels, the counsels on charity, and charity on God. Charity is what binds us together, and religious life is the most perfect way of uniting us to God in charity. All other things are but means of perfection.

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*On a loose sheet of paper (toward the end of his life)*

I don't know when, or where, or how I will die. Therefore, I must

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<sup>2</sup> Claude-Henri-Augustin Plantier was the bishop of Nîmes from 1855 to 1875. He and Fr. d'Alzon worked in close cooperation. Father d'Alzon accompanied him to the First Vatican Council (1869-70) where the bishop was a Council Father.

<sup>3</sup> Pope St. Gregory VII, also known as Hildebrand, was one of the greatest of the Roman pontiff. He reigned from 1073 to 1085.

<sup>4</sup> Armand Jean le Bouthillier de Rancé (1626-1700) became the abbot of the Abbey of La Trappe in 1664 where he introduced an austere reform of the Cistercian Order. This gave rise to the Order of Reformed Cistercians, otherwise known as the Trappists.

always be ready. Since Jesus called me to be a Christian, a priest, a religious and his friend, I must:

- Act in all circumstances as Jesus' friend;
  - Humble myself in all things;
  - Forget myself in all things so as to let myself be guided by the love and spirit of Jesus.
  - Learn to master myself.
  - Live more and more a life of prayer.
- 

*On a loose sheet of paper (toward the end of his life)*

Now is the time to cut down on my studies and to spend more time in prayer. From now on, I will occupy my time exclusively with Assumption:

- 1° The novitiate.
  - 2° The overall direction of the college.
  - 3° Our Missions.
  - 4° I will leave the Ladies of the Assumption to Fr. Picard, and the Little Sisters to Fr. Pernet, but keep the Oblates for a while.
  - 5° I will look after a Third Order of men, then of women.
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## V. MEDITATIONS FOR THE AUGUSTINIANS OF THE ASSUMPTION

*In 1878, Fr. d'Alzon, very weakened physically, appears more and more aware of his coming death. God, who is so generous with his gifts, to the point where one is prompted to dedicate himself all the more generously to his service, had favored him in his apostolate with many insights. However dry they may seem to us, the notes he had kept reminded him of all the spiritual riches of which he was the steward, especially those regarding his religious. Under God's inspiration, from these scattered fragments and from these dead pages, many beautiful ideas could still emerge. God asked them of him and his religious were waiting for them. Once again he got down to work. Unable to preach any longer, he wrote new Meditations, developing his thinking at some length.*

*These meditations, which fill a huge notebook written in better handwriting than before though just as rapidly, are like the spiritual testament of the Founder. He writes with the full authority of his long experience; he insists on a sincere conversion of heart and a solid formation in all the religious virtues. He reacts strongly to poor quality vocations. He argues in favor of apostolic work adapted as perfectly as possible to the actual needs of the Church. To strive generously and supernaturally toward the coming of the Kingdom of God, that is the last instruction of our Founder.*

*On the flyleaf of his notebook, Fr. d'Alzon wrote the following:*

In the event of my death, I ask that the contents of this notebook—written for the exclusive use of our novices and professed religious—be examined by Fathers Picard and Emmanuel Bailly. Though nothing must be added, each of them can subtract what he sees fit. And if having examined it together, one is in favor of retaining a passage and the other of removing it, the opinion in favor of its removal should prevail.

E. d'Alzon

## **Topics of Meditation on Assumptionist Religious Life**

If God lets me live long enough, I would like to record in these notebooks my principal thoughts on the Assumption and its work.

I have already written notes, circular letters, and topics for retreats. It seems to me that I haven't said everything I would like, nor have I said it well enough. Will I say it better now? I am urgently asking that of Our Lord and of the Blessed Virgin.

Included in the two notebooks I am starting and in the black portfolio is everything I consider to be most important. I will not put the material in order, at least as far as the topics are concerned. I have preached a number of retreats solely from very brief notes. Without expanding these outlines into full-blown sermons, it seems to me that it would be helpful to take the more important ones and develop them in such a way as to facilitate the meditation of beginners. In this way, the results will have the advantage of saying things that are not limited to our religious, but which can also apply to our entire family. If, by using this information, novice masters can communicate to the young in their care what will make them better Augustinians of the Assumption, then I will have attained my goal.

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## THE FIRST MEDITATION.

### The Need for Solitude during a Retreat

*“Et erat pernoctans in oratione Dei; He spent the night in prayer”* (Lk 6:12).

For religious who wish to become both perfect and apostles, is there a more compelling example than Jesus Christ preparing his own evangelical life in solitude?

Resolved as we are to imitate our Divine Master, let us enter, as he did, into this symbolic night of retreat –of meditation, silence, penance, and consideration of our duties of state. Let us endeavor to inflame our hearts with that fire which made the Psalmist cry out in ecstasy: *“Et in meditatione mea exardescet ignis; In my thoughts a fire blazed up”* (Ps 38:4 Vulgate).

What are the characteristics of solitude?

1° Withdrawal: *“Exiit in montem; He departed to the mountain.”*

2° Withdrawal in order to rise up: *“Exiit in montem orare; He departed to the mountain to pray.”*

3° Watchfulness: *“Et erat pernoctans; He spent the night.”*

4. *“Et in oratione Dei; praying to God.”* What was this prayer to God?

#### I.—Withdrawal

##### 1° from my day-to-day activities

I have to withdraw: from what? From my day-to-day activities, from my thoughts, from my habits.—Ah, what a struggle that is, if I have become set in my ways, if my thoughts have somehow become part of my soul!

One does not know that thoughts, perfectly legitimate in themselves but purely natural, can do untold harm to a religious soul. How easy it is to give way to such thinking, unless something spurs us to put ourselves back on track and how important it is to realize the obligation of a religious soul to withdraw entirely from a way of thinking (so easy to give way to) which justifies in its own eyes a host of shortcomings unworthy of the perfection to which God has long been calling it.

##### 2° from my habits



One must withdraw from one's habits.—Every retreat entails entering a new world. Over the past year I may have made considerable progress. Yet there is much progress still to be made. But have not certain indulgent and easy-going habits created a barrier between my former resolutions and my present manner of life? Jesus withdrew. Certainly he led a perfect life and withdrawal could add nothing to this perfection, but he wished to give me an example. And he withdrew. Ah, how difficult this withdrawal is for anyone who does not have a real love for solitude and communion with God, to which it gives birth.

### 3° from my affections

One must withdraw from one's affections.—Ah, yes, the Prophet cries out: "*Redite, praevaricatores, ad cor*; sinners, return to your heart" (Is 46:8). At times this has been for me a cause for remorse. Ah, am I really free in the depth of my heart? Are there no chains binding me? No attachments, however imperceptible? How important it is that I examine the extent to which I must cut out, break, or remove so that, in the place of affections unworthy of God, I pay attention to Him alone. All of my affections must pass through Him alone and rest on Him alone.

## II.—Rising Up

### 1° above all that is mundane

"*Exiit in montem*; He departed to the mountain." Let me begin by emphasizing a point to which I will often return. Whoever wishes to approach God must lift himself up from the often pestiferous depths of the plains to the pure mountain air. With what do too many Christians feed their minds? With thoughts that are ugly, sordid, materialistic, mundane, self-interested. Alas, in a few words, this is the habitual pastureland of piety-practicing Christians, without authentic piety, of priests, perhaps worthy of respect were they men of the world, but who have no real holiness. In the end, all these respectable people lose the faith by the narrowness of their thinking, by the worldliness of their sentiments, by the complacency of their way of doing things (I was going to say conduct), which may not be objectionable, but which is also anything but inspiring.

Does not this apply to the majority of Christians and secular clergy? Has not this worldliness penetrated the cloister itself? Are all religious making the necessary effort to rise up?

It's a tough question! Why have I embraced a state of perfection if I have no intention of continually lifting myself up above myself? I go on retreat to lift myself up. It must be said of me: "*Levavit se super se*; he lifted himself up above himself (Lam 3:28 Vulgate)". What loftier sentiments must now fill my soul? There's nothing simpler.

Does not the Apostle tell all Christians: "*Hoc sentite in vobis quod et in Christo Jesu*; have among yourselves the same attitude that is also

yours in Christ Jesus”(Phil 2:5)? How Jesus Christ felt, thought and judged—I should be lifting myself to these heights.

#### **2° to the holy mountain**

St. Augustine reminds us that, in many passages of the Sacred Books, the holy mountain is none other than Jesus Christ himself considered as God. So, we might say that, when he went up to the mountain, it was his humanity that was entering into communication in a more intimate way with the Godhead. All the more so must I lift myself up, all the more reason for me to go to this holy mountain which is Jesus Christ.

“*Domine, quis habitabit in tabernaculo tuo aut quis requiescet in monte sancto tuo? Qui ingreditur sine macula*; Lord, who may abide in your tent? Who may dwell on your holy mountain? Whoever walks without blame” (Ps 14:1-2 Vulgate). Purification from stains takes place by withdrawing ourselves from merely human thoughts, habits and affections. We must do something more, however: we must put on the thoughts, the feelings and the attitudes of God Himself.

#### **3° with wholehearted determination**

If withdrawal requires an effort, lifting ourselves up requires even more. Here begins another struggle: *Corpus quod corrumpitur aggravat animam, et terrena inhabitatio deprimit sensum multa cogitantem*; for the corruptible body burdens the soul and the earthen shelter weighs down the mind that has many concerns” (Wis 9:15). This is the lot of every human being. If I wish to rise above myself, my soul must acquire sufficient energy to overcome the corruption of my senses—sufficient courage to dominate this ‘earthen shelter’ of my soul which weakens the supernatural sense within it. Lord, help me by your grace to master my dispositions, in order to lift myself up during this retreat and never again to slide down into the valley of death.

### **III.—A Prayer for Humility**

“*Exiit in montem orare*; He departed to the mountain to pray.” A retreat comprises two kinds of prayer. To begin with, let us consider the first: the prayer of the poor, of the needy, of the sinner.

#### **1° of the poor and the needy with Jesus as our model**

Jesus Christ—of whom St. Paul says, “*Quum esset dives, propter nos egenus factus est*; for your sake he became poor although he was rich (2 Cor 8:9), and Isaiah says, *Posuit in eo Dominus iniquitatem omnium nostrum*; the Lord laid upon him the guilt of us all (Is 53:6)—Jesus Christ experienced, not for his own sake but for ours, this first prayer. He accepted it, and he offered it up to his Father. He became poor. “*Egenus et pauper sum ego*; I am poor and needy” (Ps 108:22 Vulgate). All the more reason do I not need such an attitude and should I not, in my distress, cry out that I

may be so disposed?

*“Domine, quid multiplicati sunt qui tribulant me? Quoniam tauri pingues obsederunt me; Lord, how many rise against me! Many bulls surround me”* (Ps 3:2, 21:13 Vulgate). Beset with such poverty and tribulations, how much do I not need help in prayer? This retreat will show me how totally helpless I am, how poverty stricken I am, into what depth of wretchedness I have fallen. It will give me the strength to pray that someone will come to my aid.

#### **2° from a sinner with Jesus as Advocate**

Not only am I poor, helpless, abandoned and distressed. Besides all this I am a sinner and I have to pray for forgiveness. This is what I must pray for during my retreat. I will see my sins stare me in the face—all the time and with ever greater clarity. *“Et peccatum meum contra me est semper; my sin is always before me* (Ps. 50:5 Vulgate). I will soon see that God’s creatures and the harm I may have done them pale in comparison to my horrible offenses against God himself. *“Tibi soli peccavi et malum coram te feci; against you alone have I sinned* (Ps 50:6).” This is the prayer of the guilty who, facing up to the penalty he deserves, has no other choice than to throw himself into the arms of Infinite Mercy, and to cry out with tears: *“Miserere mei, Deus, secundum magnam misericordiam tuam; have mercy on me, God, in your goodness”* (Ps 50:3). The retreat to which Jesus summons me is a time dedicated to pleading with him to be my advocate, in view of the fact that He will one day have to pass sentence on me in his capacity as judge. But I still have time during these blessed days; I can ask him to wash away my iniquity—and he, being God will wash them away because he is so abounding in mercy, because he has so often forgiven me in the past. *Et secundum multitudinem miserationum tuarum, dele iniquitatem meam; in your abundant compassion blot out my offense* (Ps 50:3).

### **IV.—Persevering in Prayer**

There is a second kind of prayer that is important for us in this retreat—and without it the retreat will have no lasting effect. It is said that Jesus Christ spent the whole night praying to God. *“Et erat pernoctans in oratione Dei; he spent the night in prayer to God.”* During a retreat the soul is often surrounded by darkness.

#### **1° in the darkness of punishment**

The darkness of punishment. The soul has drifted away from God and God from the soul. Jesus Christ distances himself in order to force the soul to seek him the more. It sees nothing; in some ways it understands hardly anything. It is only right that it should be so. That is its punishment for seeking so much that is human, earthly, and selfish. It is a cleansing punishment, a true trial, where vain fantasies besiege our imagination and

where we begin to live in a past that brings with it all kinds of regrets. It is only right that it should be so. On the Last Day, God will abandon those who have abandoned Him. During a retreat something similar happens. God hides, he shrouds himself in the blackness of the night and the soul can no longer perceive him. It would take too long to describe this state—but we deserve it. All we can do at the time is to surrender. How long will it last? This depends on God’s good pleasure—but it also depends on how generously we submit to it.

### **2° in the dark night of faith**

The darkness of trial. This state is also a trial. God has allowed the saints to experience it. He hides himself that we might seek him with more and more determination. And when the dawn comes, his rewards will be in proportion to the determination with which, during the hours of darkness, we have raised our hands and hearts to that which is holy, blessing the Lord even when he seemed to be chastising us. The Psalmist invites: “*In noctibus extollite manus vestras in sancta, et benedicite Dominum*; Come, bless the Lord, all you servants of the Lord who stand in the house of the Lord through the long hours of night” (Ps. 133:2 Vulgate).

So Jesus Christ prays to God: “*Et erat pernoctans in oratione Dei*; He spent the night in prayer to God.” What kind of prayer is this, other than the prayer of all the saints as long as their exile lasts? After their exile, they will emerge into the light of day: “*Et in lumine tuo videbimus lumen*; and in your light we see light” (Ps 35:10 Vulgate ). Then prayer will become “luminous,” full of divine light. But, meanwhile, we must continue to pray, and one of the most powerful and fruitful attitudes of a good retreat is the ability to pray through the darkness, in the dark night of the faith.

Withdrawal, rising up, the sinner’s prayer, and perseverance in prayer through the dark night of the faith—these must be my attitudes, following my Divine Master’s example, if I want this retreat to be beneficial.

Lord, help me to withdraw myself—help me to raise myself up, as you did. Help me to pray like a sinner, full of faith. Then I can be sure that this retreat will do me a lot of good.

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## THE SECOND MEDITATION.

### Jesus Christ and the Religious on Retreat

*“Mihi vivere Christus est; For to me life is Christ”*  
(Phil 1:21).

Life for the Apostle meant Jesus Christ. Life for the religious must also mean Jesus Christ. We must side with him. If we do not become living images of our Divine Savior, our life is nothing more than an illusion.

But it is above all during a retreat that the figure of the Son of God who became Mary’s Son stands before a religious—and here are the obligations that flow from his meditation:

- 1° He must study Jesus Christ all the days of his life;
- 2° The more he gets to know him, the more he must love him;
- 3° The more he comes to love him, the more he must endeavor to imitate him as perfectly as he can.

These are three very simple conclusions which, according to the most elementary principles of the faith, must necessarily follow one from another.

#### I. Studying Jesus Christ

##### **Without study, there can be no knowledge of Jesus Christ**

If God so willed it, we could, no doubt, like St. Paul, have the perfections of Our Savior revealed to us all at once. Or we could, like the angels who contemplate him in God, in the Divine Word, fall down in worship before him. As we read in the Letter to the Hebrew: *“Dicit: et adorent eum omnes angeli ejus; He says: ‘Let all the angels of God worship him’”*(Heb 1:6).

This certainly opens up a vast field of thought, but we would lose our way if we attempted to explore it since the eyes of our mind would be blinded by the light, our hearts burnt to cinders consumed by such love. No, God doesn’t expect this from us. He bestows upon us the gift of faith. He reveals his Son to us through a cloud; and while we are waiting for the glory of our home above, he wishes us to advance step by step in the knowledge of his Son, *“in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge; in quo sunt omnes thesauri sapientiae et scientiae absconditi”* (Col 2:3).

The study of Jesus Christ is therefore the study of wisdom itself and knowledge itself. Isn't such study well worth while? So how can a religious think he can make better use of his life than by searching the treasures of this divine wisdom and divine knowledge?

#### **The study of all the mysteries: Incarnation**

So what shall we study? Ah, there is no lack of topics. Let us start with that mystery whereby a God became human so that man might become God, *Deus factus est homo, ut homo fieret Deus*. Is it not worthwhile to comprehend how criminal humans can approach God—not in the deceptive manner which the serpent suggested to Eve in the earthly Paradise, but in the manner devised by God himself? Is it not worthwhile to consider the way in which we can acquire divine sonship—the way in which, according to St. Leo, we have already acquired it—by being baptized? Listen to this great Pope: “*Universa summa fidelium fonte orta baptismatis, sicut cum Christo in passione crucifixi, in resurrectione resuscitati, in ascensione ad dexteram Patris collocati, ita cum ipso sunt in ista nativitate congeniti*; the entire body of the faithful, born in the baptismal font, is born with Christ in His nativity, just as all are crucified with Him in His passion, raised again in His resurrection, and set at the Father's right hand in His ascension”<sup>5</sup>.

#### **His Youth**

Is it not worthwhile to contemplate such a marvel? The Christian and all the more so the religious study the humility, the silence of the Son of God made man, his profound self-effacement at Mary's breast, his poverty in the manger, the reversal of all human standards by the utter destitution of this One by whom all things were made! He learns at Nazareth the great law of work, according to which the great Worker of the universe, the One by whom the ages themselves were made, forces himself to earn his bread by the sweat of his brow, in the workshop of a poor craftsman, and teaches us how to work, and how to sanctify our work, less by his words than by his example.

#### **His Public Ministry**

What can be said of his manner of apostolic life, of his labors, and the ingratitude he meets in spite of the power of his word whether in teaching or in healing?

What about his sufferings, what about his death and his supreme sacrifice on the Cross? What about his life here in the tabernacle meant to confirm his parting promise: “*Non relinquam vos orphanos, veniam ad vos*; I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you” (Jn 14:18). Has he come often enough? Is he sufficiently with us and in us through the Eucharist? Can we not go on and on, delving ever deeper into the riches of the divine

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<sup>5</sup> *Tractatus septem et nonaginta* (CPL 1657) - SL 138, tract. 26, linea 32 (Leo the Great & 97<sup>th</sup> Tractate & CPL & tract. 26, line 32)

treasures? *O altitudo!*

**With the help of the Gospels and books written by saints**

All this is the Gospel, pure and simple. All I have to do is to meditate on it. There we read the words of life spoken by the Savior to his disciples. With them, with St. Peter, we can say, “*Ad que ibimus?*; To whom shall we go” (Jn 6:68). What more marvelous doctor need we seek? “*Ad quem ibimus? Verba vitae aeternae habes;* You have the words of eternal life” (Jn 6:68).

But the Church invites us as well to study Jesus Christ in what the saints have written about him.

**Protecting oneself**

**a) from laziness**

It isn't easy to study, it's demanding, because it takes effort to understand and laziness hardly loves effort. Of course not everything can be found in books; we will speak about this later on. But there are two pitfalls to avoid when we study the Son of God made man: first, a laziness that believes it knows everything and believes that affections are enough. No doubt, they are our ultimate aim, but we must build them on a solid foundation. A farm laborer or a factory worker who may not be able to study will receive, if he devotes what time he has to God after a heavy day's work, special graces, provided he is not able to study Jesus Christ more. But for religious like us, it isn't the same. Laziness is like a wall erected between Jesus Christ and us. Until it has been demolished, we will be capable of nothing.

**b) from complacency**

Second, there are those who, not wanting to take the trouble of studying Jesus Christ seriously, fall into the trap of I don't know what world of sterile fantasies. How prone they are to so many false devotions, based on false notions and false sentiments. And what dangers they pose to progress in perfection! Who has ever reached his destination by taking the wrong route? Yet this is a danger to which lots of religious expose themselves by neglecting to study Jesus Christ enough.

False concepts of Jesus Christ produce a false Christianity. What light this incontestable axiom throws on the state of so many souls!

When one has acquired sufficient knowledge of Jesus Christ through study, one will be in a position to reflect fruitfully on the details of his life. Then, how many valuable lessons will not flow in superabundance! Jesus Christ is the true “supersubstantial” bread” mentioned in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus Christ is all that St. Paul had need of.

## **II.—Loving Jesus Christ**

**Jesus Christ, the most perfect object of our love**

In order to love, one must know; so it is that the first prerequisite of

love is knowledge of the object. But knowledge makes you hate whatever is nasty and repulsive and makes you love whatever is good, beautiful and delightful.

Who is better than Jesus Christ? Who is more beautiful than Jesus Christ? Who is more perfect than Jesus Christ?

He is divine beauty, “*splendor gloriae*; the refulgence of glory” (Heb 1:3), *figura substantiae*; the very imprint of God’s being (ibid.). Consider all God’s perfections. They are all to be found in Jesus Christ—or rather let it be said that Jesus Christ, being God, is himself every conceivable perfection.

Take whatever is perfect in God’s creation. It can all be found in Jesus Christ...but we must begin by knowing him, and knowing what these perfections are.

Take the solution of a scientific problem. Take the reading of some literary masterpiece. Take the beauties of nature; some vast plane, a range of lofty mountains, the fathomless ocean...doesn’t it all inspire me with wonder and delight? Yes, but not with half the thrill I will experience by contemplating the greatness, the goodness, the beauty, the perfection and the sheer immensity of Jesus Christ as I get to know him better.

I will begin by admiring him with an endless and limitless admiration, for he himself is endless and limitless. But this Jesus whom I admire so much—this inexhaustible treasure—this fount of all goodness—this model and prototype of all that is most beautiful...He loves me! He places himself at my disposition. He comes down to the level of my nothingness—to the level of my sinfulness...in order to blot out our guilt—in order to endow my nothingness with gifts from above—in order to make me live, and live more abundantly.

What can I do except fling myself at his feet with all the affection I can muster? What can I do except fling myself into his arms and into the very depth of his Divine Heart?

Yes, unless we are among the damned, it is impossible to know him without loving him.

And it is this love which brings about a new life—a life in which everything becomes easy because we love him—and easier and easier because we love him more and more.

#### **New life in the love of Jesus Christ**

Love discovers in Jesus Christ the Holy of holies come down to earth for us, the link between man and God. Whoever begins to fall in love this way will undoubtedly do so with the imperfect love of beginners, but will experience a burning desire to get rid of whatever stands between him and the object of his love. He will reproach himself for not loving more and this very self-reproach, that of a guilty man who has been pardoned, increases his love. He will begin to love with the joy that comes from experiencing the gifts which Jesus Christ offers and with the knowledge that



he has delivered him from his sins. He begins to love with the hope of possessing him for all eternity, a reward he may deserve, but will certainly receive because God himself has promised it. He will begin to feel the grace of God flowing into his heart by Jesus' power; he will rely more and more on this help from above. He cannot not love what he now possesses, the guarantee of something even more excellent to come.

#### **For me, to live is Christ**

He loves because he has found Jesus Christ and through him has been united to God. Ah, this is the life of Jesus Christ our God and our Mediator! He is striving day by day to draw closer to us and, in order to increase the scale and the scope of God's work within us, this soul that has disposed itself to grow in love, incapable yet of ascending to eternal life, has recourse to the Eucharist, the gauge and promise of this happiness for evermore. With the Body and the Blood of a God, a God himself is given to him. He possesses him; he can say, "My beloved is mine and I am his; I hold him and I shall never let go of him" (Sg 2:16, 3:4). And the soul, by virtue of love, has the power to oblige Jesus Christ to remain with him. It is at that point that he can declare more than ever, "*Mihi vivere Christus est; For me, to live is Christ.*" To live by getting to know Jesus, loving him more and more each day as he is better known, better grasped, more completely the source of all that is good—this is life for me, in love. *Mihi vivere Christus est!* Having reached this stage, one can only hope for death in order to experience the fullness of joy in the fullness of life. *Mihi vivere Christus est, et mori lucrum; For me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain*" (Phil 1:21).

### **III.—Imitation of Jesus Christ**

#### **Imitating the life of Jesus Christ completely**

It's not enough to say that one loves Jesus Christ; one must prove it the way that he wishes him to prove it. He himself said, "*Si quis diligit me, sermomen meum servabit; If anyone loves me, he will be true to my word*" (Jn 14:23). This is the greatest proof of love that Jesus Christ requests.

Jesus' preaching consisted in the entire way he lived. Have we not heard him say: "*Exemplum dedi vobis, ut quemadmodum ego feci, ita et vos faciatis; I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you*" (Jn 13:15). Of which virtue has he not left us an example? Which aspect of human perfection does not shine forth in his life? That is why every moment of Our Savior's life is an inexhaustible mine of perfect behavior to be imitated.

#### **Imitating the inner dispositions of Jesus Christ**

One shouldn't simply judge the external act; one must imitate the internal dispositions with which he perfectly accomplished everything.

Let's take an example. Our Divine Savior was nailed to a Cross

along with two condemned criminals who suffered exactly the same as he did: the same torture, the same agony. But what a difference! One of them died in despair, blasphemy on his lips to the end. Then there was the other, guilty no doubt, but the Savior's grace touched his heart; he humbled himself, repented, and confessed his crime. And between the two of them, Innocence itself was hanging between Heaven and Earth, atoning by his sacrifice for the sins of mankind and offering to his Father the purest of victims. But the same applies to every one of Our Savior's actions, no matter how ordinary they may have been. Whatever he did had a holiness about it a thousand times superior to any human effort. And so it should be so that we may understand that perfection does not consist in the action itself, but rather in the disposition with which it is carried out.

#### **Continual Imitation**

This imitation must take place at every moment for every moment has the possibility of taking on an indescribable intensity. Oh, how one single act of Jesus' love contained more abundant treasures of love than all the acts of love performed throughout the ages by saints and angels! I would say the same for all of his other virtues which, after all, get lost in his love.

But even human powerlessness can be the beginning of progress in the way of perfection. With God's help, one makes efforts and ends up drawing closer and closer day by day. His intentions become purer. He becomes more completely generous. He abandons himself more and more willingly to whatever God asks, not only in some general fashion, but more particularly by the loving attention he pays to the least detail whereby he can imitate Our Savior's actions.

Ah, this is the wonder of it all: studying Jesus Christ allows us to know the Savior. The more one knows him, the more one loves him. The more he loves him, the more he wants to imitate him. But, in order to imitate him better, one must study more and so it is that one progresses in this triple effort of study, love, and imitation. And look at the result! "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word," and he adds, "*Et Pater meus diliget eum; et ad eum veniemus et apud eum mansionem faciemus*; And my Father will love him and together we will come to him and set up our abode with him" (Jn 14:23).

O Father, love him whom you have created. Come to him with your Son and with the Spirit who is your love. Set up your abode there, thanks to what your beloved Son has accomplished. Do this now and for all eternity.

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## THE THIRD MEDITATION

### Abusing of God's Grace

*“Expandi manus meas tota die ad populum incredulum, qui graditur in via non bona, post cogitationes suas; I have held out my hands all day long to a rebellious people, who walk in a way that is not good, following their own devices” (Is 65:2).*

Listen, Our Savior is calling us and we refuse to go to Him. He is pleading with us, but we won't listen. What has gotten into us? Are we at the point of trying his patience, as good as it may be? Let's look closely at how guilty we can be of abusing his grace? May he not reproach us on the Judgment Day, despite his attempts to reach out to us all the day long, of insisting on going our own way—our sinful way, following our own whims and fancies. Let us, in order, take the principal graces that we have abused, taken for granted, and what we can do to make up for it.

#### I.—The Grace of Baptism

This is something that is common to all Christians, but, through it, how many other graces are offered to us. We are made clean, our sins washed away, our innocence recovered, the white robes restored. What happiness! But what is even this compared to the fact that God adopts me into his family and declares me his son? As he did for the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, on the day of my baptism, God, in adopting me, said to me, *“Dominus dixit ad me: Filius meus es tu; ego hodie genui te; You are my son; this day I have begotten you” (Ps 2:7).*

#### II.—The Grace of a Vocation

##### a) Separation from the world

But just as God chose me from among the many sons of Adam to be wrested from the world of sin, so did he choose me from among Christians to be lifted to a still higher dignity. When he called me to religious life, he said to me: *“Egredere de domo tua et de cognatione tua; Go forth from your*

land, from your relatives, and from your father's house" (Gen 12:1). No need to enter into details, but I felt deeply that I had a lot of bonds to break. Have I really broken them off? Have I used those bonds which are legitimate as a pretext to remain much more attached to these individuals than is healthy? I left my family: have I not often cast rueful eyes in their direction? And if I had made a more radical break, might I not have been able to have hoped to advance more rapidly in the life to which God has called?

How many bonds must not a religious continue to break! It's something he must be doing over and over again, because over and over again he can feel his heart being drawn toward earthly things. Even if a religious has not yet made it to heaven, he has at least directed his attention beyond these earthly things. How are we doing in this regard? What level of liberty do I enjoy? Has God seen us carry out the command he gave us as he did to Abraham, "*Egredere de domo tua et de cogitatione tua*; Go forth from your land, from your relatives, and from your father's house."

#### **b) Into the land of saints**

God added: *Et veni in terram quam monstrabo tibi*; And come into the land I will show you." Yes, there is another land to which religious are called, not the land of other men, but the land of the saints. There is solitude and therein a set of obligations of an entirely different order because this other land is run on completely different principles than that of men caught up with earthly things. In this land, there will be a new regime, where we will entertain hopes quite contrary to those that obtain here below. There will be the desire for happiness, but a happiness that will be fulfilled in ways beyond human imagining. In other words, our horizons will be opened to eternity, to possessing God to a far greater degree than for ordinary men because we are seeking Him far more perfectly. How are we measuring up to this vocation and what are we making of it? Does it still resonate within the depths of my heart? Or have I allowed it to fall asleep through culpable neglect?

### **III.—The Grace of the Novitiate**

I did listen to this divine voice. There was a time in my life when I felt just like the psalmist who sang, "*Laetatus sum in his quae dicta sunt mihi, in domum Domini ibimus*; I rejoiced when I heard them say, 'Let us go to the house of the Lord'" (Ps 121:1 Vulgate). Yes, I rejoiced when I decided to enter the novitiate. It felt like I was crossing the threshold into God's house, my Father's house. What more could I have hoped for? Sharing an intimate relationship with God—what a privilege!

#### **a) God's invitation: Our Apprenticeship**

But if in the courtyard of the Kings of the Chaldeans young men like Daniel and his companions had to be trained by means of all kinds of

endless trials in order to appear before the king, what preparation is not necessary for him who must enter into the most incredible and intimate relationship with the King of kings? Any yet this is what a religious novitiate is all about. The novice is doing his apprenticeship in God's special service.

In a kingdom, everyone is subject to the king, but there are certain chosen subjects who are entrusted with more specialized duties. In order to be worthy of them, they need to be trained. That is what the novitiate is for: a continual course of training whereby they become worthy to serve God according to the perfection which He himself has destined for them. And, just as the King of Babylon provided Daniel and the other exiles of Jerusalem, chosen from among all those held captive, with everything required for their training, so, too, during the novitiate, does God supply a soul with all the help it needs to be raised up to Him.

#### **b) Abusing the graces of the novitiate**

What a wonderful, generous grace the novitiate is which, by its very novelty, gives a soul such spiritual delights as it would have never dreamt of, if it would commit itself to taking advantage of it! But how delinquent it would be if, before such divine munificence, it responded with nothing but laziness, indifference, boredom, and ingratitude. There are certain lukewarm and fearful novices who need to be asked what the king in the Parable of Wedding Feast asks of a certain guest, "*Amice, ad quid venisti?*; Friend, how is it that you came in here? (Mt 22:12<sup>6</sup>)?" Why, indeed, have such novices come if not to be stumbling blocks to other young men who are still weak and who, in the face of this scandalous laxity, will hesitate and, perhaps, turn back.

Still, such novices surely heard the call; they entered with good intentions, but they were unable to negotiate the initial hurdles they faced. Perhaps they laid down their arms or carried them any which way with no consideration of what they were given them to do. And so what did their novitiate amount to? Nothing but a series of defeats, of giving bad example, of lacking in enthusiasm, of yielding to temptation, and of stifling any qualms of conscience. The novitiate, thanks to one fall after another, became the prelude of even more disastrous falls in years to come when these young men will have taken on greater commitments. Jesus Christ had extended them such a loving, such an insistent invitation, but they became bored with Jesus Christ. Religious life became for them like a last resort, an ultimate fallback, because they had nowhere else to go. It was a refuge where they could hide their incompetence and laziness. When the novitiate year comes to an end for such novices and it is time to make their profession, I ask you: what are their dispositions? They have spurned God's graces and will continue to do so until the grace of final perseverance becomes well nigh impossible.

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<sup>6</sup> Editor's note—incorrectly cited as Mt 26:50 in *ES*

#### IV.—The Grace of One's Profession

##### a) initial fervor

Let us suppose that one has completed a fervent novitiate. The time comes for him to make his final profession, vows for life. Happy is he who can cry out like David, "*Funes ceciderunt mihi in praeclaris, etenim haereditas mea praeclara est mihi*; My chains have become my glory and earned for me a rich inheritance" (Ps 15:6 Vulgate). With great delight a novice took on himself these precious chains; the love of Jesus Christ led him to the altar where he wished to offer himself up with Christ. His one ambition is to walk in the footsteps, run in the footsteps, of those great religious, his Fathers, who have left him such fine examples of how grace can triumph over nature.

##### b) rapid decline

But how long will his fervor last? It is now a few years since he made his profession. Where is he at this point? Does he continue to meditate daily, keep the rule, maintain a spirit of recollection, cultivate a spirit of silence, and perform the work assigned to him? What has happened to this ardent young man we thought we knew, but who, alas, has disappointed so many expectations? He got taken up with himself, he turned from God, he grumbled against his superiors, he took dislike to his cell, he found his brothers repugnant, he turned a wistful eye to worldly things, and his heart became clogged with regrets. And yet...he made his vows. He'll go on, but dragging his chain while ceaselessly whining, deploring his sad lot.

##### c) loss of a supernatural spirit

The poor devil! He who was called to be no less than the angels has become instead nothing more than a coarse and sordid man. He loves finding fault with those around him. He covers up the disgrace of his own collapse by telling himself that everyone around him is just as bad. What comfort—for someone dying of the plague to think that, in dying, he'll be joining lots of others who are dying of it as well! So, good-bye to the life of perfection—he's had enough of it. All that remains is a certain veneer of respectability for the sake of appearance. But inside, within his innermost self, what would one see if he were allowed to penetrate the crust and see into his depths? Grace has withdrawn; just as one rotten piece of fruit putrefies every other it touches, this religious seems to have no other purpose in life other than to sow discord all around him.

What happened? He refused the grace offered to him. He has abandoned the regular observance of the Rule; he grumbles incessantly; his time for prayer has become nothing more than supplementary sleep, or,

perhaps, wilful distractions that insult God in whose presence he was supposed to be placing himself. He recites the Office with his lips and not his heart; he has made of the sacraments that he receives or administers cesspools or poisoned wells. Everything of a supernatural order has disappeared and from then on it would be meaningless to speak of a religious vocation.

**d) the vows have become fetters**

What of his vows? Oh, yes, they have become fetters, and one could say to him, “*Vae qui trahitis iniquitatem in funiculis vanitatis, et quasi vinculum plaustris peccatum*; Woe to you who drag iniquity along with cords of falsehood, who drag sin along as with cart ropes” (Is 5:18). And what chains they have become that make him so unhappy because they have turned him into a rebellious slave! His monastery has become a prison, the rule an insupportable yoke, his superiors jailers, God a despot and a tyrant.

Need we mention the scandal that such a life without any supernatural character gives, this life that causes others around him to fall. He has become like the sons of Eli whose sin consisted in abusing the sacrifices made to God by taking what was not theirs and so causing others to falter: “*Erat ergo peccatum puerorum grande nimis coram Domino, quia retrahebant homines a sacrificio Domini*; the young men sinned grievously in the presence of the Lord, treating the offerings to the Lord with disdain” (1 Sam 2:17).

**e) terror as death approaches**

Still, all must die and appear before the judgment seat of God. What will this particular religious feel at that time? Perhaps he’ll be frightened because the abuses he has made of grace haven’t entirely extinguished what little remains of his faith (though it would be perfectly logical for it to be so). Perhaps, by some superhuman effort, he might be shaken out of this torpor of the soul, this sinister symptom of eternal damnation. Perhaps he is troubled and filled with regret as he looks back over a long life during which he could have done so much but, in fact, did nothing at all. He could have engaged in valiant battles, while in fact he stayed in his tent. Who knows what goes on in the soul of a religious who has constantly abused grace and must stand before the face of God?

“*Domine, ne in furore tuo arguas me, neque in ira tua corripas me*; Lord, do not reprove in your anger; punish me not in your rage” (Ps 6:2<sup>7</sup>). O Lord, my last hour may be rapidly approaching. What state will you find me in? What talents, profitably invested, will I be able to offer you? In what virtues have I made any progress? What heroic sacrifices have I made? What good deeds have I accumulated? All this is what you expected from me—but, alas, I have abused of your goodness, and now I come to you empty handed.

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<sup>7</sup>Editor’s note: incorrectly cited in *ES* as Ps 11:6

Lord, forgive me. See that I put the rest of my days to good use and, redoubling my fervour, see that I treasure the graces you have yet to offer me, all the more so for having scorned them right up to now. I say to myself (and mean it). “*Et dixi: nunc coepi*; And I said, I have begun (Gn 18:28). May this change of heart be the work of God’s right hand; *haec mutatio dexteræ Excelsi* “ (Ps 76:11 Vulgate). May my renewed resolution be a pledge that guarantees your help to my will for I promise to make a fresh start. I know it’s a bit late to make up for lost time—but what is time compared to eternity?

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## THE FOURTH MEDITATION.

### The Prodigal Son

“*Surgam et ibo ad Patrem meum*; I will rise and return to my Father” (Lk 18:18).

To be a prodigal son you don’t have to have been a scandalous public sinner. Let us call to mind this phrase: “*Nugae laïcorum, scelera ecclesiasticorum*; what might be joking around with laypeople can become blasphemy for clerics”<sup>8</sup>.

In order to be guilty of becoming a prodigal son, you must have decided to abandon God out of boredom or distaste, claimed God’s gifts as your own, lost your baptismal innocence, and given yourself up to a life of anything but Christian perfection.

In order to imitate the repentance of the prodigal son, you must be brave enough to go deep within, resolve to mend your ways, and carry it out.

Let us examine religious from both of these points of view and see what lessons we might get out of them during this retreat.

#### I.—The Guilty Prodigal

##### Coming up against the trials of the supernatural life

Studying the lives of the Saints makes it evident that God selects the purest and the most fervent and puts them to the test. Those who are really saints stand up to the test. But how many religious, called to the highest level of perfection, give way under the impact of what was meant to be the source of numerous merits! It’s also something we see all too often in the history of monastic life. One enters religious life full of enthusiasm—along comes temptation, and one doesn’t stand up to the test. I am not saying that the falls are necessarily serious, but you need so little to make of a good religious someone who is mediocre and of a mediocre religious someone who is worthless. During the novitiate he was continually reminded,

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<sup>8</sup> St. Bernard of Clairvaux, *De consideratione libri v* - lib. 2, par. 22, vol. 3, pag. 429, linea 20  
----editor’s note: d’Alzon seems to have paraphrased Bernard somewhat. The original reads: *Inter saeculares nugae, nugae sunt; in ore sacerdotis, blasphemiae*. (Bernard of Clairvaux&On consideration&CPL&bk. 2, par. 22, vol. 3, pag. 429, line 20)

“*Sursum corda!* Lift up your hearts.” Higher still and higher! The lower regions were never meant for somebody seeking to become intimate with God. We must be humble—but our humility must consist in contrasting ourselves with that supreme model of humanity we find in Jesus Christ and in his great servants, the saints.

#### **drifting away from God**

How far he is from such thinking! He prefers, rather, to think about purely worldly matters where virtue is out of the question, where the passions awake and flare up. Without lapsing into scandalous excess, he nevertheless stores up a mountain of little shortcomings that soon stifle all spiritual energy. Soon he feels that he no longer needs to engage in spiritual exercises. God begins to look cruel to him, to use the Prophet’s words (albeit in a different sense), “*Mutatis es mihi in crudelem;* you have turned into my tormentor” (Job 30:21). But what makes God begin to look cruel? It is simply because God has begun to treat him the way he has been treating God. “*Non deserit, nisi deseratur;* He may abandon God but God will not abandon Him”<sup>9</sup>. This religious has come to the point where he enjoys complaining all the more about God. He goes around grumbling, he has stopped praying, meditation puts him off. Soon there is little difference between this religious and what the world calls a “good guy” except that the latter never aspired to be anything better, whereas this religious, having climbed to a certain height, has begun to slide down, to rush, into the pit.

#### **getting irritated with the Rule**

The Rule begins to get on his nerves. He begins to speak of it in the same way as St. Peter describes the old law when he presented the gospel to the Gentiles, “*Jugum quod neque patres nostri, neque nos portare potuimus;* A yoke that neither our ancestors nor we have been able to carry” (Acts 15:10—*editor’s note:* incorrectly cited in ES as Heb 15:10). He begins to think that the time for being so godly is over and that others are all thinking the same way. There he is—judging everyone, blaming everyone, criticizing everyone over him and around, in order to justify his own rebellion.

#### **grumbling against his Superiors**

His aversion of the Rule becomes aversion of his Superiors. Every order he receives he considers obnoxious; every decision they make is wrong, criticized, judged in the severest way possible. It’s hardly surprising since he only wishes to follow his own whims and fancies. An overheated imagination gives free rein to all kinds of suppositions. He decides that nothing ordered is the right thing. He lets others know of his discontent; and if his discontent doesn’t spread like gangrene, he comes to the conclusion

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<sup>9</sup> St. Augustine, *De natura et gratia* (CPL 0344) - cap. 26, par. 29, pag. 254, linea 28 (Augustine&On Nature and Grace&CPL&ch. 26, par. 29, pag. 254, linea 28)

that he might as well leave religious life and says, “*Pater, da mihi portionem substantiae quae me contingit*. Father, give me the share of your estate that should come to me” (Lk 15:12).

**it gets worse and worse**

We have seen lots of sad, very sad, examples of this kind. We have heard all the worse excuses they have given for leaving and we know to what degree they have degraded themselves. But who can do much for certain people who have begun to slide so severely? Once they have rebelled against the yoke, who can stop them from casting it off altogether? Alas, so many excesses they commit—first in secret and then in full view. Who of us does not remember the sad stories of certain notorious scandals? But before reaching that stage, what secret crimes had not taken place?

And before they resorted to crime, how many seemingly minor offenses had been casually dismissed as of no great importance? Still, evil was present! Still, the rot had set in. When they found themselves up to their eyes in mud, they cried out: “*Ignorans feci*; I didn’t know what I was doing” (1 Tim 1:13).

**perfectly aware**

Well, I maintain that this is a lie. They sensed that they were doing wrong, and sensed it for some time. They may have lost the sense of right and wrong, but they certainly began knowing what they were doing. So do you think that the prodigal son didn’t know what he was doing when he approached his father and said, “*Pater, da mihi portionem*; Father, give me my share of the estate”? Of course, he did. Surely, in order to have got to the point of such insolent audacity, he must have gone over it again and again. We can make of ourselves what we will—and the day came when he felt, no hesitation, no embarrassment in his soul.

**in the end, deserting God’s service**

To be honest, religious who take off in such a way don’t all come to inform their superiors. They walk off without saying a word and have you notified indirectly, in a way they deem appropriate. So the separation is effected with no formality except that of their leaving because they did not wish to stay. Later on they may regret it—but they say to themselves: “It’s too late”...and thus they place their feet on the deadly slope.

This kind of thing causes immense distress to a religious family—being witnesses to such events. But to those religious possessed of the spirit of faith it comes as a huge and salutary lesson. They are so warned that the same might happen to them unless they pay careful heed to what caused this disaster, because, after all, we all carry within us the seeds of sin.

Beware then! We are all exposed to the same dangers. All of us can fall in the same way.

**and succumbing to their passions**

I will not speak on the fatal consequences of these sacrilegious desertions. It is said of the prodigal son, “*Et abiit in regionem longinquam, vivendo luxuriose*; He went abroad to a far off land and lived in luxury” (Lk 15:13). It nearly always happens that luxury is there as the first punishment of the deserting religious. He started off with fancies that he considered permitted, then came those secret sins, finally his passions boiled over and every restraint went by the board. He bids adieu to all of his obligations and, with a diabolical grin on his face, he dares to defy heaven and say, “*Peccavi et quid accidit mihi triste?* I sinned but what evil has befallen me?” (Sir 5:4).

#### **The sadness of such a scandal**

The trouble with you, wretched apostate, is that you cannot even see the extent of the ruin and humiliation into which you have rushed! The trouble with you is that you cannot see your sullied soul, your scandalized brothers, a world triumphant, and God angered! The trouble with you is that you have thrown away your vocation, scorned divine grace, and experienced the withdrawal of the help that was sent from heaven. The supreme Judge is getting ready to pronounce sentence, the gates of Hell are opening wide, and Satan is there to snatch you from Jesus Christ! Remain in your indifference if you wish; but beware, God owes you nothing. “*Non deserit, nisi deseratur*; He will not abandon unless He Himself is abandoned.” And Jesus himself said: “*Quaeritis me, et in peccato vestro moriemini*; You will look for me, but you will die in your sin” (Jn 8:21). Can you imagine a fate any worse or more deplorable than this? O religious apostate, it will be yours if you don’t look out!

But you haven’t gotten to that stage yet. You’ve only suffered several of the enemy’s wounds. Let us see what you must do to heal your wounds and repair the damage before it’s too late, by throwing yourself into the arms of a loving Father who is waiting for you with all his affection.

## **II.—The Prodigal Son Repentant**

Our Lord depicts the wretched condition to which the prodigal son is reduced. I do not intend to linger on it. All the same, such a condition serves its purpose if one is aware of it. But, alas how many have lost their sense of shame! Pride holds them back, and they refuse to acknowledge their guilt. It is then that God retires from the scene, saying. “Have it your own way!”...and they go on living with the pigs.

### **A. The first feelings of repentance**

But if one does realize the sorry state to which he has fallen, feelings of repentance are given a chance to take possession of his soul. At first it appears solely in terms of regrets of a purely coarse nature: “*Quanti mercenarii in domo patris mei abundant panibus, ego autem hic fame pereo!*; How many of my father’s hired workers have more than enough food to eat, but here am I, dying from hunger” (Lk 15:17). Yet God accepts

this humble admission. He asks for no more because he knows that a sense of moral powerlessness will lead to better things. “*Ego autem hic fame pereo*; Here am I, dying of hunger.” Weakness is overtaking him, life is ebbing, death is approaching: blessed is he who can bring himself to admitting this! For he clearly realizes that as long as he remains in this state of servitude he will never have enough to eat. “*Hic fame pereo*; Here am I, dying of hunger.” Where has the pleasure gone of those meals he once enjoyed with his family, of the joys that, perhaps because they were taken for granted, became boring. Alas, the hunger and poverty that is torturing him brings him back to reality and the charm of those past times; but they are only faded memories now. And what about this profligate religious, what does he think of that regular life he once lived that may have had a few things that were irritating, but were, for the most part, so enjoyable because of the peace and serenity that were present among the members of a common religious family? How far away all of that is now! He may have enjoyed it once upon a time, but, afterward, he began to experience that unrelenting disdain which, like a mantle of shame, envelops very deserter.

**despite the ravages of apostasy**

Well, there are umpteen degrees between apostasy begun and apostasy completed. Before discarding the religious habit of which one had become unworthy and putting on layman’s clothes, before abandoning the altar and profaning one’s vows, how many more or less deliberate desertions may he not have been guilty of, how many attempts to sever those wonderful bonds which bound him to God Himself? Sometimes it’s the Rule: it was too rigid and his health wasn’t up to it, he says. Sometimes it’s intolerable superiors who have no sympathy for human weakness. Sometimes it’s relations with one’s brothers that are so disgusting that one has got to get away from them. And sometimes it’s one’s passions boiling up and one beginning to think that they are legitimate demands. Sometimes it’s a hodgepodge of notions, all equally absurd—but they appear reasonable because he wants them to be so. After all, one must find a reason even when one hasn’t got one! How fatally blind the soul can become when, after all, it wants to be free. Then comes the rude awakening, often brought about by material poverty, and it is the greatest favour God could bestow. What happens in those rare cases when an apostate dies suddenly surrounded by honour, comfort, and wealth? What is their death like? What do they face once they awake in eternity?

**looking at his own misery**

But what happens when, as it often does, thanks to God’s graciousness, misery brings these wretches to look within themselves, for the cry coming from famine isn’t far away from the cry of repentance? The only thing that separates the two is the cry of shame, “*Quanti mercenarii, in domo patris mei, abundant panibus!* How many of my father’s hired workers have more than enough food to eat!” And immediately he adds,

“*Surgam et ibo ad patrem meum*; I will arise and return to my father.” What a happy sequel! He does indeed arise, and he goes back to his father. And his father welcomes him tenderly forgetting all his wrongs in the light of the humiliating confession he has made.

Let us now examine carefully God’s action in dealing with a soul He longs to save.

#### **B. His return: sincere**

God begins by wakening within him those sentiments which he is still capable of having; he then goes a step further—he stirs his heart with the old memories of his being a son. I have no fear whatsoever in saying that this is what is essential. There are, unfortunately, people who are incapable of being sincere. Let us not talk about them. They are incapable of coming back. It is only possible for those who recognize the horror of their faults, however far they may have fallen.

You see, God is less interested in how far one has fallen than he is in the depth of one’s repentance, “Much has been forgiven her because she has loved much” (Lk 7:47). This is what Jesus says of the woman caught sinning in public. So let us not try to present excuses like “It wasn’t that bad.” Rather let us say to God, “Father, I have sinned against Heaven and against You.”

How is God going to judge a sinner? It will depend on the gravity of one’s offense, the level of ingratitude for past favours, the weakness of one’s nature, and the degree of rebellious pride. So let us not waste time looking for excuses. Let us just confess—confess that we really are sinners—that is the best way to receive forgiveness. How little value vain excuses are in the sight of God! How much better it is to turn everything over to him! “*Pater, peccavi in coelum et coram te!* Father, I have sinned against Heaven and against You.” What is there to add that would touch a sinner more and make him forget his past misdeeds more? Happy are those who understand that no human subtlety will cut any ice before the luminous justice of God!

So the prodigal son throws himself at his father’s feet and declares himself unworthy to be treated like a son. But all the father thinks about is clothing his nakedness and putting on a banquet to make up for what the young man has had to suffer. Let’s stop here for a moment and draw a lesson that you might find extraordinarily strange, but which, I think, will provide us with a powerful assurance of our ultimate salvation.

#### **and having a fair appreciation of his weakness**

Go, go up to your Father, fall at His feet and say to Him as well, “*Peccavi in coelum et coram te*; I have sinned against Heaven and against You.” But if weakness in its own turn brings out the best robe for you, tell him: “No, Father, not yet. I am too unworthy to be called your son. Give me the time to prove that I can become so through my own efforts at repenting.”

Yes, I'm afraid such a reconciliation would be premature. How many times have we not already been forgiven—and how many times have we not fallen once again into sin? This time we must show greater resolve.

I am speaking for those whose genuine repentance must be put to the test because of the gravity of their delinquency. Think of the early centuries of the Church. What penances did they not impose! I am not suggesting that you yourselves should be subjected to such rigorous physical discipline. All I am saying is that, deep within, you must not count on God's letting you off so lightly. This has nothing to do with God, but it has everything to do with you. His kindness is infinite—but so, or almost so, is your weakness.

Lord, may we sincerely regret having drifted away from you. We want to count on your Fatherly affection, but we don't want to forget how ungrateful we have been as your sons. We want to show you, in receiving the proofs of your forgiveness with fear and trembling, that we understand, by the way we respond, the cost of deserving it all the more each day.

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## THE FIFTH MEDITATION.

### Predispositions for Entering Religious Life

*“Propter domum Domini Dei nostri quaesivi bona tibi;*  
For love of the house of the Lord I will ask for your  
good” (Ps 121:9 Vulgate).

I have borrowed these words from the last line of Psalm 121 because they lay out the work of the ministers of the Church, that they might provide it with perfect souls. Since I have come to speak to you about the dispositions that a young Christian must bring to religious life, it seems good for me to point out that two goods coincide here, namely the good of the Church and that of those who are called by God to be perfect.

The priest who cultivates vocations must, above all, keep the good of the Church in mind, *“propter domum Domini nostri.”* It’s already a great honor that one would say to a created being, “Come, you have what it takes to render the most valuable services to God’s work: *propter domum Domini.*” But at the same time don’t forget that by being thus invited there is being placed at your disposition the greatest of all goods and the greatest of all honors, *“propter domum Domini nostri, quaesivi bona tibi;* it is for love of the house of the Lord our God that I asked such goods for you.”

In fact, it is from Psalm 121 that I have chosen these opening words and it is this entire psalm I wish to use to teach you about the dispositions you will need as you embark on a life of perfection.

#### I.—Separation from All Earthly Affections

##### To climb, one must lean on Jesus Christ

I begin by noting that this psalm is one of those called the “gradual” psalms, and if you ask me why this name, I will let St. Augustine tell you<sup>10</sup>. The word “gradus” means an incline or a descent. We are invited to climb. Recall this saying of the Lord, *“Nemo ascendit in coelum nisi qui descendit de coelo, filius hominis qui est in coelo;* No one has gone up to heaven except the one who has come down from heaven, the Son of Man” (Jn 3:13).

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<sup>10</sup> *Enarrationes in Psalmos* (CPL 0283) - SL 40, psalmus 120, par. 1). (Augustine&Commentary on the Psalms&CPL&psalm 120, par. 1)



Before we could go up, it was necessary for the Son of Man to come down to us. “*Docuit ipse Dominus a convalle plorationis ascendendum, quando pro nobis humiliari usque ad mortem crucis et pati dignatus est*; The Lord himself taught us that there can be no ascent except from the valley of weeping. For our sake he graciously willed to be humbled even to death on a cross and to suffer”<sup>11</sup>. And elsewhere: “*Quid est valle plorationis? Verbum caro fatum est et habitavit in nobis. Quis est valle plorationis? Praebuit percutienti maxillam, saturatus est opprobriis. Quid est valle plorationis? Colaphizatus est, sputis illinitus, spinis coronatus, crucifixus est: haec est valle plorationis unde tibi ascendendum est*; What is this vale of tears? The Word took flesh and dwelt among us. What is this vale of tears? He presented his face to those who struck him; he endured every insult. What is this vale of tears? He was buffeted, spat upon, crowned with thorns and crucified. Such is this vale of tears from which God urges you to ascend”<sup>12</sup>.

So while Jesus Christ comes down to us, we must go up to Him, because He has come down to show us the way. If He descended to be among us as Man, he is now in heaven as the Man-God. “*Nemo ascendit in coelum nisi qui descendit de coelo, filius hominis qui est in coelo*; No one has gone up to heaven except the one who has come down from heaven, the Son of Man.” Our Divine Saviour came down, but it was so that he could take you by the hand and lead you up to Him. So this is the first disposition which must be yours, and it is of primary importance. By raising yourself above the things of this world, you separate yourself from them.

Do you wish it to be so? Have you made up your mind to leave everything behind, to sever every link, every affection, every feeling that does not come from God?

#### **One cannot rise except on the wings of love**

Now make a serious effort to imagine yourself between these two loves, one of which is dragging you down to lower things, and realize, deep within yourself, the courage you will need to rise upwards. “*Sicut amor immundus inflammat animam, et ad terrena concupiscenda et peritura sectanda perituram vocat, atque in profunda demergit: sic amor sanctus ad superna levat, et ad aeterna inflammat, et ad ea quae non transeunt neque moriuntur, excitat animam, et de profundo inferni levat ad coelum*. As impure love inflames the mind, and summons the soul destined to perish to lust for earthly things, and to follow what is perishable, and precipitates it into lowest places, and sinks it into the abyss; so holy love raises us to heavenly things, and inflames us to what is eternal, and excites the soul to those things which do not pass away nor die, and from the abyss of hell

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<sup>11</sup> *Enarrationes in Psalmos* (CPL 0283) - SL 40, psalmus 120, par. 1, linea 10 (Augustine&Commentary on the Psalms&CPL&psalm 120, par. 1, line 10)

<sup>12</sup> *Enarrationes in Psalmos* (CPL 0283) - SL 40, psalmus 119, par. 1, linea 35 (Augustine&Commentary on the Psalms&CPL&psalm 119, par. 1, line 35)

raises it to heaven”<sup>13</sup>.

Such is the sublime doctrine taught by the Bishop of Hippo -and if you want to know why, he goes on to explain: “*Habet tamen omnis amor vim suam, nec potest vacare amor in anima amantis; necesse est ut ducat, sed vis nosse qualis amor sit? Vide quo ducat. Non ergo monemus ut nihil ametis, sed monemus ne mundum ametis, ut eum qui fecit mundum libere ametis*; Yet all love has a power of its own, nor can love in the soul of the lover be idle; it must needs draw it on. But do you wish to know of what sort love is? See where it leads. We don’t advise you to love nothing; but we do caution you not to love the world so that you might freely love the one who made the world<sup>14</sup>. “*Obligata enim anima amore terreno, quasi viscum habet in pennis; volare non potest. Mundata vero ab affectibus sordidissimis saeculi, tamquam extensis pennis et duabus alis resolutis ab omni impedimento, id est, duobus praeceptis dilectionis Dei et dilectionis proximi volat. Quo, nisi ad Deum ascendens volando, quia ascendit amando?* The soul possessed by love of earthly things is like a bird with feathers glued; it can no longer fly. But cleansed from the very sordid attractions of the age, it is able to stretch out its wings and fly unfettered. Its two wings are the two precepts of love of God and love of neighbor. Where is it going if not to God where it rises in flight, because it rises on the wings of love?”<sup>15</sup>.

And this is your vocation if you wish it to be so. Stretch out your wings and fly—fly on the wings of love. Fly towards God—up, up, up to God, until you have become totally absorbed in His bosom.

This is a serious matter. Is this what you really want?

## II.—The Joy of a Vocation

### Going up to the house of God

And if you have already replied in your heart, “Yes, it is!”, then begin singing this “going up” psalm: “*Laetatus sum in his quae dicta sunt mihi: in domum Domini ibimus*; I rejoiced when I heard them say, ‘Let us go to the house of the Lord’” (Ps 121:1 Vulgate).

You must be thrilled through and through with a tremendous joy at the thought of God’s house being your house too. Like Abraham you are leaving your home and saying good-bye to your family. There may be heartbreak, for sure, but look at what joy there is! It is God you have chosen for your inheritance. You are not only drawn, but carried, by love. Love draws you, God has loved you for all eternity. Love carries you because you

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<sup>13</sup> *Enarrationes in Psalmos* (CPL 0283) - SL 40, psalmus 121, par. 1, linea 1. (Augustine&Commentary on the Psalms&CPL&psalm 121, par. 1, line 1)

<sup>14</sup> *Enarrationes in Psalmos* (CPL 0283) - SL 40, psalmus 121, par. 1, linea 8 (Augustine&Commentary on the Psalms&CPL&psalm 121, par. 1, line 8)

<sup>15</sup> *ibid.* (Augustine&Commentary on the Psalms&CPL&psalm 121, par. 1, line 8)

need to respond to a tenderness that is as great as that of a Father and a Spouse. That is why you are overcome with joy and cry out, “*Laetatus sum in his quae dicta sunt mihi: in domum Domini ibimus*; I rejoiced when I heard them say, ‘Let us go to the house of the Lord’”.

#### **Vestibule of heaven, city of joy**

This house is not of the earth, but it has its vestibule here, which is the monastery. This is why the religious house must be first and foremost a house of joy; to enter a monastery where joy is absent is a bad sign. Every true vocation ought to be a happy vocation. I am wary of sad or gloomy applicants; founders of religious families rejected them. It is above all of religious whom St. Paul, “*Fratres, gaudete in Domino semper, iterum dico Gaudete*; Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say, rejoice” (Phil 4:4). I am not saying that there will be no trials and no suffering, but they will be borne in joy. Jesus said, “*Mundus gaudebit, vos vero contristabimini*; The world will rejoice and you will be sad”. But he adds right away, “*Sed tristitia vestra vertetur in gaudium*; But your sorrow will be turned into joy” (Jn 16:20). So it is that one must consider the joy of having been called, the joy of having an empowering grace from on high, the joy of final triumph. “*Ibant gaudentes apostolic*; The Apostles went on their way rejoicing” (Acts 5:41).

To be like the Apostles we must learn to rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that these are nothing compared with the joys of God’s house. Resolved to become more and more perfect, let us always be joyful. We are going up to God’s house. “*Laetatus sum in his quae dicta sunt mihi: in domum Domini ibimus*; I rejoiced when I heard them say, ‘Let us go to the house of the Lord’”. So let us rejoice with exceeding great joy. We are going home to our true homeland, toward our Father, to God.

### **III.—Persevering in Our Vocation**

“*Stantes erant pedes nostri in atriis tuis Jerusalem!*; Our feet were standing within your gates, O Jerusalem” (Ps. 121:1 Vulgate). We must be steadfast in our resolve—our feet must stand firm in God’s house. Those called to a life of perfection must practice steadfastness, especially during the novitiate. Our feet must stand firm just as our resolve must: in short, we must persevere. To quote, St. Gregory, “*Virtus enim boni operis, perseverantia est*; For the quality of any good work lies in its perseverance.”<sup>16</sup> It’s not good enough to make a good start. What counts in the end is perseverance. “*Virtus enim boni operis, perseverantia est*”.

Ah, how many sad things there are to be said on this subject! How many religious treat the vows as nothing but an obligation! They put them on like some new suit and get rid of them like some old coat, worn and

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<sup>16</sup> *Homiliae in euangelia* (CPL 1711) - LLT-ACI 1711, lib. 2, homilia 25, par. 1, pag. 205, linea 15 (Gregory the Great & Homilies on the Gospels & CPL & bk. 2, homily 25, par. 1, pag. 205, line 15)

threadbare.

This, unfortunately, is how so many inhabitants of the cloister behave—and this kind of behaviour brings the anger of God down on religious houses.

But it is totally unlike those aforementioned groups of fervent religious, those whose hearts burn with desire to become like the angels. Their gaze is set on a life of perfection, such as is expected from all Christians. Then when the voice of God sounded in their ears, they committed themselves to climb still higher, “*Stantes erant pedes nostri in atriis tuis Jerusalem!*; Our feet were standing within your gates, O Jerusalem.”

Convents are just the vestibule, the courtyard of the Holy City. But it was there, in the entry hall, that stood the great altar of holocausts, of perfect sacrifices, where the victim was completely destroyed. “*Stantes erant pedes nostri in atriis tuis Jerusalem!*”

#### IV.—The Living Stone

“*Jerusalem quae aedificatur ut civitas, cujus participatio ejus in idipsum*; Jerusalem, built as a city should be, whose parts fit together perfectly,” in St. Augustine’s way of putting it<sup>17</sup>.

So the first condition if you wish to advance in God’s service is joy. Away with those sad or dispirited candidates who give way to fear and regret. The second condition is perseverance.

##### Surrender oneself into architect’s hands

Here is the third condition, no less important. Listen, “*Jerusalem quae aedificatur ut civitas*. Jerusalem is built as a city should be.” The Church’s task is to build itself into a perfect unity. Jerusalem is the city par excellence. It is the vision of peace; *pacis visio*. There are three Jerusalems: the figure of speech, the image; the one under construction, being prepared; the one to be fully enjoyed. The first, the image used as a figure of speech, has disappeared; the last has not yet appeared. We are in the midst of the Jerusalem in preparation and it is our task to build this Jerusalem.

Now in the construction of this city, every single stone must be cut to its proper size and shape. Each individual soul must allow itself to be chipped and smoothed—and then placed in its proper place. The divine architect is overseeing things so as to construct a heavenly city. If you tell him: “I want to be there,” he will reply: “Yes, but I want you somewhere else.” So there are providential happenings and providential misfortunes

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<sup>17</sup> *Enarrationes in Psalmos* (CPL 0283) - SL 40, psalmus 121, par. 5, linea 1 (Augustine&Commentary on the Psalms&CPL&psalm 121, par. 5, line 1)

which push in one way or another. We must allow them to shape us so that Jerusalem may be built according to God's designs.

*“Jerusalem quae aedificatur ut civitas, cujus participatio ejus in idipsum.”* Now, here I'd like you to double your attention. St. Augustine is particularly anxious not to be misunderstood. What does the Divine Doctor mean by this word *idipsum*? “Remember, I pray you,” he goes on, “that moment when God said to Moses, ‘Go and tell the children of Israel that I AM has sent me to you.’” The word, *idipsum*, means something similar. The Heavenly Jerusalem is designed in such a way that everything points to its center—and this center is God. For, if God created everything for Himself, all the more reason why He should thus construct his model City, the Heavenly Jerusalem. As a result, we know that up there everything finds its reference in God. But the building materials for up there are being prepared down here, in the Jerusalem under construction. So these materials, albeit imperfect, must have God as their aim. And here is the condition of these living and chosen stones, *vivi et electi lapides*, doing all they can to point themselves towards *idipsum*, “that same One,” that is Jerusalem: *quae aedificatur ut civitas, cujus participatio ejus in idipsum*.

#### **Fixing our eyes on the Divine Model**

But how is this to be done? Listen, you are one of these living stones, but he in whom the living model of all creatures is to be found, the Word of God, became man and took on our shape and size. And just as a sculptor, cutting a stone to adorn a building, keeps on consulting the draught that has been given to him, so too must you never take your eyes off this divine model, towards which everything must point in its entirety as in a city, towards which each part of the city must point. In other words, each and every soul aspiring to Christian perfection must never cease to gaze on the divine model. Relating everything to God, carrying out the plan given by God, entering into the plan of the city of God as the smallest part, being a chosen stone in this city by constantly imitating God's perfection, insofar as we are allowed to do so: this is the meaning of this psalm, *cujus participatio ejus in idipsum*.

So let us summarize. Whoever wishes to climb the mysterious steps leading to the holy city must do so with joy, with perseverance, with that profound sense of what he must become in order to be worthy of this relationship with God, in order to be among the living stones of the city of God.

### **V.—The Mission of Religious Families**

*“Illuc enim ascenderunt tribus, tribus Domini ; It is there that the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord.”* These tribes are the witness of Israel. *“Testimonium Israëel ad confitendum nomini Domini; the witness of Israel to praise the name of the Lord”* (Ps 121:4 Vulgate).

#### **They bear witness to God**

What a beautiful and wonderful mission these true tribes of Israel have, these religious families destined to bear witness wherever God wishes them to be established. They are spread all over the Earth, and from the four corners of the Earth they climb up to the true Jerusalem. *Illuc enim ascenderunt tribus, tribus Domini. Testimonium Israëli ad confitendum nomini Domini.* That is why these a more exacting judgment will be made in their regard because greater perfection was required of them: “*Quia illic sederunt sedes in iudicio, sedes super domum David;* There were set the thrones of judgment of the house of David” (Ps 121:5 Vulgate).

Notice that this throne, this judgment seat, more excellent than all others, will be set over the House of David. It is from this throne that will pass all judgment given by the Father to the Son. Above the world is Jerusalem; at Jerusalem’s height is Mount Sion, where the house of David is to be found; and over this house—or, if you prefer to call it, this palace—is the throne of the Son of David who is at once the Son of God, *quia illic* [and it is there that...]

#### **They plead for peace**

But what will this judgment be? Listen, chosen tribes: “*Rogate quae ad pacem sunt Jerusalem, et abundantia diligentibus te;* Pray for the peace of Jerusalem and may those who love her prosper” (Ps 121:6). This is the wonderful mission of the tribes of the Lord, of perfect souls; here is the throne for judgment. But before giving sentence, He who sits upon the throne desires but one thing, that one should ask him for mercy and peace, and then he would shower gifts ever new on those who love this holy city. “*Rogate quae ad pacem sunt Jerusalem, et abundantia diligentibus te.*”

What a mission, if you would know how to be worthy of it! So ask and keep on asking. The abundance of God’s gifts is placed at your disposal. Take them, distribute them—it’s up to you. What prayer of peace must not issue from your lips and from your hearts—a prayer to obtain an abundance for the souls that love Jerusalem. This is quite the transaction, if that’s what you really want!

#### **Peace in strength**

And the prophet speaks in his turn to the Holy City, *Fiat pax in virtute tua* (Ps 121:7). A great lesson—peace in strength and abundance in the towers, these chosen sites where the elite troops find refuge. They will find there in plenty whatever is useful for them to fight the good fight and bring Jerusalem to perfection. “*Fiat pax*”; yes, may peace be granted! Order is found in peace as is union with God. But this peace implies effort, “*Fiat pax in virtute tua;* may peace come about through strength, through struggle.”

#### **They seek out elite vocations**

“*Propter fratres meos et proximos meos.* For the love of my brethren and friends” (Ps 121:8 Vulgate). Here is revealed the charity of the

psalmist. He forgets himself and pleads on behalf of his brothers.

And then, as frequently happens in dialogues that occur in the psalms, someone cries out in response, “I am zealous for the House of God, for its sanctification and its development; that is why I wish every kind of blessing.” He had already said, “*Propter fratres meos, loquebar pacem de te*; I asked for peace for my brethren and my friends.” Here is the special vocation: *pacem in te*. Of course there are many ways of interpreting this psalm—but isn’t this interpretation wonderful? It is the prayer of the Church, asking the Pontiff (editor’s note: Pontiff in the sense, not of the Supreme Pontiff but, but of the bishop) for priests, for perfect souls. I need vocations and it is for the members of my spiritual family that I am asking God to bestow favours from above on some privileged souls. *Propter fratres meos et proximos meos*. This, however, is but a detail.

Let us look at the big picture. It is for the Church that ministers of the altar look for vocations, that they wish to give birth to souls seeking perfection, that they ask God to make them spiritually fruitful, not the fruitfulness of the Pontiff who gives birth to priests, but the fruitfulness of the apostle who gives birth to Christians among unbelievers, and among Christians to saints.

Let us ask for this fruitfulness so much in keeping with our state: give souls to the Church whom we will assist in the acquisition of every virtue. This is our great task, the noblest of all tasks God’s servants on earth; it is the work that Jesus Christ will reward with the greatest generosity.

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## THE SIXTH MEDITATION.

### Supernatural Life

*“Hoc enim sentite in vobis, quod est in Christo Jesu; Have among yourselves the same attitude as Christ Jesus” (Phil 2:5<sup>18</sup>).*

Here is the theme of the retreat: get rid of your own attitudes and put on those of Christ. A serious undertaking that will demand all our time together.

#### I.—Giving up our human attitudes

Let us take a quick look at everything we are called to get rid of. To say we must rid ourselves of the “old man,” of our former self, is to say everything without saying anything at all. The devil is in the details.

##### **with regard to our personal ideas**

1° Giving up our personal ideas. Where we were born, our education, our character—all of these have provided us with a set of ideas indistinguishable from our very self—a complex of notions in which we have been shaped and which have become second nature to us. We cannot help being dominated thereby—so much so that when we act according to the manner in which we have learned to think, our action seems to be the only reasonable one to take since our inbred notions have become part and parcel of our very make-up.

Yet, among these ideas, there are many that are the result of ignorance, warped by error or corrupted by the seductions of the senses. Let’s not deceive ourselves. Where do these ideas come from, most of the guiding principles of our lives? It may frighten us, but if we are sincere, wouldn’t we have to admit that the falsest of notions, the most human, have almost always dominated, quite wrongly, what we called a Christian life?

##### **with regard to our personal judgments**

2° Giving up judgments rooted in these ideas. We begin by

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<sup>18</sup> Incorrectly cited as Phil XI,5 in ES



presuming that our ideas are sound. But supposing they are erroneous or have become distorted—where does that lead us? To forming judgments that are completely false or erroneous. This is precisely what we see every day: judgments that are narrow, pettifogging, or mean-spirited because we delight in shallow thinking. It's so very easy, this deplorable way of going about things; you don't have to make the effort to think. It's so very simple, such a way of proceeding; you are narrow-minded and you form similarly narrow judgments. You don't take the trouble to broaden your outlook, so it keeps getting narrower and narrower by the day.

But the more narrow-minded you get and the more you diminish yourself, the further you drift into nothingness and the further and further you distance yourself from God. Such is the spiral of our deterioration. We must put a stop to it! Such is the yoke from which we must set our minds free. But what an effort it takes! It costs us to have to admit that so far we have entertained absurd notions and, consequently, formed still more absurd judgments. Who is ready to admit something like this?

But why should we? Must we sacrifice such a way of thinking and of judging? Alas, yes, you must. As long as your way of thinking and judging remains the same, you may remain good citizens, but you will never become real Christians, let alone perfect religious. In what do these human ideas and false judgments consist? I'll tell you as we go through this retreat. I suspect that you are already beginning to understand. And if you don't suspect it, then I'm sorry for you because it shows just how incurable you are.

#### **with regard to our impressionability**

3° What would I say about giving up your impressions? Under the pretext of being impressionable we give way to all kinds of feelings, all equally un-Christian. We become impatient, ill-humoured, spiteful, jealous. The litany would be too long for me to recite. Look how many people live on their feelings, their impressions—often all the falser the more vivid they are! Impressions have a fatal influence on reason, and a still worse effect on the supernatural life one must lead. And an essential condition for making progress in Christian and religious perfection is combating these impressions. You may never overcome them completely—it's already a victory if you try.

#### **with regard to what we find repugnant**

4° I add, supernatural life requires you to give up what you find repugnant. "*Caro enim concupiscit adversus spiritum*—For the flesh has desires against the Spirit" (Gal 5:17). Let's make no mistake about it. How many things we find repugnant do not stand in the way of the one who wants to live supernaturally! First of all, there is that honest reason which considers repugnant anything that smacks of exaggeration. And how many things do not seem exaggerated to a Christian who wishes frankly to carry the cross of Jesus Christ, but who, at the same time, wishes to follow the

ways of the world! Between the two you have to choose. And human weakness is there to cry out, “Take it easy on me. Don’t knock me out in the first round!”

It’s ever so hard to submit yourself to measures that, and it gets to this point, seem not only petty, but harsh as well. All of this must be mercilessly sacrificed; whatever one finds repugnant must be overcome. When shall we begin once and for all?

**with regard to all our human desires**

5° But it’s not enough for us to tread underfoot whatever is repugnant. We must put the brakes on all human desires—and God knows how much the flesh is tormented by them! Think of all those fantasies in which the imagination gets lost; we need to clip their wings. Dreams of success, dreams of domination, dreams of wielding influence, dreams of legitimate affection, dreams of studies, dreams of quiet solitude, dreams of holiness. What are they but dreams? What God wants is the accomplishment of His will: exclusively, directly, simply, lovingly. He is jealous, as He is entitled to be, of any attempt on the part of His creatures to stand in his way under the more or less conscious pretext of having dreamed of doing something else. No, only God’s will must exist. “*Domine, ante te omne desiderium meum, et gemitus meus a te non est absconditus*. O Lord, you know all my longing; my groans are not hidden from you (Ps 37:10 Vulgate). O Lord, you know all my longing. You know everything I regret not having had. I have nothing to hide from you. All I desire, my only desire, is you yourself; I desire nothing else. Everything else is but a means of bringing me closer to you. And since you know better than I the means of bringing me closer to you, I am addressing myself to you: all I really want is you yourself; it is on you alone that I desire to depend to guide my footsteps there where I shall possess you entirely.

**with regard to our routine**

6° And that isn’t all. In religious life we develop certain habits. But because they are habits, routine sets in; unless we are very careful they lose all their supernatural worth. Our external behaviour may be beyond reproach; inwardly there is nothing but a great void. As far as heaven is concerned we are not only wasting our time, too often we are also misusing it. It would be bad enough for a religious to spend his day doing nothing, but his status implies that he is aiming at perfection. Routine in the performance of good works has dampened his former enthusiasm. He has lost his energy to do good. The treasure of his works diminishes accordingly. His virtue begins to crumble into dust. Soon he will begin to spurn grace. Aridity takes root in the depths of his soul. The tree will produce no more fruit. It will have to be cut down and cast into the fire. Why? Because the tyranny of habits, at first good but soon turned into mere routine, has rendered him sterile. Think about it: if luke-warmness has invaded your habits, hasten to rekindle the fires of your first fervour.

#### with regard to our mundaneness

7° What am I to say to you? Do you want to enter into the supernatural life? Then come up out of the realm of those Christians who are tepid, mediocre and uninspiring, who reduce God's Law to the lowest common denominator. Their desire to remain earthbound is frightening. Climb higher! To be sure, never before has Christianity stood in greater need of being reformed. Forget about others, let's first look at ourselves. See how our own level has dropped, and how imperative it is to raise it. How can you possibly get there other than by a sustained effort to scale the supernatural heights?

So this is what you will have to give up. I have to tell you three things that you must accept, three things you have to resolve in your life, if you ever wish to qualify as truly supernatural men.

## II.—Accepting the Spirit of Jesus Christ

So as not to be too long, I'll limit myself to the three major things you must accept.

#### the ideas of faith

1° Complete acceptance of the ideas of the faith. When Our Lord came into the world to announce the Good News, he said: "*Ego sum lux mundi; qui sequitur me, non ambulat in tenebris*—I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness" (Jn 8:12). He came to dispel the darkness spread by the passions, supercilious wisdom, every unsavory air, the flesh: "*Et erat lux vera, quae illuminat omnem hominem venientem in hunc mundum*; He was the true light who enlightens every man born into this world" (Jn 1:9). But the Evangelist continues: "*In ipso vita erat, et vita erat lux hominum, et lux in tenebris lucet et tenebrae eam non comprehenderunt*—In Him was life, and this life was the light of men; the light shone in the darkness, but the darkness did not understand it" (Jn 1:4-5). This is what history teaches us throughout the centuries: the continual fight of God, His life and His light, against the powers of darkness and death. Let us leave aside the struggle against unbelief and concentrate on ourselves.

Whoever aspires to Christian perfection cannot attain it except insofar as he possesses life, the life of God's Word and this life is the light of the human race. But this light is not accepted; it is not understood. It comes and is rejected. "*Et lux in tenebris lucet, et tenebrae eam non comprehenderunt*—The light shone in the darkness, but the darkness did not understand it. The Word of God "came unto His own, but His own received Him not—*In propria venit et sui eum non receperunt*" (Jn 1:11).

To be sure, we are not among those who completely reject the light, but we can count ourselves among those who accept it only partially. It frightens us because of what it may reveal. Well, we must have the courage

to look at the sun if we are truly children of the light and of the day. God has purified the eyes of the true Christian, of the perfect religious. Let us see everything in His light. To be sure, we will be dazzled, but what does that matter if, after all, the result is that we see things as God does, that we judge things as He does, that we despise what He does, and esteem what He does? In this way, will not God's life and light, through faith on this earth, be for us the prelude of the life and light of the glory to come?

**the impulses of hope**

2° With faith enlightening our judgments, its light sets our sights on the goal of our desires: we open our arms to the impulses of hope. If God is life, if God is light, He is the supreme Good. It is to this Good that we must aspire. Why did our Saviour come down to this world if not to teach us to look for everlasting happiness in the possession of the limitless Good? And where can this limitless Good be found except in God and God alone?

Ah, how invaluable to us is this light of Jesus Christ if it teaches us to look solely for the pearl of great price for which the merchant in the parable joyfully sells all that he has to purchase. O limitless good! O incomparable beauty! O source of never ending joy! It is towards you, Lord, that I now wish to hurl myself, freed from all my earthly goods. Give me wings to fly toward you, up above the vain deceptions of this world. Let me find my rest in you, and you alone. Yes, I leave it to you to decide what will make me truly happy. You are the fulfilment of all happiness. You will raise my feelings by transporting them from now on into the Kingdom above.

**the requirements of divine love**

3° Finally, the absolute acceptance of whatever God's love demands. Everything is possible to the one who believes; everything is easy to the one who loves. But we must love and our soul finds itself incapable of doing so. Our hearts are too narrow and will remain so if God does not enlarge them by the power of His almighty hand. Here is where effort comes into play: surrender to God and say to Him: "Lord, what do you want me to do, to prove that I love you?" This was the question St. Paul asked when he was struck down on the road to Damascus. Human love poses questions full of fervor. The Creator's love sometimes has terrifying answers. God's is a jealous love. What did he not ask of his greatest servants? And what may he not ask of you perhaps?

It is, therefore, in the light of faith that you must determine what is legitimate among these demands. It is in the sighs and aspirations of hope that you must come to appreciate the measure of your fervor. It is in the light and the flames of love that you must direct yourself to this life that is being proposed to you, that finds its origin in God, that is pursued with his help, and that finds its fulfilment within His very Heart.

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## THE SEVENTH MEDITATION.

### The Three Degrees of Sin

*“Puella, tibi dico, surge!”—Little girl, I say to you, arise!” (Mk 5:21<sup>19</sup>)*

All the biblical commentators tell us that the three risings from the dead we read about in the Gospel correspond to the three degrees of spiritual death from which grace can deliver us. By and large, they show us the first degree of mortal sin in the raising of Jairus’ daughter, the second degree in that of the widow’s son at Naim, and the third degree in that of Lazarus set free from the tomb four days after his death.

I do not intend to discuss mortal sin today. I prefer to presume that you are all free from it. I will not even follow the usual sequence. I am going to use these three risings from the dead to illustrate three different conditions a religious can find himself in when he begins a retreat and sees the light. It shakes him up and delivers him, not from three degrees of spiritual death, but from three kinds of spiritual sickness. It is to this study that I will limit what I have to say to you.

#### I.—Lazarus

*The weakening of supernatural life  
in a religious of many years’ standing*

Lazarus, loved by Jesus, leaves the tomb four days after his burial. He had fallen ill and his sisters had word sent to Jesus to tell him, “*Domine, ecce que amas infirmatur*—Lord, he whom you love is ill” (Jn 11:3). Jesus didn’t come to visit; on the contrary, he stayed away. What is one to think of such a way of acting? It’s terrible, not for Lazarus, since Jesus would manifest to him both his friendship and his power in a manner far beyond human expectation. But many other friends of Jesus seem to have been abandoned by Him to a deplorable state of loss.

#### How this weakening takes place

It cannot be doubted that a religious that today seems to be the

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<sup>19</sup> Incorrectly cited as Mt 9:24 in the *ES*

object of the Savior's displeasure was once His beloved friend. But how has this happened? How is it that, having advanced in age and spent many years in religious life, he has now fallen into a weakened state that is not spiritual death but looks very much like it? What has become of his efforts to avoid sin, to practice the Rule, and to develop the virtues of his state in himself? Why did he put on the religious habit? Why did he pronounce vows? Ask those who, finding the yoke unbearable, have abandoned religious life. Just how far have they fallen? Ask God, and He will tell you. They fell little by little. The spirit of their vocation disappeared little by little. They were unfaithful to the graces offered because they stopped entertaining supernatural thoughts, because infidelities, none of which appeared to be very serious, nevertheless slowly took hold of them, binding them like so many little chains and fetters which they could not break when they found themselves assaulted by temptation and called to fight.

#### **The state of soul of these religious**

So they found themselves in a state of helplessness—like Samson in the hands of the Philistine woman by whom he had allowed himself to be seduced. Secret lapses into sin begin to occur; public lapses will follow on. How long can such a condition last? God alone knows, but how perilous it is! All the more so, since they no longer experience remorse. They have cauterized their conscience, as the Apostle would say, a conscience that has become deadened and paralysed. And it is here that one can see how dangerous it is to entertain false or erroneous notions. How and where do you take hold of such a soul? This soul isn't dead, I admit, but into what a dreadful lethargy has it not plunged? Who will wake it from this state? And how much worse it gets day by day! What a sorry state to be in, given that one had been called to such a high degree of perfection! The number of one's years spent in religious life serve only to increase the burden of one's lethargy and to lessen one's chances of enjoying eternal salvation! And do we not witness this lamentable tragedy continuously taking place beneath our very eyes? The more the blessings increase, the more so does the ingratitude. With such dispositions, where will this soul, which should have done so much for the glory of God, for the honor of his heavenly Spouse, for the carrying out of God's invitation, end up?

#### **Its seriousness**

If we recognize ourselves in this picture, how we must recoil in horror! What is there to be proud of? This smug self-satisfaction has caused us so much secret pleasure—on what basis?

Let us face up to it: the soul of a religious who has reached this stage is not yet dead but it is dying. Since this state of affairs has been going on for some time, he's become accustomed to it. He doesn't worry about it anymore. His soul is spiritually paralyzed. It feels no desire to be cured. Actually it doesn't suffer much. It has little regret. It has forgotten what it feels like to be fervent and no longer detests sin. It regards its shortcomings

as trivial...and so the years go by that separate it from death and judgment. Who can tell it when its sins cease to be venial and become mortal? When mortal sin does come it won't notice it, because habitual venial sin has rendered it impenetrable. Who will tell it the difference between a mere "white" lie and a grievously sinful lie which kills the soul? -and the same applies to other sins too.

Have any of you gotten to that point, you who for such a long time have been committed by sacred vows to Our Lord? What are you going to do during this retreat to free yourselves from such a state?

## **II.—The Widow's Son at Naim**

### *The weakening of spiritual life in a young religious*

The widow's son at Naim. What did this young man die of? God alone knows, but all the commentators see in him the image of someone who has just fallen into very grievous sin, although he has not yet contracted the habit of sinning as in the case of Lazarus. Would this case not be similar to that of a young religious, or a novice, who has recently become guilty of some grievous offense? His condition is serious, but it's recent. The mortal sin he has decided to commit may not yet have been completed—he may still change his mind. But for someone who has been weakened, broken, and battered, how difficult it is! He wavers between wanting and not wanting; his will-power seems to have fallen to pieces. And now the time has come for him to be carried out for burial.

### **The signs of this weakening**

Such a state is not yours, is it, you who some time ago enlisted in the most perfect army of Jesus? What more do you want to hear than the warning which Our Lord gives you in the course of this retreat, "Young man, I say to you, arise!"? Such is the command of Him who is life divine. At his word life re-enters the corpse, the soul rejoins the body...and Jesus Christ gives him back to his mother.

Has this happened to any of you, young religious? Could it be your story? Did any of you start out as fervent novices who later on, all of a sudden, fell into a most deplorable state of indifference? The yoke of the Rule presses hard on your shoulders, obedience has given way to rebellion, the practice of charity has become revolting. You keep on asking yourself why you came here in the first place—and if you are not yet entirely dead to the life of grace, you are, or you seem to be, dead in your religious life. How did it all start? A temptation to which you yielded—an act of negligence committed—a fault allowed to develop? Or did you abandon yourself to memories of the past, allowing yourself to regret having surrendered your freedom? And in the end your erstwhile enthusiasm has given way to utter distaste. What is keeping you here? Who knows? Many have left. But instead of becoming a saint you will sink down to the level of

being a pedestrian Christian. It wouldn't be too bad if you remained there, but you won't. Just where will it all end up?

#### **The dangers involved**

My dear brothers, I am terrified. If this kind of thing happens to novices and young religious, what is going to happen to the Congregation to which they have committed themselves by their vows? Don't kid yourselves. This state of soul is not only deadly for those going through it, but highly contagious for others with whom one is living. So I cannot repeat it too often: either change or leave!—not only for your own sake, but because of the scandal you are causing. Look at how your conversations only breathe out poison. Look at the example you give that makes others say: "If this is how my neighbor behaves, why shouldn't I as well?" And remember, this way of acting is new. You did not enter religious life too long ago. Wasn't it just yesterday that you were ablaze with fervour? This fervour hasn't lasted very long—the first of your saintly desires has soon gone out—and what remains of your noble resolutions save a little heap of ashes? What is to be done?

#### **The hope of recovery**

Well, I am about to tell you. If Jesus Christ raised the young man at Naim to life in order to give him back to his mother, can he not raise you to life in order to give you back to your Congregation? In the case of more than one of you I'm sure he can, if you have really understood what I'm trying to say. This is a solemn moment. It does not depend on you alone, but it does depend on you. What is this retreat if not another occasion when Jesus passes by? He is here; he is ordering you to get up. Are you going to obey Him or not? Are you going to cast away those sad clothes smothering to death the life of your soul? Are you going to rid yourself of the corruption which has begun to penetrate and infect your mind? This is a question of the most serious nature, because it's up to you whether or not you revert to dispositions now vanished. After what you have been through, you will have to think carefully. If what you think of brings you to sorrow, then have the courage to face up to it. Here is ample food for thought. Here is ample opportunity for taking heroic resolutions. It's up to you.

### **III.—Jairus' Daughter**

#### *A passing fall; A prompt act of contrition*

There is a third state to be in—less tragic no doubt, frightening nonetheless. Not until Judgment Day will we know how many souls have been damned for just one mortal sin. How many religious lose their vocation because of one single act of infidelity! Why? Because God owes us nothing, and, since He owes us nothing, He is perfectly entitled to withhold His blessings once He sees we are abusing them. Woe to the



religious who cannot appreciate the value of God's favours! Woe to the religious who, having committed one grievous sin, does not hasten to make amends, to atone for it, and to expel it from his very being! Alas!—and yet how many times has he not been repeatedly warned. I am speaking to you who have scarcely set foot on the road of the saints and whose progress comes to a sudden halt by sin. Now is the time to look inside of yourselves.

But perhaps you have never committed any of these sins I so deeply dread. How fortunate! But keep watchful of the possibility. Grace is yours; do not let it fade away and meditate frequently on the synagogue official's little daughter. You also are "not dead but asleep." So hurry up and awake; from now on may your fervour make up to the Divine Master for your lethargy.

#### **Conclusions**

To which of these three categories, my dear brothers, do you belong? Is yours the state of a passing fall? Admire the mercy of the Father—no sooner have you fallen than He raises you up again. Are you in that humiliating situation where things are getting worse and worse? Think carefully. The consequences weigh heavily both on you and your congregation. Do you wish to become a source of constant and ever increasing scandal for the junior members of your spiritual family? Is it because of you that the gangrene has begun to spread? Listen, it doesn't take much to produce such rotten fruit; all that's needed is one murmur of discontent, one slight disobedience, one of those petty revolts that is hard to explain, except that they give birth to lots of other petty revolts on the part of others. Finally, are you one of those veterans who take advantage of their seniority only to become laxer and laxer?

Here, then, are the three main states of souls who, having given their heart to God, seek to take it back again. The examples I have given are not so distant that one could say: "it wouldn't happen to me." Once again I urge you, "Think it over," and, turning towards Him who said, "I am the Resurrection and the Life," ask him to raise you up and to grant you, in a way that you may never lose it, the ability to live as holy religious. Amen.

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## THE EIGHTH MEDITATION.

### Purity of Intention

There is no subject more delicate than the one I am about to address, not so much for the principles on which purity of intention reposes, but for the application of these principles in concrete situations. Let us begin by studying the principles on as broad a base as we can so that we may be able to draw the practical consequences on which depends the holiness of the religious life.

#### I.—The Principles of Purity of Intention

Purity of intention is an act of will that is oriented towards a goal: *intendere*. Man alone is capable of intending deliberately. An animal hunting his prey has indeed the intention of catching and eating it or of directing its steps to the nearest water hole in order to quench its thirst, but it does so without reflection or reason. Whereas when I decide on a course of action it is because I hope to benefit thereby, to obtain what is advantageous to me. If I think about it, I can examine my goal from two points of view: the ultimate goal and the intermediary one.

##### **Purity of intention excludes every error a) on the goal to be attained**

My ultimate goal can be none other than happiness. It is this goal towards which all beings are oriented. *Bonum est id quod omnes appetunt*<sup>20</sup>. Only, lots of people get it all wrong; as it is often said, they mistake the shadow for the reality. That is why, once disillusionment sets in, they have deep regrets and are forced to repeat with the impious the words of Scripture, “*Ergo erravimus*—so it was we who strayed” (Wis 5:6).

It is frightening, the number of those who make this mistake, egoists who look for happiness in themselves or beneath themselves like the greedy, the impure, the ambitious, the vainglorious. God alone must be our ultimate aim. I am sure none of you is doing otherwise. With the Prophet you have said, “*Dominus pars haereditatis meae, et calicis mei, tu es qui restitues haereditatem meam mihi*—The Lord is the portion of my inheritance and of my cup; it is you who will restore my inheritance to me” (Ps 15:5 Vulgate).

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<sup>20</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae I, VI, 1; De veritate* 1.1 (Thomas Aquinas & ST & CPL & I, VI, 1; *De veritate* 1.1)

#### **b) on the means to be used**

Sometimes, however, we mistake the means whereby to obtain this desire; and it is here that purity of intention may be lacking. Notice that God doesn't call everybody in the same way. St. Paul, in his description of the Mystical Body of Christ, says that some members are eyes, others mouths, feet, or hands. In the same way there are different ways of carrying out the will of God, who in his wisdom governs all things. It is not on this point that one should insist, but when some say in all sincerity, "*Notum fac mihi, Domine, finem meum, et numerum dierum meorum quis est ut sciam quid desit mihi*"; O Lord, make me know my end. And what is the number of my days: that I may know what is wanting to me (Ps 38:5 Vulgate). Others, without consulting God, make their choices and get it wrong. Their intention is not pure.

#### **Examples of errors of direction**

Let us take a few examples. Take a young man who believes he is being called to dedicate his life to God, but God wants him to take up an active life. He, motivated by I am not sure what laziness, seeks refuge in a contemplative order. Would we describe his intention as pure? Alas, we would not!

There is another young man called to a life of apostolic activity, but he needs a cloister to which he can retire from time to time. He needs to immerse himself in the silence of his cell at the Lord's feet having roused the Christian masses with a mighty sermon. But at every moment he likes to reap the harvest he has sown; he likes to keep abreast of what is going on in the world. So instead of joining a religious Order, he opts for the diocesan clergy. Is he right? Is his intention pure? Not more so than that of the previous case.

There is still another young man who is too lazy to till the land and too cowardly to take up arms; so he goes and knocks on the door of a seminary. Is his intention pure? How possible is that?

And, finally, what about all those young men whom God calls to the sanctuary, but who are held back in the world by ambition, the easy life, love of pleasure, or certain attachments of the heart? If they remain in the world they may well get lost or, in any case, God will make them feel the harshness of his sting. Are they going where the voice from on high is calling? They go the way of all flesh and far from sanctifying themselves with a more perfect life, they, having been deprived of a ton of graces, open themselves up to the Lord saying to them, "*Amen, dico vobis, quia non novi vos*—Amen, I say to you, I do not know you" (Mt 25:12).

A sorry situation indeed for someone who having been offered an opportunity to reach the summits of happiness in his heavenly home, turns down the offer to attain his ultimate goal and exposes himself to lasting damnation.

#### **The situation of the religious**

Well, there is an equally, if not more, tragic situation that you must look at: it is that of a religious who knows he has been called, but will not take all the necessary means of living up to his vocation in a manner worthy of God's call. This, above all, is what you must be thinking about. You are in God's service, committed to follow the path of perfection. All you have to do now is to march forward with an enthusiasm worthy of the goal you wish to attain. Where are you going and how sincere are you being?

**What goal is he pursuing?**

Examine your day-to-day dispositions. To whom are you accountable for your actions? To God or yourselves? Ah, how chilling such questions are! And how appropriate it is for us to reflect on them! I entered religious life for God. Can I say that I have maintained this commitment to him? What human feelings do not come to assail me ceaselessly in carrying out the Rule which I follow so half-heartedly...in my obedience to the yoke of my superiors that I try to shake off as much as I can; in my relations with my brothers whom I take little time to edify; in my works of zeal where my self-esteem is a thousand times more in play than the glory of Our Lord? In all this, if I take a good look at myself, what can my conscience find that is truly pure? Alas, nothing, nothing. This is the painful acknowledgement I am forced to make.

**with what level of sincerity**

From the very beginning this is the way it has been with human beings. Barely had Adam been expelled from the Garden of Paradise and become the father of two sons than they both made their offerings and, behold, God accepted one and rejected the other. Yet they both sacrificed on the altar of the Most High. Why this difference? Because one of them did so with pure intentions, but not the other. One of them was seeking of God, the other merely himself. In themselves, both sacrifices were excellent; however, of the two one was pleasing because of his uprightness, the other rejected because of his selfish dispositions.

Now, imagine, in the same house, there are two religious under the same yoke. They follow the same rule of life, they recite the same prayers, perform the same tasks, and practice the same acts of self-denial. Yet God is pleased with one of them and angry with the other. Why? Because God sees into the human heart: "*Dominus autem intuetur cor*—God reads the heart" (1 Sam 16:7; 1 Kings 16:7 Vulgate). The heart of one is full of pure intentions, but not the heart of the other.

Lord, the thought of this makes me tremble. Is my heart sufficiently genuine in your presence? In all that I do, am I seeking you in all sincerity? Have I nothing to reproach myself with on such a frightening matter? Never, I pray—never allow me to drift away from the accomplishment of your will. Let my intentions be conformed to your divine intentions for me. Let me seek you and may it be you that I find at the end of my life.

## II. Conditions for Purity of Intention

I can think of nothing more essential than following the three conditions I now set before you: being sincere, obedient, and energetic.

1° *Being sincere*.—First of all we are talking about a question of good faith. At first glance, nothing seems so obvious as being sincere when it comes to interests that are so important. Big mistake! It is so easy to deceive ourselves either through a poorly thought out act of enthusiasm, through some movement of unreasonable presumption, through some turning back selfishly on oneself, or through outside influences of which we seem totally unaware. How can we be really sincere under such conditions, all the more so when in a lot of circumstances sincerity demands effort? After receiving Communion, you are filled with heavenly rapture. Like St. Thomas, you proclaim to your brothers, “*Eamus et nos et moriamur cum illo*—Let us also go and die with him!” (Jn 11:16). But this beautiful fire doesn’t last long. The time comes to be put to the test and then what happens? Like St. Thomas and his fellow Apostles you take to flight. Your fervour was not genuine. Or else you may have embraced a relatively hard life, without enthusiasm, but also without those noble sentiments which it demands in order for it to bring you true happiness.

You have made your human calculations, and what will be the outcome of these calculations? You have not sought God, and God alone. You entered religion with one eye on what you could get out of it. You will persevere in it without enthusiasm and you will end up by dying in it with neither hope nor consolation. In your religious life you have simply gone through the motions and you know perfectly well what awaits you beyond the grave. You were insincere when you came into it—you were indolent while you lived in it—you will be hardened when you die in it. What a prospect this is!

But why should we dwell on such gloomy thoughts? Is it not preferable, in view of imitating him, to take a look at the genuine religious who prays to God from the depths of his heart to give him light and asks Our Lord, as did the blind man in the Gospel, “*Domine, fac ut videam*—Lord, grant that I see” (Lk 18:41)? He has but one ambition: to walk in the path of righteousness. Ah, let him rest assured that if he perseveres in this prayer it will be answered.

2° *Intention directed by obedience*.—One of the consolations of being a Christian is that to get to heaven we don’t always have to be right. Who can claim to be infallible? But what is necessary for us is to be of good faith in the pursuit of whatever is right. And, well, God provides us with a sure means: it is obedience. As long as we are not being commanded to do what we know is evil, we can be at peace, we can look God in the face, by doing what our superiors tell us. Let us purify our intentions by the sacrifice of our own will. It may happen that our own experience and reflection would lead us to a course of action other than the one given to us. Let us not

worry. We know we are accomplishing God's will, revealed by those God has placed in charge of us. Let this suffice to give us peace.

3° *Energy*.—But it isn't enough to recognize clearly what we must do in order to achieve the ultimate aim of every creature of reason. It is necessary to have the energy to put it into practice. What quite often ruins purity of intention is the obligation of acting in accordance with what one knows must be done. The Holy Spirit says of the impious, "*Noluit intelligere, ut bene ageret*—he didn't want to understand for fear of having to act" (Ps 35: 4 Vulgate). Doing good is hard work, from which we try to excuse ourselves by pretending we don't understand. What a terrible state to be in! It is meant to apply, no doubt, to big sinners—but it certainly applies to many other situations in life as well: a lack of energy to foresee and be familiar with one's duty; a lack of energy to put into practice what one knows ought to be done. Then what happens? Little by little one learns how to overlook things so that in the end one can no longer see well at all. Doesn't this apply to lots of pious souls all around me? And does, or does it not, apply to me too? I know what I ought to do, but I haven't got the energy to do it and I invent all sorts of lame excuses for dodging my responsibilities. I keep repeating them till I end up believing them.

*Conclusion*. Lord, purify my intentions to their root, and give me tremendous energy to put them into practice. May I see what I have to do and be courageous enough to do it. What you ask of me may seem hard; it doesn't matter, provided that I should reach my ultimate goal, which is none other than yourself. Ah, Lord, I will say to you, "*Illumina oculos meos ne unquam obdormiam in morte*—Enlighten my eyes, lest I fall asleep forever in death" (Psalm 12:4 Vulgate). Let my eyes be sincere. Let me see what I have to do—and have enough courage to do it.

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## THE NINTH MEDITATION.

### Penance

“Tunc Jesus ductus est a Spiritu in desertum ut tentaretur a diabolo, et cum jejunasset quadraginta diebus et quadraginta noctibus, postea esuriit—Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. He fasted for forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was hungry” (Mt 4:1-2).

Jesus wishes to be our model when we do penance. He who said, “*Poenitentiam agite, appropinquavit enim regnum coelorum*—Repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand” (Mt 4:17), wishes to show us by his example in what this penance consists. We will take a look at five major aspects: 1° a supernatural character; 2° solitude; 3° silence; 4° struggle; 5° privation.

#### I.—The Supernatural character

There are, in fact, some forms of penance in which one cannot recognize the work of the Holy Spirit at all. Consider some of those frightful penances of India. There have been heretics who practised extreme austerity. The Jews themselves underwent severe forms of self-denial. Was there anything supernatural about all this? Don't be tempted to think so. Among the heathens we see fathers sacrificing their own children to Moloch. Cruelty can be found in a ton of anti-Christian practices. No, penance in and of itself is not always supernatural. What is it that makes it so? It must be guided. “*Tunc Jesus ductus est a Spiritu*—Jesus was led by the Spirit” (Mt 4:1). Here we see the action of the Holy Spirit. In Jesus the Spirit could act directly; for Christians, the Spirit needs the assistance of wise spiritual direction.

You see, it often happens that we wrongly suppose some penitential exercise to have been inspired by God, when in fact it is the product of an over-vivid imagination and over excited nerves. So we rush headlong into such self-inflictions as proof of nothing at all except our excess of zeal—which, moreover, we cannot keep up for long. We indulge in excess, and we wear ourselves out quickly in these thoughtless eccentricities. How far have

you got? You mustn't go too far. At the same time you must ask yourself how far you should go—or rather how far you must let yourself be guided in this direction. You see, this kind of thing belongs to the supernatural realm and, as a result, should, according to the Spirit of God, be governed by those in charge of the direction of souls. So, on the one hand, let us not exaggerate—on the other hand, let us not be fearful—and let whatever we do be submitted to supernatural direction. “Tunc Jesus ductus est a Spiritu.”

And thus it is, as St. Augustine observes<sup>21</sup> that Lazarus becomes the model of those of us who do penance. He responds to the voice of Jesus crying: “*Lazare, veni foras*—Lazarus, come forth!” (Jn 11:43). He obeys this voice, but he cannot yet walk; he must first be untied. By whom? The Church, responds the great Doctor of the Church, and he must begin by submitting himself to God's power invested in the Church. So it is, if he submits, that he will be led by the Holy Spirit to repentance and the forgiveness which is its consequence.

## II.—Solitude

The Holy Spirit leads our Saviour into the solitude of the wilderness. Happy are those who, wishing to do penance, hunger and thirst for solitude where they will be able to contemplate their transgressions saying with the Prophet, “*Et peccatum meum contra me est semper*—My sin is ever before my eyes” (Ps 51:5). Yes, we need solitude. We must withdraw from the world and take a good look at our sin, to examine its source, its grievousness, and its disastrous effects. Who, in the daily hustle and bustle, has time to draw life from this practice of inner examination and this reflection on one's wretchedness and on the degradation to which it has brought one?

This is why so many hermits took refuge in the wilderness. They could no longer bear the company of their fellow sinners whose excesses they shared. Or they fled the company of men for fear of committing the same sins as they witnessed. Solitude was their safeguard. They said to themselves: “Far from men, there God is less sinned against, sin and its occasions are further away, and temptations may be more easily confronted.”

But above all, and this is what really matters, solitude permits us to rise up to God. It calms our passions, and it gives us the audacity to ask for sight. Not that solitude removes all the veils enshrouding faith, but clarity of vision and purity of heart are more easily found there. Happy the soul in solitude! Not that we are all called out into the stark wilderness where the Holy Spirit led Our Lord, but all of us are invited to spend a few days in retreat. “*Venite seorsum et requiescite pusillum*; Come away by yourselves

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<sup>21</sup> *In Iohannis euangelium tractatus* (CPL 0278), tract. 49, par. 24, linea 9 (Augustine & Tractate on the Gospel of John & tract. 49, par. 24, line 9)



to a deserted place and rest a while” (Mk 6:31). What matters is that we make good use of this solitude and this rest to renew our spiritual strength, to increase our horror of sin, and to make us more conscious of what it means to atone for our sins.

### III.—Silence

#### where one speaks to God

I am not referring to that silence which St. Augustine calls “the chill of charity—*frigus caritatis*”<sup>22</sup>, but of that silence which the Divine Master kept himself in the Jordan wilderness. It is that silence in which the less we speak to men, the more we speak to God. It is not that the voice of God always makes itself heard; and it is then that silence and solitude seem to join forces to torment us.

We are cut off from holding conversation with men, yet we cannot hear God’s voice either. Never did there exist a more cruel situation to be in, especially for those who need somebody to lean on. But this is the very situation to which a convicted prisoner is reduced—left to his own company. One is forced in effect to withdraw into oneself, obliged to look at oneself in all one’s ugliness. What a sad spectacle! But it serves the purpose of making us humble by considering the disdain we deserve for having been so ungrateful to God in the past, let alone for the sins we committed.

#### where our passions are stilled

There is another and equally beneficent result of silence for repentance. In solitude the passions are stilled. Social contact brings about impure desires, the love of riches, worldly ambition, vainglory...and all sorts of evil thoughts that come in their wake.

The silence of solitude gives us time to discover the vanity, the folly, the crime of all the soul’s emotions. Apart from what is necessary, what can the solitary and silent soul desire? So much of what we thought we couldn’t do without vanishes on its own.

Let me add that silence has its consolations. If God may hide his face for a time, when he sees someone pursuing him, he cannot remain forever untouched. He answers the call addressed to him. He gives himself to the one whom he sees trying to remove the obstacles that get in the way of his communication. What a precious moment in which to ask his forgiveness!

The woman who had been a public sinner was not in solitude when, with her vase of precious ointment, she went to find the Divine Master in the house of Simon the Leper, but she observed a profound silence. What

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<sup>22</sup> *Enarrationes in Psalmos* (CPL 0283) - SL 38, psalmus 37, par. 14, linea 17 (Augustine&Commentary on the Psalms&CPL&psalm 37, par. 14, line 17)

took place between her and the Savior took place without a word. How precious must that silence have been! Let it serve as a model and teach you how you must be silent and wait. God will deign to speak to us when we are not caught up conversing with men. Awaiting His voice in silence will purify your hearts and dispose you to conversion for in this case penance is the preparation for a complete change of heart.

#### IV.—The Struggle

##### Jesus Himself was tempted by the devil

To repent and then to continue a life of sin is nothing but a profound contradiction that God cannot abide. Here the Divine Master cannot serve as a model for us of a change of heart, of the transformation that must take place in the soul of the sinner. But although He was Innocence itself, He did consent to being attacked, so as to become our model in our efforts and struggles to recover the freedom we have lost by falling into sin. This is why he was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, “there to be tempted by the Devil; *ut tentaretur a diabolo*”. You who wish to become stronger and more steadfast, holier and more Christ-like, “must prepare your souls for temptation—*para animam tuam ad tentationem*” (Sir 2:1).

##### The suggestions of the devil

Don't fool yourselves. The Kingdom of Heaven suffers violence; it must be conquered by armed force. And look what happened in fact. Jesus saw the Tempter approaching him. Satan doesn't know him yet; he ignores the kind of opponent he is dealing with. Is this the Messiah? That is why he begins by using such insidious questions: “*Si Filius Dei es, dic ut lapides isti panes fiant*—If you are the Son of God, command that these stones become loaves of bread” (Mt 4:3). Of course—but this would require a miracle, thereby making Jesus reveal what he wanted kept hidden. So he won't perform this miracle. Satan has lost the first round, defeated by the silence of Him whom He wishes to tempt by uncovering his secret. That Satan has suffered a set-back is proven by the new tactics to which he resorts. He wouldn't return to the attack with such insistence unless something told him his own empire was at stake. And this is what Satan does (with less terror, no doubt, than when he was confronting Jesus) every time he has reason to fear someone is escaping his clutches.

It is no less the same with us whenever he notices that we have begun to yield. He says to us, “*dic ut lapides isti panes fiant*; command that these stones become loaves of bread.” Look at the situation you're in; reflect on everything you must do. Come on, do not live recklessly; begin to take measures once and for all to prepare yourself. Alas! alas! How hard the fight is and how many times have we not allowed ourselves to be persuaded to ease off! How many times have we not yielded out of an appalling sense

of cowardice? How many times will this cowardice not become the Devil's microphone, persuading us to give way to the ever increasing clamours of the flesh? Let us learn, let us learn how to overcome all these forms of tyranny. Taking flight, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, will serve us well. Let us join battle declaring that it is an entirely new food that we need. Having given our bodies what they demand, let us also know how to nourish our souls with the word of God.

I haven't much to say about the temptation to glory in his achievements which Jesus suffered on the pinnacle of the Temple. I think mature reflection has by now convinced us of the vanity of our pretensions. I will pass over the Devil's showing him all the kingdoms of this world. What does it prove? Simply that Satan is nothing more than a very coarse assailant and that it would be easy to overcome him if we wanted to remain firmly attached to the truth. That's the disposition that penance fosters in us.

Notice that Jesus was led out into the wilderness to be tempted. Wherever we are, temptation will pursue us. The most complete solitude will not free us from its reach. We need courage to undergo the anguish it brings. There is, however, something wonderful that takes place here, that solitude deprives the Devil of a host of weapons wherewith to attack us. Citizens for his kingdom are lacking—enough said!

#### V.—Privation

*“Et cum jejunasset quadraginta diebus et quadraginta noctibus, postea esuriit; He fasted for forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was hungry.”* Jesus submitted himself to a most rigorous fast. But it is not on the fasting itself that I wish to insist. To speak of fasting is to speak of privation. We must take a look at what privations we should impose on ourselves if we really wish to do real penance. This is a most serious question to ask. Instead of depriving one's self of food, should we not learn to control our eyes, our ears, our tongue, certain satisfactions pertaining to our heart or our imagination, a degree of independence, and legitimate success? It seems to me that in this regard anyone who wants to do penance can do a lot.

Our aim must be to desire and to give Our Lord a fruitful sacrifice, one which can sanctify our whole lives. The Prophet says, “rend your hearts, not your garments—*scindite corda vestra et non vestimenta vestra*” (Joel 2:13). What God demands most is a heart full of sorrow: *cor contritum et humiliatum, Deus, non dispicies*; a humble and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise” (Ps 50:19 Vulgate).

Retire within yourselves. Listen to God's voice. Leave for a time the company of men. Create an atmosphere of silence around you. Fight against Satan and against your passions. Deprive yourselves of whatever disposes you to sin by taking hold of it and tear it up by the roots. Then, with a trustful heart, begin to live the kind of life God has been calling you

to for so long. And when you go home and resume your everyday duties, you will become sources of edification because you yourselves will have become new men.

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## THE TENTH MEDITATION.

### The Rule

The life of man needs to be regulated. Besides common laws a host of “do’s and don’ts” govern the conduct of different people in different circumstances. It’s the same in religious life. This is why we have to keep on coming back to the very important subject of our Rule of Life.

I am going to treat this topic from three different angles: 1° the importance of the rule; 2° the extent of the rule; 3° the spirit of the rule.

#### I.—The Importance of the Rule

For some of us the Rule is just a small book containing what is more or less explicit and more or less applicable. We don’t take it too seriously and observe it as it suits us, because it doesn’t oblige us under pain of sin!

##### Proven by:

##### a) the esteem of the Church

But the Church holds the Rule in high esteem. The way in which the Church crystallizes in a few basic rules the foundation of any religious order before its official approval clearly demonstrates how important they are and how seriously these fundamental rules should be respected.

##### b) its content

Secondly, parts of the Rule express the law of God, obligatory under all circumstances. Other parts pertain to the observance of our religious vows, no less obligatory once we have taken them. Finally, there are regulations, which when violated out of a certain contempt constitute a sin, a sin more or less grievous according to the importance of the regulation concerned.

##### c) the holiness of the lawgivers

If we look at our rule from the point of view of those who drew it up, what do we see? Holy men striving for perfection in a common enterprise, following the lead of the Holy Spirit. “*Frater qui adjuvatur a fratre, quasi civitas firma*—Brother helping brother becomes an unassailable fortress” (Prov 18:19 Vulgate). These are brothers helping each other win life imperishable, while others seek a life of corruption: *Illi quidem ut coronam corruptibilem accipiant, nos autem incorruptam*—they do it to win a perishable crown, but we an imperishable” (1 Cor 9:25).

**d) the excellence of the evangelical counsels**

It follows that these saintly men would choose the best possible means and, striving to observe the law of God in all its breadth, they go further: they strive to observe the counsels given by Our Lord to those who aspire to go beyond what is considered ordinary in this world in terms of love and generosity. That is why the Rule not only includes those duties towards God and their fellow-men which all God's children are called upon to perform, but it also prescribes that they do so absolutely and, going even further, makes mandatory what remains recommendations for others.

And how do the counsels become law in religious life? By our three vows. You didn't have to take these vows; you could have followed the common path. But you did take them. So accept all the consequences. In God's eyes this is how it is—whether for your special reward, if faithful, or your special punishment, if not.

**e) the excellence of the common life**

There is more to it than this. This Rule was not drawn up for men vowed to complete solitude. It was promulgated by legislators wishing to establish a spiritual family by their building each other up. There is nothing more of admiration than those houses where the inhabitants are of one heart and one soul: *Multitudinis autem credentium erat cor unum et anima una*—the community of believers was of one heart and mind (Acts 4:32). This is what was said of the first Christians.

Tradition tells us that St. Mark established this type of life in Alexandria, where he was the first patriarch, among a number of Christians. From there it was the Fathers of the Desert, then St. Augustine at Hippo, St. Benedict in Italy, and then others whom it would take me too long to enumerate. These men gathered other men around them: some for prayer and fasting, others for prayer and study, or for prayer and manual work, but all, more or less directly, in evangelization, all practising the evangelical counsels.

Now, there is a great advantage to living a more perfect life if one can do so in community. It is no less advantageous for preaching the gospel and bearing effective witness around one to practice an austere rule of life and bind oneself to certain exacting observances. Consequently, I do not hesitate to conclude that any religious who deliberately scorns the rule is a criminal.

**thus the horror of scorning the rule**

**that one violates either because one takes it lightly**

One says: I violate it by refusing to take it seriously. And what's wrong with this is that a religious above all is a serious man. Who else will take things seriously if the man aspiring to come closer to God doesn't? I can understand someone giving way to human weakness, or even human depravity, by breaking a rule here and there. But, no, I will never tolerate a religious who habitually takes the rule lightly.

**or under the false pretext of acting out of ignorance**

And some claim to sin out of ignorance. I cannot accept this either. The Psalmist wrote these words for religious who must sing them day in and day out, "*Quomodo dilexi legem tuam, Domine, tota die meditation mea est*—Lord, how I have loved your Law! I meditate it all day long" (Ps 118:97 Vulgate—translator's comment: in Father d'Alzon's time nearly every day was counted as a feast day, comprising the recitation of Psalm 118 as part of the Divine Office). Consider the advantage this meditation gives one over other men. Why? Because it helps us to better understand prudence in the face of enemies, true knowledge from mere statistics, the experience of holiness over mere human wisdom. Finally it prevents our feet "from any straying; *ab omni via mala*" (Ps 118:101 Vulgate).

**or out of distaste**

Shall I stop at scorn that comes from distaste of the rule? Ah, to do so would be to mark ourselves with the sign of eternal damnation! Why are you seized by distaste for the rule, unless it is because you dread your own vocation? So you wish to stray from the rule and be unfaithful to it! You will soon be deeply regretting that you ever wanted to put on this wonderful yoke. Do you imagine that you will stop at that? Hardly! Having broken the rule of the counsels, you will soon find yourself trampling the law of the precepts underfoot as well. Ah, you will have perilously compromised your future, unless you hasten to turn around!

I am not going to stop at the spectacle of those religious who, flouting the rule time and again, produce communities which are religious in name only. They are desecrating the most beautiful halls of the Church's temple. What terrible punishments await them! What catastrophes they are provoking as they rouse God's wrath!

## **II.—The Extent of our Rule**

Who can doubt that Satan is exerting every effort to destroy a rule that, in some way, is the mold in which souls intent on striving for perfection cast themselves? But who would dare to conclude from this that we must yield to Satan? Yet there is more: we must consider the full extent of the rule.

**to every moment of the day**

I would go as far as to say that the rule applies to everything. It extends to every moment of the day. It tells us when to sleep, and how to spend our time when we are awake. It takes hold of us when we get up in the morning, and maps out whatever we will have to do for the rest of the day. It determines by the moments of prayer our direct duties towards God and by charity the offering of the least of our actions. This same charity not only determines our relations without but our deepest feelings with those around us, our brothers first, then Christians, even sinners and those who err

since religious are bound to pray for their return to God.

The rule determines our work and the smallest things we do; it foresees our penances; it encourages the practice of the virtues, according to the vocation we have chosen. For some it is hard in one way; for others it is hard in other ways. As St. Augustine says, “*Ut in omnibus, quibus utitur transitura necessitas, superemineat quae permanet caritas*; let charity which abides overrule all things which are used out of transitory necessity<sup>23</sup>. We must never forget this maxim—it helps us to keep in mind the degree of perfection expected of us.

I make bold to point out that the rule the foundation of which is the most perfect love of God and neighbor cannot work without love of the rule. If you cease to love it, you will automatically stop practising it. Do you wish to become perfect? Then follow a perfect Rule, and follow it perfectly; if you don't, then woe betide you!—you are putting on a show of perfection which you don't really mean. Do you wish to grasp the full extent of your Rule? Then take a complete human life. Is there anything in this life about which the rule has nothing to say? Nothing.

**to all our acts that they may be transformed into virtues**

But I shall go even further. The rule transforms, takes all our acts and transforms them into virtues. St. Augustine says in the City of God, “*Virtus est ordo amoris*; virtue is the order of love”<sup>24</sup>. What else is the Rule all about? I love, but I must love with order, because disordered love can never be divine love. But if I love with order, despite my repugnance, even because of my repugnance, then whatever I do is transformed into virtue. So the more I love, the more I will demonstrate an ordered love, that is to say, one guided by the rule. The more that I make an effort to love in order, the more I practice virtue. Such is the importance of the rule; for it to be a religious rule, it must be based in love. For it to be a rule, it must reflect a higher divine order. To be a perfect rule, it must impose virtues ordered to the proposed goal.

But this requires that one struggle, fight, make sacrifices. Who would deny that? That is why the practice of the rule is the perfection of the practice of the virtues. It's no good telling God we love Him unless we prove it. The rule provides us with the best possible means of proving that we do mean what we say.

So let us take hold of the rule in all its breadth and let us begin once and for all, by practicing it, to embrace everything that is demanded of us, to transform the smallest acts of our lives into steps on the road to heaven.

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<sup>23</sup> *Rule of St. Augustine*, V,2 (Augustine&Rule&Migne&V,2)

<sup>24</sup> *De ciuitate Dei* (CPL 0313) - LLT-A-SL 48, lib. 5, cap. 22, linea 33 (also quoted in *De moribus ecclesiae*) (Augustine&City of God&CPL&bk. 5, chap. 22, line 33)



### III.—The Spirit of the Rule

#### According to our two-fold aim, general and particular

Every human society is animated by a common way of thinking, a common aim, and the nobler the objective, the more perfect this society will be. Take the savage in the jungle. His aim is to reproduce, to hunt and live from what he catches, and to kill his enemies. In a Christian society people will cultivate higher ideals. France as a nation has set itself the ideal of extending the kingdom of Christ and defending the rights of the Church; in this are its mission and its greatness. Every religious family has perfection as its general aim and then a particular aim besides.

That of our family is to extend the kingdom of Our Lord in the world and, as such, we are essentially Catholic. That is the way of thinking that must prevail.

Now, everything must be related to the main goal; we wish to take as literally as possible the main goal: "*Estote ergo vos perfecti sicut Pater vester coelestis perfectus est*—be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt 5:48). This is the general aim. As regards our particular aim: we wish to dedicate ourselves especially to the extension of Our Lord's kingdom: "*Adveniat regnum tuum*—Thy Kingdom Come!" If you deprive any human society of its goal, it will die. In like manner, if you take away from a religious family its goal, it will soon disintegrate.

But the aim of every religious organization must be entirely spiritual; so, to describe its aim we describe its spirit. And to fulfill its aim, it must look for appropriate ways and means, as we have said. Therefore, we must study which ways and means are most likely to bring about the desired goal.

Each Order, then, has its primary means. What matters first and foremost is to produce as many saints as possible, saints who will promote God's cause as effectively as possible, given the times and circumstances in which they find themselves. Yes, it is essential that all religious must aim at becoming holy. I do not shy from saying: the very essence of the religious state is to produce more and more saints—as many as possible and as holy as possible. We must breathe an atmosphere of holiness.

Thence the obvious conclusion that the more perfect our rule is, the more perfect the members who are assembled under its yoke must become...provided, of course, that they allow themselves more and more to become saturated with its spirit, that they use all possible means to absorb this spirit, and refuse to be discouraged, let alone conquered, by whatever obstacles stand in the way.

I refrain from comparing a fervent religious family with one which is not. How sad, how distressing, how downright revolting, the sight of the latter must be! Think of the evils which must accumulate within its ranks! Then think of the beauty, the love, the lasting joy and the never ending peace which pervade the former. Ah, let us not think twice about it. Let us

embrace our rule—resolved to practice it from now on in all its breadth and depth.

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## THE ELEVENTH MEDITATION.

### Faith

God, who wished to place order in all things, did so with the virtues as well. The first of all is faith. “*Quomodo ergo invocabunt in quem non crediderunt?*—But how can they call on him in whom they have not believed?” (Rom 10:14). Once we have acknowledged God we have no choice but to admit that He is the Supreme Good; and since He is the Supreme Good, we must yearn to possess Him, because nothing less than God can make us supremely happy. That brings us to hope. But the soul will not content itself with yearning to possess God. It considers His beauty, His goodness, all His attributes—and it desires to be one with Him. Thus charity comes to crown faith and hope.

Let us begin today by speaking of faith. We will take a look at 1) its object; 2) in what an act of faith consists; 3) how it is a virtue; 4) what gifts are associated with faith

#### I.—The Object of faith

##### a) The first truth seen in the light of God who speaks to us through his Son

The object of faith is primary, first truth: “*Credere enim oportet accedentem ad Deum quia est*—for anyone who approaches God must believe that he exists” (Heb 11:6). There are what our theologians call the “preliminaries of faith.” Human reason, unaided, can arrive at the conclusion that there must be a God; but between this and the knowledge of God as revelation discloses him to us, there lies a vast abyss which nothing less than supernatural faith will enable us to cross. Yes, faith alone can bring us to the knowledge of what God has chosen to reveal to us of his unfathomable nature through his Son.

But on what does faith rely? On that primary, first truth which is God. We must retrace our steps to this primary truth. It is the starting point of every other revealed truth. It is God who teaches us; it is thanks to Him that we believe.

So what exactly is faith? “*Fides est sperandarum substantia rerum, argumentum non apparentium*. Faith is the realization of what is hoped for and evidence of things not seen “ (Heb 11:1). Nothing we are called to believe in can be seen, because if we saw it we wouldn’t have to believe in it—we would know it. Now, it is with faith as it is with hope, “*Spes quae*

*videtur non est spes*; hope that sees for itself is not hope” (Rom 8:24). That is why, in order to believe, we need the greatest of help, that is none other than God.

**b) seen in the light of Christ**

But how can one attain God? “*Deum nemo vidit unquam, unigenitus Dei Filius qui est in sinu Patris, ipse enarravit*—No one has ever seen God. The only Son, God, who is at the Father’s side, has revealed him” (Jn 1:18). God is the primary, first truth, “He spoke to us through a son—*locutus est nobis in Filio*” (Heb 1:2). The Son taught the Church, “*Sicut misit me Pater, et ego mitto vos: euntes ergo docete omnes gentes*—As the Father has sent me, so I send you: Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations” (Jn 20:21; Mt 28:19). The Church, Jesus Christ, God: one must always come back to the first truth that is God. In God can be found all the truths, and thus the object of our faith (what we believe in) is not only this first truth, but all the articles of faith that are based on this first truth.

So, let us repeat it, our faith is based on God, the first truth, enlightening us by the means that he has chosen and that are consistent with our capacity to know the truth. This capacity of ours here below cannot compare with that of God Himself—nor with that of the angels—nor with that of ours when we reach heavenly glory. It functions step by step, from the known to the unknown. Truth enters our mind in successive stages. But it is in this that one can see the wonder of the goodness of God who consented to reveal himself to our first father, to the patriarchs, to Moses, to the prophets, and finally through His Son, “Truth itself, taking flesh in a man, *veritatis homine assumpto*,”<sup>25</sup> in order to come to us.

**c) unfolding itself little by little to its present expression**

The object of faith is the first truth in the sense that, through it, we come to know everything that we must believe. But look at all of this, wonderful in its entirety...as the Apostles’ Creed has revealed it to us. Notice also how step by step these basic truths unfold themselves to our comprehension, becoming clearer and more meaningful as one by one they become the object of attack. Each century seems to become aware of additional splendour in the rays of this divine sun: “*Exultavit ut gigas ad currendam viam et a summo coelo egressio ejus*—it rejoices like a champion to run its course and its rising is on the edge of heaven” (Ps 18:6-7 Vulgate).

As a result, see how imperative it is for us to place ourselves completely at the disposal of this divine truth. We do this in three principal ways: 1) by a never-ending updating of our faith so that it becomes our very life; 2) by adhering as vigorously as possible to all revealed truths; 3) by the total surrender of our intellect to God’s acting on us so that this may attach us to Him and bring us to assent as thoroughly as possible to his teachings.

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<sup>25</sup> St. Augustine, *Civ. Dei* c.2...quoted in Thomas Aquinas, *Summae theologiae tertia pars* - LLT-A quaestio: 1, articulus: 2, corpus, linea: 20 (Thomas Aquinas&ST&CPL& question 1, article: 2, corpus, line: 20)

## II.—The Act of Faith

What, then, is this act of faith whereby we give our assent to the first truth, entrusting ourselves to that which it teaches us about all the other truths?

### The consent of our intellect

“To believe,” says St. Augustine and reiterated by St. Thomas, “is to give one’s assent to what one thinks, *“credere est cogitare cum consensu”*<sup>26</sup>. Man must, indeed, think, turn things over in his mind, and thus engage in an intellectual operation, for to think, that is to say, to weigh the “pros and cons” of an opinion is, after all, an act of the intellect. But that isn’t enough. We must give our consent, which consists in an act of the will—intellect and will thereby uniting to produce an act of faith.

Also, in an act of faith, we engage in a total surrender of our soul to God’s authority and, in this regard, we could say that the act of faith is a supreme act of obedience, the origin of which is found in the intellect since it has truth as its object. Thus it is that God, as first truth, is, according to theologians, the formal object of faith. We need him to lean on—and since it was impossible for us to elevate ourselves to him, he had to lower himself to us.

### to all revealed truths

To believe in God is to accept all the truths divine authority teaches us. And, whether they are presented to us in their entirety as they are to be found in God or whether, respecting the capacity of our intellect, they are revealed one after the other in a logical order, the first truths containing within themselves secondary truths, our faith accepts it all. That is why the act of faith is presented to us as follows: “I believe everything you have revealed to us.” Here we have the soul leaning on God, the first truth. Next comes what we call the “material,” as distinct from the “formal,” object of our faith, that is to say, the Apostles’ Creed, with additional comments to be found in the other creeds which the Church promulgated in order to refute certain heresies or in the comments from the various definitions of the ecumenical councils presented as acts of faith.

### An assent of all our being

Finally, we say: believe in God. It is an act of trust in God who reveals to us in our misery the ultimate destiny to which he calls us and which is none other than Himself. That is what St. John was thinking when he cried, *“Haec est victoria quae vincit mundum fides nostra; this is the victory that conquers the world, this faith of ours!”* (1 Jn 5:4). The world presents itself to us with all its lies, its promises, its hopes, its ambitions, and its pleasures. What is it all? *“Vapor est ad modicum parens et deinceps exterminabitur*—you are a puff of smoke that appears briefly and then

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<sup>26</sup> Aquinas, *S.T.*, II-II, 4, 1 (Thomas Aquinas & ST & CPL & II-II, 4, 1)

disappears.” Jas 4:15). What happens to it? What does it leave us with? Nothing but a little heap of dust. Whereas God—He lasts forever...et “*veritas Domini manet in aeternum*—and the truth of the Lord remains forever” (Ps 116:2 Vulgate).

To be taught by the eternal Master—to know that this eternal Master intends to manifest Himself to us for all eternity—and not only to manifest Himself, but to share His inexhaustible joys with us forever—this is what our faith has to offer—this is what assures our victory over whatever obstacles and whatever enemies the powers of this world may set up against us. Let those who opt for the world with all its deceptions go to the world. “As for me, it is good for me to adhere to God, to put my all hope in him—*mihi autem adhaerere Domino bonum est, et ponere in Domino Deo meo spem meam*” (Ps 72:28 Vulgate). So henceforward I look to no other light than the light of faith.

#### **to the merciful designs of God**

Once I possess this light of faith, it must illuminate my power of reason. It is faith that must transform me by means of everything that it shows me about God’s being, my being, and the indescribable relationship that God wishes to establish between the two of us. What am I seeking in heaven if not the infinitely perfect God that faith reveals to me? “*Quid mihi est in coelo et a te quid volui super terram?*—What else have I in heaven but you? Apart from you I want nothing on earth”(Ps 72:25 Vulgate). Now that the light of Faith has shown me what God is, or at least as much of his perfections as He wishes me to behold, what else can I do save cling to Him and to reflect on this infinite truth and on the multitude of truths it comprises with an absolute adhesion on my part? It is thus, my God, that I believe in you, as I think of you with the wholehearted consent of a faith that obeys everything that you wish to teach me.

### **III.—The Virtue of Faith**

#### **Faith is God’s gift**

Faith is a gift; it is God who makes the first move. We cannot enter the supernatural sphere except by faith and by the submission of our intellect to the truths of the faith. Such is God’s gift. In a sense this is what the teaching of the Holy Spirit is, “*Cum autem venerit ille Spiritus veritatis, docebit vos omnem veritatem*—When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you to all truth” (Jn 16:13). Faith is not going to show me the whole truth in an explicit way, but faith will render me capable of absorbing it. For me to see something, it is not sufficient to place objects before my eyes; they must be placed in the light for my eyes to be able to grasp them. The same applies to faith: I must have the light of faith given by the grace of God, which enables my soul to grasp the truth.

#### **but also a virtue to be cultivated**

But it isn't enough to grasp the truth; I must stick to it. And this truth is so far beyond my reach that it requires a constant effort on my part to attain it—and it is in this effort that the virtue of faith consists. Faith seeks to be meritorious or, to be more precise, God wishes it to be so. Merit implies sticking to the truth in the face of struggle, a struggle that is rooted in the feebleness of our human nature. Faith is something that can grow, as we hear in the prayer of Our Lord's apostles, "*Domine, adauge nobis fidem*—Lord, increase our faith" (Lk 17:5). Yes, our faith can constantly grow through study, through prayer, through the application of its principles to events in our everyday life, and through constantly bearing in mind the truths which faith teaches us and which we are able to penetrate all the more in the measure that we reflect on them, provided we so reflect in a spirit of complete surrender to divine authority, to this Majesty whose right it is to command while our duty is to submit and obey.

#### **a virtue to be safeguarded**

We are in great danger of losing the faith once we cut ourselves off from the first truth upon which all other truths depend. It should be understood that no matter how much faith has grown in us, the moment we abandon only one article, all faith disappears. Why? Because we can't start disputing with divine authority this or that article of faith that may be more or less difficult to accept. We're talking about infinite authority on which all the articles of faith depend. It's not up to us to pick and choose. We may, indeed, seek to enlighten ourselves on this or that aspect of revealed truths, but even then we must respect them in their entirety.

Lord, I see these truths darkening in the hearts of so many around me; save me from such a disaster. Do not allow that night which is enveloping so many minds to cast a shadow on the light of my faith. There are some who experience very serious doubts. Do not allow them to come to shake me. May I always have faith, my God, and by clinging to the teachings of your Church, may I ever grow in faith until I enjoy the full light of your glory in my homeland.

### **IV.—The Gifts associated with faith**

#### **The gift of Fear of the Lord**

I will not speak of 'fear of the Lord' because it has to do with hope. However, by showing God to be the Supreme Good, faith implies a degree of fear lest we lose Him. This kind of fear plays a purifying role, as the Apostle says, "*Fide purificans corda eorum*—by faith he purified their hearts" (Acts 15:9). Because if faith makes us afraid of losing God, it will also inspire us to make what sacrifices are necessary to possess Him as the Supreme Good.

A further consideration is that what makes anything impure or unworthy is mixing it with some inferior substance; on the contrary, to

purify it you mix it with something of greater worth. Thus silver would be purified by mixing it with gold. So, my soul, sullied by its contact with creatures, is purified by union with God on the intellectual level insofar as he is supreme truth. So it is as well that contemplating revealed truth in the light of “faith conveys to us a greater purity—*fide purificans corda eorum.*”

But to attain this purifying faith, human resources alone are powerless. We need God’s help and this help is the gift of understanding. “*Da mihi intellectum et scrutabor legem tuam*; give me understanding and I will search your law (Ps 118:34 Vulgate) This understanding is well beyond the senses and even human reason.

#### of understanding

This gift, which is not the same as the perfect understanding of the mysteries that we will enjoy in final glory, combines with faith and helps it to grow. For the more the human soul understands by divine light, the closer it will cling to what it cannot see but senses that it will be able to understand one day. And this work of understanding is carried out through study, meditation, and prayer, all of which aim at seeking God and trying already here on earth to know him more and more.

Moreover, this gift of understanding pushes us to do better, “I will keep your law with all my heart—*da mihi intellectum et scrutabor legem tuam*” (Ps 118:34 Vulgate). This gift is possessed by every Christian who enjoys God’s grace; all that is needed is that, with God’s help, it be developed.

Faith also bring us the gift of knowledge, whereby we discern what we have to believe from what we don’t have to. However, this gift is more concerned with the acquisition of human knowledge, the development of human thought. But, seen from the supernatural point of view, it does enable us to know things as they may apply to the cause of God.

Lord, give me an understanding of things divine and knowledge of the things of this life, so that, in the light of faith, I may come to understand, as much as it is possible, what I must believe and to put into practice what I am called to do.



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## THE TWELFTH MEDITATION.

### Hope

“*Spes autem non confundit*—hope does not disappoint”  
(Rom 5:5).

Christian understanding enlightened by faith knows God with a new vigor, begins to penetrate his mysteries now as far as our human limitations permit, becomes aware of the means placed within our reach to possess the supreme good which is God himself, and thus makes progress toward the desire of possessing God as the infinite good, the source of true happiness.

In this regard, hope is a theological virtue worthy of our meditation so that we might understand better the heavenly gifts it brings and the obligations it imposes on us if we want to reach our goal.

#### I.—The good that hope brings to us

What more can we desire than to find happiness in the possession of the supreme good? And how good it is of God to tell us: “I order you to have hope and just as for your mind am I its object inasmuch as I am the first truth, so am I the object of all your desires and I order you to seek this object which one day you will find, provided that you truly desire it.” Hope is what keeps us going amid the trials of this life. In heaven there will be no further need of hope, because what the saints hoped for they now possess. In hell there will be no hope either; one of the worst tortures there will be is to have abandoned hope and to be handed over to permanent despair. Hope is what comforts us, turns us into better people, strengthens us, and pushes us on towards God.

1° *Hope comforts us amid the pains and sorrows of this present life.*—Hope comes to us and says: “*Non sunt condignae passiones hujus temporis ad futuram gloriam quae revelabitur in nobis*—our present sufferings are as nothing compared with the future glory which will be revealed in us” (Rom 8:18). You suffer—that has been our common destiny brought about by sin from the time of our first father. But everything will come to an end. Turn your eyes to the reward which awaits you. Look at what kindness he has in store for you. If, to atone for your sins, you have to endure anguish and shed tears in this life, keep your eye on the final goal;

look at the rest to come, the homeland, and like a traveller learn how to await the hour of your return.

2° *Hope turns us into better people.*—See how he who is without hope rushes headlong into all the sinful pleasures which come his way. This is the alarming spectacle of those whose loss of faith has also taken away hope. Life is nothing but hell for them—and it leads to bitter complaints, deep-seated hatreds, rebellion, and lawlessness.

The work of hope is a work of unity. God is a good that can be enjoyed by all without anyone be deprived. God is a good in which all wills can share, which all hearts can enjoy just as every eye can enjoy the light of the sun. Just because my eyes are flooded with sunlight, does that mean that other eyes may not be equally flooded? Such it is with God: infinite, omnipresent Good, he is all in all: “*Ut sit Deus in omnia in omnibus*” (1 Cor 15:28).

We meet one another in him. Just as to enjoy a good show we must do so in good company, so it is with God—we feel the need not to be the only ones who enjoy his gifts. Consider next that, whereas all other goods are uncertain, unreliable and transitory—and although they bring us a certain satisfaction, they inevitably end in disappointment—“God is ever the same—*Tu autem semper idem ipse se*” (Ps 101:28 Vulgate). He knows no change—*Ego Dominus et non mutor* (Mal 3:6). Nothing can happen to those who have this assurance of holding on to God and making him their prize, nothing but ever greater happiness “in ever more radiant light—*ibunt in claritate in claritatem*” (2 Cor 3:18). This assurance destroys all jealousy, brings peace, and pushes them to become more virtuous here below so as to enhance the crown that awaits them.

3° *Hope strengthens us.*—Life is a time of combat. It takes courage to fight but hope points to our predecessors in the arena, and shows us how bravely they fought. “*Tantum habentes impositam nubem testium, deponentes omne pondus et circumstantes nos peccatum, per patientiam curramus ad propositum nobis certamen*—therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us rid ourselves of every burden and sin that clings to us and persevere in running the race that lies before us” (Heb 12:1).

Not only that, but hope carries certainty; given our good will, it is certain that no one will be lost other than through his own fault. So, first, I must count on God’s support, the first factor in the work of my salvation. But the second is my will and this depends on me. All I have to do is put it in the hands of hope and it will grow right away and it will be strengthened, because, assured of God’s help, what has one to fear if it once and for all is willing to face up to the true business of life, the conquest of heaven?

4° *Hope pushes us on towards God.*—Indeed, what else is there to strive for here below? *Quid mihi est in coelo et a te quid volui super terram?*—Whom else have I in the heavens? None beside you delights me on earth” (Ps 72:25 Vulgate). The assurance of being able to possess God

makes everything else look very paltry. “*Deus cordis mei, et pars mea, Deus, in aeternum*—God is the rock of my heart, my portion forever” (Ps 72:26 Vulgate). Grant me the divine impetus of hope so that whatever is not you may not entrap me in its snares. It is you that I seek; my soul seeks your altars: “*Altaria tua, Deus virtutum*—your altars, O Lord of hosts” (Ps 83:4 Vulgate).

But in order to obtain that for which we yearn, we must fulfil certain conditions. Let us examine what these conditions are.

## II.—The requirements of hope

### Respect for our supreme Good

1° The first of these requirements is that we strive to be aware of who God is as the supreme Good. For we cannot desire what we do not know. And here is where many Christians are at fault; they don’t try enough to find out as much as they ought to know about God, about all the treasures of his goodness and mercy toward us. Here I cannot over-insist. God is not sufficiently desired for the simple reason that few take the trouble of getting to know him better. To improve our acquaintance with him we must study him in the Scriptures and in meditation. How can you wish to obtain those riches the value of which you ignore?

### Prayer

2° The damned have enough faith to appreciate what they have lost by losing God. This faith of the damned, whose ordeal came from their despair, ought to be a sharp prod for us, since God not only permits us to hope, he also commands it!

But for this hope to be unshakable, one must seek more and more of it by begging for the help necessary for salvation. So the second condition imposed by hope is prayer, ardent prayer that leaps up from the fire of meditation. “*Et in meditatione mea exardescet ignis*—and in my meditation a fire shall flame out” (Ps 38:4 Vulgate). Meditating on God’s beauty fills my heart with holy desires and, possessed by these holy desires, I fling myself at God’s feet, imploring him to come to my aid. He has come to my aid many a time already, yet I must keep on begging Him to do so. If I stop my please, God, scorned, will turn his face away from me. I will no longer receive his help and support and I will lack the strength to complete my course. Oh yes, I must be a man of prayer if I wish to be a man of hope.

### Expecting trials

3° The third condition of hope is readiness to accept what trials God sends us. One must not only walk, but “patiently run the race to the end—*per patientiam curramus*” (Heb 12:1). How much grumbling we must suppress! How much impatience stifle! The way to heaven is open before us, so let us patiently run the race to the end; *per patientiam curramus*. Patience is the hallmark of whatever concerns God in this life. That is why

it is said that patience puts the seal of perfection on all our works, *patientia autem opus perfectum habet*; let your patience show itself perfectly in what you do (Jas 1:4).

This is why the Apostle, at the end of his life, said, “I know him in whom I have believed and am confident that he is able to guard what has been entrusted to me until that day—*scio cui credidi et certus sum quia potens est depositum meum servare in illum diem*” (2 Tim 1:12). God will preserve our treasure for us; what we must do is put it in his hands and learn how to await the day when we can claim it. So let us be patient. Let temporal trials no longer shake a patience that hopes in eternity. Let us walk in patience and thus walk in perfection, “*patientia autem opus perfectum habet.*”

Finally, let us know how to make our choice. Alas!—how many Christians wish to be saved, but won’t take the means necessary! I will not talk about them, but I will say: how many religious, having chosen the path of perfection, won’t take the trouble to acquire the necessary virtues. Well, let us take courage and bend our backs to the task by being men of faith and men of hope. May the angels say about us what the Holy Spirit said about Abraham: “*credidit contra spem in spem*—he believed, hoping against hope” (Rom 4:18). All human hope had disappeared for him. It was nonsense for him to expect a son at his age, but defying human hope, he clung to divine hope. He believed; he hoped: *credidit contra spem in spem*; his hope was not betrayed.

Let it be the same for us. God’s gift of hope will carry us beyond all that is passing and will open the gates of heaven to us. There it will fade away like a luminous cloud...but not until it has introduced us to reality.

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## THE THIRTEENTH MEDITATION.

### Charity

*“Major autem horum est caritas—And the greatest of these is charity.”* (1 Cor 13:13)

Let us say a word about charity, which is the virtue of virtues and let us examine three aspects of it: its excellence, its “sanctuary—dwelling-place,” and its object.

#### I.—The excellence of charity

Charity is a very special friendship between God and man. It must be reciprocal, and accompanied by what St. Thomas calls “benevolence—*amor cum benevolentia*<sup>27</sup>”.

##### in its source: the love of God

The source of Charity is God. On the one hand, he has given us the power to love; on the other hand, he has loved us from all eternity, *in caritate perpetua dilexi te—I have loved you with an everlasting love*” (Jer 31:3). He proves his love by drawing each of us close to his heart, *ideo attraxi te, miserans tui* (ibid).

Man on his part, to whom God has revealed himself by faith to be the infinite truth, the source of all truth, by hope to be the supreme good, man who finds his happiness in possessing God longs to be united to him, because of his beauty and his charm, beyond the possibility of separation. He begins to love God for God’s own sake. He wants to offer God everything a creature can from his nothingness. He desires to give God all adoration, all glory, all domination over the universe, and all the love that intelligent beings can offer.

##### in its growth: the Spirit of love engenders our good will

See how charity takes shape, grows, develops and bears fruit. Charity is a lovely tree whose seed is at the disposition of the Spirit. The Spirit’s creative breath plants it, as he wills, in that soil which is the human

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<sup>27</sup> *Summa theologiae* IIa, IIae, 23, 1 (Thomas Aquinas&ST&CPL& IIa, IIae, 23, 1)

heart. There it falls and there it takes shape depending on the quality and preparation of the soil. But even here the Spirit contributes. With due respect for man's freedom and will, the love of God fosters the growth of plants like the rays of the sun. Slowly the growth becomes stronger, if it is responsive. This it is that God's love develops in our souls by the spirit that is given to us. *Caritas Dei diffusa est in cordibus nostris per Spiritum sanctum qui datus est nobis*—the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the holy Spirit that has been given to us. (Rom 5:5).

#### **in itself**

St. Augustine does not hesitate to call charity, “that affection of the mind which aims at the enjoyment of God for his own sake; *caritatem voco motum animi ad fruendum Deo propter ipsum*”<sup>28</sup> (*De doctrina Christiana* III,16). This affection is instilled by God, but it is nevertheless an affection that entails the free movement of the human heart and, as St. Thomas remarked, this is what constitutes its beauty<sup>29</sup>. If everything were to come from God, what wonder would there be for him to love himself in us? But such is not God's design. Being the author of all that is good, he wishes, no doubt, to stir up our hearts to bound towards him as an eagle incites its nestling forth. But, it is still the nestlings that fly just as it is we ourselves who rise up to him out of love.

#### **queen of the virtues**

This affection of the mind stirs the soul drawn to acquire all the virtues so that it may possess God. There can be no supernatural virtue unless we love God. When someone is taken up with the desire to love more and more each day, he experiences above all an immense need to prove his love to God. And how can he do this other than by constantly renewing these acts of love that make him, in some ways, divine?

Moreover, if charity springs from the human will, obviously it is a virtue insofar as it requires a struggle with man's corrupt nature and insofar as it is what it is, namely, in conformity with reason. Is there anything more reasonable than to spend our life trying to become more and more perfect—and what is more perfect than loving God? So what virtue is more perfect than charity?

And its perfection consists in what I call its disinterestedness. It seeks God for his own sake. It is so caught up with the very beauty of God, with his very nature, that it disregards whatever benefits it may get out of it. It loves God for being God and for no other motive.

Faith seeks God as the first truth that enlightens; hope is attached to him as the infinite Good; charity loves God just because he is God and for no other reason.

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<sup>28</sup> *De doctrina christiana* (CPL 0263) - lib. 3, cap. 10, linea 32 (Augustine&On Christian Doctrine&CPL&bk. 3, chap. 10, line 32)

<sup>29</sup> *Summa theologica*, IIa, IIae, 23, 3 (Thomas Aquinas&ST&CPL& IIa, IIae, 23, 3)

#### **form of the virtues**

Charity is the form of the virtues, as I have said, and that is why the other virtues depend on it and why they have no value in God's sight unless they are practised out of love—no value unless, if I may say so, they have been transformed in the flames of charity. Show me a love that has become lukewarm and all the other virtues languish. Show me a love that is truly passionate and all the other virtues will catch its fire!

So it is that charity, that most excellent of all the virtues, by its very essence, communicates this excellence to all the other virtues which, no longer human, are raised by charity to God himself.

## **II.—The Sanctuary—Dwelling Place of Charity**

### **The will**

Charity at its very core, at its source, is the love of God himself, such that we could not love God unless he had first loved us. And it follows that God put into man a sanctuary to receive such a precious treasure. This sanctuary is none other than the will, in which there can be found the power to love in its turn.

The will is not that nervous impulsion which makes us rush almost instinctively towards such or such an external object. The will and the love which flows from it are powerful faculties of the human soul, controlling what is noblest and most sublime. So it is very easy to distinguish between two different kinds of affection. Listen to somebody asking: "How am I expected to love God? I can't see Him." Then listen to Jesus Christ say that no one has ever seen God—*Deum nemo vidit unquam* (Jn 1:18), and yet he tells us, quoting Moses, that we must love God with all our heart, all our soul and all our strength. Contrast these two kinds of affection. One is little more than that of an animal defending its cubs—the other introduces us to a superior plane where the soul alone takes command.

### **purified by the Holy Spirit**

It's rather like what used to happen in the Temple in Jerusalem, if I can speak this way. The crowds were not permitted beyond a certain courtyard. The High Priest alone was allowed to enter the Holy of Holies after observing the prescribed purifications. So we have within ourselves a host of human affections which may be warm, which may bring us closer to God, but which will not enable us to enter into His presence. Only the will is allowed to approach God's altar, and then only after it has been purified by the Holy Spirit. Joyfully does God enter this sanctuary of the soul and walk with us, as the Prophet says, that sanctuary where the love of God and the love of human beings meet.

Although the will alone, when purified at its very core, is capable of loving God, the rest of our being can experience its effects. Did David not cry out, "*Cor meum et caro mea exultaverunt in Deum vivum*—My heart

and my flesh exalt living God” (Ps 83:3 Vulgate)?

No matter how perfect our will may be, let us never forget that it is God who sets it in motion and gives it the power to cast itself toward the object of its love. Listen to what St. Thomas has to say, “*Caritas est amicitia quaedam hominis ad Deum, fundata super communicationem beatitudinis aeternae*—charity is a kind of friendship between man and God, inasmuch as God communicates his happiness to us”<sup>30</sup>. It is hope that shows us that eternal happiness rests in God. But if God is generous, the soul in its turn wants to be as well, and out of sheer gratitude begins to love God for Himself.

#### possessing degrees within itself

This makes it easy to understand that although charity in its initial stages, as it rises out of hope, is still very imperfect, it can develop indefinitely, *ibunt de virtute in virtutem*—going from strength to strength” (Ps 83:8 Vulgate). It is like the various degrees the soul possesses, “*ascensiones in corde suo disposuit*—in his heart there are pilgrim roads” (Ps 83:6 Vulgate) by which it is able to climb ever higher to the point that it can contemplate “the true God above all other gods, in the true Sion—*Videbitur Deus deorum in Sion*” (Ps 83:8 Vulgate).

#### the growth of charity

Yes, charity can grow indefinitely and no one can say, among those fortunate enough to be believers, “This will do!” St. Augustine writes, “*Nemo fidelium, etsi multum profecerit, dicat: sufficit mihi*—No Christian, no matter how far he may have advanced in holiness, can ever say: This will do”<sup>31</sup>. Look, doesn’t God love us thousands of times more than we will ever become capable of loving Him in return? Under the influence of God’s Holy Spirit, our heart may expand to unheard of proportions in our eagerness to love Him more and more. In an effort at showing some gratitude, shall we ever succeed, despite how hard we try, in thanking Him half enough for His goodness to us? If not, how ungrateful we would prove ourselves to be!

So let us say with the Doctor of Charity: “*Caritas meretur augeri, ut aucta mereatur perfici*—Charity merits to be increased, so that being increased it may merit also to be perfected”<sup>32</sup>. Let us increase it as much as we can; it will never be perfect until we get to heaven but let us remember that even in heaven there will be different degrees of perfection to be rewarded according to the degree of perfection that one will have attained here below.

And thus, according to St. Thomas, the more charity grows, the

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<sup>30</sup> *Summa theologiae*, IIa, IIae, 23, 1 (Thomas Aquinas & ST & CPL & IIa, IIae, 23, 1)

<sup>31</sup> *Letter 186*, 10 (Augustine & Letters & Migne & letter 186, 10)

<sup>32</sup> *Letter 186*, 3 (Augustine & Letters & Migne & letter 186, 3)



more it becomes capable of growing<sup>33</sup>. Our charity in this life becomes perfect, not by our loving God as much as he should be loved—this would be impossible—but by our becoming, with the help of his grace, more and more capable of loving him.

#### **The Chilling of charity**

Alas! charity can also cool off and this is what the eternal Word reproaches in one of the bishops of the primitive Church whose charity was no longer what it once was, “*Habeo adversum te quo caritatem tuam primam reliquisti*—I hold this against you: you have lost the love you had at first” (Rv 2:4).” There are weak willed souls who begin but cannot persevere. Let us beware of these “up and down” moods. When we feel them coming along to dampen our ardour, let us hurry to dispel them.

If Charity can languish it can also die. One mortal sin is enough for that to happen.

Let us keep ourselves from mortal sin and let us remember that Satan is the most guilty of all God’s creatures, precisely because God gave him the greatest capacity for love

### **III.—God, the Object of our Love**

The object of charity is God and our neighbour for God’s sake. So leaving aside our neighbour (whom God enables us to love by loving him), let us recall what we have to do to possess God.

#### **The pearl of great price of the Gospel**

It is the precious pearl mentioned in the Gospel for which no price is too steep that our entire will ceaselessly pursues. We do not possess it here below, but no language can express the joy of possessing it when we get to our homeland and find our rest in Him. We shall hold fast to him for his own sake, because, as St. Augustine says, “*Frui est inhaerere alicui propter semetipsum*—to enjoy a thing is to take delight in it for its own sake”<sup>34</sup>. God alone is entitled to require this of us because, being above all things, us included, it is he whom we pursue like a consuming flame stretching ever upward.

#### **The renewal of our soul**

It is this raising of ourselves above ourselves, this upward movement toward God, which brings about the renewal of our soul. “*Dilectio*,” says St. Augustine, “*innovate nos ut simus homines novi, haeredes testamenti novi, cantores cantici novi*—love renews us—turns us into new men—makes us heirs to the new alliance between God and

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<sup>33</sup> *Summa theologica*, IIa, IIae, 24, 4-7 (Thomas Aquinas & ST & CPL & IIa, IIae, 24, 4-7)

<sup>34</sup> *De doctrina christiana*, IV, 1,1 (Augustine & On Christian Doctrine & CPL & IV, 1,1)

Humanity—and teaches us to sing a new song”<sup>35</sup>. So let us become new men by faith, heirs to the new covenant by hope, and singers of the new song by love. Understand that, in reality, when we seek to love God, what is it that I want other than to love Love itself, “*Deus caritas est*—God is love” (1 Jn 4:16). The Third Person of the Blessed Trinity comes into me, uniting me to the entire Trinity. Into what deep ocean of love am I invited to plunge when I am invited to hold fast to God alone!

#### **The reciprocity of love**

Charity implies mutual reciprocity; however, St. Thomas reminds us that, properly speaking, it consists more in loving than in being loved<sup>36</sup>. But when God, who has begun by loving me, invites me to love him in return, what must I not do to render Him the most ardent expressions of affection?

When shall I love Him as I ought—this infinite Goodness, Beauty, and Perfection? When shall I hold fast to it alone? When shall I desire to delight in it alone?

#### **Knowledge of God**

But as everything about God must be loved, I must endeavour to know him and everything about him, as much as it is possible here below.

What glorious vistas unroll themselves before the eyes of someone who has really made his mind up to tread the path of love! What a pity to stop half way—what a shame to go backwards! Lord, let this not happen to me. On the contrary, let my love, ever more ardent, draw me ever closer to you till my final breath and may I be united to you for all eternity.

“The reason for loving God is God. The measure of loving Him surpasses all measure—*causa diligendi Deum Deus est, modus sine modo diligere*”<sup>37</sup>.

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<sup>35</sup> *In Iohannis euangelium tractatus* (CPL 0278) - tract. 65, par. 1, linea 17 (Augustine&Tractate on the Gospel of John&CPL& tract. 65, par. 1, line 17)

<sup>36</sup> *Summa theologica*, IIa, IIae, 27, 1 (Thomas Aquinas&ST&CPL& IIa, IIae, 27, 1)

<sup>37</sup> Bernard of Clairvaux, *Liber de diligendo Deo* - LLT-A-par. 1, vol. 3, pag. 119, linea 19 (Bernard of Clairvaux&Book on Loving God&CPL& par. 1, vol. 3, pag. 119, line 19)

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## THE FOURTEENTH MEDITATION.

### Prayer

I would like to speak about several conditions of prayer without which it is very difficult to enjoy any of its benefits. I will list these around six main headings: 1° attentiveness; 2° humility; 3° trust; 4° perseverance; 5° adoration; 6° thanksgiving.

#### I. Attentiveness

##### Our deplorable casualness

It is sad to witness the deplorable nonchalance with which most people pray. Go into any church, look at people's posture, and ask yourselves just how attentive they are to their praying. So much for the rank and file of ordinary Christians.

What about the so-called "pious" people? Are they often praying any better? Their deportment is more edifying, I admit—but I wonder what is going on inside. You are adoring the Blessed Sacrament—but what are you thinking about? You are attending Mass—but where is your mind? Even when you receive Communion, is not your imagination roaming far and wide? When you are on the most intimate terms with God, what are the results?

Such is human nonchalance: it is hardly a compliment to our intelligence and it certainly gives us no cause to boast. We are incapable of being recollected; we cannot discipline our thoughts; we have no control whatsoever over our imagination. It is altogether deplorable! And yet, what respect is due to the majesty of God!

##### Inner respect due to God

It is a question of being accountable to God concerning his rights in our regard. Do you think he is satisfied with a lot of vain "mumbo-jumbo"? Hardly! Nor was he either under the old law. Even then he complained of the scant respect his people were paying him. "*Populus iste labiis suis glorificabit me, cor autem eorum longe est a me*—this people draws near with words only and honors me with their lips alone, though their hearts are far from me" (Is 29:13). If God was entitled thus to give reproach under the old law, where he spoke, so to speak, in figures ("*Umbram habens lex futuris bonorum*—the law has only a shadow of the good things to come" Heb 10:1), how much more, then, under the new law, is he not entitled to

the undivided attention of our mind and heart? Whatever secret thoughts and feelings we may harbour in the innermost recesses of our being, there God is entitled to be admitted. “*Deus autem intuetur cor*—but God looks into the heart (1 Kings 16:7 Vulgate; 1 Sam 16:7). It is in the heart that he has built his shrine; he wants us to go within so that he might be adored by us in what is the purest and most perfect sphere of our innermost self.

Where do I stand in this respect? How have I taken into account the rights of the Eternal Majesty when I pray?

## II.—Humility

### Awareness of my littleness

The difficulty that I have in being recollected in God’s presence ought surely to give me a humble opinion of myself. What am I, indeed, but a sinner so absorbed in the things of this world that I am incapable of thinking any higher, of thinking about the things of God? When it comes to matters of business, politics, or my down time, my attention is fully engaged. But when it comes to my eternal destiny, I immediately become lazy, powerless, inclined to drop off to sleep—and those things that are the most important spark the least interest in me. Surely this gives me cause to feel thoroughly ashamed of myself. I have, indeed, nothing to boast about.

But what makes it worse yet is that it is a question of my relationship with God! Who is he, and who do I think I am? He is infinite Perfection, Greatness, Power and Wisdom. So what ought my feelings be when I draw near to his throne? Now let me take a good look at myself. What wretchedness and what degradation! Not one ounce of gratitude! Forever inflating my “ego” on account of qualities I do not possess—and if I do possess them to a minimal degree, I spoil it all by becoming swollen headed. That’s me—that’s where my conceit has brought me. But how long is this state of affairs going to last? When am I going to snap the bonds of my foolish self-esteem once and for all? When am I going to start living a life of self-emptying such as a sinner ought, all the more so because if I wish my prayers to be heard, I must remember this saying, “*Deus superbis resistit, humilibus autem dat gratiam*—God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble” (Jas 4:6)

### Acknowledging my littleness in God’s presence

Do I approach God in humility? When a religious places himself in God’s presence he should recall that he is nothing but dust and ashes. “*Quid superbis, terra et cinis?*—Why are dust and ashes proud? “ (Sir 10:9 Vulgate). How very foolish I am when I imagine myself to be a man of great worth! I am nothing of the sort. As St. Augustine puts it, “I am nothing but falsehood and sin—*quid habet homo a se, nisi peccatum et mendacium*”<sup>38</sup>. If I wish my prayer to pierce the heavens, its starting point

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<sup>38</sup> *Tractate on the Gospel of John V, 1* (Augustine&Tractate on the Gospel of John&Migne&V,1)

must be my utter humiliation. “*Oratio humiliantis se nubes penetrabit*—the prayer of him who humbles himself shall pierce the clouds” (Sir 35:21 Vulgate). If I am trying to present something else to God other than my nothingness, my prayer will be entirely in vain. This is why, far from concealing my sins, I must desire to show up in his presence with them, yes, the sad lot of them. They will fill me with a kind of confusion and this humiliation God will not despise. He will forgive me because I have belittled myself. He will hear the prayer I offer to return to the right path and to a new way of living.

Lord, look upon my infirmity—I confess it. Hasten to heal me and to give me the strength to serve you from now on as a true and humble religious.

### III. Trust in God

This trust relies exclusively on the merits of Our Lord. I know that left to myself I can do nothing, but by God’s grace I can do all things. So it is on God’s grace that I wish to depend entirely.

Now, this kind of trust is one of the highest tributes we can pay to God, one that most deeply touches his heart. We are proclaiming him to be the source of every perfect gift and at the same time we are proclaiming his goodness and his power. “His mercy is without end.” In the words of the Psalmist, “*Et misericordiae ejus non est numerus*” (see Ps 117 and Ps 135, Vulgate). Oh, how pleased God is to answer the prayers of those who put their trust in Him! How ready he is to manifest his power in their favour!

Our wretchedness may be great but his power is still greater. He commands the winds and the seas; no tempest can resist his word. Yes, pray with absolute trust, for he himself said, “*Si quid petieritis Patrem in nomine meo, dabit vobis*—whatever you ask in my Father’s name, he will give you” (Jn 16:23).

You see, God wishes to deal with those of his creatures who, though they may not be great in themselves, have become great by virtue of their relationship with him. God in his munificence wishes to ennoble those who approach him, as long as their sentiments are worthy of him. And thus is brought about that supernatural “uplift” which the Church inspires when it bids us, “*Sursum corda*—lift up your hearts”! We lift them up to where our sentiments are divinised, to where our trust becomes firmly rooted in the very essence of our heavenly Father.

### IV.—Perseverance

Remember the Canaanite woman. She prayed with a mother’s heart for her child who was near the end, on death’s doorstep. She hounded the Lord with her weeping and wailing—and the Lord pretended not to pay attention to her suffering. In the end it was the disciples, desirous of being

rid of her, who asked Jesus to work a miracle; and Jesus refused even them. He said, "It is not right to take the food of the children and throw it to the dogs" (Mt 15:26). Seems to be very harsh, doesn't he? What could the poor woman do now except back away? She did nothing of the sort. You know well her response, so marvellous that Our Lord exclaimed, "*O mulier, magna est fides tua*—Woman, how great your faith is" (Mt 15:28) and her request was thereupon granted.

God insists on our persevering in prayer because we've got to learn how precious his gifts are, gifts which we too often underestimate and take for granted. So we must never lose heart.

Perseverance in itself is a sign of strength and determination. But by persevering we double our strength, we increase it tenfold. Prayer becomes a kind of combat with God, like that of Jacob with the angel (Gn 32:25), a contest which God is only too pleased to lose. It seems that God wants to walk away, but our soul, like Jacob, says to him, "*Non dimittam te donec benedixeris mihi*—I will not let you go until you bless me" (Gn 32:27). God loves being hounded. Jacob was given the new name of Israel, which means "prevailing against God." God wanted to be defeated and he wants us to defeat him too, provided we persevere.

## V.—Adoration

How many people think of adoring God? How many bother to proclaim his supreme dominion over all creatures? Yet, what do the angels do in heaven unceasingly? What do the saints do in their unending hymn of praise?

Adoration, when we pray, ought to convince us of God's rights. What have we got that we haven't received? And since we have received it, we ought, instead of congratulating ourselves, to glorify the one who showered all these gifts on us. Wouldn't this be the best way to obtain still greater gifts?

### On our own behalf

Actually adoration does us a great deal of good. It is true that we can offer him nothing that he hasn't given us in the first place. But he would like it to be as if our will belonged to us so that in adoration we might be able to offer him free homage.

### On behalf of those who do not adore

Yes, by adoring God we can make up for those who don't and won't. When Satan and his angels were thrown out of heaven, there remained the blessed angels, faithful, and established in glory forever. They had to offer God hymns of reparation, to make up for the apostasy of their former companions and to give the Almighty that adoration which the rebel angels now refused him. The same applies to us here on earth. When a soul summoned to perfection finds himself surrounded by mass desertion on the

part of others, when God's temple is abandoned, when instead of public homage paid to Jesus Christ, we hear blasphemies against him from right and left, when instead of the adoration due him, we get rebellion everywhere, when the world we live in seems to have one ambition which is to resemble hell, then it is right and fitting that real adoration take place.

#### **The hour of the Religious**

I do not hesitate to tell you: this is the hour of glory for religious. People may pursue them and drive them out—they still possess the shrine of their hearts. They can still adore him there in intimacy and silence, full of courage. And this is the kind of adoration he most appreciates for it is accompanied by the offering of the very life of the one who presents himself to the throne of God.

### **VI.—Thanksgiving**

When our Lord cured ten lepers, nine of them were Jews and only one foreigner—and this foreigner alone thought of coming back and saying thank you to Jesus.

#### **The duty of gratitude**

Gratitude has always been rare in the human heart. The greatest benefits bestowed on it often act like water off a duck's back. God created us—who thanks him for it? God redeemed us—who renders him love for love? God comes to pray within us, to make up for our own inadequacy with “sighs beyond human utterance”—who listens to this prayer within, according to which we might be shaped if we only paid attention to it? Don't we think it more worth our while to ask worldly men if we can share their riches, their frivolities, their pleasures, and all their deceptions? Think of how many people go through life without ever saying a meaningful: “Thank God” for all his mercies.

Ah, let us learn the duty of gratitude. Let us cry out time and again, “*Quid retribuam Domino pro omnibus quae retribuit mihi?*—What shall I repay the Lord for all that he has given to me?” (Ps 115:12 Vulgate).

#### **Prayer of gratitude**

Nothing brings down more blessings from above than thanking God for what he has done for us already. Ah! Let us be grateful. Let us learn how to offer him all the thanks he is entitled to. When our prayer consists in nothing but thanking him, this alone will suffice to make us pleasing in his sight. Let us thank him even when he seems to be treating us harshly. “*In omnibus gratias agentes*—In all things let us give thanks” (see Eph 5:20). And the more sincere, loving and spontaneous our thanksgiving the more abundantly will he pour his blessings into our hearts, until that day when we will receive that gift of gifts once and for all, God himself!

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## THE FIFTEENTH MEDITATION.

### Mental Prayer<sup>39</sup>

*Mihi autem adhaerere Deo bonum est*—As for me, to be near my God is good (Ps 72:28 Vulgate).

Presence prayer is an effort to possess God here below as far as that is possible through the misty curtain of faith. To possess Him we must become pure of heart, that is to say, the destruction of sin, the acquisition of virtue, and growth in holiness, which sums up all the virtues. Presence prayer enables us to become pure of heart by detaching us from creatures. Its purpose is none other than to prepare us for Heaven where we will be united to the Adorable Trinity for all eternity.

Let us look at three statements.

#### I.—Presence Prayer is the effort to join ourselves to God here below.

How are we to join ourselves to him whom nothing can contain? St. Augustine exclaims, “*An ubique totus es, et res nulla te totum capit.*—Or are you present entirely everywhere at once, and no single thing contains the whole of you?” (*Confessions*, I, 3). Then he follows up this idea, saying, “What then is my God?—*Quid es ergo, Deus meus?*” (*Confessions* I, 4).

#### God's Greatness<sup>40</sup>

Conf I, 4. *Quid, rogo, nisi Dominus Deus? Quis enim dominus praeter Dominum? Aut quis Deus praeter Deum nostrum? Summe, optime, potentissime, omnipotentissime, misericordissime et iustissime, secretissime et praesentissime, pulcherrime et fortissime, stabilis et incomprehensibilis,*

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<sup>39</sup> Fr. d'Alzon uses the word 'oraison' here. St. Teresa of Avila defines 'oraison' as “an exchange of friendship where one entertains a frequent one-to-one relationship with God and where one feels loved.” Brother Lawrence speaks of it as “the practice of the presence of God.” Both of these descriptions help explain what Fr. d'Alzon meant by this word 'oraison.' This translation will use the phrase “presence prayer” to capture Fr. d'Alzon's meaning.

<sup>40</sup> In his manuscript Fr. d'Alzon simply went on to transcribe long passages of St. Augustine in Latin, from a Benedictine edition of his works. Fr. d'Alzon would always exhort his religious to read the Fathers of the Church in the original. This edition also retains the Latin and supplies a translation afterward. Translation taken from St. Augustine, *Confessions*, by R.S. Pine-Coffin, Penguin Books, 1961. (Augustine&Confessions&Pine-Coffin&multiple passages)



*immutabilis, mutans omnia, numquam novus, numquam vetus, innovans omnia; in vetustatem perducens superbos et nesciunt; semper agens, semper quietus, colligens et non egens, portans et implens et protegens, creans et nutriens, perficiens, quaerens, cum nihil desit tibi. Amas nec aestuas, zelus et securus es; poenitet te et non doles, irasceris et tranquillus es, opera mutas nec mutas consilium; recipis quod invenis et numquam amisisti; numquam inops et gaudes lucris, numquam avarus et usuras exigis. Supererogatur tibi, ut debeas, et quis habet quicquam non tuum? Reddis debita nulli debens, donans debita nihil perdens. et quid diximus, Deus meus, vita mea, dulcedo mea sancta, aut quid dicit aliquis, cum de te dicit? Et vae tacentibus de te, quoniam loquaces muti sunt.*

What then is the God I worship? He can be none but the Lord God himself, for *who but the Lord is God? What other refuge can there be, except our God* (Ps 17:32 Vulgate)? You, my God, are supreme, utmost in goodness, mightiest and all-powerful, most merciful and just. You are the most hidden from us and yet the most present amongst us, the most beautiful and yet the most strong, ever enduring and yet we cannot comprehend you. You are unchangeable, and yet you change all things. You are ever new, never old, and yet all things have new life from you. You are the unseen power that brings decline upon the proud. You are ever active, yet always at rest. You gather things to yourself, though you suffer no need. You support, you fill, and you protect all things. You create them, nourish them, and bring them to perfection. You seek to make them your own, though you lack for nothing. You love your creatures, but with a gentle love. You treasure them, but without apprehension. You grieve for wrong, but suffer no pain. You can be angry and yet serene. Your works are varied but your purpose is one and the same. You welcome all who come to you, though you never lost them. You are never in need yet you are glad to gain, never covetous yet you exact a return for your gifts. We give abundantly to you so that we may deserve a reward; yet which of us has anything that does not come from you? You repay us what we deserve, and yet you owe nothing to any. You release us from our debts, but you lose nothing thereby. You are my God, my Delight, but is this enough to say of you? Can any man say enough when he speaks of you? Yet woe betide those who are silent about you! For even those who are most gifted with speech cannot find words to describe you.

#### **Humility of our condition**

Conf I, 5. *Quis mihi dabit adquiescere in te? Quis dabit mihi, ut venias in cor meum et inebries illud, ut obliviscar mala mea et unum bonum meum amplectar, te? Quid mihi es? Miserere, ut loquar. Quid tibi sum ipse, ut amari te iubeas a me et, nisi faciam, irasceris mihi et mineris ingentes miserias? Parvane ipsa est, si non amem te? Ei mihi! Dic mihi per miserationes tuas, Domine Deus meus, quid sis mihi. Dic animae meae: salus tua ego sum* (Ps 34:3 Vulgate). *Sic dic, ut audiam. Ecce aures cordis*

*mei ante te, Domine; aperi eas et dic animae meae: salus tua ego sum. Curram post vocem hanc et adprehendam te. Noli abscondere a me faciem tuam: moriar, ne moriar, ut eam videam. Angusta est domus animae meae, quo venias ad eam: dilatetur abs te. Ruinosa est: refice eam. Habet quae offendant oculos tuos: fateor et scio. Sed quis mundabit eam? Aut cui alteri praeter te clamabo: ab occultis meis munda me, Domine, et ab alienis parce servo tuo (Ps 18:13-14 Vulgate)? Credo, propter quod et loquor. Domine, tu scis. Nonne tibi prolocutus sum adversum me delicta mea, Deus meus, et tu dimisisti impietatem cordis mei? Non iudicio contendo tecum, qui veritas es; et ego nolo fallere me ipsum, ne mentiatur iniquitas mea sibi. Non ergo iudicio contendo tecum, quia, si iniquitates observaveris, Domine, Domine, quis sustinebit?*

Who will grant me to rest content in you? To whom shall I turn for the gift of your coming to my heart and filling it to the brim, so that I may forget all the wrong I have done and embrace you alone, my only source of good? Why do you mean so much to me? Help me to find the words to explain. Why do I mean so much to you, that you should command me to love you? And if I fail to love you, you are angry and threaten me with great sorrow, as if not to love you were not sorrow enough in itself. Have pity on me and help me, O Lord my God. Tell me why you mean so much to me. *Whisper in my heart, I am here to save you (Ps 34:3 Vulgate).* Speak so that I may hear your words. My heart has ears ready to listen to you, Lord. Open them wide and *whisper in my heart, I am here to save you.* I shall hear your voice and make haste to clasp you to myself. Do not hide your face away from me, for I would gladly meet my death to see it, since not to see it would be death indeed. My soul is like a house, small for you to enter, but I pray you to enlarge it. It is in ruins but I ask you to remake it. It contains much that you will not be pleased to see: this I know and do not hide. But who is to rid it of these things? There is no one but you to whom I may say: *if I have sinned unwittingly, absolve me. Keep me ever your own servant, far from pride (Ps 18:13-14 Vulgate).* *I trust, and trusting I find words to utter (Ps 116:10 Vulgate).* Lord, you know this is true. For have I not *made my transgression known to you? Did you not remit the guilt of my sin (Ps 31:5 Vulgate)?* I do not wrangle with you for judgment (see Jer 2:29), for you are Truth itself, and I have no wish to delude myself, for fear that my malice should be self-betrayed. No, I do not wrangle with you, for, *if you, Lord, will keep record of our iniquities, Master, who has the strength to bear it (Ps 129:3 Vulgate)?*

**St. Augustine's example: a humble  
and constant movement toward God**

What eloquent and burning words! He is overwhelmed by the desire to unite himself to God. He cherishes no illusions. He knows his human weakness stands in the way, but he knows how to get round it, and he will! He will stretch out his arms to God with increasing and unceasing

determination. He knows clearly that God is the Supreme Good—the one and only goodness to which to hold fast. He knows he can attain God here below by faith and faith alone. So he stirs up his faith till it becomes a blazing fire of love for the God he cannot yet see, but to whom he nevertheless intends to cling with every fiber of his being.

This determination is that of a profoundly humble man. Every page of St Augustine manifests his conviction that he is nothing and can do nothing without God. Yet a Christian who wants to practice the presence prayer can't be content with a passing fancy; it requires a constancy that overcomes every obstacle that may come from our corrupt nature, from temptation, from attachment to created things, or from the snares of the spirit of darkness. It's no use beginning, then stopping—we've got to keep it up. We are still walking through the vale of trials, guided by the light of faith. We can depend on this light even though it is not the full understanding of things which are not of this world. For that we must await God's good time, and await it most patiently.

## II.—How to lift oneself to God by the presence prayer

It is impossible for our soul to lift itself up to God in prayer unless it detaches itself from created things. Let us listen once again to St. Augustine: "*O dementiam homines humaniter nescientem diligere*—What madness to love a man as something more than human"! (Conf IV, 7).

### No friendship is stable without God

*Hoc est, quod diligitur in amicis; et sic diligitur, ut rea sibi sit humana conscientia, si non amaverit redamantem aut si amantem non redamaverit, nihil quaerens ex eius corpore praeter indicia benivolentiae. Hinc ille luctus, si quis moriatur, et tenebrae dolorum, et versa dulcedine in amaritudinem cor madidum, et ex amissa vita morientium mors viventium. Beatus qui amat te, et amicum in te, et inimicum propter te. Solus enim nullum carum amittit, cui omnes in illo cari, qui non amittitur. Et quis est iste nisi Deus noster, Deus, qui fecit caelum et terram et inplet ea, quia inplendo ea fecit ea? Te nemo amittit, nisi qui dimittit, et quia dimittit, quo it aut quo fugit nisi a te placido ad te iratum? Nam ubi non invenit legem tuam in poena sua? Et lex tua veritas et veritas tu (Conf IV, 9).*

This is what we cherish in friendship, and we cherish it so dearly that in conscience we feel guilty if we do not return love for love, asking no more of our friends than these expressions of goodwill. This is why we mourn their death, which shrouds us in sorrow and turns joy into bitterness, so that the heart is drenched in tears and life becomes a living death because a friend is lost. Blessed are those who love you, O God, and love their friends in you and their enemies for your sake. They alone will never lose those who are dear to them, for they love them in one who is never lost, in God, our God who made heaven and earth and fills them with his presence,

because by filling them he made them. No one can lose you, my God, unless he forsakes you. And if he forsakes you, where is he to go? If he abandons your love, his only refuge is your wrath. Wherever he turns, he will find your law to punish him, for your law is the truth and the truth is yourself (Conf IV, 9).

**Nothing remains stable for the soul here below**

*Deus virtutum, converte nos et ostende faciem tuam, et salvi erimus. Nam quoquoversum se verterit anima hominis, ad dolores figitur alibi praeterquam in te, tametsi figitur in pulchris extra te et extra se. Quae tamen nulla essent, nisi essent abs te. Quae oriuntur et occidunt, et oriendo quasi esse incipiunt, et crescunt, ut perficiantur, et perfecta senescunt et intereunt: et non omnia senescunt et omnia intereunt. Ergo cum oriuntur et tendunt esse, quo magis celeriter crescunt, ut sint, eo magis festinant, ut non sint. sic est modus eorum. Tantum dedisti eis, quia partes sunt rerum, quae non sunt omnes simul, sed decedendo ac succedendo agunt omnes universum, cuius partes sunt. Ecce sic peragitur et sermo noster per signa sonantia. Non enim erit totus sermo, si unum verbum non decedat, cum sonuerit partes suas, ut succedat aliud. Laudet te ex illis anima mea, Deus, creator omnium, sed non eis infigitur glutine amore per sensus corporis. Eunt enim quo ibant, ut non sint, et conscindunt eam desideriiis pestilentiosis, quoniam ipso esse vult et requiescere amat in eis, quae amat. In illis autem non est ubi, quia non stant: fugiunt, et quis ea sequitur sensu carnis? Aut quis ea comprehendit, vel cum praesto sunt? Tardus est enim sensus carnis, quoniam sensus carnis est: ipse est modus eius. Sufficit ad aliud, ad quod factus est; ad illud autem non sufficit, ut teneat transcurrentia ab initio debito usque ad finem debitum. In verbo enim tuo, per quod creantur, ibi audiunt: hinc et huc usque (Conf IV, 10).*

*O God of hosts, restore us to our own; smile upon us, and we shall find deliverance (Ps 79:8 Vulgate).* For wherever the soul of man may turn, unless it turns to you, it clasps sorrow to itself. Even though it clings to things of beauty, if their beauty is outside God and outside the soul, it only clings to sorrow. Yet these things of beauty would not exist at all unless they came from you. Like the sun, they rise and set. At their rise they have their first beginning; they grow until they reach perfection; but, once they have reached it, they grow old and die. Not all reach old age, but all alike must die. When they rise, therefore, they are set upon the course of their existence, and the faster they climb towards its zenith, the more they hasten towards the point where they exist no more. This is the law they obey. This is all that you have appointed for them, because they are parts of a whole. Not all the parts exist at once, but some must come as others go, and in this way together they make up the whole of which they are the parts. Our speech follows the same rule, using sounds to signify a meaning. For a sentence is not complete unless each word, once its syllables have been pronounced, gives way to make room for the next. Let my soul praise you

for these things, O God, Creator of them all; but the love of them, which we feel, through the senses of the body, must not be like glue to bind my soul to them. For they continue on the course that is set for them and leads to their end, and if the soul loves them and wishes to be with them and find its rest in them, it is torn by desires that can destroy it. In these things there is no place to rest, because they do not last. They pass away beyond the reach of our senses. Indeed, none of us can lay firm hold of them even when they are with us. For the senses of the body are sluggish, because they are the senses of flesh and blood. They are limited by their own nature. They are sufficient for the purposes for which they were made, but they cannot halt the progress of transient things, which pass from their allotted beginning to their allotted end. All such things are created by your word, which tells them “Here is your beginning and here your end.” (Conf IV, 10)

**God alone has control over all instability**

*Noli esse vana, anima mea, et obsurdescere in aure cordis tumultu vanitatis tuae. Audi et tu: verbum ipsum clamat, ut redeas, et ibi est locus quietis inperturbabilis, ubi non deseritur amor, si ipse non deserat. Ecce illa discedunt, ut alia succedant, et omnibus suis partibus constet infima universitas. Numquid ego aliquo discedo? Ait verbum Dei. Ibi fige mansionem tuam, ibi commenda quidquid inde habes, anima mea, saltem fatigata fallaciis. Veritati commenda quidquid tibi est a veritate, et non perdes aliquid; et reflorescent putria tua, et sanabuntur omnes languores tui, et fluxa tua reformabuntur et renovabuntur et constringentur ad te; et non te deponent, quo descendunt, sed stabunt tecum et permanebunt ad semper stantem ac permanentem Deum. Ut quid perversa sequeris carnem tuam? Ipsa te sequatur conversam. Quidquid per illam sentis, in parte est et ignoras totum, cuius hae partes sunt, et delectant te tamen. Sed si ad totum comprehendendum esset idoneus sensus carnis tuae, ac non et ipse in parte universi accepisset pro tua poena iustum modum, velles, ut transiret quidquid existit in praesentia, ut magis tibi omnia placerent. Nam et quod loquimur, per eundem sensum carnis audis, et non vis utique stare syllabas, sed transvolare, ut aliae veniant et totum audias. Ita semper omnia, quibus unum aliquid constat, et non sunt omnia simul ea, quibus constat: plus delectant omnia quam singula, si possint sentiri omnia. Sed longe his melior qui fecit omnia, et ipse est Deus noster, et non discedit, quia nec succeditur ei (Conf IV, 11).*

My soul, you too must listen to the word of God. Do not be foolish; do not let the din of your folly deafen the ears of your heart. For the Word himself calls you to return. In him is the place of peace that cannot be disturbed, and he will not withhold himself from your love unless you withhold your love from him. In this world one thing passes away so that another may take its place and the whole be preserved in all its parts. “But do I pass away elsewhere?” says the Word of God. Make your dwelling in him, my soul. Entrust to him whatever you have, for all that you have is

from him. Now, at last, tired of being misled, entrust to the Truth all that the Truth has given to you and nothing will be lost. All that is withered in you will be made to thrive again. All your sickness will be healed. Your mortal body will be refashioned and renewed and firmly bound to you, and when it dies it will not drag you with it to the grave, but will endure and abide with you before God, who abides and endures forever. My soul, why do you face about and follow the lead of the flesh? Turn forward, and let it follow you! Whatever you feel through the senses of the flesh you only feel in part. It delights you, but it is only a part and you have no knowledge of the whole. To punish you this just limit has been fixed for the senses of your body. But if this were not so and they could comprehend the whole, you would wish that whatever exists in the present should pass on, so that you might gain greater pleasure from the whole. It is one of these same bodily senses that enables you to hear the words I speak, but you do not want the syllables to sound forever in my mouth; you want them to fly from my tongue and give place to others, so that you may hear the whole of what I have to say. It is always the same with the parts that together make a whole. They are not present at the same time, but if they can all be felt as one, together they give more pleasure than each single part. But far better than these is he who made them all, our God. He does not pass away, because there is none to take his place (Conf IV, 11).

### III.—The final goal of presence prayer is union with the Trinity

The goal of presence prayer is to unite us to the Trinity in heaven. “*Vita contemplativa calcatis curis omnibus ad vivendam faciem sui Creatoris inardescit.*” Contemplative life,” says St. Gregory, “frees us from all worldly preoccupations, and fills us with the burning desire to see the face of our divine Creator”<sup>41</sup>. Such is the final goal of presence prayer. In a way it is our novitiate for heaven. Here below we make the efforts. There above we reap the benefits.

#### One cannot be united to God, our happiness, except by charity

*Secutio igitur Dei, beatitatis appetitus est, assecutio autem ipsa beatitas. Sed eum sequimur diligendo, consequimur vero, non cum hoc omnino efficimur quod est ipse, sed ei proximi eumque mirifico et intelligibili modo contingentes eiusque veritate et sanctitate penitus illustrati atque comprehensi. Ille namque ipsum lumen est, nobis autem ab eodem illuminari licet. Maximum ergo quod ad beatam vitam ducit, primumque mandatum est: diliges Dominum Deum tuum ex toto corde tuo et anima et mente. Diligentibus enim Deum omnia procedunt in bonum (Dt 6:5; Mt 22:37-38; Rom 8:28). Quamobrem paulo post idem Paulus: Certus*

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<sup>41</sup> Hom. 44, in Ezech (Gregory the Great & Homily on Ezekiel & Migne & homily 44)

*sum, inquit, quod neque mors neque vita neque angelus neque virtus neque instantia neque futura neque altitudo neque profundum neque creatura alia poterit nos separare a caritate Dei, quae est in Christo Iesu Domino nostro (Rom 8:38-39). Si igitur diligentibus Deum omnia procedunt in bonum, et summum bonum, quod etiam optimum dicitur, non modo diligendum esse nemo ambigit, sed ita diligendum ut nihil amplius diligere debeamus idque significatur et exprimitur quod dictum est: Ex toto corde et ex tota anima et ex tota mente, quis quaeso dubitaverit, his omnibus constitutis et firmissime creditis, nihil nobis aliud optimum, ad quod adipiscendum postpositis ceteris oporteat festinare quam Deum? Item si nulla res ab eius caritate nos separat, quid esse non solum melius, sed etiam certius hoc bono potest?*<sup>42</sup>.

To seek God is to desire happiness. To find Him is happiness itself. We seek God by loving Him. We find Him—and although this does not turn us into Him, it does make us very like Him in a manner which is marvellous yet easy to understand, because we become imbued with His Truth and illuminated by His Goodness. He Himself is the Light, but He gives us a share in its brightness. What leads us to everlasting happiness is the first and greatest of His commandments: “Thou shalt love the Lord, thy God, with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. That is why all things work for good for those who love God” (Dt 6:5; Mt 22:37-38; Rom 8:28). And, St. Paul goes on: “I am certain that neither death nor life—neither angels, nor principalities nor powers—neither what is present nor what is to come—neither what is above, nor what is below—nor any creature whatsoever will be able to separate us from that love of God which is in Christ Jesus” (Rom 8:38). So, since everything helps to secure the good of those who love God—their supreme good, the very best they can obtain—nobody can doubt that not only must we love this supreme good, but that we must allow nothing and nobody else to stand in its way. This is what we mean when we say: with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our mind. Who, then, can doubt—having assimilated these truths and firmly believing in them—that there is nothing better, nothing more beneficial, nothing more worth our while, than to drop every other care and hasten our steps towards God? Moreover, if nothing can separate us from his charity, what could there possibly be that is better, let alone more certain, than this good?

#### **Nothing can separate us from the love of God**

*Sed singula breviter attendamus. Nemo nos inde separat minando mortem. Id ipsum enim quo diligimus Deum, mori non potest, nisi dum non diligit Deum; mors ipsa sit non diligere Deum, quod nihil est aliud quam ei quidquam in diligendo atque sequendo praeponere. Nemo inde separat pollicendo vitam; nemo enim ab ipso fonte separat aquam pollicendo. Non separat angelus; non enim est angelus, cum inhaeremus Deo, nostra mente*

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<sup>42</sup> This chapter and the following passages are taken from *De moribus Ecclesiae catholicae*, I, 18-24 (Augustine&On the Morals of the Catholic Church&CPL&multiple passages)

*potentior. Non separat virtus; nam si virtus hic illa nominata est, quae aliquam potestatem in hoc mundo habet, toto mundo est omnino sublimior mens inhaerens Deo. Sin illa virtus dicta est, quae ipsius animi nostri rectissima affectio est, si in alio est, favet ut coniungamur Deo, si in nobis est, ipsa coniungit. Non separant instantes molestiae; hoc enim leviores eas sentimus, quo ei unde nos separare moliuntur, artius inhaeremus. Non separat promissio futurorum; nam et quidquid boni futurum est, certius promittit Deus, et nihil est ipso Deo melius, qui iam profecto bene sibi haerentibus praesens est. Non separat altitudo neque profundum; etenim si haec verba scientiae forte altitudinem vel profundum significant, non ero curiosus, ne seiungar a Deo, nec cuiusquam doctrina me ab eo separat, ut quasi depellat errorem, a quo prorsus nemo nisi separatus erraret. Si vero altitudine et profundo supera et infera huius mundi significantur, quis mihi caelum polliceatur, ut a caeli fabricatore seiungar? Aut quis terreat infernus, ut Deum deseram, quem si numquam deseruissem, inferna nescirem? Postremo quis me locus ab eius caritate divellet, qui non ubique totus esset, si ullo contineretur loco?*

But let us briefly examine each word. Nobody can separate us from Christ by threatening to kill us. That within us whereby we love God cannot die—all that could kill us would be loving God no more. Death itself consists in not loving God -in loving something better than God, in following something else instead of God. Nobody can separate us from Christ by promising us life—it would be like promising somebody a drink of water and driving him away from the fountain. No angel can separate us -because when we cling to God, no angel would be strong enough to drag us apart. No power can separate us. If the power in question is that of him who does wield a certain power in this world, whoever clings to God is even more powerful than he is. If the power in question is any perfectly legitimate affection of our own, then both our loving and our being loved will draw us closer to God.

Our present afflictions cannot separate us from Him. Loving God makes them easier to endure—and we cling to God more tenaciously lest we should be drawn away from Him. No promise of future benefits can separate us—for who can promise us better things than God does—and what greater benefit is there to be promised than God himself? and He is already present to those who love Him. Neither height nor depth can separate us: for if the height and depth of knowledge are what is meant, I will rather not be inquisitive than be separated from God; nor can any instruction by which error is removed separate me from Him, by separation from whom it is that any one is in error. Or if what is meant are the higher and lower parts of this world, how can the promise of heaven separate me from Him who made heaven? Or who from beneath can frighten me into forsaking God, when I should not have known of things beneath but by forsaking Him? *In fine*, what place can remove me from His love, when He could not be all in every place unless He were contained in none?



**Our soul itself is a creature which must not separate us from God's love**

*Non, inquit, separat alia creatura (Rom 8:39). O altissimorum mysteriorum virum! Non fuit contentus dicere creatura, sed alia, inquit, creatura, admonens etiam idipsum quo diligimus Deum et quo inhaeremus Deo, id est animum atque mentem creaturam esse. Alia ergo creatura corpus est; et si animus res quaedam est intelligibilis, id est quae tantum intelligendo innotescit, alia creatura est omne sensibile, id est quod per oculos vel aures vel olfactum vel gustum vel tactum quasi quamdam notitiam sui praebet atque id deterius sit necesse est, quam quod intelligentia sola capitur. Ergo cum etiam Deus dignis animis notus non nisi per intelligentiam possit esse, cum tamen sit ipsa qua intelligitur mente praestantior, quippe creator eius atque auctor est, verendum erat ne animus humanus, eo quod inter invisibilia et intelligibilia numeratur, eiusdem se naturae arbitraretur esse, cuius est ipse qui creavit et sic ab eo superbia decideret, cui caritate iungendus est. Fit enim Deo similis quantum datum est, dum illustrandum illi atque illuminandum se subicit. Et si ei maxime propinquat subiectio ne ista qua similis fit, longe ab eo fiat necesse est audacia qua vult esse similior. Ipsa est qua legibus Dei obtemperare detrectat, dum suae potestatis esse cupit ut Deus est.*

*Quanto ergo magis longe discedit a Deo non loco sed affectione atque cupiditate ad inferiora quam est ipse, tanto stultitia miseriaque completur. Dilectione igitur redit in Deum, qua se illi non componere, sed supponere affectat. Quod quanto fecerit instantius ac studiosius, tanto erit beatior atque sublimior et illo solo dominante liberrimus. Quamobrem nosse debet se esse creaturam. Debet enim creatorem suum credere sicuti est inviolabili et incommutabili semper manere natura veritatis atque sapientiae, in se autem cadere posse stultitiam atque fallaciam vel propter errores quibus exui desiderat, confiteri. Sed rursus cavere debet, ne ab ipsius Dei caritate, qua sanctificatur ut beatissimus maneat, alterius creaturae, id est huius sensibilis mundi amore separetur. Non igitur separat nos alia creatura, siquidem et nos ipsi creatura sumus, a caritate Dei, quae est in Christo Iesu Domino nostro.*

“No other creature whatsoever can separate us” (Rom 8:39). What a profoundly mysterious man the Apostle is! He thought it not enough to say, no creature; but he says no other creature; teaching that that with which we love God and by which we cleave to God, our mind, namely, and understanding, is itself a creature. Thus the body is another creature; and if the mind is an object of intellectual perception, and is known only by this means, the other creature is all that is an object of sense, which as it were makes itself known through the eyes, or ears, or smell, or taste, or touch, and this must be inferior to what is perceived by the intellect alone. Now, as God also can be known by the worthy, only intellectually, exalted though he is above the intelligent mind as being its Creator and Author, there was danger lest the human mind, from being reckoned among invisible and immaterial things, should be thought to be of the same nature with him who

created it, and so should fall away by pride from him to whom it should be united by love. For the mind becomes like God, to the extent vouchsafed by its subjection of itself to him for information and enlightenment. And if it obtains the greatest nearness by that subjection which produces likeness, it must be far removed from him by that presumption which would make the likeness greater. It is this presumption which leads the mind to refuse obedience to the Laws of God, in the desire to be sovereign, as God is.

The farther, then, the mind departs from God, not in space, but in affection and lusts after things below him, the more it is filled with folly and wretchedness. So by love it returns to God,—a love which places it not along with God, but under him. And the more ardour and eagerness there is in this, the happier and more elevated will the mind be, and with God as sole governor it will be in perfect liberty. Hence it must know that it is a creature. It must believe what is the truth,—that its Creator remains ever possessed of the inviolable and immutable nature of truth and wisdom, and must confess, even in view of the errors from which it desires deliverance, that it is liable to folly and falsehood. But then again, it must take care that it be not separated by the love of the other creature, that is, of this visible world, from the love of God himself, which sanctifies it in order to lasting happiness. No other creature, then—for we are ourselves a creature,—separates us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

**This love can be found in Our Lord alone**

*Dicat nobis Paulus idem, quis iste sit Christus Iesus Dominus noster: Vocatis, in inquit, praedicamus Christum Dei virtutem et Dei sapientiam (1 Cor 1:24). Quid? Ipse Christus nonne inquit: Ego sum veritas (Jn 14:6)? Si ergo quaerimus quid sit bene vivere, id est ad beatitudinem vivendo tendere, id erit profecto amare virtutem, amare sapientiam, amare veritatem et amare ex toto corde et ex tota anima et ex tota mente virtutem quae inviolabilis et invicta est, sapientiam cui stultitia non succedit, veritatem quae converti atque aliter quam semper est sese habere non novit. Per hanc ipse cernitur Pater; dictum est enim: Nemo venit ad Patrem nisi per me (Jn 14:6)? Huic haeremus per sanctificationem. Sanctificati enim plena et integra caritate flagramus, qua sola efficitur ut a Deo non avertamur eique potius quam huic mundo conformemur. Praedestinavit enim, ut ait idem Apostolus, conformes nos fieri imaginis Filii eius (Rom 8:29).*

*Fiet ergo per caritatem ut conformemur Deo et ex eo conformati atque figurati et circumcisi ab hoc mundo non confundamur cum his quae nobis debent esse subiecta. Fit autem hoc per Spiritum Sanctum. Spes enim, inquit, non confundit, quoniam caritas Dei diffusa est in cordibus nostris per Spiritum Sanctum qui datus est nobis (Rom 5:5). Nullo modo autem redintegrari per Spiritum Sanctum possemus, nisi et ipse semper integer et incommutabilis permaneret. Quod profecto non posset, nisi Dei naturae esset ac substantiae, cui soli incommutabilitas atque ut ita dicam,*

*inconvertibilitas semper est. Creatura enim, neque hoc ego sed idem Paulus clamat, vanitati subiecta est (Rom 8:20). Neque nos potest a vanitate separare veritatis connectere, quod subiectum est vanitati. Et hoc nobis Spiritus Sanctus praestat; creatura igitur non est, quia omne quod est, aut Deus, aut creatura est.*

Let this same Paul tell us who is this Christ Jesus our Lord. "To them that are called," he says, "we preach Christ the virtue of God, and the wisdom of God." And does not Christ Himself say, "I am the truth?" If, then, we ask what it is to live well,—that is, to strive after happiness by living well, -it must assuredly be to love virtue, to love wisdom, to love truth, and to love with all the heart, with all the soul, and with all the mind; virtue which is inviolable and immutable, wisdom which never gives place to folly, truth which knows no change or variation from its uniform character. Through this the Father Himself is seen; for it is said, "No man cometh unto the Father but by me." To this we cleave by sanctification. For when sanctified we burn with full and perfect love, which is the only security for our not turning away from God, and for our being conformed to Him rather than to this world; for "He has predestined us," says the same apostle, "that we should be conformed to the image of His Son."

It is through love, then, that we become conformed to God; and by this conformation, and configuration, and circumcision from this world we are not confounded with the things which are properly subject to us. And this is done by the Holy Spirit. "For hope," he says, "does not confound us, for the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, which is given unto us. But we could not possibly be restored to perfection by the Holy Spirit, unless He Himself continued always perfect and immutable. And this plainly could not be unless He were of the nature and of the very substance of God, who alone is always possessed of immutability and invariableness. "The creature," it is affirmed, not by me but by Paul, "has been made subject to vanity." And what is subject to vanity is unable to separate us from vanity, and to unite us to the truth. But the Holy Spirit does this for us. He is therefore no creature. For whatever is, must be either God or the creature.

#### **The Blessed Trinity, Man's supreme good**

*Deum ergo diligere debemus trinam quamdam unitatem, Patrem et Filium et Spiritum Sanctum, quod nihil aliud dicam esse nisi idipsum esse. Est enim vere summeque Deus, ex quo omnia, per quem omnia, in quo omnia; haec verba Pauli sunt. Quid deinde subiecit? Ipsi gloria (Rom 11:36). Sincerissime omnino. Neque enim ait: ipsis, nam unus est Deus. Quid est autem ipsi gloria nisi ipsi optima et summa et late patens fama? Quanto enim melius atque diffusius diffamatur, tanto diligitur et amatur ardentius. Quod cum fit, nihil aliud ab humano genere quam certo et constanti gradu in optimam vitam et beatissimam pergitur. Non arbitrari cum de moribus et vita fit quaestio, amplius esse requirendum, quod sit*

*hominis summum bonum quo referenda sunt omnia. Id enim esse patuit et ratione quantum valuimus et ea quae nostrae rationi antecellit auctoritate divina nihil aliud quam ipsum Deum. Nam quid erit aliud optimum hominis, nisi cui est haerere beatissimum? Id autem est solus Deus, cui haerere certe non valemus nisi dilectione, amore, caritate.*

We ought then to love God, the Trinity in unity. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; for this must be said to be God Himself, for it is said of God, truly and in the most exalted sense, "Of whom are all things, by whom are all things, in whom are all things." Those are Paul's words. And what does he add? "To Him be glory." All this is exactly true. He does not say: "To them"; for God is one. And what is meant by: "To Him be glory", but to Him be chief and perfect and widespread praise? For as the praise improves and extends, so the love and affection increases in fervour. And when this is the case, mankind cannot but advance with sure and firm step to a life of perfection and bliss. This, I suppose, is all we wish to find when we speak of the chief good of man, to which all must be referred in life and conduct. For the good plainly exists; and we have shown by reasoning, as far as we were able, and by the divine authority which goes beyond our reasoning, that it is nothing else but God Himself. For how can anything be man's chief good but that in cleaving to which he is blessed? Now this is nothing but God, to whom we can cleave only by affection, desire, and love.

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## THE SIXTEENTH MEDITATION.

### The Eucharist

*“Memoriam fecit mirabilia suorum, misericors et miserator Dominus, dedit timentibus se—He has remembered his wonderful works, being a merciful and gracious God: he has given food to those who fear him” (Ps 110:4-5 Vulgate).*

The Eucharist is the memorial of all God’s wonders: of Creation through transubstantiation; of Incarnation by the way in which Jesus Christ appears under the consecrated species; of Redemption by the separate consecration of his Body and Blood; of the Resurrection by the promise of eternal life that it given.

For us religious of the Assumption, the Eucharist introduces us to a new life—a life of adoration, imitation, expiation and union. Let us examine these four aspects which, it seems to me, give form, through the action of Our Lord’s wonders, to an entirely new life.

#### I.—Adoration

##### The excellence of the Lord’s Adoration in the Eucharist

After the Consecration (at the great doxology) the priest holds the Sacred Host over the Precious Blood and makes the gesture of offering all honor and all glory to the Blessed Trinity through Jesus Christ, with him, and in him—*per Ipsum, cum Ipso et in Ipso*.

Human adoration is powerless and no holocaust could please God. *“Holocaustomata et pro peccato non tibi placuerunt—holocausts for sin did not please you” (Heb 10:5; Ps 39:7 Vulgate).* So the Son of God became Man and said: *“Tunc dixi: Ecce venio—Then I said: behold I come (Heb 10:7; Ps 39:8 Vulgate).* Thus the Incarnate Son of God comes to offer the purest adoration to his Father, and he offers it to him in a state of complete self-surrender, on the Cross but in the Eucharist as well.

##### Uniting our adoration to his adoration

It is from the depth of this self-surrender that the Son of God made man adores, and it is in union with the Son of God that we ourselves come to offer the most complete adoration. Not that our adoration by itself has

any value; it derives its worth from the infinite merits of the Divine Victim, to which we contribute what we can of our own worthlessness by uniting ourselves to him. And thus we adore through Jesus Christ who is our Priest, with Jesus Christ “who ever intercedes for us,—*semper vivens ad interpellandum pro nobis* (Heb 7:25); and in Jesus Christ, so that being but one with him, it becomes clear that his prayer is ours and that ours will be heard because of him

Jesus is, in fact, the great Mediator, “*et non est in alio aliquot salus, in quo oporteat nos salvos fieri*—there is no salvation through anyone else, nor is there any other name under heaven given to the human race by which we are to be saved” (Acts 4:12).

#### **Jesus-Eucharist, also the object of our adoration**

Jesus decided to become our brother, and he takes it upon Himself to speak on our behalf. He chose to take our guilt upon His own shoulders—to pay the price of our sins in His own humanity. But let us remember that Jesus Christ is also our God who wishes to be adored—and it is with the Blessed Trinity that he receives this honor and glory. “*Per Ipsum, et cum Ipso, et in Ipso est tibi Deo patri omnipotenti, in unitate Spiritus sancti, omnis honor et Gloria*—through Him, with Him and in Him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honor is yours, Almighty Father, forever and ever” (great doxology).

The Blessed Humanity of the Saviour, hidden beneath the Eucharistic veil, united to the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, offers this adoration.

But Jesus Christ, God and Man, inseparably united to the Blessed Trinity, gives an infinite value to this adoration; and it is thus that this homage in which we are invited to participate acquires incomprehensible excellence.

## **II.—imitation**

Jesus Christ, fully present in the Eucharist, and there in the most complete self-surrender. What could be more of a self-surrender than God made man, hidden under the appearance of a little bread and a few drops of wine? Look to what extent he’ll reduce himself to express his horror for sin; look at the depths to which sin brings him. Yet he is innocence itself. It is we who have committed the sins. So it is up to us to reduce ourselves, to humble ourselves, or at least to entertain a low and mean opinion of ourselves. Really, what Christian, imbued with faith, can think of the Eucharist without being amazed at the lowly condition which a God would choose to reduce himself.

#### **Jesus’ silence**

For it is here that God’s own Word, the eternal Word, dwells in the deepest silence. “He remains silent, he does not open his mouth; he keeps

silent as a lamb taken to be shorn. He opens not his mouth; he has nothing to say” (see Is 53:7). We can treat him as we wish; he will never complain. Silence seems to him and him alone a perfect sacrifice. Who has ever heard Jesus’ voice in the Host in the Tabernacle? A few of his most favoured servants may perhaps have strained their ear, listening in to what St. Augustine calls the eloquent silence of the mysteries, “*facundum quoddam et canorum veritatis silentium*—that rich and resounding silence of the truth”<sup>43</sup>? What words he may have pronounced were directed to individual souls, summoning them to the very heights of perfection. Such words may sometimes have been spoken from the Tabernacle, but more often than not they were whispered to the heart in the privacy of a religious’ cell.

#### **Jesus’ patience**

With him Jesus still invites you to await his day and yours. You are in a hurry; you are impatient; you are wrong. Imitate the patience of God! It’s rather like watching the sun throughout the course of a fine summer’s day. Can you see the sun moving? Yet between its rising and its setting what a vast distance it has covered! You may think you are getting nowhere with Jesus Christ inside you, yet you are making giant steps!

Notice as well how marvelously patient he has been throughout the centuries. And yet how many revolutions there have been, how many violent upheavals! But he knows how to wait for his time and so, to use the Hebrew expression, one must learn how to wait by waiting, “*Expectans expectavi Dominum, et intendit mihi*—with expectation I have waited for the Lord and he has heard me” (Ps 39:2 Vulgate).

#### **Love in suffering**

Finally, look at what love Jesus has for you in the Eucharist, “*Cum dilexisset suos qui erant in mundo, in finem dilexit eos*—he loved those who were his own, whom he was leaving behind in the world, and he loved them to the very end” (Jn 13:1). And before going to meet his death, he instituted the Eucharist. “*Desiderio desideravi hoc pascha manducare vobiscum antequam patiar*—I have longed with a great longing to share this paschal meal with you before I suffer” (Lk 22:15).

Ah, in your times of trial, approach the Eucharist with great love. Then will your tribulation become sweet, every trial light. For what greater love could he have shown than to want to be united with you with this Eucharistic food? And what greater love can you bear witness to than to seek to be one with him? So approach Jesus in the Eucharist and serve him with affection and gratitude overflowing. It would be trite to keep on repeating that we will never love him as much as he loves us. But what an honor to be called to such a struggle to love!

Let us imitate Him, for this is what he wants more than anything else, for us to model ourselves on his perfections. What is it you want?

<sup>43</sup> *De libero arbitrio* (CPL 0260) - lib. 2, cap. 13, linea 18 (Augustine&On Free Will&CPL& bk. 2, chap. 13, line 18)

What are you seeking, save to restore in yourself that likeness to God disfigured by sin? Very well—this God is within you. So what more could you want than to give him free access to your soul and freedom of action and to make every effort to form in your soul the life, the virtues, the mind of Jesus Christ? “*Hoc sentite in vobis quod est in Christo Jesu*—have among yourselves the same attitude that is also yours in Christ Jesus” (Phil 2:5). To what degree of holiness will you not attain if you allow Jesus Christ to form in you attitudes worthy of him and above all if you make the necessary effort to apply these attitudes to every aspect of your everyday life?

#### **Prayer of Imitation**

Lord, what can I do better to transform my life here on earth into a heavenly life than by imitating you more perfectly day after day following the example you give me in the Gospel? If I wish to become a saint, is there anything else to do than to become like you?

At the Last Supper you washed your Apostles’ feet to mark them with the final seal of purity and to be able to say to them as you gave them Communion, “*Jam vos mundi estis*—you are now clean” (see Jn 13:10). But you had this to add by way of encouraging them to imitate you, “*Exemplum dedi vobis, ut quemadmodum ego feci, ita et vos faciatis*—I have given you a model to follow so that as I have done for you, you should also do” (Jn 13:15). It was an example of humility and an example of charity. What more can we ask of a Christian than to surrender himself and love?

I want to imitate you, Lord, and in your footsteps, I want to follow you as you humble yourself in the Eucharist. I want to carry in my own heart and around me the fire that you have hidden there. Lord, my God, where else could I find perfection? You have brought it down from heaven to earth and have put it in my reach. May I imitate it and not be too unworthy of you.

### **III.—Expiation**

What is Jesus Christ in the Eucharist? He is the Victim par excellence. Look around and see if you can imagine anything quite so wonderful?

#### **Following Our Lord’s example**

An infinite justice had been offended. The entire human race could not make up for the sin committed by their common ancestor. Then what could be done? A man would be taken up by a God and God, by becoming one with a man, would give him his personality, preserving all the while the nature of the creature and that of the Creator. “*Salva utriusque natura substantiae et in unam coeunte personam*—preserving the essence of both



natures in one single person”<sup>44</sup>. What a marvel—a victim because a man had sinned but at the same time divine capable of repairing all the rights of God that had been infringed!

#### **Atoning for oneself**

The religious, vowed to a life of self-sacrifice, must become, as far as he can, God-like in his efforts at atonement. So he must turn all his actions continually into sacrifices. As far as his daily suffering is concerned, they become a rich treasure house because, at Communion-time and the celebration of the Mass, he can present Our Lord with the gift of whatever he has had to endure. He can say to his divine Master: “Lord, let everything in me be worthy of you, so that I too in turn, by following in your footsteps, may become a pure and blameless victim and may give you as well everything you ask of me: be it pain, sorrow, anguish, tears. Since the disciple is not above his master—since you who were totally innocent became a victim for me—let me now become a victim for you.”

#### **for others**

As he leaves the celebration of the holy mysteries, the religious can say, “I am going to offer myself up together with my Master.” The imperfect sentiment of the Apostle who cried out, “*Et nos eamur et moriamur cum illo*—let us go too, and die with him!” (Jn 11:16), must become perfect within the religious. It is especially after Communion that we become “co-offerers” with Christ, and what a privilege this is! Taking Jesus for our model, we now offer ourselves up to atone for the sins of others. Today above all, when selfishness seems to have invaded everything, extended its icy grip over everything, and dampened every outburst of generosity, what a beautiful vocation a religious has, a religious who says, “I am suffering with Jesus Christ crucified. I am offering myself up with the Sacred Host on the altar. I am sacrificing every created joy for the privilege of sharing in my Saviour’s atonement.” Ah! who will give to the religious, truly a victim with the Divine Victim, the ability to cry out with all the love that allowed the Savior of the world to accept being nailed to the cross, “*Adimpleo in carne mea ea quae desunt passionum Christi*—in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ” (Col 1:24).

Here the perfection of a religious is recognized in his readiness to offer himself up and atone. Is expiating for the sins of others repugnant to you? If so, you may be a living human being, but as far as the supernatural order is concerned you are mediocre and common-place. Are you, on the contrary, attracted by this idea of expiation? You can be confident you will make progress. Is your heart actually filled with longing alone to make up for the sins of others? Then take courage, you can be confident that you are on your way to becoming a saint.

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<sup>44</sup> Leo the Great, *Tomus ad Flavianum* 54-60 (Leo the Great & Letter from Pope Leo the Great to Flavian, Bishop of Constantinople & CPL & 54-60)

#### IV.—In Union with God

Our goal of happiness in heaven will consist in being united to God. Since I already had a lot to say on charity and presence prayer, I'll say but a word about it here.

The eye of man has not seen, nor has his ear heard, nor has it entered into his heart what things God has prepared for those who love him (1 Cor 2:9) and who have placed their hope in him alone (cf 1 Cor 2:9). But before we come to seeing heavenly visions and hearing effable things (cf 2 Cor 12:4), where our soul, rushing headlong into the arms of God, will never more be separated from Him, what joys of adoration await us! What sublime union is effected between the soul and the Man-God in the Eucharist! What a life, if only we knew how to appreciate it! The dedicated religious, having partaken of the Body and Blood of his God, can proclaim a thousand times louder than the spouse in the *Canticle of Canticles*: “*Inveni quem diligit anima mea, tenui eum, nec dimittam*—I found him whom my heart loves. I took hold of him and would not let him go” (Sg 3:4). Into what depths of union can he not now plunge? If only he could stay there forever, thrilled through and through with the glorious vision of God, a totally new life in union with God? Can we describe the life of such a religious nourished by communion with the very life of God—his attitudes, his actions, his virtues? Yes, it can be achieved—by uniting himself irrevocably to his Master and allowing himself to be taken wheresoever this Master wills to take him, on the earth and in the heavens.

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## THE SEVENTEENTH MEDITATION.

### What we are up against

*“Vos estis sal terrae, vos estis lux mundi—You are the salt of the earth; you are the light of the world”* (Mt 5:13-14)

I can imagine one of the Apostles rising from his grave and taking a good look at the world we now live in so as to compare it to the world as it was when, having run his course, he laid down his life for Jesus Christ. What would he think? What thoughts would run through his mind if he were now commissioned to preach the Gospel to the world all over again?

Would he not begin by taking stock of the present state of affairs in the world?<sup>45</sup> Would he not look for the causes which have brought it to the deplorable state it's in? Leaving aside God's grace, would he not seek out the best means of putting things right?

And these are also the three questions I beg you to ask yourselves in order to try and resolve them as best you can.

#### I.—Present State of the World

##### An eclipse of the faith

If we take a look at the Western world, what do we see? A huge eclipse of the faith, though in some places much worse than in others.

##### through indifference

Look: you will find that many are just not interested at all in discovering what is true and what is false. What, indeed, does it matter to them? Their minds, busily engaged in “looking down to earth,” have no time but for things of the earth. They say they're just too tired to look. Did they ever try? Above all they insist on being left alone. Don't talk to them about anything but their interests; they don't have time for anything else.

Alas! such is the mentality of entire populations who are ignorant of their faith. They have long lost sight of the fundamentals of what it means to be baptized.

They neither hope for heaven nor fear the fires of hell. Death for

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<sup>45</sup> Editor's note: d'Alzon was writing in 1879

them will be the end of everything; from then onwards there is simply nothingness. This attitude keeps on growing in a kind of fatalistic march. Man thinks about his physical health alone, is confined to the material world, and nothing more. They love this world; they adore and worship it. From the earth they came; to the earth they wish to return; nothingness is the goal of their hope.

Once we cease to think in terms of everlasting life, what is left? The unbridled desire for pleasure, the bitter hatred of those who have not for those who have, and the resulting series of catastrophes which, unless God intervenes to prevent them, will add up to brutal atrocities and wholesale slaughter such as the world has never yet seen.

#### **through hatred**

And in such a moral vacuum there exist men who have made their minds up to hate the truth, and have vowed to engage in the most infernal hatred of the Church. They themselves are aware that truth exists, they just refuse to know it and make every effort to destroy it in others. So, in addition to indifference with regard to the truth, there is hatred for the light it sheds. They take offense at it; it's a reproach and a source of condemnation. On these counts, they want to have nothing to do with it. And so we have, on the one hand, the enemies of truth declaring war, while, on the other hand, a great number who go on their merry way in stupid apathy and consider the assault on the faith as one more emotional outburst in some kind of new conflict. It's fun to watch animals fighting among themselves. Gone are the days of the gladiators. What is going on nowadays is the epic battle between those who believe and those who don't. It's a show and every show, in and of itself, is exciting and even entertaining.

#### **The consequences of this eclipse**

What sense of duty can one expect to preserve when such is the prevailing mentality? Every trace of faith goes by the board. Thence the violation of each and every major rule of human conduct.

#### **no more integrity**

For many, what has business become if not one vast system of carefully organized theft? What are people seeking in all this financial speculation, in all these transactions? It's to make money, as quickly and abundantly as one can; and for many, the emphasis is on the shortest time possible. But in order to waste no time and to grow rich quickly, one has to twist and fiddle with morality. This is done—and you'd be surprised how many fortunes are made, as huge as they are scandalous, rapidly amassed. So much for those in the high places.

What goes on further down the scale? A desire to imitate those in high places. And they appear to have a better excuse. The big-time thieves steal because they want the best of everything—the little ones because they've got to live! But meanwhile, respect for other people's possessions disappears. The "haves" know that others are casting envious glances in

their direction, and so they seek out every possible way to defend what they have acquired, no matter what the cost. As for the “have-nots,” they may not desire much, but they do desire what is forbidden. And who can really claim that they do not want much, if it’s only in view of their pipedream of sharing the proceeds with their companions in poverty? As for sharing what they themselves have honestly earned, they wouldn’t dream of such a thing.

#### **no more morality**

What shall I say of this state of affairs? Alas, how many wives are deceived yet how many husbands as well! In certain parts of the world, who can say for sure to a man, “You are my father?” And let us face it: how many fathers can be certain that they have the right to say to the child born under their own roofs: “You are my son.”

More and more theft, and less and less marriage: this is the bottom line as far as integrity and morality is concerned today.

#### **No more upright men**

Let us raise our sights a little higher. What kind of characters are produced by a society given over to every form of fraud, iniquity and debauchery? How many upright characters are we likely to meet in its midst? None, none, that is to say, the very opposite of honorable men. Loyalty, integrity, energy, refinement...all these beautiful qualities have vanished. What remains? Sloppy habits that drag on, contemptuous and vile, along darkened paths, enemies of the light. Would the light of day reveal such pitiful features? It might, so they prefer to go on pretending. Is what they are doing good or bad? It doesn’t really matter, as long as it is useful or enjoyable and brings profit or pleasure. Ah, how far away noble characters are!

#### **The masses of so-called “decent people”**

That’s it for the downright evil ones. What shall we say of another category, one wearing a mask, that of being “decent people”? Who is considered to be a “decent person” among the crowds? A worker who has never been in trouble with the police. And among the upper classes, who is considered to be a “decent person”? A man who has been smart enough to conceal his disgraceful speculations, his frauds, his adulteries, and his misdeeds in worming his way to the top. And where do these people end up? At the level of undiluted selfishness, at looking after “number one,” at ridiculing whatever is noble and generous, at the obliteration of any moral sensibility, at suspicion of the truth, and at a subversion of all respect.

Will you ever make an army of these masses of so-called “decent people”? All they want is an efficient police force to protect their more or less ill-gotten gains—and that’s all they do want. Don’t rely on them to fight for great truths, principles, or fundamental laws, even if you can count on them to defend their strong-boxes, and even then I wonder! As far as society is concerned, for them it’s only a word.

Given several such generations, what future is in store for nations?

The day of reckoning must be drawing very near...unless the justice of God, not wanting to see a victory limited to itself, decides to intervene and manifest its might by making much good result from such evil.

Whatever the case may be, let us take a look at such a deplorable state of affairs and try to understand how it happened. Perhaps we'll find some relevant cure, thanks to God's mercy.

## II.—The Causes of the Present State of the World

### A. Hostilities of governments toward the Church

It is not difficult to pinpoint the causes for the present state of Europe. To begin with, governments have been hostile to the Church for a very long time. Who can deny that at times the Church has had unworthy ministers? But who engineered the appointment of these unworthy ministers? The princes, the kings and the emperors. The long drawn out quarrel over Investitures amounted to this and nothing else. Would people be governed by humble servants of the Church or by obsequious "yes men" chosen by the sovereign? Under the pretext that ecclesiastical benefices owed their origin to royal generosity, kings put a finger into the pie of every episcopal election. In consequence many of these bishops were self-seeking mercenaries. As for the appointment of abbots, the abbots in question drew their revenues, and allowed their monks not only to linger without leadership but to die of starvation. If the bishops and abbots were like this, what happened to the local churches under their jurisdiction? To what irregularities were they not exposed? There was no more religious instruction. Who would have given it? The teachers themselves were utterly ignorant. How did this affect the common people? Certain reforms were introduced. How did they affect people in the country? What about city-dwellers?

I have mentioned the way princes interfered in Church matters and usurped power; it has always been so, and it still goes on today. What shall I say about the scandal they cause? When bad example is given from above, how rapidly it spreads further down the social scale!

And what is the net result? Contempt for authority. The powers-that-be rejected the authority of the Church; now their people have rejected theirs. Open your eyes and your ears and see what is now going on in lots of countries: corruption has become the *instrumentum regni*, the rule of thumb, the normal method of government. If you can't see it, you must be blind! One might say that the easiest way to enslave the population is, precisely, to make them immoral.

Over and above all of this, not to go back too far, let us say that, after three centuries, the Reformation, while it preached revolt among intellectuals, preached it as well among politicians and no nation has escaped the contagion. "Woe to you," cries the Prophet Isaiah, "Woe to you who call goodness bad and badness good!—*Vae qui dicitis bonum malum*

*and malum bonum*” (Is 5:20). We are still up to our neck in it. We need look no further for the principal cause of why modern society is so utterly being laid waste.

### B. Secret Societies

Such is the primary cause. But evil, which would otherwise turn to dust and blow away, which would otherwise melt and dissolve into nothingness, needs some organization to give it at least the appearance of being alive. And so Freemasonry came into being. Man has always been intrigued by mystery, and, as a result, so many have rushed to join the ranks of secret societies. As a matter of fact, they have existed from time immemorial. They do incalculable harm—and at certain periods of history their action has taken on a dynamism which bears the hallmark not only of this world, but also of hell.

It is said that, if one were to trace the ranking of this satanic hierarchy, it would be necessary to see as its foundation the “International”<sup>46</sup>, then the secret societies of every nation, then the Jews with their anti-Christian hatred, then Satan, whose cult has been undeniably established in the sect’s shrines. This group wears the mask of atheism and their leaders feign incredulity. However, “they do believe, but tremble with anger—*Credunt et contremiscunt*” (Jas 2:19).

Freemasonry extends its tentacles in every direction; its agents are everywhere. Currently, having sworn to destroy Christianity, it now seems to be on the brink of achieving its wish. Will it triumph completely, not to the point of destroying the Church from top to bottom, but, if care is not taken, to the point of inflicting serious damage? If the Church of our day is persecuted in France as it has already been in Germany, Italy and Switzerland, you may be sure this will be the work of Freemasonry.

Moreover, what Leo XIII has just been saying about social conditions in Russia, Germany and France<sup>47</sup>, shows that the head of God’s children is deeply concerned with the incessant attacks of Satan’s slaves. The world has not been faced with such a grave crisis for a very long time. We should expect to see a terrible conflict, the repercussions of which will be felt all over the world and for many years to come.

### The salt of the earth loses its flavour

The prophet said to sinful Jerusalem, “*Perditio tua ex te*—your perdition is your own” (Hos 13:9). Unfortunately, this is all too true of our own times. Enemies from without would be a lot less frightening, if within the evil weren’t also so great. Who can doubt that the salt of the earth has lost its savour—not everywhere, but at least in vast spheres of the world?

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<sup>46</sup> The **First International**, 1864-1876, was an international organization which aimed at uniting a variety of different left-wing socialist, communist, and anarchist groups and trade union organizations that were based on the working class and class struggle.

<sup>47</sup> *Quod apostolici muneris*, [https://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/leo\\_xiii/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_l-xiii\\_enc\\_28121878\\_quod-apostolici-muneris\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/holy_father/leo_xiii/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_28121878_quod-apostolici-muneris_en.html)

Woefully neglected seminary studies mean that lay-people receive a deplorable level of instruction and, without formation, their faith will soon be blown away like stubble in the blast. Zeal for the salvation of souls has vanished from pastors' hearts and the sheep are wandering in poisoned pastures. There is neither light to show them the way in the night that has fallen nor fervor to wake those who have fallen asleep on the edge of the chasm. This state of affairs is not absolutely universal, but it is widespread!

This is why we must sit down and think very hard, and having thought very hard we must act. How? We will speak about that in another talk.

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## THE EIGHTEENTH MEDITATION.

### What can we do about it

*“Vos estis lux mundi, vos estis sal terrae—You are the light of the world; you are the salt of the earth”* (Mt 5:13-14).

In my previous talk I endeavoured to diagnose the evils from which the world is suffering today. Must we leave it at that? Must we sit down and groan in despair as we watch things hurtling towards ruin? For heaven’s sake, no! God made the nations capable of being healed and as long as they retain a spark of Christianity they can be restored to life. We have every right to put the same question to our contemporary Catholics as Jeremiah did to the Jews, *“Numquid resina non est in Galaad, aut medicus non est ibi? Quare ergo non est obducta cicatrix filiae populi mei?”*—Is there no balm in Gilead, no healer there? Why does new flesh not grow over the wound of the daughter of my people?” (Jer 8:22). Yes, there are still remedies for those who are ill. Yes, there are still doctors who can cure them. Yes, the children of the Church can still be restored to spiritual health. But what are these remedies?

I have boiled them down to six: 1° prayer; 2° frequentation of the sacraments; 3° an austere life; 4° solid religious instruction; 5° preaching of the Word; 6° social outreach.

#### I.—Prayer

We cannot repeat often enough: the Revolution has very powerful allies—that formidable array of human passions and lusts, mobilized and sent into action by hell’s command. And in order to repel and overcome this multitude of the satanic host we must “take to the air,” we must enter a world beyond, that of prayer.

What we lack most today are men of prayer. We need men who can place themselves between heaven and earth and say to God, *“Parce, Domine, parce populo tuo—Spare, O Lord, spare your people”* (cf J1 2:17), and keep on saying it with the determination to be heard. It is undeniable that, in ages past, prayers rising from mountain, forest and desert had a powerful effect in touching God’s justice, upset with the world.

But it's not just in solitude and in the shadows of the night that we've got to pray. We must pray and get people to pray in the heart of our big cities. We must nourish in souls a hunger and a thirst for prayer. The more we run away, the more we allow the Revolution to run its course, the more Christian life will disappear. So, let us encourage the faithful to pray.

There are isolated regions where prayerful habits, acquired long ago, persist to this day in the midst of the general neglect of those around them. So why not encourage these habits of frequent prayer and why not form certain classes to engage in the presence prayer?

## II.—Frequenting the Sacraments

One of the most distressing facts of life is that men have to be pushed to make their Easter duty. What! To think that God's own food is provided for them—and they only take advantage of it once a year.

Why? We are asked. The answer is easy—it's hard to find priests; they are all so busy. To begin with, the priests are not so busy as it is said. Then, are we not turning around in a vicious circle? There are not enough priests, and this is why we don't go to confession. But it is precisely because we don't go to confession that priestly vocations do not arise. A wise parish priest will hear confessions often, in order to attract vocations, and when he has found them, he will thereby have provided them with more confessors.

But in order to pick out vocations he must take care of children. He must train them for Communion, especially those who have just received Communion for the first time. This is how he sets about reforming people's behaviour. This is where the transformation of souls begins. A young Christian, having been well prepared for his First Communion, will be convinced that he ought to receive Our Lord frequently. He may later on lose his fervor—and even his innocence when temptations to impurity begin to assail him. But of this we may be sure: his soul will have received an indelible mark and it will not be long before he reverts to the Christian habit of turning for strength to that Divine Master who dwells in the tabernacle. So, push people to Communion, including those who seem so reluctant. Their reluctance will soon disappear if we have the desire to see it so.

I know there are many priests who dislike having to hear anyone's Confession, but what good would not be done if they were more drawn to the confessional? So let us push men to Confession—and to Communion. If we keep it up, society will slowly but surely begin to take a new turn. But in order to succeed, we must love the Eucharist. Deep, deep down in our souls, there must be a sacred fire where the causes of Jesus Christ burn brightly. We must not simply wait for the sick to come; we must offer them the remedy. And to do so, there must take place an intimate alliance between the heart of Jesus and that of the priest.

### **III.—An austere life**

#### **a) react against cowardice and complacency**

How do most Christians live? What cowardice and complacency! How often they seek out every convenience and comfort! What irritating habits they've fallen into!

To begin rowing upstream, we'll have to face great trials and who can say whether Providence wants to spare us from them given the present slump in agriculture and commerce? What one does not want to do willingly must sometimes be done forcibly. Life will impose its own austerity when we are reduced to dying of hunger. No doubt these are terrible things to imagine, but, alas, (and I tremble to have to say it) if God puts us to the test, won't we have deserved it?

Ah, let us begin by practising more austerity in our own personal life and soon it will be easier to preach it to others. Let us reduce our own standard of living and then we'll have the right to ask others to do the same. For, after all, the demands of maintaining a certain level of material well-being have taken on the most appalling proportions. Who can be expected to contribute to charitable causes when he can never get enough for himself? Ask Christians to give to charity and let us give them an example. Let us learn how to deprive ourselves and we will see others following suit.

#### **b) Appease God's justice**

An austere life has another advantage. We paint such a fantastic picture of God's infinite goodness as if God weren't infinitely good because he is infinitely just and as if, in the order of divine perfections, these two attributes weren't inseparable. Let us therefore trust in God's goodness to forgive us our trespasses, but on condition that we endeavour to appease his justice by a life of due austerity. This austerity, taking on a penitential character, will be nothing more than the attitude we should have in recognition of the rights of God. By our example let us encourage Christians to penitence and God will allow himself to be moved.

Far from this, how many Christians push themselves right up to the edge of the abyss of what it is permissible? They can't imagine that, once God's anger has been ignited, it is not simply a question of adding no further fuel to the fire, but of extinguishing it by the reparation that is called for.

### **IV.—Solid Religious Instruction**

Unfortunately, we don't study enough, not nearly enough and the result is that we teach poorly. We imagine ourselves capable of imparting adequate instruction to common lay-people...and it's there we make a huge mistake! Whoever has taken part in examining young priests a few years after their ordination can tell you what remains of their theology when they

are questioned. What ignorance! How much they have forgotten from their years of study!

Now, if well-educated young men, prepared by several years of intense study, are unable to answer the questions they knew they were going to be asked, can you expect that the same knowledge will remain alive in the spirit of men who have been constantly taken up with material concerns? People need to be reminded again and again of the fundamental truths, that they be explained clearly, that they be placed within their reach. This repetition of the fundamental truths requires constant work. Furthermore, human beings are animals that imitate; when they see priests treating teaching lightly, is it surprising, then, that they in their turn do not respect what they are taught?

The indifference of the catechist explains perfectly well the indifference of the one being catechized. What doubts arise in the minds of young people because those charged with teaching them fundamental truths do it without any conviction about what they're teaching! The one who teaches thinks he can treat fundamental truths as if they don't really matter and then is surprised when his pupils treat them with contempt; or rather, he is not surprised because he couldn't care less.

## V.—Preaching the Word

### a) practical and effective

What can be said of preaching nowadays? Ah, it's enough to make you groan! "*Verba et voces, praeterea que nihil*—words and sounds and beyond that, nothing!" (a popular saying based on Ovid). We compose beautifully sounding phrases as in the days of Massillon<sup>48</sup>; we try to imitate Fr. Lacordaire. We puff our self up with foolish pride and put on a more or less well laundered surplice—and that's as far as it goes! What remains of the gospel message? We can ask ourselves: did we give any message at all and did it have anything to do with the gospel? This is serious!

Preaching must have three aims: to instruct, by presenting the truth and making it interesting in such a way that, having been enlightened, people will want to learn more about it; to convince and persuade, in a word, to convert; and finally to sanctify, that is to say, to lift your listeners up onto a higher plane. How many of us are sufficiently instructed to instruct others—especially to instruct men? How many of us hate sin sufficiently to convey it to sinners? How many of us burn with a desire for holiness so that we kindle the flame thereof in the souls of those called to it?

### b) founded on prayer

When will we return to truly apostolic preaching, based on a

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<sup>48</sup> A French Churchman (1663-1742) who became known as an outstanding preacher. An Oratorian, he was consecrated bishop of Clermont-Ferrand and elected to the Académie française.

practice of prayer whereby we allow ourselves to be the Lord's instruments, on studies that allow us to teach clearly, at a level consistent with intelligent congregations, and with a love for souls saved by the blood of Our Lord and that we want at all cost to snatch from the jaws of hell? Are we well and truly convinced that God still desires saints and that we need to prepare them for him whether by preaching that inspires them or by wise direction that forms them and fosters in them a desire to strive for everything to which God calls them? The ways are many but all of us could do a lot more than we are actually doing. This effort must come from the heart of a priest, especially if he is also a religious.

Lord, give us many holy priests and holy religious who, apart from their public activities, continue to develop an interior life capable of bringing souls to the light of the truth and the flames of love.

## VI.—Social Outreach

### a) based on Our Lord's example

“*Evangelizare pauperibus misit me*; he sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor (Lk 4:18). Apparently such was the program Jesus Christ drew up for himself and he gives as proof of his mission that the poor were receiving such glad tidings—*pauperes evangelizantur* (Lk 7:22).

Who looked after the poor in those days? Nowadays it's still worse—the poor are being looked after in view of their perversion. In those days there were vast hordes of slaves under the rule of hard task-masters, many of them used them to satisfy their evil passions. Today we make of the masses instruments of our ambitions and the slaves of lies. The loss of faith and of hope for things to come has limited their appetite to material pleasures and uprooted from their hearts any fiber of love. Hatred alone is allowed to flourish there.

### b) connect it to charity

Well, we must start all over again to evangelize the poor. We must look after them—we must see to all their needs in advance.

If there is one sign of hope for the future, it is the devoted care with which the poor and the working class are being served by a number of priests and stout-hearted laypeople. To be sure, there are many organizations. The Conferences of St. Vincent de Paul, the Association of St. Francis Regis<sup>49</sup>, working men's circles, youth ministry, the Association of St. Francis de Sales<sup>50</sup> are not, on their own, going to save France;

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<sup>49</sup> In the 19th century, after the French Revolution, the diocese of Viviers (Ardèche, France,) organized an association to support the poor in the region, especially through teaching. The Association was named after St. Jean-François Regis, a 17th century Jesuit and rural missionary who worked in the wake of the Wars of Religion that devastated the church in France, especially in rural regions.

<sup>50</sup> Fr. Henri Chaumont, ordained in 1864 for the Archdiocese of Paris, found a lay association in 1869-1870 to address what he saw as the harmful results of rationalism, the growth of atheism, and the expansion of industrialization. He was inspired by the life and teachings of St. Francis de Sales.

although humble and modest, banded together in a common bond of charity, as you would like to see, they are undeniably preparing the way for a powerful army.

We must look after working people. We must look after those who are neglected, go out to meet them, preach to them about things they do not yet know, show them the way of reconciliation and of healing, teach them the positive value of human suffering. Do this, and you will be surprised to see how, little by little, peace returns to souls and how this peace, once restored to souls that have gone astray but created to be good, bring about the triumph of the Church and of Jesus Christ in the world.

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## THE NINETEENTH MEDITATION.

### Teaching

*“Euntes ergo, docete omnes gentes.—Go, therefore, and teach all nations”* (Mt 28:19).

#### **The mission of teaching**

When Our Lord Jesus Christ commissioned the Apostles to go and teach all nations, he thereby commissioned their successors and whomever these successors might delegate for this important function. The office of teaching belongs by right to our bishops who hand it over, retaining the responsibility thereof, to men and women whom they judge competent: priests, religious and Christian lay people. Teaching is organized on a diocesan basis, subject to episcopal control, just as in the universal Church bishops are charged with teaching the faith under the jurisdiction of the Pope. The Church is one in doctrine because it comes under one supreme teacher to whom its other teachers submit.

However, I am not going to discuss the subject of teaching from this broad perspective. My present concern is with those who actually preside over the classroom, in particular with our teaching religious. I would like to deal with three questions:

- 1° What must our students unlearn?
- 2° What must they be taught?
- 3° How?

#### **I.—What Must Our Students Unlearn?**

Our classroom is like a garden. Before planting the good seed we must tear out the weeds. There are so many nowadays that we are daunted by the task of having to remove them and replace them by truth in the young minds confided to our care. Let us consider what we have to remove.

##### **a) False ideas, home-grown**

Take a look at the families some of these boys come from. You have no idea of the false notions they can pick up at home. There are the scattered remnants of Voltairian philosophy from a father who studied at the State University. He may not have taken such philosophy too seriously and may not be what we would call a “free thinker,” but...And what about the

mother? She may well be pious and have exerted enough influence to have her son sent to a good Christian school, but during the summer holidays pressure will be brought to bear on the young man to free himself from the clerical yoke, by the declaration of misleading and dangerous theories. It is during these days of pleasurable relaxation that his father may decide to take him in hand, telling him this, that and the other about what he thinks he ought to know—undermining the efforts his teachers have made to instill faith into an innocent young heart. And if the father is inclined to be cynical about religion, he may well be successful. And what can the mother do if she is weak, and he the kind of son who invariably contradicts her?

#### **b) Books and newspapers**

What about the million and one ideas that have found their way into print? Many a young newspapersman has been led astray by what he picked off of his father's book-shelf or by the romantic novels that were mother's delight. We know the kind of books being published nowadays: downright indecent books that deprive young people of their faith by destroying their innocence. And as for newspapers, we know the harm they do, especially to ignorant people by exciting their curiosity. How many pious novels have paved the way for rotten ones! How many cheap magazines have introduced their young readers to what can best be described as poisonous filth!

You have no idea of the harm done by books and newspapers that claim to be neutral, and never mention God, Our Lord, the Virgin, or the Saints, which leave out all reference to whoever and whatever ought to furnish the imagination of Christian children. Christian concepts and Christian illustrations are carefully omitted so as to convey the impression that all these children need become is good citizens.

#### **c) Other schools**

We must make a big effort to assist a student transferring from an establishment that is hardly Christian to one that claims to be totally Christian. We have to remove those false notions of autonomy, permissiveness and skepticism that have already taken root. What absurdities, let alone blasphemies, must we not expect him to utter? We have to stop him at least from corrupting his new classmates if there is any hope of bringing him round to better attitudes. If not, then we must not hesitate to send him back where he came from—to those teachers who made such a mess of his formative years by leading him astray as soon as he was old enough to think for himself.

#### **d) Modern trends**

The air we breathe has now become polluted, the moral atmosphere as much as, according to certain doctors, the physical atmosphere. The consequence is that young people are being exposed to all kinds of unhealthy influences. Not even the strictest supervision can prevent it, because half the time we don't even notice what's going on.

We cannot protect our students by wrapping them up in a cotton



cocoon. We must fortify their intellects, and I am going to endeavor to show you how.

## II.—What Must Be Taught?

First and foremost, the Catholic faith—the whole of it—in all its majesty, immensity and infinity, in its emphatic assertion of God's prerogatives, in its explanation of mysteries that become clearer and clearer to young minds, as they grow.

### Catholic truth in its unity and fullness

Catholic doctrine is one, and this unity must be felt, no matter from which angle we propound it. We can talk about God's Word (and that is how we ought to begin) or we can review the various dogmas of our faith. What we believe can be summed up in our fundamental belief of three persons in one God: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, the Father who created us, the Son who redeemed us, and the Holy Spirit who sanctifies us. What we must do is likewise summed up in the three theological virtues: faith, hope and charity—charity, according to St. Augustine, being the living expression of the other two.

We must teach these basic truths, and those that flow from them: God's power, his authority, and his right to reward or punish us. It is regarded as tactful not to mention hell too often, but why should we surrender to this weakness? We are doing people a favor by putting the fear of God into them. So many are in need of it!

### Catholic truth with some examples

Catholic truth must be taught with examples. How wrong it is to neglect the lives of the saints: their self-sacrifice, their zeal, their love of God and their neighbor! It is of paramount importance to recount the great deeds of our spiritual ancestors. The Church has its honor role, the record of its children's triumph in their warfare against the power of evil.

There is nothing like reading the lives of the saints to make you want to imitate them, nothing so uplifting as the account of their virtues. They give us courage. We ask ourselves as St. Augustine did, "*Tu non poteris quod isti, quod istae?*"—What these men and women did, why can't I?" (*Confessions* VIII, 11). It is the very best way to deal with a young person in need of conversion. Show him what a servant of God can do once he has made up his mind to do it.

To be beneficial, religious teaching must be both direct and indirect at the same time.

### Direct religious teaching

This means that it must take place at regular periods in the curriculum, and the students must be expected to take it at least as seriously

as any other subject. We ourselves must take special care in the preparation of our religion classes. A teacher who neglects this responsibility is as guilty as a chef who neglects the main course. Such insufficient preparation deserves the reproach of Jeremiah, “*Parvuli petierunt panem et non erat qui frangeret eis*—Children beg for bread, but no one gives them a piece” (Lam 4:4).

#### **Constant, indirect religious teaching**

Teaching must also be indirect. Let me explain what this means. We cannot turn every class into a religion class. What we can and ought to do, no matter what subject we are teaching, is to take Christianity into account. This is the spirit in which we ought to teach, and it requires special preparation on our part.

What I call indirect teaching lasts the whole day long. It shapes and guides students all the time, revealing God’s presence, his power, his commandments, his justice, his goodness and his mercy. Mind you, it takes some Christian endurance to keep this up! We are teaching more than docility and good behavior. Teach holiness. Show students how important it is to repent, to make allowances where allowances are due, to render service to everyone as St. Paul demands. Everything begs to be taught. And we must keep on teaching it. Once we loosen our grip we are in for a more than unpleasant surprise; the spiritual edifice we have taken so much time and trouble to build up will come tumbling down.

Need I say this must be a team effort on our part? How many teachers there are who by thoughtlessness, by disdain, if not by deliberate opposition, seem bent on destroying the good work of their colleagues! It happens not once in a while but often. They take delight in demolishing what others have built up. I’ve met the type. Their influence in Christian institutions is disastrous: for the teachers whose efforts they paralyze; and for the students, whose faith they try to drag down to their own level, which I can assure you was not very high.

## **II.—How Must We Teach?**

Several conditions are essential.

#### **With respect**

We must teach with respect. Woe to a teacher whose teaching is nothing more than bad entertainment. This doesn’t mean excluding a note of enthusiasm or a spark of humor that will endear students to us. Distinguish disrespectful lightness from a teacher’s lively presentation.

We must also respect our students. We shouldn’t impose on them some farfetched ideas on the pretext that they’re mysteries. It’s enough to require faith where the Church demands it. Go as far as the Church, but where the Church does not wish to impose a burden, we must not only permit but encourage individual liberty. Such liberty in non-essentials

disposes us to obey all the more promptly when it comes to essentials. Instead of trying to force a person to believe, why not indicate the various options the Church would be prepared to admit in given circumstances? Take the definition of Our Lady's Immaculate Conception or that of papal infallibility. Was it so difficult to foresee these definitions inspired by the Holy Spirit? Evidently not. We were not obliged to make an act of faith, but we could have guessed that the Church would one day do so.

#### **With conviction**

We must teach with conviction. The teacher who his students sense is unconvinced is the worst of all teachers. His words do incalculable harm. He is like those scribes and Pharisees Our Lord mentions, seated on the chair of Moses, who do not practice what they preach. For them, teaching is just a job. They are being paid to say certain things whether or not they are true. They are mercenaries, and one senses it. Alas, you cannot deceive young people. It's as if they have an unerring sixth sense that lets them know them whether they are sitting in the presence of a believer or a cynic. I personally regard unconvinced teachers as a plague to be gotten rid of.

How different are those individuals whose deep convictions burst forth and are revealed in their every word, in their every gesture, in their very appearance, in their whole life! How you can see them carefully tending what has been entrusted to them. It is the greatest of treasures, and they know it, and their students become as convinced of it as they are. No wonder these young intellects flourish in the face of a message spoken with such conviction by lips dedicated to the cause of truth! They find no difficulty in accepting what their teacher so passionately believes in. So it is that the soul is really prepared to receive the rich seed; if the good seed doesn't sink in, it won't be the fault of the sower.

#### **With love**

We must teach with love. It is easy to understand a teacher's love: for example, St. Jerome's for Cicero; St. Augustine's for Virgil and the Platonists. The story goes that St. Jerome was scourged by an angel for being too fond of this beautiful pagan, Latin literature. St. Augustine in his Confessions reproaches himself for having loved books other than the Bible. Without exaggeration, we must admit that there is much there to be admired, but nowadays we do come across plenty of examples of foolish admiration, which can make people look foolish.

But between loving the noblest products of human genius and loving the truth, goodness and beauty of God Himself there is quite a difference. Allow me to emphasize that there is nothing in the whole of creation so worthy of our admiration and love as divine perfection and its manifestation in God's dealings with His creatures. What and who is so admirable as to compare with our God, our creator, our redeemer, our sanctifier? What and who is there for us to be enthusiastic about, if we cannot be enthusiastic about Him?

We must love truth. We must love those to whom we communicate the truth. And we must love the various means whereby truth is communicated. When our hearts are aflame with this fire of love, our students will feel it, and they will come to catch fire as well.

**Witnessing to the truth**

We must teach with the spirit of the apostles and martyrs, and with the spirit of the Divine Precursor, John the Baptist. We too have been sent to bear witness to the truth. So we must respect the deposit of tradition and beseech God that wherever we are mirrors of his teaching that we not be too unworthy of such a noble mission.

This sums it up. Satan knows only too well what he is doing when he tries to destroy Christian teaching by closing Christian schools. Evil is powerful; all the more reason for us to fight it by teaching and preaching “in and out of season; for the time will come when people will grow tired of sound doctrine”; weaker spirits will simply not have the strength to resist. “*Erit enim tempus ubi sanam doctrinam non sustinebunt*” (2 Tim 4:3).

**Without ever becoming discouraged**

It is up to us never to lose heart. If they suppress the schools we run in the light of day, then we’ll go underground, in the catacombs. “The word of God cannot be held captive—*Verbum Dei non est alligatum*” (2 Tim 2:9).

I remember visiting, just over a year ago, the crypt where St. Peter used to baptize. How small it is! And yet, it is the cradle of the faith of Rome. How dark it is! Yet see what truth issued from such tombs, light issuing from the very depth of darkness, from these narrow passages cluttered with the bones of these first Christians (chiefly those of slaves emancipated by the emperor Claudius). It is from here that the preaching of the gospel was launched to the ends of the earth.

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## TWENTIETH MEDITATION.

### Education

“*Instaurare omnia in Christo*—restoring all things in Christ” (Eph 1:10).

Teaching is not enough. We must be not only teachers but educators—and it is much more difficult to educate than simply to teach. To throw light on this extensive subject of education, I will ask three questions, around which others will, I hope, be treated: What are the qualities of a good educator? Who must be educated? What model should a Christian teacher follow?

#### I.—The Qualities of an Educator

The Christian educator worthy of this name would be a paragon of all the virtues, and would teach all of them more by good example than by words. But I insist on the following four virtues:

##### **An educator must be: patient**

1° He must be patient. To set about educating and expect everything to run smoothly is about the worst form of self-illusion. “*O generatio incredula et perversa, usquequo patiar vos?*—O faithless and perverse generation, how long will I be with you?” (Mt 17:16), exclaimed the Master of masters, Our Lord. Yes, we need patience, lots of patience. It is above all to education that we must apply the words of St. James, “*Patientia autem opus perfectum habet*—and let patience have its perfect work” (Jas 1:4).

The gardener has to wait a long time before seeing certain seeds appear in his flower-bed. They enjoy being “waited for.” It’s the same with children. Some of them can be really slow developers, and it is often these who bear the most precious fruit.

Patience is never more necessary than when we come up against that mixture of daredevil and devil-may-care which forms the basic character of a young person. He may be good-hearted, but he can drive you crazy by his inattentiveness. As for his being well behaved...? Follow his little schemes, his satisfaction at having discovered his teacher’s most vulnerable spot, not to mention his nasty ability, of which he himself is sometimes unaware, to

infuriate those in charge of him. Oh yes, we have every cause to pray for patience when we come across cases such as these. These kinds of students are by no means the worst. They often turn out to be the best, once it dawns on them how virtuous we must have been to put up with them.

#### **Intelligent**

2° He must be intelligent. An educator who is not intelligent will be exposed to every conceivable misfortune. Nobody sizes him up better than a student. They may or may not be studying their books, but they are certainly studying their teacher. He is the object of their constant and critical research. Woe betide the teacher if he manifests any signs of being a fool!

There is but one cure for this malady: a tenfold increase in holiness. In this way, he will inspire respect, and his faults will disappear in the esteem that he will sometimes inspire. I say ‘sometimes’ because he can be mistaken as well.

I’m not saying he ought to be a genius. A genius would lose patience. But he must have the tact and good sense that can disarm these pestering students by keeping his cool, because oftentimes this is the whole battle. You see, they are trying to bait you like a bull, in the hope of getting you to lose your temper. When the teacher has had as much as he can take and does lose his temper, students have gained the upper hand, they have won the round, and the joy of having got the better of you more than makes up for all the punishments you can conceivably inflict.

Very often silence is the teacher’s most effective weapon. When students no longer know what’s going on in the teacher’s mind, they will cease tormenting him and, having lost the battle, will submit.

A teacher must be smart enough to nip in the bud certain serious matters but not to fly off the handle at something that, in itself, is a trifle. Treat the minor matters with the contempt they deserve and they will soon die down.

This is the litmus test for certain teachers who think that all is lost because their personal dignity has suffered a setback. Forget yourself and your personal dignity! By learning to laugh at yourself, you can avoid many an upset, many a deep-seated grudge, which can at times lead to cruel and unjust measures on the part of those in authority. Headmasters must support teachers even though, alas, teachers too often make themselves unsupportable!

How can this be remedied? In a measure of intelligence that they don’t possess. So the only thing to do with such teachers is to replace them without handing a silver trophy to the young rebels. You know, there are many circumstances in which the best way to turn your students into “nice guys” (if I can be forgiven such an expression) is to become a “nice guy” yourself—not to the extent of allowing them to take liberties they would soon abuse of, but to the point of showing them without malice that you see

through them and are not afraid of them.

#### **Conscientious**

3° The teacher must be conscientious. What is essential is to train students' consciences. A tremendous amount of harm can be done to tender youth if we yield on a matter of conscience and Christian honor. They will quickly jump to the (usually erroneous) conclusion that their teachers are not men of faith. What use to a Christian school is a teacher whom students don't believe in? This often spells ruin to the whole establishment. I have seen, over the past forty years and more, only one really hypocritical teacher who succeeded in deceiving the students—and he was a downright bad priest. How often did the youngsters themselves predict that such or such a teacher would not persevere in his vocation! How often they were right—and they knew it long before the headmaster even noticed!

#### **Persevering**

4° A Christian teacher must be a man of perseverance. I have said that, even in the best of schools, there is a continual tug-of-war going on between students and teachers. If the teacher knows how to stick it out, without ever losing his temper or self-possession, then what conquests lie ahead!

In general, students are “curable,” provided one knows how to treat them appropriately. The bottom-line is having a persevering courage. This is often lacking in young teachers; they too have their faults, and discouragement is often one of them. When they fail it is in direct proportion to the high opinion they have of themselves.

They experience some failure—so, they conclude, what else is there to do? This is very false reasoning. Having failed, they ought to decide to do better next time. It is here that experience comes to their aid as an invaluable gift; unfortunately, it sometimes comes too late, after too many trials and errors.

#### **Motivated by true zeal**

Finally, the Christian educator must be animated with true zeal. The task may be back-breaking, but it isn't thankless; education is a tree that bears rich fruit. He must root this zeal in Our Lord's love for souls; he must love them as the Savior himself loved them. Let him make no mistake: one soul attracted by what is good will produce a hundredfold in the future because it will have been given a Christian preparation, because it will have been saved from many falls, because it will have been supported in time of need, and because it will have received encouragement at just the right time. All of its anxieties will have been addressed and it will set itself on the right path, never to go astray.

Such is the reward of a Christian teacher's zeal, one that is patient, intelligent, conscientious, and persevering.

Now let us turn to those whom we educate.

## II.—Who must be educated?

### Children who have contracted original sin

To this question one must answer: a rowdy gang of students of every age and character, of every capacity, on whom shine the dark rays of original sin. I do not deny that in some of them baptism seems to have been more effective than in others. But it would be more than foolish to “kid” ourselves. Beneath those rosy cheeks, those clear, limpid eyes, that innocent posture, lurks a corruption or, let us be more precise, an inclination toward corruption—that is quite evident at times.

It’s most regrettable, but that’s the way it is. And it’s a waste of time to groan and wring our hands in despair. We must put our hand to the plow and clear this field of thorns.

### Lower-level, middle-level, upper-level

Let us begin by separating them by age groups; a part of the work will already be thus done: lower-level, middle-level, upper-level. The lower-level students are more innocent and have a more naïve faith; they also have their faults, but they are more hidden, depending on the initial training they received at home. They have less self-control. They can usually be guided by thinking supernaturally of their First Communion...but, alas, there are cases when their own parents are already leading them astray.

What about the middle-level students? Theirs is a critical and troublesome age. In general, it is the period of moodiness. We must be very vigilant. We must check up on what they are talking about, what they are reading, the games they are playing, the habits they are developing. Without jumping to the conclusion that they are irremediably perverse or that a battle is raging within their soul (and here I warn the younger teachers not to interfere too quickly), we must supervise them very carefully, and be prepared to present an intelligent assessment to our superiors.

Thirdly, the upper-level students have to be treated specially. They are no longer children, but not yet men. We must help them to grow up. We still need to exert authority, and we still need to keep an eye on them. What we need most is greater trust. They respond to loyalty and it is usually the best way to get at them.

### Diverse forms of action to be exercised:

#### ° on the entire body

There are different kinds of action to be exercised with students. First, action which is aimed at the entire student body. Usually this has to do with instilling the spirit of the institution. What is this spirit? It is something more easily sensed than defined, that which makes a school *sui generis*, this school and not another.

The distinguishing marks of an Assumptionist school ought to be a sense of duty, loyalty, and frankness, a spirit of sacrifice, selflessness, and a



supernatural outlook. It is this and a lot more besides that can be sensed at every moment, without being able to reduce it to mathematical data or statistics. It's like recognizing the aspects of a figure without having to measure them with a compass.

Nevertheless, instilling this spirit is of the utmost importance, because, thanks to this spirit, students form one body, are united, love one another, help one another, and grow up with a greater appreciation of the single goal of their lives.

#### **° on groups**

Authority can also be exercised over groups of students. Classroom authority depends on the teacher. Divisional authority (each division comprising several classes) depends on the supervisor—monitor, and this may be the most important of all, if a supervisor is capable of doing it. Finally, the headmaster is responsible for certain meetings. In all of this a certain direction is given, which may be subconscious but is certainly of immense value.

#### **3° on each individual**

Here we are treading on far more delicate ground, and I recommend it to be left to those who have ultimate authority. It requires deep and lengthy experience of the human heart to avoid making disastrous mistakes. How often does it not happen that our most genuine zeal fails in the face of unforeseen problems coming from every direction! We allow our blood to boil over, our imagination to run wild, our passions to become aroused, a kind of unconscious ambition to carry us away, and a kind of love for our well-being to take root, one that holds us captive in its soft chains and that takes away our sense of devotion.

Let us not, however, be discouraged. What matters is to pursue our task but expect disappointments. Very often we will have laboured in vain—much sown and nothing reaped. The character of boys and young men is such that, when we least expect it, their independence rises to the surface and evil triumphs over good.

#### **The vicissitudes and difficulties of academic institutions**

But then, you will say, how depressing! Not at all. Since the Church began, how many disappointments have not workers in the vineyard faced? What about the fruit Our Lord himself gathered? Was he not the great “sign of contradiction” throughout his life—followed, then abandoned by the crowds who wanted to make him king one moment and plot against him the next? On Calvary he was deserted by his closest followers. He rose again, but they refused to believe it. Five hundred witnesses watched him ascend to Heaven, yet many continued to doubt. In spite of all the difficulties, the Church was established and the gates of heaven were opened by Jesus Christ, who conquered the powers of hell.

And so goes the story of any academic institution. It is a microcosm of divine society. The same things happen to it, the same ups and downs,

the only difference being that it is not guaranteed immortality. That is why one must have all the more zeal to maintain it, with a special concern for its divine dimension.

### III.—What model should a Christian teacher follow?

#### Jesus Christ, the only model

Jesus Christ and none other, “*Instaurare omnia in Christo*—restoring all things in Christ” (Eph 1:10). Restore all our students in Jesus Christ, by reshaping them in the light of this divine model.

We cannot expect all our students to understand this from the get go. Is that surprising? Show me those Christian families that instil only supernatural principles in the hearts and memories of their children, who from the first buds of their reason only provide them with the great and fertile waters of divine life. Ah, how rare it is today to find young people whose first training at home has been pure, innocent and strong, characterized by a hatred for sin and zealous for what is right; young people to whom one has spoken of heaven and its hopes, young people to whom one has proposed the saints as models of true greatness and true moral beauty.

What parents have neglected, Christian teachers must endeavour to supply, especially to those entrusted to them for their First Communion. In the name of this first visit of their God in the depths of their souls, how much they can be taught to know and love him, to nourish a horror for whatever is sinful, to set aside sinful habits, and to break with a past which parental vigilance has not sufficiently guarded against impurity! And after their First Communion how much we can still speak to them about Jesus Christ and the example of the virtues he gave us to follow. We can reflect on every detail of his life, meditate on each aspect of his perfection, be inspired by each of his sacrifices.

To be sure, the picture we paint for these young people is quite a bit different from pagan virtue and its heroes, a pagan virtue which, more often than not, was nothing more than a tissue of lies, spread like a blanket over a cesspool of corruption. So let us show them Jesus Christ. May we mirror him both in what we say and how we live.

#### The Christian teacher must fashion Christ in souls

Happy the teacher who stands like a sculptor facing his model, who taps his chisel and with his hand reproduces in marble the noble features of the figure in front of his very eyes. Happy the teacher who carves Jesus Christ into the very soul of those young people confided to his care, no matter how much the marble may resist. A softer substance wouldn't last so long or retain the likeness. Here is a student who has given his teachers no end of trouble, defied them in every possible way and for a very long time. But the day comes at last when grace takes root, and the harder it was to

penetrate his heart, the firmer now his resolution and the more eager his response. It doesn't always happen like this, but history provides us with examples, none more striking than that of our patriarch, St. Augustine.

So let us carry on with our work. Let us speak of Jesus Christ. Let us make Jesus Christ loved and imitated—in this consists the precise difference between an education that is Christian and one that is not. Despite the dangers that threaten us, let us carry on forming living images of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ, having been thus multiplied (if I may speak this way), having triumphed in the intimate depths of those remade in his image will shine forth in a society regenerated by his grace and by the work of Christian educators.

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## TWENTY-FIRST MEDITATION.

### Our Vows

*“Vota mea Domino reddam—My vows to the Lord I will make”* (Ps 21:26 Vulgate)

David from his throne offered his vows to the Lord like a sacrifice that he knew would be most pleasing to the Lord. Vows have been retained under the new law—not only retained but sanctified and consecrated. Nothing is more useful than taking vows, provided that they are taken seriously.

This is an extremely weighty topic and I will try to treat it as simply as possible. I may not be able to say everything; I hope, however, to say the essential.

#### I.—Vows, A Fulfilment of Love

Let us begin by stating this principle that love is the fullness or the completion of law. Christian law is a law of love, but it may happen that this love, because of its very fullness, is too great to be confined to the law. To demonstrate its intensity, it needs something more; it needs more than a list of rules and regulations, more than a list of “do’s and don’ts.” It needs counsels, not only what God orders, but that to which he invites.

There are many “evangelical counsels.” However, the Church recommends three main ones to those who are seeking perfection: poverty, whereby we strip ourselves of material possessions; chastity, whereby we surrender sensual pleasures, and obedience, whereby we submit our will to another.

Now a vow is more than a good resolution whereby the human will, bent on the acquisition of this or that good habit, decides to do something good or not to do something bad. A vow is a formal promise to do, or not to do, this or that, having thought it over carefully and decided that the promise in question is intended to give order to one’s life. Obviously, when we pay attention to the voice within, something from the innermost recesses of our heart says, “*Amice, ascende superius*. Friend, come up higher” (Lk 14:10). Yes, but how much higher does the Lord wish you to come up? This is the secret of God who calls, and that of the will that responds. Not all are called to make vows; but some are invited to do so.

### **Three fundamental conditions**

So what are the implications of the binding up that a vow entails? There are three conditions: 1° They must be taken deliberately; otherwise, most of them are rendered null and void. If one is motivated by some spur-of-the-moment enthusiasm, one may think he is making a vow, but he isn't. So it is of the utmost importance that our vows be taken after mature reflection and serious self-scrutiny. A vow taken carelessly and superficially would be an insult to the God to whom we offer it. So you wish to vow something to God, do you? Very well, you are to be commended...as long as you really mean it.

2° A vow is something which stems from the human will. It's up to the intellect to weigh the "pros and cons," but it's up to the will to make the decision, to render, if I might say so, its own practical judgment in the matter. To do so, a level of personal energy is necessary.

3° But this isn't enough. One must make a formal promise that brings the resolution of the will to completion.

### **Formal acceptance by the Church**

So, deliberation, resolution, a formal promise—these are the basic elements of any vow, to which must be added, in the case of religious life, acceptance of the vows by the Church. The Church does not accept every kind of vow—it does not, for example, accept what are called "solemn" vows from the members of certain recently founded congregations. That's understandable. To be praiseworthy, any gift or promise has to be pleasing to whomsoever we present this gift or pronounce this promise. So if the Church says: "No, thank you," the vow has no reason to exist; it's as if it never took place.

## **II.—The Object of our Vows**

So whereas we are free to offer God something good which will please him, we are not free to offer him something which is bad and which he will certainly reject.

What we vow cannot, in principle, be something we are already obliged to do. Obligation comes under the heading of "Law"—and when it's a question of obeying the Law, we don't have to sit down and think it over. Since a vow goes beyond the law, it consists in an act of virtue and I am obliged to carry out this act as a result of the decision which my will has taken and offered to God.

Let me add that a vow is the most perfect sacrifice we can offer. Not only does it extend beyond the realm of obligation, but it touches a man in the deepest recesses of his being, the deliberation of his intellect and the decision-making power of his will. It implies an act of adoration, an acknowledgement of God's sovereignty. To break a vow is to destroy, or at least to retract, an act of adoration. It is a sin, therefore, to go back on one's

vows, unless one is dispensed for a superior motive involving some greater act of charity.

### III.—Observing our Vows

It is with fear and trembling that I broach the subject of observing the vows.

#### **The warnings from the Holy Spirit and from theology**

The Holy Spirit said, “*Quodcumque voveris, redde; multo enim melius est non vovere, quam post votum, promissa non reddere*. A vow made is to be a vow paid; far better to undertake nothing than to undertake what you do not fulfill” (Sir 5:3-4 Vulgate). Nothing, indeed, is more serious than vows made to God. They touch on God’s majesty and the perfection of our souls and often our very salvation.

St. Thomas tells us, “We must keep faith with God because of His supreme domain over all his creatures, especially all intelligent beings, because of his unceasing goodness towards us, and because of the promises we have made Him.” Three powerful reasons—we must consider ourselves fortunate to be linked to God by such an admirable threefold bond. Nevertheless, how many individuals rebel against divine authority, display a lack of gratitude toward Infinite Goodness, and, after having made solemn promises, shamefully back on their word?

#### **Violating one’s vows is an act of deplorable infidelity**

Does the Holy Spirit hesitate to compare violating vows with infidelity, “*Displicet Deo infidelis promissio*. An unfaithful promise displeases God” (Sir 5:3 Vulgate)? And so, when one has had the happiness of binding oneself by vows, one must spare no effort to remain faithful to holding fast to them. Isn’t this frightfully important? Can we insist on it too strongly?

For, after all, how many religious there are who make their vows and then seek to free themselves therefrom, forgetting these words, “No one who sets a hand to the plow and looks to what was left behind is fit for the kingdom of God” (Lk 9:62). Perhaps such infidelity comes from the fact that they haven’t thought enough about such a commitment, about the seriousness of the state of a soul who has so tightly bound itself to God and who can no longer keep its word. But what’s the use of merely thinking about it? Must we not banish all self-illusion so that, if temptation comes to assail us, we will know how to resist it?

### IV.—The Usefulness of Vows

#### **The vows are entirely for our benefit**

Is it useful to make vows? When we make a promise to another man,

it is in his interest rather than ours; in general, he is the one who demands a commitment from us in view of gaining some benefit from it. But when we make a promise to God, it can be to no one's advantage except our own. Whence this adage of St. Augustine: "*Quod Domino redditur, reddenti additur*. What is given to God enriches the donor"<sup>51</sup>.

Whatever we do for God brings its own reward. So think of the reward which will be ours for performing the greatest act of the Christian life—an act which becomes obligatory only because our own free will has made it so!

It has been said that our vows deprive us of absolute freedom. I will have something to say about this later on. Look at God Himself. Being absolutely perfect renders him incapable not only of sin but of imperfection; but does this imply any restriction of his freedom? On the contrary. The more perfect we become, the greater freedom we will enjoy, because perfection strengthens the power of our will.

Unquestionably, Jesus Christ did not have to make vows. Being God, and therefore infinitely perfect by nature, he could not promise himself to be any better than he already was; whatever he did was perfect by the mere fact of his doing it. Still, God does swear by himself, "*Quia per memetipsum juravi, dicit Dominus*. By myself I have sworn—oracle of the LORD" (Jer 49:13). But this was a promise, not a vow, referring to us, not to himself.

#### **The example of the apostles**

When we come to the Apostles, however, they could and did take vows and it is the Church's belief that they observed the counsels of the apostolic life to the letter and that they certainly lived in poverty and chastity. As for obedience, being moved by the Holy Spirit, they were in a special way dependent on him. So it is that St. Peter says, "*Obedire oportet Deo magis quam hominibus*. Judge for yourselves whether it is better to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). What is the heart of the matter—to know whether, because of their exceptional status, they observed all the evangelical counsels? The answer is clear for anyone who reflects on their role as foundation stones upon which the Church of Christ was built.

### **V.—Excellence of the Vows**

To take vows is an act of religion, worship, adoration. To take vows of religion is the greatest act of worship we can possibly pay to God.

#### **adoration**

A vow is an act of what we call "latria" or the homage due to God alone—it brings us into direct contact with God. Human acts are not good or evil in themselves—what makes them good or evil is the intention with

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<sup>51</sup> *Epistulae* (CPL 0262) - LLT-A -epist. 127, vol. 44, par. 6, pag. 25, linea 14 (*Letter 127 to Armentarius and Paulina*) (*Augustine&Letters&CPL&letter 127, vol. 44, par. 6, page 25,line 14*)

which they are performed. “*Nec ipsa virginitas, quia virginitas est, sed quia Deo dicata est, honoratur.* Virginitas is not commendable in itself, just because it’s virginitas—it becomes commendable by dedicating us to God”<sup>52</sup>. So if even virginitas derives its sole merit from the God to whom it is dedicated, how much more can the same be said of every other vow?

#### **submission**

A vow makes us less dependent on ourselves, and more dependent on God. I don’t need to dwell on this; it’s self-evident.

#### **Strengthening the will to do what is good**

Finally, a vow gives our will something of the unshakeable. If, on the one hand, obstinacy in sin increases its grievousness and malice, is it not evident, on the other hand, that steadfastness in the pursuit of goodness makes this goodness more meritorious? Look at God—how unchangeable he is! Taking a vow makes us imitate to some degree his changelessness. The reason why God cannot change is because he is already as perfect as can be. Isn’t it clear that this impossibility of changing to which the vow commits us allows us to participate in some way in God’s perfection?

#### **holocaust of the New Law**

This is why the state in which we dedicate ourselves to God’s glory and God’s service, with no restriction or reservation, is called the state of perfection. Furthermore, this is why the religious state is compared to a holocaust, which was the most complete form of sacrifice under the law of figures.

Pope St. Gregory also had this to say, “*Sunt quidam qui nihil sibimetipsis reservant, sed sensum, linguam, vitam atque substantiam quam perceperunt omnipotenti Deo immolant.* There are some who keep nothing back for themselves; they offer Almighty God their senses, their tongue, their very life and whatever they possess”<sup>53</sup>. What more could you want for a religious than to offer himself up as a perfect offering?

## **VI.—The Three Essential Vows**

Apart from the three principal “counsels” corresponding to the three vows of religion, religious are not bound by all the other evangelical counsels.

#### **The more specific counsels**

St. Thomas points out that some contradict each other. For example, a life that is purely contemplative doesn’t go hand in hand with a life of action and good works. Each religious family has its own particular

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<sup>52</sup> St. Augustine, *De sancta uirginitate* (CPL 0300) - LLT-A -cap. 8, par. 8, pag. 241, linea 22 (Augustine&On Holy Virginitas&CPL& chap. 8, par. 8, page. 241, line 22)

<sup>53</sup> *Homiliae in Hiezechielem prophetam* (CPL 1710) - LLT-A -lib. 2, hom. 8, linea 465 (Gregory the Great&Homilies on the Prophet Ezekiel&CPL& lib. 2, hom. 8, linea 465)



counsels. For the Carthusians, solitude; the Trappists, manual labour; the sons of Francis, surrender to Providence; the Dominicans, preaching...and this is what gives splendour to this great army of the Church, made up of so many different religious orders. Each regiment bears its own weapons, its own discipline, its own goal; they all form the most wonderful assembly of holiness that earth can offer heaven.

**The state of perfection**

No, I need not demonstrate that surrendering our possessions, our bodies and our free will adds up to perfection, because it is everything that a human being has and is.

But let us conclude by reminding ourselves that if the status of a religious is more sublime than that of the simple Christian layman, if his merits are greater, how much more serious are his abuses, how much more dreadful the violation of his sacred commitments.

May God preserve us from such misfortune. By allowing us to enjoy the privilege of our commitments, may He grant us the greatest happiness possible on earth as we await the deluge of delights he will shower on those who loved him the most and served him the most perfectly here below.

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## TWENTY-SECOND MEDITATION.

### Poverty

*“Quaerite primum regnum Dei et justitiam ejus, et haec omnia adjicientur vobis. Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness and all the rest will be added unto you” (Mt 6:33).*

*“In sudore vultus tui vesceris pane. By the sweat of your brow you shall eat bread” (Gn 3:19).*

The vow of poverty implies certain precise and stringent regulations upon which the Church insists before giving its approval to the establishment of any new religious Orders. This is not what I am going to speak about. That forms a special part of the novitiate curriculum. I don't want to spend time on that right now.

Today I want to tackle poverty from a different angle. What are its effects on the heart and soul of each individual religious? I will point out four major ones:

- 1° freeing us from worldly obligations;
- 2° giving us freedom of soul;
- 3° filling us with joy;
- 4° helping us to imitate Our Lord more perfectly.

#### I.—Freeing us from Worldly Obligations

##### Either God or mammon

*“Ubi enim est thesaurus tuus, ibi est et cor unum. Where your treasure is, there will your heart be” (Mt 6:21).* If you love the things of this world, the wealth and the pleasures it has to offer, how can you prevent your heart from growing roots?

*“Nemo potest duobus dominis servire. No one can serve both God and mammon.”* It can be a terribly difficult choice to make—but, having listened to the Master's voice, we cannot go back on our word. It is not easy to choose.

##### Mammon's friends

Look at the injustices committed by men who have sold their heart for gold and silver! It can happen to priests, even to religious—watch them

deteriorate once they have fallen in love with money. It is bad enough to love money for its own sake. It's a thousand times worse when one uses it to get involved in a thousand and one disorders—and we see this going on all around us.

#### **Simple Christians**

I am not speaking about those Christians who have been surrounded by riches from birth, and who may, indeed, live in style, but of whom it can be said what is said of the just man by the psalmist, "*Dispexit, dedit pauperibus, justitia ejus manet in saeculum saeculi*. He has given generously to the poor, and his justice remains forever and ever" (Ps 111: 9 Vulgate).

Let us not dwell on these men of whom great virtue was not expected even if, having riches, they never set their hearts on them and heeded the counsel of the Holy Spirit, "*Divitiae, si affluent, nolite cor apponere*. If your riches abound, do not set your heart on them" (Ps 61:11 Vulgate).

#### **The poor in spirit**

Let us address here those who, on the other hand, have taken the vow of poverty and who are trying hard to keep up the spirit of it. Nothing frees the heart from worldly cares like renouncing worldly wealth. Everybody on earth seems to want to be rich. The line between riches that are legitimate and those that are not is not always so clear; one's title to certain goods is often questionable and can often lead to all kinds of fights. So, if you renounce everything, what do you have to lose and what is there left for you to quarrel about? The religious community of which you form part may have to stick up for its corporate rights, but at least no one is attacking you personally.

#### **The Church's situation**

There is a lot of work that is being done in the Church today. It was stripped of its possessions and it is trying to keep its head above water. Perhaps some of its agents have become unduly preoccupied with this matter, but for the time being the Revolution is making quite sure we don't get overly encumbered and it will be some considerable time before we are ever in danger of becoming too rich. Meanwhile, what moral strength one has been given to say, "I began with nothing and if I was able to earn something, I freely gave it away."

How very important it is to retain one's freedom toward all and to be free of all obligations, except from the gratitude attached to one's benefactors! Ah! Let us maintain this freedom vis-à-vis the world! Let us prove to it how superior we are to it because we refuse to muddy our boots in its mire.

## II.—Giving Us Freedom of Soul

### It is the fruit of poverty

Freedom with regard to the world flows from a higher principle: freedom of the soul. This freedom consists in being the slave of no earthly desire and consists in following as closely as possible the words of the Lord's Prayer, "*Panem nostrum quotidianum da nobis hodie*. Give us this day our daily bread."

Absolute trust in God never lets us down. If, at times, God seems to take pleasure in putting our trust to the test, this is only to manifest his munificence when the time comes for him to show us he really cares.

### Having an experience of it

Interior freedom is the fruit of poverty. How do you expect to pray while dreaming of money? It is worthwhile trying to see how it works. Become attached to anything whatsoever; then see if you can pray half so well. All kinds of preoccupations and distractions will assail you every time you are supposed to be thinking of nothing but God.

I don't want to waste my time on those religious who hoard their monthly allowances and take pleasure doing so. How often do we not sense while dealing with such cases that they are chained to something which prevents them from flying straight up to heaven! Then take the wealth-worshipping, comfort-loving religious, what a scandalous impression they create and what fiendish glee we experience in showing them up for what they are!

The Holy Spirit says, "*Avaro nihil scelestius*. There is nothing more detestable than a miser" (Sir 10:8). Without putting this pronouncement to the test, I am not afraid to say that a religious' conversation will never focus on matters of heaven as long as the love of riches keeps him chained to earth.

See, on the other hand, the high esteem in which a greedless man is held by the world. I am not saying, to be sure, that the judgments of the world in this respect are more infallible than they are for anything else. I even admit, if you will, that the world may be wrong in its judgment of this or that man. But it does not go wrong in this basic principle of judgment that nobody is regarded as so noble as he who is selfless and that no one is so independent as he who wishes and asks for nothing.

## III.—Filling us with Joy

### Inimitable joy

It is an incontestable fact that joy reigns supreme especially in those religious Orders that are the poorest. Why is this so? Is it not because God repays them for what they have given up for his sake?

People seek riches so as to enjoy life; one renounces such enjoyment on earth when one practices poverty seriously. Then where do these seek to

find joy or hope to find it? If it is not here below, then they must be looking to the life hereafter. And who can take this hope away? The truly poor religious can say with all his heart, “*In te Domine, speravi, non confundar in aeternum*. In you, O Lord, have I hoped—let me never be put to shame” (Ps 30:2 Vulgate).

**Not possessing, but expecting**

We have (don’t I know it!) seen worldly men embrace the Church as a career. They kneel down before the bishop for the tonsure and say, “*Dominus pars haereditatis meae et calici mei*. The Lord is my portion and my cup” (Ps 15:5 Vulgate). And this portion they have their eyes on is some fat benefice!

However, as I have pointed out, we are in no way similar to them and I am not afraid of saying that that the cause of our joy is hope overflowing, “*Cum invocarem exaudivit me Deus justitiae meae, in tribulatione dilatasti mihi*. When I called upon him, the Lord of all goodness heard my cry, in my distress he has replenished my soul” (Psalm 4:2 Vulgate).

**The prayer of the poor is always heard**

God always hears the poor. “*Iste pauper clamavit, et Dominus exaudivit eum*. This poor man called, and the Lord answered him” (Ps 33:7 Vulgate). This is our greatest hope: to be heard by the mercy of God. Evidently, the simple fact that we call on the God does not free us from the consequences of poverty nor from what the world calls trials. But who can doubt that the Lord makes up for it by showering his blessings on the one who attaches himself to God and who considers him his treasure? “*Oculi omnium in te sperant, Domine, et tu das escam illorum in tempore opportuno. Aperis manum tuam et implet omne animal benediction*. The eyes of all look to you, O Lord and you give them their food in due season. You open wide your hand; and you fill all creatures with your blessings” (Ps 144: 15-16 Vulgate).

This is what David sang while under the law of figures, when earth’s bounty so often prefigured that of heaven and of divine hope. David trusted the Lord, nor was his trust in vain. Think of the many times he had to rely on God alone while Saul was after his blood. So let us learn to hope as David hoped. Let us accept the poverty to which he was subjected as a figure of the poor man, par excellence, Jesus, his descendant, and, like David, we will find our joy by relying on God alone, and deeply despising whatever is not God.

**IV.—Helping us to Imitate Our Lord more perfectly**

**Although rich, he became poor**

As God, Jesus was rich. Let us not forget, he made himself poor for

our sake. Why should he, unless it was to show us where to look for genuine wealth, which is none other than himself, the truth, of which he is author? Did he not assert, “*Ego sum verita*. I am the truth?” (Jn 14:6).

What a pity it is that we still lend an ear to the falsehood and vanity of this world! “*Filii hominum, usquequo gravi corde, ut quid diligitis vanitatem et quaeritis mendacium*. Sons of men, how long will you be dull in heart, so that whatever you love is in vain, and whatever you seek is false?” (Psalm 4:3 Vulgate). Jesus chose poverty. He left their holes to the foxes and their nests to the birds, while he himself possessed not a stone to lay his head on (Lk 11:58). So why must we continue to chase after shadows where we shall find neither truth, nor life, nor happiness?

#### **In every detail of his life**

Let us ponder in our hearts over and over again every detail of this poor life, from the very beginning in Nazareth where Mary, poor working woman, laboured to earn a living in the workshop of Joseph. And it was there that the mystery of the Incarnation took place. In fact, God sent His angel to greet her not in some palace but in a humble hovel.

To the scorn of his fellow-citizens, the Son of God chose to be born, to see the light of day, in a stable, “*eo quod non erat locus in diversorio...because there was no room in the inn*” (Lk 2:7). Let us follow him closely all along the way. Poor he was, and poor he continued to be. He began by earning his bread at the sweat of his brow; later he received from those to whom he preached the good news. Not a penny for himself! When he had to pay the temple tax (Mt 17:26), he worked a miracle and found the necessary amount in the mouth of a fish. When it came time to prepare the Passover meal, he appealed to the charity of one of his secret followers. As he hung on the Cross he had to entrust his mother, as poor as he was, to the care of John. When he died, he was buried in a tomb which did not belong to him—after being anointed with perfume and given a burial shroud furnished thanks to the kindness of Joseph of Arimathea and the holy women. That’s just how poor he was!

#### **His final exaltation**

But after all this he rose again. His poor, denuded body became bright and glorious. Then, having risen again, he went up to heaven, there to take possession of a kingdom such as no conquering emperor could ever have dreamt of, “*a kingdom which would last forever more...et regni ejus non erit finis*” (Lk 1:33).

Understand that heaven’s riches are acquired by holding worldly wealth in contempt, by sacrificing and renouncing it. Let ordinary men use their wealth despite its dangers. Let us, for our part, fix our gaze on the One by whom all things were made and let us ask him to teach us how to separate ourselves from all that is not of God so that one day we may enjoy the undivided possession of God.

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## TWENTY-THIRD MEDITATION.

### Work

*“In sudore vultus tui vesceris pane. By the sweat of your brow you shall eat bread” (Gn 3:19).*

This severe sentence passed on to our first father after he had sinned and transmitted to his descendants applies as well to all his children.

We must work because we are sinners, and the duty to work is imposed on all sinners. We will cease to be condemned to work only when we have recovered our original innocence. In this perspective work is:

- 1° a punishment;
- 2° a safeguard;
- 3° an emancipation.

But we are also Christians. Christ has sanctified work and we now see in it:

- 1° a raising up of our intelligence;
- 2° an ennobling of our character;
- 3° a form of worshipping God;
- 4° a form of victory.

#### I. Work, imposed on Sinners

1° *Work is a punishment.*—The Master par excellence said so. He began by placing the first man in a garden of delights and he was to cultivate this beautiful garden. Everything there was delightful and sumptuous, “*in paradiso voluptatis*” (Gn 2:15); nothing was meant to be difficult, excessive, exhausting or painful. But when the man revolted against God, the earth and its products began to revolt against him—and what had been an agreeable pastime now became a back-breaking “chore.” Thorns and thistles started sprouting up instead of beautiful flowers and delicious fruit. Work now became a vital necessity—either work or die! Such was the lot of the first men. If such was to be the case, death would become a definitive punishment and work would be its painful precursor.

Are any of us less guilty than our first father was? And since we are equally guilty, as much sinners as he, we must work as he did. How hard must we work? As hard as is necessary to keep us alive. A degrading necessity, but that’s the whole point of it. Pride was at the root of our



rebellion. The punishment of pride is humiliation and there's nothing like work to achieve that.

A slave has his ball and chain. Man, slave to sin, also has his ball and chain, namely, work. We will wear this chain till the day of our death—and woe to whoever refuses to wear it willingly! His chain and his chastisement will be far worse when he gets to the other side of the grave. So let us bend our neck to the yoke of work.

Do not say: “I have other people to work for me.” If you are a sinner, it's your work that is required, not someone else's.

Do not say: “I'm entitled to take things easy.” While one is enjoying a surfeit of leisure (understand that I have nothing against much deserved rest), is he sinning any the less? And if you commit more sin, can I not rightfully say that your work should be doubled? What a strange situation! The more you relax, the more sins you commit. Hurry up and get back to work—like that you will commit fewer sins or even none at all.

2° *Work is a safeguard.*—If work is a punishment we must accept, a punishment God imposes on us, it is also a safeguard. In this light, I shudder to think of those who are forever demanding more time off.

The sick, of course, are unable to work. This puts them in a perilous situation. If the point of hardship is to turn one toward God, how I tremble for those whose sickness condemns them to physical inertia, and who thence conclude that they are entitled to a moral inertia which weakens them day by day. They mistake rest for idleness, thereby exposing themselves to the greatest of dangers.

Note that Adam in the Garden of Eden didn't have to work himself to exhaustion; but he was kept busy. “*Posuit eum in paradiso voluptatis ut operaretur eum.* God placed him in the Garden of Delights to tend and cultivate it” (Gn 2:15). How many people imagine that rest consists in doing nothing at all! And it is during these idle periods that Satan steps in. Idle conversations ensue, we take delight in them, and evil enters our thoughts. Our imagination begins to taste forbidden fruit—dangerous books, perilous pastimes. In the end our senses revolt and innocence is lost! This is what comes of idleness. If only, in our leisure, we had busied our minds with something healthy! If only we had plunged into work as soon as we felt the Tempter approaching! Think of the moral lapses we would have avoided, the weight of which causes us to groan!

Oh yes, work is hard. But it's harder still to be in purgatory...or hell!

A further source of concern is that idleness very often brings about a weakening of faith. If only you had a truly Christian zest for work, you would have found it so much easier to go on believing in the fearful consequences of God's justice. But this would have required energy on your part, the kind of energy engendered by work—the comforting consciousness of doing your best. Take the situation where that energy doesn't exist, where one no longer works. In that case, it is so easy to “kid”

yourselves that “God couldn’t be as cruel as all that”; his punishments in the other world can’t be so bad, can’t be half so severe as you used to imagine.

In fact, these chastisements will be what scorned Wisdom, Justice, and Love will judge appropriate to impose. Such, and nothing less, is the truth of the matter. Do you, or do you not, wish to escape the punishment of God? Then work, not only to pay the debt of your own sins, but also to save yourself from the disaster of committing any more!

3° *Work is an emancipation.*—Nothing is more evident. “*Qui facit peccatum, servus est peccati.* He who commits sin becomes the slave of sin” (Jn 8:34). But by paying sin’s ransom, you free yourself from its bondage. Of course, you can’t completely pay for the debt yourself; the Saviour’s merits will see to the rest.

One thing is certain: God imposed work and work reduces the cost.

Note I am not referring to the man who still bears the weight of original sin; I am talking about the Christian who, after baptism, needs to be absolved. And he is, but he has still to atone for these sins. Now take two Christians—both have sinned, and both have been absolved. Which of the two, do you think, will accomplish more rapid atonement—the lazy man or the hard-working man? To ask this question is to answer it.

Jesus Christ said: “The truth will set you free” (Jn 8:32). But for the truth to set us free we must know it and in order to know it we have to engage in the work of study.

The more we absorb of God’s truth, the freer we will be. This, as I say, implies hard work. The greater your work of study, the greater your grasp of the truth and the greater your level of freedom.

## II.—Work proposed to Christians

So here you are—children of God and of His Church. The sad fact remains that none of you is impeccable. So you have sinned. As we have just seen, this calls for punishment and expiation. If you are subject to sin, then you must do all you can to escape from it. If you are a slave of sin, then you must spare no effort to seek the freedom of the children of God, a status which, unfortunately, you know very little about! Well, there is yet more to do.

1° *A raising up our intelligence.*—You must give your intellect a chance to develop. Listen! If the land on which we walk is soil that we must render fertile “by the sweat of our brow...*in sudore vultus tui,*” our soul is a field destined for the cultivation of truth. The gospel parable shows us the seed, sown by the sower, producing results according to the soil into which it fell. You must likewise get your intellect to bear all the fruit it is capable of producing for the Divine Sower.

Let us suppose you don’t have to perform any manual work. There remains intellectual work to be done.

What are you doing in this regard? How sad it is to look around

nowadays and see so many brilliant intellects crippled and paralysed by their own unforgivable laziness! As a result, so many of these individuals have become as boring as the thinking that they have settled for. They repeat the same meaningless slogans that please so many. Satan's emissaries know very well what they are doing. They set up a smoke-screen of empty words where laziness may take refuge. They proclaim these senseless sonorities in pompous tones before the great assembly. Thus revolutionary propaganda is born and evil gains its most deplorable victories.

Ah! Where can we find industrious Christians, filled with a passion for the truth, and prepared to study it with delight? They are what we need most nowadays: among the clergy, in the monasteries, but above all out in the wide-world. This is France's great curse: we have so few of them.

2° *An ennobling of our character.*—In what does Christian work consist? It is an effort to overcome difficulties. Work is a constant battle in which characters are strengthened by having to struggle hard.

3° Work is a way of worshipping God. The sanctuary has its ritual, its liturgy, its solemnity -and so it must. But there is another kind of worship that should take place, namely, that God be honoured by continual worship. This worship is provided by our work—as long as we labour in a spirit of freedom and love.

Undoubtedly, “where there is love, there is no work, or, at least, work becomes nourishment and proof of one's love...*Ubi amatur non laboratur, vel si laboratur labor amatur*”<sup>54</sup>.

Apart from what rest and recreation is necessary for human weakness, the religious spends all his time either praying or working—this is what his life is made up of. The work he does is a sacrifice of his body or of his intellect or of his will. And this, I repeat, is worship rendered to God the whole day long. It's a question of wanting to get started and setting about it with vigour and determination.

This worship will be of all the more value if it is performed with the most fervent dispositions: faith, humility, prayer and love. We are working under the gaze of God. We bow to the sentence passed by Him, condemning man to toil. We ask Him to bless this sweat shed for him. We love him because we must acknowledge that our work is feeble, but fruitful, reparation for the injuries committed against his majesty.

4° *Work is a kind of victory.*—So from henceforward we work with a new spirit, imitating God made Man who himself worked hard from the days of his youth. We transform this work into an activity that resembles God's continual action in creation. Thus we earn victory, that is, an abundant recompense for our work since, being faithful in small things, the Master will reward us as if we had done great ones.

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<sup>54</sup> St. Augustine, *De bono viduitatis* (CPL 0301) - LLT-A-cap. 21, par. 26, pag. 338, linea 17 (Augustine&On the Good of Widowhood&CPL& chap. 21, par. 26, page 338, line 17)

Let us work, let us work—for the time is short. Let us work as sinners who deserve punishment, as workers who await their compensation, as children in a family, who having done what was demanded of them, return at the end of their lives to the house of their father, there to enjoy eternal victory and eternal rest.

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## TWENTY-FOURTH MEDITATION.

### Chastity

*“Beati mundo corde quoniam ipsi Deum videbunt.*  
Blessed are the pure of heart for they shall see God”  
(Mt 5:8)

This virtue seems to have come down from heaven with Jesus Christ. There is little evidence of it in the Old Testament...and less than little among the heathens.

For now, let us leave aside an examination of the tragic consequences of violating this virtue. For the time being let us examine its privileges and how to maintain it.

#### I.—The Privileges of Chastity

##### 1° Resembling God: God is Purity itself

The foremost of all the privileges of chastity is that it allows us to be like God. What is so pure as God himself? It is impossible for God not to be chaste, precisely because he is a pure spirit. Sins against chastity can be committed only when our bodily inclinations are held captive; a disembodied spirit can rest assured that he will never experience “the sting of the flesh” because he has no flesh to contend with. The angels, like God himself, are pure spirits. If a number of them were precipitated into hell, this was due only to sins of the spirit that drew them there.

But as for us, we were created in an intermediary condition—bodies like animals, souls like the angels. We feel the weight of the body dragging the soul down, and we know what will happen to our soul if we surrender to the lower part of our being. But here the goodness of God shines forth. He will not change the nature he has given us, which consists in the indissoluble union of matter and spirit. He does, however, enable us by his grace ever to climb upwards towards his own infinite purity—and this

continual straining upwards towards the heights is what our perfection in this life amounts to.

God would not be infinitely lovable were he not infinitely kind and infinitely beautiful, in fact infinitely lovely—and he would not be infinitely kind and lovely were he not infinitely pure. Without this infinite purity he would not be the God of infinite light. His limitless understanding would be obnubilated by shades of darkness (a blasphemous supposition). It is from this source of infinite light that light will shine upon us one day, “*In lumine tuo videbimus lumen*. In your light we see light” (Ps 35:10 Vulgate).

#### **Only pure hearts can see God**

But to be worthy of such a privilege we ourselves must endeavour to become purer and purer as life goes on, and thus come to resemble God as far as his grace permits. When, O, when, will we resemble our Creator to such a degree that the light of his countenance shining upon us will produce a reflection on our part, bright enough for him to see himself in us and recognize us as his sons?

And as we come to resemble God more by our purity of heart and as the brightness of his own pure light becomes more clearly reflected in us, so we advance in spiritual vision. Our Lord tells us in his loving mercy and encouragement that we should be pure, “*Beati mundo corde, quoniam ipsi Deum videbunt*. Blessed are the pure of heart for they shall see God” (Mt 5:8).

Here below we cannot see God. All we know about him is what his only-begotten Son who abides in the bosom of his Father chose to reveal to us. If, however, we are permitted here below to fathom something of these mysterious depths, it is thanks to what the Son of God himself meant when he said, “*Beati mundo corde, quoniam ipsi Deum videbunt*.”

#### **2° Our Saviour's Love**

The second privilege is that purity of heart draws greater love out of Our Lord's heart. His favourites are “the chaste hearts for he is their spouse. *Sponsus castarum animarum*.”

We know how fond he was of St. John, the virgin apostle to whom he confided his heavenly secrets. That's not surprising. What did God the Son come down from heaven to fight against? Wasn't it sin? And what horror does he not experience for someone who has allowed sin to become an obstacle in his way, who has allowed the flesh to get the better of him? He withdraws his spirit from him, “*Non permanebit spiritus meus in homine, quia caro est*. My spirit shall not remain in human beings for they are only flesh” (Gn 6:3). But when, on the contrary, he comes across a human creature who, far from giving in to the demands of the flesh, tries hard to live the life of the spirit, he is pleased with him and rests upon him.

How few appreciate this friendship with Jesus! And yet we ought to envy those who do. This friendship here below is the surest prelude and soundest guarantee of the joys of heaven.

### 3° Given the capacity for higher things

The third privilege of the pure soul is that it is made capable of engaging in higher things.

There is nothing like impurity to turn us into egoists; it makes our souls think of nothing more than “number one.” Everything is sacrificed to our lustful passions. If I wanted to tell you what I thought of certain young men we have known and loved, I could name several whose shameful conduct brought disgrace on their families and scandal to their community.

On the contrary, someone who is chaste enjoys such an incomparable freedom to go about doing whatever is great and good, noble and generous! Ask him to make a sacrifice. The purer his heart, the more willing his response. No earthly attachment holds him back; an eternal reward stirs him. By virtue of this very privilege what he knows of God pushes him to cry out with St. Paul, “*Non sunt condignae passiones hujus temporis ad futuram gloriam quae revelabitur in nobis*. I consider that the sufferings of this present time are as nothing compared with the glory to be revealed for us” (Rm 8:18). His clear gaze pierces the grime and soot of his present environment, showing him the goodness of the world beyond.

Purity is held down by no weight, it is free, it has wings, it can soar upward toward the glory of God. *Non sunt condignae...*

And this explains why priestly and religious vocations abound at certain times and not at others. Chastity sets the stage of self-sacrifice. Where chastity is on the rocks, vocations disappear.

St. Ambrose, honouring a virgin martyr, remarked that virginity produces martyrs, not visa-versa. “*Non ideo laudabilis virginitas quia et in martyribus invenitur, sed quia ipsa martyres facit*. Virginity is worthy of high praise—not because it is found among the martyrs, but because it makes martyrs”<sup>55</sup>. The greatest proof of love is to lay down your life for those you love. Virginity has proved its worth by giving us so many martyrs.

### 4° A Special Reward

The fourth privilege of purity is that it bestows on us a special dignity when we get to heaven.

Look at the army of virgins who have washed their robes and bleached them in the blood of the Lamb. Because they are virgins, they will follow him wherever he goes: “*Virgines enim sunt*. For they are virgins” (Rv 14:4). Look at these saints. They are pure, they are virgins like the Lamb himself. As a result, they have their reward apart, as St. Augustine tells us, “*Profecto habebunt aliquid praeter caeteros in illa communi immortalitate, qui habent aliquid jam non carnis in carne*. They will be given something more than the others. Over and above our common

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<sup>55</sup> *De uirginibus* (CPL 0145) - LLT-A-lib. 1, cap. 3, par. 10, linea 4 (Ambrose&On Virgins&CPL& bk. 1, chap. 3, par. 10, line 4)

immortality, theirs will be a glory which never pertained to the flesh”<sup>56</sup>.

Following the same line of thought, he adds, “*Gaudia propria virginum Christi non sunt eadem non virginum, quamvis Christi. Num sunt aliis alia, sed nullis talia. Ite in haec, sequimini Agnum, quia et Agni caro utique virgo...Sed ecce ille Agnus graditur itinere virginali; quomodo post eum ibunt qui hoc amiserunt quod nullo modo recipiunt?*” The joy of Christ’s virgins will be other than that of his non-virgins, although they all belong to Christ. We will all be happy, each in our own way, but this special kind of happiness is reserved for virgins alone. Go! Aim at this special happiness. Follow the Lamb whose own sacred body is that of a virgin. Follow him along that path of virginity where his own feet have trod. How can the rest of us follow who have lost our virginity and can by no means recover it?”<sup>57</sup>.

Yes, let us follow the Lamb—let us preserve our privilege. If like the penitent Augustine we have lost our virginity, let us at least recover our chastity.

## II.—How to maintain our Chastity

I suggest four means: watchfulness, prayer, devotion to Mary, and devotion to the Eucharist.

### 1° Watchfulness

Jesus Christ said, “Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation” (Mt 26:41). So watchfulness is imperative. In what must it consist?

St. Jerome gives us an answer: nearly always in running away, for he who loves danger will perish in it. Bossuet expresses his thought by saying: “If you don’t want to be sullied by creatures, keep away from them.”

So it is no use saying: “I am not infected.” Alas, you are infected, to such an extent that you do not notice it—or rather that you choose not to notice it. Watchfulness will be of little use if you don’t run away, if you don’t put distance between yourself and the danger. It is no use taking heroic resolutions not to be burnt by the fire. When you are standing in the midst of the flames, can you help being burnt?

Now, what precautions are you taking to remain chaste? The chaste soul is always afraid of breaking the vase holding its treasure. St. Paul tells us that we carry this treasure “in earthen vessels...*in vasis fictilibus*” (2 Cor 4:7), that is to say, in vessels that break easily. So, we must take care to protect them.

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<sup>56</sup> *De sancta uirginitate* (CPL 0300) - LLT-A-cap. 13, par. 12, pag. 245, linea 11 (Augustine&On Holy Virginitate&CPL&chap. 13, par. 12, page 245, line 11)

<sup>57</sup> *De sancta uirginitate* (CPL 0300) - LLT-A-cap. 29, par. 29, pag. 266, linea 11 (Augustine&On Holy Virginitate&CPL&chap. 29, par. 29, page 266, line 11)



What must we watch over? Over our senses: over our eyes—to avoid lustful looks, a dangerous show, obscene literature; over our ears—to avoid vulgar conversations and provocative music; over our appetite—to avoid self-indulgence in those pleasures of the table which drag us down to animal level; in short, whatsoever is likely to cause us to lose our purity.

#### 2° Prayer

Furthermore, we must pray. Bossuet observes that separating ourselves from creatures is not selfishness on our part—its purpose is not smug self-satisfaction. On the contrary!

The happiness we cannot help seeking is not to be found in creatures, nor in ourselves, but only in God. If we sacrifice sensual pleasure it is so as to be able, by practicing great purity, to draw near to the dazzling purity of God. This ability is obtained through prayer.

No doubt we will have to begin by crying out to God from the depth of the chasm—begging him to come to our rescue. We must never cease for an instant to implore his help. Nevertheless, prayer is a movement toward, a straining forward, a reaching out to Him who alone can calm the passion of our desires by his goodness, his perfections, his merciful love. It is He whom prayer seeks, toward whom it reaches out, for whom it leaves the world behind.

#### 3° Devotion to Mary

But at the same time we live surrounded by dangers to right and left. We need somebody to protect us all the time and this is why Jesus has given us his Mother, the Virgin of Virgins.

In fact, she is there to teach the path of a truly marvellous virginity, with the help of a solid humility. Yes, devotion to Mary means imitating her humility. She is the model Jesus himself gives, “*Ecce Mater tua*. Behold, your Mother” (Jn 19:27).

This is why St. Ambrose, in the wonderful pages he has written about virginity, keeps on returning to the examples that Mary gives us in this regard. For him she is the prototype of virginity.

#### 4° Devotion to Our Lord

I would be wrong were I to present her as the only prototype. There is Jesus himself, who gives us an example in his life on earth as well as being our strength in his Eucharistic life.

The great archbishop of Milan, refuting those heretics who overstepped the mark by declaring virginity to be obligatory says to them, “*Praeceptum quidem non habuit, sed habuit exemplum*. This one did not have a command, but he did have an example”<sup>58</sup>. And indeed, virginity, which is the highest degree of charity, cannot be commanded—it must be chosen: “*Non enim imperari potest virginitas, sed optari*. For virginity

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<sup>58</sup> *De uirginibus* (CPL 0145) - LLT-A-lib. 1, cap. 5, par. 23, linea 3 (Ambrose&On Virgins&CPL&bk. 1, chap. 5, par. 23, line 3)

cannot be commanded, but must be wished for”<sup>59</sup>. Happy the soul that is able to choose and that chooses that which raises it to angelic heights!

And this is the example that Jesus Christ gives us in his human life and in the silence of the tabernacle.

#### **who feeds us with his own pure flesh**

Nobody can remain pure without God’s grace. So the author of grace comes to us himself and becomes our food. Is he not that “food of the elect and that wine which produces virgins...*frumentum electorum et vinum germinans virgines*” (Zec 9:17 Vulgate)?

Do you wish to overcome the demons? Be chaste. Do you wish to be chaste? Feed yourself with God’s own body; he alone is the author of virginity. “Who else could be its author?” cries St. Ambrose. “*Ejus auctorem quem possumus aestimare nisi immaculatum Dei Filium, cujus caro non vidit corruptionem, cujus divinitas non est experta contagionem?* Whom else can we judge to be its author but the immaculate son of God whose flesh knew no corruption, whose divinity is immune from all contagion?”<sup>60</sup>. This incorruptible flesh, this spotless divinity, is what we receive in the Holy Eucharist. It is in the Eucharist that we receive the author of purity, chastity and virginity. And do we not believe that he will give them to us if we but ask?

#### **who safeguards us through his Church**

St. Augustine in his treatise, *On Holy Virginity*, invites us to “contemplate those legions of young men and women who have dedicated their virginity to Jesus Christ. *Respice agmina virginum puerorum puellarumque sanctarum*”<sup>61</sup>. They are holy, and where did this race of a new kind receive its formation? “In the Church,” he replies. “*In ecclesia eruditum est hoc genus*”<sup>62</sup> (idem).”

Look for dedicated virgins outside the Catholic Church. You will not find them. And it is most remarkable that nobody hates the Church as bitterly, or attacks it as furiously, as those who have left the Church as a result of their impurity. Loss of purity brings about a loss of the faith. The sight of anything pure produces satanic hatred in those who have been tortured by this holy virtue.

Whatever your vocation may be, be pure, walk in purity, and remember that there is nothing here on earth like purity to resist the onslaughts of those who have surrendered their bodies to evil. Let us remember that nothing defiled can enter the Kingdom of God and that it is purity which opens its golden gates, the virtue which reserves for us a

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<sup>59</sup> *ibid.* 5, 23,3 (Ambrose&On Virgins&CPL&bk. 1, chap. 5, par. 23, line 3)

<sup>60</sup> *ibid.* 5, 21, 2 (Ambrose&On Virgins&CPL& bk. 1, chap. 5, par. 21, line 2)

<sup>61</sup> *De sancta uirginitate* (CPL 0300) - LLT-A-cap. 36, par. 37, pag. 277, linea 15 (Augustine&On Holy Virginity&CPL&chap. 36, par. 37, page 277, line 15)

<sup>62</sup> *ibid.* (Augustine&On Holy Virginity&CPL&chap. 36, par. 37, page 277, line 15)

privileged reward.

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## TWENTH-FIFTH MEDITATION.

### Austerity

*“Beati qui esuriunt et sitiunt justitiam, quoniam ipsi saturabuntur.* Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice, for they shall be satisfied” (Mt 5:6).

However many interpretations can be given to this Scripture, there is one that I would like to underline today. Everybody hungers and thirsts after pleasure, success, honour, fame, a good job and wealth. Who thirsts after justice in its truest sense, the justice of God? Who is aware of what is due him? Who is concerned by the injustices done to Him day after day, year in and year out?

Leaving aside for the time being what God’s justice is entitled to from other people, what rights does he not have in our regard, especially in view of our ingratitude, our sins, and our rebellion of every sort?

In fact, true hunger and thirst after justice is the hunger and thirst we ought to have for paying our debts to God and we can temper the rigors of his justice in the afterlife by the austerity we practice in this one.

This is the theme I intend to develop in today’s talk. I intend to explain the meaning of Christian austerity, and I intend to describe its admirable results—for Christ has promised great things to those who really wish to be taken up with hunger and thirst for divine justice.

#### **I.—What are the Claims of God’s Justice? What Austerity Means**

##### **The claims of justice**

To appreciate the claims of God’s justice, we must bear in mind that one single act of rebellion precipitated thousands of angels from the very height of heaven to the very depth of hell. One must recall how a piece of fruit, eaten in defiance of God’s prohibition, drove our first parents from the Garden of Delights and condemned them to the fruits of concupiscence, namely, to work, to death while on earth, and to hell at the end of their lives. Even if we cannot understand it, this was nonetheless justice.

God, who did not forgive angels, decided to forgive men, as long as his justice was compensated. This is why he sent his Son, to redeem us, to raise us up, to restore us to life. *“Ego sum resurrectio et vita. Si quis*

*crediderit in me, etiam si mortuus fuerit vivet...Credis hoc?* I am the Resurrection and the Life. If anyone believes in me, although he be dead he shall live—and whoever lives and believes in me shall not die forever. Do you believe this?” (Jn 11:25-26).

Nevertheless, this resurrection and this life, whereby order was restored, should not be restricted to Jesus Christ alone. He wished to pay the “lion’s share” of the debt, to wipe it out in principle, but he desired that we all contribute our portion, no matter how insignificant this portion may be. So let us take divine justice to heart. Let us make it, as our Saviour tells us, the food which satisfies our hunger and the drink which quenches our thirst. We will then experience a happiness unknown to those whose joys are restricted to the things of this world. We will then begin to experience the joys of justice satisfied. “*Beati qui sitiunt et esuriunt justitiam*. Blessed are those who thirst and hunger for justice” (Mt 5:6).

#### **appeased by austerity**

How are we to arrive at these delight of an entirely different order? Listen carefully, because I’m going to frighten the life out of you! The answer lies in austere living. Who wants to live an austere life nowadays? Nobody. Who wants austerity, which implies cutbacks, privation, humiliation, pain and sorrow, whether it comes of its own accord or we invite it in? We jump at opportunities to love the easy life and stupidly refuse to budge.

The life of austerity gives the soul control over the body, by silencing the demands of the flesh and the tyranny of our feelings. And it is this above all that I wish to present to you and that I hope to study attentively with you.

## **II.—The Advantages of Austerity**

That the prospect of austerity terrifies our corrupt nature is a fact more evident than the shining of the sun. But why should it be so? Because it is painful to cut out corruption. We would prefer not to suffer from some loathsome disease. But if the only possible therapy implies using a sharp knife and a red-hot poker, we hesitate and shrink back. Better to endure what ails us than be cured by such a brutal procedure.

1° *Austerity tames the beast*. A man living under the dictatorship of his passions is living in a bestial condition. Listen to the Holy Spirit crying out to him, “*Nolite fieri sicut equus et mulus*. Do not become like horse or mule” (Ps 31:9 Vulgate). Yes, but by remaining animals, we can at least enjoy ourselves. Well, austerity comes and says: “Put this unseemly way of thinking behind you.” May a salutary brake tame such debased individuals and bring them back to the law of God.

A Christian sinner may waver, but if the trumpet of justice sounds in his ears, he is seized with a victorious fear; he repulses the temptation,

avoids the occasion of sin, flees from the danger. If evil desires continue to pursue him, he is now in a position to fight back; he can tame them with austerity, with privations. So-called independent ethics can be judged on their own merit. Voluntary self-denial, offered up to God's justice, has struck at the very root of the disorder. Once more evil has been overcome, once more justice regains the upper hand.

2° *Austerity purifies the soul.* Our soul has become dirty, choked up with the grime of our passions. Who can describe the horrors that sin, the fruit of passions, whatever they may be, brings to a soul subjected to its miserable demands?

May a desire for divine justice which sets afire the flames of austerity sink deep into the desecrated temple of our heart and purify it so that it might shine with restored innocence. No doubt, my friends, nothing is so beautiful as lily-white purity which has never been sullied. But is there not also something much to be admired in voluntary restoration? Happy is he who has retained the innocence of baptism poured upon it before the dawn of memory. But happy too is he who, having lost the original sheen of his innocence, seeks to restore it availing himself of the means of austerity. Austerity is fitting for pure hearts. It restores purity to the one who has had the misfortune of losing it and preserves and enhances it where there was no need for restoration.

3° In fact, *austerity eliminates sinful pleasures*, and, in so doing, insures us against future relapses. How wonderful it is to see a Christian who is as austere as he is pure and who safeguards his purity by continued austerity. I am not afraid at all to lay out these two principles: no holiness without purity—no purity without austerity.

How far, we may ask, must austerity go? As far as temptations go and as far as love of purity leads it. Fear of the dangers the former presents and love of purity of heart which the latter produces: these must be the twin foundations that support austerity. But really, how far must we go? To the point where there is no more danger of relapse. As long as this danger subsists, the need for austerity will remain indispensable and, since such threats remain always, so must this ally be ever at hand.

So, are you a sinner? Then be austere to atone for your sins and satisfy the demands of justice. What a privilege to obtain reconciliation with God at such bargain prices!

Has yours been the good fortune of retaining your baptismal innocence? Then be austere so that you may safeguard such a precious treasure by taking salutary precautions.

But the advantages of austerity do not end here. Those who take to heart the justice of God are filled with deep trust in him, forget themselves, and think only of his mission. They will take whatever means that are necessary to do so, as God himself desires.

4° By the pleasures it foregoes and the sacrifices it undertakes, *austerity develops further resources for itself.* What don't we spend when

we have money coming out of our ears! If we're short of cash, then we tighten our belts.

Listen! Now, if a charitable man who practices austerity saves up resources, does he not then have them available for good works, the need for which is so little understood today? And in so doing what a wonderful transformation of his whole character takes place! Think what he will be free to donate for the good of others by depriving himself of that which his body requires of him so often with too much insistence! See what a vast vista of opportunities unfolds itself before your eyes. When will you take up the challenge with the vigour of a real Christian?

5° *Austerity produces a legitimate independence.* The austere man is contented with little. He doesn't have to beg, and he knows how to wait. What is the source of the loss of all dignity? In the indignity of having to provide for our own comfort. And what a deplorable indignity it is—and how wide-spread! “*O homines ad servitutem natos!* O you men born to slavery!” cried Tiberius<sup>63</sup>. “*O homines ad pecuniam natos!* O you men born to financial bondage!”, can we not say all the more? We are indeed born to slavery—to the bondage of those gold and silver chains we have forged for ourselves.

How much more worthwhile it is to have fewer needs. We can then look the world in the face as Mordecai looked at Haman (cf. Book of Esther—Est). When will we understand that the only way to improve society is when people improve their characters?

6° *Austerity forms fine characters.* And the trouble today is precisely the shortage of fine characters. They are rapidly disappearing from the stage. We are afraid of them and when they do show up we treat them with resentment.

Well, let me tell you just what's on my mind: great and good characters will be produced in Christian schools alone. Elsewhere they will be ostracized, or rather suffocated from birth. What can you expect from someone whose character is deprived of the light of faith? He will end up where nations devoid of faith have ended. Take for example present generations.

The notion of moral grandeur has become a thing of the past. It began to phase out the day when, having forgotten the need to exercise austerity, men came up against the choice between pleasure and duty and it was not duty that won out!

Look at your future, and decide which of the two you are going to choose. Tremble if you have already acquired the habit of abandoning duty. And what makes you betray moral principles? Forgetting that above and beyond comforts and conveniences, there is a God who says to us, “Do

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<sup>63</sup> Tacitus, *Annales* (Ab excessu diui Augusti) (LLA 382) - LLT-A-liber 3, cap. 65, par. 3, pag. 127, linea 1 (editor's note: the actual Latin phrase is *O homines ad servitutem paratos*) (*Tacitus&Annals&CPL&bk 3, chap. 65, par. 3, page 127, line 1*)

penance,” that is to say, practice austerity.

7° *Austerity is a school of dedication.* Society lives not only on duty accomplished. There is often something stiff, inflexible about duty, a kind of Jansenist or Protestant wilfulness, something almost noble about the pride and vanity with which duty is accomplished as it was in the great sages of times past. Duty by itself is not good enough. We need something else besides; we need dedication.

In bygone days there were schools of dedication—that’s what monasteries were. I know monasteries underwent periods of laxity and decadence, but look at what fine examples they have given the world. Look, for example, at an Anthony, a Basil, a Benedict, a Dominic, a Francis of Assisi! These men and their disciples really did hunger and thirst after justice; they followed their Master in their search for it. So it was that they went through all sorts of bodily torture, heart-breaks, and privations, all the while remaining humble, persevering and loving. They were austere. They sought God so that they might offer themselves up with his Son in the perpetual sacrifice.

Has this race of spiritual giants become extinct because of its austerity? No, not at all! Otherwise, its extinction would spell the end of the world. New sacrifices are being demanded from the four quarters of the Earth—not only demanded but accomplished.

See how many religious families are dedicating themselves to every human misery. Look at our Little Sisters of the Assumption. They go wherever they are called, stay as long as needed, and ask for nothing more than a day’s board. They give themselves because they are joyfully, not sadly, austere.

8° *And last but not least at all, in fact the most important, austerity produces saints.* You have often heard quoted the words of an ancient pagan poet, “*Fecunda virum egestas. Poverty produces men*”<sup>64</sup>. Poverty and austerity are sisters, and of the two austerity has this advantage of always being voluntary, whereas poverty is often unavoidable. Austerity also produces men—real men, whole men—and in order to become a saint you need to be whole. Of course, grace is necessary, but the practice of austerity brings down God’s blessings and fosters its growth. It is easy to understand why at certain periods of history the very notion of holiness disappeared: people gave themselves over to the pursuit of pleasure alone. And what can come from such a situation? Certainly no saints, and hardly any real men.

But wouldn’t it be wonderful to have plenty of saints walking about? What, not one of you will say, “I’ll commit myself to being austere so as to become a saint!” I would expect more of you. I do hope that, given an austerity suitable to your age and circumstances, holiness will bear abundant fruit in our dear Assumption.

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<sup>64</sup> cf. Lucan, *Pharsalia*, Book One, line 165 (or *Bellum ciuile (Pharsalia)* (LLA 342) - LLT-A-liber 1, versus 160, pag. 6) (Lucan&Pharsalia&CPL&bk. 1, verse 160, page 6)





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## TWENTY-SIXTH MEDITATION.

### Obedience

*“Factus est pro nobis obediens usque ad mortem, mortem autem crucis. For us he became obedient unto death, even death on a cross” (Phil 2:8).*

Such is the model of perfection: nailed by obedience to the Cross. He is there for us to look at all the time—to remind us that just as sinful rebellion was the cause of Man’s downfall, so the obedience of the Perfect Man was the cause of his salvation.

And the prophet foretold that the reason why a God came down to earth from heaven was to practice this obedience. *“Scriptum est de me ut facerem, Deus, voluntatem tuam.* It was written of me that I should do your will, my God” (Ps 39: 8-9 Vulgate, Clementine version).

Therefore, both the beginning and the end of the life of Jesus Christ are stamped with the seal of obedience, and, in between, the evangelist takes care to let us know that, during the eighteen years of his ‘hidden life’, “he was subject” to his parents—*et erat subditus illis* (Lk 2:51).

So obedience seems to be one of the fundamental virtues of the Christian life; it is unquestionably the very essence of religious life. Obedience concerns that which is most excellent in our lives—the will. Poverty relates to the things that surround us and chastity to that which envelops our soul. Obedience touches our soul in that which is most intimate, most profound, the will.

So let us speak about obedience. In this meditation, we’ll study the nature of religious obedience; in the next, its excellence.

#### The Nature of Religious Obedience

##### A. The need for obedience

Religious life is a life-long school of perfection and, in order to attain perfection, religious must be instructed, guided, commanded and corrected.

1° *They need instruction.* Along comes a young man and knocks on our door because he is filled with the desire to dedicate his life to God. But what does he know? Very little, or better said, nothing! He will have to be

cast into the right kind of mould where he can be formed. But you cannot treat the human will as if it were some kind of wax or metal that one might soften by fire and then pour into a mould. It's a human faculty, intimately and inseparably united to the intellect. It is by enlightening the intelligence, by instruction, that one forms the will.

The first step to take when training a novice must be to "unlearn" him of his preconceived notions of the Christian life so that they can be replaced by what he'll be taught. By way of an aside, that is why, when a novice trained in one religious order joins another, he finds it extremely difficult to fit in because he cannot rid himself of attitudes previously acquired. Each of the two orders may provide an excellent apprenticeship, but they are simply not the same.

*2° Novices need guidance.* Instruction, as I have said, addresses the intellect. It is necessary so that acts of the will may be purged. How much patient and persevering effort has not to be made if we are to do away with certain habits so that others may be take root, that all aspects of the supernatural life of perfection may sink in! How difficult this is and how time-consuming!

But it is equally indispensable for the young religious to learn to accept the guidance we give him. How necessary it is for him to take it seriously! For, if he won't accept it, what's the use of dishing it up? And such is the misfortune of certain novices who really want to join a community as long as they hold on to their own personal ideas and habits.

Mind you, I'm not saying these ideas and habits may not be excellent in themselves. What I am saying is that they are not good here, in this place where they want to hold on to them. It's like an architectural monument: you can render it absolutely ugly by trying to add a piece to the middle of it in an entirely different style.

Having said this, I insist: resistance to guidance is one of the worst possible symptoms. What is to become of a novice in later years if from the very beginning he resists letting himself be guided and, above all, if by word and example, he constantly rebels against whatever he is told?

*3° Moreover, novices need to be commanded.* Yes, I'm afraid it boils down to practice. You can use whatever words you would like, but action is what matters. And what is more, these acts should be such that they demonstrate whether one is capable of being a religious or not. I can't be any clearer: actions are the clearest possible indication of the disposition of the will. So we must put him through his paces—we must make him do as he is told. We must command him like soldier; as on the field of manoeuvres, he must be drilled to perform every exercise correctly in such a way that one may be certain that he is capable of action when the time comes. The religious needs this training even more because a soldier is often nothing more than a military "robot," whereas a religious must, at every moment, remember that he is called to the highest of all acts since by obedience he is invited to resemble the Man-God.

4° *Finally, a religious needs to be corrected.* Every law must have its corresponding punishment. In civic life the supreme sentence is the death penalty whereby an offending citizen is expelled from human society in the most terrible manner. In religious life expulsion is likewise the supreme sentence.

But let us make no mistake about it. Lots of our members need to be punished without there ever being a question of expelling them, and this is easy to understand. These are weak characters, incapable of serious transgressions because they lack the energy to commit them; however, they are also incapable of heroic virtue. They require an element of fear to drive them along; they must be constantly kept on their toes in the performance of their duties.

It may be very humiliating, but we have to admit it: we need the bridle, the spur and even the whip to get something out of us. I'm afraid this applies to most men. In the drawing up of our rules we must cater not to the exceptions but to the dispositions of the majority of those with whom we will have to deal.

I'll go even further than this. What is beneficial for the majority of people is especially indispensable for religious. There is no civil society, no private organization, that does not require a modicum of obedience! Take obedience away from an army and you would have anarchy. Take obedience away from a factory and you see all the raw materials put to waste.

But in the most perfect of societies obedience is what constitutes its moral fiber; a society is perfect in proportion to the obedience of its members. Under obedience you will obtain the very finest results because, compared with other societies, here one's entire will, all one's heart and soul, is engaged, "*Deus meus volui et legem tuam in medio cordis mei.* O my God, I have longed for your law in the depth of my heart" (Ps 39:9 Vulgate, Clementine).

#### **B. The practice of obedience is an obligation for everyone.**

Since obedience is so universally advantageous and since religious obedience draws its very perfection from the will that exercises obedience, see how important it is to fortify this will against its own weaknesses and to form it in such a way that it is capable of carrying out these new and more perfect tasks it is proposing to accomplish. Why else would obedience have been raised to the level of holiness associated with a vow? Considered thus, what is obedience if not the obligation we freely impose upon ourselves to become and remain as perfect as our human nature permits?

Thence the immense benefit for a religious to vow obedience to his superiors under the yoke of a rule which he has already been observing for some time.

So the disposition to obey is a disposition to become perfect and the undertaking to obey is an undertaking to become perfect. From which I

conclude that, in order to practice obedience perfectly one day, religious must engage in a period of preparation by practicing certain acts of obedience. This is a reason for the novitiate where one tests one's strength and one ascertains the extent to which one is capable of controlling his will. But once having passed the test with flying colours and having made a serious commitment by taking a vow, one must maintain the suppleness of his docile dispositions, and this is achieved by an energetic effort to be more obedient as time goes on. It may not be that demands of obedience are placed on us as often, but they take on a character of greater weight because obedience goes, in fact, to the heart of religious life.

#### **Superiors as well**

It has been said that some superiors don't obey. This is not true. Outside the community they obey the bishops in a way and without exception the bishop of bishops. Within the community they obey the rule. Strictly speaking, they obey all the other religious because they are obliged to render them every service to which they are entitled.

It is here a question of mutual good faith. The superior is not a law unto himself. He belongs to all, placing himself at their disposal with order and wisdom. He is not obliged always to give to whoever keeps asking, but rather to whoever he judges to be in greater need. Unreasonable requests are forever being made and, in sacrificing himself for each religious, a superior is not only free but obliged to ignore them.

#### **In every detail of one's life**

The vow of religious obedience embraces our entire life—not only as regards how long (though in some of the less perfect orders this vow can be renewed annually) but also in the sense that whatever one does in religious life is to be done for God and our neighbour. Numerous acts, indifferent in themselves, assume, thanks to obedience, a saintly and meritorious character. Who can possibly calculate the intensity that a will which is ready to give of itself is able to attain? Who can tell how often the will can renew its gift of self by repeated acts of obedience?

#### **In order to strengthen the will**

That is why obedience, far from shackling the will, perfects it. O what marvel of human nature transformed by grace! The revolt of sin had in some ways crushed the will. Jesus Christ came to repair the damage and strengthen it by his blood. So it is that through baptism our weakened will is reinforced. The demands of baptism, which make of the baptized soul a child of God, oblige one by an entirely free contract to follow the divine law. But this contract is not enough. One feels the need of doing not only what is good, but what is perfect; that is the role of a vow. Who forces one to take a vow? Nobody—we forced ourselves. It is therefore in complete freedom that one dons this admirable chain, "*Funes ceciderunt mihi in praeclaris*. Your chains have fallen on me, much to my delight" (Ps 15:6 Vulgate Clementine).

What have I done after all? I have deprived my will of the liberty to commit sin. Provided I keep my vow, it becomes impossible. But it is my liberty that desires this and leads me to make this commitment. Whatever good we do makes us more perfect. I have freely and willingly placed myself under the obligation of doing not only my “bit” but my best. I have given to my nature a greater perfection and therefore to my will and my liberty as well.

*In conclusion:* the vow of obedience is, by its very nature, an act whereby my will obliges me to become more perfect. Considered thus, the state of obedience resulting from the vow is a saintly condition in which I am bound to regard whatever is legitimately commanded as the accomplishment of God’s will. My life, let me remember, is not just a series of disassociated acts, but one continuous whole—and the more obedient this life is, the further I advance along the road to perfection.

I have spent more time than I originally intended describing the nature of obedience. The excellence of obedience will be the subject of a second talk.

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## TWENTY-SEVENTH MEDITATION.

### The Excellence of Obedience

*“Ordinavit in me caritatem. He put order in my love”*  
(Sg 2:4).

We have already said that there are three sacrifices that we make to God in religious life: our possessions (poverty); our bodies (chastity); our wills (obedience). As far as heaven is above the earth, so is our soul above our body and all the goods of the world.

From which I may conclude, first of all, that just as spirit is superior to matter, so is the vow of obedience to the other two vows; it is of my own free will that I surrender my possessions and my body to God. The first two vows derive their value from the third; thus they become the matter itself of this greater gift. Having sacrificed everything itself, the will sacrifices itself. Can we imagine anything more perfect, more excellent?

We could well stop here were it not that I intend to demonstrate the excellence of the vow of obedience from several other points of view.

#### I.—What is essential in Obedience for Religious Life

When we “get down to brass tacks,” religious life consists essentially in obeying. Obey and you will give up your possessions and your senses whenever the command comes to do so. Obedience encompasses all of life.

For what is it that sets all truly human activity in motion? Is it not willingness? If, then, you place your will entirely at the disposal of someone in authority, to command you and make you act in different ways, will not your entire life be affected? What else have you to do except ascertain and accomplish the will of whoever is in charge of you? What else remains except to allow yourselves to be formed according to the rule you have embraced, with the conviction that whatever your superiors command has now become what you must be interested in and what you must aim at?

“But,” you may reply, “this means that I am no longer master of my own destiny!” Yes and no. You aren’t in the sense that you bound yourself by a vow. You are in the sense that you did so freely—and, moreover, as

has been said, you did so only with the intention of obliging yourself to become more perfect.

It is of the nature of intelligent beings that they become freer by becoming more perfect. To maintain the contrary would be to maintain that beings incapable of making commitments like infants and the insane enjoy greater freedom than do mature human beings in full possession of their reason; or, if you prefer to express it otherwise, that God enjoys no freedom at all, because being infinitely perfect makes him incapable of doing any wrong. Religious enjoy the happy privilege of having insured themselves against the commission of sin, and by so doing acquire a closer resemblance to God himself. For creatures shaped by his hand, how can we possibly think there is anything imperfect in becoming more similar to the One Supremely Perfect Being, the source of all perfection? So let's get this straight: the more like God I become, the more perfect I shall be. And the more that obedience makes it morally impossible for me to sin, the more like God I shall become.

I know there are two ways of thinking about obedience—first, as a dead weight, a millstone round your neck—and this point of view is that of those religious tired of having to obey. Is this the right way of looking at things? Merely asking the question is enough to get an answer. The right attitude is the one which brings us to the very heart of the matter. What made you become a religious in the first place, and why did you bind yourself by a vow of obedience?

Am I not right in supposing that you saw in it the most effective means of overcoming your defects, your short-comings and your vices? Did you not seek in vain, around you and within you, for a better way in which to dedicate your whole life to the pursuit of holiness? And, having sought high and low, could you have come up with a more powerful way to express the love you bore God? To show us how much he loved us, a God became obedient unto death, even to the death of the Cross. How can we express our gratitude towards him better than by becoming obedient to him ourselves—obedient to our very last breath?

## **II.—Three Consequences**

I can immediately see three consequences.

### **Religious who criticize**

Take the religious who has all kinds of arguments with regard to obedience, bringing forth more or less theological objections to this or that point of the Rule, to the spirit of our Order, to the commands of superiors and the way they exercise their authority. Here you have a religious in serious danger of losing his vocation. If he doesn't resist this temptation in the most vigorous fashion, he will soon become a shameful ruin of his formerly attractive self.



#### **“Routinized” religious**

Then take the religious who drones along, blameless but without enthusiasm for the Rule, following its prescriptions as part of a dull routine, obeying simply out of habit, submitting mechanically to those in authority, a locomotive to its engineer. How can we pass judgment on this poor fellow? He seems to be mired in lukewarm weariness. Perfectly harmless he may be—but he is equally incapable of generating sufficient fervour to do any good which the Rule proposes. He will never oppose his superiors, because he simply stands aside and lets them pass. But as for helping them, as for giving them moral support and lightening their burden, Oh, no! He never thinks along these lines. He just carries on cheerlessly, imagining himself to be perfectly obedient.

#### **The devoted religious**

To the contrary, take a really devoted religious, zealous like a war-horse, ready to dart into the fray, even if, finding it hard to bend over, he finds, I don’t know where, an admirable ability to fight against himself so that he might make himself more amenable. He takes his self-imposed obligations seriously. But he realizes that what binds him is a precious treasure and that his heritage is none the less precious, “*Funes ceciderunt mihi in praeclaris, etenim haereditas mea praeclara est mihi*. Your chains have fallen on me, much to my delight, and that which has happened to me fills me with joy” (Ps 15:6 Vulgate Clementine). Look at him and say: Here, indeed, is a man of God, prepared to do, and to sacrifice, whatever is asked of him, because for him obedience means showing God how much he loves him. Love, for him, is something stronger than death. Sacrifice, for him and for all the friends of God, is a divine prelude, “*fortis ut mors dilecti*; Love is stronger than death” (Sg 8:6).

#### **Under the guidance of the Rule**

It is naturally necessary to spell out the rules of obedience, yet of the truly obedient religious it can be said what St. Paul said, “*Lex iusto no est posta*. The law is meant not for a righteous person” (1 Tim 1:9). Why? Because he has such a desire to obey that he doesn’t have to worry about whether the Constitutions oblige him down to the minutest detail. He knows that he is being obedient. If from time to time he looks up those rules peculiar to his own religious family, it is just to make sure his obedience is along the right lines. You see, many practices of obedience, highly commendable in one religious order, may be out of place in another—and under the pretext of being perfect, we must not stray from that particular path of perfection according to which we have been trained.

For it is characteristic of human weakness that none of us can be outstanding in all the virtues. They need to be arranged in one so that they form an ensemble that is unified, harmonious and beautiful.

And this is what the bride in the Canticle of Canticles means when she says that her beloved “one has commanded (that is to say put harmony

into) her love—*Ordinavit in me caritatem*” (Sg 2:4).

God alone possesses every aspect of goodness to an infinite degree, in infinite unity and simplicity. But as for us, we can only participate in this reality and this is why all the different Rules of religious orders have this one goal alone, such that it would be dangerous to mix things up and confuse them.

### III.—Conclusion

#### **Tend towards perfection**

So let us tend towards love as intensely as we can, but under the direction of the Rule which is meant to guide and determine the expressions of this love. Having “got this straight,” let us cast fear aside and advance confidently along the road that leads to holiness, under the watchful eye of the Church which blesses the laws of religious families and under the watchful eye of God who accepts and consecrates these vows, especially the most perfect of the three, obedience, where the other two find their focus.

#### **in the footsteps of Jesus Christ**

I said at the very start that to obey is to walk in the footsteps of Jesus Christ. When God decided to redeem the guilty human race, the glorious Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, decreed that the Second Person, the Son, become man and this command came forth equally from all three persons. It was God who commanded and it was the Son who accepted this sacrifice inasmuch as “he was the Sacrificial Lamb from the beginning of the world. *Agnus tanquam occisus ab origine mundi*” (cf Rv 13:8). What can this mean? The Lamb was not being slain; it had been slain from the beginning of time. The Son, who is eternal, wishing to unite himself personally with a man in order to redeem men, accepted the Trinity’s decree in the name of the human will to which he wished to be united. As God, the Son gave this command no less than the Father and the Holy Spirit. As Man—or as Tertullian puts it, as “a future man—*homo futurus*”<sup>65</sup>—the Son accepted, submitted and obeyed. So we can say that the very first act of obedience took place within the bosom of the Trinity itself from the very beginning of time. And it is on this act of obedience, far and away the most perfect of all acts of obedience, that the salvation of humanity depends.

#### **despite hell’s assaults**

Let us conclude by looking at what wonderful effects the saints have produced in this world by being obedient and let us understand why hell with its rebellious partisans launches such vicious attacks against obedient

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<sup>65</sup> *De resurrectione mortuorum* (CPL 0019) - LLT-A-cap. 6, linea 12 (Tertullian&On the Resurrection of the Dead&CPL&chap. 6, line 12)

religious, for they are the ones whom it especially wishes to target. They are its true enemies both because they are true imitators of Jesus Christ, Satan's judge, and because their obedience is the prolongation of that supreme act of obedience accomplished on Calvary, that sacrifice whereby heaven and earth were reconciled.

**by adopting the mind of Christ**

And let us also conclude that, were you to ask me how we must obey, were I to answer, "by adopting the mind of Jesus Christ; *Hoc sentite in vobis quod in Christo Jesu*" (Phil 2:5), I would be entitled to add: from all the mysteries, all the details of the Savior's life there arise two lessons: a lesson of love, the source of all obedience, and a lesson of obedience, the greatest and most perfect expression of love.

The greatest of all virtues is charity. What kills charity is rebellion just as what keeps it burning bright is well-ordered love. Let me repeat: God uses obedience to regulate charity—to direct and control (if I may put it thus) those excesses of love in the soul of saints. Theirs is the path we must follow—theirs is the life we must adopt. To love and to obey—this sums up the life of a religious. To love and to obey in union with Jesus Christ, with his mind within us—this is the goal for which we strive.

**through the mysteries of Christ**

May the God of the manger, may the God of the cross, of the altar and the tabernacle make us understand how perfect it is to practice obedience. By reminding us of the obedience and love practised by the angels and saints in heaven, may he impress upon us that without obedience there can be no true adoration, that obedience and adoration in spirit and in truth on earth are the surest guarantee that one day in heaven obedience and love will be the source of our everlasting glory and our everlasting happiness.



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## TWENTY-EIGHTH MEDITATION.

### Superiors

“Obedite praepositis vestris et subjacete eis. Ipsi enim pervigilant quasi rationem pro animabus vestris reddituri, ut cum gaudio hoc faciant et non gementes: hoc enim non expedit vos. Obey your leaders and defer to them, for they keep watch over you and will have to give an account, that they may fulfill their task with joy and not with sorrow, for that would be of no advantage to you” (Heb 13:17).

Such is St. Paul’s command. If it is important that simple faithful obey it, how much more so religious!

The Rule by itself is a “dead letter,” like the Bible for Protestants. Look at all the commentaries heretics have written on the Sacred Scriptures and what have they amounted to? A Tower of Babel—a literary edifice which has to be continually reconstructed and re-demolished, until nobody can make heads or tails of the Holy Books, and they end up by being demoted to nothing more than a work of human hands. Whereas the Church, with its teaching, sorts out difficulties, maintains the deposit of faith, reveals, when the time comes, those treasures contained in God’s Word, decides exactly what they mean, and condemns errors as they crop up.

The same applies to the Rule. Place it in the hands of individual religious, each of whom is determined to give it his own personal interpretation and he’ll see in it whatever he wants. Whence the need for an authority to clarify what may be obscure and resolve differences: superiors are useless unless what they have to say is welcomed with docility. And so here is the outline of this meditation:

- 1° The need for superiors;
- 2° The dispositions required to welcome their advice

#### I.—The Need for Superiors

Where can you find any grouping of intelligent beings, let alone societies, without superiors? Even in hell there are superiors! Ruling there with a rod of iron may help to compensate them for the torments they

themselves have to endure—but it serves as well to make hell even more “hellish” for their subordinates.

Now take a good look at the Church and how wonderfully organized it is! Does it not offer us a model? It looks to heaven itself for its ideal. There you find angelic hosts forming their ordered choirs assembled with the saints, before the throne of God.

But even if other societies could subsist without a living authority, religious societies could not. Their very life consists in being obedient and how can one obey if there is no one to command?

In this way you see why superiors are necessary and why we must pray to God to give us good ones.

#### **Four remarks: the shortcomings of Superiors**

1° I hear it said: “But superiors have their shortcomings!” First of all, let me ask who does not. You who are so gifted with detecting the faults of everyone above you, have you nothing to reproach yourself with? Listen, if you were faultless, you would be well-disposed. Of all the vices the one that least suits a religious is a spirit of maliciousness. Ah, how much you need a superior to eradicate this fault-finding tendency which, like an awful cancer, spreads its contagion all about you: “*Quorum sermo ut cancer serpit*. Their teaching spreads like gangrene” (2 Tim 2:17).

Say we admit that superiors have the shortcomings you point out. So what? Why did you come here in the first place? To make saints of yourselves, unless I am mistaken. Well, see their faults as the most perfect instruments of penance; accept them. Do not forget that when St. Paul enumerated his apostolic credentials to the early Christians, he put patience at the top of the list. So if you wish to become apostolic religious, be patient—and find in your patience the proof that you are called to be apostles.

I have admitted the possibility of your superiors having every possible shortcoming. But do they? Are we not inclined to see the faults of others through our own? Might it not have been for you that Our Lord said: “*Hypocrita, ejice primum trabem de oculo tuo; et tunc videbis ejicere festucam de oculo fratris tui*. You hypocrite! Begin by removing the plank from your own eye—then you will see clearly enough to remove the splinter from that of your brother” (Mt 7:5)?

How easy it is to magnify these faults of our superiors—to make them into something huge. In reality, what is huge is your spirit of criticism which smears everything around you with mud and is not satisfied until it has polluted the whole atmosphere with its venomous contagion.

Let us get back to the truth. Generally speaking, major superiors seek out the most competent men they can find to be superiors. Can they be blamed for not always finding them? Oh, I see, you’re upset because they didn’t pick you. What a terrible shame! What a lot of good you would have done! What peace and prosperity your reign would have established! And

you're such a fool as to believe this? Alas, alas! How blind, conceit and a judgmental spirit can be! Of course major superiors can make mistakes; they probably do so now and again. Please God they will never make the mistake of appointing you because your judgment would be awful. When Judgment Day came round, God would exact from you everything you were forever complaining about not finding in others.

#### **The superiors we deserve**

2° It has been said that a nation always finds the leaders it deserves. You have weak superiors because you deserve no better. It is worth thinking about: do I not have the superiors I deserve? Are they not so weak, so inadequate, because you yourselves are unworthy of being placed under a more inspiring commander?

#### **The graces they confer**

3° However, unless your community happens to be under a curse, they do have very special graces. God, who owes nothing to anyone, acts as if he owed this to them, for your sake. Try to deserve such graces. They will be showered upon you for your greater benefit.

#### **The basis of their authority**

4° Remember that the Church, by approving their nomination, has given them a certain jurisdiction over you. It is a blessing indeed that the Church wishes that, through them, harmony should reign in religious communities. And from this point of view, to disobey them is to disobey the Spirit who governs the Church. Still, the Holy Spirit must have known that he couldn't desire superiors without choosing men subject to human weakness and human failings.

But if you do have good superiors, what a boon and a blessing it is! And my contention is that you can turn them into good superiors if you welcome them with the supernatural dispositions that good religious should possess. Let us take a close look at what these dispositions are.

## **II.—Dispositions that religious should have toward their superiors**

The dispositions that religious should have toward their superiors are summed up in the advice that St. Paul gives us in the opening passage that I quoted at the beginning of this meditation:

1° "*Obedite praepositis vestris; obey your leaders.*" Obedience, but supernatural obedience—seeing God in the person of your superiors.

When you kneel before a crucifix, do you refuse to meditate on the mysteries of the Passion because the image of Our Saviour on the cross is badly painted or clumsily carved? It doesn't matter, as long as it is a reminder of the love of Jesus Christ for you. *Obedite praepositis vestris.* That's enough on obedience.

2° St. Paul adds, "*Et subjacete eis.* Defer to them." How many religious turn their monastery into the vestibule of hell by refusing to accept

a status of true dependence! How much suffering would disappear if only we learnt to be truly dependent—if only we accepted the decisions of those to whom Jesus Christ has given responsibility to decide on our behalf!

But, no, we prefer to have an attitude of equality or even superiority. We congratulate ourselves on being proud; humble acquiescence to advice and directives is completely ruled out.

3° *“Ipsi enim pervigilant quasi rationem pro animabus vestris reddituri.* For they keep watch over you and will have to give an account.” We don’t think about this half enough. Your superiors will give an account to God for your souls on one simple condition: that you give them a chance to do so. How can you expect them to carry this heavy responsibility if you do all you can to escape from their control? Their degree of accountability will obviously depend on the degree of your docility.

You don’t want to be dependent—well, fine, you’re free. Only remember this: the day will come when you have to appear before God. Your life may have been anything but what it ought, in which case your superiors can simply say: “He refused to listen, to depend on us. He alone must bear the responsibility for his rebellion, falls, and the scandals he caused.”

4° *“Ut cum gaudio hoc faciant.* That they may fulfill their task with joy.” Happy are those communities into which subordinates help their superiors to inject life by creating an atmosphere that allows joy to pass from fathers to sons. In this way, obedience becomes pleasant and agreeable because the manner of authority has become pleasant and benevolent. But how can these dispositions be obtained if not through great openness and mutual trust? At first, this may appear difficult to achieve; however, with a little effort, it’s possible. In the process, superiors themselves come to place in you the same trust you placed in them.

In order for superiors to act enthusiastically and joyfully, they must feel loved. I am not questioning the principle that they ought to begin by loving you. But how do you expect them to feel when they feel that their intentions are misconstrued, their orders criticized, and whatever they do interpreted in the worst possible light?

Ah, “they could have spread happiness all around them; instead, they only spread sadness. *Ut cum gaudio hoc faciant et non gementes.*” Perhaps you prefer that the whole community be overshadowed by that gloom which dwells in your own heart. If so, how sorry I am for you. But, alas, I’m sorrier still for your superior—and for the whole community that lives under this cloud of discontent, this sadness for which you alone are to blame.

Superiors appear sad and somber. What about the other religious? Ask yourself why. It’s all your fault. It’s because superiors have to put up with you, with your character...and, through them, the whole community suffers!

5° *“Hoc enim non expedit vobis.* For that would be of no advantage

to you.” Yet how many individuals take a fiendish delight in poisoning a community with their black moods, backbiting, and insubordination! Does it not occasionally happen that one annoys superiors simply for the pleasure of it? Alas, how often this happens and with what disastrous consequences!

Listen. What has this carefully designed edifice of autonomy and endless criticizing of yours achieved? Nothing but reciprocal antipathy and the destruction of any spirit of community. Is this what you want? Ah, how right the Apostle was—you have been the loser. “*Hoc enim non expedit vobis.*”

Do superiors make mistakes? It can happen—I admit it sometimes does. But what about you? Ah, look deep inside yourselves and see what harm you are doing to others and to yourselves. “*Hoc enim non expedit vobis.*” St. Augustine, in the introduction to his magnificent treatise on Christian Doctrine, has this to say: “*Quidam reprehensuri sunt opus nostrum, quia quae praecepturi sumus non intellexerint.* Some will find fault with our treatment of the subject, because they will not have understood what we mean to say”<sup>66</sup>. How many religious are quick to cast blame because they don’t understand! And yet, they want to bring to these same superiors all their brilliant insights. What injustice!—or rather let us say: what utter stupidity!

In conclusion: Those religious who, through their spirit of faith see God in the person of their superiors, in spite of their shortcomings, often force them to become God for them, to re-consider their decisions and bring them to maturity, to give these decisions the best possible motivation, and to seriously ponder all the consequences.

“Wherever two or three are gathered together in my name, I shall be there in the midst of them,” says Our Lord. How many religious have it in their power to compel Our Lord to place himself between them and their superior, to be a bond of love, kindness, strength and life!

I have endeavoured to show you what harm a religious can do his community by revolting against his superiors. Might I have done better to describe a community in which perfect obedience safeguards the practice of the Rule, mutual esteem, the bond of peace, and the strength that comes from mutual support?

What happiness reigns in houses where such a spirit prevails. Jesus Christ in the midst of his disciples is the model there. What more could you ask for in seeking perfection—and attaining it?

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<sup>66</sup> *De doctrina christiana* (CPL 0263) - LLT-A-prooem., linea 14 (Augustine&On Christian Doctrine&CPL&foreword, line 14)



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## TWENTY-NINTH MEDITATION.

### Good Works

*“Tibi derelictus est pauper. To you does the poor man entrust himself” (Ps. 9:35 Vulgate).*

Let us remember the description of the Last Judgment when the Son of Man will absolve and reward us according to no other criterion than the acts of kindness we have performed, overtly or secretly, towards our brothers and sisters. Therefore, let us be clear that such an exercise of charity is of the utmost importance.

Nor do I hesitate to add that such acts, which have always been important, are more so nowadays than ever.

So I would like to begin by speaking about the necessity of good works. But the motive of these good works stretches far beyond that of simple goodwill, which consists no more than in a sense of satisfaction that comes from helping our fellow human beings. No, they call for far loftier ideals, which I shall point out rather quickly.

1° The need for good works;

2° The character of good works.

It is my intention to dwell on these two main points.

#### I.—The Need for Good Works

##### A. The situation today

If ever works of charity are needed it is surely today. Everywhere the ugliest passions have been let loose and the most atrocious crimes are being committed against humanity.

See with what fury the working classes are rising up against the upper classes. Popular indignation is being fed and flattered with the most subversive ideology. A dangerous monster has been unleashed and who is there to restrain it?

This is the trouble society faces in of our times. Old buildings usually topple of their own accord, when the mortar which binds them together begins to crumble. Nowadays these stones are being violently forced asunder. There are people who simply delight in destroying them and

scattering them in a thousand pieces. Destruction is the order of the day.

#### **The unleashing of passions**

Why all of this? Where is it leading us? Into the unknown. And what is pushing us so blindly into this land of the unknown? Hatred. Outside the boundaries of the Church where can there be found people who love one another? And what shall happen should those who show such hatred gain control, if not to devour one another? They know well what to expect. Their leaders (who are slaves to the system, besides being heads of the mob) instinctively dread the day of triumph, because they know that for them triumph will be mean the dawn of disaster. This has always been the case; human history keeps repeating itself. Hatred destroys. It can hold sway but a short while before it inevitably disappears, leaving greater ruin than ever.

#### **Satanic hatred**

We have now arrived at one of these solemn, historic moments when darkness besieges us on all sides, when we feel surrounded by pitfalls, and when we can no longer see whether these pitfalls lie to the right or to the left. Nations hate one another. Within nations political parties fight bitterly! Hatred is everywhere and so are its alarming symptoms. What can we do?

It is evident to whoever makes a Christian appraisal of our present predicament that, whereas the Church stands for God and the supernatural, the Revolution stands for Satan and the anti-natural. Since the day he rebelled, Man has been the slave of the Devil through sin. Jesus Christ came to set him free. But modern Man rejects Jesus Christ by rejecting his Church—and once Jesus Christ is no longer on the scene, the Devil inevitably enters.

Now the Devil fights with two weapons: error, or untruth, about which I do not intend to speak today—and hatred. The Devil, being first and foremost a liar, always lies, lies, lies. So when somebody finds him out and tells him: “You are the Devil,” he replies: ‘I’m nothing of the sort. I’m an honest citizen and I perform good works, so you must be mistaken.’ But take a look at his so-called good works. Beneath their smooth veneer you will discover hatred—hatred as cunning as it is dreadful. With all the appearance of loving humanity, the most hateful and violent propaganda is being fed to the masses. Volcanic lava is ever ready to erupt from a ruptured crater. What do they really want? To create turmoil and ruin...and over this upheaval their triumphant hatred.

But if the Church is founded on a supernatural principle, if it relies on God, its strength must lie in the very opposite of hatred, in that love which is God Himself, *Deus caritas est*. It is with this love that we must oppose him “who was a murderer from the start,” and whose torments, apparently, can find no relief save in human blood.

#### **The choice to be made**

Behold, now, these two mighty forces confronting one another

across the battlefield: the hatred of Satan on the one hand and the love of God on the other.

Let's face it—that's what is going on. War has been declared between heaven and hell. And let me add: this war is taking place whether we see it or not, as if our very selves were not at risk.

So what are we to do? The choice is quite simple: on which side do I wish to be—on God's or on Satan's?

Expressed this way, the answer would be obvious were it not that Satan, unfortunately, is infiltrating God's camp in his effort to sow discord within its ranks. But this obliges us all the more to face the practical consequences of our commitment to the great commandment of love under the Church's guidance. Behold how the acceptance of certain principles makes the solution obvious.

#### **Attacks against the Church**

The great assault today is against the Church, God's work founded by Jesus Christ. Who are God's enemies? Those who wish to destroy the Church. And you have to admit, don't you, that what we see before our eyes is the Church, on the one hand, directed by God (something we must believe in if we have faith, because Christ made it quite clear when he said, "*Ecce ego vobiscum sum*. Behold I am with you," (Mt 28:20)) and on the other, the enemies of the Church equipped with tremendous, infernal, diabolical, Satanic power?

Doubt it if you can—deny it if you will—Jesus' words hold good. Having told St. Peter he would found his Church on him, what did he immediately add? "*Et portae inferi non praevalent adversus eam*. And the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Mt 16:18). The Church on one side, and hell on the other. Remember Jesus' words. And being caught up, as we are, in one of these battles between the Church and her enemies, of which there have only been three or four in the previous eighteen centuries (like those with the Roman emperors, Arius, Mohammed, Luther, and the Revolution), who would dare maintain that Satan isn't involved?

But if Satan is there, he is there with his lies and his hatred. Let us put aside the question of his lies that have been dealt with by the doctors of the Church, by bishops, by the Pope in his infallibility. Let us take up another sort of arms: a charity made manifest in works.

#### **B. The urgent need for good works**

I don't have to tell you there are spiritual as well as corporal works of mercy. Our good works may be corporal in substance, but they aim at touching souls. Today when there is a tendency for everything to be focused on the material, you will not touch souls by giving out all sorts of things without giving your very selves.

Here we come to a thorny question: must our generosity be restricted to what we can well afford to do without, to the superfluous? I am not afraid to say that if you are satisfied with saying what is superfluous,

you're lost. In fact, we have set aside for ourselves so much of what is really superfluous, for all kinds of perceived or self-made needs, that it's time to give of what is necessary.

There was once an Egyptian hermit who had a vision. The Barbarians had lit a vast fire in the desert. The monks of Upper Egypt tried to put it out with their works and acts of penance. But at one point all this work, represented in the image of their mats, wasn't enough—so the fire grew until it stretched from the Barbarians of the North to the Arab hordes under the leadership of Mohammed.

Would to God that today, spurred onward by the love of God, you give of yourselves so generously that you be able to extinguish the sea of flames ignited by the Revolution, a far more dangerous fire than any lit by the Goths, Vandals or Huns!

In the wake of these ravaging hordes, a new Society came into being. In the wake of the Revolution's onslaughts we can only wait for the cunningly reasoned onslaughts of socialism stretching its hand to the "Kulturkampf"<sup>67</sup>.

## II.—The Character of Good Works

Their character is manifold. Charity embraces all the virtues. We could draw up a long list—let us just indicate a few.

1° *First of all a spirit of faith.* "*Sine fide impossibile est placere Deo.* Without faith it is impossible to please God" (Heb 11:6). This is the hallmark of every truly Christian activity. The stronger our spirit of faith, the more we depend on God, and the more we seek to please Him alone. How many endeavors have come to naught because they were not undertaken in a spirit of faith.

The spirit of faith is fearless. It stands up to what is considered "respectful"; it speaks up because it believes. It is able to say, "*Credidi, propter quod locutus sum.* I believed, therefore I spoke" (Ps 115:1 Vulgate). When duty calls, it knows no obstacle. Faith moves mountains; but it must desire to combat every objection to which laziness and tolerance give rise.

2° *Humility.* Faith reveals God's power to us as well as our own weakness. The stronger God is, the more man is nothing. We must turn everything over to God and rely not at all on ourselves.

Mistrust in ourselves is the daughter of humility; it is that true self-knowledge which shows us how vile and despicable we are. The humble and obedient man recounts God's triumphs because God resists the proud and showers his grace on the humble. So if we wish God to bless our good works, let us be humble above all else.

3° *Also be prudent.* Let us be wary of ourselves and not be like those

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<sup>67</sup> a German term referring to the conflict between the government of the Kingdom of Prussia and the Roman Catholic Church from about 1872 to 1878, predominantly over the control of educational and ecclesiastical appointments.

who take a perverse pleasure in tempting God; failure and shame are their punishment.

4° Bearing what we have said in mind, let us make it clear that good works demand *zeal and resolve*. Yes, a burning love is necessary without which nothing can get done.

Have we not sensed hell's passion in the zeal to be witnessed in the propagation of evil? Oppose it with the zeal of heaven, the zeal of God's love. Nobody loves his friends more than he who gives his life for them. This is what Jesus did on the Cross. He who had nowhere to lay his head, he who possessed nothing gave himself, gave his very life by the shedding of his blood.

Oh, how beautiful the examples of ardour are of a Camillus de Lellis who, sick himself, devoted his life to the sick; of a Jerome Emiliani who gave himself entirely to the education of children; to a Vincent de Paul who, poor himself, dedicated so much to the relief of poverty. What made them do it? Charity. The cry of St. Paul, "*Caritas Christi urget nos*. The love of Christ drives us on" (2 Cor 5:14), never stopped ringing in their ears and echoing in the depths of their hearts. They spent their lives giving of themselves and giving of themselves with an ever-greater zeal, with a tenderness that nothing could resist.

5° But what should particularly catch our attention is the spirit of creativity of charity. See how artful the enemy can be in his perversion of souls. Not only does he make use of whatever comes in handy, but he devises ways and means nobody else would ever have thought of. It's admirable in a way! We must lift our hats to him for being clever, for being endowed with what we have to admit is super-human cunning. See how he manipulates the press, the stage, the world of sports, the world of music, the world of vice, the club scene, the secret "rendezvous," the lure of the occult...it all serves his evil purposes—and when one bottle of poison is empty, he quickly uncorks another.

Then why, in this war that we are waging, should we not do the same? Let us oppose the inventions of hatred with those of love.

In recent years we have certainly seen examples of this. Take the Conferences of St. Vincent de Paul. The offspring of modest parents, they have spread from one end of the world to the other. These conferences stand as a hardy tree, if you will, but how many branches it has given birth to: Catholic committees<sup>68</sup>, Workers' circles<sup>69</sup>, Christian mutual aid societies, etc. Springing up on every side, they have one common engine, charity—and this is what gives us hope. Where hell insists on promoting much hatred, we must feel the call to respond with much love and to do so with

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<sup>68</sup> editor's note: the so-called 'Catholic committees' were a phenomenon of late 19<sup>th</sup> century France, 1870-1905; these organizations, whether it be in the world of the press, education, politics, or social outreach, were established in order to give Catholicism a voice in a world rife with anti-clericalism

<sup>69</sup> editor's note: another phenomenon of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century; these groups were launched by Count Albert de Mun in 1871 in order to win back the working class to a Christian way of life

acts. Then prove it, brothers. Prove it by giving all you can—by giving your very self.

As for us religious, I do not hesitate to declare that our very vow of poverty fits us singularly, not only to give but to get other people to give. We become like Our Lord whose pierced hands and feet, and open side, are the fountains wherefrom love flows out to the whole world. To all Christians, there is the call to be charitable. To religious, there is also the call to be charitable but, even more so, to preach charity by the very life they lead with burning zeal and resourceful tenderness.

Christians and religious, let us give and give of ourselves. Thus, hatred will be driven back to hell and love will descend from heaven to men so as to enable them to rise again to the bosom of God.

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## THIRTIETH MEDITATION.

### Prayer in the Midst of the Church's Trials

*“Pater, si possibile est, transeat a me calix iste; verumtamen non mea sed tua fiat voluntas. My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet, not as I will, but as you will” (Mt 26:39).*

#### Following Jesus' example

This is what the Divine Master said in the agony that he chose to suffer in the Garden of Olives before Judas betrayed him to his executioners. The Church can certainly repeat the same petition in these troubled times: “Father, if it be possible, let this threatening storm-cloud of persecution pass us by.”

I dare say that this is how the Church ought to be praying. Even if, in the end, persecutions may produce some remarkable results, how many weak souls are lost! And if the Church can prevent the defection of these feeble souls, it must. That is why the Church must pray.

#### Trials and prayer

“It was necessary that Christ should suffer and so enter into his glory. *Nonne oportuit Christum pati et ita introire in gloriam suam*” (Lk 24:26). It is necessary that every man who offers himself to God's service should prepare himself for temptation. Did Jesus Christ not command us to repeat without ceasing, “*Et ne nos inducas in tentationem. Lead us not in temptation*” (Mt 6:13)? And since all Christians must say this prayer, why should not the Church, their common Mother, have to keep on saying it too? Jesus' prayer in the Garden was not granted because, at that time, a savior was needed. But is there any reason why the Church's plea should not be granted, since each of its members has received the command to say the Lord's Prayer?

#### The answers God gives

No, the Church is not forbidden to pray that it be delivered from persecution. And how often was its prayer not answered! Did the Church, prefigured by the Hebrews under the Old Law, not see its prayers granted again and again? Moses and the plagues of Egypt and the crossing of the Red Sea dry-shod—are these not evident proofs of divine help? Joshua, Samuel, Saul in the early years of his reign, David, Nehemiah and the Maccabees, to name only the most important, reveal the constant assistance of God, after His people, chastised for their rebellion, cry out to him.

What about the New Law? What about that storm on the lake when the boat carrying Jesus across the water was on the very verge of

shipwreck? What about Peter being rescued from Herod's designs? What about the Church's definitive triumph after three centuries of persecution? What about so many of those epic moments in history when the Bride of Christ looked as if she were to be consigned to the annals of the past, yet rose victorious, appearing to have sustained no injury, in order to prove that her Spouse was ever at her side?

Let us move on and dig deeper in order to consider those tremendous benefits the Church has gained by being threatened and persecuted, then delivered thanks to the prayers of its members. I am going to treat the broad strokes of what happens at such times and, afterward, I will examine the practical results. It is quite clear that God wishes to work all this to his glory. Yes, persecutions can be useful because of their long-term results.

### I.—The General Results of Persecution

1° *The separation of the good from the wicked.* As a matter of fact, as time goes by, we are evermore struck by this separation that has come to greater light in our time. Our Lord said, "*Qui non est mecum, contra me est.* Whoever is not with me is against me" (Mt 12:30).

Yet how many so-called conciliatory men would prefer to have one foot dangling in either camp. "*Quae societas lucis ad tenebras? Quae autem convenio Christi ad Belial?* What fellowship does light have with darkness? What accord does Christ have with Belial?" (2 Cor 6:14-15).

No doubt, the Heavenly Father of his family does not wish to separate the wheat from the weeds before the time comes; one must await the harvest. But when the wheat is ripe and the weeds begin to multiply of their own accord, then surely the time has come for drastic action and we must separate ourselves from those who not only wish to be separated from us, but have also vowed to wage war with us till death.

Have we not reached this stage? Let us open our eyes and see that such is the case. Those who are good will remain good, and those who are evil entrench themselves in their perversity. Did God allow the fight between the good and wicked angels to drag on? No, it was over in a flash. Satan and his cohorts were thrust down into hell. It happened in an instant.

2° *Waking up those who are asleep.* When God allows the bark of the Church to be tossed and buffeted by waves, he keeps an eye on her and knows the moment to intervene and bid the waves be still. Meanwhile the terrified passengers turn their eyes to heaven, those who are asleep awaken, and everyone springs into action. The captain's orders are obeyed more than ever; everyone senses that there is a crisis at hand.

The same thing applies to the Church. How listless it was at certain times. What deep feelings of fatigue and discouragement! What lack of determination—an attitude of 'whatever'! What a terrible state of affairs, one in which souls run great risks, can even lose themselves. But it is a state



of affairs which cannot last. Persecution forcibly brings it to an end. To be sure, the winds shake many a rotten fruit off the tree, but those that resist are the stronger for it.

In fact, there are within the Church a vast number of Christians whom it is difficult to imagine going to hell—they wouldn't be worth it. Nor are they worthy of heaven. They have to be placed somewhere. It seems that for them purgatory is a must, lenient but long: long because they have done nothing to deserve seeing God, lenient because they were never capable of doing serious harm. For this kind of Christian, persecution would appear to be highly beneficial. It would provide a “kick in the pants.” And although most of them would hardly understand what all the fuss was about, the mere presence of danger would make them turn their eyes to heaven and cry out: “*Domine, salva nos, perimus*. Lord, save us—we are drowning!” (Mt 8:25).

And sometimes even Jesus wakes up, but only to tell them what he told the apostles: “*Quid timidi estis, modicae fidei?*—Why are you terrified, you of little faith?” (Mt 8:26).

So even these have their prayers answered and it is good to know how to compel God to pardon the lapses of his people here on earth.

3° *The perfection of the good*. Who is good here below? No one. “*Si iniquitates observaveris Domine, quis sustinebit?* If you, O Lord, should mark our guilt, Lord, who could survive?” (Ps 29:3 Vulgate). Because of this, I am barely able to say what follows.

Nevertheless, God himself distinguishes man from man, distinguishes those who are narrowly saved—*tanquam per ignem*; as gold in the fire (Wis 3:6)—from those whose constant concern is to do what they think is most pleasing to His Infinite Majesty.

Yet even those who are good require purification, “*tanquam aurum in furnace*; as gold in the crucible” (Wis 3:6). They must divest themselves of whatever impurities they have by passing through the fire. The half-hearted will do so after death. God reserves the same for those who are good during their lifetime, so that whatsoever befalls them contributes to the happy result that “*Qui sanctus est sanctificetur adhuc*. He that is holy, let him become holier still” (Rv 22:11 Vulgate).

4° *The triumph of the Church*. That the Church has been condemned to struggle is evident from the “ups and downs” through which her Divine Spouse has permitted her to pass. But having passed through the fiery sieve and sorted things out, the Church knows where to look for its greatest support.

The Church has suffered two kinds of persecution in her time: the kind which almost destroyed her, and the kind from which she emerged triumphant.

Are not those populations to be admired, who almost totally abandoned, have nevertheless put up a heroic resistance against all tribulation? Take Ireland, for example. Even the United States. Even in Far

East God has left witnesses. Happy those who remain faithful witnesses to the end!

Next to these, there are other peoples who, having allowed themselves to become infested with false doctrines, are nevertheless making constant daily efforts to drive them out.

God considers such efforts wonderful and he finds joy, not because his faithful are suffering, but because they demonstrate courage in struggle and gain glory in victory.

## II.—Practical Results of Persecution

1° *The possibility of personal conversion.* Persecution can serve to facilitate conversions; that is a real possibility.

But there are certain conditions: we must be disposed to listen to God's voice, a voice which speaks to us in so many different ways. It is necessary to turn towards God in all sincerity...to repent, a repentance like that of the citizens of Nineveh when they listened to the voice of Jonah. Still we have to be more specific.

It takes 'guts' to convert. I am not talking about those mass movements of conversion which mean little; they are like the waves of the ocean that crash on the seashore and then disappear just as quickly as they came.

No, what we need are individuals who convert personally. Conversions cannot take place *en masse* but one by one. Even when St. Peter preached and two or three thousand Jews converted, the Holy Spirit descended on each of them individually. This wasn't a question of a mass resolution, but the work of separate souls.

If God the Holy Spirit saw fit to inspire them to return simultaneously, that's another matter; but, if I may use a popular phrase, each of them took personal responsibility for his actions.

2° *Fervent prayer.* Here I need only point to the work of "Notre Dame de Salut"<sup>70</sup>. Yes, what is needed is prayer and lots of it. It is necessary to turn to Our Lord, to cry out to him and never to lose heart.

How can I describe this torrent of prayer that wells up as a result of persecution? What can I say except that prayer without ceasing holds infinite weight on the scales of divine justice: "*Multum valet deprecatio justi assidua.* The fervent prayer of one who is righteous is very powerful" (Jas 5:16).

Such prayer is the wonderful work of the Communion of Saints. So let us pray and get others to pray. Let us pray as hard as we possibly can. This prayer will pierce the heavens as did that of Jesus Christ.

3° *A more austere life.* That Christians' wishy-washiness is an

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<sup>70</sup> editor's note: the association known as Notre Dame de Salut had at the time Fr. d'Alzon was writing these meditations organized, under the direction of the Assumptionists, a prayer campaign that had gathered some 1,600,000 signatures from throughout France.

obstacle to God's action goes without saying. I ask you, how can the heart of God allow itself to be moved by the prayers of those consumed by a desire for the easy life or even those absorbed in forbidden pleasures?

Yes, it is necessary to have courage to lead a more austere life. We must learn to put an end to our cowardliness and concessions to the senses which serve only to weaken our character and produce men ready to compromise on every religious issue as long as it doesn't interfere with the good life.

4° *Effect on the masses.* What have I to say on this subject? There is no doubt that one can exercise enormous influence over lots of people, provided one wants to—but one must want to and want to with all one's heart. "But," someone will answer—"but I'm just a poor little woman!" Well, look what you have witnessed over the past couple of months. Do you think that the national prayer campaign has had no effect?

But this campaign must continue. Others like it must be launched until victory is won.

Sometimes the prayer of one isolated individual accomplishes exceptional miracles. Let us remember that woman who, in great anguish, thought she was about to lose the soul of her son. She prayed, and above all she wept. The old bishop that she went to see told her that it was impossible that God would allow the son of so many tears to perish. And, in the end, God touched the heart of that young man and his name was Augustine.

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## THIRTY-FIRST MEDITATION.

### Relations amongst Ourselves

“*Mandatum novum do vobis*. I give you a new commandment” (Jn 13:34).

I would like to talk about relations of religious among themselves and I would contend that they should be:

- 1° Edifying;
- 2° Loving;
- 3° Respectful
- 4° Founded on serving one another.

#### I.—Relationships that are Edifying

##### The duty of edifying one another

Why did you embrace community life in a monastery? Was it not to gain mutual support by maintaining daily relationships with men like you seeking perfection? Otherwise it would have been better to go on living all by yourself, and leading whatever kind of life suited you most.

From the moment you seek the company of certain men in view of becoming holy, you have to be penetrated through and through with the standing by one another that you have contracted with them. You asked to be admitted to their company so that they might edify you and sustain you in your journey to acquire the greatest virtues; but you, in your turn, you must return the favor. For your part, edify them. Remember that if their manner of living serves as a living sermon for you, much more powerful than any spoken work, they have a right to expect the same from you.

Bear in mind what the Holy Spirit has to say: “*Frater, qui adjuvatur a frater, quasi civitas firma*. When brother helps brother, theirs is the strength of a fortress” (Prv 18:19, Vulgate). This fortress is the monastery. Be clear about what you yourself are called to contribute to it. If, to the contrary, you end up by disedifying your brothers, you can be sure your bad example will be followed. Others will imitate you, and the result will be that a certain number of religious will become decadent.

##### Failing to edify makes no sense

“But,” you will say to me—“since I became a religious I have been

subjected to a host of bad examples.” What? What are you saying? You are complaining of having been a victim of the evil you have done, that you have been committing against others day in and day out?

Since when has somebody else’s wrong-doing been an excuse for your doing likewise? Such a chain of reasoning just doesn’t make sense. Look here! You entered the monastery to seek holiness in the company of your brothers. Instead of being edified you are disedified. So you compensate yourself by disedifying those who disedify you.

In other words, you are the victim of bad example—the kind of example which could lead you to a loss of religious spirit, grievous sin, and even hell eventually. So, shamelessly you decide to avenge yourself of this scandal by destroying the religious spirit of your brethren, getting them to commit grievous sin, and sending them to hell. What a wonderful piece of logic that is! But you must admit that it wasn’t inspired by Our Lord who said: “Woe to him who causes scandal!” (Lk 17:1).

See, on the contrary, what a vast amount of good you could do if only you firmly set your mind to it. I have to admit that certain of your brothers could be more edifying in the example they are giving, but what conclusion must you draw from this if you yourself are a genuine religious? You may perhaps have to ask yourself if you are not partly to blame, but then you must ask yourself what you can do to bring your brothers to perfection, less by what you say than by the good example you give.

## **II.—Relationships that are Loving**

What a sight it is to see brothers who love one another! “*Ecce quam bonum et quam jucundum habitare fratres in unum!*” How good it is, and how delightful, for brothers to dwell together in harmony” (Ps 132:1, Vulgate). Yes, there is nothing better than a religious community where everybody loves one another, but to achieve this everyone must pull his weight.

### **An affection that leaves no one out**

For this love to last, all narrow, self-centered sentiments must be rooted out—they too often prove to discourage the genuine affection that should exist among all brothers.

Beware of exclusive friendships that give rise to jealousy and harsh judgments. They cause separation to occur with those who seek to set themselves. The love that we have to show must extend to all, just as the community in which we live together belongs to all.

### **serious and profound, following the example of Jesus Christ**

The soul of every one of our brothers was purchased by the blood of Jesus Christ who loved him to the point of shedding his blood for him. So let these same souls be for us the object of a similar love. Let us be ever

ready, following our Savior's example, to give of ourselves and spend ourselves on their account, as the Apostle puts it: "*Libentissime impendam et superimpendar ipse pro animabus vestris*. I will most gladly spend and be utterly spent for your sakes" (2 Cor 12:15). If such should be the dispositions of an apostolic labourer towards the sinners he encounters, all the more reason for his harboring similar sentiments towards those with whom he is called to live together as family.

And if this affection is deep and true, it cannot fail to produce lasting results. It is said that one never notices the good he is doing—but the religious who truly loves the souls of his brothers is doing lots of good all the time. One can sense the bond which exists between them and Our Lord. In truth, this affection implies great frankness and loyalty. When such is the case, everyone can see it and who can complain of a friend who speaks his mind because he wishes to be helpful?

#### Faithful

This affection must be loyal and avoid certain frictions. "*Amicus fidelis, protectio fortis; qui autem invenit eum, invenit thesaurum*. A faithful friend is a strong shelter, and whoever has found one has found a treasure" (Sir 6:14 Vulgate). But how rare these faithful friendships are! Charity between religious is the prerequisite of the greatest fidelity that can exist. We live too close together never to get on one another's nerves. Not all of one's brothers have a character that is equally good-humoured.

Happy the faithful religious who never loses heart—who never becomes discouraged when his feelings get hurt, either as a result of a misunderstanding or as a result of the fickleness of the human heart. A brother who has been injured should respond with all the more affection so that the injury will appear all the more unjust because of his own loving response—unless one's brother is small-hearted, in which case one can be all the more consoled in the face of the rebuffs knowing that one did everything out of love of God and not to receive the praise of others.

This being said, and keeping in mind what was previously said about particular (exclusive) friendships, there may arise among religious, as a result of being involved in ordinary chores or in even greater efforts together, a kind of special esteem. If such is the case, I would refrain from criticizing it if it is clear that the relationships between such brothers is based on an esteem that finds its source in God and not in mere human feelings.

### III.—Relationships that are Respectful

Expect nothing from a community where respect for one another does not exist. Christian respect is one of the most critical conditions of the common life.

The religious who does not respect his brothers lacks self-

knowledge, does not really know his brothers, and is unaware of the honor of having been admitted to live in their company.

1° *He lacks self-knowledge.* For, if he looked deep within, in the light of faith, he would see his own faults, his own imperfections, the disagreeable side of his own character. He would appreciate the importance of “putting his own house in order” before demonstrating a lack of respect toward others. Yet if he removed all these obstacles, then respecting others would come easily. He would begin to admire the patience with which people put up with him—and this would give rise to great respect indeed!

2° The religious who does not respect his brothers *does not know them or knows them very poorly.* Let him regard them in the true light and remember what Our Lord said: “Judge not, and you will not be judged (Lk 6:37).”

You who are so hard on others, think for a moment about what you yourself deserve. And if your judgment of the other members of your community (supposing it to be accurate) is so disparaging, think what God’s opinion must be when he takes a good look at you! Believe me: before promoting yourself to the rank of Community Critic, imagine the criticisms your brothers could well have of you and the judgment that God himself might make of your state of being.

Then perhaps you could ask yourself whether the elimination of respect is not something that tends to convert religious life from an anticipation of heavenly joy into a living hell. Because when you come to think of it, the place where individuals respect one another most is the Communion of Saints around God’s throne, whereas in hell there is absolutely no respect for anyone; the damned and the demons hurl reproaches at one another, insult one another, call one another names—because they despise one another and know one another’s sins only too well. Do not imitate them, but imitate rather the angels and saints who respect one another in God’s presence.

3° The religious who does not respect his brothers *is unaware of the honor that he has been given.* I would certainly never contend that every religious house is perfect, but at least those who live there are aspiring towards perfection, and that’s already saying a lot. To be afforded the honor of living in such company is priceless! You may blame, you may criticize—to what purpose? Will you correct yourself? It is not by means of blame and criticism that one corrects. They only make matters worse; they are a source of division and nothing more. Be respectful, be firm, and, above all, be charitable. Then any observations you see fit to make will not be bitter or out of hand. Besides, they might be able to do some good.

“The Catholic Church,” according to a Protestant author, “has been a school of respect.” If this respect were banished, it would have to find refuge in religious communities as if in a sanctuary.

#### **IV.—Relationships that are of Service to One's Brothers**

It is not good enough to elaborate beautiful theories about how things ought to be. We must “get down to brass tacks”, and the “brass tacks” of community life are services requested and rendered.

Which religious, in a thousand and one circumstances, does not have to ask for a helping hand? And how often are we not put upon to offer such services ourselves? Who likes being disturbed? Who likes being bothered?

##### **Following Christ's example**

Yet what did Our Lord do from Bethlehem to Calvary but allow himself to be “bothered” endlessly? And what an example of patience does he not give us in the Blessed Sacrament! What stupendous miracles does he not perform in order to show us how, when one is as good as possible, not counting the cost, one can render one service after another!

So there is your model. Who has ever been as perfect as Jesus Christ? And who has rendered, and continues to render at every moment, half the service he does? Listen, when you have done half as much to help all of humankind as he, in his humility, has to help you, then you can begin to complain. Meanwhile, hang your head and take note that your inflexibility, your selfishness, your total preoccupation with yourself represent everything that is diametrically opposed to the mind of Christ.

##### **Two safeguards: being useful and obedient**

What to do about it? Get a hold of yourself, forget your “ego” so as to help as much as you can...with two guidelines: usefulness and obedience.

Each of us has his own way of being useful. A Carmelite Sister is not expected to go out and nurse the sick nor is a Sister of Charity expected to flog herself with iron chains for the conversion of sinners; each has her own role to play. The same applies within our community. A lay brother is not asked to undertake demanding studies any more than a clumsy student is asked to be in charge of the infirmary.

Studies that are not taken seriously produce illiterates and the ill who are not treated properly end up in cemeteries. We must not allow service to degenerate into dis-service.

This is why, besides looking for service that is useful, we must add obedience. It enlightens, it orients, and it confers a special force that allows services to be rendered usefully and intelligently. Even when the best will is present, one must know how to give it direction; this is where obedience comes in: to serve as guide.

*In conclusion:* mutual edification, mutual love, mutual respect and mutual aid—these are the four fundamental ingredients of relationships between religious. As long as they are maintained, the community will develop in fellowship and zeal and will bear the fruit that Our Lord has a right to expect from a field that is so carefully cultivated by his grace.



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## THIRTY-SECOND MEDITATION.

### Relationships with Outsiders

“*Vos estis sal terrae.* You are the salt of the earth” (Mt 5:13)

I have spoken about the relationships of religious among themselves. For a long time religious life was a life cut off from the outside world. People flocked to monasteries; monasteries themselves were located away from the hustle and bustle of the world and, in the silence of the cloister and the chants of the Divine Office, offered holy and wholesome delights that nothing and nobody could disturb.

Later on the disciples of St. Benedict, in the West, came down from their mountain perches, emerged from their forest enclosures and set about evangelizing the nations, with noteworthy results.

Today, thanks to Francis and Dominic, Religious Orders are involved in the everyday life of the Church and popes have entrusted religious in Catholic countries with reviving the faith and, where it is not present, to bring the light of faith. So it is now recognized that religious must have dealings with the world. But what must they be like?

I maintain they must be:

1° supernatural;

2° reserved;

3° kind;

4° concerned exclusively with the salvation of souls.

Under these conditions, far from doing any harm, they will be able to produce abundant fruit on God’s behalf.

#### I.—Supernatural

##### The overriding sentiment

“*Sic nos existimet homo ut ministros Christi et dispensatores mysteriorum Dei.* Thus should one regard us: as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God” (1 Cor 4:1). Every religious can put into practice the first half of St. Paul’s advice and every Augustinian of the Assumption seeking ordination the second because he must prepare himself

to be a priest one day, to perform all the duties assigned to him, and to acquire all the virtues necessary.

Let men regard us as ministers of Christ. Let us always be his servants and his ambassadors. And let this be the bottom line in our dealings with men.

If only we never left our communities without this thought in mind, what grief we would be spared, what pitfalls we would avoid, and, above all, what good we would do! All I wish to be is my Saviour's ambassador to men. All I wish to do is get involved with them in works of charity and the saving of souls, both those absent and those with whom I am working with face-to-face. How much good could be done in this regard—and that's what I must do.

#### **Avoid all gossip and jiggery-pokery**

And so, how my thoughts must rise above gossip and all jiggery-pokery! Although I may happen to hear people engaged in such things, I must join in knowing that, yes, I can change the tone of the conversation. In such situations I must avoid any kind of noxious curiosity, avoid any desire to satisfy hard feelings, avoid any pleasure I might get in learning about the misfortunes of anyone I dislike. Never must I listen with the intention of repeating what I hear. Never must I intentionally cause harm to anyone with my tongue.

All such things turn the supernatural life upside down! I entered the monastery to become holy, and off I go to the parlor looking for a way to damn myself. If I must have dealings with people outside, it is for them to find in me a minister of Jesus Christ, someone who whispers in their ear at the opportune time what I am called to proclaim elsewhere from the rooftops, but which in private has the possibility of penetrating deep within them, awakening their consciences, and converting some or improving others. Instead of doing this, what am I doing? Hasn't my behavior become rather coarse, involved in all kinds of petty scheming and putting my nose into what is none of my business? As for the good that people came seeking from me, it is nowhere to be found.

#### **Maintain the high road**

Why has this happened? Because I have not maintained the high road, because I am no longer a man of God, no longer supernatural. And I am no longer supernatural because I have stopped making treasures out of supernatural truths and feelings. When I speak about God, I sound as if I were reciting a lesson learned for a school-teacher. My words drop out mechanically, as from a conveyor belt. It sounds like they're memorized, pat answers, but certainly not convictions coming from my heart.

Because to be supernatural, to be a man of God in my dealings with others, means having for a long time become so at the foot of the Cross or in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament. In such a way it is that the thought of God and of his cause, that love of Our Lord and of the Church,

place the words of an apostle on our lips. Then will those who come to see us leave better or resolved to become so.

Ah, how much time has been lost, even misused, because we did not know how make of our dealings with others something sufficiently supernatural!

## II.—Reserved

In all too many circumstances, good relationships depend less on what we say than on what we don't. *How many busy-bodies* come to see us in order to get us to talk. Or sometimes it's they who do the talking, waiting for us to nod our heads and then go out and tell everybody we agree with them. When dealing with such people, silence is the key—and the shorter the conversation, the better. We must not let them catch us off our guard, we must not let them put words into our mouth or even find out what we really think. In certain situations, we are not required to have a very high opinion of them, but, even in such circumstances, we must be careful not to show it unless we are sure it will do them good—something that is not easy to discern if we are talking to someone we don't know well.

So let us constantly be on our guard. When people come to see us, let us remember that we are not necessarily surrounded by friends and quite often we could compare ourselves to Daniel in the lions' den, for fear that our soul be devoured.

Need I mention how vigilant we must be when dealing with members of the opposite sex? There are circumstances which prescribe the greatest caution. I am addressing religious of all ages—it is an illusion to consider age as some kind of defense against certain dangers. But I am speaking above all to those of you who are young—and I earnestly entreat you, in the strongest possible terms, to flee the deceptive allurements of such relationships and preserve the innocence of your soul and the integrity of your chastity. So pay serious attention to this matter, be watchful, and put in place strict measures of reserve.

Do you want people to look up to you—not as a person, for this would be vanity, but as a priest and a religious? Then be reserved at all times. Don't let useless outbursts reveal how little virtue there is in your life and how little value in your actions. Little by little, even if you don't do an enormous amount of good, you will at least accomplish what you can: doing no harm—and that's already a lot.

## III.—Kind

Having once established the need for reserve, there is nothing more important than a great kindness.

Why are you always criticizing everything and everybody? What is

the result? People will only avoid you. Maybe that would be for the best. Then, keep away from them. Your absence may benefit you—and it will certainly benefit others!

#### **The example of Our Lord**

In what does this recommended kindness consist? In making people feel that Jesus Christ is there: in your attitude and approach, in whatever you say or do, in your very self. “*Sic nos estimet homo.*”

How much time did the Savior not spend in solitude and “deserted” places?! But when he did make an appearance, he spoke in such a way that it made those sent to arrest him say, “*Nunquam sic locutus est homo sicut hic homo.* No man has ever spoken as this man speaks” (Jn 7:46). You see, his whole being exuded this sense of compassion, patience, goodness, and kindness—this was his charm.

Try to acquire this charm. Such charm is not incompatible with a certain reserve. Reserve prevents you from sliding down into the gutter of human affairs; divine charm, on the other hand, lifts people up. Once again in this fashion you lift them up as did the One to whom the Pharisees said, “*Quo usque animam nostrum tollis?* How much longer will you keep us in suspense?” (Jn 10:24) The effect of your charm may fall far short of your aspirations. But there are also times in which, like our Model, we must know when to come down to meet people. Sometimes it is wiser to remain at a certain level where people can still feel your presence in case of need. In all these situations, certain conditions must be met.

#### **Under the gaze of God**

This is where tact and prudence come into play. We must do our utmost to help our fellow-men—but we must do it under God’s gaze, and the way we think Our Lord would have done it. Kindness, when it has as its ultimate goal the good of souls, finds a thousand ways of (if I can use this expression) gathering them in its net. But to acquire this kindness, how much we must immerse ourselves over and over again in the love of the Divine Teacher!

Happy is he who possesses such kindness in all its purity! Happy is he whose one ambition, in whatever he undertakes, is to make Jesus Christ better known and better loved.

### **IV.—Concerned Exclusively for the Salvation of Souls**

#### **Avoid any basis for calumny**

About the worst thing that could happen to us would be people legitimately questioning our motives—of our seeking not the good of souls, but our own personal gain or satisfaction.

You can be sure that we will inevitably be accused. The Church’s enemies have always taken delight in slinging mud at its sons and defenders. But it is one thing to suffer calumny, and quite another to

deserve it.

And, believe me, tongues will wag with pernicious results if, on the one hand, we do what we can to give the appearance that we're doing what is right, but, on the other, do not do everything in our power to avoid any incrimination. And the best way to protect ourselves from such accusations is to meditate constantly on the sublimity of our vocation.

#### **Seeking only the Kingdom of God**

We became religious to save our own souls and extend the Kingdom of Jesus Christ to other souls. How are we carrying out this two-fold aim? What does God see—gazing down on us? Are we trying to serve Him better? Are we getting others to adore Him “in spirit and in truth?” Are we filling other hearts with the desire to dedicate their lives to his service more and more perfectly?

Yes, we must be heavenly minded men, and our sole purpose in life must be to pursue a heavenly aim—to fill heaven with an ever increasing number of residents. And in our dealings with others, we must ask ourselves time and time again: “How useful have I been to souls and with what level of perfection am I serving them?” Here, indeed, is a program worthy of our noblest ambitions: to conquer souls, and to conquer them for Jesus Christ, to aid Jesus Christ in his great work of saving the human race. Can you think of anything more worthwhile?

#### **With commitment, passion and grit**

But to keep pace with the Good Shepherd as he hunts for human hearts, we must demonstrate commitment, passion, and grit. We chose to set out in this ministry—but because it is full of so much worry and fatigue—and, alas! so much failure and disappointment—we lose heart and we look for something easier and more agreeable instead. This is the great danger. To prevent ourselves from such a result, we must carry on with an ever-increasing zeal that will purify us of whatever we find distasteful and will prosper our efforts all the more for their being performed with a greater spirit of detachment.

Let us love souls—not only from the height of the pulpit, but in our ordinary, everyday dealings with them. Let us love souls, and let us learn the full cost of such love by gazing upon the Crucifix, the expression of our Master's decision to shed his blood for them; by gazing upon the tabernacle, the sign of his patience with us; by gazing upon the altar, where, offering himself up day after day, he teaches religious what their vocation really means—to make of themselves humble and generous victims and to reproduce in their own lives, and to the utmost of their ability, this great and solemn sacrifice whereby the world is redeemed.

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## THIRTY-THIRD MEDITATION.

### Studies

If our religious family is to be stamped by a particular apostolic character (and since we cannot count on the infused knowledge given to the apostles on the day of Pentecost), it is incumbent on us to prepare ourselves to convey divine knowledge by undertaking serious studies. In other words, to be true Assumptionists we must study, and study hard.

I am going to begin by giving you certain general directives. Then, because we want to be practical, we will get down to the ‘brass tacks’ of specific recommendations.

#### I.—General Directives

##### **A. Avoid laziness and idleness; they cause complacency**

To begin with, religious must avoid laziness at all cost. We touched on this matter in addressing the law of work as a consequence of the vow of poverty I see this bit of advice as indispensable for a religious in today’s world: “*Nemo dat quod non habet*. You cannot give what you haven’t got”<sup>71</sup>. One of the main causes of people losing their faith today is the laziness of catechists and preachers. They know little and understand less. The result of their ignorance is disaster: “*Nescierunt neque intellexerunt, in tenebris ambulat, movebuntur omnia fundamenta terrae*. They know nothing, they understand nothing, they walk about in the dark, and (in consequence) all the foundations of the earth will be shaken” (Ps 81:5 Vulgate Clementine).

It’s useless to cast aspersions on unbelievers. Start throwing a few at some of those preachers whose heads are as puffed up with self-complacency as they are void of grey matter. They turn people away, cause them to look at God’s word in disgust, because they won’t take the trouble of preparing their sermons properly. May God hold them strictly accountable one day for the time they lost. I hope they find it hard to explain away their laziness and intellectual paralysis, that rendered them incapable of any serious thought.

##### **decadence in the monastery**

Let us revert, however, to what concerns us more closely, that is,

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<sup>71</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* Ia IIae, Q. 96 A.6 (Thomas Aquinas&ST&CPL& Ia IIae, question 96, article.6)

how the decadence of almost every Religious Order came about. St. Bernard makes the observation that poverty gave birth to virtue, that virtue brought plenty, that plenty produced idleness, and that idleness soon became the mother of all vices...and this, in a nutshell, is the history of why and how so many monasteries sank into stagnation.

Look at all those religious who become tired of their cells. The author of the *Imitation of Christ* said it well, "*Cella continuata dulcescit*. Little by little, withdrawing to one's room becomes delightful, if one persists"<sup>72</sup>. But when does this happen? It does so when we spend our time there in prayer and study. But if we spend long hours there doing nothing at all, it will soon become intolerable—it will turn itself into a prison cell from which our only thought will be how to escape.

#### **Insatiable curiosity**

And what will you do then? You will start going out. And I can bet my bottom dollar that you won't be leaving your room to go into church, leaving the truth hidden in books for the truth hidden in the tabernacle. You will go out to steep yourself in the vanity of mundane discourse. Like the Athenians, you will have no time for anything but telling or hearing "*aliquid novi*; something new" (Acts 17:21).

How strangely charming, how odd, in fact, this fascination that feeds itself on what others have to say and satisfies others with what it itself has to say! But what is the purpose of all this idle talk? Where does all this senseless chatter—and that's what it really is—lead? Simply to make weighty and supernatural ideas disappear, to excite rivalry, to turn disagreement into antagonism, and to provoke severe reproach of one's neighbour. Is this kind of thing worthy of a religious? And is it surprising that such conversation lowers not only his moral stature but his intellectual level?

And when such conversation is repeated and prolonged, is it surprising that grumbling begins, grumbling against one's brothers, grumbling against one's superiors, grumbling about one's state of life. One begins to ask oneself what ever brought him to enter religious life in the first place and he can't figure why.

It's not long before one begins to ask why he would not leave a place where his freedom and independence are so restricted. There is but one step left—and this step is easily taken. We've seen it happen time and time again.

#### **or ridiculous ambition**

One may resign himself to staying where he is, but not before long he begins to look for some compensation: ambition quickly takes root in a soul that is no longer supernatural. He begins to ask: why not one of the top

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<sup>72</sup> Thomas a Kempis - *De imitatione Christi, lib. I: Admonitiones ad spiritualem uitam utiles* - LLT-A vol. 2, cap. 20, pag. 37, linea 13 (Thomas a Kempis&The Imitation of Christ&CPL& vol. 2, chap. 20, page 37, line 13)



jobs in the Order? I have known this kind of folly to drive men insane. Yes, downright insane! They were obviously incapable of such a charge, but they didn't think so, and the thought of their outstanding merits being totally ignored made them profoundly sad. Supposing they had not been entirely mistaken, might this have not proven even more dangerous since unbridled ambition leads to all kinds of intrigue, and sometimes goes to such extremities as can hardly be believed? It is amazing what harm can be done and what disruption caused by one ambitious spirit.

One ambitious spirit—if his vain pretensions are not satisfied within the monastic walls, you may be sure he will hurry to satisfy them elsewhere under the appearance of being full of zeal. You'll see him mixing himself up with whatever is none of his business, and the smallest trouble he causes will cause people to lose their respect for religious. They will look upon religious either as stupid fools, or as busybodies who cannot keep their noses out of other people's affairs.

It is not as if we never had to put up with the censure and fault-finding of other men. It happens not only sometimes but often—it's our common lot. But, as St. Peter reminds us (cf 1 Pt 4:15-16), it must be because we are religious and done by people who hate what we stand for. When this happens, we can accept it happily. So let the children of this world scorn us for being religious as much as they like—we glory in it. But let them not scorn us for being bad and unworthy religious...and I'm afraid this does happen when certain communities give way to laziness.

#### **B. Avoid a mania for studying**

But besides such deplorable laziness, let's not be afraid to mention the opposite extreme, also a defect: study for the mere sake of study. The religious so affected seems to be suffering a form of diabolical possession—possessed by the devil of “vain knowledge,” the kind of knowledge which builds himself, and no one else, up. What possesses one to study in this fashion? I can't treat the matter at length right now.

#### **source of pride**

I know there are religious so frantic at their studies that community exercises become nothing more than a bore. The Rule of Life ceases to oblige them. I freely admit they are studying theology and the other ecclesiastical sciences, but they are studying them from such a merely human standpoint that all they get out of it is shrivelled-up piety and a taste for disputation.

It puffs up their ego to such an extent that they feel like Simon Magus who “thought he was somebody; *existimans se esse aliquem*” (Acts 8:9). Take as an example the religious who thinks he's somebody and passes censorious judgment from the heights of knowledge.

Listen, just about everyone who thinks like this ends up delighting in shaky ideas. They create a “school of thought.” Why should they work to reach the same conclusions as everybody else? So they go off on their

own. Their influence begins to lead others astray. They are endangering the salvation of others by dwelling on paradoxes against the faith.

**source of obstinacy**

What is worse is that they become pig-headed. Under the pretext that they are smarter than the other members of the community, they dig themselves into their own way of looking and feeling about things...and sometimes, even here on earth, they reap the fruit of their proud obstinacy and become objects of ridicule.

Is it not better for the religious to sit down in God's presence, open his books, and start studying with sentiments of humility, obedience, and the love of souls? Let us follow the example of so many saints—men of vast erudition who nevertheless took as their motto: "Humility and Love."

Open St. Augustine, and see how the works of this great Doctor of the Church were all written under this two-fold inspiration. We may not possess his genius—all the more reason for imitating his virtues as we get down to our studies. His will be the balm which alone preserves us from all corruption.

## **II.—Specific Recommendations**

Now I would like to address a word to three different groups listening to me today: to those of you who are just beginning, to those who have been studying for a while, and to the "old-timers."

**to newcomers**

To this first category I say: You have just arrived. What do you know? Let yourselves be guided. Possibly you've brought a lot of useless baggage along with you in the form of a human way of looking at things, a worldly wisdom—something which you must above all get rid of. Do not imagine that we hold in high esteem the knowledge reflected in State university diplomas. We endure them in the same spirit that the Hebrews accepted divorce, "*Ab initio autem non fuit sic*. From the beginning it was not so" (Mt 19:8). It was one of the Popes who invented university degrees. Since then the Devil has thrown them back in the Church's face; and until they regain their original spirit, we can only expect the worst possible consequences.

Listen to me: leave behind any preconceived notions which, on the one hand, may be inimical to Christianity, and especially those, on the other hand, to the Assumptionist spirit in particular.

But if, on the contrary, you have nourished your mind, for many years, on sound Augustinian concepts, then so much the better! Please leave it to your superiors to judge.

You may, or may not, be an extremely capable young man, but it is clear that you have been deemed sufficiently capable to be admitted as a

member. Even if you are not a genius we can make good use of you—perhaps better use than if you were a genius, as long as you quite humbly allow yourself to be guided. And if you are not particularly bright, then make good use of your time and don't waste a minute of it; keep your mind occupied and work at it daily. You may never acquire a deep devotion to the God of knowledge, but you will to the God of humility. Undertaking the work asked of you and cultivating an attitude of docility toward those more learned than you will help you achieve a certain perfection (like St. Joseph of Cupertino)—and that's what religious life is all about.

**to those further along**

Here's another group. You have been Assumptionists for a number of years, and have proved your intellectual worth. Very well, put it to good use with both modesty and diligence—and stick to your prescribed course of studies. You don't mean to tell me that Mystical Theology, Sacred Scripture, the Church Fathers, Church History, Liturgy and all the rest provide insufficient scope for your budding talents! If so, then allow me to question the authenticity of your passion for this effort. It strikes me that you don't appreciate well enough the order in the development of doctrine. On my part, I find it to be rather quite a heavy burden to be placed on young shoulders.

**"to the old-timers"**

You are already a veteran. From the days of your novitiate you were given philosophical and theological training, after which you were left for the most part to your own devices.

Take my word for it: do not rely on yourself alone. Consult your superiors. Mindful of your personal interests, the work that has been assigned to you, and the advice you have been given, set up a plan of studies. It may happen that you can't follow it as rigorously as you would like. Nevertheless, whatever may happen, you can keep coming back to it.

And if you fail to carry it out completely, let me share this very reassuring word with you: St. Thomas was never able to complete the *Summa Theologica* and yet is he not regarded as the Angelic Doctor? You and St. Thomas will be able to comfort one another in heaven for not having been able to put the finishing touches on the plan of studies you had fixed here below.

And whatever the chaos in which you seem to be engulfed, take my word for it again: the position you occupy now is of the utmost importance. An old world is disappearing—it has almost vanished. Why? It's not for me to say. All I perceive is the fact—and what I am telling you is that it is part of God's plan.

"If Providence erases," says de Maistre, "it is no doubt in order to write"<sup>73</sup>. So many of our institutions have been done away with. What other

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<sup>73</sup> *Considérations*, OC 1:27, 24 (de Maistre&Considerations&OC&1:27, 24)

institutions will replace them? If they bear the “trade mark” of God’s hand, then they will contribute, during the span of their existence, to the continuation of God’s work; otherwise they, too, will promptly disappear. Ah, but one institution will endure: that which, founded on Jesus Christ, comprises the Pope and the bishops—and around them priests and religious, especially those called to pay special attention to sound doctrine.

In the dark night created by the fumes rising from the bottomless pit, God has set up some beacons to light the path in these modern times: the Immaculate Conception which implies two basic truths, that man fell through sin and that he was restored by Jesus Christ; the proclamation of Papal Infallibility—what a wonderful rampart for maintaining the unity of doctrine against the Babel of “think as you like” and “do as you please.”

Believe me: in the doctrine of Mary Immaculate we gain a strength that flows from the reality of the supernatural order implied in it. In the infallible Vicar of the One who is the Origin and Term of our faith, we can study all times with total assurance; we can search the reaches of the furthest horizons and plumb the uttermost depths, yet however long our lives we may be, they will be far too short to scan the length, breadth, height and depth of what God has revealed to man.

So let us study. Let us admire the way in which God affirms the truth in the face of the sneers and denials of the proud. Take stock of the majestic unfolding of our Catholic doctrine. Bask in this safe haven with its ever-shining and never-ending light that descends from the heavens.

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## THIRTY-FOURTH MEDITATION.

### A Superior on Retreat

If a retreat is necessary for ordinary religious, it is one thousand times more necessary for their superiors. Obligated in virtue of their office to give more of themselves to others, they have much less time to take care of themselves.

But they do need time, and plenty of it, to be able to sit down and, in God's presence, to think about the account they will have to render to the Father of the heavenly family.

So here are some of the main topics of reflection that should absorb them as they enter their retreat.

1° What is their responsibility by virtue of their position?

2° What means are they to take in order to re-establish or maintain the smooth running and fervor of their communities?

3° What is the good that they are called to work for souls?

4° What kind of apostolic activity should they encourage?

#### I.—The Responsibility of a superior

The superior of a community can be sure of one thing: he will neither save nor damn himself alone. He is surrounded by others and bears a responsibility for them for which God holds him accountable.

His community consists of men widely different in character and he has to bring them together—not an easy task. Nature may dispose their various personalities to clash, and this a superior must do everything to avoid.

They differ too in degree of perfection. The superior must be acquainted with every rung of the spiritual ladder...from those at the point of falling into grave sin to those at the very summit of spiritual perfection, and everything in between: temptation, indifference, discouragement, and moral lassitude.

#### **No ambition for authority**

Superiors will encounter brothers living with them who would like to take their place. Such a situation can be very awkward. If the superior himself wanted to be in charge of the community, how on earth is he going to talk to his would-be rival about humility, modesty and disinterestedness? Listen, we're not talking about using such trite and merely conventional phrases as are current in business and professional relationships. Here there

is something of the conscience involved, something “dead serious” which must be taken “dead seriously.”

It is hardly less awkward when the superior accepted his appointment unwillingly. Be he ever so humble, he will experience tremendous difficulty in convincing an ambitious man that not everyone in the world is as ambitious as he is.

But what happens if he himself is ambitious? This cripples him from the word, “Go!”, and he knows it. Here he is in the position he coveted. He may prove himself capable or incapable, but this is beside the point. Well, he wanted the job—now he’s got it. What he hasn’t got are the blessings God would have bestowed on him had he not sought promotion by means of human intrigue. Alas, from Day One he’s going to have a hard time. The whole community feels ill at ease precisely because everybody knows he wanted to be the boss.

#### **Not refusing the job**

Or take the case of a religious who turns the job down because it would be a bother. He prefers to go his own sweet way, working when he feels like it, and expecting everything to be done for him. He has no desire to command—it would annoy him to have to do so. He is equally allergic to having to obey, because obedience is a yoke around his neck. Such a religious is a thorn in his superior’s side, his cross.

He doesn’t want to be a superior out of laziness. Work is tiring, and he doesn’t want to wear himself out. Yet he expects whoever is the superior to do more work so that he himself can do less. The unfortunate superior is left with his own load to carry plus that of the “lazy devils” under his command; otherwise nothing would get done. To what extent must he shoulder the load of others? Is it not a question of fair play? A certain amount of work has got to be done, and the superior cannot do it all. The more he undertakes, the more certain unpleasant tongues will wag, accusing him of doing everything himself and not giving others a chance.

Where does God come into all this? So, you don’t want to become the superior because of the thousand and one difficulties of which I have mentioned only a few! But supposing you were to become the superior! The demands of responsibility wouldn’t be any the less than before you took on the job, would they?

Remember Jonah. He didn’t want to go to Nineveh in the same way that you yourself are running away from what is asked of you. There came a mighty tempest. He was thrown overboard—and the waves carried him to the very city where he dreaded to go. You don’t want to become the superior, so up you get and off you run, causing any number of tempests; however, unlike Jonah, I am not sure whether or not you’ll escape drowning yourself.

Raise your sights a little higher. You need not dread this responsibility in so far as you place yourself in the hands of obedience.

Otherwise how are you to appear before the judgment seat of God? Think of the accounting that will be asked of you on the Last Day. How will you justify yourself for having neglected the souls entrusted to you?

Listen, you are making this retreat on behalf of those souls you must sanctify. Think of the fold confided to your care. Some of them have fallen, but you won't lift them up. Some of them have offended God, even grievously, but you won't correct them. Some of them suffer, but you won't console them. Some of them are weak, but you won't strengthen them. Some of them are perverted, but you won't convert them.

When you appear before the judgment seat of God, how will you respond to the questions of the Just Judge about your real motives for wanting to be appointed superior, about your lame excuses for not having fulfilled your task conscientiously, about the souls you have permitted to go terribly astray, and about the entire community which, owing to your negligence, is now in such bad shape?

## **II.—Ways of Fostering Fervour and Regularity**

### **The state of the community**

During these days “far from the maddening crowd” which Providence provides, question yourselves seriously about the state of your community.

Is the Rule being observed? Is the work being performed satisfactorily? Is everybody faithful to the life of prayer? Is obedience honoured? Is charity practiced among brothers? Is the work of the community being carried out seriously—and with results? Are people making progress in the intellectual life? Are our motives supernatural? Are those who observe us edified? Are we spreading a Christian influence around us? Is our activity really carried out for God's sake? Surely this provides ample food for thought.

### **Maintaining fervor**

When you took over from your predecessors, what was the situation in the house? Was there regularity and fervor—and did you maintain it?

Notice that in our modern world where machines do so many things for us, it's not enough simply to own them and then think that the work will get done. You have to know how to use them, operate them, direct them to do what you want. You have to maintain them, repair damaged parts, renew the springs, oil the wheels. It's the same with a community. If it's running well, so much the better! It's important that it continue to do so, and that's why it needs constant supervision to assure that nothing stand in the way of its running smoothly, of its exercises taking place, and of all of the demands of religious life being carried out. Guidance is needed to help each one grow in love for his vocation, in seeking greater perfection through prayer and obedience, mutual affection, and a spirit of penance, work and zeal.

#### **Renewing regularity**

If, on the contrary, the new superior inherits a lax community, how much more must he beseech God's help in addressing the degeneration he has found?

Where is he to begin? What are the most effective methods to be used? Should he make his authority felt? Should he try to earn his confreres' confidence? Should he try to live the life of a good religious and wait until the religious under his direction grow in respect for him? If his first attempt fails, must he change tactics with the risk of being accused of inconstancy? Or, on the contrary, should he persist in his attempt and perhaps be accused of stubbornness?

Aren't these questions ample subject matter for meditation by a superior on retreat? And if he begins to see more clearly what he must do, hasn't he already achieved a lot?

### **III.—The Good to be done for Souls**

Clearly, one cannot impose confidence, one cannot force a religious to open up more than he wants to. It's not a question here of strict duty. Granted that each one has this freedom, which a superior must respect, what good can a superior not do to his religious?

#### **Win confidence**

The human heart, as coarse as it might seem, needs to be loved. Without indulging in woozy sentimental stuff, one needs only to look at the charity of a St. Francis de Sales, a St. Bernard, and above all a St. Augustine to see what immense good one can achieve through supernatural affection.

Religious might occasionally show no response, but it is not wrong to ask them why. Of course tact, prudence, a certain reserve are necessary. Now add respect to these three elements and you will see that eventually you will get them to tell you what is necessary.

Let's be clear. You do not need to have them tell you everything because there is a lot you will have to figure out on your own; however, if you are able to discern a hidden corner of their lives, where some profound feeling lies, does it make any difference whether they are the ones to make it known or not? Often religious feel better if you find out for yourself without their having to tell you. And this gives you all the greater freedom to act since you are armed with something that they did not volunteer to give you.

#### **by understanding how to direct souls**

Let me pause here for a moment. Every superior must learn the science of spiritual direction and during his retreat he must evaluate how much of it he has learned, and if not enough, how much more he must learn. This is a question of good faith. On it depends stagnation or progress in his



spiritual family.

I stress this crucial point: the obligation to master the art of directing souls, “*Ars atrium*; the art of arts,”<sup>74</sup> said St. Gregory. During a retreat, mindful that he must be a master in the art of making saints, a superior can well ask himself what good he has achieved, what obstacles he has placed on the road to holiness of the religious, and how he might shape, one by one, the souls entrusted to him.

#### **IV.—Apostolic activity**

##### **Cultivating apostolic zeal**

Given that our little family must be penetrated by a zealous spirit, it needs to be involved in a definite apostolic program. It is the special responsibility of the superior to direct and foster this spirit.

Because they simply fail to see the whole picture, a superior must first rein in well-intentioned but imprudent religious who think that everything is possible.

Let us keep coming back to the example of Our Lord, who could have converted the whole world by himself but ended up on the cross alone with only his mother, St. John, a few pious women and the good thief around him (and he wasn’t there on his own).

When the Holy Spirit came down on the Apostles, weren’t they equipped to shake up the whole world? Yet it took three centuries for the Church to triumph, and no sooner were persecutions of blood ended than a violent persecution of heresy began to assail her.

We will always have to fight and this shouldn’t surprise us. We will move forward slowly but surely; sometimes we will have to take a few steps backward. Never forget: God has his plans. To be certain, we will always have plenty to do and we shouldn’t worry about the results. The essential thing is never to get discouraged.

##### **Maintaining**

A superior must continually rekindle the resolve of his religious. To succeed, he must always give a clear vision. Obviously, he must himself follow the directives of his own superiors. But once the objectives have been set, he must prudently formulate plans of action and fire up the zeal of his collaborators. He must above all squelch any defeatist attitude that says “there is nothing left for us to do” as well as “every man for himself”—this is the surest road to disaster. There is always something we can do, be it prayer, suffering, even death.

It has been said that in the Church the person to be most pitied is the Pope, that in a diocese it is the bishop; we can say that in a religious community it is the local superior, especially since in most instances few

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<sup>74</sup> *Consilium de cura pastoralis* (ep. 73) - LLT-A-pag. 291, linea 209 (Gregory the Great & Advice on Pastoral Care & CPL & page 291, line 209)

give him much pity.

But let us add that he should not need the consolations of those under him; he has those of his Divine Master in the tabernacle and at the altar. It is there that he can seek them, mindful of the resolutions that he made during his retreat and that he will be able to carry out the more they were made in a spirit of faith, hope, and love, under the watchful eye of Our Lord.

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## THIRTY-FIFTH MEDITATION.

### Holy Communion

Today let me talk to you about frequent Communion, which you all practice, and let's look at its conditions and its benefits.

#### I.—Conditions

##### 1° Faith

Faith is the first condition of all—and I am afraid to say faith, though never entirely absent, is often quite weak when it comes to receiving Communion. Why?—because we are not sufficiently awed by what it is we are about to do. We would do well to repeat what Jeremiah says (and this strikes me more and more as providing a clue to many of our imperfections). “*Desolatione desolata est omnis terra, quia nullus est qui recogitet corde.* Desolate before me, desolate, the whole land, because no one takes it to heart” (Jer 12:11).

If only our degree of faith corresponded to the reality that we were about to be united to his God, would we not be penetrated by a far greater revulsion towards sin? Would we not make far greater efforts to purify ourselves? Notice, I am not suggesting that we should go to Confession more often. What I am suggesting is that we should concentrate more on being truly sorry for our sins and making our minds up not to commit them in future.

For it is a great illusion to think Confession by itself is enough. What would be more proportionate to our lives as religious would be a downright horror for all kinds of sin, watchfulness over ourselves. But this effort to purify oneself of one's faults and to repeat the words of the psalmist, “*Amplius lava me ab iniquitate mea et a peccato meo munda me; Wash me more and more from my guilt, and cleanse me from my sin*” (Ps 50:4 Vulgate) is all too rare in the face of what is due not so much as a result of God's justice as of his holiness.

##### 2° Adoration: of God hidden in the host

Adoration—Oh, if only we had a faith that was more alive, we would approach the holy table, I would not say with more respect—that's a word I would use for our dealings with other creatures—but with far deeper adoration.

What exactly is adoration? Nothing less than acknowledging God's

absolute dominion over all his creatures, and, therefore, over us.

“Over all creatures”: let us limit our consideration to those creatures we have to deal with. Well, as regards these creatures, let us suppose that besides belonging to God they depend on us. We have the right to use them—that’s all. But if they do not even depend on us, then we have no right to be angry with them nor to appropriate them, nor even to wish for them anything but God’s will.

But we too are creatures, and we must realize what this entails: nothing less than our dependence on God. If we depend on him, look what happens when we receive Communion. By an act of unbelievable self-effacement, the Creator of all beings becomes totally dependent on us. He comes down and rests upon our tongue to become our food. How can we not efface ourselves completely in the presence of such a supreme humiliation on the part of his Infinite Majesty? How can we not respond with utter dependence in the face of his? Shall we not allow this dependence of ours to penetrate everything we do?

Of course God makes allowance for our limitations. He neither expects nor exacts all he is entitled to in return for so great a love. He does, however, have the right to expect that our adoration be translated into acts, that it affect, day by day and better and better, every aspect of our life.

If only our adoration were as profound as it ought to be! How it would take hold of every moment of our existence! We would leave the Holy Table with the utter conviction that we owe him the continual offering of every thought, every desire, every movement, every act that characterizes us as human beings.

So let us enter into adoration fully aware of who this God is hidden in the host. Let us ponder his greatness some of which he would communicate to us if only we approached him worthily.

#### **of his blessed humanity**

Let us also ponder the Savior’s humanity united to his divinity. This body is the body offered up for us on the Cross. When will the Divine Victim teach us the great law of self-giving? When will this Blood which washes away our stains and produces virginal souls, give us a profound spirit of purity? When will this soul, which dwells in our Saviour’s body and is God’s temple par excellence, become the model for our soul? When will we imitate his ceaseless prayer both for sinners that they may repent and for all Christians that they may walk in the way of perfection?

Ah, what holiness there is in the soul of Jesus Christ which we receive in our hearts! What holiness does he not require of us in the depths of our being? And why cannot we not say to him, “O soul, most perfect of all souls, give me a share of that perfection”?

#### **3° Love**

The third condition for benefiting from Communion is love.

I have already spoken about what purification is necessary. But once

our hearts have been cleansed from all defilement, they must be adorned with beauty. And nothing is so beautiful in God's sight as love. St. Augustine reminds us that, strictly speaking, everything comes down to loving.

How are we to acquire this gift of love? By prayer and by desiring it. A prayer that ponders the tremendous gift we have received, a prayer that asks him who has already given us so much to add what is still lacking, a prayer that kindles the flames so necessary if our hearts are to burn with love: "*et in meditatione mea exardescet ignis*. And as I think about it, my heart burns with fire" (Ps 38:4 Vulgate Clementine).

And where will this fire, enkindled by prayer, lead us? To him whom our hearts were made to love and long for, Jesus Christ, our food, victim, the source and the guarantee of all the happiness we, poor creatures, desire.

Listen! Look at how half-heartedly you so often receive your God. Look at the scanty proof you give him that you appreciate what he is doing for you! Conjuring up in your heart the full depth of your love, offer him, as he comes to visit you in his infinite kindness, the homage of a love that never wants to be separated from him.

## II.—Fruits of Communion

### Transformed by Communion

The Bread of Angels is a bread which transforms our entire being. Ontologically, we will never be angels; our nature differs from theirs. But by grace we can reach their level as they stand before God's throne.

This transformation results from our sharing in the divinity, and this sharing takes place in Communion: we become one with our God. As Our Lord made clear, this union will be complete in heaven; here on earth, it already begins. "*Ut sint consummati in unum*. That they may become perfectly one" (Jn 17:23).

Well, then, try to understand what our thanksgiving should be like and what we should say to Our Lord when he takes abode within us? "Lord, may I one day become one with Thee. May this Oneness begin now, and become more and more complete every day of my life. May my thoughts and feelings become more like unto Thine day by day." Our thanksgiving will thus become more than a few minutes of intense adoration. It will become something that lasts all day—that, in fact, lasts for a lifetime. It will last all the time between one Communion and the next. Our thanksgiving for one Communion will be our preparation for the next.

What a wonderful life to live: spent in adoration, love and thanksgiving! "How can I repay the Lord," cries David, "for all his goodness to me?" Then he adds, "The cup of salvation I shall raise and call on the Lord's name" (Ps. 115:12-13 Vulgate). That's it in a nut-shell. Our soul does not know how to express its thanks for all the blessings received

in Communion. All it can think of is showing how much we appreciate these blessings by going to Communion once again and asking for more.

When received worthily, this food from heaven whets the soul's appetite; to receive Jesus Christ worthily makes us long to receive him again. Giving thanks for one of God's visits fosters a desire to receive them over and over again. For we must never forget that the Eucharist is our true "daily bread." We get tired of it only when it no longer bears fruit within us. Do you wish it to bear fruit? Then prepare yourself to receive it every day—and from one Communion to the next you will see the progress that takes place.

**Its fruits:**

**a) an ever greater perfection**

Communion is the light which brightens our faith. Communion is the force that prepares us for the work we have to do, for the journey we have to travel, for the trials we must undergo. When we are transformed by Communion, we must offer unto God the first-fruits of his blessings—our greater and ever increasing perfection.

Let us stop and reflect for a moment in what exactly perfection consists. It consists in becoming who we are in the eyes of God.

God, who created us without consulting us, is absolutely free, by virtue of redeeming us, to desire that we be re-made according to his own plan, and his own plan for us is something a thousand times better than anything we could have thought up for ourselves. His concept of our perfection is more than our own efforts could achieve, but through the Eucharist we can get there. We will get there slowly or rapidly, depending on the extent to which we cooperate with the graces given us. In this regard we can only wonder at the marvels of God's work!

**b) a perfection in accordance with our special vocation**

Just as, according to St. Paul, star differs from star in brightness (cf 1 Cor 15:41), so will the life of one saint differ from that of another, both of whom are equally called to sanctity. There are two elements which go to make up sanctity: God's grace and the human will. But we must also take into account the entire complex of divine ways that makes it such that everyone, placed by Providence in a different situation, has his part to play. These parts are many and each one has his own.

Need I add that each of us is called to accomplish his own way steadily, step by step, though for no two of us will the journey be identical. Think about this: a certain number of people sit down at the same table and partake of the same nourishment. At the end of the meal they will rise from table, each refreshed and replenished. They will all go about their different tasks, each according to his or her own trade, but all of them can accomplish something excellent.

The same thing happens with regard to Communion. We all participate; we all benefit; we all take away perfect, but varied, fruit.

Now, I wanted to stress this point in order to eliminate the excuse of those inclined to say: “I will never do as well as Father or Brother So and So.” Listen, this is not what is being asked of you. What is being asked of you is that you do perfectly what is asked of you, strengthened by the Eucharist you have the pleasure of receiving.

Beware of incurring the blame of the useless servant, who, having received one talent, did nothing to add to its value. He didn’t even buy anything with it. He returned it exactly as he had received it, without make it bear fruit. He didn’t make good on the investment the Master had made and had a right to expect—and for this alone he was condemned.

Listen! Take advantage of Communion. Let it develop within you those seeds of virtue that God has planted in your soul but that you have neglected to cultivate, as you were asked to do. May you be able to say one day, like the profitable servant: “Lord, you entrusted five talents to me; here are another five that I have earned.”

Then the Master will reply: “Well done, good and faithful servant. Because you have proved trustworthy in little things, I will place you over great things. Enter into the joy of your Lord.”

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## THIRTY-SIXTH MEDITATION.

### Christian Propaganda

*“Hora est jam nos de somno surgere. The hour has come for us to rise from sleep” (Rom 13:11).*

Brothers, when the first claps of thunder echo through the sky and announce that a fierce and formidable storm is about to break, if this doesn't wake us up, what will?

Where are we going? What will become of our Christian schools? Where will all the religious end up? And what about all the priests? Who can say?

Perhaps God in his goodness is frightening us with punishment and in his mercy will spare us in the nick of time. But who, in these days, can be sure of anything?

So I am telling you that now more than ever: “Wake up”! And instead of giving way to pointless despair, let us put our hand to the plow and get involved in some real Christian apologetics. Our Lady Help of Christians, whose feast we keep today, will come to our aid<sup>75</sup>.

But as we kneel to implore her help, let us at the same time gather beneath her standard and launch a propaganda campaign whereby Catholics will begin to appreciate the necessity of standing up to the Masonic lodges. And in order to arrive at practical conclusions, let us determine the principal characteristics of this campaign.

Let me tell you what they must be:

1° Convinced of the insipidness of what is nowadays called tolerance;

2° Energetic, in the face of the furies of the Revolution;

3° Prudent, for fear of compromising the great cause of God;

4° Selfless, so as not to confuse our own personal interests with those of the Church and everything it represents.

#### I.—Conviction

What is unfortunately lacking nowadays is conviction and there is

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<sup>75</sup> editor's note: this meditation dates back to the year 1879



little conviction because there are very few principles and principles are lacking because they are now being smothered under the twin pillows of vested interests and unbridled pleasure.

It is so easy to let things go for others as long as they do the same for us; basically this is what tolerance is all about. Men are throwing a reciprocal blanket hypocritically over each another's consciences. The voice of the Lord cries out but no longer resounds; tolerance deadens the demands it makes in the depths of one's soul.

Yet did not Our Saviour proclaim: "*Vos estis sal terrae, quod si sal evanuerit in quo salietur? Ad nihilum valet ultra nisi ut mittatur foras et conculcetur ab hominibus.* You are the salt of the earth. But if salt loses its taste, with what can it be seasoned? It is good for nothing more than to be thrown out and trampled underfoot" (Mt 5:13)? This was said to the Apostles. This is said to priests. This is being said to all Christians—and we must not hesitate to keep repeating it. There are times when all of us must stand up and be counted, when we must all become the salt of the earth. Let it not be said to any of us that we are "good for nothing more than to be thrown out and trampled underfoot; *ad nihilum valet ultra nisi ut mittatur foras et conculcetur ab hominibus.*"<sup>76</sup>

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## CHRISTIAN APOLOGETIC

*Hora est jam nos de somno surgere.* Now is the time for us to rise from sleep (Rom 13:11)

From a retreat preached to men, Paris, . 1873

The need for a Christian apologetic. Not to be proved; those who don't understand it would have to be really blind.

*Characteristics of this Apologetic*

It must be: 1° Convinced of the insipidness of what is nowadays called tolerance; 2° Energetic, in the face of the furies of the Revolution; 3° Prudent, for fear of compromising the great cause of God; 4° Selfless, so as not to confuse our own personal interests with those of the Church and everything it represents.

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<sup>76</sup> This meditation of 1879 remained as such, unfinished. However, Fr. d'Alzon left a remark in his text indicating that he was going to use notes from a retreat he preached to men in Paris in 1873 to complete it. Here are those notes, reproduced in their entirety—presented in outline form, as they were found.

### *I. Conviction*

How many people there are for whom tolerance represents nothing more than an insipid faith!

“*Vos estis salis terrae, quod si salis evanuerit.* You are the salt of the earth...” (Mt 5:13).

The mouth speaks from the abundance of the heart, but the mouth has often nothing to say because the heart is not filled with the great cause of God.

“*Salvum me fac, Dominum, quoniam defecit sanctus; quoniam diminutiae sunt veritates a filiis hominum.* Save me, Lord, because holiness is gone—because truth is disappearing from the hearts of men” (Ps11:2 Vulgate Clementine).

We must have the courage to desire the truth, love the truth, and desire the truth in its entirety.

The insipidness of men who do not desire the whole truth.

This is why we must restore its splendour, with a spirit enlightened by its brightness.

With hearts devoted to its cause...

## **II.—Energy**

Look at the furies of unbelief.

War is being waged between heaven and hell.

God is being denied.

Advantages of those who are free-thinkers<sup>77</sup>.

But free-thinking is nothing. Think what you want, but no propaganda is needed for “think as you please.” A free-thinker who is consistent with what he thinks stays in his corner of the ring, respecting everyone else’s freedom, as long as no one bothers him. Unfortunately, freedom of thought leads to worse. It leads to freedom of action, another matter altogether.

Freedom of action lets all the passions loose. It is the very antithesis of morality, the release from every social bond.

In what period of history has not the triumph of passions led to total disruption and ruin?

So how can someone want to see convinced Catholics anything but energetic in sticking up for the moral law and for the truths upon which it is founded?

See what a noble task is set before our eyes!

For the greater the peril, the more fierce must be the struggle.

My brothers, I wish you the greatness of Mattathias (cf. 1 Maccabees 2:37): “*Moriamur in simplicitate nostra.* Let us all die in our

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<sup>77</sup> editor’s note: in the French-speaking world the expression “la libre-pensée » dates back to the wake of the French Revolution. Fundamentally, it opposed any authority and religious dogma in particular.

innocence!” This single-hearted man had inspired the hearts of his children with his own burning zeal.

“*Zelo zelatus sum pro domo Dei. Zeal for God’s house consumes me*” (cf Jn 2:17; Ps 69:9).

So let us your energy be expressed in the zeal you have to save souls.

### III.—Prudence

To be energetic does not mean to be rash.

We must strike hard, but with blows that serve the cause we support.

What is needed, therefore:

Reflection.

Study.

Submission to obedience, organization.

We must calculate where to strike.

For we face machinations that are formidable.

### IV.—Selflessness (Disinterestedness)

This is an essential trait of the war we wage.

Don’t waste time calculating the number of punches you’ll have to throw, nor those you will have to bear.

Already in his day, St. Paul said: “*Inter dispensatores quaeritur ut jam fidelis quis inveniatur*. Now it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy” (1 Cor 4:2).

And he added, “*Omnes quae sua sunt quaerunt, non quae Jesu Christi*. They are all seeking their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ” (Phil 2:21).

Brothers, you are fighting for what you regard as a righteous cause; but are you sure it is for God alone?

What we need are apostles of this stripe.

We need people who understand the work of the Church.

Yes, brothers, become apostles now, during this Easter-tide.

You must become convinced, energetic, prudent, unselfish apostles.

In order to do so, you must understand:

What it means to save a soul.

What the Church is and the greatness of its cause.

Who Our Blessed Lord is, the founder of the Church, the Saviour of souls, your Saviour.

Who God is who is calling you to carry out your mission and who will reward your faithful service.

## Seven Additional Meditations

*Between 1874 and 1875, Fr. d'Alzon wrote many meditations, especially for the novices for whom he had reassumed a little more responsibility. He even intended to write one for each day of an entire year. He finished those for the first semester in 1875 and kept in reserve many others that had been rather hastily written from his retreat notes and that Fr. Charles Laurent had lithographed with a few technical corrections.*

*They were all published by Fr. Ernest Baudouy in 1925-1927 under the title: Meditations on Religious Perfection. Seven of them are included here because their themes are closely related to those found in this first part of the Spiritual Writings of Fr. d'Alzon.*

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### 1. Assumptionist Perfection

All Christians are called to perfection according to the vocation God has given them. In general, the perfection to which religious are called is greater than that of others, but an Assumptionist religious has his own particular vocation. Dedicated to an apostolic life, he cannot spend all of his time and energy singing, doing penance, fasting and working with his hands. This would leave him too little time to prepare, let alone to carry out, the good works for which our religious family was founded.

Let us follow the words of St. Peter and say with him what he said about the Apostles: "This will permit us to concentrate on prayer and the ministry of the word" (Acts 6:4). Though we will have to come back on this subject of prayer and preaching, let us first take a quick look at what prayer and the ministry of the word should be for an Assumptionist.

#### I.—The Prayer of an Assumptionist

1° The prayer of an Assumptionist must be based on the contemplation of God's perfections: "*Ignoti nulla cupido*. There is no desire for that which is unknown" (Latin proverb). Even though the author of the *Imitation of Jesus Christ* says that it is better to love than to discuss at great length, we can safely say, without losing ourselves in the subtleties of scholasticism, that it is important for us to know God, and to know him according to the principles of sound theology. I will never know enough

about the fullness of God's being, his independence, his power, his wisdom, his beauty, his justice, and his mercy. All this requires an effort on my part, and indeed a very big effort to maintain within myself a deep feeling of admiration for who God really is, and of adoration for his supreme dominion over me.

2° Our prayer must become imbued with knowledge of Our Lord, the true model of every apostolic man. So how shall we acquire zeal for God's glory and love for souls, if not by constantly meditating on the value Jesus Christ attached to them? So we must reflect over and over again on this life of the God-made-man in which our Savior's divinity gave his humanity greater strength in order for him to love sinners. It is by praying at the foot of the Cross that we will learn how Jesus Christ gave life to souls, and how we in turn must give them life, not that we possess the goodness he had, but because he will pass this goodness on to us if we ask him for it.

3° Our prayer must take place in solitude and silence. Yes, we do need to go on retreats and to be alone with God. And the more our busy lives deprive us of the opportunity to be alone with God, the more determined we must be to seek some seclusion at least for a certain period of time every year. But there are also ever-so-many occasions when we could recollect ourselves, instead of dissipating ourselves; when we could keep quiet, instead of engaging in useless conversations that prevent us from praying as we should.

4° Finally, our prayer must be fervent on an ongoing basis. Special times must be set aside for prayer, particularly for mental prayer. Since the angels in heaven never cease to praise God, why separate our intelligence and our heart from the thought and love of God? From this point of view, the Lay Brothers can pray as do the choir religious; both can walk continually in God's presence and become perfect. If Abraham, in the midst of his flocks and of his numerous servants, was able to attain such a high degree of perfection simply by remaining constantly under the eye of Jehovah, why, in the midst of my daily activities, can I not succeed in attaining an equally perfect prayer?

I am not referring here to the prayer of the Divine Office. I plan to treat this topic separately.

## **II.—The Preaching Ministry**

This ministry which Our Lord entrusted to his Apostles through the all-powerful intervention of the Holy Spirit is most admirable!

However, this evangelization, entrusted to the Religious of the Assumption, implies:

1° Love of the Church.—We are soldiers of the Kingdom of Jesus Christ. Because the Church has never been more violently attacked, it is important that we defend her with the most ardent love. We must have no illusions about this. God, Jesus Christ, and his Church are no longer

wanted. For that reason, there is nothing more beautiful than to devote ourselves to the cause of God, of Jesus Christ, and of his Church. Surely, it is not an exaggeration to say that everything is crumbling around us. Those in charge would like to destroy the Church completely. The beauty of our vocation consists in taking up arms on her behalf.

2° Proper preparation.—To dash into the fray without being properly armed would be the height of folly. So we must prepare ourselves. We must fight valiantly, but also knowledgeably. However, this knowledge is not given to us directly as it was to the Apostles. We must acquire it through study. That is how we are to sanctify ourselves through our work, which is so necessary for those who want to dedicate themselves to fighting for God. But what perseverance and what courage it takes in the midst of the weariness that accompanies this preparation! What a supernatural outlook it requires! It means working with our intelligence and at the same time harmonizing that work with God's intentions.

3° Action.—We are ready for battle, but two dangers await us: we will either win or lose. If we lose, we can easily get discouraged. However, this is the time to increase our trust; it is the solemn moment of hope. Why? Because "when I am powerless, it is then that I am strong" (2 Cor 12:10). Human judgments have no part in these matters. Did Jesus Christ not overcome hell by being put to death? And apostolic men do God's work only amid contradictions. So I must expect to be contradicted and persecuted, and I must not let myself get discouraged.

But I can also be successful, and that precisely is the biggest danger, because in doing good to others, I risk doing a lot of harm to myself. Consequently, it is with great humility that I must talk about the little good I have been able to do. And from this point of view, when an Assumptionist religious considers the little he is doing, when in fact he seems to have done a lot, he must downplay the success he is having, and he must simply and resolutely attribute it to God.

Lord, make me a man of prayer and an evangelizer. In whatever work I do, may I sanctify myself and help bring about the extension of your reign and the salvation of souls. Amen.

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## 2. Perfection according to the Assumptionist Spirit

*"Ambula coram me et esto perfectus.* Walk in my presence and be perfect" (Gn 17:1). After all I have heard during this retreat, what must I retain in order to understand perfection according to the spirit of the religious family to which I belong? Here is what I conclude:

1° *A deep conviction about the rights of God* because of his infinite perfections.—I must always live in God's presence, contemplate his divine attributes, and become more and more conscious of the infinity of his being

and of the nothingness of my origin. From this point of view, I cannot meditate enough on his divine perfections, the contemplation of which will constitute my eternal life and my eternal happiness. God, the infinite being, the supreme good and the absolute truth, is powerful, just, merciful, wise and loving. All of these ideas come together in this Being of beings to a degree far beyond my understanding. This fills me with admiration and with a sense of dependence.

2° *Selflessness*.—Yes, when I compare my rights with those of God, what do mine amount to? Since I am a weak creature, I do not belong to myself, but to him, and I have no other right but to do his will, to the point of completely forgetting about myself.

3° *Self-contempt*.—If I look at my past, at my incomprehensible revolts, at my senseless ingratitude, and at the criminal misuse I have made of his gifts, what must I think of myself; what a deep contempt must I not have for the degradation into which I have fallen for so many years, and of my own free will? Genuine self-contempt is one of the essential conditions for becoming perfect. Must I not say to myself what the Pharisees said to the man born blind: “You are steeped in sin from your birth” (Jn 9:34)? Even when, with genuine humility, I become aware of my original corruption and of the hideous sins I voluntarily inflict upon myself every day, will I ever be able to have anything for myself except utmost contempt?

4° *Gift of self*.—Since we don’t pay much attention to the things we dislike, I must pay little attention to myself. For that reason, if God asks me to give myself to him, I must offer him the gift of myself, sincerely convinced that I am offering him very little and that, in the final analysis, it relieves me of such a burden. Giving myself to him must not make me feel that I am giving him anything precious. On the contrary, it is very kind of God to accept an offering so unworthy of his infinite beauty and grandeur. However, since God does accept my gift, this ought to fill me with great joy because of the honor he is giving me by humbling himself to the point of wanting me! So the very least I can do is offer myself unconditionally, convinced that I have been raised to the highest degree to which I can possibly aspire.

5° *Love of Our Lord Jesus Christ*.—But how will I give myself? Would I ever have known how to offer myself, to devote myself, and to dedicate myself, if Jesus Christ my Savior had not come to teach me? He bows to me and comes down to my level. He descends into my nothingness and unites himself to me because he loves me so much. He is my Redeemer, but he is also my God. When I see him, I will cry out: “Let us love God because he loved us first” (1 Jn 4:19). “The love of Christ impels us” (2 Cor 5:14). Oh, the infinite love of a God who became man to die and save me by his death! Yes, his love impels me, and from now on I must respond to it with every fiber of my being.

6° *Imitation of Jesus Christ*.—But Jesus Christ is not only my

Savior. He is also my model. I must learn how to know him always more perfectly, in order to imitate him as much as I can. That is why I must study him in three sources, which really amount to one:

a) The Gospel, where his life is recounted, and where every detail is an inexhaustible source of divine knowledge that I must learn through Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ.

b) The Crucifix, the model of the sacrifice of myself which I must offer constantly in union with the sacrifice of my Savior.

c) Finally the Eucharist, where he puts himself entirely at my disposal, where I can go to listen to him in his sanctuary, but where he does even more, since he wants to speak to me in the depth of my heart.

And when, with the help of these three sources, I have learned what God has to teach me, then all I have to do is put it in practice in order to resemble Jesus Christ and to reproduce in myself, within the context of my vocation, all that a creature can possibly imitate of its God made man who came to teach us how to be perfect.

7° *Devotion to Mary*.—In his infinite goodness, this God-made-man wanted to give us a Mother. He gave us his own, so that, on the one hand, we might approach with filial trust the person Jesus loved so much, and to whom he gave such great power over his heart. And, on the other hand, if the model he offers us of his own virtues frightens us, we can find in his Mother, the most perfect of creatures, the type of virtue whose best expression shines in his divine person.

8° *Enthusiasm*.—So Jesus and Mary are our models. With what joyful enthusiasm must we not go to the Son and to his Mother: to the Mother of a God and to the Son who is God? What a community, and what an honor to be admitted into such a community! Look what admirable relationships Jesus has established between heaven and earth! With what enthusiasm must I not devote myself to everything Jesus will ask of me!

9° *Salvation of Souls*.—Our Lord asks me to begin by sanctifying myself, then to devote myself to the salvation of souls who make up his Kingdom. Whatever work contributes to this goal and falls within the scope of my ability to act, I must undertake for the sole reason that I work for Jesus Christ.

10° *Love of the Church*.—This Kingdom of Souls over which Jesus Christ reigns supreme is none other than the Church, his spouse and his Mystical Body. The love of the Church, the defense of its rights, the study of its teaching, the sanctity of its members, and the extension of its influence, that is my goal, because by dedicating myself to the Church, I am dedicating myself to the preeminent work of Jesus Christ.

Lord, help me to fulfill this program. May I learn to know you through Jesus Christ; may I serve you by the grace of Jesus Christ; and may I love you forever in the love of Jesus Christ, the only one through whom I can go to you.



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### 3. Mental Prayer

“*Oportet semper orare et non deficere.* We need to pray always and never lose heart” (Lk 18:1). What need does the religious have to pray, both for himself and for others?

#### I.—Our Need to Pray

1° The need to overcome my usual sluggishness.—Human nature is so constituted that, even with the best of intentions, it falters at every moment. It is a lamp into which oil must be constantly poured. My soul becomes dry and dies out, if it is not maintained by some daily food. This essential food is prayer. To be sure, my personal experience has made me aware of this. What would I become if I stopped praying for a certain amount of time?

My prayer didn't have to be emotional or even comforting. After certain dry meditations, I felt new life circulating in my heart precisely because of the efforts I had made.

2° The need to offset with prayer the dryness that comes from studying.—Say what you like, some studies dry up the heart. We live intellectual lives, we live especially in a make-believe world, we delve into the exact or physical sciences, we discuss religious questions from a controversial point of view, which almost always deprives them of the gentle persuasion that should otherwise flow from them. The result is nothing more than something that resembles a forlorn landscape swept by northerly gales. There is no more moisture in the soil, no more sap in the vegetation. What I need is the refreshing waters of prayer to offset the effect of the very studies I am duty-bound to pursue as a religious.

3° The need for prayer even as we go about doing our good works.—Good works have their pitfalls. I am tempted to consider them from a merely human point of view. They build up my self-esteem, and the personal satisfaction I derive from them pins me down to this world and distracts me from God. To avoid such serious pitfalls, I must pray, and pray unceasingly. Good works can trouble us and preoccupy us, as they troubled Martha as she prepared the feast for our Savior. What greater privilege is there than setting the table for Jesus Christ? Yet her eagerness and worry met with Our Lord's disapproval. The same applies to me.

Must we neglect our good works? Of course not! But we must carry them out prayerfully.

Lord, may my good works never distract me from my main goal, and, under your watchful eye, may I always choose the life of recollection,

even amid the busiest good works in which I may be employed.

4° The need for prayer as we go about our daily business.—A religious can sometimes have business to transact, business that can be very absorbing. What an escape prayer can be from the tyranny of its administration! When all is said and done, dear Lord, I may be taken up with work which is more or less monastic, but my goal, nevertheless, remains perfection in religious virtue and a very intimate union with you. How will this happen except through prayer?

And so, Lord, the more lax I am, the more dried up I become, the more engrossed I am in study, in my apostolate or in its administration, the more ardently must I pray. It's a question of my eternal salvation, dear Lord, and if I do not accomplish this, why should I work so hard? Why should I have become a religious? I must draw near to you, Lord. I must go up to the altar and there perform my function as mediator between heaven and earth. How am I to fulfill this formidable task if I do not pray, as you ask me to do? And so, Lord, I will pray, and my strength to serve you will be renewed by fervent and constant prayer.

## II.—We must pray for others

When I consider the greatness of a religious dedicated to the salvation of souls, I am amazed. God tells him: "Go and spread the Gospel" (cf Mk 16:15). But this religious must have already heard the divine word. He must have already thought about the souls who will be entrusted to his care. He must have already compared the scope of his ministry to the evils that are gaining ground everyday around the world. So he is obliged to pray, not only for himself, but also for others, and the characteristics of this prayer will depend on the various apostolates to which he must dedicate himself.

1° Prayer for certain individual souls.—Here is a hardened sinner who is now approaching the end of his life. He must be shaken out of his indifference. What can I do for him unless I begin praying for him? Here is a young man carried away by his passions who has nevertheless been shaken. An interior voice told him that he is not beyond redemption. But to solve his problem, a human effort will not suffice. It requires the divine intervention of prayer. Here is a poor soul in distress that needs to be comforted. But there is nothing on earth that can alleviate her pain. Only heaven can heal her wounds and mitigate her sorrow, until such time as she obtains a more complete cure. Here is a child to be taken away from the evil influences that surround him. How sterile my efforts will be if they have nothing more powerful to back them up than human words; if beneath these words the child does not have the impression that it is God himself who is speaking to him. But so that he might get this impression, it is important, before talking to him, that I pray a lot for him.

Lord Jesus, you who on earth went looking for souls one by one,

you who waited for Nicodemus during the night, and for the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well, you who entered the homes of those who sent for you, you who told your disciples to search for the lost sheep, teach me how to pray for sick souls so that they may be healed, and for dead souls so that they may be restored to life. Make my prayer more like yours, so that I may continue to do your work in the way you pointed out to me!

2° Prayer for the good works we do.—There are certain good works in which obedience or charity oblige me to be more particularly interested. It is a question of doing something for the overall good. What am I doing in this regard? To be sure, it is not surprising that I find the work too much for me if I do not pray! But if I do pray, what obstacles will I not overcome, thanks to the energy God will give me if I ask him for it! The stamp of holiness I will leave on the work for which I am responsible will depend on the amount of my zeal, and my zeal is kindled by my prayer: "While I was meditating, a fire blazed forth" (Ps 38:4 Vulgate).

Lord, let my prayer bring down your blessings on the good work I do.

3° Prayer for the Church.—Whether I live a quiet life or I'm absorbed in active ministry, I must take to heart that which Jesus Christ loved most here on earth, namely his Church. So what can I do to help her? Exteriorly, perhaps nothing. But I can always pray for her. I will therefore pray, and I will pray with all the love I have for Jesus Christ. No matter how much my words, my gift for governing, and my ministry, whatever it is, might be useful to the Spouse par excellence of the Son of God, it is no less true that they would be even more useful if they were backed up by fervent prayer.

Lord, grant me the prayer of apostolic men. And if I am not yet a good apostolic man, grant that I may become one a little more each day.

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## 4. The Religious in Chapel

Let us adore Our Lord Jesus Christ who consents to dwell in a humble sanctuary in order to be closer to his own, and let us examine the feelings the chapel should inspire in a religious who lives under the same roof as his Divine Master.

### I.—A sense of astonishment

Why would a God want to humble himself in this way? Jesus said that "his delight is to live with the children of men" (Prv 8:31), but it is no

less true that men are highly unworthy of him. Christians erect temples in his honor, but they do not go there to adore him; or if they do, it is to offer him a few distracted prayers.

Lord, I wonder why you are eucharistically present in so many churches. Also, I am beginning to understand why you desire special shrines. But it is no less true that there is nothing astonishing about your attaching such importance to my adorations and about your wanting to dwell among us!

## **II.—A sense of adoration**

It is only too true that I do not know how to adore. The angels adore you in heaven, Lord Jesus. So why don't you stay there, surrounded by all your glory? No, you choose to come down to us, stripped of all your splendor. And so, Lord, should not the first feeling to arise in my heart after my initial astonishment be one of adoration? It is only right that I should adore you to make up for those who do not, and that my adoration be ongoing! It is only right that I should go to the chapel as often as I can in order to offer to your Majesty—which, though hidden, is the very Majesty of God—some compensation for so many insincere adorations to which you are subjected.

## **III.—A sense of the presence of God**

Here is what I want to come back to. God said to Abraham: "*Ambula coram me et esto perfectus*. Walk in my presence and be perfect" (Gn 18:1). By his faith, Abraham merited to become the father of all believers, but am I not more fortunate than the patriarch? You, my God, are constantly close to me while I take some recreation, while I eat, while I study. Even while I sleep you watch over me. And whenever I wish to speak more particularly to your infinite mercy, I always find you there for the rendezvous.

You never leave the chapel. You are always there at my service so that I might not distance myself from you and that I might find you close to me, as a friend close to his friend, when he wants to speak to him about very intimate things. And should I not be thinking about you all the time?

## **IV.—A sense of perfection**

God did not only say to Abraham, "Walk in my presence"; he added: "And be perfect" (Gn 18:1).

I ought to be a perfect religious. Perfection is my calling; strictly speaking, I have no other. And when I think that the source of all perfection is here, two steps away, why would I not avail myself of this source of light, strength, life, and holiness?

What a sublime mystery that teaches me all of the virtues: humility, by his eucharistic self-abasement; patience, amidst so many insults silently endured; love, by his complete gift-of-self; obedience, by the authority given to the priest enabling him to give orders to a God; and so many other virtues which would be too long to enumerate!

Mary and Joseph, you were the first to adore God's Incarnate Word, either in Bethlehem when he came into this world or in Nazareth during his hidden life. Teach me how to adore him in humility, obedience and love, as I pray, work, and try to edify my brothers. Teach me to transform my novitiate into another Nazareth where I can find Jesus, or where, following your example, I can profit from his being with me to acquire all the perfection he is entitled to expect from a creature so showered with his blessings. Amen.

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## 5. The Rule

*“Quicumque hanc regulam secuti fuerint, pax super illos.* To all those who follow this rule, peace be upon them” (Gal 6:16).

One of the characteristics of religious life is the Rule. 1° It separates the religious from the world; 2° It makes him become more like Jesus Christ; 3° It gives him the means of attaining his own personal perfection.

### **I.—The Rule separates the religious from the world**

Undoubtedly, in the world, there are certain obligations and certain constraints, such as military discipline and the rules of etiquette, but all of these rules have a human purpose. The purpose of religious rules is to separate the one who chooses to live by them and to dedicate him to God. They place the details of his life under a rigorous yoke and impose on him obligations whose purpose is to make him more perfect. The Rule presupposes that the one who accepts it implicitly accepts to dedicate himself completely to the service of God, and to submit to a series of regulations whose purpose is to unite him to God by a life of perfection.

From that follows a series of consequences: a special habit, awkward arrangements, specific tasks to perform, the common life, and orders given by the superiors and accepted, even when they are not understood. In short, a very special type of life which limits our freedom and obliges us to go where we do not want to go. As Our Lord said to St. Peter, *“Alius te cinget et ducet quo tu non vis.* Another will tie you fast and carry you off against your will” (Jn 21:18).

Where do I stand in this regard? What do I think about this

separation, because it should not be just a physical separation like that of a soldier confined to his barracks? It must be a deliberate separation, freely accepted, like that of a son living in the same house as his father and accepting the authority of the one with whom he is living. Is that where I stand?

Is my separation from the world, as described in my Rule, well accepted in my heart? Am I happy to forego certain relationships with people on the outside and to live more intimately with God, my Father, for the love of whom I became a religious?

## **II.—The Rule makes the religious become more like Jesus Christ**

When the Son of God came down to earth, he received his rule from the will of his Father and practiced it with tremendous regularity: “*Tunc dixi: ecce venio. In capite libri scriptum est de me, ut facerem voluntatem tuam. Deus meus, volui, et legem tuam in medio cordis me.* Then I said, here I am Lord. In the written scroll it is said of me that my delight, O my God, is to do your will, and that your law is within my heart” (Ps 39:8-9 Vulgate). Yes, Jesus Christ, as God, is the eternal rule and the law of the universe, but Jesus Christ, as man, wanted to receive his rule: “*In capite libri scriptum est de me, ut facerem voluntatem tuam.* In the written scroll it is said of me that my delight is to do your will.” So the importance of the rule is indicated by what the prophet says about the way our Savior himself chose to follow it.

And the prophet isn’t only speaking in general terms. He expressly gets into the details of this rule imposed on the Savior. That is why, in the Gospel, these words are so often repeated: “*Ut adimpleretur quod dictum est a Domino per prophetam.* All this happened to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet” (Mt 1:22). The prophecies express what God wanted Jesus Christ to be and to do throughout his entire life. Everything was foreseen: his conception, his birth, the place and time of his birth, his flight into Egypt, his return to Nazareth, his work, his apostolic journeys, his suffering, the details of his Passion, and his death. Jesus Christ took his last breath only when “he was sure that all the prophecies had been fulfilled. *Sciens Iesus quia omnia consummata sunt*” (Jn 19:28).

So, for me, Our Lord is a perfect model of the fidelity with which I must observe my own rule with all of its prescriptions. What, then, am I doing to imitate this divine model? How faithful am I in observing the Rule?

## **III.—The Rule gives the religious the means of attaining his own personal perfection**

The rules of the various religious Orders contain certain prescriptions common to all of them.

But, besides these common prescriptions, there are particular points that vary according to the specific purpose for which each Order was founded. Everyone must practice virtue, which is the basis of perfection. But because human weakness cannot try its hand at everything, some Orders stress work, while others stress austerity. The latter fast very often, the former spend more time in choir; some emphasize solitude, while others emphasize works of charity or apostolic works. And the rule provides each religious with the means needed to achieve the special goal he has set for himself. It is up to each individual to enter wholeheartedly into the spirit of his Rule, in such a way that if, for example, one has chosen to do manual work, he is not expected to do apostolic ministry, and if one is dedicated to doing works of charity, he is not expected to wear himself out by doing excessive penances.

In this way, I will serve God alone by observing my rule and its spirit. And even if I do not manage to live up to everything mentioned therein, I will at least attain my own personal perfection.

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## 6. Our Studies

This is a serious subject which is not well understood. We must study, and we must get others to study.

### I.—We must study

Let us look around us to see what has happened. What has caused the decadence of so many religious families? It is because they stopped studying. “You will earn your bread at the sweat of your brow” (Gn 3:19), God said to Adam. When we do not till the soil like a Trappist, we must plough through the field of knowledge. When we do not bind up wounds like the sons of St. John of God, we must apply in the pulpit, in the confessional, in charitable works, and in the foreign missions, the doctrine that heals souls.

But for this to happen, we must be prepared; and to be prepared, we must study, and study constantly. Just as in the fields there are many different types of plants, so also there are many branches of knowledge: languages, scripture, philosophy, theology, history, and canon law. Since the field is enormous, I might do well to specialize in one particular area. In any case, God is asking me to study a lot and this for the following reasons:

1° Because the more knowledge I will have that is imbued with charity, the more useful I will be in saving souls and in extending the reign of God.

2° Because intellectual work will be a way of atoning for my sins. By studying a lot, I am undergoing Adam's punishment: I am earning my bread at the sweat of my brow.

3° Because study is an excellent way of warding off temptation. By concentrating on my studies, I will not dwell on all that could come to mind if I were inactive.

4° Because it is something that I owe to others. I will be asked to preach, to direct souls, or to teach. How can I fulfill these duties if I am not prepared? How am I to give others what I myself do not possess? It is a strange illusion that we often have in this regard! Have I not succumbed to such illusions on more than one occasion?

## II.—We must get others to study

We must study not only for the sake of those to whom we wish to render special services, but we must also get others to study.

1° We must get them to study religion. How have I made the study of religion attractive? In preparing my catechism classes, have I sought to give the youngest children an appreciation for the basic notions of religion? We often dislike this work and wrongly so. The more we study, the more we realize the need to study in order to become the good teachers we should be, because the minds of children are very receptive during their formative years, and because they are very sensitive to wrong impressions that can easily be transmitted if we are not extremely careful.

2° In class we must get them to study grammar, literature, etc. In this regard, religious teachers have two obligations: we must prove that, as teachers, we are just as competent as the others, and we must give a Christian perspective to every word that comes out of our mouth. Everything can be the subject of a sermon. But what zeal, what prudence, what tact, and what knowledge we need in order to do so!

3° We must get people to pursue higher education. This applies to only a few. All the more reason why these few should study as hard as they can. It is not enough to have the ability; one must also know how to use it. Alas, many lazy people have buried beautiful talents and allowed them to go to waste!

So let me examine myself seriously in terms of my laziness and of my lack of zeal to acquire knowledge and to transmit it to others, as a religious should do.

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## 7. Studies



*“Me oportet operari opera eius qui misit me, donec dies est, venit nox, quando nemo potest operari. I must do the deeds of him who sent me while it is day. The night comes on when no one can work”* (Jn 9:4). Study is a far more serious obligation than is generally thought. The priesthood is losing ground because of a certain ignorance, which consists in not knowing how to speak about God.

If we are not assigned to do manual work, we are obliged to study. 1° What should be our attitude when we study; 2° What subjects should we study?

### 1.—What should be our attitude when we study?

1°—We must have a supernatural attitude. We must not seek to acquire any vain glory or to flatter our ears, but we must have a supernatural perspective inspired by faith. In this regard, let us remember that nothing is more important than increasing our knowledge of God. We should concentrate on this subject.

2°—We must avoid superficial curiosity. This is a dangerous temptation for young people: to raise strange objections, to look for an argument, to become pigheaded, preferring human reason to divine authority. They want to be aware of everything in a most dangerous way, and they bring upon themselves the judgment of the Holy Spirit: *“Qui scrutator est majestatis opprimetur a gloria; He who is a searcher of (divine) majesty, shall be crushed by (its) glory”* (Prv 25:27).

3°—We must be obedient. *“Tempora auctoritas, re autem ratio prior est; Authority has priority in time, but reason has it in things”*<sup>78</sup>. We must begin by accepting authority, and it is a sad sign of a narrow mind not to accept it. We must never forget the tree of knowledge of good and evil in the Garden of Eden: *“Eritis sicut dii scientes bonum et malum; You will be like gods who know what is good and what is evil”* (Gn 3:5). That is what Satan promises, but it is something he cannot give, because he did not accept truth, and without truth there can be no systematized knowledge.

4°—We must be methodical. Nothing is more beautiful than the vast panorama of knowledge whose horizons are limitless. But it is a well-ordered panorama containing no chaos. In the beginning, there was chaos, but God separated light from darkness, and it was the beginning of order. So let us be methodical about the way we study.

5°—We must be humble.

### II.—What subjects should we study?

1°—Jesus Christ. *“In ipso sunt omnia; In him all things are”* (Rom

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<sup>78</sup>St. Augustine, *De ordine* (CPL 0255), lib. 2, cap. 9, linea 4 (Augustine&On Order&CPL&bk. 2, chap. 9, line 4)

11:36). “*In quo sunt omnes thesauri sapientiae et scientiae absconditi*; In whom every treasure of wisdom and knowledge is hidden” (Col 2:3). Though Jesus Christ has been thrown out of society by the governments, he has also been excluded, but in a very different way, from the various fields of knowledge. Just as Christians must spare no effort to bring him back into society, so we must make every effort reinsert him into the fields of knowledge. But this will require a far deeper and wider acquaintance with Jesus Christ.

2°—Dogmatic Theology. The human intellect thirsts for truth, and dogmatic theology is the foundation of all truths. Protestants, lost in quarrels over free-thought, have given up on dogma and have preached only on moral issues. But what becomes of morality with no dogmatic truths to back it up? As if the way we behave were not based on what we believe.

3°—Moral Theology. Personal ethics and social ethics. The mistake of those who distinguish between major and minor moral issues. Moral principles.

4°—The Bible, and Jesus Christ in the Bible. Obviously, in reading the Bible, we must keep our eyes fixed on the dominant figure of Jesus Christ. “*Finis legis Christus ad justitiam omni credenti*; Christ is the end of the law. Through him, justice comes to everyone who believes” (Rom 10:4). Jesus Christ enlightens all knowledge because he is the absolute truth.

5. The Fathers of the Church. The best commentators of the Bible; the Fathers of theology and the founders of Christian literature.

6. Church History. What a vast field in which the Church is considered as the vehicle of truth where all the quarrels over doctrine take place with increasing interest, and as a society fighting against the powers that be! These are very interesting studies, from both points of view.

7. Canon Law: the study of the Church from the point of view of its internal structure.

8. Finally, literature and art, which must be studied from the Christian point of view.

**VI.**

**ADDENDA TO PART I  
OF THE SPIRITUAL WRITINGS  
OF  
FATHER EMMANUEL D'ALZON**

- I. The Purpose of the Institute**
- II. Our First Rules**
- III. The Theme of the Kingdom**
- IV. The Spirit of Assumption**

# I. Purpose of the Institute

## *First Insights*

*Soon after he made his vow of priestly humility before the miraculous image of the Virgin Mary, at the shrine of La Consolata in Turin, Father d'Alzon felt driven, as if divinely inspired, to found a new religious institute. He revealed his plans to Mother Marie-Eugénie of Jesus and confided to her his first insights into the work to be undertaken.*

*Turin, June 24, 1844*

### **The vow of priestly humility**

...Let me begin by talking about myself. I feel a bit embarrassed that I don't know what to tell about the vow I made. One evening I was struck by the deplorable situation whereby the ambition of certain people is what runs the Church. There was something else too, but I forgot what it was. At any rate, the conclusion I reached was that I would give up all higher ecclesiastical offices. And the next morning, at Mass, I made the vow to refuse all offices, in the same way as do the Jesuits.

### **The idea of a new Institute**

It would be difficult for me to express the way I felt after having done this. Some of my reactions were not very nice. But what I want to tell you is that since then an idea that I once had and that had become no more than a vague recollection came back to me stronger than ever: the idea that I must dedicate my life to founding a religious community. All this to say that I would like to speak with you. Nevertheless, what am I capable of doing? Never have I ever seen more clearly my cowardice, my uselessness, my inconstancy, my pride. Sometimes I say to myself that with such ugly faults I should take ideas like that out of my head. Sometimes I also think that when God allows me to see my faults so clearly, he only wants to prove to me that if anything comes of it, it is he who will have done it all.

### **Uncertainty**

You may well ask me what would be the purpose of such a community. Alas, my dear, if you were to address this question to my reason, I would have a superb plan to give you, but if you were to address it to my supernatural sense, I would have to say that I still don't know, and

that I'm relying on this idea: God knows. Also, strangely enough, it seems to me that all God wants of me is that I be prepared. But for what? I don't know, perhaps for moving on to eternity. Nevertheless, in the depths of my soul, I feel an urge to do something, the details of which I cannot yet perceive but which I am confusedly trying to figure out. There is also the terrible possibility that I am failing to respond to divine grace. So pray for me that I may unravel this mystery. I feel confident that I would be prepared for any sacrifice, as long as God's purpose becomes clear.

*Nîmes, August 16, 1844*

#### **The idea of religious life**

I will be a little selfish today, my dear. I will begin by replying to your last letter, the one in which you speak of my future plans. I cannot hide from you that for a long time I have been thinking about becoming a religious, though I have never felt attracted to any of the existing religious Orders. But if, at this moment, I were as sure that God is calling me to do something, as I was when he called me to the priesthood, I wouldn't hesitate a single moment. I can assure you, however, that at the present time I feel no specific attraction. So I must wait for God to act, beseeching him to do with me as he wills, and striving to meet with his plans, if perchance he has some which concern me.

#### **He lacked some of the necessary virtues**

Here is how I see myself. It seems to me that if I have some of what is required to carry out what you are suggesting, I nevertheless lack many of the necessary qualities. I am not sufficiently persevering. I allow myself to be carried away by some good to be done but without figuring out what this implies. I am not very regular. This is largely due to my temperament; but it is not less true that I place many human obstacles in the path of grace. Recently, I have had the impression that I have acquired more regularity and perseverance, but not yet enough to instill these virtues in others.

#### **Apostolates that were holding him back**

I must also take into account certain material factors. Among my present apostolates, there are three which I cannot abandon before they are firmly established: the Refuge, the Carmelites, and the college or boarding school I have founded. The Refuge will soon be able to manage on its own. The Carmelites, I believe, will still need bolstering for at least the next two or three years. The College is my greatest worry. To backtrack at the present time would be terrible, because of the difficult situation in which the clergy finds itself as regards the University, in addition to the fact that I foresee that I will have to put a lot of money into it. At times, I feel like going to live there, especially to observe the individuals and characters God is sending us. If I could find someone capable of running the school, I would willingly give him the job.

#### **He would start in the Midi (in the South of France)**

To move to Paris wouldn't bother me. But remember that Paris means far less to me than it does to you. For that reason, it would be easier for me to start here in the South, with the understanding that we could move elsewhere later on. The South has been good to religious Orders. St. Francis, St. Dominic, St. Benedict, St. Ignatius and so many others worked in the South. So although nowadays there is more going on in the North, it could very well be that the South would have its advantages. But this is only a side-issue, so I'll come back to the main issue.

#### **He was not attracted to the Jesuits**

Though I don't like the Jesuits any more than you, I don't judge them exactly like you. What I have against them is this: first of all, their exclusiveness. "Nothing is beautiful, good, or perfect except the 'Company'; *non est ex praedestinitis qui non est amicus Societatis*." I say this is terrible. Second, their secretiveness; apparently, they are correcting themselves of this. Third, they don't behave naturally, which is due to the "character breaking" they undergo when they are in training. Finally, they have never understood, at least up to now, what I call "Catholic Freedom," which, to my mind, is the most powerful external weapon the Church must use in order to win.

#### **The moral basis of the projected Institute**

The moral basis I would like to give to a new Congregation would be this: 1° The acceptance of everything that is Catholic; 2° Frankness; 3° Freedom. Note that I have nothing to say about what makes an Order, an Order. I am simply pointing out what ought to distinguish a modern Order from those which already exist. So let me repeat: I know of nothing that is more likely to do away with exclusiveness and self-satisfaction than the recognition of all the good that is done by others. I know of nothing which appeals more to modern man than frankness. And I know of nothing more powerful than freedom when fighting against the Church's present enemies.

#### **His thoughts about dogma**

These thoughts are open to further and fuller development, but I think they are easy to understand. My thoughts about dogma, if I may use this expression, can be summed up in these few words: we must help Our Lord to continue his mystical incarnation in the Church and in each member of the Church. It's by doing this, I think, that we can present the Catholic truth in a most advantageous way against the pantheism and materialism of our day...

In short, if God wants me to try something, I suspect he wants me to wait a bit. Nevertheless, I will pray and endeavor to remove all the personal obstacles I could bring to his work. Accordingly, I accept your prayers and your willingness to offer one day a week for my intentions...

I completely agree with what you call the passion and the philosophy of religious Orders. My passion would be to manifest the God-

made-Man and to divinize humanity through Jesus Christ. And this would also be my philosophy...

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*The new Institute began very humbly at the Collège de l'Assomption (Assumption College) in Nîmes which Father d'Alzon had purchased in 1843. Here are the very first notes written by Father d'Alzon on separate pieces of paper regarding the purpose and spirit of the Institute. The first two, carrying the same handwriting, are dated by Fr. Siméon Vailhé "between 1845 and 1850." The date of the third, which is attached to the first two in our archives, is uncertain.*

## Notes

### 1. The Order

We must not forget that we want to extend the reign of Jesus Christ in souls, but we must do so by completing as much as possible the work we have already begun.

That is why we must make every effort to accompany young people in some way in the world to which we have introduced them. Once we have founded a house in another area, its purpose must be to develop in its surroundings, especially with the help of Tertiaries, all the good works it can possibly carry out. It must become a permanent center of faith and charity by attracting as many young people as possible to this center, by organizing retreats, and by holding meetings of our former students.

That is why the novitiates could be rather long because we could keep as a tertiary this or that young man who would not be suited for religious life.

### 2. The Apostolate

*Aim:* to bring about the reign of Jesus Christ in the world, and to prepare his everlasting reign in the next.

*Means:* by spreading truth and charity.

*Truth:* teaching (oral and written); developing various fields of knowledge; personal studies.

*Charity:* developing strong characters; love of God and of the brothers; team spirit; devotion to duty; a spirit of prayer, a spirit of sacrifice; the struggle against self; devotion to God and to everyone; a life based on fidelity to one's conscience; love of the Church.

*Qualities of the workers:* do they love God, Jesus Christ and the Church; do they have a zeal for the salvation of souls; do they wish to lead a life of sacrifice and to imitate Jesus Christ by obedience, by poverty, by study, and by forgetting themselves?



*Motivation:* a spirit of faith, a supernatural frame of mind.

*External means:* teaching, education, good example, protesting strongly against the world, goodness of heart, trying to reconcile truth and the findings of modern science, apostolate of the working classes.

3.

According to Father Faber,<sup>79</sup> there can be no sound spirituality without a deep concern for the trials and tribulations of the Church, without a deep respect for its liturgical ceremonies, and without a deep love for the Holy See.

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<sup>79</sup> Frederick William Faber, an Oratorian and devotional writer, b. June 28, 1814, at Calverley, Yorkshire, England; d. in London, September 26, 1863. He was of Huguenot descent, received Anglican ordination in 1839, and became a Catholic in November 1845. In 1847, he was ordained a priest, and in 1848, he joined the Oratory of St. Philip Neri.

## II. Our First Rules

### 1. Notes in view of eventual Constitutions<sup>80</sup> 1849–1850

#### *Purpose of the Order*

The purpose of the Order is made clear by our fourth vow: to work as hard as we can to extend the reign of Jesus Christ in souls: first in our own, then in those of our Brothers and in those of all Christians.

The spirit of our Order is, therefore, one of apostolic zeal.

We will strive to achieve our purpose especially by working to bring about the triumph of faith, hope and charity within us and around us:

1° *Faith*, by our willingness to submit to the teaching of the Church and to the spirit of this teaching; by our love for the unity of the Church and by our filial submission to its head; by our respect for truth to which we will be faithful in our studies, firmly convinced of the importance of our vocation which is to become the defenders and soldiers of this truth and, consequently, the soldiers of Jesus Christ, the very Word of God and the Eternal Truth; by our spirit of faith through the practice of obedience, always placing ourselves in the hands of our superiors, as if in the hands of God himself.

2° *Hope*, by our detachment from worldly goods, to the point of embracing evangelical poverty and of loving supernatural things; by humility, that is, by despising created things, including ourselves; and by

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<sup>80</sup> Fathers Athanase Sage and Pierre Touveneraud noted that these Constitutions never pretended to be definitive. Fr. d'Alzon was the first to realize that they could be no more than a "project." The third General Chapter which received them from the Founder and accepted them noted that to obtain the approbation of the Institute from the Holy See they would wait until the Rule was somewhat more "defined." Under the name of regulations, the Chapter included the observance of religious life and some norms of government of the Society. But already the principles of the Order were clearly stated and were worthy of Roman approbation. Its aim, its spirit, the limits of its apostolate, its notion of vows, its desire to be considered a full-fledged Order, its place in the ensemble of religious institutes, the strong unity of its government, such were the choices for which the fledgling Assumptionist Congregation needed await no further decisions. The following footnotes are by FF. Sage and Touveneraud and were prepared for the French edition.

prayer, that is, by asking for God's grace and his gifts, and by longing for God, our beginning and our end.

3° *Charity*: a) By loving God in a very special way; by chastity, that is, by renouncing sensual pleasures; by mortification, the guardian of our sexual instincts and the means by which we can atone for our sins by uniting our sufferings to those of Jesus Christ; b) by our love for Jesus Christ which we will express especially by practicing the virtues of which he is the perfect model; c) by loving Our Lady, his mother and our special protectress; d) by loving the Church, his spouse; by our zeal for the salvation of souls which will manifest itself in our works of education understood in the broadest sense of the word, in our foreign missions, and in our works of charity, with which we can seek the help of our Brothers of the Third Order.

We must be simple and honest in the expression of our faith. We must be men of prayer in order to get constantly closer to Our Lord. We must be humble in the pursuit of our studies. We must be zealous about the triumph of the Church.

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## 2. Our First Constitutions

1855

### *OVERVIEW*<sup>81</sup>

#### **Purpose**

Our small Association seeks to sanctify itself by spreading the reign of Jesus Christ in souls. Our specific spirit is based on a very ardent love for Our Lord Jesus Christ and for his Blessed Mother, our special patroness, on a great zeal for the Church, and on an inviolable attachment to the Holy See.

Our life must be one of faith, devotedness, sacrifice, prayer, apostolic spirit, and frankness.

Struck by the spectacle of the rivalry between the secular clergy and the regular clergy (i.e. those who follow the rule of an order or congregation), we believe that above all else we must respect the differences between the two in order to avoid any damaging clashes.

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<sup>81</sup> Transcribed from the novitiate notebook of Br. Victorin Galabert and completed with passages handwritten by Fr. d'Alzon, this introduction summarizes the Constitutions of 1855.

Therefore, we must not interfere with any work which might be the prerogative of the secular clergy. By occasionally sacrificing a particular good, we will accomplish more perfectly the one entrusted to us. By the edification that accompanies humble charity, we will strengthen the fraternal bonds which must unite the servants of Jesus Christ, in whatever part of his vineyard they are called to work.

#### **Means**

More specifically, we intend to extend the reign of Jesus Christ by doing the following works:

1° Education understood in the broadest sense of the term, by trying to form Christians profoundly attached to the Church, by pointing out the absolute necessity of a vital unity, not only in dogma but also in discipline, under the increasingly respected direction of the Sovereign Pontiff.

2° Publication of books that can help Christian education.

3° Works of charity, by which we can prepare children to carry out their duties as Christians in the world, and to work for the reconciliation of the poor and the rich classes.

4° Retreats, in our houses or outside, as long as this type of work does not involve any serious inconveniences.

5° Foreign missions and works to destroy schism and heresy.

We shall be involved in external works such as preaching, confessions, etc., only when we are certain that this is agreeable to the secular clergy, under whose direction we shall be when carrying out this type of work.

Along these same lines, we shall endeavor to inspire the children entrusted to us with a sense of respect and affection for their pastors and an understanding of their duties as parishioners.

#### **Religious Life**

Besides the three vows, we also make one to extend the reign of Jesus Christ in souls.

The vow of chastity needs no explanation.

We desire to give the most absolute meaning to the vow of obedience.

The vow of poverty must be understood in this way. At the time of profession, the novice disposes of his possessions, as he wishes, in such a way that, later on, he will not be able to change anything without the authorization of the Superior General, and that his Superiors will not be able to force him to change the stated beneficiaries. Should any unforeseen bequest, or some asset he had disposed of, come to him after his profession, this bequest or this asset belongs to the community unless, in the judgment of the Superior General, it is deemed appropriate to cede it to the family of the religious.

The novitiate lasts two years. Ten years after the start of postulancy, a religious may do a third year of novitiate and add the fourth vow to

consecrate himself to the extension of the reign of Jesus Christ in souls, which he fulfills by dedicating himself to the works indicated above.

Novices are admitted by the Superior General or by those empowered by him to admit them either to the novitiate or to profession.

#### **Membership**

The Congregation is composed of:

1° Choir Religious, who engage in education, charitable works, or other forms of apostolate mentioned above.

2° Lay Brothers or Oblates, who help the religious in charitable works according to their talents and abilities. They shall have no part in the government of the Congregation or of the houses to which they are assigned

3° A Third Order, whose members, outside the community, intend, by their stricter way of life, to protest against the rules of conduct of the world. Under the direction of the Order, they may devote themselves to those works of charity, zeal, or apostolate which are compatible with their status and are capable of extending the reign of Jesus Christ in souls.

#### **Government**

The Congregation is governed by a Superior General who serves for life. The General Chapter, which shall elect him, shall provide him, according to need, with one, two, three or four Assistants General. These Assistants shall form his Council and shall have consultative voice, except in financial matters, where they shall have deliberative voice

Should the Superior General become seriously derelict in his duties, the Assistants General should admonish him and, if necessary, bring their complaints to the Apostolic See so that it may take the means to remedy the disorders.

General Chapters are held to elect a Superior General, and whenever the Superior General deems it necessary for the good of the Congregation.

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#### *Appended Note*<sup>82</sup>

Although the attached schedule may be modified, it is nevertheless the usual order of our day:

Rise.....	4:25
Prime .....	4:45
Meditation until.....	5:35
Study	
Mass .....	7:00

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<sup>82</sup> This note is included in Fr. Galabert's novitiate notebook as well as in the copy Fr. d'Alzon had made of his manuscript.

Breakfast	
Study	
Small Hours.....	11:30
Particular Examen	
Dinner (Lunch).....	Noon
Recreation	
Study .....	1:30
Visit to the Blessed Sacrament.....	6:45
Office (Vespers, Compline, Matins, Lauds) ....	7:00
Supper .....	8:00
Recreation .....	
Readings of points of meditation .....	9:15
Bedtime .....	9:30

We recite the Office in choir; we psalmodize it, except on major feasts.

Our food is ordinary; but we impose upon ourselves no general mortifications, given our obligation to speak a great deal.

We sleep on a straw mattress. At night, we wear a long nightshirt in order to be ready to get up at any time to supervise the children.

ORIGINAL EDITION: *Premières Constitutions des Augustins de l'Assomption, 1855-1865*, Rome 1966, pp. 31-34.  
 TRANSLATION: *Foundational Documents*, pp. 7-12; Revised by editor.

### 3. Constitutions

#### Book One: Common Rules

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##### CHAPTER 1.

##### PURPOSE AND SPIRIT OF THE ORDER

The purpose of our small Association is to work toward our perfection by extending the reign of Jesus Christ in souls; accordingly, our motto is found in the words of the Lord's Prayer: *Adveniat Regnum Tuum*.<sup>1</sup>

The coming of the reign of Jesus Christ for ourselves and for our neighbor is what we have in view before everything else.

The means of attaining this goal are: for ourselves, the practice of the religious virtues; for our neighbor, the works of zeal specified below.

The religious virtues we shall practice are the following<sup>2</sup>:

1°—*Faith* will open us to the supernatural order. We shall believe with all our heart whatever the Church believes and teaches. We shall view all our actions in the light of the divine mysteries, so that even the least of our actions might be carried out under the watchful eye of God and be prompted by the desire to fulfill in ourselves some of the teachings of Our Lord.

Moreover, we shall practice this virtue:

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<sup>1</sup> "Extending the reign of Jesus Christ in souls" is a very supernatural formula for the apostolate. We no longer use the expression "in the world," as in Fr. d'Alzon's earlier note on the Order. It is not a question of the temporal triumph of Christ; the reign of Christ is not of this world, though it manifests itself in the world. We specify "reign of Christ" and not "Kingdom of God," because it is not up to us to bring about the Kingdom of God and extend it. The Kingdom will come at the time determined by the Father, and when it comes, it will have a perfect and definitive form: it is eschatological. But we prepare ourselves for its coming by desiring it and working to extend the reign of Jesus Christ which prepares it.

<sup>2</sup> By religious virtues, Fr. d'Alzon does not mean the virtues of poverty, chastity, and obedience which religious vow to observe according to the evangelical counsels, but rather the Pauline triad: faith, hope, and love, three things that last, and the greatest of which is love (1 Cor 13:13). These three form the basis of Christian perfection and mark within us the coming of the reign of Jesus Christ. In them all disciples of Christ must exert themselves, even if they do so in different ways. They are so intimately linked to the unique goal which is the Kingdom that in turn they become the goal of our life. Fr. d'Alzon never ceased, from the earliest years of his priestly formation until his death, to insist upon the paramount dignity of the theological virtues which recreate us in the image of God.

–By our complete submission, not only to the teaching of the Church, but also to the spirit of such teaching;

–By our filial obedience to the Sovereign Pontiff whose every known wish we shall readily follow;

–By our respect for truth, manifested in the deposit of religious dogmas, realizing more fully the importance of our vocation as defenders and soldiers of these dogmas, and consequently as soldiers of Jesus Christ, Word of God and Eternal Truth;

–By our spirit of obedience to the Rule and to our Superiors, our faith enabling us to see God himself in those who are placed over us in our small Association.

2°—*Hope*: We shall place our trust in God alone, never in human means. We shall try to hold all created goods in contempt, in order to attach ourselves only to those of heaven.<sup>3</sup> Evangelical poverty will be the external proof of our practice of hope. We shall also draw from it a true spirit of humility, i.e., of contempt and hatred of ourselves; and a spirit of prayer in which we shall ask for the graces needed to fulfill the Law and the Counsels of God; and a deep conviction that all that is not God or is not related to Him is not worthy of us.

Such a practice of hope will inspire us with the most profound gratitude for God’s gifts and remind us of the words of the Apostle who suggests that we thank God for all that happens to us: “*In omnibus gratias agentes*” (Eph 5:20).

Hope will be for us the source of absolute trust in Our Lord amid all our trials. It was precisely at the time of his Passion that He said to his Apostles: “*Non turbetur cor vestrum, neque formidet; creditis in Deum et in me credite*; Do not let your hearts be troubled. Have faith in God and faith in me” (Jn 14:1). As Our Lord pronounced these words just as he was about to fulfill the prophecy which said of Him: “He shall be surfeited with shame; *saturabitur opprobriis*” (Lam 3:30), we shall have confidence that, despite whatever trials befall us, He will not abandon us if we remain faithful to Him, because He himself promised us persecution along with Victory; “*Si me persecuti fuerint, et vos persequentur; in mundo pressuram habebitis, sed confidite, ego vici mundum*; If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. In the world you will have hardship, but be courageous: I have conquered the world” (Jn 15:20 and 16:33).

In all things, the members of our family must remember:

1° Never to request in their prayers anything which is not directed toward the greater glory of God;

2° To ask for deliverance from the trials which God sends them only insofar as such deliverance further contributes to the extension of the reign

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<sup>3</sup> “To hold earthly goods in contempt” is a very evangelical expression but it sounds strange to modern ears. It must be understood in the sense that the coming of the Kingdom relativizes, without negating, the value of earthly realities.



of Jesus Christ;

3° While working to solve their temporal difficulties, to seek solely a greater freedom for the service of God to whom they must be completely and absolutely consecrated;

4° To find their happiness, their strength and their rest in the love of the Cross, since the Lord Jesus saved the world by the Cross. They must be deeply convinced that their trials are nothing when compared to those of Our Lord Jesus Christ. If they love this good Master, they should forget their own afflictions in the presence of those endured by Christ and those endured daily by the Church, his heavenly Spouse. They should act like the child who, suffering from a small hurt, quickly forgets it and attends solely to his mother when she suddenly becomes seriously ill. With this loving selflessness in mind, the religious of Assumption shall offer at the Holy Sacrifice and to Our Lord present in the tabernacle their hearts and their capacity to suffer, in order to atone for all the crimes committed against God and the Church.

3° *Charity*: The practice of charity includes *the love of God* whom we shall love most exclusively; *chastity*, which, because it detaches us from all fondness for sensual pleasure, will help us direct toward God all the aspirations of our heart; *the love of Our Lord*, which we will try to prove by practicing the virtues He perfectly exemplified in his holy humanity, and by making all our actions depend on his spirit according to his injunction: “*Vos amici estis, si feceritis quae praecipio vobis*; You are my friends if you do what I command you” (Jn 15:14).

The practice of charity also includes love of the Blessed Virgin, the Mother of Jesus Christ and our special patroness; love of the Church whose every interest should be ours;<sup>4</sup> and devotion to the Holy Angels, especially the Guardian Angels of our Brothers and of the souls entrusted to us.

Love of neighbor shall manifest itself: by our gentleness in bearing whatever wrongs others inflict upon us, by our readiness to serve others as required by our vocation, by our cordiality and our spirit of frankness, and especially by our zeal in all the works we undertake for the good of souls.

Finally, charity will reveal to us that spirit of unity which Our Lord asked of his Father right after instituting the Sacrament of the Eucharist and before shedding his Blood for the salvation of the world: “*Ut omnes unum sint... Ut dilectio qua dilexisti me in ipsis sit et ego in ipsis*; That all may be one...so that your love for me may live in them and I may live in them” (Jn 17:21, 26). Because, in the words of St. John, God is love, and because he who lives in love lives in God, we shall continually ask the Spirit of Love,

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<sup>4</sup> After “the love of the Church,” Fr. d’Alzon inserted “the Mystical Body of the Savior,” an idea which was very dear to him, coming as it did from his assiduous reading of St. Augustine, at a time when the expression was not very common. Vatican I expressly avoided such a title, but Vatican II gave it a prominent place among the images by which the Scriptures express the mystery of the Church (*Lumen Gentium* 1, 6-7).

who proceeds eternally from the Father and the Son, to unite us indissolubly to God, to Jesus Christ, to his Church, to our Brothers, and to the souls entrusted to us.

Such a spirit of unity will keep us far from the struggles which all too often arise within the Church between the secular and the regular clergies. We shall scrupulously stay within our bounds so as to avoid conflict with others who, like ourselves, are engaged in working for the salvation of souls. Consequently, we shall not get involved in any type of work that seems more properly the prerogative of the secular clergy. We must know how to renounce doing some of the good which must be done, in order to accomplish more perfectly the one which will be more directly entrusted to us. We do this in order to strengthen, by the example of humble charity, the bonds of brotherhood which should unite all the servants of Jesus Christ, in whatever type of work they do in his vineyard.

More specifically, we shall seek to extend the reign of Our Lord by the following works:<sup>5</sup>

1° Education, understood in the broadest sense of the term, i.e.: secondary schools, colleges, seminaries, and universities. We shall engage in primary education only if we offer it free of charge. We shall devote ourselves to forming Christians deeply attached to the Church and to pointing out the absolute need for a vital unity, not only in dogma but also in discipline, under the increasingly respected direction of the Sovereign Pontiff. If one of the greatest evils of our day is the spirit of division which tends to break the bonds uniting the intelligentsia, one of the purposes of our small Association must be to try, through education, to bring the minds and hearts of individuals closer to the common center which Jesus Christ gave to his Church.<sup>6</sup>

2° Publications of books capable of helping Christian education. The calumnies against the truth, which Protestants and philosophers have built up over three centuries, make it imperative for the defenders of divine truth

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<sup>5</sup> The list of apostolic works corresponds to the works already undertaken or projected by the Congregation, according to the purpose and spirit of the Congregation: "colleges" at Nîmes and Clichy; school manuals with a greater Christian flavor; popular or scholarly publications, such as *Revue de l'Enseignement Chrétien* and an edition of the *Summa contra Gentiles*; works of charity by the students or by others outside the college, for the benefit of such disadvantaged people as servants or even gypsies; retreats; foreign missions which some of the younger religious such as François Picard sought in 1850.

<sup>6</sup> One of Fr. d'Alzon's great ideas was the restoration of unity to minds and hearts disturbed by modern relativism. In founding the Little Sisters of the Assumption, Fr. Etienne Pernet had the same purpose in mind: unity of minds in truth; of hearts, in love. The young Assumption did not nostalgically yearn for a Christianity which had long ago disappeared. Rather, after the turmoil of the Revolution, it confidently sought the coming of a new humanity better attuned to the light and grace of Jesus Christ, who is the transcendent answer to the desires of the modern world for fraternity, equality, and liberty.

to dispel the darkness which has obscured modern science.<sup>7</sup>

3° Works of charity, by which we can prepare the children entrusted to our care to carry out their Christian duty in the world. We cannot deny the fact that the poor harbor in their hearts great hatred against the rich. This comes either from a loss of faith among the lower classes or from the scandalous use the upper classes have made of their wealth. To redress, as much as possible, such a great evil, we shall try to inculcate in the young people entrusted to us a love and a respect for the suffering members of Jesus Christ, and we shall try to instill in them the obligation they have to help the suffering, not only by their alms, but by their words, their advice, their encouragement, and their solace.<sup>8</sup>

4° Retreats. We shall conduct them either in our own houses, or on the outside, provided there are no serious drawbacks to the latter.

5° Foreign missions and works for the destruction of schism and heresy.<sup>9</sup>

We shall undertake work outside our houses, such as preaching and

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<sup>7</sup> *The Association for Good Books* was trying, in southern France, to offset the massive spread of anti-religious and anti-Catholic propaganda that had begun in 1820. Assumption tried to help. To get at the root of the evil, Fr. d'Alzon wanted to revamp the entire Christian educational system. Harking back to the University of Paris, he was thinking of a great endeavor to restore unity of minds in truth. From Nîmes, he contributed by establishing a School of Advanced Studies. Then the Bonne Presse was started. In his report on the Bonne Presse to the General Chapter of 1886, Fr. Vincent de Paul Bailly stated that by founding the *Revue de l'Enseignement Chrétien*, "Our Father was only continuing to pursue the earliest preoccupations of his zeal." And the recording secretary added, "Notes dealing with his life reveal to us that since 1837 he had dreamed of founding an Order of tertiary religious printers..." (*Pages d'Archives*, 3<sup>rd</sup> series, no. 7, October 1965, p. 507).

<sup>8</sup> Already in 1845, Assumption tried to form an elite that would be conscious of its Christian and social responsibilities: solid, upright Christians, men of their times, citizens of their homeland. The Revolution of 1848 only emphasized the urgency of starting a Catholic democratic and social movement to forestall atheistic and revolutionary socialism which was expressed by Blanqui's "No God, no master!" and by the theories of Proudhon and Marx. The rich forgot the precept of brotherly love. Shocked churchmen saw irreligion rapidly spreading among the lower classes, which, prior to the 1848 Revolution, had had no political rights and, despite the Revolution, still no civil rights. The selfishness of the rich needed to be shaken up; the undeserved misery of the working class alleviated. Far-reaching structural reforms were not yet considered; charitable works were mentioned as a remedy to present ills. This was expressed in language that we must go beyond today, but which is a reminder of the Gospel message which it carries: love and respect for the suffering members of Jesus Christ. This mystical point of view led Fr. Pernet to find his vocation amid the Assumptionists (*Pages d'Archives*, 4<sup>th</sup> series, no. 1, April, 1966). Without evangelical love, social justice shrinks away and becomes only claim and counterclaim, and inexpiable strife. In our own day, we must live an evangelical love informed by faith, in order to work for a unity of minds in truth and a union of hearts in love, thus creating a better political, social, and cultural life for people and nations (Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*).

<sup>9</sup> "Schism" here means Anglicanism, and "heresy" means the Protestant Reformation.

confessions, only if we are certain that it is agreeable to the secular clergy, under whose direction we shall place ourselves to perform such work.

Along these same lines, we shall endeavor to inspire the children entrusted to us with a sense of respect and affection for their pastors and an understanding of their duties as parishioners.<sup>10</sup>

**CHAPTER 2.**  
*PREDISPOSITIONS REQUIRED TO ENTER THE ORDER*

Whoever desires to enter our small family shall examine himself to see whether he has the following predispositions:

1° Does he have an unwavering desire to offer his life to God, so that it may be required of him in work, persecutions, suffering, contempt, or the lowliest occupations? Is he ready to endure anything to do the Lord's will, and thus achieve perfection?<sup>11</sup>

2° Does he have a burning love for Our Lord Jesus Christ and a resolve to face anything in order to prove himself a soldier capable of working for the extension of his reign?

3° Is he ready to place his entire life under the protection of the Blessed Virgin and consider her as his Mother?

4° Is he ready to have no other love on earth except for the cause of the Church, which is God's Kingdom? Is he ready to face any peril for the salvation of souls?

5° To achieve perfection, does he wish to practice the holy evangelical counsels, as we shall teach him?

**CHAPTER 3.**  
*EXAMINATION OF THOSE PRESENTING THEMSELVES TO BECOME RELIGIOUS*

Those in charge of receiving postulants must examine them to discover whether they have a frank, open, generous, flexible character, are not too eccentric, are endowed with sufficient intelligence for studies, are in good health, and are able to meditate without too much difficulty. Would

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<sup>10</sup> One of the purposes of our colleges was the integration of the students into their respective dioceses and parishes. Speaking of the College, Fr. d'Alzon said, "The House of Assumption was chosen to prepare men capable of loving the Church, of being impassioned for the Church, of sacrificing themselves for the Church," not in the abstract but in concrete ecclesial communities of priests and faithful. "Freedom of education" thus understood is a wide-open system of education and not "ghetto education" destined solely to preserve the students it already has.

<sup>11</sup> This first aptitude is basic. Those mentioned in the next four paragraphs assure fidelity to a life consecrated to God. Thus, at least in 1868, the triple love is based on a love called "principal" of which God is the goal and which expresses itself in the service of the Kingdom. "If you add to this principal love the love of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of the Blessed Virgin, his Mother, and of the Church, his Spouse, you will know, in its simplest expression, the spirit of Assumption." Our Christ-centeredness comes from a very traditional God-centeredness: "God is one. One also is the mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all" (1 Tm 2:5).

community life be too great a burden for them? Would they tire others by their unreasonable demands or their whims? Would they seek to introduce their own mentality?

Those in charge of postulants and novices must be aware of their responsibility should they admit to the Association members unsuited to be good religious.

#### **CHAPTER 4.**

##### *QUESTIONS TO BE ASKED OF SOMEONE WHO PRESENTS HIMSELF TO BE A RELIGIOUS*

- 1° Does he come from a heretical family?
- 2° Has he professed doctrines that have been condemned or are contrary to the faith?
- 3° Is he legitimate?
- 4° Has he been found guilty of criminal offenses?
- 5° Does he have any debts?
- 6° Among his relatives, has anyone been disgraced, dishonored?
- 7° Is he in good health?
- 8° In his family, is anyone mentally deranged, or has he been himself?
- 9° Is he unmarried?
- 10° Does his family need him to subsist?
- 11° What has his past life been like? How long has he been considering religious life? Why is he choosing us?
- 12° Is he resolved to sacrifice his will completely?

The prudence of the Superiors will determine whether any of the above points warrant the exclusion of someone who requests admission among us, depending on their seriousness or their number.

Attention must be drawn to the fact that in joining us one must be absolutely resolved to give himself to God in complete obedience and dependence, and be ready to serve Him in any capacity, as soon as the Superior has spoken.

The postulant shall be stripped of the use of his possessions, leaving him only the use of his clothing. He must be ready to give up even these and put on others, should he be asked to do so.

We recommend that novices not pay too much attention to their bodies and their health. But, because they must be unconcerned about this, they must be closely supervised, lest, by excessive zeal, they ruin their health ahead of time.

Even while treating them rather rigorously, we will show them sincere affection, which will prompt them to open themselves to their Master [of Novices], and become attached to the Society in which they will spend their lives. Having peace of soul, at least from this point of view, they will strive with greater fervor toward everything that concerns their own

sanctification and that of their neighbor in the love of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

**CHAPTER 5.**  
*ENTERING RELIGIOUS LIFE; THE NOVITIATE*

When someone requests admission among us, we shall ask him, in more or less detail, depending on his age, the various questions mentioned above. We will urge him to reflect for a while on the general purpose of our small Society. If he accepts its spirit, the conditions and the main requirements which we have explained to him, we shall urge him to make a short retreat among us.

During this time, we will study him and urge him to examine himself even more seriously. If after consulting God in prayer and silence, he persists in his intention, he will enter a probationary period of from three to six months, unless he is known to us by other ways, for example, if he was educated by our religious, or if he had been a teacher in one of our houses, or if he had been for some years a member of our Third Order. During this time, he will be able to judge whether our congregation suits him, and we will examine whether he suits us. Then if, for good reasons, he leaves us, or if we find it useful to dismiss him, we shall try to carry out the separation with all prudence and charity.

If, on the contrary, he persists in his intention, and we judge him apt to become a good religious, we shall invest him with the habit and he will begin his novitiate.

Ordinarily, the novitiate lasts two years. It cannot be less than a year and a day, and can never be longer than three years.<sup>12</sup>

The novices shall be trained:

1° To detachment from their will, by numerous practices of obedience;

2° To humility, by various tests of *contempt* to which we shall subject them. They must be made to realize that as long as they cling to their personal honor or to that of our small Society, they will only imperfectly pursue the glory of God and the triumph of the reign of Our Lord;

3° To penance, by various mortifications, so that we may know whether they are able to destroy within themselves the appetites of nature and the tyranny of the senses;

4° To prayer; we shall have them read books that can train them in mental prayer, and we shall frequently question them on the state of their interior life. It is important that we inspire them with a great spirit of faith in their relations with God, so that they may seek Him only for himself and not

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<sup>12</sup> Two years of novitiate were specified in order not to rush the definitive commitment, which was made after just one year of vows.

for the consolations they might derive from his service;

5° To the exact practice of the schedule: we shall teach them to be orderly not only in the actions foreseen by the Rule, but also in all their work, studies, and other occupations;

6° To community life: that is, to putting up with the character of other people with whom they must learn to live and whose harshness they must consider as an exercise in patience and charity. So that they may not cause others to suffer, they must during their novitiate struggle to destroy whatever might be defective in their own character;

7° To great frankness and cordiality toward their Brothers;

8° To an absolute openness of heart toward their Superiors.

We shall try to give the novices a virile, generous, unselfish character. We shall teach them to be preoccupied the least possible with what concerns them personally and with everything that their egoism and self-love might come to expect. As often as possible, we shall instruct them about religious life; we shall ask them to explain what they think about it, how they are progressing in the virtues they are seeking to acquire in it, and about the desire they have for the greater glory of God and the extension of the reign of Jesus Christ.

Novices shall be admitted to profession upon presentation by the Master of Novices, following examinations that will be specified later on by the Superior General or his delegate.

During the novitiate, a novice who may want to complain about his Master of Novices can always write to the Superior General who would then see whether, for serious reasons, the novice might be sent to another novitiate, provided the Congregation has several.

Concerning the Lay Brothers, we can leave things up to the Superior of the place where they were received. What is especially required of them is a great spirit of faith, of simplicity, and of obedience. Experience shows that neither an exterior coarseness nor even a lack of education is an obstacle to the sanctification of certain persons who can render very great services, provided they act out of love of God, with confidence and docility. But we shall be most severe concerning anything that smacks of lying, deceit and difficulty in being open, stubbornness, or the love of bizarre practices, as is often found among some members of the lower class.<sup>13</sup>

## **CHAPTER 6.** *DISMISSAL OF RELIGIOUS*

The longer someone has been in the Society, the harder it shall be to dismiss him. We must know how to remove, in a timely way, a dangerous or dead member, even in vows. But we must do this only when precautions

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<sup>13</sup> This paragraph must be understood in the context of 1885, when Assumption accepted Lay Brothers totally lacking in education, even elementary, but who were perfectly disposed to consecrate themselves humbly to God's service.

have been taken to avoid scandal inside and outside the Society. Those dismissed are released from their simple vows, except that of perpetual chastity.<sup>14</sup>

If someone has left on his own and then presents himself again, we may take him back if we deem there are sufficient reasons to do so. However, beforehand, we must receive permission from the Superior General and require that he remake his novitiate.

*CHAPTER 7.  
VOWS*

In addition to the three vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, we shall pronounce a fourth vow, that of consecrating ourselves to the extension of the reign of Jesus Christ in souls.<sup>15</sup> This vow implies an obligation to give ourselves, with all possible zeal, to the works of charity mentioned above, within whose limits we desire to restrict our activity. These vows will be simple until they receive the approbation of the Sovereign Pontiff; the Superior General can grant release from them, except for the vow of perpetual chastity. The regard the religious have for their vows will be the measure of their fervor. The more exact they are in observing them, the more assured they will be of attracting God's blessings upon themselves. Conversely, laxity regarding these four essential points would be the surest sign of decadence and of God's wrath upon our small Association.

*CHAPTER 8.  
POVERTY*

The richness of our small family must consist in its absolute detachment from earthly goods. Our Lord said, "Foxes have lairs, the birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head" (Mt 8:20). Therefore, we shall be ashamed of any unnecessary satisfaction we give to our bodies. Since Our Lord, during his apostolic life, did not want to give the example of exceptional external mortifications, we shall seek to imitate Him at least in his poverty during this precious period of his life on

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<sup>14</sup> According to the legislation of that time, simple vows were not juridically recognized as religious vows. Thus, the Superior who had received them could release from them, even in the case of perpetual vows, except for the vow of chastity, which was reserved to the Holy See.

<sup>15</sup> Upon reading this passage, one might conclude that all the members of the Institute – choir religious, lay brothers, and brothers of the Third Order – pronounced the fourth vow consecrating themselves to the extension of the reign of Jesus Christ. But according to the text of the profession formula in use until 1863, both the choir religious and the lay brothers made three vows, but only the choir religious made the fourth vow. Brothers of the Third Order, who were only "secular Brothers," made no vows but committed themselves "to extend the reign of Our Lord."



earth, which must be a model for our own life. For this reason, we shall be very strict in the use of our time. We are all poor men who must work to earn our living.<sup>16</sup>

In conformity with the General Chapter of 1850, we shall keep only those properties where our religious or their students reside. In our various houses, colleges, novitiates, country dwellings or farms, we will limit ourselves to what is necessary, without seeking to spread ourselves out too much. Revenues from various houses must be used to improve these houses, and the remainder is to be used for good works.

Consequently, every year, the Superior General shall balance the books of the general account. He can set apart a portion of the surplus income in an amount equal to what is foreseen in the overall budget of the following year. The remainder of the surplus must then be used for good works, especially for the foreign missions, if possible.

Nevertheless, there is one case in which all of the surplus may be set apart, namely, whenever we are planning to open other houses and would need the surplus of several years to carry out such projects.

We shall not require a dowry from those desiring to enter religious life, but we shall accept whatever they wish to give as a donation. Such donations must be spent on good works during the year, unless, as mentioned above, they are set aside for other foundations.

Before entering religious life, the novice shall dispose of everything he owns. And once he has pronounced his vows, he may never come back upon the disposition he has made, without the formal consent of the Superior General.

If, after his profession, he receives a bequest or an inheritance, such a bequest or inheritance belongs to the community, unless for good reasons the Superior General deems it appropriate to cede it to the family of the religious.

If the bequest or the inheritance can be sold, it would be advisable to sell it and use the money immediately for some good work, especially for the foreign missions.

Let the clothing, food, and residences of the religious always be poor. Nonetheless, the sick shall be treated with all the care which charity inspires, according to the recommendations of the Rule. While banishing all luxury from our cells, we shall accept for our colleges and other residences whatever can inspire our students with a deep feeling for Christian art. Our

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<sup>16</sup> The presentation of the three religious vows follows the traditional order: poverty, chastity and obedience, even though the stress is placed on the perfection of obedience, according to the spirit of modern apostolic congregations. The *Directory*, linking religious virtues with the theological virtues, will successively treat of obedience after faith, of poverty after hope, and of chastity after charity. Moreover, these 1855 Constitutions treat of the evangelical counsels in the spirit of solemn vows that involve not only the members but also the Institute itself, as the chapter on poverty clearly illustrates.

churches shall be for us an object of holy envy, and we shall devote to them all that can enhance the majesty of the ceremonies and increase love of Our Lord.

The religious shall purchase nothing without permission.

Regarding everything that concerns them personally, they will act with the thrift that befits poor people. Their garments shall be as simple and poor as possible.

At the chapter of faults, they shall accuse themselves of anything they have broken, crushed or allowed to deteriorate.

They shall have no peculium [allowance, kitty]; and when they are given some money for their travels, they shall hasten, upon their return, to give back to the bursar whatever money remains.

Let them keep in mind that voluntary poverty brings them closer to the real poor. What they deprive themselves of enables them to help the real poor, and they thus preach by their example about the good that can come from poverty and about submission to the decrees of Providence.

Before profession, a religious shall draw up and sign an inventory of whatever he may have brought with him. Should he, for whatever reason, leave the Congregation, we shall return to him everything listed in the inventory, except for deteriorated items for which the Congregation is not responsible. All the money he may have earned by his work or otherwise shall remain in the community to offset his living expenses while he stayed among us.

In order to train the religious to develop a spirit of detachment, the Superior shall from time to time require them to exchange the objects they use, such as rosaries, breviaries, rooms, religious habits, etc.

## **CHAPTER 9.** **CHASTITY**

It is from their devotion to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and in their filial tenderness for the Blessed Virgin that the members of our little family shall draw the strength they need to keep this vow. They must avoid useless conversations; they must keep themselves fully occupied at all times; they must loathe all dangerous relationships; they must always be ready to account for their actions; they must remember that the apostolic life is after all an angelic life and that they must have its virtue. Only a transparently innocent heart can enjoy an intimate relationship with Him who is the eternal and pure splendor of the Father.

Superiors have a special obligation to ensure that this virtue is observed among their Brothers, and they must forestall the occasions and eliminate the circumstances which could damage their reputations. The religious shall remember that it is only by great purity that they can achieve their goal, the eternal possession of God, as Our Lord said, "Blessed are the pure in heart; they shall see God" (Mt 5:8).

*CHAPTER 10.*  
*OBEDIENCE*

Whereas a religious gives whatever he possesses by poverty and his body and its senses by chastity, he gives himself totally by obedience. This virtue, whose vow is the bond of religious life, completes the sacrifice of all his being. He must seek its explanation in the very center of the adorable Trinity and in the eternal obedience of the Son—the uncreated Word—to the will of the Father. For this reason, Jesus Christ wanted to be called the Lamb who was sacrificed from the very beginning of the world. He declares through the Prophet that he wills whatever the Father wills and that his law is written in his heart: “To do your will, O my God, is my delight, and your law is within my heart” (Ps 39:9 Vulgate). St. Paul teaches us, and the Church repeats in the prayers of Holy Week, that “For our sake Jesus Christ became obedient accepting even death, death on a cross” (Phil 2:8).

For our obedience to be pleasing to God, it must be humble, calm, prompt, faithful, uncomplaining, and courageous.

Assumptionist religious must practice obedience in the most absolute way, especially in the following instances:

1° The religious will have the most absolute and filial obedience first and foremost to Our Holy Father the Pope; secondly, to the Superiors General; and finally to the other Superiors in the Congregation.

2° They will never go out without requesting permission. If the Superior is alone or with other religious, they will also ask for a blessing.

3° They will render an account of their interior life at least once a month. For the Superior, obedience will consist in always being ready to listen to the religious, unless urgent business prevents him from doing so.

4° They will give an account of their studies whenever requested to do so.

5° They will always be ready to work at whatever tasks are entrusted to them, however difficult and disagreeable they might be.

6° They will obey as promptly as possible all the orders they will be given.

7° Every day, after dinner, upon leaving the chapel, and every evening after the reading of the points of meditation, the religious will attend what is known as “obedience,” in order to request the permissions they will need, either for the remainder of the day or for the next day.

8° They will not, without permission, interfere with the duties of others. Without permission, they will never eat between meals; and they will never receive outsiders in their cells.

9° In all humility and without grumbling, they will accept whatever reproaches are made to them and whatever penances are imposed upon them. To be truly obedient, religious must remain completely indifferent regarding the tasks entrusted to them, considering them as coming from God, as soon as the Superiors have specified them. Religious always have the right to make to the Superior whatever remarks they deem appropriate.

They must tell him everything and act in this regard, as in everything, with great frankness and complete freedom. But they are urged to flee with utmost care those conversations in which, under pretext of a greater good, they criticize the government of houses or the faults of the Brothers. Such conversations are the ruin of communities. The Major Superiors are strictly obliged to punish with utmost severity, yet with prudence and discretion, the smallest abuses they might discover in this regard.

A religious who is a chronic complainer should be dismissed without mercy, if he is deemed incorrigible. Better to cut off one member than to let gangrene take over the whole body. Indulgence toward one member could mean the loss of the entire community.

10° Religious will neither receive nor send letters without permission. The Superior may read all incoming or outgoing mail except those letters which the religious send or receive from the Major Superiors. Those being sent to Major Superiors will be sealed in the presence of the religious who sent them, and any incoming letters from these Superiors will carry the seal of the Congregation. A Superior who commits an indiscretion in this regard will be considered disqualified for any position in the Congregation, for at least three years.

#### **CHAPTER 11.**

##### *VOW OF CONSECRATING ONESELF TO THE SALVATION OF SOULS*

Because the spirit of our Order is especially apostolic, we must try, as much as possible, to acquire the virtues proper to such a sublime vocation. Consequently, keeping in mind that Our Lord came on earth not to be served but to serve, we must consider ourselves humbly dependent upon the souls we are called to help. We must remember that these souls have rights over us and that the only right we have over them is the one Our Lord entrusted to us of leading them, with the means we have at our disposal, toward their own personal perfection. This attitude of dependence will generate respect, which in turn will serve as a safeguard for them and for us. It is in the heart of Jesus Christ that they must be dear to us. It is the love that Jesus Christ manifested when He shed his Blood for them that must be the measure of the efforts we make to direct them toward holiness according to their own vocation.

Though each religious should be willing to accept, within the limits of the Institute, any assignment proposed by his Superiors, the latter shall nevertheless consider very carefully the various aptitudes, the natural talents, and especially the graces received by each, and appoint them to the work in which they are most likely to succeed.

We shall send to a foreign land only those religious who have requested it. On this point as on all others, we must avoid, as much as possible, everything that goes against prudence, for we must not forget that personal pursuits, through self-deception, can sometimes be mistaken for divine zeal. Superiors will be attentive to discern these two very distinct

attitudes so as not to reap some great harm in the place of an expected good.

Since zeal for the salvation of souls is one of the distinctive characteristics of our Association, we cannot do enough to rid our zeal of all the defects that could otherwise render it jealous, bitter, or self-seeking. We should bring to whatever good we do as much disinterestedness as possible, especially from vainglory. We shall rejoice when others accomplish work we were not judged worthy of doing. And when others will have done God's work, even work we think we might have had a right to do, we shall say with Moses: "*Utinam et omnes prophetent*; Would that all the people of the Lord were prophets!" (Nm 11:29). Our zeal shall be humble, as we recall the words of Our Lord to his apostles: "When you have done all you have been commanded to do, say 'We are useless servants. We have done no more than our duty'" (Lk 17:10). Finally, our zeal shall be persevering. Holy Scripture gives countless examples of the way in which God makes prosper the works He wants, even when they appear most hopeless: He grants more of his graces when He sees man relying less on himself.

## **CHAPTER 12.**

### **PRAYER**

The life of Assumptionist religious will be a life of prayer, recollection, and presence of God. During the novitiate, they will be trained in meditation and in the practice of the interior life. The religious must remember that all their strength comes from God. Prayer must be their greatest weapon in repelling temptation, combating the enemy of salvation, and overcoming all obstacles to good works. They will deem themselves happy to progress in the interior life. As prayer is their principal means, they will walk unceasingly in the presence of God in order to be perfect. This feeling of the divine presence will be the source of their recollection and of their modesty. They will try to pray to God everywhere, in order to adore God everywhere and to thank Him everywhere for his gifts or to atone for the scandals that surround us. They will pray especially for the intentions of Our Lord, finding their happiness in uniting their prayers to those which the Eternal Pontiff unceasingly makes to the Father for sinners. They will pray for all the needs of the Church, and in this prayer of devoted sons they will ignite their zeal for the extension of the reign of Jesus Christ. If their prayer is filled with the spirit of faith, as that of a religious should be, they may rest assured that it will be more powerful than any means inspired by purely human prudence. They will undertake nothing without recommending themselves to God, but they will also remember that nothing attracts divine grace more than gratitude. They will thank Our Lord for everything good or ill that happens to them, because, on the one hand, everything turns to the greater good of those who love God, and, on the other hand, the Apostle urges us to render thanks for everything, "*In omnibus gratias agentes*; For all things give thanks" (1 Thes 5:18).

**CHAPTER 13.**  
*OFFICE*

We recite the Roman Office; and we recite it in choir, as much as possible. For us, this obligation is of the same nature as the one for priests.

We shall deem ourselves happy to recite in this way the public prayer of the Church, and we shall fulfill this ministry with respect, love, recollection, and devotion. In accepting this obligation, we will consider it as:

1° A mortification, given the increased fatigue the Office may cause us.

2° An occasion to edify the students in our colleges where the Office is recited.

3° In our relations with our neighbor, the esteem we would like to inspire for the great prayer of the Church, over and above a host of practices with which we do not find fault, but which we consider inferior to this solemn prayer, the perfect public prayer.

Special rules shall be made concerning our manner of reciting the Office and the times at which it will be recited.

**CHAPTER 14.**  
*MORTIFICATION*

The religious must realize that when they entered the Congregation, they sacrificed their life to God. This life no longer belongs to them. Therefore, they should care little about whether it is long or short, provided it is spent as God wills it.

Consequently, health reasons will not be accepted in order not to do what is demanded. On the other hand, whenever they are told to take care of their health, the religious must obey so as to do what is most pleasing to God. A religious is a soldier: he must be ready to fight or lay down his weapons, according to the orders of his leader. He must always keep in mind the objective of his vocation: victory over the world and himself, as well as the exemplification of Jesus crucified.

To conquer one's self, penance is necessary, but it must be in conformity with the spirit of the Institute. It consists mainly of poverty, prayer, study and patience in carrying out good works, forbearance with one's neighbor, and regularity. Fasting and other penances will be less necessary than in other religious institutes, because an Assumptionist must let his body be weakened by the good works he does for the salvation of souls.

One reason for practicing a few extraordinary penances will be to obtain the success of our good works, the conversion of sinners, or the reparation of the scandals that afflict the Church; and for these reasons we will often meditate on the Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

**CHAPTER 15.**  
*HUMILITY*

The most indispensable virtue for the Assumptionist religious is certainly humility. If it is true, as St. Paul states, that “Knowledge inflates” (1 Cor 8:1), then we are undeniably exposed to great dangers because of the work we are engaged in.<sup>17</sup> Peril lies in the very good we are called upon to do. Consequently, we must attempt, by humility, to bring a great purity of intention to every act of our life, lest we let self-love take the place of the glory of God, which is the only thing we must seek.

We must constantly raise our thoughts toward Him who must be the beginning and the end of all our actions, lest we find our reward in the personal satisfaction we obtained in accomplishing such and such an action, good in itself, but which we insufficiently directed toward God. Humility will detach us from our own will, for fear that, adhering too much to some personal attachment and not solely to God’s good pleasure, we be exposed to hear the terrible words: “Look, you seek your own pleasure on your fast days” (Is 58:3, NJB). Humility shall be the source of our obedience, no matter how great the sacrifices imposed upon us. Mistrust of ourselves will lead us to understand our need for guidance; and being conscious of our weakness will cause to spring up within us a greater confidence in God. Humility shall be the source of our openness with our Superiors, in our personal sharing with the Superior, in recognizing our faults, our temptations, our pains, our needs, and all our inner ills.

Humility will make us accept all the orders we receive as well as the lowliest jobs and the most contemptible situations. It will make us understand that we deserve only the last place and to be downtrodden because Jesus Christ said, “I am a worm, not a man” (Ps 21:7 Vulgate). Humility will make us accept, with respect, the customs established in the community, even when we do not understand them. It puts a curb on our tongue. It inspires the gravity suitable for a religious. It is the source of the modesty which he must bring in his relations with his Brothers and with his neighbor. Finally, reminding him constantly how despicable he is, humility will cause him to love contempt, because of his love for Jesus Christ who was overwhelmed with insults. It will give the religious the strength to become, in the divine hands of Jesus and those of his representatives, a docile tool always ready to do good and to extend the reign of God in souls.

**CHAPTER 16.**  
*SPIRIT OF RETREAT AND SILENCE*

The more we are called upon to live in the world, the more we must seek solitude from time to time. Every year the Brothers shall make a ten-

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<sup>17</sup> The Constitutions of 1855 have no chapter on study. Study seemed obvious for religious whose first apostolate was teaching. But such an apostolate has its dangers.

day retreat, and they shall make monthly retreats in the manner prescribed by their Superiors.

They must bear in mind that it is by making every effort to be recollected that they can remain united with God and maintain their love of Our Lord Jesus Christ, which must be the constant object of their efforts.

To this purpose, they shall make every effort, as far as their occupations allow, to observe regular silence and to enter within themselves amid the distractions which their duties sometimes impose on them. It will then be obvious that, when they do break silence, it is because they are really obliged to do so.

Major Silence shall be very strictly observed, beginning at the obedience which follows the reading of the points of meditation, at night, until the following morning, after Prime. Ordinary silence shall be kept as carefully as possible except during recreations.

#### **CHAPTER 17.**

##### *FRATERNAL CHARITY*

The love of souls is a distinctive characteristic of our small family. The religious must love especially the souls of their Brothers and of their Superiors, just as the Superiors must have a very special love for the religious who are subject to them. Everyone should thus try to have for one another a love full of tenderness, esteem, respect, and gravity. They should find in the members of our small family living images of Jesus Christ, temples of the Holy Spirit, and children of the Virgin Mary, our common mother. They must avoid all undue familiarity, all particular affection, that bane of communities, all antipathy which might undo the bonds of holy affection, all injurious words, and whatever relationships might produce scandalous discussions. They must warn each other when necessary; and unless a disorder becomes public, they must avoid revealing anything scandalous they might have witnessed, unless it be to those persons whom it is absolutely necessary to notify in order that the harm might be corrected as promptly and as efficiently as possible, without charity being greatly damaged.

In their daily relationships, the Brothers are to remember that their greatest love, after Jesus Christ, the Virgin Mary, the Church, and Our Holy Father the Pope, is our small Congregation. But they must love it for God and in God, avoiding any exclusive love that would consider something good only if it were done by us.

In their conversations, they will talk especially about useful and edifying subjects, avoiding slander, violent disputes, and anything that might offend religious decorum.

Without permission, they will not enter each other's rooms.

They must avoid whatever might offend Brothers of different nationalities.

Finally, may it be said of us what the Holy Spirit said of the first



Christians, “The community of believers were of one heart and one mind” (Acts 4:32).

**CHAPTER 18.**  
*EXTERNAL RELATIONS*

In their external relations, the Brothers must keep in mind the edification they can give, and the scandal they can cause if they do not always act as true religious.

They shall carefully avoid whatever might be a cause of rivalry with the secular clergy, doing only in these circumstances what they have been expressly invited to do. The Superiors are enjoined to be extremely prudent in supervising this very important point of the Rule.

We shall not get involved in lawsuits and family matters unless we have reason to believe that doing so would avoid great harm or bring great good. But it is important not to delude ourselves regarding this very delicate matter.

We shall not involve ourselves in any good work without the permission of the Superiors, local or General, who must be consulted about the importance of the work.

The religious shall receive no visitors; they will never go out without permission. Letters will be written or received only with the Superior’s authorization. Without permission, religious will not eat outside of their religious house.

The religious must be modest in everything. Their habits and their furnishings must be neat and decent. They must be especially modest in their relations with others. The religious must remember that modesty reveals them to others as masters of themselves, as living copies of Jesus Christ, and it makes their behavior a living sermon, often more effective than any speeches.

**CHAPTER 19.**  
*MEANS OF MAINTAINING FERVOR*

Because we seek God alone and the triumph of his Son, our Divine Master, it is by supernatural means that we must seek success in our endeavors. These means are:

1° A constant meditation on the virtues of which Jesus Christ is our model in the Gospels.

2° A devotion to the Blessed Virgin, to our patron saints, and to the guardian angels of those entrusted to us. Besides the Blessed Virgin, the patron saints of our Society are St. Michael, St. Joseph, SS. Peter and Paul, St. John the Evangelist, and St. Augustine.

3° The conscientious choice of Superiors, and especially of the Superior General and his Assistants, as will be prescribed later on. The Society must have a great deal of power and authority over the Superior General; and the Superior General, over the Congregation.

4° The greatest uniformity in spiritual exercises, penances, customs, occupations. For this reason, the Masters of Novices must strive to make their charges realize the importance of our various observances.

5° The care with which the Superiors will endeavor to be a living rule in the house they govern.

6° A profound conviction that we must love our Congregation for God alone, not for itself or ourselves, nor for any advantages that we might gain from it.

7° Accuracy in the personal reports of the religious and the Superiors, at the times specified by the Rule.

8° The vigilance which the Religious who are responsible for making the regular visitations must have as they carry out this duty.

9° The resolution, which the religious must often renew, that they will not become involved in external matters but will concentrate on the objective they had in mind when they joined us.

10° The energy with which the Superiors will forestall any abuses at their outset, repressing them gently or vigorously, but always remembering that if they tolerate certain disorders, they are responsible before God for the souls entrusted to them, and for the souls which, later on, might lose themselves in the Congregation due to abuses that have become incorrigible because they were not suppressed in a timely way.

#### **CHAPTER 20.**

##### *CHAPTER OF FAULTS*

The Chapter will be held weekly, on Friday or Saturday evening whenever possible. In our educational institutions, it can be held from 8:45 to 9:15.

When everyone is gathered in the designated place, all kneel and the Superior begins the *Miserere*, which is recited in alternating choirs, or between the Superior and the community. At the end, the Superior recites the prayer *Respice quaesumus* and the Hail Mary. The religious then rise and a chapter from the Rule or the Constitutions is read. When the reading is not done by the Superior, the reader asks for his blessing: *Jube, Domne, benedicere*. The Superior responds, *Regularibus disciplinis instruat nos Magister coelestis*. When he judges it opportune, the Superior stops the reading with these words, *Tu autem, Domine, miserere nobis*.

The Superior makes whatever remarks he wishes, then the Lay Brothers and the Choir Novices accuse themselves and leave. The self-accusation is done in this way: the one who is doing it kneels before the Superior and his Brothers and says, "In the presence of God, of my Superior, and of my Brothers, I accuse myself of..." He should accuse only external faults.

After the Lay Brothers and the Novices, the other religious then accuse themselves in turn. The Superior does so only on the eve of major feasts. When the accusations have ended, the Superior may again make

whatever remarks, or seek whatever advice, he deems appropriate. The meeting ends with the psalm *Deus misereatur nostri*, and the *Sub tuum*.

No one should repeat what was done or said at the Chapter. There are different kinds of faults that can be accused at the Chapter. The Superior must adjust the penance to the seriousness of the fault. These penances are mentioned below. If the fault reaches a certain degree of seriousness, it should be referred to the Superior General.

**CHAPTER 21.**  
**DAILY SCHEDULE**

Although the daily schedule may be modified for proper reasons, here are the daily exercises to which the Brothers are obliged and the time at which they shall take place:

Rising .....	4:25
Prime .....	4:45
Meditation .....	5:00
Angelus, study .....	5:35
Community Mass .....	7:00
Study .....	8:00
Small Hours, particular examen .....	11:30
Dinner and Recreation .....	Noon
Study .....	1:30
Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament .....	6:45
Office .....	7:00
Supper .....	8:00
Recreation .....	8:30
Points of Meditation, obedience, adoration.....	9:15
Bedtime .....	9:30-10:00

On Sundays, High Mass and Vespers are sung.

**CHAPTER 22.**  
**FOOD**

The religious must remember all that the great servants of God taught about the dangers related to food. It is with food that Satan tempted the first man; it was about their food that the Jews so often brought down upon themselves the wrath of God in the desert; it was when he was hungry that the Savior of the world permitted the devil to tempt Him. On the other hand, Our Lord warned us that it is only by prayer and fasting that we can conquer certain demons. The religious should therefore be ever watchful to keep their meals simple and to practice mortification, as their religious state requires.

At dinner they shall have soup, two courses, and one dessert. At supper, two courses and one dessert.

They may have breakfast, but they shall never have an afternoon snack without permission.

They shall never complain about their food in public. They shall never ask the cook for anything for themselves. If they have special dietary needs, or if they have any remarks to make, they will, in all simplicity, speak to the Superior. During dinner and supper, there will always be a reading. Anything else will be spelled out in particular rules.

**CHAPTER 23.**  
*RECREATION*

The religious shall have two types of recreation: those they spend with the students and those they spend among themselves. The recreation with the students requires special attention. They shall avoid all familiarity and all brusqueness. They may play games; in fact, they should even do so in order to get the games going. They shall see to it that students do not chat among themselves at great length, or form cliques. They shall supervise with special care any problem students.

They shall avoid coarse language and anything that smacks of back-biting or complaining. Without affectation, they will occasionally speak to the students about God. They shall be cordial with students and avoid deviousness in dealing with them, so that they might inspire confidence. During recreation we can often do a lot of good to students, but also much harm, because in these moments of relaxation people are especially susceptible to good or harmful influences.

During recreation among themselves, the religious will endeavor to strengthen the bonds of fraternal life and affection which will be the greatest relaxation they can seek at such a moment.

Whenever he can, the Superior will try to take part in the recreation of the religious. At such times, there is a danger of offending charity and obedience by somewhat unchristian remarks. The mere presence of the Superior should put an end to such abuses. No one shall be absent from recreation without having obtained permission, which will be granted only for serious reasons.

**CHAPTER 24.**  
*THE SICK*

We shall have tender love for the sick members of our Congregation. We shall lavish upon them every care allowed by evangelical poverty. We shall love them all the more because, in their weakness and suffering, they resemble Our Lord. If the house where they reside has few resources, it would be preferable that the healthy religious deprive themselves of some essentials so that the sick religious might have what would be superfluous for them, were they in good health.

We shall make a special effort to furnish them with the means of sanctification, either in the form of pious conversations or good books.

When they are in danger of dying, with all possible charity and prudence we will help them to prepare to appear before God.

For their part, the sick will try not to be too demanding. They shall practice obedience by submitting willingly to whatever is prescribed for them; chastity, by avoiding all immodesty; poverty, by asking only for what would be suitable for poor people; charity, by the edification they give by patiently and gently accepting their illness and their medicine. They shall remember that many saints made of their sickness a way of preaching conversion.

Because the enemy of salvation attacks religious souls especially during their last moments, sick religious will seek to put their conscience in order, as soon as they have been sick in bed for twenty-four hours.

Whenever possible, all our houses shall have an infirmary so that sick religious may get whatever care they need while still observing religious regularity, and so that whatever easier living conditions they are granted will not become a habit once they have recovered their health.

**CHAPTER 25.**  
*OUR DECEASED BROTHERS*

We shall have a tender affection for the souls of our Brothers whom God has called to Himself. Whenever a religious dies, each religious priest of his house will say three Masses for the repose of his soul; each Lay Brother will receive Holy Communion three times; and the Office of the Dead will be recited three times. In the other houses, a Mass for the Dead will be said for his intentions.

**CHAPTER 26.**  
*OBLIGATION OF THE RULE*

This Rule does not oblige under the pain of sin, unless whatever is prescribed is also imposed by God's law, or when it is broken with formal contempt of the Constitutions, or when the Superior has given a written order which includes the phrase, "By virtue of obedience..." In this last case, disobedience is a mortal sin.

## **Book Two: Organization of the Society**

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**CHAPTER 1.**  
*MEMBERS OF THE SOCIETY*

Our Association is composed of:

1° Choir Religious. They devote themselves to studies, teaching, charity, or to the apostolates mentioned above. They do not have to be priests, but if they are not, they shall not be Superiors, unless there is an

urgent necessity.

2° Lay Brothers or Oblates. They help the other religious in charitable works according to their talents and skills. They shall have no part in the government of the Congregation or of the houses to which they are assigned.

3° Brothers of the Third Order. Its members, outside the community, intend, by their stricter way of life, to protest against the ways of the world. Under the direction of the Order, they may devote themselves to those works of zeal, charity, and other apostolates which are compatible with their position and are capable of extending the reign of Jesus Christ in souls.

## **CHAPTER 2.** *GOVERNMENT OF THE SOCIETY*

The Society is governed by a Superior General, named for life, with absolute power.

Four Assistants, named for the lifetime of the General, keep watch over him in the exercise of his authority. The Superior General and his four Assistants are elected in a General Congregation, by secret ballot, and by an absolute majority of the votes cast.

At the death of an Assistant, the surviving Assistants and the local Superiors have the right to elect his replacement. (If we ever have provinces, the Provincials shall perform the duties attributed to the local Superiors).

Should it become necessary, for the good the Order, to depose the Superior General, the Assistants, after careful consideration, will refer the case to the Holy See, which has the right to make the final decision.

The Assistants constitute the General Council, but the Superior General is obliged to consult it only in cases of selling, buying or altering the real estate owned by the Order. Only in these cases shall the Assistants have deliberative voice.

Besides the Assistants, the Superior General is aided by a Secretary and a Procurator General.

## **CHAPTER 3.** *SUPERIOR GENERAL*

All authority in the Congregation resides in the Superior General. He receives the vows of those called to profession.

The Superior General shall appoint to all positions, except when he delegates this authority, for the colleges and other houses, to the Provincial or to the local Superior. It is in his hands, or in those of his delegates, that religious shall make their profession. It is to him that they promise obedience, and he is the one who can release them from such a promise.

In person or by his delegate, he visits houses, corrects abuses, approves or modifies local regulations; in short, he makes whatever improvements he deems appropriate according to the spirit of the Rule.

By his authority, incorrigible religious are expelled from the Society.

He founds houses and may suppress them with the authorization of his Council. He transfers religious from one house to another.

The Religious shall have recourse to him in cases involving good works that are difficult or important.

He appoints the Masters of Novices and dismisses them, as he wishes. The temporal affairs of the Society are handled in his name, unless, for serious reasons, he thinks it necessary to have them handled in the name of another religious.

No book shall be published by a member of the Congregation without his authorization.

He transmits part of his authority, whenever he deems it appropriate, to religious to whom he entrusts a mission or responsibility.

If he should become ill, he may delegate one of the Assistants General to govern the Society.

**CHAPTER 4.**  
*ELECTION OF THE SUPERIOR GENERAL*

An election is required: at the death of the Superior General; if he resigns and his resignation is accepted; or if he is deposed. In the latter case, the Assistants General convoke a General Council to hold a new election.

Have right to attend a General Chapter: the Assistants General, the Secretary General, the Procurator General, the Provincials, the local Superiors, and a certain number of religious from various houses or Provinces, as shall later be enacted.

The Superior General must always be a priest. The Religious must choose one of their own who has the qualities we will specify later on. He shall be elected by an absolute majority of the votes cast. If, after two ballots, no one receives an absolute majority, the electors shall choose between the two candidates receiving the most votes. If, after a third ballot, there were a tie, the choice shall be made by drawing lots.

Prior to the election of the Superior General, the electors shall make a three-day retreat. The election shall be held only after there has been sufficient time for those taking part to be able to arrive at the place where the Chapter is being held.

**CHAPTER 5.**  
*GENERAL CHAPTER*

The Superior General may convoke a General Chapter whenever he deems it necessary. The General Chapter is composed of: the Superior General, who presides in person or by his delegate, the four Assistants General, the Secretary General, the Procurator General, the Provincials, the Masters of Novices, and two Religious from each house, elected by secret ballot.

Thus composed, the General Chapter has the right to modify the Constitutions or write new ones, provided such changes are approved by the next two General Chapters.

At this general meeting, one of the Assistants General shall give a report on the state of the Society; the Provincials will do likewise for the houses under their jurisdiction; the representatives of the local houses may present the requests or observations entrusted to them. However, they shall be careful not to let special interests cause them to forget the general interests.

The Superior General shall kindly accept remarks made in the interests of the Order.

Items discussed shall be decided by absolute majority of the votes cast.

The General Chapter itself decides when it will adjourn.

#### **CHAPTER 6.**

##### *LOCAL SUPERIORS*

Local Superiors have the right to govern their respective houses according to the Rule and the authority given them by the Superior General. Within such limits, they are responsible for the souls entrusted to them.

They have a very strict obligation to maintain the Rule in all its strictness. Therefore, they must require strict obedience from those who depend on them, and who, at the same time, must be able to love them so that they can lead with kindness rather than by fear.

Three times a year, each Superior must send to the Superior General a report on the overall state of his house, on the financial situation, on the works undertaken, and on the religious personnel.

Each time a new and important good work is suggested, he shall seek the advice of the Superior General or of the Provincial.

Each local Superior may have a Treasurer, who shall be completely subordinate to him, unless, for reasons of prudence, the Superior General thinks it best to appoint the Treasurer himself. In this case, the local Superior is entirely relieved of temporal matters.

Specific regulations shall determine the duties of other positions and the spirit in which they are to be carried out.

ORIGINAL EDITION: <i>Premières Constitutions des Augustins de l'Assomption, 1855-1865</i> , Rome 1966, pp. 37-90. TRANSLATION: <i>Foundational Documents</i> , pp. 15-71, Revised by editor.
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### III. The Theme of the Kingdom

*From November 5, 1870, to March 20, 1871, Father d'Alzon gave the Religious Sisters of the Assumption, in the presence of their foundress and of the novices who had withdrawn to Nîmes in the wake of the German invasion, a remarkable series of 53 spiritual conferences on the spirit and the virtues of the Assumption.*

*Following a simple outline, he preached extemporaneously. The Sisters reproduced the conferences as faithfully as possible and gave Father d'Alzon a copy. On November 12, 1871, he wrote to the foundress, "Let me begin by first doing justice to the quality of the secretary's work. Strictly speaking it is only the first conference that was badly written; those that follow, to the contrary, are much better."*

*From November 9 to December 7, 1871, he again gave 40 of these conferences at the novitiate in Le Vigan, but adapted them to his new audience. The written account of these presentations is, unfortunately, very poorly done. So we are obliged to rely on the text of Nîmes for the extracts that follow; however, the ideas clearly resemble the themes treated in the first part of this collection.*

## 1. THE COMING OF THE KINGDOM

*My dear Sisters,*

I have divided my topic into two parts:

1° What does the reign of God mean to you?

2° How are we to bring about the coming of the Kingdom of Jesus Christ?

It is important, my dear Sisters, for you to reflect on this subject because we have adopted it as a characteristic of the Congregation. Because we have taken it as our motto, we must put it in practice.

I remember discussing your foundation with your Mother General at Impasse des Vignes. I was the one who suggested *Adveniat Regnum Tuum* as your motto. It had struck me as a very beautiful and meaningful motto when I visited the Sisters of Marie-Thérèse. I don't know if these Sisters are living up to their motto, but will we ourselves lag behind in doing what is necessary to bring about God's glory? I believe that an understanding of this motto is of prime importance at the present time.

### I.—WHAT SHOULD THE KINGDOM OF GOD MEAN FOR YOU?

#### **God's rights are being ignored.**

My first proposal concerns the proclamation of the universal rights of God. Increasingly, these rights are ignored more than ever due to all the erroneous theories that are circulating in today's world. But take notice that these theories, which are excessive and radical, attack absolute truth with absolute negativism (atheism, fatalism). Today, erroneous theories proliferate; they drive God out from everywhere. Everyone is repeating the words from the Book of Job: "*Qui dixerunt Deo, recede a nobis; Go away, for we have no wish to learn your ways!*" (Jb 21:14). And, my dear Sisters, just as kings are being removed from their thrones, so the impious are trying to expel God from heaven! No more God! Down with God! That is the cry that resounded throughout Paris in the camp of God's enemies! And after all that, why should God not have an army of warriors ready to fight for his rights! This will make you understand the timeliness of the Assumption which seeks to give back to God his rights and to proclaim the supreme reign of Jesus Christ.

This, my dear Sisters, is what the social problem is all about. People don't take it seriously enough. They don't look for a solution where one can be found. The rights of God imply his supreme dominion over all things: "*Domini est terra et plenitudo ejus; The Lord's are the earth and its fullness*" (Ps 23:1 Vulgate). Communism destroys this order and deprives

the Master of his sovereign rights.

The rich are saying: "It all belongs to us." The poor reply: "No, it doesn't belong to anyone." These erroneous ideas stem from a denial of God. It is the eternal struggle between the poor and the rich over who owns what, and it will go on until the rights of God are firmly established. Do you sense the social problem, with its insurmountable difficulties, and the struggle between the "haves" and the "have-nots"? This property belongs to me because it belongs to everyone. The question is insoluble. God alone can decide. Would that he come with his rights as sovereign Master and say: "It all belongs to me. I give to the rich just as I do to my farmers. I want the rich to give to the poor, and I don't want the poor to steal. They do me harm when they force my farmers to leave because I am the landlord, I am the one who freely distributes my farmland."

#### **The rights of God are proclaimed by adoration**

What does it mean, my dear Sisters, this universal proclamation of God's rights? It means, first and foremost, that we must adore him, that we must acknowledge his sovereignty over all things.

And it is the denial of this first commandment that is the main cause of all our social upheavals. The people don't want God, so they get Communism instead. Governments also expel God, so God takes his revenge on their kings and princes. Order will not return until God is adored. The kings want to be God. Yes, all of them: some more, some less. I am not accusing either William or Napoleon of being atheists. But if they are not atheists in principle, they are in practice because their governments are atheistic. The kings dare say to God: "Get out of here," but then comes the counterpart when the people say the same thing to the kings. For the situation to revert to normal, God must be put back on his throne.

So you say: "My God, I intend to dedicate my life to giving you back your earthly throne, not your heavenly one, which no one can take from you. But your earthly one is in the hands of evil men. I will devote my life to giving it back to you; I wish to spend my whole life doing this." This is beautiful work, my dear Sisters! It is a worthy cause that can occupy and fill an entire life.

So you can now understand what it means to adore God and to get others to adore him also? But that's the life of the seraphim! It's the prayer of the Church as it begins the Office: "*Venite, Adoremus*; O come, let us adore him!" Remember, my daughters, that we—in our devotions and in our basic principles—are quite simply Catholic. Let others engage in elaborate theories and in beautiful comparisons, but we ourselves must stick to the Lord's Prayer. We have taken these words from it: *Adveniat Regnum Tuum*; Thy Kingdom Come. We didn't discover them and we haven't invented them. They are as old as the Gospel. All we claim to do is to apply them to the needs of today, which involves restoring the practice of adoring God. If France adored him a little more, we wouldn't be in such a mess. So

we have our work cut out. It consists in adoring God in order to make up for the crime of those who do not adore him. Just think of how useful our lives will be if we devote ourselves to the restoration of the reign of God!

#### **The universal kingship of Jesus Christ**

First of all, this reign can be considered from the point of view of the kingship of Jesus Christ. “*Postula a me, et dabo tibi gentes haereditatem tuam*; Ask of me and I will give you the nations for an inheritance” (Ps 2:8). The Psalms, the Prophets, the Book of Revelation are all full of this kingship of Christ. You are familiar with the words: “*Data est ei corona, et exivit vincens ut vinceret*; He was given a crown; he rode forth victorious” (Rv 6:2). “*Habet in vestimento et in femore suo scriptum: Rex regum et Dominus dominatum*; A name was written on the part of the cloak that covered his thigh: ‘King of kings and Lord of lords’” (Rv 19:16). He is, indeed, the King of Kings. In the past, Christ was King of the nations and of societies, at a time when they were Christian, which is no longer the case today. I do not want to examine this question from a political point of view. But political events have a sad reverse side to them. As things stand today, we are witnessing a sad state of affairs. There seems to be a conspiracy in today’s world to deprive Jesus Christ of his kingship. “*Nolemus hunc regnare super nos*; We will not have this man rule over us!” (Lk 19:14)

#### **His reign over our hearts**

I now come to my second point: *Jesus Christ is the King of every human heart*. Each heart is a kingdom which belongs to him because each person is a little world of its own over which Jesus Christ must reign. Here, the extension of the reign of Jesus Christ implies something very special regarding your perfection. He must reign over us before we can make him reign over others. He must really be our King. We will give him as much sovereignty over others as we have allowed him to have over our own hearts.

#### **Personal consequences**

Think about what is strong and powerful in the idea that Jesus Christ is our King. Remember that if Jesus Christ humbles himself when he takes a poor little Sister as his spouse, it is the King who comes to celebrate his own eternal wedding. He is the one to whom the Psalmist refers when he says: “*Attolite portas, principes, vestras, et elevamini portae aeternales: et introibit rex gloriae*; Lift up, O gates, your lintels; reach up you ancient portals, that the king of glory may come in!” (Ps 23:7 Vulgate). Who is this who comes to meet the bride with all the majesty befitting his rank? It is none other than the King himself. He is King before being a Spouse. You became his subject the day you were baptized in his blood. Now that he has deigned to offer you his hand in a sacred alliance between the two of you, do not forget that he is still a King.

This imposes duties on you, duties of obedience and respect, and an

intimate relationship with him, combined with the sweetness of a spouse. But, before all else, you are queens, because you have espoused a King. This, then, is the very lofty, pure, holy, and exalted dignity of a religious sister, the spouse of Jesus Christ and of a King. So I invite you to be queens and to think and act like queens!

Begin by reigning over yourselves, reigning over your own souls. “*Regnum Dei intra vos est*; The reign of God is within you” (Lk 17:21). You must master yourselves; otherwise you will be inviting the King into a disorderly soul that forgets that her spouse is coming to reign over her. So before endeavoring to establish his Kingdom over others, make sure it is firmly established over yourselves. Become aware of the fact that besides the external kingdom, there is also an internal kingdom. You are under the strict obligation to establish within yourselves the most beautiful, the most orderly of kingdoms, and to live by its rules, remembering that in this kingdom counsels become obligations. And thus you will advance along the road leading to perfection by truly giving your spouse supreme dominion over you.

#### **Service of the Church**

What can I say about *the honor of working to extend the Kingdom of God within the great society of the Church*? In days gone by, not much attention was given to the role of women; apostolate was considered a male prerogative. To be sure, women like St. Teresa of Avila, Maria de Agreda, and others had an influence within their society, but nowadays direct women’s apostolate is unquestionably much more acceptable. The Popes are encouraging the convents of women to engage in the apostolate, which leads us to believe that the Holy Spirit is at work. Your Congregation is aware of its role. You must extend the reign of Jesus Christ not only in individual souls, but also in the Church, Jesus Christ’s beautiful bride. If the Apostles are the first citizens of heaven, then an apostolic Congregation shares in this special privilege. My dear Sisters, the cause of the Church depends on your dedication.

#### **Dedication this requires**

I would like to give you a certain spirit. Here, I’ll just mention it and leave it up to your Mother General to complete what I will say and to apply it. Now is the time, my dear Sisters, to declare war on your own personality by dedicating yourselves one-hundred percent to the cause of Jesus Christ. Really, personality, selfishness, and individuality should no longer be an issue. We become unworthy of our mission if we harbor any narrow feelings. As St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians: “*Dilatamini et vos*—Open wide your hearts” (2 Cor 6:13). Open them to what is noble. Forget about yourselves completely. Narrow, self-centered and petty feelings interfere with such great work; they are abominable (do find me a better word if you can). They are even worse than that when you consider that, by virtue of your religious vocation, you are called to take a fourth vow to

extend the reign of Jesus Christ in souls

God is granting you this remarkable honor, and you would offer him a narrow heart, full of yourself? No, this cannot be: “*dilatamini et vos*—open wide your hearts!” Acquire a heart as big as the Church, that immense ocean into which God has poured all his treasures. What God loves the most is the Church. He entrusted his elect to this Church. It is the spouse of Jesus Christ. Additionally, it includes all the saints and all the individual spouses of Jesus Christ. It is the most marvelous of all his creations. So why not abandon your own narrowness? Why not accept to sacrifice yourself? Yes, we will be patient with the narrow hearts that hesitate to give of themselves, but we will do all we can to give souls a holy zeal. I will leave the practical application to your Mother General, but let me insist: you must forget yourselves, adore God, give of yourselves, and preach by example.

You might think that the conclusion I am about to draw from what I have just said is too severe. The honor paid to a Sister by allowing her to take the fourth vow is so great that we must be very careful before allowing her to take that vow. It is a wonderful honor which is not given to everyone. Moreover, it is something too serious for the Congregation to allow someone to assume such an honor unless she is perfectly disposed and thoroughly prepared. A nice little Sister, charming though she may be, but full of herself, should not take the fourth vow.

## II.—WHAT MUST WE DO TO BRING ABOUT THE KINGDOM OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST?

1° *The rights of God must be proclaimed to both the poor and the rich.* You do not have many contacts with the poor, but what wonderful opportunities you have in working with the rich! You are admirably equipped for this task. How so? By your vow of poverty, my dear Sisters. Your love of poverty, which you have voluntarily accepted, enables you to say to the rich: “Happiness is not to be found in riches,” and to tell the poor: “I am happy because I own nothing.”

There’s a conclusion to be drawn from all this at the present time, namely the need for a Religious Sister to render a real service to society by placing herself very disinterestedly as an intermediary between the rich and the poor. Let me give you an example: the devotedness with which the religious Congregations are now caring for the wounded.<sup>1</sup> For the common people, those who lack refinement, this devotedness is a source of admiration. From the spiritual point of view, a Carmelite in her cloister will, I admit, achieve more by praying, fasting and taking the discipline. But when it comes to direct influence over the masses, look at the Nursing Sisters who dedicate themselves to the relief of present-day misery. See

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<sup>1</sup> Several sisters worked as nurses during the Franco-Prussian war of 1870 and during the bloody revolution that followed it.

how they disarm the anger which evil men stir up against the rich. Look at your own Sisters in Sedan, Auteuil, and Rheims. See how busy they are doing this great work. See the important role they are playing in this struggle of the poor against the rich and in the very un-Christian decisions taken by the rich against the poor. In a sense, the rich want to restore slavery by destroying the bonds of charity that unite everyone like brothers and sisters.

Your mission, my dear Sisters, is to preach the Kingdom of God and to say: "The Kingdom of God is not to be found in wealth. You who possess it must not look for the Kingdom of God in your possessions. You who are dispossessed and own nothing must not covet that which cannot bring you happiness." True happiness can be found only in that Kingdom where God rewards those who serve him faithfully. As he said to Abraham: "*Ego sum merces tua magna nimis*—I am your shield; I will make your reward very great" (Gn 15:1). See how beneficial a genuine practice of poverty can be to society, where constant hatred arises from a desire for material goods and breeds discord among the people. If you doubt this, think about Jesus Christ. What did Our Lord do? He became the poorest of all in a society lost in materialism, luxury and pleasure. It was appropriate that it be so, because here lay his power to redeem the world. There was at that time a greater need for social reform than there is even today. So why should we take other means than those used by Jesus Christ and his Apostles?

How will you go about it? In the name of your voluntary poverty, place yourselves between the rich and the poor, but above all, insist on the idea of God.

2° *Have a spirit of devotion.* I have already spoken to you about adoration. It can be understood in two ways: one external, the other completely internal which includes all intimate relations with God and about which so many Sisters have no precise idea. They pray, they receive Holy Communion, they kneel before the Blessed Sacrament, they recite the Office, but this deep feeling of adoration before God's infinite Majesty is seldom there. Or if it is, it doesn't last very long. I don't know if there are any exceptions among the Religious of the Assumption, but I do know about one of our own religious who has to pull himself together several times a day in order to remain in this state of adoration.

To adore means to put one's self under the weight of God. Do you understand, my dear Sisters, what is meant by the weight of God? Basically, it means to lose one's self in God, to be humbled by the greatness of his glory, to consider one's self as nothing in his presence, and to recognize that he is everything. Accordingly, a Religious of the Assumption who is called to a life of contemplation has a lot of work cut out for her: She must learn to adore, and she must follow in the footsteps of the prophets.

3° *Extend the Kingdom of Jesus Christ in modern society.* I ask myself this question: is it your role to work directly to bring about the re-Christianization of society? No, from the point of view of human politics;

yes, from the point of view of reforming and re-Christianizing social behavior. Obviously, from this latter point of view, a lot needs to be done. The major Christian principles must be studied in order to propagate them through education.

Just as a stone is no more than an agglomeration of many particles of dust, so society is an agglomeration of many particles of living dust made up of human beings. By trying to perfect one of these particles of dust, you contribute to the beauty of the entire edifice. It won't be very complicated. You will have three or four little girls, maybe one hundred in a few convents. Nevertheless, your influence over these few will be sufficient to inject the idea of God into society. To bring this about, however, you yourselves must imprint in your own hearts a profound sense of adoration.

My dear Sisters, let us make amends to God, who is so little-known and so ignored, by getting others to adore him. You will be able to do this if you yourselves are convinced of the need to adore him; if you yourselves are convinced that all the evils of our society stem from this denial of God. The level of moral standards rises and falls to the extent that the idea of God is generally accepted or is waning.

Consequently, you might wonder if I'm asking you to think about God and to walk in his presence at all times. Yes, this is what I am asking: a constant awareness of God's rights over us. I'm not asking for anything else besides that.

I do not intend here to embark on the very important question of how the Religious Orders can influence politics. I wish to restrict myself to the social question. It is in your hands; you must show solidarity with the kingdom of God. When you are teaching, you must therefore transmit principles that are very clear, very simple, very straightforward, and very energetic. Here, I want to talk about faith and examine the question of God's supreme rights over the human intellect.

You must teach the truth to your students. Your teaching must be imbued with the thought of God. It's your job to bring about the kingdom of God in the intelligences of your students. The crime of State Education is to expel God from our schools. I believe that we are obliged to fight against this tendency and that this is one of our present-day missions. Do you realize, my dear Sisters, the great honor God is granting you to be able to plead his cause? You must sow truth. The Religious of the Assumption, their hands full of wholesome truth, "*Ecce exit qui seminat seminare—go out to sow the seed*" (Mt 13:4). And in what fields? In the souls of their pupils. Surely, they will sow it delicately and tactfully, but they will never cease to sow it!

4° *Make Christ known.* First of all, make him known in your family. A Sister can do a lot of good in her relations with her parents, sometimes by speaking out, often by not saying anything, which can be much better. If you only knew all the stupidities I've heard said to Sisters in other convents! But a religious, guided by the wisdom of her Superior, can, if she



is young, bring a Christian spirit to a family by offering good advice. Her influence will be felt by the way she acts, by those little things which convey the impression that she is a holy woman and that God lives in her. The good she is called to do is incalculable.

This is not an absolute rule because there are Sisters who do not succeed in doing this. I am speaking only about those who do. The others would do better to pray for those who do succeed. By dint of what I may call supernatural tact, the latter will certainly succeed in bringing whole families back to the practice of their religion. But to succeed requires a lot of work. I have often heard it said that this or that Religious of the Assumption is charming and ravishing; I've heard it ever-so-many times! It's commonplace, but I can assure you that I've heard it said much less often that she's a saint! Why not seize the opportunity of becoming one?

You may not enjoy sitting in the parlor. It can be tiring and boring. It can involve distasteful conversations and individuals who are hard to put up with, but it is often these people to whom you will do the most good. As you sit there, you are obliged to sanctify yourselves by giving spiritual alms. But need I remind you that such spiritual almsgiving entails much prudence and discretion?

I was thinking of presenting you with a long list of apostolates you could do. But would this be useful? Opportunities occur daily. Some things are worthwhile doing on some occasions but not on others. The introduction of the rifled bore<sup>2</sup> changed the way war is waged, just like Napoleon's way of forming a battalion revolutionized military tactics. In all things, success often depends on circumstances.

5° *Work for the Kingdom of Jesus Christ.* To work for the Kingdom of Jesus Christ, that is to say, for the Church, is a great honor, my dear Sisters. One of the things that gives me high hopes for the future of your Congregation is your love for the Church which is so devoted, so frank, and so loyal. You identify yourselves with the Church. People have strongly criticized you. I must say that at least three-quarters of these criticisms are not well-founded. In this regard, my dear Sisters, I stand with you, as you can well imagine. At any rate, one thing consoles me: we share the views of Our Holy Father the Pope and of the majority of Catholic bishops throughout the world. This, it seems to me, makes up for any mistakes we may have made. We have had to suffer a bit, but it has been for a belief that has become a dogma.<sup>3</sup> What a nice ordeal!

The persecutions which followed the first eight Ecumenical Councils of the Church have been described by our Christian authors. We see them breaking out again after this one. Admittedly, I did not foresee everything that is taking place. But the devil is raging furiously, and God is

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<sup>2</sup> A shoulder firearm with spiral grooves cut in the inner surface of the gun barrel to give the bullet a rotatory motion and thus a more precise trajectory.

<sup>3</sup> The proclamation of papal infallibility.

allowing him to vent his anger, as he allowed him to vent it on Job. But, much as I wish it weren't happening, all this is doing good to the Church. It is as great an honor to suffer with the Church, as it is to say beforehand: I think like the Pope. Yes, but this imposes duties on us. We must put to good use this deeply Catholic instinct with which God has endowed us. We must learn to use it with fortitude, but also with mercy. We must acquire a truly apostolic love for souls by rooting our teaching in Catholic truth.

My dear Sisters, it is time for me to conclude. It is imperative that Jesus Christ reign throughout the world. There is nothing more beautiful than to be called to work at its restoration. You must say to yourselves: despite the fact that I am poor and destitute, God is entrusting me with the most sublime of all missions if, one day, he allows me to pronounce the fourth vow, that of dedicating my entire life to the extension of the reign of Jesus Christ in souls.

*(Fourth Conference, November 8, 1870)*

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## 2. ADORATION

*My dear Sisters,*

The great crime of our times is to not realize the depth of this commandment: "You shall do homage to the Lord your God; him alone shall you adore" (Mt 4:10). Yes, you shall love, but above all, you shall adore him, for this is the creature's duty par excellence. The Psalmist sings: "*Domini est terra et plenitudo eius*; The earth is the Lord's and its fullness" (Ps 23:1 Vulgate). Yes, the earth belongs to the Lord, and man's great crime is his failure to adore, his failure to be grateful. A never-ending praise should rise to God from the lips of this creature drawn from nothingness. However, in the universal symphony of praise that rises from the earth to God, man's voice is all too often silent. Every creature sings the divine praises according to its own nature and ability. Do you not say every day: "*Benedicite omnia opera Domini Domino*; Bless the Lord all you works of the Lord" (Dn 3:57)? Material beings adore and thank the Lord in their own way, but intelligent beings must give him special praise. We ought to say: "I adore you, O my God, my Sovereign Lord and Father; knowing that I belong to you makes me happy. You will not reject the work of your own hands. "*Opera manuum tuarum ne despicias*; Forsake not the work of your hands" (Ps 137:8 Vulgate). No matter how imperfect I might be, I sense something pushing me to perfection."

*(Extract from the Third Conference, November 7, 1870)*

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### 3. MANUAL LABOR

*My dear Sisters,*

Manual work is quite fitting for poor religious. It is useful to undergo the humbling experience of manual work. I must tell you about the results of my own experience in this regard and about the different opinions people may have about this question. Every now and then at Le Vigan, Father Hippolyte sends his novices to work in the fields, to cut hay or harvest grapes, whatever the season requires. When Fr. d'Alzon is there, he also goes to the fields to give a good example, but he quickly begins to puff and his sixty years force him to stop. On the other hand, Fr. Laurent who is, as you know, an excellent religious, very fervent, even scrupulous, is extremely scandalized by this type of behavior. He feels it is perfectly useless to ask novices, who are destined one day to become priests, teachers or missionaries, to perform this type of servile work. Let us think about this. Without wanting to quarrel with Fr. Laurent, I would say first of all that Fr. Hippolyte is right. It's very useful to impose manual work on novices because it's good at times to undergo a humiliation. Manual work is a marvelous means to cure laziness and to correct certain forms of independent behavior. I don't want to question the opinions of Mabillon and M. de Rancé<sup>4</sup> on this question, all I want to say is that I'm convinced that in certain cases nothing tames headstrong individuals as well as their having to work outdoors. If a sister torments her superior, then let the superior send her to gather the hay. I guarantee you that in a very short time, thanks to the fresh air, she will mend her ways. I made a very successful experiment using this tactic on several young hotheads. If we gave the job of drawing water from the well to the sisters who are sick in the head, many a head would get better.

*(Extract from the Ninth Conference, November 13, 1870)*

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### 4. VOCATIONS TO RELIGIOUS LIFE

It is not enough for a devout sister to find happiness in her vocation. She must also find happiness in fostering other vocations, and she must

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<sup>4</sup> De Rancé (1626-1700) was the founder of the Cistercians of the Strict Observance at La Trappe in France. Jean Mabillon (1632-1707) was a Benedictine monk of the Congregation of Saint-Maur and a scholar.

frequently ask the Lord to send new ones. I will not address the purely natural reasons for this, because I respect your intelligence, but I will speak to you about the spiritual reasons. Indeed, you are right when you say: "I have the best situation that can be given to anyone on earth: I would like others to have it also. I have found a treasure, and it is so marvelous that even if I share it I do not lose it. In giving it to others, I can nevertheless keep it in its entirety." Just as God's light is given to everyone, it nevertheless shines at the same time on each one of us. Just as my own eyes do not receive less light because the entire universe absorbs its rays, a happy soul wants to share her happiness with others. She loves Our Lord; she is burning with love and fervor; she cherishes the grace of her vocation; and she would love to bring many spouses to the King: "*Adducentur regi virgines post eam*; After her shall virgins be brought to the King" (Ps 45:15, Vulgate). So, without being imprudent, she will strive to bring others to the Lord and to inspire noble thoughts: "*Proximae eius afferentur tibi*; Her neighbors shall be brought to him" (*Ibid.*). Needless to say that she has to be tactful as well as zealous. If she is, I say that a fervent sister cannot refrain from fostering vocations.

#### **Following the Lord's Example**

From another point of view, I will say again that a soul that loves Our Lord must experience feelings similar to his: "*Hoc enim sentite in vobis quod et in Christo Jesu*; Have among yourselves the same attitude that is also yours in Christ Jesus," (Phil 2:5). Obviously, Our Lord came to save souls, but he also came to call souls to perfection. Denying this would be heresy. So you too should be zealous about promoting the perfection of souls, which therefore furnishes you with an apostolate. You will meet individuals who have stiff, proud and stubborn characters, but who also have talent. Indeed, we are looking for people who are strong. A genuine vocation can sometimes be hidden in the depths of this person's heart. What happens, my dear Sisters, is that, like under the peel, there is an excellent fruit. Why shouldn't you try to find such vocations? Our Lord was not deterred by St. Thomas' unbelief or by St. Peter's lack of refinement. He made apostles of them. Why can't you be as patient as he was? He chose certain apostles because he saw a good heart beneath Peter's rude exterior, and a certain purity of soul in St. John. Christ then formed them, molded them, and instructed them, sometimes getting angry with them: "*Generatio infidelis et perversa usquequo ero apud vos et patiar vos?*; What an unbelieving and perverse lot you are! How long must I remain with you? How long can I endure you?" (Lk 9:41). Study the Gospels and see for yourselves how patient Our Lord had to be in order to train the Twelve for the apostolate, and you will see how to train your pupils to become religious sisters. Can I suggest a better model?

Here's another encouraging word from Our Lord: "*Amen dico vobis quod vos qui secuti estis me...*"; Indeed I say to you that you who have

followed me shall likewise take your places on twelve thrones to judge the twelve tribes of Israel” (Mt 19:28). Yes, that’s the honor reserved for you if you are apostles and form apostles. I won’t hide the fact that this mission is very demanding, quite disagreeable at times. But, believe me, it will never be more difficult than the task Jesus had in forming his disciples. Don’t say there are no vocations. If you look for them, you will find them. Some come by themselves, but they are not the most numerous. It is necessary to look for them and not get discouraged. They come and go, but very often a neglected vocation is a lost vocation. Admittedly, they may be hard to find, but where were the vocations when Our Lord came into this world? Yet in three years’ time, he found approximately one hundred, including the twelve apostles, the seventy-two disciples and some others. If you could give the Church one hundred vocations every three years, that would be wonderful, I assure you. You might say that that would be a miracle. Yes, a miracle of grace, but Our Lord did say “You will do works far greater than mine” (Jn 14:12). Therefore, be his disciples and you will perform miracles finding vocations.

#### **Worldly objections**

Let us examine the objections raised by the people of the world. When Our Lord came, like today, people did not understand the meaning of a vocation. People think that anyone who wants to be a religious is fanatic and absurd; he or she is following a passing enthusiasm that will soon cool off. A woman poet once put it this way: “Why search in a gloomy cloister for the God who is everywhere?” Surely, God is everywhere, but he can’t be found everywhere. Yes, there are people who do not understand. They may well be the ones you will eventually win over! Concentrate your efforts on figuring out in what way and to what extent you can bring souls to greater perfection, and subsequently make them more suitable for religious life.

In this regard, I must mention another fact. Just as the Church, founded with ridiculously few means, is one of the most striking proofs of the divine inspiration of the Gospel, so a religious vocation, which appears absurd to people everywhere, is a divine proof of its genuineness. Madame So-and-So leaves the world, the joys of high social life, and the success her status could have given her. She who could have been in a commanding position now submits to obedience; she could have enjoyed leisure, but now has to work; she could have enjoyed her wealth, but she now sleeps on a straw mattress; she goes to chapel rather than to worldly parties. Frankly, this is not common sense. I grant you this, but you will have to concede one thing. In spite of the weaknesses and faults of all religious, a consequence of their being human, one fact is obvious: man was not capable of inventing religious life. It is of divine institution. Given the sense of perfection which it supposes in the very corrupt heart of man, it is proof of the truth of religion as well as of the mission of Our Lord and of the apostles.

Some will also object. People today are much too superficial; they understand nothing of the things of God. First of all, my dear Sisters, the work of grace is to transform nature, and its results are admirable. People learn to master themselves; some, like Father de Ravignan,<sup>5</sup> make others suffer a little, though this did not stop him from becoming one of the most saintly religious of our times. A difficult character and a certain uncouthness are not impediments to a religious vocation. When the Pharisees went to see St. John the Baptist, he called them a “brood of vipers.” When the Publicans and the soldiers went to see him, they were received more courteously. Our Lord said: “*Potens est Deus de lapidibus istis suscitare filios Abrahae*; God can raise up children to Abraham from these very stones” (Mt 3:9). And I tell you that you can make a holy religious out of this foolish and nasty girl, if you really want to. It takes a lot of patience. You must study individual souls very closely, learn what each one needs and, if need be, be ready to admit your own mistakes. My dear Sisters, in doing this type of work, there are ever-so-many ways of sanctifying yourselves.

I will not speak about particular friendships. But let’s imagine a difficult young lady whom you would like to bring closer to God. If you have toward her the supernatural love you need to encourage her to correct her faults, you will first have to correct your own. How can you tell her not to be jealous, that she must study, that she should not be so susceptible, if she sees that you are lazy, extremely susceptible and, in a word, full of the faults you reproach her? You can only succeed in leading young people to holiness if you first sanctify yourselves.

#### **Atoning for having given the bad example**

Let me add one more important thought. Who among you has not scandalized a few people? Well! You can repair this by doing vocation work. Perhaps some young sister regrets an unfortunate conversation or a bad example that caused some harm. An older sister may realize that a companion of hers might not have left the convent had she not contributed to the loss of that sister’s vocation. What can be done to atone for these past scandals? Pray assiduously and strive to bring others to the Lord by firming up your own vocation. You are responsible for having weakened someone’s vocation. If, by divine mercy, you have stayed, there nevertheless remains a certain solidarity between the two of you. Atone for the evil you have done to Our Lord, to souls and to your Congregation. Find fervent vocations to compensate for your shortcomings.

Having said all of this, my dear Sisters, I would like to tell you how deeply grateful I am to you. Now is the time to say with St. John: “*Nos ergo diligamus Deum, quoniam Deus prior dilexit nos*; We, for our part, love God because he first loved us” (1 Jn 4:19). This is what I am inviting you to do because love is the best way to say thanks. As you progress daily

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<sup>5</sup> Gustave Xavier Lacroix de Ravignan (1795-1858): a French Jesuit, orator and author.

in charity, you will be preparing a place for Our Lord in your hearts and in those of the children entrusted to your care. In so doing, you will live your vocation to the fullest by sanctifying yourselves as well as others. I know of no better or more perfect way of doing this than by making saints of men and women in religious life.

*(Extract from the Eleventh Conference, November 19, 1870)*

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## 5. DEFECTIONS FROM RELIGIOUS LIFE

St. Augustine states that the separation of Judas from the other apostles should console us regarding the separation from the Church of heretics and schismatics. I would add that we should console ourselves when we see certain sisters leave the Congregation. That will not happen to you, but who knows? Regardless, I'm just making a general remark. Once Judas had excluded himself from the community of the apostles, what did Jesus say? "Now is the Son of Man glorified and God is glorified in him" (Jn 13:31). This sounds strange, and yet it is very simple. First, Judas' betrayal was the occasion for the nascent Church to undergo trials and sufferings: she was born in the blood of Jesus Christ and in that of the martyrs. Just as Our Lord was glorified in the humiliations of his Passion, so the Church is glorified in her sufferings. She is made fruitful by the blood of her children; she is even glorified when certain unworthy members break away from her.

This is not man's way of thinking, it is God's way. In Our Lord's cry on the Cross, there is a note of joy. It is undoubtedly strange that we should rejoice over the loss of some members, and indeed this is not the human way of looking at things. My Sisters, I'm sixty years old and I've been ministering to convents for a long time. I'm a religious and I have a long experience of religious life. Do you know what I find in the cry of Jesus? The need for superiors not to hold back religious who want to leave. What I say here is terribly serious, and I say it after long reflection. If a sister wants to leave, let her go. God will be glorified. If ever a headstrong sister leaves the Congregation, give her a hearty farewell. The Congregation will benefit and be strengthened, and Christ will be glorified.

*(Extract from the Sixteenth Conference, November 24, 1870)*

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## 6. THE GIFT OF SELF

Should religious whose motto is "*Adveniat Regnum Tuum*"; Thy

Kingdom Come” not understand how much are obliged to give of themselves and to devote themselves? It was St. Paul who said: “*Ego autem libentissime impendam, et superimpendar ipse pro animabus vestris, licet plus vos diligens, minus diligar*; I will gladly spend myself and be spent for your sakes. If I love you too much, will I be loved the less for that” (2 Cor 12:15)? A religious, who is truly concerned about the salvation of her Sisters but who also realizes that it is not her task to preach to them, cannot do better than to devote herself to their service, thereby turning herself into a living sermon. If she is working with children in a school, in catechism classes for the poor, or in an orphanage, she may be so overworked that she feels that she is shortening her own life. But does it matter? “I will live ten years less, but I will do more good than if I lived longer.” This is a serious question which can be clearly resolved only by Obedience. But this places an enormous responsibility upon the shoulders of the superiors. Here is a religious who is generously doing her utmost. Should her superiors slow her down? Here is another religious who is conscious of the good work she is doing but who does not overtax herself in order to be able to carry out a little longer the work she feels she is called to do. Should her superiors spur her on? This can become a serious problem once the superiors and the inferiors have prayed about it at the foot of the Cross where Jesus shed his blood down to the last drop.

It will take me a long time to get over the feeling I experienced yesterday at the cemetery as the coffin of poor Br. Edouard Patt was lowered into the grave where he will await the day of the resurrection at the end of time. I was struck by the solemn nature of life and death. This feeling is not about to go away. Barely a week ago, this religious was teaching, and he was completely dedicated to his duty. Did I sufficiently keep watch over him to check the state of his health? Should I have stopped him sooner from teaching? I don’t know, but it’s a dreadful responsibility. If we do not show enough consideration for the health of our religious, we can lose them. If we show too much, we can produce a generation of pampered religious. It’s very puzzling.

What I’ve just said applies to the superiors. However, it is not less true that you, Sisters, you must be willing to work hard. If from a certain point of view this question weighs very heavily on the shoulders of those in charge, the best thing for you to do is to give yourselves generously, courageously, and without ulterior motives. That’s why you entered religious life. If you had died on the day of your profession, the moment of your burial would have been no more than a detail.

My dear Sisters, I’m very serious about what I’m saying. Having buried one of my religious only a few days ago, I am obviously weighing my words very carefully. Nevertheless, despite the deep sorrow this has caused me, I cannot think of anything else to say to you.



Take what happened at the siege of Sebastopol.<sup>6</sup> Personally, General Canrobert was a very brave man, but he lost more soldiers by trying to spare them than did General Pélissier who had the courage to order a butchery! So when it comes to religious life, I think that we should proceed a little more efficiently. As I painfully looked at the casket of this Brother waiting in the tomb for the eternal awakening, I thought to myself that, as hard as it was, this was the best way to imitate Our Lord and to go to heaven.

To what extent must we give of ourselves? To this question, Monsieur de Rancé<sup>7</sup> once replied: “Remember, Brothers, that you have come here not to live but to die.” I don’t want to go that far. It’s OK for Trappists, but a Religious of the Assumption who dedicates herself to the salvation of souls must live in order to accomplish that goal. It would be a calamity if her superiors allowed her to prematurely use up all her strength. Superiors must respect the life of their subordinates; it is their duty. But the sisters themselves have every right to request demanding assignments and to sacrifice their lives, if need be. It is my opinion that they must be free to give of themselves to the full extent to which God inspires them.

*(Extract from the Twenty-first Conference, November 30, 1870)*

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## 7. OUR OBLIGATION TO STUDY

### I

Unless your superiors dispense you specifically, you are obliged to maintain a certain level of intellectual life. I cannot accept that a Daughter of the Assumption should spend a single day without developing her intelligence. If she doesn’t do so, she is acting badly and is failing to live up to her vocation. The Religious of the Assumption, as I understand them, must be well-educated women, women who have accepted this rule concerning work which states: “By the sweat of your brow shall you gain bread to eat” (Gn 3:19). Since this statement applies to all of humanity, can a Christian teacher think that she is exempt from it? Either I understand

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<sup>6</sup> The siege of Sebastopol took place during the Crimean War (1854-1856) during which Britain and France were allied against Russia. François Marcellin Certain de Canrobert (1809-1895) was a French Marshal. He demonstrated ability during the Second French Empire. During the Crimean War, he was judged too timorous and relieved by general Aimable Pélissier. The latter (1794-1864) succeeded Marshal Canrobert as commander-in-chief of the French forces before the Siege of Sevastopol. His command was marked by relentless pressure of the enemy and unalterable determination to conduct the campaign without interference from Paris.

<sup>7</sup> Monsieur de Rancé (1626-1700) was the founder of the Cistercians of the Strict Observance (Trappists) at Notre Dame de la Trappe Monastery in France.

nothing of your vocation or you are obliged—notice the word I just used—to develop your intelligence. Father Olivieri<sup>8</sup>, the famous theologian, used to get up a quarter of an hour before his fellow Dominicans in order to study. A quarter of an hour each day isn't very much, but it's enough to stop your brains from getting rusty.

I repeat what I've said because I'm adamant about this. Except if she has been given a lot of practical responsibilities, I can't accept that a Daughter of the Assumption will not be concerned about acquiring a basic general education, regardless of whether or not she is a teacher. I'll even go further. I believe that absolution should be refused to a Sister who doesn't spend at least a quarter of an hour each day in serious study. Do not say you are incapable of studying. Do not tell me that your brain is like a sieve. Even if the vessels in your brain are full of holes, I maintain that you are obliged to fill your memory by reading a lot. To be sure, you'll forget some of it, but something will always remain.

*(Extract from the Forty-eighth Conference, February 24, 1871)*

## II

### A Serious OBLIGATION

Allow me to answer some of the objections you have raised about the severity of my comments regarding your obligation to study if you are to carry out your work of education. I will gladly answer these objections, even if it means prolonging these talks longer than I had intended. And to support my opinion, I will call upon the testimony of others. I consulted two of our Fathers who generally disagree with me on many matters but who agree with me on this. With them, I maintain the position which surprised you so much, viz. that a confessor should deny absolution to a Religious of the Assumption who refuses to study in accordance with the demands of her vocation. I will now give you the reasons underlying my thinking.

#### The obligation stems from:

##### a) The General Rule Concerning Work

After he had sinned, Adam was told: “By the sweat of your brow shall you gain bread to eat; *In sudore vultus tui*” (Gn 3:19). You are not dispensed from the law of expiatory work. You are condemned to work like everyone else. But you must work in accordance with your vocation, your trade, if you'll pardon the word. A mason does not do the work of a locksmith and vice versa. If you were Trappistines, you would work the soil, you would hatch silk-worms. If you were Daughters of St. Vincent de

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<sup>8</sup> Fr. Benedetto Maurizio Olivieri was Master General of the Dominicans in 1834-1835 and a high-ranking official at the Holy See

Paul, you would care for the sick, you would work with your hands. Sisters, you are Daughters of the Assumption, and your job is to teach. You must fulfill the obligation to work according to your way in life, the trade you have chosen. To do that, you must study.

**b) The Vow of Poverty**

You have all taken the vow of poverty. This means living like poor people. Poor people have to work, so you must work.

**c) The Justice due to the Parents**

There is a question of justice here. I have often said to the children who do not want to work that they are sinning against justice because their parents are paying for the education they are receiving. All the more reason for me to say that Sisters, who do not have infused knowledge, are obliged, out of justice toward the parents and out of charity toward the pupils, to provide an adequate standard of education. And to do this, they must study, and they must prepare their classes.

**d) The Responsibilities of a Teaching Congregation**

Lastly, I would say that you have a moral responsibility toward your other Sisters and the Congregation. There are various subjects to be taught, such as grammar, geography, etc., though these do little to raise the intellectual level of your pupils. But if, in addition to the girls who study only the bare minimum, there are not others who study broader subjects to raise their minds to a higher level, your school will soon lapse into mediocrity, which will lead to the decadence of your Congregation. Laziness has been the cause of many downfalls, including Religious Congregations. Yes, it is greatly to be feared that a Sister who does not work, who does not study, and who does not put her intellect or her hands to good purpose, will soon spend her time wagging her tongue! Religious Congregations suffer enormously from these interminable conversations that arise from idleness.

I therefore hold to what I said: unless she has received a dispensation from her superiors, I will refuse absolution to a Sister who does not study.

*(Extract from the Forty-ninth Conference, February 27, 1871)*

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## 8. OUR VOWS

*We have only one copy of the following Instruction. Because it is written in the hand of Fr. Alexis Dumazer, to whom Fr. d'Alzon assigned the responsibility for re-transcribing his Circular Letters, because it is entitled Second Instruction, and because of its contents, everything suggests that it was written in 1876 and that it should be placed after the Instruction*

on Prayer<sup>9</sup> as the second one given by Fr. d'Alzon on the occasion of the Chapter. In our estimation, it should be considered almost as a Circular Letter.

2<sup>nd</sup> Instruction

*My Dear Brothers,*

The recent departures which have caused us so much sorrow oblige me to insist on the importance of our religious vows.

There is this difference between a vow and a mere promise. A vow, especially a perpetual vow, ties us to God in a more complete way and puts us at a higher level that is permanent. A promise is like a beautiful fruit from the tree of virtue, whereas a vow is the tree itself. Also, a religious who develops a dislike for his vows, abandons this permanent state of virtue without realizing the harm he is doing to himself.

I will now treat several very important questions regarding the vows.

**Vows bind us**

First, the bond of the vows. To be sure, a simple vow, in the eyes of the Church, does not have the same canonical effects as a solemn vow, but it is just as binding when I take it, and I cannot break it without committing a serious sin. The Church can grant me a dispensation, but she requires serious reasons, as foreseen in theology. If these reasons are not valid, the dispensation is null and void. I must explain my motives, but if I do so incompletely or untruthfully, I am not dispensed, by virtue of this clause which is always added to dispensations: "*Si preces veritate nitantur*; If this request is based on truth." And people often deceive themselves regarding the authenticity of the motives they provide when requesting such dispensations. Let us remember that our vows are promises made to God and accepted by him. They are a contract between God and us. God will never default on this contract and will always give us the necessary graces so that, on our part, we can remain faithful to it.

**Observing the vows**

Once we have taken our vows, we must observe them. As the Book of Ecclesiastes reminds us, "You had better not make a vow than make it and not fulfill it" (Eccl 5:4). Unfortunately, so many of us break our vows, at least venially, often because we haven't taken the time to study the obligations we have assumed. Vows are acts that oblige us to reflect about what we owe God. A religious commits himself according to the terms of his Rule and Constitutions. After they have taken their vows, many religious try to avoid their obligations. Half-hearted religious are always

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<sup>9</sup> See "Previously Unpublished Second Circular on Mental Prayer" which is published in this volume after the "Eleventh Circular," dated September 15, 1875.

trying to restrict the meaning of their vows. As their fervor declines, they want to do less and less, which gives rise to those devastating interpretations of the vows which brought about the deplorable results we have seen. The fervent religious, on the other hand, does not try to restrict the meaning of his vows because he is constantly seeking greater perfection.

#### **Their usefulness**

It is useful to take vows. A soldier swears an oath to his country and courageously defends it. However, it should be noted that promises made to men are made in the interest of those to whom they are made. Vows, on the other hand, cannot benefit God. We are the ones who benefit from them. Our reward in heaven will be measured by our fidelity to our vows. Indeed, love fulfills the law (Rom 13:8). Now, the vow is essentially an act of love. It develops love within us. Our reward in heaven will be given in return for our love. It is therefore useful for us to take vows. However, we must do so prudently because everyone is not capable of this degree of perfection. Since it is useful for us to take vows, it is likewise very useful for us to encourage others to take them also. Not to do this would be to neglect the sanctification of others.

#### **Their Purpose**

Why do we take vows? The purpose of religion, according to the etymological meaning of the word,<sup>10</sup> is to bind us to God. The more perfectly we are bound to God, the more perfect is our religion. Also, the word “religious” has come to designate the state of those bound more strictly to God by their holy vows. Our union with God will, of course, never be perfect until we get to heaven where it will bring about perfect happiness. We can therefore consider our vows as a way of achieving this happiness. A religious for whom the vows are nothing more than a heavy and unbearable chain shows that he no longer has any love. A true religious, on the contrary, undoubtedly sees his vows as a bond, but also as something lovable and admirable, as expressed by the Psalmist: “*Funes ceciderunt mihi in praeclaris*; The chains which have fallen on me are chains of happiness” (Ps 15:6 Vulgate). Our vows place us in an intermediate state between the angels and human beings. In heaven we will see God face to face; on earth we know him by mental images and concepts. Moreover, in religious life there is also something perfect in terms of affection, something that is linked to the beatific vision.

#### **The advantages of the vows**

The vow divinizes its corresponding virtue by turning the act of virtue into an act of adoration, a doctrine propounded by St. Thomas Aquinas (ST II-II:81:1 ad 1). As stated by the Fathers of the Church, it is neither virginity nor the renunciation of all material things that makes a supernatural virtue, *hoc enim fecit et Crates philosophus* (St. Jerome,

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<sup>10</sup> From the Latin *religare*, to bind, tie.

*Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* CPL 0590 LLT-A lib. 3, linea 922). What counts are the intention and the effort to do everything for God.

The vow truly stabilizes our soul, and in so doing enables us to participate, as it were, in God's immutability by preventing our will from wandering.

It consecrates us to God and constitutes a perfect sacrifice like the holocausts of the Old Testament because it immolates our entire being on the Lord's altar. The vow of poverty destroys everything that touches us exteriorly. Chastity sacrifices our body. Obedience gives to God our will and everything we have within us, thereby turning us into a perpetual sacrifice. Accordingly, we can rightly apply to ourselves the words we repeat every day at Mass, "*Sacrificium laudis*; Sacrifice of praise."<sup>11</sup> The sacrifice of ourselves is truly a "sacrifice of praise" that can be renewed every day and that contributes to the glory of God.

#### **Their Relevance Today**

Finally, there is another very serious reason for remaining faithful to our vows: they are an act of defiance against God's enemies. The members of Secret Societies are bound together by infernal vows to wage war on Jesus Christ. All the social and political problems of our day boil down to one basic issue: will Christ reign, or will he be banished?

God's enemies make vows to the devil and form an immense army in the service of the Anti-Christ. Therefore, if there is a hierarchy in hell, and especially if this hierarchy reproduces itself on earth for evil purposes, this is a very good reason to constitute an Army of Resistance to fight for the rights of God. We must place ourselves at the head of this Army, and we must endeavor to understand what Our Lord meant when he asked St. Peter: "*Amas me plus his*; Do you love me more than these?" (Jn 21:15). Yes, we must love Jesus Christ more than the others. We must be attached to him by narrower bonds, namely, by our vows, so that, having shown him more love, we might receive in return greater strength that will enable us to do greater good.

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## **9. THE APOSTOLATE**

*This is the eighth talk given by Father d'Alzon during a retreat he preached to the members of the Chapter of the Religious [Sisters] of the Assumption before their Chapter began in August 1876.*

*All that is left of his other talks are titles or outlines that draw their inspiration from the Circulars he addressed to the Assumptionists. Father d'Alzon undoubtedly kept this talk on the Apostolate in order to re-give it,*

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<sup>11</sup> Eucharistic Prayer I.

*with the necessary adaptations, to his own Religious on the occasion of their Chapter which was to take place a few days later in Nîmes. It therefore gives us the substance of a third talk, hence the special importance of this document.*

*“Praedicate evangelium omni creaturae; Go into the whole world and proclaim the good news to all creation” (Mk 16:15).*

The Assumption, in all its branches, is an apostolic undertaking. However, though each Brother and each Sister must exercise his—her apostolate within that context, the superiors must nevertheless consider themselves as the directors of these apostles. And from this point of view, there are some considerations which I consider essential to their mission, namely:

1° An all-embracing love of the Kingdom of God, which includes a love for all the souls specially entrusted to their care.

2° Absolute disinterestedness regarding all personal preferences in carrying out God’s work.

3° A strong resolve to give all we can of ourselves and to inspire others to do the same.

4° Limitations on personal and community apostolates, as determined by prudence.

## **I.—AN ALL-EMBRACING LOVE OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD**

You have dedicated yourselves to the extension of the reign of Jesus Christ in souls. But is it Jesus Christ whose kingdom you wish to extend, or is it your own? The kingdom of Jesus Christ is the noblest of all causes. But alas! Think of all the obstacles which must be overcome: caution, laziness, fatigue and disgust, both your own and that of others!

At every moment, you find yourselves coming in contact with individuals whom you may understand, but who don’t understand you; whom you care about, but who don’t care about you, or who care about you in their own way. It is up to you to broaden their intelligences and their hearts so that they may grasp the important question of God’s cause. You must open the horizons of those who are short-sighted. You must light furnaces for those who are only looking for foot-warmers and who fear they will catch a cold if they are given too much heat. Blessed are those superiors whose spiritual horizons extend to the entire world, because their ambition is to have Jesus Christ reign everywhere!

Your task is not only to work directly with souls, but to acquire a following. In the past, there was the school of prophets (1 Kgs 20:35). Under the guidance of saintly superiors, we need a school of apostles. I can

imagine a superior who truly loves Jesus Christ and the Church, his body, the kingdom of Jesus Christ, and who says to himself: "I have ten, twenty, thirty souls who, like me, can become instruments for extending this beautiful kingdom. I have thirty, sixty, one-hundred pupils whom I must influence and through whom I can reach as many families. I have Children of Mary and Tertiaries whom I can mobilize as helpers in the work I am doing. Just as I go looking for fire in the heart of Jesus Christ, so I must transmit the fire I have in my heart to the heart of my daughters."

## II.—PERSONAL DISINTERESTEDNESS

Having spent many days and months in this work, this admirable Sister Superior takes a rest. She looks around glowing with satisfaction and says to herself: "I have worked well." Whereupon, a dozen devils gather around her, pleasantly repeating: "Yes, indeed, she has worked well." What an infernal joy for these dreadful creatures, if the self-esteem of this apostolic soul takes pleasure in these praises that are coming out of hell! What a difference between this and what Our Lord said to his apostles: "*Cum fecerit ea quae precepta sunt vobis, dicite: servi inutiles sumus: quod debuimus facere, fecimus*"; When you have done all you have been commanded to do, say, 'We are useless servants. We have done no more than our duty.'" (Lk 17:10).

First of all, know that you are capable of nothing in the spiritual realm. If you accomplish by natural means a work which is essentially supernatural, you can claim no merit for it. Consequently, you cannot expect to receive a reward. Secondly, if a supernatural work turns into self-complacency, you are playing with fire because pride feeds on it and makes us become like Satan who takes pleasure in himself. Finally, know that, by self-complacency, you are throwing away a wonderful opportunity to console Jesus Christ and to provide him with something that is durable, built by your hard work and strengthened by your humility.

Nothing is as rare as true disinterestedness in the service of Jesus Christ. Why do so many religious, after losing their vocation, come to such shameful ends? Because it can be said of them what St. Paul said to some of the priests in the early Church: "*Caeteri quae sua sunt quaerunt, non quae Jesu Christi*"; They have their own interests at heart, not those of Jesus Christ" (Phil 2:21). And what drives them to these extremes? It is that they haven't seen enough disinterestedness in their superiors. They imitate their superiors to excess, and they lose their way. Who is to blame? The superiors who were not sufficiently disinterested and who were too self-complacent. Oh, blessed spiritual poverty! It is no less important than the material poverty we promise when we take our vows, and it may be even more important in the case of our superiors. When, out of love of Jesus Christ, will we put it into full practice?



### III.—A STRONG RESOLVE to give all we can of ourselves

We will never do as much for God as we would like, but the desire itself is an excellent attitude. Daniel pleased the Lord because he was a man of desires (Dn 9:23). When Our Lord gave us the Our Father, he taught us that we too must be men of desires. Limit yours to those contained in the Lord's Prayer, then let St. Teresa of Avila prove to you that you do not need any more than them to attain the highest level of contemplative life. The same applies to the apostolic life. The glory of God, the coming of his Kingdom, the carrying out of his will, what more do you want?

So, leaving aside for the moment the object of our holy desires, let us examine their intensity. These desires cannot be enkindled in our hearts except through prayer. When St. Peter decided to create deacons, he said: "*Nos autem orationi et ministerio verbi instantes erimus*; This will permit us to concentrate on prayer and the ministry of the word" (Acts 6:4). To pray and to preach, that was their duty, but the first was to pray.

Pray for the community in general, pray for the needs of each sister, of each of your pupils, and of all those with whom you are in contact. Pray for sinners, pray for the saints. Pray for the success of the good works you are responsible for. Pray for those who are hurting you in any way whatsoever. And if they are hurting you because of some sort of antipathy, then think of the divine vengeance you can have by saying: "Father, forgive them; they do not know what they are doing" (Lk 23:34). This is the vengeance of Jesus Christ on the Cross, of him who converted the world thanks to the enormous desires of his love for sinners.

### IV.—LIMITATIONS ON PERSONAL AND COMMUNITY APOSTOLATES

To do things well, you must not do too much, and you must not make others do too much either. Remember your purpose, your character, and your spirit. Do not take on any more. Do not impose work on others that is beyond their strength. You must know when to use the spur, but also when to apply the brakes on yourself and on others.

The superiors who demand too much are wrong. They run the risk of exhausting their subjects and of rendering them incapable of doing their best. This applies also to superiors who want to do everything themselves. Our Lord himself didn't do much. He accepted suffering and death, but his outward activity, as related in the Gospel, amounted to little. He trained the apostles and sent them throughout the world (Mt 28:19). Let this be a lesson for those superiors who think that nothing can be done properly unless they do it themselves. This is not the way to establish traditions of an apostolic nature.

Finally, you should content yourselves with certain practices established by your major superiors, and not insist on your own personal

devotions. In addition to the vows of the Order, some masters of novices or superiors may try to impose a long list of other vows, such as other penances, special processions, and special devotions of all kinds. All these devotions are excellent ways of preventing the sisters from following the Rule. So please keep to the Rule, and do not allow the superfluous to take over the essential.

The apostolate of the superiors of a community has this splendid particularity: whereas other apostolates are meant to produce Christians, that of a superior is meant to produce saints. If, from this point of view, the superior's is more limited, from another point of view it is more exalted.

May the Lord turn you into apostles of sanctity by making you holy yourselves! Begin by doing, then continue by teaching, like Our Lord about whom it was said: "*Coepit facere, et docere*; He began by doing and teaching" (Acts 1:1). If your most eloquent preaching is your good example, your apostolate will be as fruitful as God expects it to be.

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## IV. The Spirit of the Assumption

*The three following documents treat the spirit of the Assumption from different points of view. The first conference is at once informal and lofty, addressed to the Religious [Sisters] of the Assumption and later recommended to the Oblates; the second is a more developed outline of the fifteenth sermon of a retreat preached to the Religious [Sisters] of the Assumption after 1870; the third is a piece on our spirit, based on texts from the Gospel.*

*Father d'Alzon was fond of this last method of working and, as of 1843, warmly recommended it to Mother Marie-Eugénie, "As I reflect on your goal and the chapter you are writing to describe it, an idea came to mind.... In studying the Scriptures a little, you will find a ton of passages there that express what you want to say; you would have a double advantage: that of receiving or rather of seeking your rule in the Word of God and that of preventing people from accusing your thinking of being too pious..."*

*What follows are four extracts from letters and two short notes.*

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## 1. A Spirit of Unity

### Letter to the Oblates

I have just found the summary of a talk I gave seven years ago to the Sisters at Auteuil. I am sending it to you, my dear Sisters, because, with only one or two expressions of minor importance, its ideas are perfectly applicable to you. As usual, it's about some of the characteristics of the spirit of Assumption. Take from it a sense of the perfection Our Lord seems to be asking you by way of a more complete gift of yourselves to the cause of our divine Master.

E. d'Alzon

*Nîmes, August 19, 1876*

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### A Variety of Spirits among the Saints

The works undertaken by the saints each have their own spirit. Maria de Agreda,<sup>1</sup> St. Catherine of Siena, St. Teresa of Avila, each one has her own particular style. Why? St. Thomas Aquinas, quoting Aristotle, tells us: "*Quidquid recipitur ad modum recipientis recipitur*"; Whatever is received is received according to the mode of the receiver"<sup>2</sup>. This aphorism applies not only to natural but also to divine realities. Take for example, the oil in this lamp. Look at this thin, round column of oil. Pour the same quantity of oil into a big brass lamp. The oil would go into all of its contours and take the shape of each section. It would always be oil, but would have a different form. God's grace enters our heart in a similar fashion. If a heart is small and narrow, not much grace is received; if it is large and expanded, grace enters in abundance. However, it is always the same grace.

Let us apply this to the spirit of the saints. They have all received the spirit of God, but in a particular way. Maria de Agreda had the Franciscan spirit; St. Teresa of Avila, despite what Father Bouix<sup>3</sup> says,

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<sup>1</sup> Maria de Agreda (1602-1665), a discalced Franciscan mystic from Spain.

<sup>2</sup> *In Aristotelis libros De anima II et III* – LLT-A liber 2, lectio: 552, linea: 4, p. 138 (Aristotle & On the Soul & CPL & bk 2, reading 552, line 4, page 138)

<sup>3</sup> Fr. Marcel Bouix, S.J., edited and translated the works of St. Teresa of Avila from Spanish to French (1806-1889). His brother, Fr. Marie Dominique Bouix, S.J., was one of the best known and most distinguished of modern French canonists (1808-1870).

followed the Dominican spirituality. At the time, the Society of Jesus had very few theologians, and it is obvious that Dominican theology is the dominant characteristic of the works of St. Teresa. God permits and even wants a certain diversity among his saints in order to avoid disagreeable monotony and so that, when we meet in heaven, it won't be boring. But when all is said and done, it is always the spirit of God.

#### **In Religious Orders**

The same diversity is found among religious orders. Each has its own spirit, according to the purpose God had in mind when he allowed it to be established in the Church. *Ubi spiritus Dei, ibi libertas*; Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom" (2 Cor 3:17). The service of God requires a certain amount of freedom. Some orders claim that, above all, we must make use of natural means in our search for God by using and developing the natural gifts with which he has endowed us. Others claim that nature must be destroyed so that grace can reign. The truth, of course, is that we must save ourselves with our human nature and by the grace of God. It's a question of more or less. It's like a sick man for whom the doctor prescribes wine with some water. If he likes wine, he will pour a lot of wine into a little bit of water; if he prefers water, he will pour a lot of water into a little bit of wine. It's a question of more or less. For me, knowing that I must be saved through grace, but with my human nature, I will obviously try to mix the maximum amount of grace with a minimum amount of my human nature. But everyone is free to do as they see fit: "*Ubi spiritus Dei, ibi libertas*; Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom" (cf 2 Cor. 3:17). As long as we have the Spirit of God, the spirit of the Gospel, the mode of the receiver matters little.

#### **The Spirit of Assumption**

Now let us consider your own distinguishing characteristic, the spirit of the Assumption. I cannot treat all of its aspects; I wouldn't know when to stop. I will take just one of its aspects, that of unity, and we will meditate on it together. When Jesus Christ was about to leave for Calvary, he concluded his awe-inspiring discourse after the Last Supper with these words addressed to his heavenly Father as his final prayer: "*Ut sint consummati in unum*; That their unity may be complete" (Jn 17:23).

We cannot imagine a more solemn occasion than this, when Our Lord Jesus Christ, who was about to leave his apostles and go to his death, gave them his parting words and his final recommendation. He was speaking to the first convent of the New Law. Though the Carmelites date their foundation earlier than that and consider the monks of the Old Testament as their first Fathers, the apostolic college was really the first and the model of the convents of the New Testament. Our Lord was there as their divine superior. St. Peter was there as his appointed successor. There was also present a very unworthy member, but he had already left the table at this time. So Jesus prays for them to his heavenly Father. "*Ut sint*

*consummati in unum*; That their unity may be complete.” Unity is the supreme good he wishes them. It’s the last word of his Gospel. It’s also the one I suggest for your meditation. Our divine Master was asking for unity between them and his sacred person, unity in the Catholic Church of which they were the first core, unity among themselves, and unity in their apostolic ministry. Let us meditate on these four aspects.

Let us suppose for a moment that our Blessed Lady was hiding in some corner of the Cenacle and heard these words. Let us make this supposition in order to put ourselves in her place and to listen like her and with her to the teachings of her divine Son. This will turn this talk, which is not directly on the Blessed Virgin, into the most solid talk on how best to imitate our heavenly Mother.

### I.—UNION WITH JESUS CHRIST

First of all unity, union with Our Lord Jesus Christ. Has there ever been a more perfect union than the one he had with his Blessed Mother? Ever since the very first moment of his conception in her chaste womb, Mary never ceased for a moment to be completely united to her divine Son. How could her thoughts, feelings and affections—how could anything she ever said or did—fail to conform to the thoughts and feelings of Jesus Christ?

It was this close and ongoing union with Our Lord which raised the Blessed Virgin to such an exalted state of perfection, and which made her so pleasing to God. Within the Church she is the model, I dare say, of those souls whose vocation is to live ordinary lives doing ordinary things—and they are the most numerous—because there was nothing remarkable about her life, except her extraordinary union with her divine Son. And this is why every Christian—and, still more, every religious—can and must imitate her.

This does not mean that you will ever attain the perfection of the Blessed Virgin. This does not even mean that you will ever become as pleasing to Our Lord, or that he will ever love you as much as he loves his Mother. Nevertheless, there is a saying in the Gospel which should give us food for thought. It says: “A man shall leave his father and mother and cling to his spouse” (Mt 19:5). I do not wish to exaggerate the meaning of these words because in a sense Mary was the spouse of Jesus Christ, just as much as she was his mother. And for these two reasons, she is entitled to all of the affection of her Son. But it is no less true that these words are among the most comforting that can possibly be addressed to a nun, because they can be a source of life and strength to her whenever she feels sad and discouraged.

Yes, from a certain point of view, I can say that, as a spouse of Jesus Christ, I am entitled to the fullness of his love because, in a certain sense, he can be detached from his Mother, so to speak, and be attached to his spouse. Just think of the vast spiritual horizons this opens for a nun. Just imagine

the high degree of sanctity she could acquire if only she responded faithfully to every one of the graces Jesus Christ lavishes on her, many of which fall by the wayside!

The Scriptures say that God gave King Solomon a heart as large as the sand on the seashore: "*Dedit ei latitudinem cordis, sicut arenam in littore maris*" (1 Kgs 5:9). A heart large enough to receive Our Lord! You can see the sand on the seashore; you can measure the contours and boundaries of the ocean, but who can probe its depths? Who can determine the dilating strength (for lack of a better term) of the love of God as it enlarges the heart in order to enter it a little more. And can you tell to what extent Christ, your divine Spouse, would give himself to you and would unite you to himself if, like the Blessed Virgin, you fixed your eyes constantly on him and responded to every one of his graces by a renewed fidelity, and to every one of his desires by an additional sacrifice?

## II.—UNION WITH THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

Secondly, Jesus Christ desires that we be united with the Catholic Church. St. Teresa of Avila uttered on her death-bed: "I die as a daughter of the Catholic Church." And you can say with joyful hearts: "I live as a daughter of the Catholic Church?" They say that when a young girl leaves school and begins to enjoy her freedom for the first time, she is happy to be living. Similarly, can we not say that we are happy to be living in a truly Catholic atmosphere and to be breathing deeply this pure, simple, honest but strong spirit of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church? And when I consider that there are more and more religious orders today, it seems to me that, among them all, Our Lord has particularly wanted you to cooperate with him in this fantastic work of unity which is taking place today in the world.

Our Lord tells us that at the end of time there will be but "one flock and one shepherd; *unum ovile et unus pastor*" (Jn 10:16). It's toward this end that we are working. It is one of the glories of the pontificate of Pius IX, and something that doesn't receive the attention it deserves. Never in the history of the Church, ever since its earliest times, have there been as many foreign missions as today. Pius IX has already established more than 170 new dioceses. And while whole peoples who have never known the Church are hastening to become part of it, Catholics are becoming more centralized. They are grouping themselves around the Holy See and developing closer ties with it.

If the question had been asked twenty-five years ago what would be the first dogma to be defined, the answer would have been the Immaculate Conception. Today, it is quite obvious that the first one to be discussed at the coming Council and the first one to be defined is papal infallibility. Everyone believes in this, and everyone proclaims it. Nobody nowadays would dare uphold the contrary. All that can be said against it is that the

definition of this dogma is not opportune. It will be up to the Pope himself to decide when the time is ripe. At the Council of Nicea (A.D. 325), which was attended by 300 bishops, only six of them refused to subscribe to the Creed, to the Son of God as consubstantial with God the Father. Today, among the 1200 Catholic bishops of the world, there might not be even two dozen who will refuse to subscribe to the Pope's infallibility.

Personally, I admit to feeling almost sorry that this dogma will be defined. It has filled me with joy to be able to say to Our Lord: "Lord Jesus, if the infallibility of your Vicar on earth is not yet an article of faith—even though it seems so evident from the very words of your Gospel and the constant tradition of your Church—I nevertheless believe it with all my heart, because I refuse to wait until you have commanded me to believe. As with everything concerning perfection, the one who loves you is not satisfied with precepts but delights in doing whatever you merely suggest."

You, to the extent that your health and your apostolate allow it, you must work to bolster this Catholic movement in favor of unity. You must close ranks around the See of St. Peter. You must develop within yourselves a fervent devotion to the Pope, not to Pius IX, to Gregory XVI, or to their successors, but to the Pope, to the Vicar of Our Lord, to the center of the holy Church, to our leader, to our supreme pastor. As that good old shepherd said so well when he was told that the Republic had been proclaimed, "I have never known sheep to be properly cared for when there was more than one shepherd, because each one pulls the sheep in his own direction."

So that everything might be in order, we must line up behind our Supreme Pastor. Also, all the secondary pastors must rally to his support. If this happens, wonderful consequences will follow for you. What security, what inspiration this will give to your lives, to your studies, to your teaching! I lived in the diocese of Nîmes for fifteen years before it adopted the Roman liturgy. The ceremonies constantly varied from place to place. So much so that one day a bishop asked me which rite we were following. I replied: "Monsignor, we follow the usher who walks first in line." Now that we have the Roman rite, we know exactly what to do. In case of doubt, we consult the ritual.

And so, that's it. We are certain that the doctrine put forward by the Holy See is true because it is the "Chair of Truth." By following its teaching, you can be sure that you will never fall into error. It is fashionable today to embrace the most outlandish theories regarding certain aspects of Christian doctrine. As far as I am concerned, I admit that I can't make heads or tails of what is being said. The "ifs," "ands," and "buts" just confuse me. When I hear this type of talk, I feel somewhat frightened, like a certain distinguished member of the French Judiciary listening to a preacher who made a name for himself in the Christian pulpit, namely

Father Lacordaire:<sup>4</sup> “Whenever I listen to him,” he said, “I think he’s always ready to jump up and perform a somersault in the air, like some acrobat. Though he always falls back on his feet in the pulpit, he nevertheless frightens the life out of his audience.” Never indulge in doctrines of this sort; never adopt any that do not come directly from the center of our holy Church, which is one in her faith.

### III.—UNITY WITHIN THE CONGREGATION

Let us now examine the third unity, unity within your Congregation. If I think about the two opposing camps in the world, I see Satan’s camp where hate reigns, and God’s camp where love reigns. The Church fights by using charity against the spirit of evil, and to do that she mobilizes all her forces. You are one of the armies of the Church. Our Lord has wanted you as a Congregation to wage war with her. Does this mean that your Mother General founded you in answer to a miraculous revelation of God’s will? No, I don’t think so. But was it an inspiration of the Holy Spirit and the express wish of Our Lord? Yes, obviously. And the proof is that your Institute has been officially approved by the Holy Church.

Our Lord wants you to work for him as daughters of the Assumption. And to do that, you must close ranks in a spirit of unity and charity. You are already a numerous Congregation. However, if you are not as numerous, for example, as the Daughters of the Child Jesus who were founded only a few years ago and who already number eight-hundred sisters, it is because Our Lord has singled you out and chosen you from among many others. And this is precisely why the devil watches you so closely.

When they wanted to build a church on the mountains next to Nîmes, they had to import cement from Rome because the wind is so strong that walls constructed with local cement would have crumbled. If in the holy Church there are buildings that are exposed to the fury of Satan, it is definitely the convents of religious men and women. What is needed is extremely strong cement to hold out against these attacks. This requires the cement of unity and of charity. Be united in your spirit and in your work, and you will double your effectiveness. *Vis unitate fortiori est*; The more united you are, the stronger you will be.

But I can’t insist enough on the individual efforts each one of you must make to attain this unity. It certainly exists among you, and I know that you are not living in one of those convents that can be found in Syria where a bishop noticed some sticks in the Chapter room. When he asked what they were for, he was told they were there to give the nuns the means of settling their differences without breaking the furniture. But even if you

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<sup>4</sup> Father Jean-Baptiste Lacordaire, a Dominican, the greatest pulpit orator of the nineteenth century (1802-1861).



do not damage your unity by grossly insulting yourselves, are there not sweeter ways to weaken it: hands and iron claws hidden in velvet gloves, but which nevertheless tear the seamless garment of unity; flattering and honeyed words that sow division? We are generally very concerned about the mission we must accomplish on the outside, but we often neglect the one we have on the inside.

*“Solliciti servare unitatem spiritus in vinculo pacis; Make every effort to preserve the unity which has the Spirit as its origin and peace as its binding force,”* says St. Paul (Eph 4:3). Be fully attentive to preserving and increasing unity among yourselves through the bond of peace. Yesterday you were singing: *“Ecce quam bonum, et quam jucundum habitare fratres in unum; How good it is, and how pleasant, where brethren dwell at one!”* (Ps 132:1 Vulgate). Beautiful words, and how very true! But does this dwelling together consist merely in eating at the same table, working in the same common-room, sleeping in adjacent cells? Of course not! It’s especially a question of your interior dispositions, of the unity of your minds and hearts. It is to this unity that each of you must very attentively make your individual contribution, as St. Paul mentions.

There is a set of interesting questions very few of us ever ask ourselves. They go like this: “Am I doing my very best to maintain peace and unity in my milieu? Do I speak words that sow discord and division? Am I a peacemaker and a conciliator?” I leave you with these questions so that you can meditate on them.

There was a young man who was thinking about joining us, but he joined the Jesuits instead. He spent eight years with them, after which the idea went through his head that God had given him the mission to reform the Jesuits. He thought that there were many things that would be better otherwise. He was asked to leave, and he left. That was the best thing to do. It may sometimes occur to you that such and such a thing would be better otherwise. But in reality, couldn’t everything be done in a better way? Certainly, my dear sister, they could, and everything would surely be a lot better if you yourself were a little more humble, a little more obedient, and a little more charitable. Let this be your contribution: you should seek to increase the unity of spirit in the bond of peace by more humility, greater obedience, and above all more charity.

#### IV.—UNITY IN YOUR MISSION

I am finally getting to the question of unity in your mission. Your purpose, the reason for your existence, is to extend the reign of Jesus Christ in souls. A zeal for the interests of God, a thirst for the salvation of souls, these are some of the particular characteristics of the spirit of Assumption. I hope my love for you is not blinding me, but it seems to me that I have never seen this type of devotion to Catholic interests and this gift of self for winning souls over to Jesus Christ, as I try to imagine how the spirit of the

Assumption will put them in practice in the Church. You owe this spirit to the sisters who founded you. I am therefore not here to tell you to acquire something you don't have, but to tell you to develop what you already have. But why must you work for souls? In order to present them to Jesus Christ and to lead them to a union with him, which is the way you should be living yourselves. So everything leads to our divine Master, and everything comes from him. It is by your union with him that you will attract souls to him. And in this sense, I could have finished my talk where I began because Our Lord is both the beginning and the end of all things. Work for him. Never forget that he is the sole master of souls and that they all belong to him alone.

Monsieur Thiers<sup>5</sup> wrote a book in which he maintains that a field belongs to the farmer who cultivates it, simply because it is watered with his sweat. I do not intend to discuss this theory at this time, but the fact remains that in everyone there is an extraordinary propensity to appropriate the soil we cultivate. Look at the delightful little fields, the charming orchards and the vegetable gardens you have been given to cultivate, call them what you want. They are the souls and the hearts in which you see, every once and a while, a flower or a fruit budding as the result of your work. You can easily come to think that these souls are your property. But you mustn't. You must give credit to God for the perfume of these flowers and for the delicious taste of these fruits. We must not forget that we are in his hands, not as machines but as humble instruments with which he operates. It is so easy to say: "What a pity this child is no longer in my charge. I was the only one who could do her any good!" In so doing, we are substituting our own spirit and our own thoughts for the Catholic spirit and the thoughts of Our Lord. Very often, a priest who has been put in charge of a more or less numerous parish introduces so many personal ideas, perspectives, and devotions that it can hardly be called a "Catholic" parish anymore; it has become "Father So-and-So's" parish. But don't laugh too much. We could easily find schools that have become "Mother So-and-So's" school.

Therefore, work for Our Lord, and through him increase his influence, not your own. Bring Christ to souls, and not yourselves.

*Auteuil, February 13, 1869*

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<sup>5</sup> Marie Joseph Louis Adolphe Thiers (1797-1877) was a French statesman and historian. He was the second elected President of France Eugénie, and the first President of the French Third Republic. Thiers was a key figure in the July Revolution of 1830, which overthrew the Bourbon monarchy, and the French Revolution of 1848, which established the Second French Republic. He served as a prime minister in 1836, 1840 and 1848. He wrote about politics, art, literature, and history. His literary reputation introduced him into the most influential literary and political salons in Paris.

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## 2. Five Virtues

*“Sectare justitiam, fidem, spem, charitatem, et pacem cum iis qui invocant Dominum de corde puro; Pursue justice, faith, hope, charity and peace, in union with all those who call on the Lord with a pure heart”* (2 Tim 2:22).

You have often been told that the characteristic of the Assumption is love of Jesus Christ, of his Blessed Mother and of the Church. But to understand how this love should be developed, I will borrow some of the recommendations St. Paul sent to Timothy: *Sectare justitiam, fidem, spem, charitatem, pacem*. Let us reflect on these five virtues.

### 1° Justice

Justice involves all of God’s rights. Since it is the virtue whereby we give to others that to which they are entitled, it’s very simple: justice requires that we seek to give God all of his rights. It is essential that we be concerned about this, because nowadays all we hear about are the Rights of Man, and very little is said about the Rights of God. *Pursue justice*. That is why Scripture sings the praises of the just man.

And we must practice justice the way Jesus Christ practiced it, by giving back to God from deep within ourselves what others deprive him of, by praying for those who do not pray; by doing penance for those who never do any; and by doing good to compensate for those who do harm. As the Psalmist says: *“Tabescere me fecit zelus meus, quia obliti sunt verba tua inimici mei; Indignation seizes me because of the wicked who forsake your law”* (Ps 118:139 Vulgate).

### 2° Faith

Everybody needs faith, but what characterizes ours is our acceptance of the supernatural order. Our judgments on people and things must be made only in the light of faith, which means struggling against human prudence. Let us be prudent, but within the context of our faith and not according to human criteria. *“Prudentia carnis mors est; The tendency of the flesh is toward death but that of the spirit toward life and peace”* (Rom 8:6). The spirit of the Assumption seeks the rights of God and defends them in the light of God’s own thinking. This is a good attitude to have because it wards off the tremendous danger of mixing the interests of God’s cause with our own interests!

### 3° Spem. Hope

The aim of all the saints is to do everything for God. But a good number of souls do not become saints because they fall into the appalling hypocrisy of their human hopes under the guise of divine hopes.

The Holy Spirit has said: "*Beatus vir qui post aurum non abiit*; Blessed is the man who does not go chasing after gold" (Sir 31:8). The gold, which the Holy Spirit tells us not to seek, is whatever attaches our heart to earthly things. The spirit of the Assumption is essentially disinterested. Woe to the one who holds on to anything, except to God. Happy the one who understands the full meaning of the loyalty which disinterestedness entails! This raises the question of poverty, but at a higher level. We must despise whatever riches do not emanate from the heart of Jesus Christ, whatever treasures are not divine, and whatever reward is not God himself.

### 4° Caritatem. Charity

I will not speak about charity in general. It is a distinctive characteristic of all the saints. But, presuming that such charity exists at Assumption, I would say that it must be more than it is elsewhere. It must be:

a) *Ardent*, in the face of the sleepiness of so many pious souls who are primarily concerned with themselves and who take refuge in the innermost recesses of their being and think only of themselves. Personal, individual piety is one of the plagues of our present times. I will never accept that that is genuine charity.

b) *Audacious*. I use this word because we Assumptionists are accused of being too audacious. We should not be foolhardy, but we must know how to be daring. What can ever be achieved if we are not audacious? We get blamed for it, but so did Our Lord, and so did the Apostles, to whom Jesus said: "*Venit hora, ut omnis qui interficit vos, arbiterur obsequium se praestare Deo*; A time will come when anyone who puts you to death will claim to be serving God" (Jn 16:2).

These are the ideas we are facing at the present time. "*Absque synagogis facient vos*; They will expel you from synagogues" (ibid): we are, indeed, being thrown out of everywhere: "*In mundo pressuram habebitis, sed confidite. ego vici mundum*; You will suffer in the world, but take courage! I have overcome the world" (Jn 16:33). That is why your charity must be audacious and daring. This will frighten some people, but they will never be part of Assumption because they will not have its spirit.

c) *Full of initiative*. We are in a period of upheavals. Who can deny it? Everything on all sides is falling apart. We have witnessed many frightful upheavals, and we will see many more. Don't you think that, after reversing the situation, God will rebuild? We do not know his plans for the

future, but we must act as if we heard him say, as in the Book of Revelation: “*Ecce nova facio omnia*; See, I make all things new” (Rev 21:5). Oh! What a lot of things will need to be done! Not that we will have to do it all by ourselves, but nevertheless what energy it will take to do what God has a right to expect of us! We will be blamed, but we’re used to that. We must continue to press forward and, in the end, we will be blessed. But in any case, we will have done what we thought was right.

### 5° Pacem. Peace

Yes, peace, but with whom? “*Cum iis qui invocant Dominum de corde puro*; The Lord is near to all who call upon him in truth” (Ps 144:18 Vulgate). Two types of people do not call upon God with a pure heart. I am not talking about God’s sworn enemies. I am talking about those who are positively in error. They range from the mere deist to the heretic who has been excommunicated by the Church for one reason or another. We will never be able to be at peace with any of these people.

Then there are those who, like the Jansenists,<sup>1</sup> claim to belong to the Church, despite what she says. They do not invoke God with a pure heart. They are fully aware of what the Church teaches and of what she disapproves. But because the Church has so far issued no formal condemnation, they continue to hold certain views which they know will be condemned sooner or later. These people do not invoke God with a pure heart. They substitute their own opinions for those of the Church. No, we cannot be at peace with them. We must fight them all the more energetically that they are likely to be eventually won over to the Church because they claim to accept its authority.

That being said, let us seek peace within the established order. Let us seek peace in God, with God and for men and women, and out of love for God. Through the action of Jesus Christ and the powerful intercession of Mary, let us pursue peacemaking, the work God wants to carry out on earth in order to bring about the triumph of the Church, which is the triumph of God here below.

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<sup>1</sup> Jansenism, a doctrine propounded by Cornelius Jansen (1585-1638), a theologian at Louvain University and later Bishop of Ypres. Among other things, he emphasized predestination, denied free will, and maintained that human nature is corrupt and incapable of doing any good.

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### 3. According to Scripture

#### **Why this presentation?**

The Rules of St. Basil are nothing more than a series of answers taken from the Bible to questions religious supposedly asked him. I thought it would be useful for the Religious of the Assumption to have similar answers taken from the bible, answers which would be neither the Rule, nor the Constitutions, nor even the *Directory*, but commentaries which would help them build their perfection on words dictated by the Holy Spirit himself.

#### **Reasons for this approach**

St. Augustine doesn't hesitate to say that the words dictated by the Holy Spirit can have many meanings, all of them true according to the needs of the persons who are meditating on them. The Religious of the Assumption may therefore see meanings in them that are particularly applicable to them, according to the purpose of their apostolate.

Furthermore, various meanings can emerge as circumstances change. The Gospels state that Jesus said many things that the disciples did not understand: "*Ipsi autem nihil horum intellexerunt*; They understood nothing of this" (Lk 18:34). And in another passage: "*Spiritus Sanctus...vos docebit omnia et suggeret vobis omnia quaecumque dixerō vobis*; The Holy Spirit will teach you everything and will remind you of all that I told you" (Jn 14:26). There are two teachings: Jesus' own which generally concerns material matters because of the disciples' inability to understand. Then the Holy Spirit comes and instructs them again, and finally they understand. The Lord himself did this very thing with the apostles in one of his appearances: "*Aperuit illis sensum, ut intelligerent scripturas*; Then he opened their minds to the understanding of the Scriptures" (Lk 24:45).

This happens often in the spiritual life. It happens that we can go a long time without understanding a thing about the interior life, and then all of a sudden there is light and we see. That's why we must constantly say: "*Veni Sancte Spiritus; Et emitte coelitus; Lucis tuae radium*; Come Holy Spirit—and send from heaven—a ray of your light" (Sequence for Masses on Pentecost and during its octave).

So in the following notes I intend to highlight those biblical texts that seem most apt to express the Assumptionist spirit. They will help our young religious to better understand this spirit and to see how it is based on the Word of God.

#### **Union with Jesus Christ**

Read frequently chapter 15 of St. John's Gospel and you will

understand that a union with God requires an ongoing union with Jesus Christ.

Christ is the true vine and we are the branches. And unless the branches are connected to the vine, the sap cannot flow through. So there is no divine life without union with Christ, that is to say, with his teaching, his commandments, his intentions and his examples. *“Ego sum vitis, vos palmites. Qui manet in me, et ego in eo, hic fert fructum multum, quia sine me nihil potestis facere; I am the vine, you are the branches. He who lives in me, and I in him, will produce abundantly, for apart from me you can do nothing”* (Jn 15:5). Hence, it is necessary to do everything for Jesus Christ, in Jesus Christ, with Jesus Christ. *“In hoc clarificatus est Pater meus, ut fructum plurimum afferatis, et efficiamini mei discipuli; In this is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples”* (Jn 15:8). The more we are disciples of Jesus Christ, the more we bear fruit, and the more we glorify God.

#### **The Flight in Egypt**

*“Ecce angelus Domini apparuit in somnis Joseph, dicens: Surge, et accipe puerum et matrem ejus, et fuge in Aegyptum, et esto ibi usquedum dicam tibi; An angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph and said: Get up, take the child and his mother and flee to Egypt, and stay there until I tell you otherwise”* (Mt 2:13). The angel of God warned Joseph beforehand in order to protect Jesus. So a religious exposed to danger must constantly call upon the holy angels so that the danger might be removed insofar as God wills it.

#### **Unproductive Religious**

*“Omnis ergo arbor non faciens fructum bonum, excidetur et in ignem mittetur; Every tree that is not fruitful will be cut down and thrown into the fire”* (Lk 3:9).

#### **Vocation**

*“Ambulans autem Jesus juxta mare Galilaeae, vidit duos fratres; As Jesus was walking along the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers”* (Mt 4:18). Jesus can call whomever he wants to the apostolate. But there are ever-so-many religious who could call others to religious life if they were zealous enough!

#### **Religious Formation**

At the beginning God said: *“Faciamus hominem; Let us create man”* (Gn 1:26). Adam, the first man, “who is the model of the future man; *qui est forma futuri”* (Rm 5:14), is the model of the religious who must think of himself as worthless clay, with which the new man, Jesus Christ, will be formed. Tertullian says: *“Quodcumque enim limus exprimebatur Christus cogitabatur homo futurus; What was meant by ‘clay’ was indeed the future*

man, Christ”<sup>2</sup>. What must be done is to form Jesus Christ.

#### **Poverty**

*“Ne solliciti sitis animae vestrae, quid manducetis, neque corpori vestro quid induamini; Do not worry about your livelihood, what you are to eat or drink or use for clothing”* (Mt 6:25). Read the whole passage right up to the end. Everything about the spirit of poverty is there. Peace and trust in the midst of destitution and poverty.

#### **Charity**

*“Ut in omnibus quibus utitur transitura necessitas, superemineat quae permanet charitas; Let charity which abides (1 Cor 13:13) overrule all things which are used out of transitory necessity”*<sup>3</sup>.

*Commentary.* Not only should we strive to attain the highest degree of charity, we must also stimulate others to do the same. That’s our mission. But let’s be clear. Let us love, and let us ask others to love God, Jesus Christ, and the Church. Let us demonstrate our charity by the zeal with which we fight what is evil and defend what is good. What a sad charity is the one that is charitable toward error and sin! Charity that makes all types of excuses for the intrigues of the enemies of God is but a lie! Let us love, and let us invite others to ardently love God, Jesus and the Church. Everything else will come later.

#### **Prudence**

*“Joseph, autem vir ejus, cum esset justus et nollet eam traducere; Joseph her husband, an upright man unwilling to expose her to the law...”* (Mt 1:19). Let us always be prudent like St. Joseph, and let us know how to be silent when we feel we have been wronged, because very often great good can come from what we thought was an outrage. If St. Joseph had followed his first inclination, would he have been worthy to play the part God gave him in the mystery of the Incarnation?

#### **Faithfulness to the Signs God Gives Us**

*“Vidimus enim stellam ejus in Oriente; We saw his star in the East”* (Mt 2:2). Ever so many people pay no attention to certain signs from heaven. Without pretending that we can foretell what will take place (that would be fanaticism), it is nevertheless amazing how many signs are given to us when we ask for them!

*“Audiens autem Herodes rex, turbatus est, et omnis Hierosolyma cum illo; At this news King Herod became greatly disturbed, and with him all Jerusalem”* (Mt 2:3). When we simply and courageously do God’s will, we can expect to disturb a lot of people who refuse to do so, but let’s not worry about it more than we need to.

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<sup>2</sup> *De resurrectione mortuorum* (CPL 0019) - LLT-A -cap. 6, linea 12 (Tertullian&On the Resurrection of the Dead&CPL&chap. 6, line 12)

<sup>3</sup> *Rule of Saint Augustine*, Ch. 5, 2 (Augustine&Rule&Migne&chap, 5, 2)



#### **Adoring Jesus in his Humiliations**

*“Et procedentes, adoraverunt eum; And resuming their journey...they adored him”* (Mt 2:9-10). The Magi adore the humble Infant-Jesus, which is what entitles them to the second visit from the angel. Confessing the humble Jesus always produces abundant graces.

#### **Joy in Penance**

*“Tu autem, quum jejunas, unge caput tuum, et faciem tuam lava; When you fast, groom your hair and wash your face”* (Mt 6:17). Penance is meant to make us joyful and enthusiastic.

#### **God and Money**

*“Non potestis Deo servire et mammonae; You cannot serve both God and Mammon”* (Mt 6:24). We must choose. It’s a terrible reality for every man and woman, ten times more terrible for every Christian, a hundred times more terrible for every priest, and a thousand times more terrible for every religious!

#### **Trust in God**

*“Si ergo vos, quum sitis mali, nostis bona data dare filiis vestris; quanto magis Pater vester, qui in coelis est, dabit bona petentibus se? If you, with all your sins, know how to give your children what is good, how much more will your heavenly Father give good things to anyone who asks him?”* (Mt 7:11). Trust in God is based on his infinite goodness. The more I doubt his goodness, i.e., his existence, the less I trust him.

#### **Being Strict with Oneself**

*“Intrate per angustam portam; Enter through the narrow gate”* (Mt 7:13). Whatever gate is taken by others, ours is always the narrow one.

#### **Preaching with Authority**

*“Erat enim docens eos, sicut potestatem habens; He taught them with authority”* (Mt 7:29). Religious must always teach in the name of God, and the faithful must always be able to sense that it is the word of God and not science.

#### **Steady Confidence**

*“Quid timidi estis, modicae fidei? Why are you fearful, O you of little faith?”* (Mt 8:26). In the midst of the greatest dangers, Jesus is always watching over us, though he may sometimes seem to be asleep.

#### **Prayer for Vocations**

*“Messis quidem multa, operarii autem pauci. Rogate ergo Dominum messis, ut mittat operarios in messem suam; The harvest is good but laborers are scarce. Beg the harvest master to send out laborers to gather his harvest”* (Mt 9:37-38). The first thing Jesus did at the beginning of his public life was to spend the night in prayer before choosing his apostles. Without apostles, there is no Church. Without successors to the apostles, the Church cannot continue. The existence of the Church depends on the

perpetuation and development of the apostolate.

#### **Dangers of the Apostolate**

*“Ecce ego mitto vos sicut oves in medio luporum;* Look, I am sending you out like sheep among wolves” (Mt 10:16). There is therefore a perpetual danger. But what a joy if the sheep triumph over the wolves! And that is what happened every time we were sheep!

#### **Jesus’ Real Family**

*“Quicumque enim fecerit voluntatem Patris mei, qui in coelis est, ipse meus frater, et soror, et mater est;* Whoever does the will of my heavenly Father is brother and sister and mother to me” (Mt 12:50).

#### **Patience with Evildoers**

*“Sinite utraque crescere usque ad messem;* Let them grow together until harvest” (Mt 13:30). At times we must put a quick end to abuses, but at other times, when abuses have crept in because of our own negligence, we may have to wait for a more favorable time to suppress them.

#### **Confessing Jesus Christ**

*“Tu es Christus, filius Dei vivi;* You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God” (Mt 16:16). Jesus Christ is the great power against hell. We must be constantly devoted to him; he is the one whom we must seek, proclaim and preach. We must teach his doctrine, practice his moral teaching, and imitate his entire life, always proclaiming: *Tu es Christus, filius Dei vivi;* You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.

#### **Praying for Enlightenment**

*“Domine, ut aperiantur oculi nostri;* Lord, open our eyes” (Mt 20:33). The reason why we don’t understand is of little importance! Whether we are in total darkness or our eyes are merely sick, let us constantly ask God to see. *Domine, ut videant oculi nostri;* Lord, open our eyes that we may see. We will never see too much, if it is Jesus who heals our eyes, or if he gives us his light.

#### **Vocation**

A scribe approached Jesus, asking to become his disciple. Jesus refuses: *“Vulpes foveas habent...Filius autem hominis non habet ubi caput reclinet;* Foxes have lairs...but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head” (Mt 8:20). This serves notice to those who would consider the priesthood as a job! Then, there are those who hesitate to commit themselves: *“Sine, ut mortui sepeliant mortuos suos; tu vero vade, et annuntia regnum Dei;* Let the dead bury their dead, but you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God” (Lk 9:60). There are some who must be pressed into service by their superiors.

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*The following section was added by Fr. d’Alzon after he returned*

*from a pilgrimage to Lourdes under the auspices of Our Lady of Salvation in 1876.*

### 1. Faith

“*Et deduxit illos in via mirabili*; She conducted them by a wonderful road” (Wis 10:17). What has just taken place proves to us that we too are conducted by a wonderful road. What miracles have just taken place! Namely:

- a) An affirmation of faith in the supernatural order.
- b) An affirmation of faith in God’s visible protection of us. “*Dominus regit me, nihil mihi deerit*; The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want” (Ps 22:1 Vulgate).
- c) A prayer requesting miracles for the healing and sanctification of our souls.
- d) A prayer requesting that, during the Chapter which is about to begin, the decisions we take will be inspired by the Holy Spirit. “*Ille est super me, qui fecit me: nemo eum attingit, nisi qui transierit se. Cogita corpus: mortale est; terrenum est; fragile est; corruptibile est; abjice*; He is above me who made me. No one can reach Him unless he passes beyond himself. Think of the body: it is mortal, earthy, weak, and corruptible; away with it.”<sup>4</sup> St. Augustine took all creatures into account. “*Transi ergo omnem mutabilitatem...Effunde super te animam tuam, ut contingas Deum, de quo tibi dicitur, ubi est Deus tuus?*”<sup>5</sup> Pass beyond all changeableness...Pour out your soul “above you,” that you may reach unto God, of whom it is said to you, “Where is your God?”<sup>5</sup>

### 2. Prayer

The supernatural life manifests itself especially by a life of prayer. Prayer is the effort we make to unite ourselves to God. Now, at Lourdes, people were saying that our pilgrimage...was a pilgrimage of prayer: 1° for ourselves, 2° for souls, and 3° for the Church:

- 1° A prayer for ourselves, one that was humble and constant.
- 2° A prayer for souls, their work, and our various apostolates. It reached out to sinners and reflected a love for the saints and a concern to form them.
- 3° A prayer for the Church, the body and fulfillment of Jesus Christ. It was a prayer for her triumph and a fervent prayer.

### 3. Joy in the Service of God

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<sup>4</sup> *Sermones ad populum* (CPL 0284) - LLT-A-sermo: 126A (= olim: In Ioh. eu. Tract.: 20), par. 11, ed. SL 36, pag. 210, linea 32 (Augustine&Semons to the People&CPL&sermon 126A, par. 11, page 210, line 32)

<sup>5</sup> *Sermones ad populum* (CPL 0284) - LLT-A-sermo: 126A (= olim: In Ioh. eu. Tract.: 20), par. 12, ed. SL 36, pag. 210, linea 32 (Augustine&Semons to the People&CPL&sermon 126A, par. 11, page 210, line 32)

“*Gaudete in Domino semper*; Rejoice in the Lord always” (Phil 4:4). There is a spirit of sadness, and there is a spirit of joy. “*Quam bonus Israel Deus*; How good God is to Israel!” (Ps 72:1 Vulgate).

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*One reads on the following page:*

### **Assumption—A Doctrinal Congregation**

If the Assumption is to be a doctrinal congregation, its doctrine will be very simple: it will be the doctrine of the Church commented by St. Augustine and by St. Thomas, Augustine’s most illustrious disciple. It will be focused on the supremely perfect being, on infinite truth which reflects its splendor, and on infinite good which is found in divine life. For, as St. Augustine says, “The supreme being is a being who has life supreme; *Summe ens est ens summe vivens*”<sup>6</sup>. We know God through Jesus Christ. “*Deum nemo vidit unquam; unigenitus filius, qui est in sinu Patris, ipse enarravit*; No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, ever at the Father’s side, who has revealed him” (Jn 1:18). And Jesus Christ has entrusted his revelations about his Father to the Church. God, Jesus Christ, the Church. We need grace to go to Christ and through Christ to God. And Jesus Christ entrusted this grace to Mary. *Ave, gratia plena*; Hail, full of grace.

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<sup>6</sup> *Confessions* I, 6, 10 (Augustine&Confessions&Pine-Coffin&I,6,10)

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## 4. Extracts from his Correspondence

### Love of Christ

You know that when Our Lord entrusted his Church to St. Peter, he put this single question to him: “*Diligis me plus his?*; Do you love me more than these?” (Jn 21:15). The essential thing is that you love Our Lord deeply and everything that he loved, that is, the Blessed Virgin and the Church. Love Our Lord with all your soul. And each time you celebrate the Holy Eucharist, may the love in your heart increase to a new level. Psalm 83 refers especially to priests when it says: “*Ascensiones in corde suo disposuit*; He has decided in his heart to advance upwards” (83:6 Vulgate). It is in the presence of Our Lord that you must curb the harshness of your character; it is under his watchful eye that you must do everything; it is to him that you must constantly request advice. You must also give a new perspective to your studies by injecting a faith dimension into every human science.

*(Letter to Fr. Picard on the occasion of his ordination, June 5, 1856)*

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### Trust in God

Before all else, I urge you to put your trust in God, if you want to be a true Assumptionist. This is crucial. The supernatural spirit must be our prime motivation: “*Quaerite primum regnum Dei et justitiam ejus*; Seek first the Kingdom of God and his justice” (Mt 6:33). That is what is most essential and, in fact, the only thing that is essential, everything else is additional.

*(To Michel Ménard, Nîmes, February 27, 1872)*

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### Roman Teachings

“Give the pupils of your aluminate a love for the teachings coming from Rome. Both Fr. Picard and Fr. Vincent de Paul told me they were struck by the way the Assumption has its own spirit. Now, when I try to figure out why this spirit has possibly made us a little more useful than other congregations, I think that part of the answer lies in our selfless attachment to Roman ideas, and another part in the way some of our more intelligent members, basing themselves on certain general principles, have sincerely applied them.”

*(To Fr. Alexis Dumazer, January 8, 1875)*

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**Threefold Love**

Who is stopping you from basing your life on a very serious principle: the love of Our Lord, of the Blessed Virgin and of the Church, which is the core of our Assumptionist spirit? With Our Lord, you have communion, the reign of the Divine Master in society, and truth. With the Blessed Virgin, you have the perfect model of all human virtues. By devoting yourself to the Church, you fulfill the important duty Christians have today. If this threefold thought, which really boils down to one, suits you, what is to prevent you from meditating on it and putting it into practice?

*(To Mrs. d'Escures. Les Châteaux, August 17, 1875)*

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Our spirit must affirm itself more and more by the way we take initiatives to instill a Christian spirit in souls, in families, in associations, in corporations, and in all of society, or, in other words, in the life of our society.

*(Note of August 13, 1877)*

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We must have a spirit of joy and generosity.

*(Note of August 27, 1877)*

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# PART II. OUR THREEFOLD PURPOSE

*Piety; Institutions; Struggles*

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## INTRODUCTION

*Father d'Alzon up close and personal*

## **OUR PURPOSE<sup>7</sup>**

THE COMING OF THE REIGN  
OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST

by Piety, Institutions, Struggles

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### **PIETY**

BY DEVOTION TO THE BLESSED SACRAMENT  
and all activities related to it

BY LOVE OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN, MOTHER OF OUR LORD

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### **INSTITUTIONS**

OUR ORDER

the Congregations of

THE RELIGIOUS OF THE ASSUMPTION, THE LITTLE SISTERS,  
THE OBLATES

Third Orders of men and women,  
Alumnates, Secondary Schools, our University,  
Organizations of workers, Social ministry

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### **STRUGGLES**

FIGHTING AGAINST THE REVOLUTION  
by preaching, teaching, the press.

WAR AGAINST THE SECRET SOCIETIES  
by the Third Order and Societies of every sort

WORK AGAINST THE SCHISM

by foreign missions and the reform of the Eastern clergy (1874)

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<sup>7</sup> Poster drawn up in 1874 outlining Father d'Alzon's first circular letter.



# INTRODUCTION

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## *Father d'Alzon: A Man of Doctrine and of Piety*

*Father d'Alzon had a soul of crystal. A young man on his way to the altar, he willingly poured out his heart to his friends. The founder of an Institute, he confided with all simplicity his most intimate thoughts to the Foundress of the Religious of the Assumption whose spiritual director he had become. He often urged her on to holiness by uncovering this or that secret of her interior life.*

*As an introduction to this second part of the Spiritual Writings of Fr. d'Alzon, we have gathered some of the thoughts he confided to others, to which we have added some more personal notes which have been preserved.*

*These texts, presented in chronological order, have been grouped in the following way:*

- I. On the way to the altar: 1829-1835.*
- II. The beginnings of the Assumption: 1844-1850.*
- III. The years of trial: 1851-1858.*
- IV. The fruitful years: 1858-1880.*

# I.

## THE FUTURE PRIEST: 1829-1835

### 1. Meditation on Friendship

*June 1829*

*“Amicus fidelis protectio fortis, qui autem invenit eum invenit thesaurum; A faithful friend is a sturdy shelter; Whoever finds one finds a treasure” (Eccl 6:14).*

#### **Searching for the Source of Friendship**

If I were to make a hideous and materialistic caricature of that which, in this world, is the source, if not of our most violent emotions, at least of our purest and certainly of our deepest and most lasting feelings, I would agree with Montesquieu. He said that when nature patterned human behavior on the climates of the world, it seems to have inserted between misanthropic England and disgustingly voluptuous Africa something more noble and more generous in the region separating these two, and that friendship was born in the country of the Franks.

To be sure, I too am a Frank, and I have a friend. But, without worrying if it's the climate in which I live or the blood that flows in my veins that prompts me to ask about the cause of my happiness, I can say that my heart beats and that I do not try to find out what makes it beat or to analyze it painfully. I would be too afraid that, without giving my intelligence anything but additional fatigue, such unfruitful work would only end up by diminishing, possibly even extinguishing this fire which brings me such happiness.

No, we should not ask man to explain this principle concerning his existence and his perfection, or concerning this attraction between two friends that produces an ineffable relationship of which only his intellect seems to be aware. This principle does not originate in him. Though he realizes that he participates in it, he senses himself that he must look elsewhere for its source.

He who would seek to discover where a river originates would exhaust himself delving into the bowels of the earth in order to find the first

trickles of water which eventually come together and end up covering enormous areas of land. But this is not the right procedure. There's another that is more reliable and that will not let you forget all the work you have done as soon as you have finished your project. Instead, why not look up at the sky? There you will see the clouds transporting thousands of gallons of water to drop on the mountains and replenish their reserves. Where do these clouds come from? From a bottomless sea into which everything enters, out of which everything comes, and in which everything will be engulfed and disappear. When the unknown source reaches its end through underground paths, it becomes a river that proudly carries the ships of the merchant nations.

#### **God is the Source of Friendship**

The same applies to friendship. We must not look to earth for an explanation of what comes from heaven. Here also, we must look upward and see how everything comes from, and leads back to a vast ocean, the primary cause of all human beings and of their affections. We must see how the closer we get to it, the closer we get to infinite love and to happiness, because supreme happiness consists in losing ourselves in God's immense depths.

And what must we do to get there? Only one thing, for, as Christ said to Martha, *"there is need of only one thing"* (Lk 10:42): to believe, then to love, to know through faith, and then to love according to the New Commandment. It was, indeed, a new commandment (Jn 13:34) that man should love his fellow-man. When our first father's son killed his brother (Gn 4:8), the link between man and man was broken. To re-forge this link required the word of a God, of a God whose love would lead him to death.

#### **Christ's Teaching on Friendship**

Listen to how our Savior, having healed and enriched our minds, set about healing and enriching hearts. It was at the Last Supper, which he had longed to share with his disciples (Lk 22:15), that: *"knowing the hour had come to pass from this world to the Father, and loving his own in the world, he loved them to the end"* (Jn 13:1). This took place while his beloved disciple was resting on his breast. He then began his final recommendations: *"My children, I will be with you only a little while longer. You will look for me, and as I told the Jews, 'Where I go you cannot come,' so now I say it to you. I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another. This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."* (Jn 13:33-35).

Here we see friendship in all of its perfection. We must love the way Jesus loved. Even in love, he wants to be our model: *"as I have loved you."* And how much did he love us? *"Until death,"* says the Apostle, *"even death on a cross"* (Phil 2:8).

And so, it's again in Jesus that love gets purified, or better still, it's

from him that it flows. What was love, and what was friendship, before he came, other than a natural attachment of one man for a fellow man? Besides, there was nothing to elevate people in this world when God did not serve as a link between them. It was a mere case of one man plus another, nothing more. Today, that is no longer the case. We now consider them to be two intelligent beings endowed with the ability to know and love each one another and, as the Serbian poets say, to marry one another in God.

#### **Jesus' Prayer of Friendship**

How can this come about, asks the man who has never loved, or who loves poorly? Let this man listen again, let him listen to this farewell discourse in which the Son of Man, having made friendship a duty, turns towards his heavenly Father and cries out: *"Holy Father, protect those you have given me, so that they may be one just as we are one"* (Jn 17:11).

And a little further on he says: *"I pray not only for them, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, so that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us, that the world may believe that you sent me. And I have given them the glory you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them, and you in me, that they may be brought to perfection as one, that the world may know that you sent me, and that you loved them even as you loved me. Father, they are your gift to me. I wish that where I am they also may be with me, that they may see my glory that you gave me, because you loved me before the foundation of the world. Righteous Father, the world also does not know you, but I know you, and they know that you sent me. I made known to them your name and I will make it known, that the love with which you loved me may be in them and I in them"* (Jn: 17:20-26).

These were Jesus' final words at the Last Supper, after which, it is written, he left and went to the Garden of Gethsemane, because he knew that his hour had come.

#### **Signs That We Are Disciples of Christ**

And so, is it not surprising that love should be thus presented as the sole proof of Christ's divine mission? *"This is how all will know that you are my disciples"* (Jn 13:35). Then, addressing his Father, he said: *"That they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us, that the world may believe that you sent me"* (Jn 17:21).

This then is both the clearest proof of the mission of the Son of Man as well as the most astonishing prodigy he performed, since he did not ask for another proof from his Father to attest that it was his Father who sent him. And, indeed, can we think of anything more wonderful for men than this fellowship of which God is the source, the nourishment and the goal? Love comes from God, subsists in God, and is achieved in God. Our love of others is like a new bond tying us to God, and the love of those whom we love increases our own love of God. This sacrifice we make of ourselves in order to achieve unity in God enriches us because of our attachment to one

another. And those to whom we attach ourselves in this way likewise become united to God. Consequently, we also belong to God through those who love him and who belong to him.

Such are the real foundations of that friendship which is so praised by everyone and for which everyone feels the need, even though very few are able to become aware of that need.

The trouble is that most of the time love is sought only in people. Human hearts have not learned to gravitate around the eternal center of God's infinite love. We do not understand that in order to love we must begin by believing in the word of God. So, may these poor sick souls listen to what God has to say. He alone can cure them and warm their hearts. In him alone will they learn to love, and to love in a way they will never regret...

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## 2. The Call from God

*January 24, 1830*

*To Luglien d'Esgrigny<sup>1</sup>*

I scare you dressed in a priest's robe. Nevertheless, I must tell you about all the thoughts I had before I settled on an idea so repugnant to you.

To begin with, until I was ten or twelve years old, this idea of becoming a priest attracted me very much. I abandoned it for a while, and the career that attracted me most was the military. I gave this up because of a few remarks from my parents. But it was about this time that I decided to devote my life to the defense of religion, and this thought grew in me in a surprising way. But at about that same time, I admit, I experienced an immense repugnance for public office. I wanted some type of career, but it would have been only for a short time so that I might acquire some knowledge about administration.

Then I saw that there was only one battlefield worthy of me, the Legislature, and I thought I would have to prepare myself for it by serious studies. Yet, for the same reasons that made me despise public office, and because I was convinced that I was living in a lawless State and therefore in one that lacks legitimate authority, I thought that since God was not in command, I felt called to exercise real authority at the highest levels. And so, in my opinion, this kind of authority was supposed to be found in the elected Chamber, and only in the elected Chamber.

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<sup>1</sup> Luglien de Jouenne d'Esgrigny was Emmanuel d'Alzon's best friend when he was young. He met him in Paris when both of them were studying law and frequenting various conferences, including the Association for the Defense of the Catholic Religion founded by Emmanuel Bailly. While attending these conferences, which brought together students interested in religious questions, he came in contact with a number of important intellectuals, among them Félicité de la Mennais and Fr. Combalot.

But I soon became convinced that it was lacking at both the Palais-Bourbon<sup>2</sup> and Les Tuileries,<sup>3</sup> and that in a sick society like ours, one can have influence only by separating oneself completely from it and by bringing to bear on it the weight of all the rights the State was not authorized to grant. From then on, my enthusiasm to become a deputy disappeared completely, and I saw nothing more in the French Government than a piece of decrepit machinery whose repair it would have been useless and even dangerous to attempt.

As I planned my future, other considerations entered into the picture. I resolved that if ever I decided upon a career, I would do so by the age of 35 at the earliest. At the same time, I was looking forward with pleasure to the possibility of consecrating myself to God in the far distant future of my career.

Little by little, the desire for a career disappeared, and I saw before me only the priesthood for which I had nothing to sacrifice, since I no longer felt any attachment to the world. Do you know what frightened me the most at that time? It was my lack of enthusiasm; it was the coldness with which I considered the sacrifices I had to make and the possibility of benefiting from them. The ease with which I thought I could break my ties frightened me. But what frightened me even more was the absolute absence of enthusiasm. However, this enthusiasm finally came, and there is nothing more to be afraid of except the weight of the burden I'll have to carry. It came and has always increased every time I received Holy Communion. It took hold of me, rescued me from many a pitfall, and made me long for the day when I would be free, because we become truly free only to the extent that we opt for a more perfect way of life.

Now my sole desire is to do God's will. I am not in a hurry, though I would like to enter God's service as soon as possible. However, I am calm, and I place myself in his hands.

Everything I have just told you should prove to you that I have thought things over carefully; that all I wanted to do was to take the best possible means of fulfilling my life's ambition; that there is nothing regressive in the sequence of my thinking; and that therefore I have few reasons to fear that I am deluding myself.

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*November 8, 1830*

*To Henri Gouraud<sup>4</sup>*

#### **Study of the Holy Scriptures**

I thoroughly enjoy studying the Holy Scriptures. It nourishes the mind and strengthens the spirit. It makes us love God. It throws us into his

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<sup>2</sup> The French National Assembly.

<sup>3</sup> A royal palace in Paris built by Catherine de' Medici.

<sup>4</sup> A friend of Emmanuel d'Alzon.

hands and focuses everything on him. Every day, I spend an hour and a half meditating either on St. John's Gospel or on one of St. Paul's Epistles. At first, I must force myself because I find it difficult to concentrate. I even get tired before I am able to grasp the first ideas. But once I become absorbed in the subject matter at hand, once I begin to feel that I have discovered some new aspect of truth, I cannot describe the deep satisfaction which takes possession of my entire being. It then becomes amazing how I get to love God! It is no longer as a friend, as a king, as a father, but as God! It is impossible to compare what we feel toward everyone else with what we feel toward him.

Again this evening, I was meditating on these words of St. Paul: "*Nobis autem revelavit Deus per spiritum suum; spiritus enim omnia scrutatur, etiam profunda Dei*; God has revealed this wisdom to us through the Spirit. The Spirit scrutinizes all things, even the deep things of God" (1 Cor 2:10). What is the Spirit of God? Why does he reveal himself? How does he reveal himself? I had the impression that I was seeing this infinitely perfect Spirit plunging into the very depths of God, and revealing all truth since the very beginning, the very light "which enlightens every man coming into this world" (Jn 1:9). I adored the way he treats everyone, the way he constantly reveals himself to all faithful souls. Each of these particular revelations constantly increases his general revelation, just as a thousand little streams go to make up that great river of truth which has been flowing since the beginning of the world.

I am telling you this rather coldly. But when we feel very strongly about something, when we remember that this Spirit of God constantly dwells in us in a permanent way, that he constantly sheds light in our soul and plunges us into the very depths of God, that is all we need, believe me, to become completely overwhelmed and to make us seriously think about who we are and about what we must become in order to be worthy of the one whose temples we are...

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### 3. Self-Portrait

*February 19, 1831*

What am I?

What do I want to be?

How will I become what I want to be?

It is true that *for a rather long time I have had a life plan*. I know vaguely—at least I think I do—what I want to do with myself. But I have never dredged my own depths. I have never determined the exact means I intend to use in order to achieve my goal. Today, this is exactly what I seriously intend to do. I want to know clearly what I am, what I want to be, and what means I will take to become what I want to be.

## I.—What am I?

### My Intelligence

My intelligence has a very good opinion of itself. It sees itself as being quite open, capable of achieving what it sets out to do, *although it does function by leaps and bounds, embraces new ideas enthusiastically*, and often gets fed up before the end. Since I've come to know more about it, I have the impression that, in maturing, it has developed more consistency, to the point that it is no longer frightened by work that will take several months. Halfway through a project, it may grow weary, but it is capable of picking itself up and of carrying on.

*It relishes truth. Its fondness for things religious transports it into the realm of its beliefs, as if into a world where everything is alive and with which it would like to become identified.*

Its judgment is said to be quite good. What has contributed the most to maintaining it this way is *its steadfastness in accepting truth wherever it finds it, even at its own expense*. For myself, I have often come across truth without realizing it. It is usually quite easy to discover. More often than not, I find it enshrined in well-worn maxims.

Its memory is inconsistent. It is good at remembering the main features of events or general principles, but it is weak and unreliable when it comes to remembering words and certain details.

It doesn't take much to distract its attention. It has difficulty concentrating, if it is not already warmed up. Please don't speak to it at certain moments, even about something it is interested in. It will listen, but won't understand a thing. It will listen to other very different things, like stupidities, but will not understand what you are talking about. However, this weakness vanishes little by little. What about a topic it likes? Oh, that's another story! It will think about it all day, and especially all night. It will gladly mull over it until the subject has been exhausted or until something else captures its attention unexpectedly. This is not something deliberate. Even if I were to say to myself for a whole week that I want to think about this or that, by the end of the week I would still be at square one. Nevertheless, it has happened that intense concentration helped me to break out of this obscurity, to discover what I was looking for, and to see in it a lot of things that interested me, things that I found boring at first but that now looked attractive.

### My Will

There is nothing weaker than my will. Pride wages a cruel war within me. To no avail, I experience the sad effects of having such a high the opinion of myself. I am continually looking at myself, admiring myself, almost adoring myself. Yet pride reduces me to less than dust; it breaks me; it crushes me. It's all to no avail. I give way to pride, thereby becoming weaker than ever. I know very well that I'm worth something, that my conduct will improve, that my work will be well done, and that I can



overcome my passions only if I learn to master the strongest of them all, if I become convinced of my worthlessness, and if I say to myself: you are nothing; you are worthless. I am fully aware of all this, and yet I continue to think very highly of myself.

Mine is a concentrated pride. It's not my social position which puffs me up. If anything, this keeps me humble. No, it's me! I'm bad, I'm even stupid. I see myself as being not only good but also a genius. In other words, I'm blind.

From another point of view, I have very little self-control. I seem to be making some progress on this score, but very slowly. One day, a person whom I like very much and whom I trust said to me: "You give the impression of being spineless." These words did me a world of good. For the next three months, I was no longer the same. If only someone would tell me the same type of things four times a year!

I am lazy when it comes to early morning rising. I am self-indulgent at table. I am continually poking fun at certain people. All this indicates that I have a weak character and lack self-mastery. I fight it by fits and starts. This does me no good because it makes me angry with myself. I force myself. I do more than I'm capable of. I decide everything incorrectly. Consequently, I cannot control myself for very long. I do attack and conquer myself, but it's a one-day victory. I am too simple, too trusting, and too easily deceived. I don't know enough about the human heart. Nevertheless, for the past six months, I have been studying "*Gil Blas*"<sup>5</sup> and "*L.V.*," which I think has done me some good.

What about my imagination? It seems to be like that of everybody else my age. It's a youth sickness which can be cured, not by suppressing it completely, which would be impossible, but by controlling it.

#### **My Heart**

I can say with assurance that I have a good heart. I wouldn't want to exchange it for another. I love God; at least I think I do. I gave him my heart a long time ago. Every day, I uncover new implications of this gift. They do not scare me. Quite to the contrary, they encourage me.

I love my parents. I can sense everything that I owe them. But at times, why does it take a whim or a bad mood to force me to think about what I owe them?

I don't have a lot of friends. I despise superficial relationships. In order to love someone, to become attached to someone, there needs to be a perfect similarity of beliefs, opinions and feelings. My friends (and I have had some) may do something wrong. But as long as they do not give up the faith, I will not give them up. On the contrary, their difficulties make them dearer to me. I know from experience that people can return to God, even after drifting far away from him. What about friendships with former classmates? I don't think I have many left. There is one who was in all my

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<sup>5</sup> *Gil Blas* is a picaresque novel by Alain-René Lesage published between 1715 and 1735.

classes. We were together again in Law School where we attended the same lectures. We used to visit each other. I became quite attached to him. Then why did I drop him?

“If you want someone to love you,  
Shepherdess, love someone yourself.”<sup>6</sup>

He used to complain that he had no friends! At the present time, I do have a few friends. I love them as much as I love myself. I try to love them out of love for God. I owe them all the joy I receive from sharing my heart with someone else. I couldn't possibly find better friends. I won't look for any others because I am unable to open my heart to everybody. For a long time now, I no longer make advances to others, and I even turn down those that others make to me. This might be wrong, but what can I do?

It seems to me that I have great love for people in general, and for poor people in particular. It pleases me to be of service to them. I am reluctant to blame them for anything. That is why I dread having to scold them. I do think I am capable of making a sacrifice.

This, then, is the way I see myself. However, I'm far from thinking that I'm perfect. There are many things about me which need to be corrected, but there are also many others which simply need to be well directed.

## II.—What do I want to be?

The goal I have in mind is to make proper use of both my qualities and my faults, in order to attain all the perfection my being is capable of. I would like to develop as much as possible whatever is good in me, while trying as much as I can to rid myself of whatever is evil in me.

I'm not looking for absolute perfection, just relative perfection. God alone is absolute. His creatures must not aspire to that which is above their human nature, lest they transgress the laws of that nature. The surest way of knowing what I am capable of doing is to know that to which God destines me. The surest way for me to attain perfection is to worthily carry out the role he wants me to play.

Now, my principles, my aspirations and my tastes turn me away from what is called life in the world, and my love of learning, along with my decision to belong to God and to live with God, are leading me to envisage the possibility of becoming a defender of God's truth, which would be the greatest of all honors.

To adore the Word through whom all things came into being, to spread the Eternal Word, and to be the mirror in which he, the life and light of the world, reflects his rays, so that they can bounce back into our darkness, this, in my estimation, is the greatest goal I can possibly have. In vain, pride tries to sully this holy desire. Every day I try to purify it a little

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<sup>6</sup> Antoine-Vincent Arnault, *Oeuvres*, vol. 3, p. 432

more, and every day I have the impression that it has become nobler. Every day it appears to be more intense and more urgent. It fills my heart with great hope and, as it were, with anticipated joy.

### **III.—What means will I take to become what I want to be?**

#### **Taking Christ as my model**

But in order to strengthen my soul and to make it less unworthy of the burden it wants to impose upon itself, it needs a model. This model, I have found it, and in it I have found all the virtues to which I aspire and all the strength I need to acquire these virtues. It is a living model which encourages those who look at it, which adjusts itself to those who seek to imitate it, and which truly becomes part of those who wish to reproduce it in themselves. This model is none other than the Son of God, in all the phases of his life on earth. To emphasize that he is one of us, he called himself the Son of Man. For me he is a model because he instructed sinners and “enlightened those who sat in darkness and in the shadow of death” (Lk 1:79).

So let me keep my eyes fixed on him. Let me repair the damage wrought in me by the three concupiscences<sup>7</sup>, by seeking to identify myself with him who is both the remedy and restorer of all our infirmities. He prayed “that all may be one as you, Father, are in me, and I in you” (Jn 17:21). These were the words with which, before performing his Supreme Sacrifice, he presented to his Father “those whom he loved to the end” (Jn 13:1).

Yes, Lord Jesus, may I be one in you, and you in me! You know that, of all the pages written about your earthly life, none impress me more than this farewell discourse when you addressed yourself to all mankind in the person of your Apostles. You wished, in the fullness of your heart, to show them it was only for love of them that you were accepting death. And of all the desires that you expressed, the one I would most like to see come true is the one in which you called upon the human race to erase the ancient crime by coming to lose itself in you.

May I be in you and you in me! May my intelligence, my will and my heart rise to greater and greater heights so that I might become what you desire me to be, you who are the Creator of all that I am!

#### **Reforming my Intelligence**

My intelligence, by entering through faith into the realm of truth, will seek God more and more in himself and in all that he did. It will work, not for itself or for some vain desire for personal glory but to subject itself to the penalty imposed upon the sons of Adam and to glorify God by becoming better acquainted with his perfections and with his creatures. It will work also to become more worthy of distributing the bread of the word

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<sup>7</sup> The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and pride of life.1 Jn 2:16

to those who hunger for truth and to make his light shine in the eyes of those who have strayed away from it.

To master its inconstancy, to surmount its apathetic discouragement, and to moderate its fits and starts, will my will not be strengthened if I contemplate the one who is order itself, who does everything in an orderly way, and whose will is a perfect law!

#### **Reforming my Will**

The more my intelligence understands the word of God and the more my will submits to divine law, the more my heart will be fired up with pure love. I will love God, I will want nothing else but God, I will care for nothing but for God. Whatever is not God, I will know it, want it, and love it solely for his sake. I will love others in that way, and my love for them will lead me to desire their happiness, to know them so as to be able to cure them of their ills, to comfort them in their sorrows, and to support them in their weakness.

As I learn to appreciate truth more and more, everything I study will bring me closer to the truth. Since I want to become perfect, a deep disdain for everything that does not foster this aspiration and a firm decision to overcome every obstacle which stands in my path will convince me that all things are vanity (Eccl 1:2).

#### **Reforming my Heart**

So that my heart might become worthy of Eternal Beauty, I will extinguish every vestige of impurity. I must be constantly vigilant because the animal instincts within us understand nothing of the things of God and cherish them even less.

#### **According to the three Evangelical Counsels**

This threefold reformation must be expressed in some exterior way. Our threefold concupiscence must give way to three virtues. These three virtues must dwell in every soul who wishes to enjoy the fruits of Redemption. However, they will bear fruit to a greater or lesser degree according to the care with which they are cultivated.

For me, therefore, poverty, chastity and obedience must each be developed in a special way.

We cannot appreciate spiritual values if we do not have comparable contempt for the things of this world and of the flesh. So I am determined to become “poor in spirit” (Mt 5:3). I must thank God for having given me the personal means of being able to work without having to worry about tomorrow. I will use the possessions he has given me to acquire more easily the knowledge I will need to fulfill my task.

Obedience will triumph over both my pride and the weakness of my character. I will obey in order to crush my pride that keeps saying: “*Non serviam*, I will not serve!” I will obey because pride, which wishes to enslave me, has never been able to lead me along the right path. Time and time again, it has led me into wrong paths, sometimes rushing me on

imprudently, at other times barely dragging me along. All I derive from it is endless fatigue and a regrettable loss of time.

The first result of original sin was the loss of innocence (Gn 3:7). By submitting my will, I will purify my heart, and the religious order to which I will submit myself will establish order within me and submit my senses.

#### **Concluding Prayer**

Lord Jesus, you who had nowhere to lay your head (Lk 9:58) were obedient unto death (Phil 2:8). You who are the Lamb of God, whose blood is the wine that triggers the development of virgins, come and renew these three dimensions of my soul. Let me be poor like you, obedient like you, and chaste like you, so that I may resemble you in all things. Of all my desires, you know the one I want most, how I want to be like you, especially through the priesthood in which you were both the priest and the victim. But before exercising its formidable functions in your name, allow me to try them out in some way on myself. Teach me to offer myself to you all the days of my life. Teach me to offer you my entire self: my passions that they might be consumed; my soul that it might be renewed; my body that it might become enslaved to your law.

And one day may I hear your voice summoning me to an even greater ministry: "Courage, good and faithful servant. Because you were faithful in small matters I will put you in charge of larger affairs" (Mt 25:23).

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## **4. Study Plan**

### **I.—A Difficult Undertaking**

*February 1831*

For several reasons I find it difficult to draw up my study-program. First of all, I must know myself and know what I am capable of. It's almost like knowing in advance what I intend to learn. It implies knowing the means by which I will attain the goal I have set for myself.

The three main points are: intellectual knowledge, scientific knowledge, and methodology. I must also take into consideration the point at which I find myself at the outset, the use I will make of the knowledge I will acquire, and a thousand other more-or-less awkward questions.

Would it be better to draw up my own study-program or to rely on some charitable soul to clear the way for me? I think it's a 50-50 situation. I therefore opt for the first alternative, were it only to see how far I can go on my own.

My program has two aspects: its form and its content. It's been

obvious to me these last few years that I know what I want to become. My goal has not changed. I want to defend religion and therefore acquire the necessary knowledge I need to do so. To fight fruitfully, I must know my religion. I must study history to learn about its relationship with the human race. I must study the philosophies which attack religion and those which owe their origin to it. I must study those sciences habitually used against religion, when in reality they are its most potent auxiliaries. So much for the content. In what order and according to what method will I study religion, history, philosophy and the sciences? All this is part of the form.

However, for me this form has varied in the past and will vary again in the future. In two years, my historical studies will undoubtedly suggest a different approach, which will allow me to make better use of my time. But I also wonder if it's not better to waste a little bit of time as long as I gain some experience. I know that a guide will give me some knowledge, but will I understand it? Will he understand me? Regardless, I do know how it feels to follow a path without knowing where I'm going or even where I am! I've now made up my mind. I will go it alone.

## II.—My Method

What am I? What do I know already? What do I want to become? What do I want to know? How will I learn it? These are my questions.

What am I? I have already answered this question elsewhere. From the point-of-view of my intelligence, I believe that I am capable of studying serious questions. That's all I want.

What do I want to become? I also know this very well...

What do I know? A little bit of religion, a little bit of history, and a little bit of philosophy. Since I left college,<sup>8</sup> I continue to study. I've read quite a bit; I've written quite a bit; I'm now concentrating on history.

What do I want to learn? I've already said this.

How am I going to do this? In what order will I study the various branches of knowledge? How much time must I dedicate to each? How deeply should I delve into each one of them? How much time should I give to reading, writing, exercises, and learning other languages?

The natural order would seem to be: religion, history, philosophy, and the various sciences. However, since religion comes up in many different subjects, I think I ought to postpone for the time being a deeper study of what concerns it more specifically. In this study I include Christian doctrine, Holy Scripture, the Fathers of the Church, and Church History.

The study of history includes all of antiquity with its wonders and its vices, its beliefs and its superstitions, as well as a universal knowledge of the various peoples and their governments. Before getting down to details, it would be good to bring together and to explain in a special project the

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<sup>8</sup> middle school in the United States

general effect produced by this first view of the world and of its life. Particular studies could then be made more easily on this or that historical event without being bogged down by chronology.

In Philosophy two things are to be considered: the history of philosophical systems, and the evolution of each system. Philosophy is for me what it was for Malebranche,<sup>9</sup> an explanation of the faith. Faith is strengthened by understanding, and philosophy based on faith lends faith a helping hand. History of Philosophy comes after General History. Philosophy comes after Religion, not before, as my teacher used to say.

The various other sciences come last. For me they are of only secondary interest.

So this will be my procedure. I'm not going to divide my studies by year, for in my eyes that would be absurd. I say: Religion always, History and Philosophy often, Sciences sometimes.

### III.—Study Tools

#### Reading

Finally, there's what I would call tools for study. Without a doubt, reading is the most important. But it is not sufficient to have plenty of land on which to grow your crops. The soil must be good, and you must have enough seed to cover the entire area. Since I have a good memory, it is less important for me to read a lot than to read well.

If the books I have chosen are interesting, then by all means I should take notes. Taking notes will oblige me to read attentively. But I don't think it helps—I think it rather hinders—to always read pen in hand.

Is it better to choose readings related to the task at hand, or to read merely for the sake of reading? Well, there are books and books. Some books are so excellent and beneficial that they are well worth reading for their own sake. Others are of inferior quality. They are lucky that we remember them and associate them with an idea. When reading a book on abstract politics, it's not a bad idea to add a few well-written Memoirs: it's a way of distinguishing between theory and practice and of preventing us from taking sides.

Among important readings, Leibnitz<sup>10</sup> and other contemporary thinkers recommend that we include newspapers. Monsieur de Maistre<sup>11</sup> read the newspapers, took notes from them, and kept extracts. It will, I

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<sup>9</sup> Nicolas Malebranche (1638-1715) was a French Oratorian and philosopher. In his works, he sought to synthesize the thought of St. Augustine and Descartes.

<sup>10</sup> Gottfried Wilhelm Leibnitz (or Leibniz) (1646-1716) was a German philosopher and mathematician. He wrote in multiple languages, primarily in Latin, but also in French and German.

<sup>11</sup> Joseph-Marie, Comte de Maistre (1753-1821), was a French Savoyard philosopher, writer, lawyer, and diplomat. He was one of the most influential spokesmen for a hierarchical monarchical state in the period immediately following the French Revolution.

think, prove very beneficial to read three or four newspapers of a distinct political color.

A question I have not yet resolved is that of writing. Should I write about topics I am still reading about, or should I wait, as Monsieur de la Mennais recommends, until I have collected enough additional information and facts so that my mind can proceed almost naturally? I haven't yet decided.

#### **Languages**

The valuable knowledge provided by foreigners obliges us to learn other languages. I only want to study German, English and Spanish. I'll study these languages when I'll need them, at which time I'll make a special effort to learn them and to keep them up by using them. That seems to be the best system. And so I've decided to study German in order to read in their original language certain books I will need. With what I know already, a month or six weeks should suffice, I hope, to learn enough for what I need.

Buffon<sup>12</sup> says: "The style is the man himself." There are two styles: the construction of sentences—every orator knows how to construct a sentence—and one's own creativity. One is like clothing that dresses up an idea; the other represents its substance. The former can be acquired; the latter can be modified and improved. Monsieur de la Mennais recommends translating as a useful exercise. It is also useful to read something out loud...and to read poetry.

#### **Conversations and Travel**

I cannot say very much about two very rich sources of self-education, conversations and travel, because they require an entirely different sort of study. But our intellectual growth has much to gain from contacts with other intellects and from being able to observe new customs, which all have something good and bad about them, but which are all different. Whoever knows how to read the minds and hearts of people certainly learns a lot more from them than from books.

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*July 10, 1832*

*Letter to his cousin Edmond d'Alzon*

#### **My Vocation**

It appears that my entering the seminary has caused many tongues to wag in all sorts of ways, but few have understood my thinking as well as you. Some have said that I put on the cassock because the fanaticism of my

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<sup>12</sup> Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon (1707-1788), was a French naturalist, mathematician, cosmologist, and encyclopedic author. This quote in French, "Le style est l'homme même," is taken from a speech that Buffon gave to the Académie française on August 25, 1753.



parents forced me to do so. But it would have taken more than common fanaticism, under the circumstances, to drive me into the priesthood against my will. Others have said that I wanted to serve King Henry the Fifth,<sup>13</sup> undoubtedly by organizing a conspiracy of seminarians. Oh, the idiots! The smarter ones among them have since discovered that they weren't omniscient and that there was something else behind the whole thing. Do you understand the malice of it all?

God gave me the grace to wish to devote myself, and for a long time I have experienced an increasing desire to defend the faith at a time when it was being attacked the most. I liked to think that nowadays—when times are troubled, changeable, uncertain, when the future is so obscure that that everyone, whatever his status or opinion, feels threatened—there was at least something fixed and changeless to which I could attach myself—and that if I exposed myself to some danger, it would at least be for a worthwhile cause. I'm sure I have told you more than once that nothing disgusts me as much as selfishness, which I see invading contemporary society. It's like an ice sheet that paralyzes everything; it's a plague that spreads quickly, bringing corruption and death in its wake.

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## 5. Dedication to Jesus Christ<sup>14</sup>

*Personal Reflections: The Future Priest 1829-1835*

### Introduction

May 3, 1833

It is written in the Book of Revelation that St. John saw a lamb standing before the throne of God, yet as if he had been slain—and the ancients surrounding the throne, and the angels who served the throne, bowed down before him crying: "*Dignus est Agnus, qui occisus est, accipere virtutem, et divinitatem, et sapientiam, et fortitudinem, et honorem, et gloriam, et benedictionem*; Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches, wisdom and strength, honor and glory and praise" (Rv 5:12-13).

It is to this Lamb, slain since the world began, that we are resolved to dedicate ourselves—in order to render to him who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb himself, all praise and honor, glory and might,

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<sup>13</sup> After the abdication of Charles X in 1830, Henri, Comte de Chambord, was a pretender to the French throne during this period.

<sup>14</sup> This statement is the Preamble to the Act of Consecration or Dedication which follows. See the Act of Dedication (CD CC00800b).

forever and ever. Amen!

It seems clear to us: the godlessness of modern times is doing all it can to abolish his glory and deprive him of his power—but the harder it tries, the more he who is seated on the throne will exalt the glory of the Lamb and establish his power over all creation. So here we are, bowing down before the Lamb, joining our voices to those of the ancients and the angels, and crying out loud in union with those four mysterious animals: “Amen! Amen”! (Rv 5:14).

Yes, we wish all power and glory to be given to the Lamb—and this is why we gather at his feet, so that our combined chorus may bring down God’s blessing on all we do. We intend to increase his glory and power as much as we can.

The means whereby we will achieve our purpose is by imitating as perfectly as we possibly can the Lamb’s condition of victim. Like St. Paul, we have only one message to proclaim, that of Jesus Christ and him crucified—*Jesum Christum, et hunc crucifixum* (1 Cor 2:2). Let this be our war-cry: “Jesus Christ”! Let his sacrifice on the Cross be the pattern we are looking at all the time, “*Aspice et fac secundum exemplar quod tibi in monte monstratum est*—the model shown to us on the mountain” (Ex 25:40).

We will often come and look at this model. Here on the altar, as there on the mountain, he shows himself to us, teaching us what we must become if we are to pay him the homage to which he is entitled. And as Jesus Christ offered himself willingly up to his heavenly Father (Is 53:7) so we too must offer ourselves up ceaselessly to God. Our Divine Lord hanging on the cross had but one desire, the salvation of men. We too must love the cross, seeking therein nothing but our own salvation and that of our fellow-men. And as Jesus Christ, raised on the cross like the Brazen Serpent (Nm 21:8; Jn 12:32) drew all things to himself—*cum exaltatus fuero, omnia traham ad meipsum*—so let us, in our turn, mount the cross in the spirit of penance, and bring to heaven as many souls as we can who yet are earthbound.

Let us endeavor to kindle in our own hearts the love of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament of the altar. We will implore the Divine Victim to imprint his likeness upon us (Ps 4:7). We will beg him to transform us—to turn us into blazing furnaces of love. And let the sparks of divine charity issue from our lips with every word we utter. For there are cold and tepid hearts awaiting but one single contact with the burning heart of Christ to warm them, to heat them, to set them on fire.

The sight of so many insults endured by Our Blessed Lord in the Eucharist, especially on the part of ecclesiastics, is something which fills us with implacable indignation. We must spare no efforts to make up for it as much as we possibly can. We must, indeed, comfort and console Our Divine Savior. Those he loves are repaying his love with outrage. Let us embrace the spirit of penance, and let us embrace it with joy. Let us use

every means we can to spread abroad the knowledge of his goodness, he who dwells night and day in the tabernacle for our sake.

We cannot put it off—we must begin right away. So let us begin among our own brothers. In view of the above considerations, we forthwith take the following resolutions.

**Particular rules in our own regard**

1. We will continually bear in mind Our Lord's presence on the Altar. "*Jesum Christum et hunc crucifixum*; Jesus Christ, and him Crucified" will be constantly in our thoughts and on our lips—never ceasing to remind us of what we ought to be and what we ought to do.

2. Every time we assist at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, we will renew the offering up of ourselves in union with the Divine Victim.

3. We will receive Communion six times a year to obtain God's graces necessary for the carrying out of our project. These Communions will be on the six major Feasts of Our Blessed Lord: Christmas, the Circumcision, Holy Thursday, Easter Sunday, the Ascension and Corpus Christi.

4. But our special Feast will be Holy Thursday. "*Sciens Jesus, quia venit hora, ut transiret ex hoc mundo ad Patrem, cum dilexisset suos qui errant in mundo, in finem dilexit eos*; Jesus, knowing that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, loved them to the very end" (Jn 13:1).

5. During the week preceding each of these feasts we will perform an act of mortification of our own choice, to make up for the insults to which Our Blessed Lord has been subjected.

**Act of Dedication to Jesus Christ and him Crucified—*Jesum Christum et hunc crucifixum*<sup>15</sup>**

Today, the third day of Mary's month of May and the Feast of the Finding of the True Cross, in the year 1833—we, the undersigned, filled with the warm and compelling desire to dedicate ourselves and all people to the greater glory of God, do pledge irrevocably to Jesus, victim for love of us, our bodies, souls and all our faculties—of whatever we possess, or will ever possess, be it temporal or be it spiritual—that he, Our Lord and Master, may dispose of it howsoever he sees fit, both in time and for eternity.

Being of one mind with our divine model (Phil 2:5) and uniting ourselves with the supreme sacrifice ceaselessly offered by that spotless Lamb (Ex 12:5) to God his heavenly Father—we promise by a solemn oath sealed with our very blood, to offer ourselves up too—like him and with him.

1° By working our hardest, during our seminary days and to the very

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<sup>15</sup> Presumably made by d'Alzon and a group of fellow-seminarians under his leadership.

end of our days, that we may become perfect as regards devotedness and forgetfulness of self—as regards detachment from material goods—and as regards all the other virtues which we learn by contemplating Our Lord’s divine heart.

2° By dedicating every moment of our life to the salvation of souls...(illegible)...And may our hearts be possessed by that burning love with which the Heart of Our Loving Savior has never ceased to burn for us.

3° By offering ourselves up day by day at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass—and consummating our personal sacrifice, as wholeheartedly as we can, when we receive Holy Communion on these six principal feasts that...(illegible)....

4° Lastly, by mortifying the flesh in union with Our Beloved Savior, we will each perform six penances during the week preceding each of these special feasts.

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## 6. Further Study Program<sup>16</sup>

*October 9, 1833*

The study program I have in mind must be based, it would seem, on the very nature of the human intellect, but accommodated to the limits of my own. You would have to be a universal genius to embrace a scheme covering whatever man is capable of learning. I know how much I can do. I know, therefore, when and where to stop.

Religion being necessarily my specialty, I must spare no effort to delve deep into it. All other branches of knowledge must take second place. I must study them only as far as this helps me to elucidate the mysteries of Theology.

And even as regards Theology, I must not aspire to have every single piece of information on my finger-tips. This would be pitting myself against infinity, and it would be folly to attempt it.

No, I must choose what corresponds closest to the needs of our times. What seems to be the most needed nowadays is to establish the foundations of our faith. At the same time, weary and muddled intellects must be taught to think things out for themselves. Once they have accepted God’s authority, their spirit recovers its strength and power and is infused with new life.

The advantage I see in having a study program is that it enables me to envisage everything as part of a whole—and to solve problems in the light of other problems already solved.

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<sup>16</sup> Aged 23, d’Alzon left the seminary at Montpellier, and would soon be leaving for Rome to complete his studies.

### **My Order of Procedure**

I propose to pursue my studies historically. My reason is because, filled with a lively faith from the outset, we wish to know what our faith obliges us to believe in. History unfolds the successive developments which God, the author of faith, has set before the eyes of all believers—and history too tells us when and how the human spirit has gone astray.

### **The Age of the Old Testament**

God spoke from the beginning, and by his word all things came into being. This sums up Chapter One of the Book of Genesis. Under the heading of this chapter we can assemble all we know about Geology. It is essential to bear in mind that, far from contradicting Genesis, geology lends it its support. And covering the period between creation and the flood, the Bible is our sole source of knowledge. So this is how we begin our study of ancient history, with the Bible.

Iniquity abounds throughout the earth. God punishes mankind by drowning the lot—all except one family whom he saves in order to re-people the planet. This family splits up into three main branches. From the senior branch issues one particular nation to whom God entrusts the deposit of Sacred Tradition, and of whom he regulates the conduct and sociology. This nation remains under God's special protection. Through the mouth of his prophets, God promises them a glorious rebirth. This nation retains the deposit of God's truth. But it is surrounded by other nations who, little by little, have lost touch with God. For them, what is left of the divine message soon becomes entangled with all sorts of sordid and worthless products of human fantasy.

But even among these nations there do arise men who are bent on discovering the truth. Failing to find it beneath the entanglement of popular myths, they appeal to their Reason. But Reason, instead of reassuring them, turns a deaf ear. They find themselves tumbling headlong into one set of falsehoods after another.

What a contrast between these pagan peoples on the one hand—rapidly losing contact with religious reality, and plagued with the conflicting ideologies of their various philosophers—and the Jewish people on the other hand! The Jews always find happiness when they serve the Living God—and are invariably crushed by their enemies when they abandon him.

### **The Age of the Church**

Such must be our historical introduction to the great controversies of Christendom. Jesus Christ is born into the World. He establishes his religion on a further development of ancient beliefs. At the same time, by founding his Church, he provides mankind with the means of discovering truth—truth which, though available under the former dispensation, now stands out with unmistakable precision.

Two aspects of Christianity are to be considered: it is a body of

beliefs, and it is a system of government. With its dogmas, it provides an inexhaustible treasury of truth. With its government, it constitutes a perennial society over which God reigns supreme—and it can no more phase out than can the Lord who governs it.

Taken in its dogmatic aspect, Christianity presents the ceaseless struggle throughout the ages between truth and falsehood. No titanic contest is half so impressive. On one side we see the enemies of truth banded together to stifle the cause of Christ. Opposing them we see the Christians, armed with no less than divine authority, resisting and counter-attacking those who would overthrow the ordinance of God. The battle rages continuously—and those who study it in the light of history see how truth invariably triumphs in the end. Truth emerges brighter than ever—the mightiest efforts of Darkness result inevitably in more and more light.

Those heresies which appeared prior to the 16<sup>th</sup> century do merit our attention. But when we come to the time of the Reformation we have to be particularly vigilant. Here we reach a period the events of which still have an immediate effect on the world today.

We have to show how Luther, by proclaiming the principle of anti-Papacy, enthroned that of the Sovereignty of Reason—and how the 18<sup>th</sup> century philosophers took up this false principle, and brought about the social ruins we witness today. Studying the last few centuries sheds a powerful light on our own. It prepares our minds for the things to come, and shows us the religious paths we have to follow.

From the sociological point of view we cannot dismiss the Church. Its relations with princes and peoples are of the utmost importance. Questions of sovereignty, freedom, self-expression...must all be studied from the Christian point of view. Studying them in the light of the past will make it easier for us to apply them to the needs of the present.

#### **Advantages of the Historical Perspective**

So the program I propose to follow has much to be said for it, because it treats all the important issues in natural sequence.

First of all, we get God: manifesting his power in creation—his wisdom in the making of man and in the commandments he gives him—his justice by the punishment he inflicts on him—his love by the means of atonement.

Then we get man: pure and spotless as he issues from the hands of his maker—sullied and spoilt by original sin—reassured by the promise of a redeemer. We witness the formation of the human family according to Natural Law, later to be confirmed by positive Law. We witness the formation of Jewish society, along with that of other societies.

Our Lord Jesus Christ is announced by the prophets. He appears on earth, and grace is given through him (Jn 1:17). Here is the time to deal with the question of divine grace.

The Holy Spirit is sent to the Apostles. He teaches them all truth (Jn

16:13)...and the knowledge of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, leads us to reflect on the deep mystery of the Blessed Trinity.

The struggle with paganism entails proving that Jesus Christ is God and came from God. At the same time the first heresies emerge, furnishing the occasion to insist on the Church's authority—an insistence which becomes more and more precise as circumstances render it necessary.

And by now, successive heresies oblige us to delve into a labyrinth of theological diversity. Studying the Fathers of the Church is the best way of understanding what went on, as Christian Truth unfolded the petals of its development.

Different philosophical systems have arisen and developed alongside Christianity. Their study throws a helpful light on the truth which cannot change.

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*October 21, 1833*

*Personal Reflection*

I have taken the resolution that, as soon as I can do so without attracting attention, I will start living an austere and monastic life. I must do all I can to chastise myself before the Lord; it's the best way to overcome pride.

*November 26, 1833*

*to his sister Augustine*

Rome is a most entrancing city—I assure you this is no exaggeration. I have spent the whole day sight-seeing—not bad for me!

*July 28, 1834*

*to Abbé Ginouillac<sup>17</sup>*

**My Apostolic Preoccupations**

As for me, I have been worrying recently about my immediate future. What exactly am I aiming at? It's clear that I wish to devote myself to the defense of Religion. Yes, but how?—This is more difficult to make precise. I feel no particular preference for one job rather than another. So it seems to me, my wisest course is to study hard, and acquire the amount of knowledge which will enable me, when the time comes, to take up whatever Providence has in store.<sup>18</sup> Thence the necessity for me to study every branch of theology. This will take me several years without wasting my time.

Speaking about the priest of today: I think one of the reasons why sermons fail to “sink in” is because we put ourselves so much in evidence

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<sup>17</sup> Presumably a French secular priest from d'Alzon's part of the country or a fellow-student at Montpellier.

<sup>18</sup> In fact, Fr. d'Alzon was ordained five months later.

that God hardly stands a chance! In his sermons the priest must speak “*tanquam potestatem habens*; as one having power, and not like the Scribes and Pharisees” (Mt 7:29). Are we not too inclined to imitate these gentlemen? We argue, and thereby our human personality comes to the fore. We have delivered a fine piece of oratory—a masterpiece of philosophical reasoning—but not a Christian sermon. And when it comes to refuting an adversary, is it possible not to be hurtful? But did Jesus Christ speak like this? Did the Apostles speak, or write, like this?—St. Paul in his Epistle to the Hebrews is not arguing with the Jews, but rather instructing them according to their own beliefs...and this, it seems to me, is how we ought to preach today.

*August 23, 1834*

*draft of a letter to Abbé Fabre*

As for me, I study every day. I am becoming more and more convinced of certain general principles which, during my journey here, impressed me with their utmost importance. And the first of these principles is that we must always work for Rome—sometimes without Rome—but never, never against Rome.

*August 24, 1834*

*Lamennais Crisis*<sup>19</sup>

If you wish to know how these happenings have affected me personally, let me tell you they have caused me deep distress. But they have purified my faith. I now look for comfort in God alone. I now wish for nothing but the good of his Church. Apart from this, everything fades into insignificance—everything else becomes petty, feeble and illusory.

Pray God, I beseech you, that what has taken place beneath my very eyes will teach me to be humbler, and place more trust in the Lord. It is sometimes very hard to pull yourself together. It is so easy to lose heart. But when the storm dies down, when the waters become calm again—although you feel much weaker, although you feel you have been smashed to pieces...you, nevertheless, become more docile, more restful in the hands of God—and this, no doubt, is how God wishes me to be.

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## 7. Pre-Ordination Retreat at St Eusebio's<sup>20</sup>

*November 29, 1834*

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<sup>19</sup> Monsieur l'Abbé de la Mennais, the priest who had such influence over Emmanuel d'Alzon, was now in serious trouble with the Holy See – and this was upsetting d'Alzon very much.

<sup>20</sup> D'Alzon, aged 24, will be a priest in less than a month



My patrons for this period of Recollection will be: First, Our Blessed Lord himself, who is my special patron. Then the Blessed Virgin, St. Joseph, St. John the Evangelist, St. Paul, St. John Chrysostom, St. Francis de Sales and St. Ignatius.

*November 30, 1834*

How many times, while meditating on the basic truths, have I not applied them to others and forgotten to apply them to myself! I didn't think I needed to be reminded of the very purpose of my creation: to know, love and serve God. After all, had I not already made my mind up to dedicate my life to his service!

Yet think of the ingratitude I have made myself guilty of by not paying sufficient attention to this fundamental concept! Think of the deeper insight it would have given me about the importance of my priestly functions!

I adore you, O my God. I adore your divine ordinance whereby you have directed men into so many different walks of life, yet destined each one of them to fulfill the same purpose which is your greater glory and their own eternal salvation.

Give me the grace, Lord, to become more and more convinced that, in the state of life you have chosen me for, nothing matters except this one fundamental thing. Give me the grace to wish for no other tools than those you have already placed in my hands for this accomplishment of my task. These tools, and none others, are the best possible means of doing what you have commanded me to do.

*"Diligentibus Deum omnia cooperantur in bonum; Everything contributes to bring about the good of those who love God"* (Rom 8:28). Let me never lose sight of you, Lord, because whatever I do must be done for you. Let me never forget these words: *"Nemo venit ad Patrem nisi per me; Nobody can come to the Father except through me"* (Jn 14:6). Then nothing else will matter. It won't matter whether I am rich or poor—honored or despised—in good or bad health—young or old. What will matter is that I am looking for you. And knowing that nobody can approach the Father except through you, I also know you have shown me the way to go. It is the golden way you want your disciples to follow: *"Si quis vult venire post me, abneget semetipsum, tollat crucem suam, et sequitur me; If anyone wants to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me"* (Lk 9:23). So you are asking for unconditional surrender. So I must be completely indifferent to the ways and means—as long as I reach you, Lord my God—as long as I reach the source of all goodness.

*December 1, 1834*

So now begins the month during which "he who is mighty will do

great things for me”. Am I destined to die without ever being noticed on earth? Does it matter, as long as God notices me from heaven? I do wish for a long life...but supposing this only entails committing more sins?

In my journeys on land I have always trusted the coach-drivers—in my sea voyages I have always trusted the captain and crew. It is in their own interest that I should arrive safely at my destination. So what about my journey through life, my voyage to heaven? What would happen if I didn’t trust God?

When I wish to learn something, I have to do what the teacher tells me. It’s up to him whether I use a pencil or a paint. So when it comes to my Salvation, must I not use the various instruments placed in my hands by Divine Providence?

Reading the life of St Ignatius<sup>21</sup>. I am deeply impressed by the battles he had to wage against himself before becoming converted. Lord, my God, let me say what St. Augustine said: “*Tu non poteris quod isti et istae*; What these men and women did, why shouldn’t I?”<sup>22</sup> If only I could, Lord, with the help of your grace. So I surrender myself to you. I hold myself as nothing—just a little piece of clay in your hands. And, after all, what else am I?

Do you wish me to become a Mission preacher? Very well, Lord—I will become one. I will die young if my chest cannot stand up to all that preaching! I will catch my death of cold in the frosty air of my native mountains! I may be despised by those who think I could have put my talents to better use. I may become a chronic invalid. Does any of this matter as long as I am performing your blessed will?

Give me, O Lord, the strength to overcome that self-consciousness which is so powerful an element of my make-up, and spoils all I do. Or else, if you prefer, let me retain it so as to fight against it. The very fear of yielding to its illusions may, after all, save me from basking in the opposite illusion that I am doing a vast amount of good.

*December 2, 1834*

God created the world for his external glory. He created angels, then men. Some of the angels revolted against God, and these rebels were consigned to hell. God created the first man who defied him and chaos entered the world. One sin brought hell; one sin brought death. And I, how many times have I not sinned! It’s not someone else, it is I who have rebelled a thousand times against my Lord, who a thousand times deserved to be crushed, and because God is infinitely patient, I don’t even think about it. O my God, impress this thought in my heart. Let me never forget that I am constantly under your just judgment, let me not add ingratitude to my

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<sup>21</sup> St. Eusebio, where d’Alzon did this retreat, was a Jesuit establishment.

<sup>22</sup> *Confessions* VIII,11 (Augustine&Confessions&Pine-Coffin&VIII,11)

numerous other faults.

*December 3, 1834*

I have often meditated on sin. O my God, why haven't I realized its horror? I come before you as my judge, but you come to me as a friend: "*Tu qui dulces mecum capiebas cibos*; You ate with me sweet foods" (Ps 54:15 Vulgate). That's what you say and you do not want to impose on me your justice. O, if I only understood your love! But I am incapable of it and my heart remains cold. O, my wretched state!

How loving you are, my God! I can only recognize my fault by loving you. Then I see all that keeps me separated from you. Then, like the merciful husband who reproaches his unfaithful spouse all her infidelities, you show me all my sins. O, my God, I do not want to sin again. Your goodness is too heavy for me.

What a dichotomy in me! I sense that I love what is beautiful, good, holy, just; I am filled with love for chastity, but then I do wrong: I'm drunk with pride, I let my mind gaze on the vilest images, I tear my neighbor apart, I indulge laziness. Why this continuing battle between your grace and my fallen nature? Until when, Lord? Until when, Lord? *Usquequo Domine? Usquequo?* (Ps 12:1 Vulgate).

*December 4, 1834*

How wonderful it must be the death of a good priest! As his last hour approaches, he sees himself surrounded by all the souls he has saved, and have gone before him into glory and the guardian angels of those who are still here on earth, praying for him who opened their eyes to the light. He has lived as his Lord and Master lived, a mediator between God and man. He has sacrificed himself for the salvation of others. His only ambition for himself has ever been to serve God better—to become a true apostle whose heart burns with divine love.

What a beautiful life! What a glorious death after such a life! What a rich recompense awaits him in the hereafter!

*December 5, 1834*

Pity, Lord, have pity on a poor prodigal son who doesn't understand sufficiently how very "prodigal" he has been—who doesn't appreciate sufficiently the happiness of being able to lay all his past sufferings at your feet. Let him find his rest in you—let him henceforth seek your glory and naught else. Lord, God of my heart—it seems to me that, in spite of everything, I do love you...and that my love, though inadequate, has made me repent of my sins.

Today, December 5, 1834, I received absolution after a General Confession of all my life. I am conscious of having made this confession in

good faith—so now I must depend on God’s infinite mercy. He will, I trust, consider the wretchedness of a poor sinner who so longs to return to the path of virtue.

All thanks to you be given, loving Savior, for having restored peace to my soul. Let me recall to mind this peace whenever I feel afraid of not having told everything in confession. I do not think you would have allowed me to experience such peace, had I not been really and truly reconciled.

Yes, Lord, this is true peace. You are my Father—you are my Brother—you are my friend—you are “My Lord and my God” (Jn 20:28).

Give me, I pray, an abundant love for you. Flow like a river of life (Rv 22:1) into my soul. Lord and Savior, drown me in your blood! I wish to love no one but you. I wish to live for nothing but you—to devote my life entirely to you—no matter where in the world you send me—no matter what corner of your vineyard you set me to cultivate—no matter how you decide to employ me.

Lord, my God, come and live in my soul. Come and live in me so that I may live in you. May I be absorbed into that mysterious oneness you spoke to your Apostles about during the Last Supper, those two great signs of love—the greatest man has ever received from his God—the Eucharist and Calvary.

And all my life I will remember that at its most critical moments I experienced an unlimited trust in Jesus.

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## 8. Ordination

*December 26, 1834*

*to his father*

### **Today, priestly ordination**

I haven’t been able to read your letter, dated December 3 until today. It arrived a week ago, but I have been away for the past fortnight.

Owing to some misunderstanding (which I still cannot understand) I couldn’t be ordained last Sunday, as I had hoped. It is only this morning that I was raised to the priesthood. So I couldn’t say my first Mass on Christmas Day, as I had looked forward to. It is tomorrow, St. John’s Day, that I will ascend the altar steps for the first time.

It should take me too long to describe the agony I went through before receiving Holy Orders, and the happiness that has been mine since. This agony, and this happiness, have to be experienced to be understood.

I am now a priest for all eternity. The thought of this makes me tremble from head to foot—yet it fills me with inexpressible joy and immeasurable trust. On each of the three occasions (sub-diaconate, diaconate and priesthood) as I lay prostrate before the bishop, and they sang the Litany of the Saints over me—I asked God not to let me get up again

unless I was to become a priest after his own heart.

I have a boundless trust in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. The Divine Office was already doing me a world of good. Please God—as one holy religious told me—please God no defilement will ever touch these fingers which, day after day, are destined to touch the Sacred Host.

Let me tell you why I decided to spend a whole month at Saint Eusebio's. They told me so many things about the Jesuits that I had to go and see for myself what they were really like. Well, I left this establishment convinced that, by and large, Jesuits are holy men. They are, however, inclined to say, from morning till night, the Pharisees' prayer: "We thank you, God, for not being like other men" (Lk 18:11). As for what is said about the espionage they practice in Rome: it's only too true—I have, unfortunately, manifest proof of it. I can best compare the present state of the Jesuits to a mighty tree that has been cut down—they are the twigs which sprout up alongside the severed trunk.

Someone played a very dirty trick on me—I think it was Bishop du Puy<sup>23</sup>. At any rate someone denounced me at the Holy See stating I held very dangerous opinions. No one said anything to me. But two days before my being ordained sub-deacon, Cardinal Odescalchi<sup>24</sup> who had been kind enough to promise to ordain me, and who since then had been promoted to Cardinal Vicar, sent word that he wished me to come and see him.

He asked me what I thought about Monsieur de la Mennais, I told him I had accepted with complete submission what was written in the encyclical—that I had disapproved of "Words of a Believer" before ever this book was condemned—and that my philosophical opinions had since undergone a substantial modification. I did not, however, understand what the Holy Father was getting at by disapproving of de la Mennais' "philosophical system."

To which the Cardinal replied that the Holy Father disapproved of the way in which Monsieur de Lamennais associated Religion with Liberty, as if the two were one—that he did not condemn all Monsieur de la Mennais' opinions—that several people had become converted by reading Monsieur de la Mennais' first book—that he, the Pope, would be only too pleased if what Monsieur de la Mennais had written about the Holy See could be republished.

He then asked me, on behalf of the Holy Father, to sign a written declaration to the effect that I accepted the encyclical—and that I did not agree with those who maintain that it is not aimed at a certain school of thought. Would I like some time to think it over? I told him: No, thank you—and I signed at once.

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<sup>23</sup> Probably Most Rev. Louis de Bonald, bishop from 1823-1840.

<sup>24</sup> Cardinal Carlo Odescalchi (1785–1841) was an Italian prince and priest, archbishop of Ferrara, cardinal of the Roman Catholic Church and Vicar of the Diocese of Rome Eugénie. Close collaborator of popes Pius VII and Gregory XVI Eugénie, he renounced his titles in order to become a Jesuit in 1838.

It appears every bishop will have to sign a similar declaration—at least this is what Cardinal Odescalchi told me. Wishing to send you a copy of it, I asked the Cardinal this very morning. He told me he would get me one, but the Holy Father is keeping the original—and the Holy Father, he assured me, is very pleased with the promptitude of my submission. It's a pity we have to do things like this to get into the Pope's "good books." I am to be introduced to him one of these fine days. Let's see how he takes to me.

*December 27, 1834*

#### **First Mass**

This morning I said my first Mass in the Catacombs under St. Peter's. Monsieur l'Abbé de Brèze<sup>25</sup> acted as Assistant Priest, and Monsieur d'Auriol<sup>26</sup> as altar-server. Monsieur Poly<sup>27</sup> said Mass after me. So there were only four or five people present. But since you were not there, I preferred this to being surrounded by a crowd of strangers who meant nothing to me and would only have got in my way. It appears I performed the ceremonies most efficiently—but Abbé de Brèze would not allow me to linger over the "Memento of the Living." I am sure you will appreciate my wishing to take my time at such an important part of the Mass.

After Mass, Abbé de Brèze took me home for breakfast. He was very kind to me—so was the priest from Montpellier. Abbé de Brèze pretends he was representing my parents and friends and, for this reason, wants to write to Mother.

I have no more news for you, except that Montalembert<sup>28</sup> is returning to Paris. He recently wrote a letter to His Holiness, stressing that he too submitted entirely to the encyclical.

I cannot conclude without telling you how much I appreciated your letter. I lovingly kissed your signature to make up for not being able to give you a kiss myself.

*January 18, 1835*

*to Luglien d'Esgrigny*

#### **Priest for Others**

No, I think I have become a priest as much for others as for myself. My fondest desire is to glorify God by bringing as many lost sheep back to him as I possibly can. It was the longing to pour a little balm on the anguish

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<sup>25</sup> Most Rev. Pierre-Simon de Dreux-Brèze. (1811-1893), bishop of Moulin 1849-1850.

<sup>26</sup> a bank employee in Rome

<sup>27</sup> a priest of the diocese of Montpellier where d'Alzon had begun his seminary studies

<sup>28</sup> Charles Montalembert was a notable Catholic layman, publicist, and politician – a friend from d'Alzon's early years in Paris.

of suffering humanity which led me to the altar—for there, I was convinced, could humanity be soothed and saved. But when I mounted the altar steps, it was only on condition that I would come down again, mix with human society, and exert what saving influence I could.

Such is the mission which, rightly or wrongly, I believe to be mine. And this mission will not be accomplished without costing me much sorrow and many disappointments at the sight of man's ingratitude.

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## II.

### ASSUMPTIONIST BEGINNINGS 1844-1850

#### Religious Vocation

*December 1, 1844*

*to Rev. Mother Marie-Eugénie de Jésus*

##### **Called to Found**

Today, on the first day of the ecclesiastical year, I have endeavored to take myself in hand, so that Jesus Christ should be formed in me as he was formed in Mary's womb. This seems to have done me good. It has made me feel how firmly and steadily—and yet how gently and tenderly—I must belong to God. This is largely due to your influence, so I am writing to thank you.

*December 20, 1844*

*to the same*

##### **Reappearance of the star**

For some time now I have been wondering about my personal contribution to God's providential plan. My ordination ten years ago left me groping in the dark, in the sense of having no precise vision of what future years might hold in store. Now at last I see the star has reappeared—and it seems to point in a direction worth aiming at.

Certain possibilities cause me such repugnance as to bring me almost to the point of rebellion. But what do my personal preferences matter?—Very little, or rather not at all. I must be prepared for anything.

On the other hand, there are "signs of the times" which make it look as if I will be able, after all, to accomplish the designs which I think are God's designs.

Let us allow God to act. For my part, I am (I hope) ready for anything, regardless of the cost.

*January 23, 1845*

*to the same*

##### **Diligence in studying**

I seem to have the reputation of being a scholar—if so, I don't



deserve it. However, as I look around me, I seem to be studying three quarters and a half times more than any of the others. They tell me they are too tired—so perhaps I tire less easily than they do.

But scholarliness implies certain aptitudes I do not possess. And the very active life I am obliged to lead leaves me little time for books.

Nevertheless, since you came to visit me at Nîmes I have been giving myself time to study. Yesterday, for example, in spite of several visits to the sick, to and from others, I found time to read through the whole volume published by Father Lacordaire<sup>29</sup>, except his last two sermons.

I also spent nearly two hours working on my Lenten sermons. I'm telling you this to show you I am not devoid of willingness to follow your advice.

You tell me I could find lots of vocations for the kind of religious Order you envisage. But do you honestly think I possess the necessary qualities to found one? Take my general speech and behavior. So far it has proved that I'm not much good at pleasing everybody. And when it comes to holiness, I am all too aware of the distance between me and any of the Holy Founders. Look at the rigorous apprenticeship they imposed on themselves before undertaking to train others!

*January 25, 1845*

*to the same*

I have already read the first five chapters of the *Treatise on Monastic Life*<sup>30</sup>. I find it satisfactory, except for the distinction the author makes between “anchorites” and “cenobites.” Your holy Poles have “stolen” the idea of an Order of teaching priests, with a Third Order of laymasters to assist them, from me...but perhaps it's truer to say that you gave it to me.

*May 31, 1845*

*to Mr. Eugène Germer-Durand*<sup>31</sup>

**Irrevocable decision**

You must be kindness itself to have written a letter like the one I received from you two days ago.

I must tell you, however, that your letter which has done so much to encourage me in the pursuit of my aim, would not have had the contrary

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<sup>29</sup> Henri-Dominique Lacordaire (1802-1861) was a Dominican preacher who refounded the order in France.

<sup>30</sup> Possibly, *Traité de la sainteté et des devoirs de la vie monastique* by Armand-Jean Le Bouthillier de Rancé

<sup>31</sup> A devoted Catholic lay-master without whose loyal collaboration Fr. d'Alzon could never have made a success of Assumption College, Nîmes. His son became an Assumptionist.

effect had you been of the same opinion as Monsieur de Tessian<sup>32</sup>. Be convinced that I may break but will never bend. I know what I am letting myself in for. I know I shall have to be prepared to stand alone. The future, as I see it, looks anything but rosy. But I won't back out.

Happy are those who have only to obey. The task I have set myself calls for much more than simple obedience. It will entail loneliness too. My determination to accomplish it will be pitted against that of others whom I shall have to win over or defeat. But if I am doing what God wants, does it matter?

I feel the same resolve to accept being branded anything by my adversaries, being treated as an empty headed nincompoop—as an inconsequential and muddle-minded weathercock. And you must bear this in mind when you consider the proposals I set before you.

I have many plans. No sooner had I taken over the College than my guiding star re-appeared on the horizon. For ten years I hadn't known which direction my life was to take. Now at last I do know. Many troubles lie ahead—many sorrows, many anxieties. Yet I feel perfectly calm—and, please God, I will retain this calm and see the matter through.

Now, if God wishes me to fulfill my mission, I, and no one else, will have to accept all the responsibility. I will, at times, have to seek advice, but the decisions will have to be my own. And if ever I do seek advice, but decide not to follow it, I will incur the blame of those I love the most. I must accept that too. So let Abbé de Tessian say what he likes. It hurts me not to meet with his approval, because he is a friend whom I esteem. But I must nevertheless forge ahead. I have a job to do.

And so, my dear friend, can you understand how much I stand in need of your friendship, in the fullest sense of the word? There is in your education and mine what I venture to call an instinctive “common denominator.” You may be “but a simple layman,” but you perceive the very “pith” of my purpose far more accurately than do lots of others who imagine they have all the facts and figures at their finger-tips. You know too that up to now I have undertaken many a good work which had to be done, but without identifying myself with it—whereas this good work is going to absorb all my thoughts and energies for the rest of my days.

I could, indeed, go through the list of my previous undertakings—and I was, no doubt, right to undertake them. But let me admit the truth. I never concentrated on any of them as much as I ought to have done. Why not? Because I felt I was being pushed, not attracted.

Let's take a look at them. The Ladies of Mercy<sup>33</sup>: are they any worse

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<sup>32</sup> Canon Jean-Charles Dortet de Tessian, a diocesan priest in Nimes, whose family also came from Vigan. Ordained in 1824 he asked Fr. d'Alzon to take charge of the Ladies of Mercy. He also served as d'Alzon's confessor.

<sup>33</sup> The Ladies of Mercy were an association of devout women dedicated to charitable works for whom d'Alzon served as chaplain for a time.

off for my having taken charge of them? Then there's the Refuge<sup>34</sup>. Has its growth been retarded through my fault—or through the fault of the bishop and certain other well-meaning persons? What about the Carmelites?<sup>35</sup>—is their future not safely assured? The Conference of St. Vincent de Paul<sup>36</sup> was established in spite of the bishop. Do they still need me to defend them against the bishop, now that he directs them without ever consulting me? The same applies to the diocesan finances. Here decisions are taken in my name, I being the Chairman, without my being informed...and to the Popular Library<sup>37</sup>, concerning which His Lordship consults Monsieur Gareiso<sup>38</sup> instead of me.

It's not that I mind. But it does mean that I can now relinquish my hold on these admirable enterprises. I may have launched them—and everybody knows it—however they don't need me anymore. They will come to no harm by my absence. And there are other good works which I will continue to patronize until somebody else steps into my shoes—it can easily happen, and will do the work no harm...it will carry on just the same.

But as for this particular work: I am determined to have a go at it, whether anybody else wants me to do it or not. If God wants it, I will succeed—if God doesn't want it, I will fail, and it doesn't matter if I do. Meanwhile it has become fixed in my mind, and planted eradicably in my heart. I must see it through...and the many obstacles to its success cause me no trepidation.

*August 11, 1845*

*to Most Rev. Cart, bishop of Nimes<sup>39</sup>*

#### **Establishing Christ's Kingdom**

For a very long time I have been consumed by the longing to establish Christ's Kingdom here on earth. By blessing a house on his behalf—a house of which he will be the one and only Master—you have given me, in his name, the one encouragement I needed.

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<sup>34</sup> A hospice for unwed mothers which Fr. d'Alzon opened in 1837 and entrusted to the Sisters of Marie-Thérèse.

<sup>35</sup> In 1843 Fr. d'Alzon oversaw the installation of a Carmelite monastery in Nimes.

<sup>36</sup> The Conference was founded in Paris in April, 1833 by a few young men, principally Frederic Ozanam, and a Catholic newspaper editor, Emmanuel Bailly, a close friend of Fr. d'Alzon and the father of two Assumptionists. Fr. d'Alzon fully supported this social outreach organization.

<sup>37</sup> A library for working class people opened in 1852 by Fr. d'Alzon

<sup>38</sup> Abbé Joseph Gareiso (1805-1885) was a priest of the diocese of Nimes, professor and eventually superior at the major seminary, and at the end of his life vicar general.

<sup>39</sup> Jean-François-Marie Cart became bishop of Nimes in 1837 and remained there till his death in 1855.

*October 21, 1845*

*to Mère Marie-Eugénie*

**Preparing for the Vow of Perfection**

Well, this is how mad I am: believe me, yesterday morning at Mass I felt I just could not refuse God's invitation to start a kind of novitiate in view of taking a vow of perfection. Now I am wondering whether it wasn't some stupid form of pride which put this idea into my head. But why did this idea come to me during Mass? Yes, I do feel God is calling me closer and closer to himself—although my desire to do good is still in its infant stages. But see here, my daughter. You and I are faced with a most serious responsibility—so serious in fact that it obliges us both to become saints. The thought of it makes us tremble. But why waste time being afraid? Now is the time to begin.

*October 31, 1845*

*to the same*

**Zeal for the Kingdom**

May I tell you about myself? How is it that, while you are becoming so self-confident, I feel crushed under the appalling weight of humble gratitude for the good you have done me over this past year? May God, my dear daughter, reward you one hundredfold—and may he, at the same time, multiply the fruit of this zeal for the extension of Christ's Kingdom which must become the whole aim of your existence and mine. You tell me I am better than you. I assure you, you are mistaken...but I want to be.

## Beginning of the Novitiate

*December 26, 1845*

*to Mère Marie-Eugénie*

**The Foundation Night**

Am I wrong, dear daughter, to give you the hour between Meditation and Mass, on this the eleventh anniversary of my ordination? It seems to me I may, because all I wish to speak to you about is the good work whereby God permits me to pay off some of my debts.

There are six of us to begin with—you began with only five. You began earlier—we are beginning with one more to make up for beginning later.

We gathered together in the evening, the day before yesterday, as we had agreed. But we didn't have much to say to one another. I was worn out. I had hardly slept the previous night, and had spent all day hearing confessions. The brothers too were falling asleep. I did say a few words, but very few—we weren't in a mood for conversation. At ten o'clock it was time for me to leave for the Cathedral, where I had to officiate at the Night Office and Midnight Mass. I wasn't feeling very pleased with myself nor with everybody else, I permitted myself to whisper in my neighbor's ear

(concerning a priest who is noted for his lack of intelligence, and sings out of tune): “Did you ever hear such meaningless moans and groans as when poor old So and So opens his mouth?” It wasn’t very kind of me to say this, was it?

During Midnight Mass I behaved myself quite well—except that I felt very annoyed because they had forgotten that the altar has to be incensed during the “*Benedictus*”.

How could I harbor such unworthy feelings? Don’t ask me! There was I, having resolved to give myself to God—and it had all blown away like a puff of wind, never to return.

I went home feeling calm and quiet—neither happy nor sad, just thoroughly exhausted. It was two o’clock in the morning. I got into my night-shirt and I went into chapel, and stretched myself out on the altar-steps—my intention being to sleep there before the crib. Half an hour later I was just dropping off to sleep when one of the other Fathers, who had also said Midnight Mass out, came in—then I thought I had better go upstairs to bed.

They had agreed to wake me up at six o’clock. But they didn’t—they let me sleep on until a quarter to seven. I was to have said Mass for the community at half past six—but the boys’ Mass was at 7 o’clock, so we postponed the community Mass until half past seven.

So the first Mass, at midnight, was said for you—the second for the boys (and many of them, to my delight, received communion)—and the third for us. I had intended to say a few words after Mass to the brothers and to the Third Order members who had come to support us with their prayers. However, there had been some mistake. When I turned around to face the congregation there were only two or three people in chapel! As you may guess, this put me off preaching, but fortunately there were no more Christmas disappointments.

After my thanksgiving I was accosted by some of our novices who wanted to sweep their rooms. I told them the brooms were available, and I was expecting them to come and ask for them. I added that I would do all I could to give them good example as regards religious austerity. I would suggest penitential practices, but never impose them unless they themselves asked me to.

I find this voluntary mortification most helpful, at least to begin with. Like that, future novices will, on arrival, have to accept already established customs. For example, they themselves asked me if they could sleep on straw mattresses. One of our lay-masters asked me two months ago if he could have his walls papered. I agreed—but this morning he came to me and asked for another room with bare walls. So don’t you agree it’s much better to wait for them to take the initiative?

During High Mass in the Cathedral I was assistant at the bishop’s throne. In this capacity I had to wear one of those horrible, heavy copes which caused me some annoyance. I dozed off during the “*Credo*,” but

apart from this everything went off well. In my heart I was deeply moved. It embarrasses me to admit that I shed quite a few tears, but I think this was due to the singing—I can never listen to the “*Adeste, Fideles*” (“Come, all ye Faithful”) without giving way to tears.

I came home, and thought out some practical resolutions as regards Poverty and Obedience. Then I had lunch. As I left the refectory, I met a young deacon, the younger brother of Abbé Goubier<sup>40</sup>. This young man had spent last year as one of our resident supervisors. He now asked me for an interview. He seems to have a budding vocation.

I had to attend Vespers at the cathedral, and take the collection. I wasn't feeling at all well. But I took the collection—and plucked up courage to listen to the sermon. I hadn't listened to a single sermon all through Advent. The canon who preached it ought to have delivered it properly.

As a reward for my courage, I sat down next to the cathedral administrator, and begged him not to wake me up if I fell asleep. This caused him such amusement that he had to bite his biretta, but even this couldn't stop him from laughing. I was afraid I had given scandal. I did not, in fact, sleep through the sermon—I did an excellent meditation instead.

It was a very well written sermon, but delivered coldly, with no enthusiasm; I paid no attention to it and remained quite recollected, which was just what I wanted.

Then I came home again and called a meeting of the brothers. I warmly congratulated one of them for having already begun to obey me. I read out the rules I had prepared for them. I then kissed their feet to demonstrate that I, as their superior, was here to serve them—and that I depended on them. Such is going to be my relationship towards them. They understood—and now everything is running smoothly.

I am reporting all these details to you, my dear daughter. I want to show you how imperfect I really am—but that a vast amount of good can be expected from these poor brethren of mine. Their candor is transparent, though they are still feeling rather awkward.

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## D'Alzon's Rule of Life

*December 1845*

*Personal Reflection*

The thoughts that have filled my mind for some considerable time—and the vocation I believe to be mine—oblige me to examine myself, and adopt a more exacting lifestyle, more in conformity with what I think God is requiring of me.

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<sup>40</sup> Abbé Jean-Baptiste Goubier was the brother of Abbé Vital-Gustave Goubier, a close friend of d'Alzon in Nîmes.

So where do I start? I am: a Christian, a priest, a religious, and the superior of a community—these four things.

#### **1° I AM A CHRISTIAN**

I am a son of Adam, and a son of Jesus Christ.

As son of Adam, I am a sinner, and cannot dodge the fact. I am most strictly obliged to acknowledge this reality: a) so that I may learn to disregard myself; b) so that I may learn, by observing my own shortcomings and vices, to show mercy for the shortcomings and vices of others, and to learn, from all the remedies I may encounter, whatever is useful for saving my brothers, for whom I bear responsibility.

As a son of Adam, I am condemned to earn my bread at the sweat of my brow. God forbid that I should ever forget it for one single day!

As a son of Jesus Christ, I must acquire his love and become thoroughly penetrated with his spirit. I will remember that I must carry him everywhere and wherever I go to do so as his spirit would require of me.

The spirit of Jesus Christ will make me utterly devoted to my brothers...bearing patiently with them at all times...and loving them as he does.

The love of Jesus Christ must inspire all my actions. The spirit of Jesus Christ must make me do whatever he would have done had he been in my shoes. His love will make me do whatever I have to do as perfectly as I can. His love will continually goad me on towards the acquisition of that holiness to which he calls me.

Let me remember that the spirit of Jesus Christ is very insistent. Our Lord makes demands. By listening to him I am opening myself up to advancing along a path that may frighten my nature. But love for him will ease the rigor and soothe the pain. So for this, let me develop within me a tremendous love for Blessed Sacrament because I have experienced the effect that Our Lord in the Eucharist has on me by seeing the difference in me whether I have prayed in chapel or elsewhere.

The spirit of Jesus will help me to sanctify my work and will ennoble it to the dignity of being a duty. I will work no longer like the slave, no longer like the hireling who acts “like slaves being watched; *ad oculum servientes*” (Eph 6:6), but I will work like the son of a great family, family within which Christ my model wanted to do his share of the work.

#### **2° I AM A PRIEST**

As much as it depends on me, I must become thoroughly penetrated with my character as a mediator, an offerer of sacrifice, by gazing on Christ my model.

As a priest I must pray more and more for others.

So, when I recite my Office and when I celebrate Mass, I must unite my prayer to the great prayer of Jesus Christ. I must realize how pure I ought to be if I am to represent such a Pontiff. But since the priesthood was instituted solely in view of the Church, I must endeavor to permeate myself

with the greatest love for this bride of Christ whom he acquired by his blood, whom he made the dispenser of all his gifts and in whom he reconciles all men to his Father.

To the cause of the Church will I dedicate all my zeal. To bring about its triumph will be the very purpose of my existence. I will see myself as one receiving the honor of being allowed to fight for the cause of God—to fight for whatever he holds most dear, because God loves nothing more than he loves his Church.

I will love the Church all the more for seeing it persecuted. I will suffer, no doubt, from its humiliations—but these will be the motive, the strongest of motives, for me to glorify the Church on earth, and provide it with all the assistance I, in my weakness, can convey.

### 3° I AM A RELIGIOUS

Let me borrow the thoughts of Monsieur de Rancé <sup>41</sup>. He said, I recall, that a religious must be three things: an angel, a martyr and an apostle.

a) *An angel*, by the purity of my entire being. I have been called to the honor of speaking of God, so I must know him—and only the pure of heart will see him face to face. As an angel, I must carry out God's commands, "*qui mittet angelos suos spiritus*; who sends his angels as spirits" (cf Ps 103:4 Vulgate). So I must become consumed with the longing to do what God wants, when he wants it, and how he wants it.

b) *A martyr*.—My persecutors are my own passions. In order to fight them, I must accept to be wounded in the process. These passions are the false gods which demand to be adored by my senses and the faculties of my soul. If I wish to be saved I must overcome them. Unless I recognize and practice this truth, I am wasting my time.

A religious must be a penitent, just as Jesus Christ was on the cross. He must suffer not only for himself, but for others too—just as Jesus Christ died for the salvation of all. So that if my penance were restricted to my own personal needs, this would indicate a very narrow conception of what I am called to become. It would risk turning me into a spiritual egoist—and this is one of the worst distortions of Christian piety.

Human nature is, by itself, and still more thanks to original sin, prone to extreme laxity. So I must do all I possibly can to bring about the triumph of the spirit and that won't be one of my easiest tasks. As far as possible, I must breathe the rarefied atmosphere of higher thoughts and higher feelings, taking care, as I have urged so many others to do, not to tread in the puddles of mundane sentiments and considerations.

Self-denial will be for me a source of purification, atonement, and education. It will purify me by stripping me of my vices. It will atone by appeasing God's anger, against me and others. It will educate me by turning me into a better person; otherwise, it would have defeated its purpose.

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<sup>41</sup> A zealous and austere priest who revived the Cistercian Order in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.



c) *An apostle.*—As an apostle, my duty is to make the truth known. I must study it and not deceive myself as regards my obligations in this respect. I do so in order to have the courage to fulfill these obligations to those young people entrusted to my care.

As an apostle, I must love the truth—remembering that the very source of all truth is Jesus Christ, the eternal Word of God and God himself. My studies, varied as they must necessarily be, are a capital element of my life. If, in fact, I find little time to study, I must remember to work as much as and as well as my circumstances permit.

As an apostle, I must remember the respect I must always have for the word of God and I will impose a penance on myself each time I may neglect to do so. Since an apostle is responsible for bringing the orders of God to men, he must bring them in a way that they will accept them; therefore, this truth must always guide me in the manner I conduct myself with others whether in public or in private. I will always preach Jesus Christ. But since Jesus Christ was once a child, but then also a man of poverty, king, high priest, and teacher (in a word, someone who served many roles), in making him known, I'll present him in such a way as to make him most easily acceptable. What this means on my part is that I have the most absolute obligation to study him as much as I can and in his entirety.

The apostle has no meaning apart from the one who sends him and he is all the more an apostle inasmuch as he faithfully carries out his commission. This is why I must endeavor to be an obedient apostle. Obedience, in its truest sense, places us directly under the influence of God—and I will only really be an apostle insofar as this influence touches the depths of my being. The apostle loves the one who sends him. But he also loves those to whom he is sent, because his mission is one of love and mercy. I must acquire these dispositions towards all the students entrusted to us and to all those whom I am sent to evangelize.

But the souls I must love most of all will be those whom it is my duty to guide as their superior. So that brings me to my fourth consideration.

#### **4° I AM A RELIGIOUS SUPERIOR**

If it is true that God deigns to permit me to labor for his greater glory, that Our Lord does not consider me unworthy to bring about the extension of his Kingdom in souls, that, over and above all this, he has placed me in charge of this establishment, and called me to be superior of this budding community that we are forming, there are certain convictions that follow that I must make my own above all else.

1° Nobody should know me better than I know myself for, if this is an obligation for me as a simple Christian, how much greater my obligation as superior.

2° Knowing myself as I do—being so aware of my own

shortcomings (which awareness made me hesitate for a long time before undertaking the task I believe myself destined to perform)—I must be wholeheartedly disposed to resign my office and go “back to the ranks” of a simple religious as soon as my brothers express their wish for me to do so or as soon as I myself think somebody else would do better.

3° The good work we are setting out to do depends on certain supernatural notions which are nothing more than the truth of the faith being put into practice. As their superior, it becomes my duty to make these ideas clear to my brothers.

4° Nothing must make us desist from our good work, except from that authority who, on earth, has received from Our Lord the power to bind and loose.

5° Although it’s the least I can do to offer my life for whatever contributes to God’s greater glory, I will offer it every morning between the consecration of the bread and that of the wine so that at this most solemn moment of his Sacrifice Our Lord will be willing to accept my whole and entire self as one belonging to him and not allow me to turn back on myself any longer.

6° May all my prayers, all the few good deeds I perform, and all the self-denial I have the courage to practice, have no other aim than to ask God for the graces we need for such an undertaking.

7° Since prayer is more necessary for me than for anyone else, even though I may be taken up more than others, I will attend, insofar as I possibly can, all community exercises, especially the recitation of the Divine Office. And unless I am ill, I must never go to bed before completing my spiritual exercises, no matter how busy I may have been during the day.

8° My acts of self-denial must be regulated in the light of my role as religious superior. They must be such that they help me fulfill my responsibilities. Thus cutting down on sleep, which would give me extra time, will be preferred to others that might grate on my nerves and lead me to lose my temper. Such even-temperedness is not one of my natural virtues, and I must work hard to acquire it. I will offer up a few acts of self-denial to obtain from God the graces of which not only I, but my brothers, stand in need.

9° As Our Lord was among his apostles, so must I be in the community, as long as I have the honor of being in charge of them.

Now Our Lord, during the three years that he lived in the midst of them on earth, demonstrated the following characteristics:

- a) He went out seeking them and called them.
- b) He never hid from them any of the sacrifices that they would have to make. “Leave the dead to bury their dead” (Lk 9:60).
- c) He was not put off by their appearance.
- d) He instructed them in gradual stages: sometimes before the Jewish crowds, sometimes before the 72, sometimes only before the 12,

sometimes, and most especially, when he took Peter, James, and John aside in private.

e) He always used the language of faith with them.

f) He listened to them with great patience.

g) He slowly prepared them for the revelation that his Kingdom was not of this world and that great suffering lay ahead.

h) He always spoke to them as their Master—but at the same time he reminded them he had come to serve: “*Non veni ministrari sed ministrare*; I have not come to be served but to serve” (Mt 20:28, Mk 10:45).

i) He gave them his full confidence.

j) He delegated his power to them and told them they would perform even greater wonders than he did.

These various facets of Our Lord’s attitude towards his Apostles must be reproduced in my attitude towards my brothers.

1° I must do my utmost to attract them to God. I must facilitate this attraction by doing away with that stiffness and abruptness of my character that people so rightly reproach in me.

2° I must inspire them with a spirit of sacrifice—reminding them constantly that religious life is a life of separation. One must accept this entirely or return to their former way of life. If they choose to remain, they’ve got to live a life of self-sacrifice.

3° Difficult characters poison community life. In thanking Our Lord for having put me in touch with men of such admirable disposition, let me not deceive myself as to the future. One day some thoroughly disagreeable individuals will come knocking on the door. How am I to react? I won’t get rid of them at once assuring myself that what is impossible for men is possible for God. Patience must be my most powerful asset. I must wait as long as Our Lord would have waited. And if he does not correct himself, I will do as Our Lord did to the people at Capernaum—I’ll allow him to leave. While the faults of brothers can, indeed, be an occasion of virtue for the superior, they can also be an occasion of scandal for the community—and if they are, they can nowise be tolerated.

But, here again, I must imitate Our Lord who was never deceived by appearances. For this I must pray very hard for the gift of discernment of spirits.

4° Straightforwardness and openness of heart: these are qualities which must characterize our work—some of the most powerful qualities in the pursuit of our mission. In my dealings with the brothers, I must furnish a constant example of these qualities. I must, however, be careful to distinguish between what ought to be said in public and what ought to be said in private. Words which may help some would harm others. Nor are they all called to the same degree of perfection. So let me learn to combine charity with prudence—bearing in mind before all else the greatest possible good I can do to each individual soul.

5° I must not forget that one of the most efficacious means in the

training of religious is to keep them constantly in the dual presence of themselves and Jesus Christ. Once they are convinced that he is the sole master, and I merely his mouth-piece, once they perceive that my sole aim is to introduce them to the upper realm of divine reality, it will become easier for them to accept what I have to say, and derive benefit from it, no matter how severely I may have expressed myself.

6° Although men stand in less need of a “shoulder to cry on,” it remains true that many a spiritual sickness is cured simply by patient and sympathetic listening. I expect brothers to give me their absolute confidence. But how can I hope to obtain it unless I am prepared to lend a kindly ear when they come to me with their troubles—when they consult me about those interior trials which are part and parcel of progress in the inner life?

7° It is only by gradual stages that I stand a chance of training those who have yet to attain entirely that poverty of spirit, that death to self, without which they will never become true religious. It is especially in regard to their weakness that I must exercise understanding and patience. Since religious life consists in a real crucifixion, am I to be surprised that those who wish to embrace it should experience, at the moment of sacrifice, the kind of agony our Savior endured?

8° Our Lord always spoke with authority to his Apostles; yet he washed their feet. Thus must I constantly endeavor to render my brothers all those services whereby I attract them to God and convince them of my own good will towards them. But as regards my responsibility as Superior, I must never forget that it is I who will have to render an account of them before God. I must, therefore, retain my independence, fixing my eyes on the object in view, despite the many obstacles strewn across the path.

9° My chief concern must surely be a spirit of unity. Unity cannot subsist without mutual trust. I must give them my full confidence, and I must teach them to appreciate it as much as possible. I must impress upon them that there is nothing so detestable as secretiveness. Mutual trust, based on mutual esteem, adds so much to our moral stature. Yes, I must constantly endeavor to increase the moral stature of my brothers in the realm of faith and help them become great servants of Jesus Christ, not leading to pride, but rooted in carrying out God’s law.

10° Last, but not least, I must not cling jealously to my authority. I mustn’t do myself what I can get them to do instead. The men who do the work matter more than the work itself...and the work itself must in every detail be summarized in Jesus Christ: “*Instaurare omnia in Christo*; to re-establish all things in Christ” (Eph 1:10).

In order to do all this:

I must remember that, as a son of Adam, I am condemned to work. As a son of Jesus Christ, my work atones for my sins, as long as I raise it up by a sentiment of duty.

As a priest, I belong to myself no longer, but to Jesus Christ.

As a religious, I have set my feet on the road to perfection, along which road I must continually advance.

As a superior, my personal sanctification cannot be realized unless I bring about the sanctification of that community to which I belong.

To put it “in a nut shell,” I must become a saint—and this I shall never become otherwise than by reproducing the life of Jesus Christ in my own.

So I must place myself under the following obligations:

1° To stick to the community timetable as far as I can, despite my being continually called away.

2° Never to let a day pass without having prayed as much as the rest of the community.

3° Never to give myself more than six hours’ sleep.

4° To make acts of adoration to Our Lord dwelling within me.

5° To remain as much as I can in the Presence of God.

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*Personal Reflection*

*(between 1845 and 1850)*

I have taken vows of poverty, chastity, obedience and zeal for the salvation of souls. How do I intend to fulfill these obligations?

1° Poverty. I renounce the ownership of whatever may belong to me, in the sense of making no further use of it save for God’s glory. Whether or not I am to leave some of it, or none of it at all, to members of my family, will depend on the wisdom of those I intend to consult. I resolve to live poorly with regard to clothes, food, daily expenses—without, however, doing anything which may give the impression that I have gone too far. And I am going to do my best to waste as little time as possible.

2° Chastity. All I have to do is to renew my vow of subdiaconate<sup>42</sup>, remembering, however, that my religious vow adds to the gravity of the obligation.

3° Obedience. Let this express itself in my life by my observing the Rule as precisely as I can, by the example that I will be obliged to give as a result, and by the way I must exercise humility in all that I do. Let these be the means of my edifying my brothers at every possible opportunity and of tracing the path they themselves will have to follow.

4° By the vow to devote myself to the extension of the Kingdom of Jesus Christ. By this vow I will dedicate myself specially to bringing about the Kingdom of Our Divine Master over souls: first over the souls of my brothers, then over those of the young people entrusted to us.

5° I will devote myself entirely to the running of the Congregation—until such time as my legitimate superiors strictly forbid me to concern

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<sup>42</sup> In d’Alzon’s day, and right up to Vatican II, a young man took a vow of celibacy when he was ordained subdeacon.

myself with it any more.

(between 1845 and 1850)

What is God asking from me especially at this stage? It is to honor the spirit of Jesus Christ by imitating him whether in his public ministry or in the time between the Resurrection and the Ascension—which time was spent training and enlightening his Apostles by his patience, his words, his miracles, his love, and his peace.

I must endeavor to radiate calmly the kindness of Christ, his openness of heart, straightforwardness, and his great generosity—and I must, in all this, be very firm but very gentle.

(between 1845 and 1850)

#### A Study Program

I intend to go over my studies again, sticking to my previous plan, I will pursue them historically. I will study the Truth under its threefold aspect of Theology, Philosophy and Morals, in their historical framework.

I will begin by the *Discourse on Universal History*<sup>43</sup>, then St. Augustine's *City of God*—finally Rohrbacher's *History of the Church*<sup>44</sup>.

Then I will read through the Bible and its commentaries.

I will consult the historical works of...[?], the *History of Philosophy* by Gerando<sup>45</sup>—that of Brucker<sup>46</sup>—*The Symbolics*, by Kreutzer<sup>47</sup>...I will make a special study of Plato and Aristotle.

I will read Titus Livius—Xenophon—Herodotus—Plutarch's *Lives*.

Then, as I read through the *History of the Church*, I will also read

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<sup>43</sup> by Bishop Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet

<sup>44</sup> Abbé René-François Rohrabacher (1789-1856) was a French priest and historian. He was, for a time, a disciple of la Mennais. He was the author of the *Histoire universelle de l'Eglise*.

<sup>45</sup> Joseph Marie, baron de Gérando (1772-1842), was a French jurist and philosopher. He is most remembered for his 1804 book *Histoire comparée des systèmes de philosophie, considérés relativement aux principes des connaissances humaines* (*Comparative History of philosophical systems, considered in relation to the principles of human knowledge*) as well as his 1820 study of benevolent activity, *Le visiteur du pauvre* (*The visitor to the poor*). He influenced Henry David Thoreau, Margaret Fuller, and especially Ralph Waldo Emerson who used his philosophical framework extensively in support of his own first book *Nature*.

<sup>46</sup> Raymond-Philippe-Auguste Brucker (1800-1875) was a French journalist and convert to Catholicism, a professor of philosophy and director of the St. Francis Xavier Society.

<sup>47</sup> Georg Friedrich Creuzer (1771 – 1858) was a German philologist and archaeologist. He was appointed professor at Marburg, and two years later professor of philology and ancient history at Heidelberg. He held the latter position for nearly forty-five years. Creuzer's first and most famous work was his *Symbolik und Mythologie der alten Völker, besonders der Griechen*.

those Fathers of the Church whose lives coincide with each particular period—the principal histories of great events and of great nations.

I will continue with the Middle Ages—the struggles between spiritual and temporal power, the philosophical movements, and St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Bonaventure will draw my particular attention. I will examine the roots of the Reformation.

I must also study the history of Monastic Orders. At this point things begin to open up. I will make a comparative study of the attacks on the Church by various kings—the sectarian wars—the Age of the Philosophers (the Enlightenment)...It all combines to solve intriguing problems. It helps to explain the present—it sheds a light on the future.

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*January 2, 1846*

**New Year Resolutions**

My three resolutions for the coming year are:

1° To become more even tempered; 2° To acquire a deeper spiritual outlook in my everyday life; 3° To abandon myself unconditionally to whatever God's plans may be for me.

Let me add that I tremble more, day by day, at the thought of my own incapacity. So how am I to account for this kind of enthusiasm that I am able to inspire in certain individuals who so admirably present themselves? I end up figuring that they're making a mistake and once the truth comes to light, they may well repulse me with a contempt equal to the esteem in which they, mistakenly, hold me now.

*The Practice of Poverty*

*(to Sr. Marie-Augustine Bevier<sup>48</sup>)*

**January 5, 1846**

...Would you like to know how I am knuckling down to a life of poverty as a future religious ought? I have been making my own bed for some time; but the day before yesterday I moved into a new cell. I swept it—not at all well, but I did my best. Today I had pitchers and buckets placed in the corridor. The novices who live with me, or soon will, must get used to following the example you have been giving us for so long—their only servants must be their own fingers!

Need I tell you, these poor fingers provoke infinite compassion! I have a talent for flaying mine each time I tuck the blankets under my straw mattress! Please teach me how to do these things without making too much of a mess of myself.

Although I am not sure whether all my novices will remain, I cannot

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<sup>48</sup> One of Marie-Eugénie's first companions, director of a boarding school and director of specialized studies

help being struck by their fervor; it makes me take a good hard look at myself! They are so docile, so obedient, so full of good will. In fact, I am deeply impressed by them. The only thing I fail to understand is how Providence could possibly have arranged for me to be the captain of such a wonderful crew...

*January 27, 1846*

*(to Mother Marie-Eugénie)*

**My method as a superior**

...May I add that my sons are doing better and better. I don't push them, but I do stop them from sliding backwards, once they themselves have taken up a good resolution or practice. I make their progress depend on their own zeal. This gives me a powerful hold on them, by permitting me to insist on what they themselves began by demanding.

*February 14, 1846*

*(to Mother Marie-Eugénie)*

**Life of Faith**

...For the past few days three main thoughts have really impressed me.

1° I seem to have come to, not only a better understanding, but a deeper experience of what the life of faith is.

2° I have really been struck by the resemblance those of us who dedicate ourselves to the salvation of souls must bear to Jesus Christ. It is a state of service, love, and authority.

3° I long to dedicate my very body to Jesus Christ so that he might turn it into the instrument of penance and sanctification he has in mind. But I have not always been faithful to this disposition. I must reacquire it—the thought keeps on coming back during Mass and Communion. I am more easily recollected during mental prayer, without grand considerations, but I do find myself in a state of total gift of my being to God. The urge to imitate Our Lord in his dealings with souls was inspired, above all else, by reading *A Treatise on the Duties of Superiors*, by Monsieur de Bérulle<sup>49</sup>.

*April 29, 1846*

*(to Mother Marie-Eugénie)*

**Spiritual Outlook**

...It seems to me that I am experiencing some desire to improve myself. And it seems to me more and more evident that living in this house is bringing down abundant blessings on your poor father. I have returned to my prayers and community life with great zest. Only I don't think I ought to undertake anything extraordinary for the time being. What I need just now

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<sup>49</sup> Cardinal Pierre de Bérulle (1575-1629), a diplomat and spiritual writer who tried to reintroduce the Reformed Carmelites to France and then the Oratory.



is as much peace as I can get—and peace, they say, is to be founded on strength; *pax in virtute* (Ps 121:7 Vulgate). God, it seems to me, is calling me to a far deeper spiritual outlook—and a far greater surrender to his ways, whatever they may be. I surrender to him as far as I can get myself to do so, repeating over and over again in my prayer: “*Domine, quid vis ut faciam*; Lord, what do you wish me to do?” (Acts 9:6). To sum up, I am beginning to notice that good seed has been sown in my heart, without my knowledge. So it is imperative for me to work at, and develop, these poor little virtues of mine, as insignificant as blades of grass whose tiny green shoots are beginning to emerge from a soil which is powdery and dry.

May 2, 1846

(to Mother Marie-Eugénie)

**Trust in God**

This morning I prayed to Our Lord very hard. I often get the impression that greater and greater graces are being granted to me here. I have been greatly fortified by the thought of all St. Athanasius had to suffer for the Church. It seems to me that I am now firmly resolved to abandon myself entirely to whatever Our Lord demands of me. I even feel I am on the best of terms with him for the time being. I do suffer from occasional, and involuntary, distractions in my prayer. I do, nevertheless, feel I am praying ardently that whatever Our Lord wishes of me should come to pass.

May 4, 1846

(to Mother Marie-Eugénie)

**Taking things up once again energetically**

...Yesterday morning, at the capitular gathering of my novices, I made them proclaim their faults. I then made a few serious observations on the spirit of charity, zeal, unity, mortification, and reliability. Then I told them I was facing the future of our good work with three main feelings: sorrow, confidence and courage. What made me sad, I told them, were the disappointments necessarily in store. But what filled me with confidence was the ever increasing and unshakable conviction that God willed our good work and what gave me courage was the feeling that, with God’s help, I would have sufficient energy to deal with anything whatsoever. I spoke on this theme passionately and convincingly—and I think they were impressed.

At the gathering of the Third Order I adopted a similar approach. I was, I told them, filled with joy at the outcome of my efforts. I had gone away and left them for a time—just as an artist or a sculptor would stand at a certain distance from his handiwork, in order to perceive its shortcomings. Shortcomings I had, indeed, found—but not so serious as I had feared at first. I was pleased with what had been achieved. Its success filled me with a fatherly feeling towards them—a combination of affection and authority. I

intended to go on feeling fatherly since I was, after all, God's ambassador to them—and from him all fatherhood derives. These words, and what I added on the same theme, may have seemed a bit much to certain individuals, but the Tertiaries who actually attended the gathering thought they were singularly mild in comparison with what I had told them that morning.

I am trying to pray very hard, and to attach myself as closely as I can to Our Lord and the Blessed Virgin, for I must tell you I feel I am enjoying in this regard the fruit of all those Masses I offered at Our Lady of Victories. I could never have believed I loved the Blessed Virgin so much! It is becoming easier for me to remain recollected. I do have distractions. But I also experience "impetuosity in prayer" (I can think of no better expression) in the course of which "impetuosity" I feel I am handing myself over to Our Lord with no bars hold. My Masses are being said better. I feel I am being lifted gently but forcibly to a world where Our Lord is drawing me in order to live a new life....

July 12, 1846

(to Most Rev. Cart, bishop of Nimes)

#### **An Overview of the New Religious Order**

Your Excellency,

...You have asked me to explain in writing how I envisage the good work I propose to undertake. I think I can summarize it in very few words. I propose, above all, to bring about God's glory and our sanctification, by saving souls within the framework of education. Since, however, other works have already been established with the same end in view, I do stand in need of some particular motivation to seek authorization for this one. I have two. First of all, because other Religious Orders, having undertaken a similar apostolate, have, it seems to me, come up against almost insuperable difficulties. These difficulties must be overcome—and so, like St. Paul, I propose to step into the breach and "*omnia omnibus factus sum*; become all things to all men," (1 Cor 9:22). Secondly, because the time has come to plunge ourselves once again into what I call the "Christian Spirit," a spirit which seems to be disappearing day by day, like an iceberg floating amid tepid waters—amid the "rose-water" piety of modern times. Yet it is a spirit whose most visible characteristics are to be found in the valiant men, and women too, who have gone before us as founders and foundresses of religious associations. We see it in Cardinal de Bérulle, in Fr. de Condren<sup>50</sup>,

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<sup>50</sup> Charles du Bois de Condren (1588-1641) was a spiritual writer and superior general of the Oratorians.

<sup>51</sup> Abbé Jean-Jaques Olier, founder of the parish of St. Sulpice and of the Sulpicians...a renowned spiritual writer and spiritual director. With Monsieur de Bérulle, he founded the famous seminary of Saint Sulpice in Paris.

in Monsieur Olier<sup>51</sup>, in Blessed Pierre Fourier<sup>52</sup>, in St. Vincent de Paul, in Abbé de Rancé, in Abbé Jean-Baptiste de la Salle. When we read the lives of these wonderful men and compare the way they understood piety in their direction with what passes for piety and direction nowadays, it cannot help but make us stop and wonder.

It would, indeed, be absurd to dish their doctrine out to mere children in all its stark nakedness. But the least we can do is to protect their little heads from the load of theoretical rubbish which so many pious people in our world today are lapping up like so much nonsense. The cross has become both scandal and folly even for lots of Christians who frequent the Sacraments.

What strikes me most is how weak practical faith is becoming among devout people. This type of piety is to the structure of religion what can be likened to that which in a monument leads to the deterioration of the surface of its walls: soon humidity has no problem penetrating it and destroying the cohesive force of the cement. Among the ills that afflict the Church of Jesus Christ, here is one which education can and must repair. But this requires a great spirit of unity. Our educators also need some kind of association. I would say something similar for egoism which we must oppose with an even greater spirit of sacrifice and self-emptying.

*August 30, 1846*

*Personal Reflection*

I am thirty-six today. I am appalled at how useless my life up to now has been. How much wasted time! How many blessings I have left barren! So from now onwards I intend to make a fresh start. I feel God's grace spurring me on. This time, at least, I want to be faithful to him.

What God seems to be asking of me, at the cost of unceasing effort, is:

1° An unlimited trust in his goodness.

2° A deep spiritual outlook in whatever I do—and above all in my judgments and resolutions.

3° Complete self-mastery.

4° An even temper complemented with great kindness.

5° A more sustained resolution to develop a spirit of prayer.

This morning I offered myself up to Our Lord Jesus Christ in union with our Blessed Lady, my Mother, St. Michael the Archangel, Sts. Peter and Paul, St. John the Evangelist, St. Augustine, and St. Rose of Lima whose feast it is today.

*September 8, 1846*

*(to Mother Marie-Eugénie)*

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<sup>51</sup> St. Pierre Fourier (1565-1640), together with Alix Le Clerc, founded the Daughters of the Blessed Virgin Mary and reformed the Canons Regular of St. Augustine.

**Nativity of the Blessed Virgin**

I have been preparing myself for this feast over the past few days<sup>53</sup>. I would have wanted that it be a second birthday for me—this is the thought that has been playing on my mind the most.

In order to make myself worthy of participating in the mystery of Mary's birth, these days I have spent several hours a day in quiet reflection. What struck me most was the necessity of unlimited devotedness...and of a very delicate conscience.

*September 25, 1846*

*(to Mother Marie-Eugénie)*

**Being Amenable to God**

For some time I seem to have become more amenable to God's influence. Please God, this will not only last but increase.

*November 17, 1846*

*(to Mother Marie-Eugénie)*

**Seeking Greater Graces**

The other day I read these words of Bossuet<sup>54</sup> which struck me: "Never cease seeking greater graces, despite your constant infidelity." It is one of those sayings that deserves to be included in the Gospel itself, since it represents such a wonderful commentary on it.

*December 12, 1846*

*(to Mother Marie-Eugénie)*

**Imitating the Lamb of God**

One of the prayers I feel most inclined to repeat is this: "*Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi, dona nobis pacem*; Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world—grant us peace."

How I long to be, as much as it depends on me, a living copy and representative of this Lamb of God! How I long to wash away—if not by shedding my blood on the Cross, then at least by the loving embrace of my interior trials—whatever is disordered around me.

*January 27, 1847*

*(to Mother Marie-Eugénie)*

**Governing by Prayer**

... You have no idea how I sympathize with you in what you have to put up with from certain characters. O Yes, I know how it feels. You would laugh if you caught me on my own, like this morning—if you caught me in

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<sup>53</sup> Fr. d'Alzon renews the vows he has already taken. He adds that of devoting himself wholeheartedly to Mother Marie-Eugénie's own sanctification.

<sup>54</sup> Bishop Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet (1627-1704) was a renowned French bishop, preacher, theologian, and writer.

one of my cantankerous moods, brought on by the cantankerous moods of those I have to live with. Thank God others seldom notice. I think it is impossible for any superior to govern her house smoothly...unless she governs it by prayer.

*January 28, 1847*

*(to Mother Marie-Eugénie)*

**What I love in Jesus Christ**

...Being ill has allowed me to rest a little and given me some personal time. I've taken advantage of it to reflect and to take a resolution to surrender myself entirely to God. In the *Life of St. Catherine of Siena*, by Monsieur Chavin<sup>55</sup>, which I have been reading, he speaks of many things, even of St. Catherine, and it has done me good. Why are you not more like this admirable virgin? And what about me, alas!—Why do I not share her generosity and her burning love for the blood of Jesus Christ? But it seems to me that what I love about Jesus Christ is the whole Jesus Christ, God and Man...and as the God-Man, our priest, our intercessor, our victim...

*April 3, 1847*

*(to Mother Marie-Eugénie)*

**In the Confessional**

I will have to give two hundred absolutions before I go to bed tonight—what a prospect! Please pray for me not to damn myself in trying to save others. Tomorrow four thousand men will do their Easter duty here,...wonderful for a town of 30,000 Catholics...

....A quarter to midnight, and I've just finished my confessions. I admire these people who came. I was doing them at the rate of twenty five per hour—and they waited with exemplary patience. Only I'm a little scared for myself. Fortunately, Our Lord tells us: "*Beati misericordes*; Blessed are the merciful" (Mt 5:7). I am now going to chapel to recite Matins with our small community who are just getting up. Good night and Good morning!

*June 4, 1847*

*(to Mother Marie-Eugénie)*

**Roman Breviary**

....I have good news for you! I have received permission—for myself, the other priests of the Assumption, and our postulants—to recite the Roman Office<sup>56</sup>. Fr. Jelowicki<sup>57</sup> writes that the Holy Father, in

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<sup>55</sup> Abbé François-Emile Chavin de Malan (?-1856) was a French priest who wrote numerous biographies of saints and prominent Church figures.

<sup>56</sup> In those days each French diocese had its own form of the Divine Office.

<sup>57</sup> Alexandre Jelowicki (1804-1877) was a Polish Resurrectionist priest, a writer, editor, and preacher.

according this permission, sends the whole community his most gracious and heartfelt blessing, “In granting you the favor of reciting the same Office as the clergy of the Eternal City,” he continues, “the Holy Father referred to you in the most glowing and flattering terms. I know this fine priest, he said to his attendant secretary, and I grant him this favor with all my heart. Tell him he will always find in me a friend to second his saintly ambitions and his works. Let him ask—and he will receive”<sup>58</sup>.

...I had wanted at one time to read the *Treatise on Self-Abnegation*, by Monsieur de Bérulle. I have to admit I didn’t like it—in fact, I am getting to like Monsieur de Bérulle less and less. He is too cut and dried. I’ve gone back to Bossuet—and St. Francis de Sales. As for Fénelon<sup>59</sup>, my distaste for him increases in that I find him a poor guide.

September 8, 1847

(to Mother Marie-Eugénie)

#### Love for the Church

Yesterday I prayed...for that vigorous love for the Church which was upheld by St. Gregory VII<sup>60</sup> whose feast day we celebrate<sup>61</sup> in the midst of severe trials, and enabled him to accomplish the task for which he was chosen by Divine Providence.

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## Retreat Made at Chalais, 1847

*September 21.*—What Our Lord seems to be asking of me above all is complete and utter dependence on him and his grace, whether for my personal sanctification or for the good of souls and for the glory of God. I must be an instrument of Jesus Christ. I must allow him complete mastery over me, always and everywhere. Let me take care never to forget this fundamental principle.

*September 22.*—It seems Our Lord is inviting me to approach him, guided by a simple sentiment of love that will guide me, provided I abandon myself entirely to it. I must then endeavor to refer every single action of my life thereto, forcing me to perform it as perfectly as I possibly can—but without troubling myself about which course to pursue when faced with two options, and unable to decide which of the two would be preferable.

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<sup>58</sup> This was Pope Pius IX – Fr. d’Alzon’s lifelong friend and supporter.

<sup>59</sup> Bishop Francois de Salignac de La Mothe Fénelon (1651-1715) was a churchman, writer and professor, arch-bishop of Cambrai. He was involved in the quietism controversy, opposed Bossuet, and was eventually condemned.

<sup>60</sup> Pope: 1073-1085, also known as St. Hildebrand.

<sup>61</sup> It’s now celebrated on May 25.

I must look upon those I love solely through the heart of Jesus Christ, that is to say, in the light of his love, loving them because he wants me to love and as much as he wishes me to love them.

I have been deeply struck by these words of Our Lord to St. Catherine of Siena: "I am the one who is, and you are the one who is not."

What a lot of time wasted by allowing my mind to wander, seeking my own satisfaction or the love of compliments! How many works there were where I could have assisted Our Lord, because he wanted me to be his collaborator! And I turned down all these opportunities of sanctifying myself.

Wouldn't I do well to make two full retreats every year, and a day's retreat every month?

*September 23.*—God seems to be showing me that, with the help of his grace, being able to do something means intending to do it. And once I have become attached to his will, nothing can detach me as far as he is concerned; any detachment must necessarily come from me. I must also reflect seriously on my attitude towards my parents and the way I must treat them as a religious. Have I let myself go a bit much in this respect?

I have also given some serious thought to Sister Marie-Eugénie. How ought I to treat her? It seems to me she is being tempted, so I must trust my own judgment rather than hers. Yes, she is being tempted by a very subtle form of pride—after all she is seeking her own self-satisfaction.

If I want to enter into the mind of Jesus Christ, I must remember what he said: "*Ignem veni mittere in terram, et quid volo nisi ut accendatur*; I have come to set fire to the earth—and what else do I wish, save that it be kindled?" (Lk 12:49), But the fire he came to kindle is not yet universal, so I must ask myself to what extent he wishes I myself carry this flame.

*September 24.*—Feast of Our Lady of Mercy. I prayed to the Blessed Virgin that, since there were no longer any religious in France devoting themselves to the ransom of captives, she would obtain for me, in my work of ransoming souls from their captivity of error, the same graces as she obtained in the past for those who delivered themselves up to physical captivity in order to ransom their brothers from chains.

I also promised Our Lord to allow myself to be guided by his love, surrendering myself to him and accepting all the consequences of this commitment.

*September 25.*—How guilty I have been as regards lack of charity! How often have my judgments been, not only rash, but based on envy! How easily have I believed ill of others and communicated such to others! In this respect Our Lord insists on my becoming merciful towards sinners in the same way he was. Love and compassion: this is what I need most.

Our Lord is once more asking me to acquire a deep sense of peace and a deep inner calm to enable me to listen to his voice, however softly he may speak, and to slow down in order to leave the door open for his divine intervention.

*September 26.*—I am frightened by my own nothingness, which I am beginning to perceive more clearly. It's not so much what I see in myself, as what I think about myself. I have implored Our Lord over and over again to come and dwell within me.

*September 27.*—It is amazing how pleased God is with the little I know and the little I do, even though I am trying to do my best. For what proportion is there between what I am and what he is entitled to? How can he, who is infinitely perfect, deign to so much as notice me in my nothingness, and, still more, in the ugliness of my soul?

One of my principal resolutions will be to be patient with myself, because God himself is patient with my wretchedness. I feel a great longing to live by faith—and this is what I shall ask of Our Lord.

*September 28.*—To expect everything—to be prepared for everything—to accept everything it pleases God to send me in the way of trials and the Cross. To say repeatedly to Our Lord: "*Tu in me, et ego in te*; As you are in me and I in you" (Jn 17:21).

*September 29.*; My Resolutions:

1° To spend as much time as I can in prayer at the feet of Jesus Christ.

2° To practice being his instrument in all that I do.

3° To do my utmost to manifest him in all the actions of my life.

4° To be guided above all by his love.

5° To be very patient with myself and everybody else, just as Jesus Christ is patient with me. And work as hard as I can in practicing self-control.

6° To be assiduous in reciting my breviary. To practice greater devotion to my own patron saints and those of our association.

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*November 4, 1847*

*Personal Reflection*

It is by becoming more deeply recollected, more and more conscious of God's presence, that I will acquire the proper attitude towards the different persons with whom I come into contact. I have much progress to make and energy to exert in this respect, but for me, my exterior behavior will always have to be a reflection of the interior state of my soul.

I would also have to take a serious look at the way I regard things for which I am responsible and the works entrusted to me. I don't think about them sufficiently in God's presence. I don't pray about them sufficiently. I must give the matter serious thought, because I have been negligent here.

For some time past, my mental prayer has become very careless. I claim to have surrendered myself to God once and for all, and thought that would do. But I'm afraid it won't at all. This gift of self must be renewed often and constantly preserved by repeated acts of self-surrender.



I do not think I am practicing much self-denial. Without doing anything really unusual, I am sure I could do a lot more that I am doing.

And I must try to persevere in cultivating the sentiment of my utter dependence on God.

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*December 5, 1847*

*(to Mother Marie-Eugénie)*

**Feeling of Helplessness**

I am becoming more and more overwhelmed by the profound conviction of my own helplessness, of my utter incapability. I am trying hard to offer it all up to Our Lord. He is much more merciful than men. In his great kindness, he can make up for their uselessness by his divine grace. He can produce good from nothingness—and even from evil. It is this thought alone which keeps me going and when I feel a little down, I can then willingly take up my burden and try to carry my cross as gently as possible, instead of dragging it along, as I have done so often and so badly.

*July 9, 1848*

*(to Mother Marie-Eugénie)*

**After the Turmoil of the Revolution (of 1848)**

I must be very careful not to become overly involved in politics. Something tells me I should stay aloof especially this past week which I have spent in quasi isolation, shut up in my room nearly all day, reading the life of Monsieur Olier. Some things in it were never meant for me—others are “right up my street”—and this provides much food for thought. I now understand why I have done so little good over the past year. Would it not be much better for me to limit myself to my college, and allow politics to take their course? Does all this denote an unstable character? Or is it, as I believe, a genuine perception of God’s will? It is hard for me to tell.

*September 22, 1848*

*(to Mother Marie-Eugénie)*

**Financial Worries**

...In times like ours when money means everything, those of us who wish to belong to God have to endure the martyrdom of gold and silver. It is our way of being poor but respectable!

What with all this, I get out of sorts at times. Let me leave off for today. Tomorrow or the next day I may be back in harness once again.

*November 20, 1848*

*(to Mother Marie-Eugénie)*

**Two-Day Retreat**

...I am going into retreat for a couple of days—to ask the Blessed

Virgin to offer me to God.... Today, exactly fifteen years ago, I embarked at Marseille on my way to Rome. God grant that my second journey towards him may be quicker than my first! Where will I be in fifteen years' time?

*December 5, 1848*

*(to Mother Marie-Eugénie)*

**A New Incarnation of Jesus Christ**

You dread spiritual direction—and will always dread it, as long as you remain attached to your “*me*.” But is this not, precisely, what must be destroyed, and replaced by the meek and humble humanity of Our Lord, of whom we each ought to become a re-incarnation? It is not good enough to rejoice in God being who he is, as you would like to content yourself; we must learn to rejoice in what God wishes to do in us—as long as we let him.

*April 19, 1849*

*(to Mother Marie-Eugénie)*

**Stripping Myself**

God wishes me to belong to him. So not only must I give myself to him—but I must strip myself of whatever stands in the way between him and me. Perhaps one day I will succeed in doing so.

*September 12, 1849*

*(to Mother Marie-Eugénie)*

**Meditating on the New Testament**

These days I am going through my New Testament. It is from there that I am doing my meditations...not expecting to assimilate it fully, but stopping here and there at what “rings a bell,” then digging as deep as I can.

*February 26, 1850*

*(to Mother Marie-Eugénie)*

**Instilling the Mind of Christ**

I must speak to you, not only now and then but always, of how necessary it is for this poor little enterprise known as the Assumption to be penetrated through and through with the spirit of Jesus Christ. What are we doing to it, I ask you, by allowing it to become imbued with our own spirit? Must it assimilate our defects, our grumbles, our too human ideas? Is it for this that people have entrusted us with the responsibility for their sanctification and salvation? Alas, we have borne this responsibility for years—and what good have we to show for it? Do you remember the detailed information you gave me about your new recruits? I could send you a similar catalogue about mine. But where do we find in all these statistics a complete and loving reproduction of the life of Our Lord in Christians who are seeking perfection? I tell you, all this is causing me a great deal of

worry. If, on the one hand, we must not give way to discouragement, it is, nevertheless, high time for you and me to reset our sights, and start serious work on what our true aim must be: Jesus known and glorified in souls.

March 11, 1850

(to Mother Marie-Eugénie)

**Praying More**

God is imploring me with such insistence to seek refuge in the divine heart of his Son that I wonder if I am not guilty of not giving more time to prayer. I do hope, however, that one day I will belong entirely to God.

April 21, 1850

(to Mother Marie-Eugénie)

**My Duty**

I do feel God is calling me—but I am responding slowly to his appeal. For me everything is an obstacle. When I consider myself with all my troubles, with all these violent emotions whereby my vanity is wounded by the least contrariety, it makes me wonder whether I will ever be of any use to God. In addition to which my health is not too good. So I want to pray to the Blessed Virgin, asking her to make sure that, during this month of May, I perform absolutely all my spiritual exercises without seeking the least dispensation. Like this I shall know whether God wishes me to address the question of my health or not. If I am still feeling unwell by the end of the month, it will be a sure sign that I've got to take things easy. If, however, by this time I am feeling well, then it will be an equally sure sign for me to move on. Because I have to admit that all these exemptions I am allowing myself are playing havoc with the Rule—and the effect on the others could not be more disastrous. So I wish I knew whether God wants me to relax—thereby giving an example only too easy for the others to imitate—or whether, on the contrary, I must fulfill everything the Rule prescribes. So, I beg of you, please pray very hard to Our Lord and the Holy Virgin all through this month of May, that I may clearly perceive what is best for me to do.

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**Formula of Religious Profession 1850<sup>62</sup>**

*Ego Emmanuel Maria Joseph Mauritius Daudé d'Alzon, professionem facio et promitto omnipotenti Deo coram ejus virgine matre in coelos assumpta, et universa coelisti curia ac omnibus circumstantibus,*

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<sup>62</sup> See also letter B10728 to Mother Marie-Eugénie.

*paupertatem, castitatem, et obedientiam, et secundum eam peculiarem curam circa juventutis eruditionem.*

*Insuper specialiter promitto me aucturum pro viribus regnum Domini nostri Jesu Christi apud animas tam christianorum quam infidelium.*

*Nemausi in nocte natali Domini nostri Jesu Christi, anno millesimo octingentesimo quinquagesimo.*

I, Emmanuel Marie Joseph Maurice Daudé d'Alzon, make profession and promise Almighty God—in the presence of his Virgin Mother assumed into heaven—in the presence of the entire heavenly host—and of all those gathered here—poverty, chastity and obedience—and to devote myself especially to the instruction of youth.

In addition to which I make a special promise that I will do my utmost to bring about the extension of the Kingdom of Our Lord Jesus Christ in the souls of both the faithful and unbelievers.

Given at Nîmes on the night of Christ's Nativity.

A.D. MDCCCL.

E. d'Alzon

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### III. THE YEARS OF TRIAL: 1851-1858

*September 15, 1851*

*(to Mother Marie-Eugénie)*

#### **Temptations of Hatred and Contempt**

Sometimes it seems to me that you have been asking God to make me experience those feelings of hatred and contempt for certain individuals which you tell me have been your lot. For the past fortnight I have been feeling just the same. The retreat did something to help me overcome these feelings, but they returned, and this morning I had to go to confession before I could say Mass. The refusal I received regarding Abbé Bastien<sup>63</sup>, and the surrounding circumstances, filled me with such indignation and disgust that I am still at bursting point, liable to explode at any moment. I am telling you this, because I finally feel I'm getting control of myself.

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<sup>63</sup> Rev. Claude-Hippolyte Bastien (1822-1873) was a priest in the diocese on Nimes who was interested in the Assumptionists but who was refused permission by Bishop Cart.

*April 12, 1851*

*(to Mother Marie-Eugénie)*

**Giving Birth to Souls**

Today is the feast of Our Lady's Compassion<sup>64</sup>. I am praying to the Holy Virgin with sorrow in my heart. May she teach me how to give birth to souls as she was able under her title as Mother of all Christians.

*September 17, 1851*

*(to Mother Marie-Eugénie)*

**Standing Beneath the Cross**

I have asked Our Lady of the Seven Sorrows to teach both you and me how to stand beneath the cross of her Son with resignation, obedience and love.

*January 20, 1852*

*(to Mother Marie-Eugénie)*

**Money Problems**

This is my day of retreat. I am praying very hard to the Blessed Virgin. I reproach myself with having honored her so little. It seems to me I could have done so all the more without ever regretting it. I feel I am totally disposed to accept God's will—but it does hurt. I am far from complaining. Sorrow and pain—all of this is good for us when we offer them up to God in peace and resignation.

*February 11, 1852*

*(to Mother Marie-Eugénie)*

**A Wounded Healer**

God wishes us to accomplish his work in the midst of sorrow. This morning I thoroughly placed myself as an instrument in his hands. Let him use me, break me, or set me aside. It seems to me that I really want to belong to him.

*May 10, 1852*

*(to Mother Marie-Therese de Commarque)*

**Religious Life Is Sanctification**

Religious life is not liberation from suffering; it is becoming holy through it.

*May 18, 1852*

*(to Ms. Pelissier)*

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<sup>64</sup> The Friday before Good Friday, according to the old calendar.

**To Love Suffering**

We cannot become perfect unless we love suffering.

*July 18, 1852*

*(to Mother Marie-Eugénie)*

**Holiness**

Holiness is to be found in lovingly practicing perfect obedience.

*October 11, 1852*

*(to Mother Marie-Eugénie)*

**A Child of the Blessed Virgin**

I feel taken up with great love for the Blessed Virgin. It seems to me that I am like a child cuddled in her arms.

*October 24, 1852*

*(to Mother Marie-Eugénie)*

**Intimacy with the Blessed Virgin**

I feel I am getting on with the Blessed Virgin better and better. Dare I say we are now on intimate terms?

*April 11, 1853*

*(to Mother Marie-Eugénie)*

**Devotion to the Holy Spirit**

What makes us so unworthy in God's sight is that we don't love enough and we do not turn our actions into acts of love. And the reason for our not turning our actions into acts of love is because we don't know how to enter into relationship with that very substance of love, that is the Holy Spirit. I most greatly reproach myself for my lack of devotion to the Holy Spirit whose temple I am....

This thought has struck me: of what oratorical value was St. Peter's first sermon when he emerged from the Last Supper Room? Let's face it: not much—yet it converted three thousand souls. How?—Because every single word of it was impregnated with the Holy Spirit. So let us take a religious superior like you or me, someone whose very life is of apostolic significance. Why cannot we impregnate ourselves with the power of the Holy Spirit so profoundly that it is seen in whatever we do and say? There is something pushing me to enter into this state of dependence on the Spirit of God till the feast of Pentecost...

*April 29, 1853*

*(to Mother Marie-Eugénie)*

**Conversion at Last**

I want to dedicate myself wholly to becoming holy. try to approach this target as best I can and then I fall! I have, however, planned a spiritual offensive for the month of Mary. Please God, something comes of it, at last!

May 8, 1853

(to Mother Marie-Eugénie)

**Mad about the Holy Spirit and about Our Lord**

The month of Mary is working wonders in this establishment. I have become altogether wrapped up in the Holy Spirit—madly in love with him. Yes, let me be mad—mad about him—mad about Our Lord. “*Nos stulti propter Christum*—We are fools for Christ’s sake” (1 Cor 4:10).

May 17, 1853

(to Ms. Pelissier)

**Price of Souls**

Among the things it does me most good to meditate about are the price of souls and Our Lord’s love for them; it really pushes me to greater conversion. When I think of all Our Lord has done for them and all he would do if only he were allowed free access to certain hearts, I feel ready to be taken apart piece by piece in order to be of more help to Our Good Master in his work.

July 6, 1854

(to Mother Marie-Eugénie)

**Novena for Protestants**

I am doing a novena to the Guardian Angels of all the Protestants in the Province of Avignon: that makes 150,000 or 160,000 celestial spirits—quite a number!

September 13, 1853

(to Mother Marie-Eugénie)

**Days of Anguish**

Two days of deep anguish. But why must I undergo these sufferings? It must be because I am getting weaker. It seems to me, however, that today on the eve of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, I have begun to regain strength. It’s not that I am suffering less—but rather that my love of the cross has increased.... So it is with greater love that I accept the cross Our Lord wishes me to bear. Let him be blessed, always and in every circumstance. Let him be blessed, above all, in my wounds, in my humiliations, in my fears, in my periods of dryness...in everything that happens to me, as long as I can glorify him just a little! I even feel happy—yes, even very happy—to be able to suffer. What strikes me forcibly are Our Lord’s words to Ananias about St. Paul: “I will show him how much he

will have to suffer for my name's sake" (Acts 9:16). Truly I find it good to seek God's glory when I feel I can barely go on.

September 19, 1853

(to Mother Marie-Eugénie)

**Our Lady of Seven Sorrows**

We are beginning our retreat tomorrow<sup>65</sup>. It seems to me that Our Lord has graces in store for me. I feel it coming. I must be prepared to allow myself to be shaped as he has it in mind. Yesterday I asked the Blessed Virgin to let me participate in that painful fecundity with which her Son endowed her as he hung on Calvary. Yet, if such be God's will, I must also be prepared to suffer with no visible result.

October 8, 1853

(to Mother Marie-Eugénie)

**Retreat's End**

I have emerged from my retreat, I feel somewhat weaker, somewhat deprived of that rigor brought about by much suffering. Somewhat more lenient towards myself and everybody else—because I believe I felt the strength of Our Lord in so doing. I accept suffering in the name of justice, no more than I deserve. I think I am beginning to accept it with love.

sometime in 1853

(to Mother Marie-Eugénie)

**Trials of Every Sort**

For some time now my motto has been these words of St. James: "*Omne gaudium existimate, fratres carissimi, cum in tentationibus variis incideritis*"; Consider yourselves happy, indeed, my dear brothers, when you encounter trials of every sort" (Jas 1:2).

January 30, 1854

(to Mother Marie-Eugénie)

**Spiritual Progress**

Shall I open my heart to you, my daughter? I am becoming daily more frightened by all the human sentiments I find there. I can clearly envisage that sublime and luminous condition of a soul self-possessed in God's sight—or rather, completely possessed by Jesus Christ. How I wish I were like that! Yet, every day, I slip back into my old self. Am I deceiving myself or not? Day by day I slip and fall. Yet (correct me if I am wrong) I do seem to be making some slight headway.

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<sup>65</sup> The original text reads: "day after tomorrow."



*February 7, 1854*

*(to Mother Marie-Eugénie)*

**Drawn to the Cross**

I feel ever more drawn to the folly of the cross.

*February 15, 1854*

*(to Mother Marie-Eugénie)*

**Love of Our Lord**

It seems to me that, despite my constant infidelity, Our Lord, each day, is gradually taking hold of me more and more. It's a mixture of gravity, earnestness, simplicity, dryness, a loving tenderness with its measure of suffering, self-abandonment, fear, renewal of a spirit of faith...but above all the need to love Jesus Christ and everything he loves for no other reason because he loves it.

If I feel sad and broken, then I love my sadness and brokenness in Jesus Christ—accepting it in so far as he wishes me to accept it—wishing it or not wishing it in conformity with his love meant to purify me. O, if this were nothing more than wishful thinking—nothing more than the parrot-like repetition of something he had heard without understanding a word of it! But it seems to me I am perfectly sincere—all the more so since these feelings didn't come over me all of a sudden and since they cause me great confusion as a result of everything impure that I find deep within my soul—so seemingly incompatible with this dazzling light which God is revealing to me.

This is why I am hesitating to complete the draft of our Constitutions. It's much better for me to wait until I myself have acquired a more solid union with Our Lord and his spirit.

*March 28, 1854*

*(to Mother Marie-Eugénie)*

**Total Abandonment**

I enter into Passiontide with the intention of giving him my hands, my feet, my head and my heart so that he may do whatever he likes with them. I am struck by the feeling of total surrender which Our Lord seems to be asking of me—so that, whatever I do may be his—or, if you prefer, that these plans may be his, not mine.

*May 4, 1854*

*(to Mother Marie-Eugénie)*

**Sufferings**

Our financial affairs are worrying me a bit. However, although I must keep an eye on them, something tells me it is far more important to

keep an eye on the sufferings of Our Lord. Compared with those of the Church, what sufferings can I not bear?

September 14, 1854

(to Mother Marie-Eugénie)

#### Night of Faith

Today God gave me the grace to understand the difference between those who can say: “*Mihi absit gloriari nisi in cruce Domini Nostri Jesu Christi*; God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of Our Lord Jesus Christ” (Gal 6:14) and those who cannot—and further to understand what we will have to suffer before being able to say it with all our heart. I do not believe I have yet reached this culminating point—but I do believe, in all sincerity, that I want to. The “Night of Faith” yawns in front of me like a deep chasm into which I must take a flying leap, holding on to the Cross—accepting all the Cross teaches and all it signifies. Such is my present state of mind. Since it fills me with peace and with a greater love than ever for Our Lord, I yield to the cross as far as I can.

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(Editor’s note: We offer in what follows the contents of a notebook of personal reflections entitled “Some Impressions”)

#### PERSONAL JOURNAL EXTRACTS 1: SOME IMPRESSIONS

September 15, 1854.—*Feast of Our Lady’s Seven Sorrows*. I have asked the Blessed Virgin—in virtue of what she had to suffer as she stood at the foot of the Cross—to obtain for me the grace of giving birth, howsoever painfully God wills it, to our little religious family.

September 22, 1854.; This morning at Mass I experienced the deep feeling of how utterly I depended on God—and as I held the sacred host in my hands, I besought him to accept me too as a victim.

September 24, 1854; (*Feast of Our Lady of Mercy*). I put it to Blessed Virgin that, since the work of ransoming captives from the Muslims was now an anachronism, could she please transfer the appropriate graces to that of ransoming souls held captive in universities.

September 26, 1854.—Our adoration of the Blessed Sacrament (presumably the Forty Hours) has been postponed to a day later. I have asked Our Lord to let me clearly know his will. It seems to me I am destined for humiliation, suffering and death.

It seems to me that, in virtue of my vow of poverty, I must tend this establishment as if I were a servant, not the owner. The property, after all, belongs to God and his Blessed Virgin.

*September 28, 1854.*—Let me recognize and admit that I have not been a saint—neither have I sufficiently urged others to become saints. I feel driven to make my mind up once and for all and to become whatever God wishes me to be. This I promise Our Lord, in union with Blessed Virgin and our holy patrons.

*September 30, 1854.*—“*Egredere de domo tua et cognatione tua.* Leave your country behind you, your kinsfolk and your father’s house” (Gn 12:1). Something is telling me to do likewise. I must be ready to follow Our Lord wherever it pleases him to send me. Never mind the hardship, the troubles, and the sorrow.

*October 1, 1854.*; Today is the Feast of the Holy Rosary<sup>66</sup>. My heart is full of confidence and peace—a peace I must communicate to others. I must imprint the sacred mysteries of Our Lord’s birth, death and resurrection into my very flesh and bones. I have asked the Blessed Virgin to see that it is all accomplished.

*October 2, 1854; (Feast of the Guardian Angels).* I have confided this establishment to our Guardian Angels. My trust in them seems to be growing day by day.

*October 4, 1854; (St. Francis of Assisi).* I have asked St. Francis to give me a great love of poverty—and that affection he so clearly had for every creature.

*October 6, 1854.*; I believe that I have asked Our Lord, from the very bottom of my heart, for the grace to work hard for my own sanctification. How ashamed I am when I think of my past life. How useless it has been. The little good I have been able to do has been spoiled by my unworthy motives. All this upsets me terribly. I hope the Lord will take pity on me.

*October 8, 1854.*; *The Motherhood of the Blessed Virgin*<sup>67</sup>. I have asked Mary to be my mother, the mother of our house, the mother of our work. Above all I have asked her to give me a mother’s heart in my dealings with souls. I came to understand that the two deepest sorrows which Jesus Christ ever suffered were being abandoned by his Father and the thought of the affliction that he was causing in his mother’s heart.

*October 9, 1854.*—Turning my thoughts once again to feast of St. Francis, it seems to me that I must seek my peace, and learn to love my neighbor, in complete poverty of spirit.

If I have nothing, if I am entitled to nothing, then what have I to complain about? This spiritual poverty comprises everything: my senses, my self-esteem, my reputation, my very life. To be poor I must be detached

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<sup>66</sup> It is now celebrated on October 7.

<sup>67</sup> A feast now celebrated on January 1

from all these. Some things irritate me. I must ask Our Lord, the Lamb of God, to give me that meekness wherewith he overcame the world.

*November 17, 1854.*—I have written nothing for more than a month! However, I felt well-disposed on the Feast of All Saints—and it did me good to read about the death of St. Salvius<sup>68</sup>.

Today, on the feast of Gregory the Miracle-Worker, I long to be seized and captured by Our Lord. Mother Superior (presumably Mother Marie-Eugénie) has written me two inspiring letters about her retreat. To adore—to obey—to reduce myself to nothing: three admirable aspirations which stir my heart to its very depths. Let them become a reality in my own life during the coming year.

*December 4, 1854.*—I had wanted to undergo a conversion on the feast of St. John of the Cross<sup>69</sup>. But what have I done about it since?

I had to cancel the retreat I intended to preach to the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. Man proposes—God disposes. In the course of the minor exposition of the Blessed Sacrament recently established at the cathedral, I promised Our Lord to concentrate on my duties of state—that is to say, on my duties as a religious superior. Perhaps for that reason I was unable to preach the retreat I had set my heart on doing. But however incapacitated I may be, I must learn to accept my illness like a saint. I must learn lovingly to submit to whatever misfortunes come my way. So this is the pact. I am delighted at being ill, since Our Lord wishes it so—and with all the love I am capable of, I offer him my miserable little aches and pains, that his Kingdom over souls may be extended.

*December 11, 1854.*—I am more ashamed than ever of the time I've wasted in idle "chit-chat." So this evening let me take the resolution to think about my ministry and nothing else. Perhaps this is the reason why I couldn't preach that Retreat to the St. Vincent de Paul. Whether or not this is the reason, I must henceforth put my hand to the plow.

*January 1, 1855.*; I have never started a new year more earnestly than this one. Will it be the last? I intend to start living the life of a religious again. I intend to get rid of whatever displeases Our Lord about me. I intend to live for him alone.

This morning I prayed for Abraham's faith, Moses' wisdom in

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<sup>68</sup> St. Salvius (d. 584), a native of Albi, Gaul, became a lawyer, then a magistrate, before entering monastic life as a hermit. Later he was elected abbot of a community of hermits and eventually appointed bishop of Albi where he spent the last ten years of his life. He lived simply and gained a reputation for his generosity to the poor and needy. What is most notable about his life as bishop is his opposition together with that of St. Gregory of Tours, at the risk of their lives, to Chilperic I, a pretender to the Merovingian Kingdom who was not only ruthless in seeking the throne, but also promoted Arianism, practiced simony, and sought to control the Church.

<sup>69</sup> Transferred to November 24 and now on December 14.

government, and Elijah's zeal for God's glory. I offered myself to Our Lord, and placed myself under the special protection of the Blessed Virgin. I want there to be something that feels more of a religious about me. I am asking God for the gift of peace—peace within myself and peace for others.

*January 8, 1855.*—The virtues I am setting out to acquire are humility, self-control in eating, a deeper prayer life, and more dignity in my composure. I don't know whether God wants me to pray for good health—all I want is what he wants, as he wants it, and the way he wants it. But if he does want me to pray for it, it seems to me that I ought to obtain it through the Blessed Virgin's intercession. So I am vowing, if I feel perfectly well again by Easter, to make a pilgrimage to Notre Dame de Rochefort<sup>70</sup> by train as far as Avignon—and if I am too tired, I will come back the same way. But the journey between Avignon and Notre Dame de Rochefort will be on foot, both there and back. This vow will be kept between Easter and Pentecost.

*May 27, 1855.*—Today, the feast of Pentecost, I had the powerful feeling that I should move our little congregation in several directions:

- 1° the defense and knowledge of Church guidelines;
- 2° involvement in social work;
- 3° explanation of the duties that Christians under our care must accomplish as well as they can;
- 4° promotion of an intense love for Our Lord, for the Holy Spirit, and for the Blessed Virgin.

*June 2, 1855.*—An Assumptionist religious must acquire two loves which are one and the same love: the love of Jesus Christ hidden in the Eucharist and the love of Jesus Christ manifested in the Church; and these two loves are but one. He must love Mary, the mother of Jesus who is the food of our souls; Mary, mother of Jesus who is the spouse of the Church—and these two loves are, likewise, one.

*June 3, 1855.*—It seems that what Our Lord especially wants is for me to resign from many of my activities, in order to concentrate on what has now become my principal ministry and to jettison whatever stands in the way of our humble little enterprise.

*August 15, 1855; (Feast of Our Lady's Assumption).* It seems that the Blessed Virgin has granted me three great favors:

- 1° that I now understand the mystery of the Assumption as the triumph of Jesus Christ transfigured by the communion of his elect;
- 2° that I have been preaching too much about myself and not enough about Jesus Christ;
- 3° that I must win many more souls by being less sarcastic, less

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<sup>70</sup> Notre Dame de Rochefort is a shrine in the Gard on a promontory, originally built at the time of Charlemagne, dedicated to Our Lady of Grace. It was rebuilt in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and was a site that Fr. d'Alzon often visited with religious and students from Nimes.

irritable, less haughty and standoffish. I must win them over by being patient, humble and even-tempered. These are virtues I haven't got and must acquire.

*February 29, 1856.*—Today, February 29, feast of Our Savior's five wounds<sup>71</sup>, I have consented that my college at Nîmes be closed down. The pain and the humiliation are going to hurt. But I have asked Our Lord to unite them to the pain and humiliation he himself suffered on the Cross .

*June 14.*—“*Vosmetipsos tentate si estis in fide: ipsi vos probate an non cognoscitis vosmetipsos, quia Christus Jesus in vobis est nisi forte reprobati estis; Test yourselves to see if you are still true to the faith. Judge yourselves—and will not your own self-knowledge tell you that Jesus Christ dwells in you unless you are among the reprobate?*” (2 Cor 13:5). What a question! Of course Jesus Christ dwells in me. So I must belong entirely to him—and my soul must be his instrument, just as my body is the instrument of my soul. What life! What union! What perfection and transformation!

*June 16.*—“*Estote ergo imitatores Dei sicut filii carissimi et ambulate in dilectione, sicut et Christus dilexit nos, et tradidit semetipsum pro nobis, oblationem et hostiam Deo, in odorem suavitatis; So let us be imitators of God, like his very dear children and let us walk in his love. Just as Christ loved us, and delivered himself up for us—a pure and fragrant victim offered to God*” (Eph 5:1-2). I cannot imitate Our Lord unless I too turn myself into such a victim?

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*June 12, 1856*

*(to Mother Marie-Eugénie)*

**Life in the presence of Christ**

...On the whole, this stay at Lamalou<sup>72</sup> has done me good. I am referring not only to my health, which seems to have improved considerably, but above all to my spirits. I feel rested and relaxed—and these long hours of solitude speak the necessity of drawing closer and closer to God.

I have been reading the *Imitation of Christ* and the *New Testament*—and that's about all. The *Imitation* has always done me good. As for the *New Testament*, I am finding in it a flavor it had lost for some time—and how glad I am! My love for Jesus Christ and his Church grows steadily day by day. Yesterday I was reading these words of St. Paul: “*Vosmetipsos tentate si estis in fide: ipsi vos probate. An non cognoscitis vosmetipsos, quia Christus Jesus in vobis est nisi forte reprobati estis; Test yourselves to*

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<sup>71</sup> Celebrated on the 28<sup>th</sup> in a non-leap year

<sup>72</sup> A rural establishment in the Hérault that in the 19<sup>th</sup> century became a thermal center for medical cures because of the springs located in the area. Beginning in 1854, with his failing health, d'Alzon would come here frequently. It was here that he composed the *Directory*.

see if you are still true to the faith. Judge yourselves—and will not your own self-knowledge tell you that Jesus Christ dwells in you unless you are among the reprobate?” (2 Cor 13:5). What a terrifying reproach this is to those of us who are losing the sense of the presence of Jesus Christ! On the other hand, what a difference these words make to those who are continually aware of Jesus Christ! So I must resolve to develop this feeling to the utmost, that God is truly at work within me—and I must remind you too of it, my dear daughter, because Jesus Christ is our most precious possession. Oh, if only we could soak ourselves through and through with this life of faith! If only we could long for nothing else but to unite our lives with that of Jesus Christ, and his life with ours. But how can we dwell on these sublime thoughts without feeling thoroughly ashamed for harboring such pettiness, the sources of which are so unworthy? So I am asking God to overwhelm me with the greatness of every action I do that is rooted in Jesus Christ dwelling within me, Christ being to my soul what my soul is to my body.

*October 15, 1856*

**Motherhood of Mary**

The Blessed Virgin granted many graces today on the feast of her motherhood.

*November 2, 1856*

*(to Mother Marie-Eugénie)*

**Victim for the Assumption**

I am becoming more and more preoccupied with the thought of turning myself into a victim—into a victim of the Assumption in the sense of humbly submitting to all others. If I knew such were God’s will, I would ask him to send me a few more of these sufferings which leave an individual incapable of anything but self-annihilation beneath the weight of humiliation and sorrow and the weight of a tremendous love for him who emptied himself and suffered for our sake. Then I begin to wonder if I am worth God’s while to annihilate. So pray for me.

*June 20, 1857*

*(to Mother Marie-Eugénie)*

**Child-like Spirit**

...I believe that in order to rediscover a bit of love and the freshness of first love, it is necessary to turn back to childhood in our relationship with Our Lord. This is what happened to me last night. Having got into bed, I remembered I had forgotten to recite the prayer, “*En! ego*”<sup>73</sup>, applicable,

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<sup>73</sup> The prayer in English goes: “O most loving and sweet Jesus...”—a prayer before the crucifix

as you know, to the souls in purgatory. So I relit my candle, I got up, and recited this prayer before my crucifix. I unhooked the body from the crucifix and took it to bed with me. I assure you this return to childhood did me the world of good.

I did a very long meditation, better than I had done for a long time. I think, by and large, we behave towards the good God as if we were really important people. A little bit of humility, simplicity and self-denial would loosen the heart, and allow God's grace to fill it up with loving tenderness<sup>74</sup>.

October 6, 1857

(to Mother Marie-Eugénie)

#### Accepting God's Will

For the past two days I have been unable to say anything after the Consecration except: "*fiat voluntas tua*; Thy will be done." Whatever God's will might be, I bow to it without knowing where it will lead me. If only I could cease my doubting! I would like to be a saint: I must only be silent. Fortunately, Our Lord himself kept silence. Perhaps I convince myself to imitate him in this way. Meanwhile my nerves are acting up in the craziest way." But it's all beside the point. We must go on working in our Father's vineyard, "*per tribulationes multas et malas*; despite much trouble and anguish" (cf Ps 70:20 Vulgate).

November 26, 1857

(to Mother Marie-Eugénie)

#### Forgetting Ourselves

You must learn to forget yourself and accept everything in life from Our Lord's point of view, worrying as little as possible about what you have to do, but accomplishing everything you do from his point of view. This applies to everything. The good seed is always there. You must cast it abroad in whatever you do, especially in the ordinary things you do because your daughters must be able to take you as a model in the "humdrum" of life, because they will seldom be called upon in their ordinary lives to do anything extraordinary. This implies, it seems to me, a total and very painful crucifixion of our own wretched personality which keeps on attempting to assert itself. This implies a complete surrender of our self to Our Lord so that he may do or not do whatever he wants, with or without us!

And this is what I think I ought to tell you—in the name of Our Lord to whom I have been praying very hard for you over the past few days. I have been very struck by a particular passage in the Gospel. When he knew he was about to die, Our Lord said to his Father: "*Opus consummavi quod*

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<sup>74</sup> On the very next day, June 21, 1857 at Lamalou, Fr. d'Alzon wrote his famous letter on the Crucifix, "My Every-Day Friend" which he sent to Sister Walburga and to the Tertiaries.



*dedisti mihi*; I have finished the work you gave me to do” (Jn 17:4). But what actually had Our Lord done? From the point of view of exterior achievement, nothing at all.

The same applies to the Church throughout its history. The Church has done nothing—and yet everything. And what about all the saints? They too did nothing—and yet everything. What matters is to unite ourselves in spirit to him who achieves everything, through us and through the Church, although, from the depths of his tabernacle, he seems to be doing nothing at all. I don’t know whether I am making myself clear. But I find in this way of looking at things the death of personal human activity, on the one hand, and, on the other, the goal of making room for this hidden and silent life towards which I feel so powerfully attracted, and towards which I am drawing you. Because I have to admit it. When I am looking after others, I do try to see things from their point of view—but when I speak to you about yourself, I find it impossible to do so without taking my own spiritual condition into account. Perhaps I am wrong—but I cannot work at your sanctification without first making sure that I am applying to myself what I am telling you to do.

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## IV. THE FRUITFUL YEARS: 1858-1880

*April 30, 1858.*; Almost two years of interruption<sup>75</sup> indicate that I made resolutions that I failed to carry out. And yet they were good resolutions—could have made a saint of me.

As I said Mass this morning and thought about the life of St. Catherine of Siena<sup>76</sup> I prayed to Our Lord to grant me some graces of the contemplative life, in the sense of perceiving more and more that without him nothing is worthwhile. Reading the Martyrology made me feel deeply ashamed of my own mediocrity. When, at last, will I belong one hundred per cent to Our Lord<sup>77</sup>?

I offer myself to our good Master because on my own I am not capable of becoming a true apostle, that he may send into his harvest. “*Mitte operarios in messem tuam*; Pray therefore to the Lord of the harvest that he send laborers into his harvest” (Lk 10:2).

*May 1, 1858.*—“Let us begin by becoming humble if we wish to become truly great”—words of St. Polycarp as he awaited death in the amphitheater<sup>78</sup>. If I am so mediocre it is due to my lack of humility—or rather to my surfeit of pride.

*July 30, 1858.*—I have promised to practice being perfect from now till August 15, 1859—so from that time forward I may take a vow to do so.

*November 28, 1858.*—I am taking the vow to drink no more liquor, no pure coffee, no more tea, except under doctor’s clear orders—and in special circumstances such as an outbreak of cholera.

*November 8, 1859.*—I am deeply affected by the story of Abbé Cestac<sup>79</sup>. Something is driving me to entrust myself to Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, just as he entrusted himself to Blessed Virgin.

It seems to me that Our Lord wishes me to show less affection to those I guide so as to cultivate in them an unequivocal love for him.

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<sup>75</sup> Fr. d’Alzon resumes writing in his Journal after a long break.

<sup>76</sup> Now a day earlier, on April 29

<sup>77</sup> The Martyrology, or list of the next day’s saints, was read out during the choral recitation of Prime.

<sup>78</sup> Now celebrated on February 23

<sup>79</sup> Identity unknown

My role is always to be that of the bridegroom's friend.

*January 10, 1860.*—I am not sufficiently preoccupied with the sanctification of my religious.

*January 23, 1861.*—The time has now come for me to take the vow of perfection. I've been wanting to do it for fifteen years. What a lot of time wasted! What a lot of downright mediocrity! This vow will consist in my doing everything as perfectly as I can—and in choosing the most perfect course of action. "*Quid nunc Christus?* What is my opinion of Christ?" (Mt 22:42). However, to save myself from those excesses which are the enemy of true perfection, here are a few considerations which I must always bear in mind:

The guiding maxim must be: "*Mihi vivere Christus est*; For me life means Christ" (Phil 1:21); to allow Our Lord to be reproduced in me as much as it depends on me

1° In my prayer I must ask Our Lord to show me what is most perfect—and then ask him for the strength to accomplish it.

2° I must practice the religious virtues of our small Congregation, especially humility, self-sacrifice, charity, prudence and zeal.

3° I must pay more attention to how I am fulfilling my duties as a religious, as a superior, as a priest

*December 22, 1863.*—God seems to be manifesting his will. Our small Congregation has its objective marked out: that of reconciling the Oriental Churches, the struggle against the schism<sup>80</sup>. It calls for a spirit of humility and of charity countering the spirit of pride and division that has torn the robe of Christ; a love for unity and obedience to the head of the Church; in order to accomplish our task, the study the Oriental languages, their rules and rites, their religious history, not to mention their theology properly so called.

I feel an urgency to be more exacting in the practice of poverty, to sell my estates as soon as I can. I am asking Our Lord to set the seal of his approval on this enterprise by giving Marie Correnson<sup>81</sup> a religious vocation.

*November 6, 1865.*; It appears that God doesn't wish me to sell my estates. The vocation I asked him for does not seem to be taking shape just yet<sup>82</sup>.

But what is developing is our little association itself. It is more important than ever to provide ourselves with spiritual protectors, souls who by prayer, penance, good works and communion, bring God's blessings

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<sup>80</sup> Presumably at Pope Pius IX's special request a year earlier, and now the new mission was getting under way.

<sup>81</sup> Marie Correnson, daughter of the school doctor, was to become the foundress of the Oblate Sisters who did so much to assist us on these Near-East Missions.

<sup>82</sup> Presumably Mademoiselle Correnson still hesitated.

down on our enterprise in general—and this year on the college in particular. I am committed to persuade a number of people to recite daily the *Veni Creator*, the *Pange Lingua*, the Litany of the Blessed Virgin, the *Miserere*, and the hymn to the Guardian Angels—plus one act of self-denial every day and one Communion every week—all for our intentions<sup>83</sup>.

*August 4, 1866*<sup>84</sup>.—“*Igitur qui dispersi errant pertansibant, evangelizantes verbum Dei*; Those who had been driven away spread the Gospel as they went from place to place” (Acts 8:4).

When things are falling apart, at times of persecution and struggle, God has special help in store. Look at the situation nowadays. So many priests being driven away—so many religious having to take refuge in Italy. Infidelity is gaining so much ground: in England, here in France, in Germany, all over Europe. So what about praying to “Our Lady of the Infidels?” By these words I mean all the pagans, all the Protestant rationalists, all those whose Christianity consists solely in having been baptized, but who have never made an act of faith, all the Church’s enemies, and all those members of secret societies who know full well what oaths they have taken.

*August 4, 1866*

*Found on a loose leaf inserted in the Journal.*

“*Igitur qui dispersi errant pertansibant, evangelizantes verbum Dei*; Those who had been driven away spread the Gospel as they went from place to place.” In rereading the preceding pages, I cannot help reflecting on the way God’s Providence has dealt, step by step, with our little family. World events seem to trace the path we are to follow, the furrow we are to tread, as we go about in the Lord’s vineyard.

What is the universal ill? Infidelity! Well then, let us invoke the Blessed Virgin under the title of “Our Lady of the Infidels.” Strange as this may seem, is anything more appropriate? What is the disease eating Europe away, if not infidelity? It is spreading to England, Italy, Germany, Spain, and above all France. So we must fight it wherever it appears—and since it is springing up everywhere, we must fight it everywhere.

The Assumptionists must bring about the triumph of the Blessed Virgin over the enemies of the faith. With this triumph in view, they must ask for special indulgences for those who assist us—placing ourselves under the protection of “Our Lady of the Infidels.” “*Triumphatrix infidelium; Ora pro nobis!* You who triumph over the infidels, pray for us!”

And were I to have a church built in honor of Our Lady of the Infidels, I would put three altars there: in the middle that of Our Lady; on one side an altar in honor of the Guardian Angels of all living heretics and infidels; and on the other side, one in commemoration of all those who,

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<sup>83</sup> At this time daily communion for lay people was almost unheard of.

<sup>84</sup> Found on a loose leaf inserted in the Journal.

having died outside the body of the Church, are nevertheless saved, though their souls still languish in purgatory.

I have given myself the task of urging devout souls to recite the following invocations to the Blessed Virgin:

*Mater auctoris fidei nostrae.  
Scutum fidei catholicae.  
Triumphatrix infidelium et haereticorum, ora pro  
nobis.  
Sancti Angeli custodes infidelium et haereticorum,  
orate pro eis.*

Mother, source of our faith,  
Shield of the Catholic faith,  
You who triumph over heresy and infidelity, pray  
for us.  
Holy Guardian Angels of all infidels and heretics,  
pray for them.

Finally a *De Profundis* (Ps 129 Vulgate), for the souls of all who have died outside the body of the Church.

*around 1866*

I must surrender my senses, my judgment, my self-consciousness, my heart, so that everything may become an instrument in his service. “*Mihi vivere, Christus est; For me life means Christ*” (Phil 1:21).

*around 1866*

*Found on a loose leaf inserted in the Journal.*

What I would like to become:

1° A man of faith, prayer and genuine humility.

2° A religious penetrated with a spirit of self-sacrifice, earnest in the fullest sense of the word, and above all supernatural as regards his most basic motives, his appearance, his behavior, whatever he says and does.

3° A superior intent on my duty to develop and sanctify his spiritual family in charity, communion, piety, love of Our Lord, love of the Blessed Virgin, love of the Church...in tune with all the perfection of the evangelical counsels and apostolic zeal.

*around 1866*

SUBJECT MATTER OF MY EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE

1° The Rule, the Divine Office.

2° My prayer-life, my practice of the presence of God.

3° My love for Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament.

- 4° My love of neighbor.
  - 5° My spirit of commitment in the performance of our works.
  - 6° My character; my pride?
  - 7° How edifying have I become?—And how zealous?
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October 1858<sup>85</sup>

(to Mother Marie-Eugénie)

**In the Presence of the Lord**

In my prayers for you over the past three weeks, all I have been able to think about are these words of God to Abraham: “*Ambula coram me et esto perfectus*; Walk in my sight and be perfect” (Gn 17:1). This perfection which consists in living in Our Lord’s presence is simple, humble, calm, patient, gentle and loving. It brings a peace produced by self-possession. It entails the sacrifice of all we are—expecting nothing in return, because one is only thinking about the one to whom one is offering. Such, then, is my constant prayer for you. That is because I also request it for myself for I am far from it.

March 28, 1859

(to Mother Marie-Eugénie)

**Imitating the Saints**

You know, I get accused of wanting to imitate every saint I read the life of! At present we are reading the life of St. Charles<sup>86</sup> in the refectory. I assure you I have no wish to imitate him by becoming an archbishop or a cardinal! But I am captivated by the beauty, the strength, the energy, the perseverance of his character. Besides, the thought of the good I can do for my children binds me to them. Also, the few novices I see arriving lead me to hope and believe there will be many more. Still my health, which is weak and which the slightest effort affects, disheartens me. What am I to do? Where is God’s will in all this? To tell you the truth, I don’t know. Sometimes I blame myself for being too concerned with details, things of no importance. Sometimes I feel totally unable to face the bigger issues. So what is it that God wants? I feel I am ready to do anything and everything if only I could see clearly ahead of me. But sometimes I see too clearly, and at other times I cannot see at all! So please tell me what you think—if you have any ideas.

For the past fifteen minutes what seems clearest to me is that I ought to focus on my religious family and devote myself entirely to it, but then surface all the demands of being Vicar General? Am I to tender my resignation as Vicar General—thereby losing the means of keeping three or

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<sup>85</sup> Here the text takes up once again the “Personal Reflections.”

<sup>86</sup> St. Charles Borromeo

four of my religious alive?<sup>87</sup> It's nothing—and yet it's everything. If only you knew how confusing this situation is!

*March 1859*

**Study Program**

I propose to undertake a study of history. So I will start with the history of the world—then the history of the Church in three volumes. I must constantly refer to Rohrbacher.

I must study a bit of moral and dogmatic theology every day.

At least two hours of Latin a day, by reading the lives of the saints.

I must prepare my sermons by reading the Bible, Bossuet, Bourdaloue<sup>88</sup>, Fr. Lejeune, and above all Fr. Grenade.

*Approximately the same date: study plan<sup>89</sup>.*

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|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1. Dogmatic Theology                  | 1. Dogmatic Theology                  |
| 2. Moral Theology                     | 2. Moral Theology                     |
| 3. Discipline                         | 3. Discipline                         |
| 4. Canon Law                          | 4. Canon Law                          |
| 5. History                            | 5. History                            |
| 6. Controversy                        | 6. Controversy <sup>90</sup>          |
| 7. Philosophy                         | 7. Philosophy                         |
| 8. Sermons                            | 8. Sermons                            |
| 9. Instructions to boarders           | 9. Piety: books to read and recommend |
| 10. Retreats                          |                                       |
| 11. Instructions at the Mercy convent |                                       |
| 12. Literature                        |                                       |

*March 26, 1860*

*(to Mother Marie-Eugénie)*

**Impatience**

You know I am impatient by nature. I seem to be overcoming this tendency, but now and again the “old man” gets the better of me.

*July 5, 1861*

*(to Mother Marie-Eugénie)*

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<sup>87</sup> Being the Vicar General assured Father d'Alzon of a modest income, every penny of which he needed for his good works.

<sup>88</sup> Louis Bourdaloue (1632-1704) was a French Jesuit and preacher, whose sermons, according to Voltaire, surpassed those of Bossuet; Abbé Paul Le Jeune, a 17<sup>th</sup> c Oratorian spiritual author who wrote *An Introduction to the Mystical Life*; P. Luis de Granada was an outstanding Dominican preacher and teacher of the 16<sup>th</sup> c. whose writings influenced the Counter-Reformation.

<sup>89</sup> Here follows a double list of books, the purpose of which is not clear.

<sup>90</sup> Probably what we now call apologetics.

#### **Submission to God**

For some time now I have been trying very hard to bring my whole nature under Our Lord's complete control, with regard to my thoughts and my feelings so that whatever I say or do may be but a consequence of them and so that in the crisis I am going through things may calm down and be transformed.

*February 3, 1863*

*(to Mrs. Varin<sup>91</sup>)*

#### **Our Lord's Prayer**

Today is the feast of Our Lord's Prayer in the Garden. It is one of my favorite devotions. On Calvary Jesus Christ suffered on behalf of all sinners. I think that in the Garden of Olives he suffered as a result of the imperfect prayers of holy souls, yours and mine, that made some claim of being prayerful. Try to pray a little better. Ask Our Lord to allow your prayer of suffering to bear fruit. To pray when we are sad and in anguish is a most admirable form of penance—provided we pray with courage and love.

*August 31, 1865*

*(to Mother Marie-Eugénie)*

#### **Towards a Glorious Age**

Yesterday I was 55<sup>92</sup>. The day after tomorrow, September 2<sup>nd</sup>, will be the 55<sup>th</sup> anniversary of my baptism. I am no longer young—and yet my convictions are still growing. I feel we are up to a glorious age. But to reach it we must still face a few squalls. The Promised Land still lies across the desert.

*September 1, 1865*

*(to Marie Correnson)*

#### **Spiritual Legacy of Ideas**

Tomorrow I will have been a baptized Christian for fifty-five years. How much longer have I to remain in this world? God alone knows. If so he wills, I should like to leave a spiritual legacy of ideas which, it seems to me, will contribute to the development of the Kingdom of Our Lord. It may be ridiculous pride that leads me to say this—but I really think there is an immense amount of good to be done.

*January 31, 1866*

*(to the same)*

#### **Faith**

I long to be a man of faith.

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<sup>91</sup> Probably Françoise Varin d'Ainville, a spiritual directee of Fr. d'Alzon, involved in many works of charity and a benefactor of the Assumption,

<sup>92</sup> The original copy of the letter reads 59 and the year is given as 1869.



August 6, 1866

*Reporting to his Spiritual Director, Fr. Picard*<sup>93</sup>

Today I am taking up my pen and writing to you, not as my son, but as my spiritual director.

This is the sixth day of my retreat. Eight or nine days remain but I feel I can already begin to tell you about what I've experienced. You may well ask, "Why are you doing such a long retreat?" To begin with, some of the saints used to go on retreat for forty days. Not being a saint myself, I decided to remain in God's presence a little longer than usual, and I congratulate myself on this decision. For the first few days I was so physically tired that I slept ten or twelve hours a day: night time, day time, afternoon "siesta," or merely seated in my armchair. I thought it best thus to allow myself to relax, because I must have needed that extra sleep. Now my conscience is beginning to trouble me—everything, after all, has its limits.

So much for my opinion—which I submit to yours. I know from experience it's that time of year when I sleep the most after the very tiring summer nights. Yet this year, I have suffered less from them. On the other hand, my brain has been overworked: what with the panegyric I had to preach at Abbé Durand's<sup>94</sup> funeral, my articles on the Oxford Movement<sup>95</sup> in England, the speech I had to give on the occasion of distributing awards at the College, etc. Nevertheless, I feel I ought to slowly return to a pattern of sleep that's less scandalous.

As for my soul: I am more worried about the time I have wasted, the graces I have misused, and worldly way I have lived, than about my actual sins. But I do detect a substratum of pride, gluttony, ill-temper and flippancy, which I find most humiliating. I am not sufficiently a man of prayer; this is where I really must turn over a new leaf.

As a Superior, I think I believe I see how often I act out of sheer haughtiness. "Is that what you want to do?" I say. "Well, go ahead and see what you'll cook up!"

And what about the coming year? Everything inclines me to

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<sup>93</sup> Fr. d'Alzon seeks spiritual direction from Fr. Picard. Fr. Francois Picard, ex-pupil of the Collège de l'Assomption Nîmes, joined the Order at a very early age – and right from the start d'Alzon picked him out as his probable successor. He did, in fact, become our second Superior General: from Fr. d'Alzon's death in 1880 till his own death in 1902.

<sup>94</sup> Identity unsure

<sup>95</sup> The Oxford Movement was a movement of High Church members of the Church of England Eugénie which eventually developed into Anglo-Catholicism. The movement, whose original devotees were mostly associated with the University of Oxford, argued for the reinstatement of some older Christian traditions of faith and their inclusion into Anglican liturgy and theology. They thought of Anglicanism as one of three branches of the "one holy, catholic, and apostolic" Christian church. By the 1840s many participants decided that the Anglican Church lacked grace, and converted to Roman Catholicism. The movement's philosophy was known as Tractarianism after its series of publications. D'Alzon took a particular interest in this movement and even learned English to be able to read some of these publications, especially those of Cardinal Newman.

concentrate on my religious, on the novitiate, on the Oblate Sisters. As for interior and exterior life, I long to be transformed into Our Lord: I am so good at theorizing about this—and so bad at putting them into practice.

*Here we give Father Picard's reply:*

It is easier and more natural for a son to seek his father's advice than for a son to give him his. So I have never felt more embarrassed at writing to you than I feel today. Let me place myself, however, under the all-seeing eyes of God—and this is my answer: Far from finding your decision extraordinary, I was very glad to hear that you had gone to Le Vigan (Fr. d'Alzon's birthplace) to surround yourself with prayerful silence for two weeks. It seems to me that a long retreat will provide both rest for your body and refreshment for your soul. And far from blaming you for taking so many hours' sleep, I order you to take plenty of rest, despite the scruples which afflict you in consequence. It is very important for you thus to take advantage of your stay at Le Vigan, in order to build up your strength—for you will have Clergy Retreats and lots of other work to do. This restful atmosphere brings about a great soothing calm. The soul repossesses itself, and sees more clearly how it can surrender itself more wholeheartedly to God in giving itself to other souls. And a well-rested mind is better able to control itself and concentrate on holy things. Am I telling you that laziness is the ideal disposition for spiritual recollection? Nothing is further from my opinion. I would never dream of writing as I do to someone who was lazy. But laziness has never been one of your major faults. You have others which you do well to admit and fight against: for example, timidity whereby you hesitate too long before addressing a reproach—and when you do, you exaggerate and give way to impatience. Then you tend to be haughty. And your tendency to let problems sort themselves out—these are not the best qualities in a superior. Such superiors do not exercise the humility and patience of the father of a family and they do not arrive at getting their children to practice virtue. Our Blessed Lord was more simple in his dealings with the Apostles. Let him be your model and your strength. Spare no efforts in transforming yourself entirely into this beloved Jesus. In your personal behavior, and in your conduct as Superior, you must often ask yourself this same question about which you once preached such a wonderful sermon to us: "Quid nunc Christus?. What is your opinion of Christ?" (Mt 22:42). Little by little you will have no other life than that of Our Lord, because you will have put on the mind of Christ: "Hoc sentite in vobis quod in Christo Jesu. Let these be your sentiments which were those of Christ Jesus" (Phil 2:5). How straightforward I am being, dear Father! You see how seriously I am taking my duties as your spiritual director! Having sounded the depths of your soul—having described that combination of strength and sweetness, humility and benevolence, energy and kindness, which a life of prayer will produce in your soul, by uniting this beloved soul to Our Divine Savior—let me now deal with the various matters you are good enough to consult me about. Let me refer also to the Clergy Retreats, and to the other good works which keep you busy throughout the year. By looking after priests you are rendering a tremendous service to our Order, by making it known and attracting novices. The novitiate must always be at the back of our mind.

There now, dear Father! My spiritual direction may be deficient in many respects, but sincerity and love are certainly not lacking. I have prayed for you a lot, and will ever continue to do so. May Our Blessed Savior sanctify you during this retreat—and by sanctifying you he will transform us all.

Fr. Picard.

*August 13, 1866 (to Fr. Picard)*

#### **Rest on Retreat**

I think my retreat, which is nearly over, will have done me good. My immense need for extra sleep is beginning to wear off—and although being on retreat may have obliged me to concentrate, it seems to have benefited me, even physically. I feel better disposed to serve souls and devote myself to various works. I feel humbler, more charitable, and readier to surrender to Our Lord a right over my body, my judgment, my will, and my heart. What I do now will depend on circumstances.

*April 5, 1867*

*(new letter of spiritual direction to Fr. Picard)*

#### **Giving up Things**

I am writing to you as my spiritual director.

Since my retreat last August I have been constantly worried about this: God is asking me to discard many things in order to take up a new life. It seems to me that I am being asked to give up the following:

1° I must give up preaching Lenten series, pastoral retreats and others, though I shall have to preach at least one next year.

2° I must surrender the spiritual direction of the alumni of St. Maur to Fr. de Cabrières—and that of the Children of Mary from the Priory to Fr. Vincent de Paul or Fr. Emmanuel<sup>96</sup>.

3° I will keep for myself a few ten-minute sermons for the Men's Mass—and two or three sermons a year in the cathedral.

4° Fewer visits in the parlor.

5° Much more prayer.

6° A little more penance.

7° More time spent looking after the Oblate Sisters and the Religious Sisters of the Assumption.

8° But above all, looking after our own religious and future religious.

9° I must employ every legitimate means of procuring vocations.

Please pray above all for me during Passiontide. After Easter I plan

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<sup>96</sup> Abbé de Cabrières had been one of Father d'Alzon's pupils. He was later to become Archbishop of Montpellier and a Cardinal. Fr. Vincent de Paul and Fr. Emmanuel were brothers, sons of a Monsieur Bernard Bailly. The former became first editor of *La Croix*, the Assumptionist daily newspaper. The latter became our third Superior General.

to make a short retreat. Let us ask the Holy Spirit to shed his light upon us, because this may be the very thing I am especially be asked to do.

Giving up preaching Clergy Retreats may be advisable for reasons of health.

*Response of Fr. Picard:*

I do pray for you every day—but for the past few days I have been praying harder than usual, because you are about to begin a retreat which may be of the utmost importance for your own sanctification and that of the rest of us. I think the resolutions you have taken are excellent: further separation from creatures—more time spent in restful recollection under God’s watchful eye—a more intense life of prayer—this is surely what Our Lord demands of a soul he wishes to sanctify and use for the sanctification of others. So the many things which wear us out are made to yield to the one thing which makes us strong (Lk 10:42). This will help you better to accomplish God’s holy work, and better to mortify your own nature. Your health is not able to cope with every which thing. The Congregation needs to be accompanied, shaped, and developed in its spirit—and here is a task you alone can accomplish. So let this task be your life’s work. You will bring about a far greater good by laying the foundations of a lasting edifice. There is one occupation, however, very close to my heart, and I do think you ought to keep it up, if only as a “sideline.” Your Clergy Retreats: please give yourself sufficient leisure to be able to preach one or two of them every year. It is highly useful and extremely beneficial for the Order. You could, perhaps, get Father Charles Laurent to take on one of these retreats—it would be opening a field of apostolate in which he could do an immense amount of good. I need not suggest any holy and wholesome thoughts with which to inspire your life. Our Lord himself is planning your course and urging you on (2 Cor 2:14). Follow his promptings. But you must not indulge in such self-imposed penances as would undermine your strength, such as depriving yourself of sleep or fortifying nourishment. On these two points, obedience for you will be a sacrifice far more pleasing to God than all the penances and privations in the world. You see, my dear Father, that I have given you a straight answer. Let me leave you now because I am needed in the confessional.

*August 15, 1867*

*(to Mother Marie-Eugénie)*

**Love of the Church**

My retreat which was spent mostly in silence than anything else has done me a lot of good, especially that of urging me to love the Church even

more and the Pope, as well as detest the Secret Societies<sup>97</sup>.

June 1, 1868

(to Fr. Picard)

**Personal Conversion**

I would like to go on retreat, somewhere I could be completely alone. I am tired of the human race. Yet only yesterday, on the feast of Pentecost, I wanted to be converted—and I think I even began to.

August 17, 1868

(to Mother Correnson)

**Man of Prayer**

At Lourdes I prayed for my own conversion, for the spirit of prayer, and for the gift of setting souls aflame with love for Our Lord and our Blessed Virgin.

1868

(to the same)

**Our Lady's Compassion**

I have an immense devotion to Our Lady's Compassion.

November 19, 1869

(to the same)

**Catholic Outlook**

Since I arrived in Rome<sup>98</sup>, I have felt more keenly, day by day, the need for a Catholic outlook—selfless, generous, and universal, concerned more with God's interests than our own because God will look after our interests far more effectively if we concern ourselves exclusively with his. I feel that, in this respect, I am undergoing something of a conversion—becoming less and less focused on myself. Is this only imagination on my part? Another effect of living in Rome is that it is leading me to raise my mind above things having to do with my country alone. Rome is the capital

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<sup>97</sup> Fr. d'Alzon often speaks of secret societies, especially after 1870. He doesn't identify them except for Freemasonry, the secret society *par excellence*. It was in early and long-lasting opposition of the Roman Catholic Church, which first condemned the "liberi Muratori seu Francs Massons" in the bull *In eminenti* (1738). After the French Revolution, this attitude hardened, only to find itself vindicated when political developments in Italy, France, and Spain in the second half of the 19th century made many Catholics, including Fr. d'Alzon, feel that semi-Masonic governments had declared war on organized religion. D'Alzon sensed that many clubs, movements and political, literary, and philosophical sects harbored rationalist, anti-Catholic, anti-Christian, esoteric, and even demonic elements, e.g. the Lodges, the Illuminati, the Carboari, the Templars, the Theosophic societies, etc. Papal encyclicals and works of apologetics by Catholic authors seemed to do little to stem the tide of their rise.

<sup>98</sup> Fr. d'Alzon, still Vicar general, was in Rome, a companion of his bishop (Claude-Henri-Augustin Plantier) taking an active part in the First Vatican Council. He worked behind the scenes, especially to promote the idea of Papal Infallibility.

of the Catholic world. We must be Catholics, not only at heart but in mind. We must have Catholic ideas. When one speaks of large ideas, I don't think you can find any larger than these...

*December 24, 1869*

*(to Fr. Picard)*

**Becoming a Saint**

The experience of the Council (Vatican I) makes me long more and more, day by day, to become a saint in the Assumptionist sense of the word. Never has the love of Our Lord, coupled with that of the Blessed Virgin and the Church, been more necessary and more appropriate for animating souls than today.

*February 5, 1870*

*(to Mother Correnson)*

**Activism**

Something is bothering me. I feel carried away to get involved in major issues. Well, sometimes I wonder if it isn't all my own doing because I am active and meddlesome by nature. It upsets me to think this may be so, for all I really care about is doing everything for God's glory. Ask Our Lord not to let me do anything except for him—for his glory and nothing but his glory.

*February 9, 1870*

*(to the same)*

**Premonition**

Sometimes I have a feeling that God is going to give me another ten years of life—from 60 to 70—and that just as Our Lord took three years and three months to achieve his outward objective, so will I have three times as long to achieve mine. But as I might have even less than another ten years, I had better hurry up so as not to arrive at his judgment seat empty-handed.

*July 20, 1871*

*(to the same)*

**Illness**

Ah, my dear daughter, it is no bed of roses seeing your illness going on and on. Allow me to assure you that I know how it feels. I fell ill in May 1854—and it lasted for three or four years, with oppressive fatigue and excruciating pains. I didn't get to know you until I returned from Paris in May 1857—by which time I was still suffering, but a lot less.

*January 2, 1873*

*(to Mother Marie-Eugénie)*

**Longing for Solitude**

This morning I spent nearly two hours in chapel before Mass, praying in front of the Blessed Sacrament—but here in my study whatever I

have set things up exists so that my studies nearly always lead to meditation. I may be busy with the things of this world, but I assure you I especially long to be alone.

*January 21, 1874 (last note from the collection known as 'Impressions')*

**Personal Reflection**

It seems that the work of our enterprise has to be performed by religious, that is to say, by religious sisters as regards the education of girls, all forms of ministry with women, by the Oblate Sisters in our foreign missions.

But what strikes me now is how wrong I have been not to develop the Third Order among priests. It could bring about the most beneficial results. By doing so we could achieve some valuable results. We could rekindle their priestly "morale", their priestly commitment, their priestly devotion, and their apostolic zeal.

We could encourage them to bear great fruit by getting involved in all kinds of evangelization as well as the training of future vocations.

A large organization entrusted to these priests could be enormously useful. It could be involved in defending the Church by countering the Secret Societies.

*August 13, 1874*

*(to Fr. Emmanuel Bailly)*

**Convictions from a Retreat**

Concerning your retreat, I can only share with you the essentials of my own:

- 1° A deep conviction of my nothingness.
- 2° A supernatural trust in God *for everything*.
- 3° The knowledge of being God's instrument in the little I can accomplish.

*September 17, 1874*

*(to Mrs. d'Escure<sup>99</sup>)*

**Accepting Suffering**

As for me, the older I grow (and I was 64 the other day) the more convinced I become that salvation is to be found nowhere else than in a life of acceptance of whatever sufferings Our Lord chooses to send me. This was one of the fundamental resolutions I took after my last retreat. It has done me such a lot of good, that I would like to recommend that you too acquire this relationship with God.

*October 28, 1874 (to Mother Marie-Eugénie)*

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<sup>99</sup> Mrs. Louis-Joseph-Josias de Gaillard d'Escures was a spiritual directee of Fr. d'Alzon.

### Shorter Sermons

I have very courageously resigned myself to preaching shorter sermons, of becoming a man of prayer as much as possible, of giving up lots of activities, of living as a true religious.

*August 17, 1875*

*(to Mother Correnson)*

### Knowing Oneself

At Mass this morning as I divided the Sacred Host, I said to myself: “This is how I must become. I am breaking sacred host, so I must let myself be broken by Our Lord.” I don’t want to be anything special any more<sup>100</sup>. Perhaps this is merely subconscious pride on my part. Oh, how difficult it is to know yourself. But, it seems, I do wish to be converted—this time for good.”

*October 14, 1875*

*(to the same)*

### Tribulations

I too am passing through many tribulations. But whatever happens to me, I have come to the conclusion that I need to throw myself unreservedly into the arms of God and to let him lead me to whatever degree of holiness he wishes me to attain. I am not there, far from it; I’m miles away. Why should I get discouraged, if Our Lord is ready to do 90% of the work himself?

*October 17, 1876*

*(to Mother Marie-Eugénie)*

### True Friend of Our Lord

I am deeply preoccupied with developing a friendship with Our Lord. Thinking this way squares with your preoccupation regarding the rights of God. How are we to face up to the limitless extent of these awe-inspiring rights? Isn’t it, therefore, better to be his friend?

*December 17, 1876*

*(to Fr. Bailly)*

### Woe Is Me

Alas, woe is me. I have been a sub-deacon (and will soon have been a priest) for forty-two years. Please pray that at least this year I may be converted. I hardly ever go out. I long for peace and quiet. I’d love to study scholastic philosophy which intrigues me more and more every day. I have become completely disillusioned with myself—but it is with invincible hope that I look forward to the triumph of the Church. You say to me: if we cause so much fear, certainly there must be something about us to make them afraid. It may be simply because we are such disagreeable

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<sup>100</sup> He had just offered the new bishop his resignation as Vicar General.



characters—this is what I tell myself every day. I would hate to be anything more than an ass’s jaw-bone in the hands of the true Samson<sup>101</sup>.

*December 24, 1876*

*(to Fr. Picard)*

**Service of God and Man**

Today, forty-two years ago, Our Lord gave me the great grace to understand that I must do everything for him, and nothing for anybody else. Today he has given me another great grace—that of understanding that I must do everything for others like him.

*March 21, 1877*

*(to Mother Marie-Eugénie)*

I have been wanting to use the book written by Monsieur Gay<sup>102</sup>. I found it convoluted and I am up to my neck in Bossuet’s meditations. How I wish you had a little time between now and Easter to withdraw to the foot of the Cross with the Blessed Virgin. I am doing what I can to remain there—to try and learn patience and humility, two virtues in which I am singularly lacking.

*June 3, 1877*

*(to Mother Marie-Therese de Commarque)*

**We Are Not Immortal**

Weakness and sickness have the great advantage of warning us that we are not immortal. This is a thought which seldom leaves me; and it is very wrong of me to offend the good God, knowing that his judgment is coming nearer. To tell you the truth, I do not consider this with enough humility, but I do take it seriously. On the one hand I am full of confidence; on the other hand, I do feel I am under a most grievous obligation to make up for lost time and never again to waste an hour or a minute.

*July 2, 1878*

*(to Mother Marie-Eugénie)*

**Guided by Love**

Reading the life of Saint Josaphat<sup>103</sup>, I am struck by the fact that his friend Rustky<sup>104</sup> was not a saint. Rustky was a good, conscientious man, guided by a sense of duty—whereas Josaphat was guided by love, so of the two it was he who was given the grace of martyrdom. I am trying, wherever

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<sup>101</sup> In the writings of the Church Fathers that d’Alzon read regularly, Samson prefigured Jesus Christ as one sent to liberate his people.

<sup>102</sup> Most probably refers to Charles-Louis Gay, a renowned spiritual and mystical writer, vicar general, of the diocese of Poitiers, a theologian at Vatican I, and eventually consecrated a bishop in 1877.

<sup>103</sup> A Ukrainian bishop who died a martyr in 1623 – his feast-day is November 12<sup>th</sup>.

<sup>104</sup> Ivan Velamin Rutsky (Joseph, in religious life) was a companion of St. Josaphat at Holy Trinity monastery in Vilna; he was a reformer of the Basilians.

possible, to be inspired by the initiative of love. I owe this thought to Dom Guépin<sup>105</sup> and I am very grateful to him.

*Sometime in 1878*

**Things Which Require My Attention**

- 1° My own personal life.
- 2° The Augustinians.
- 3° The Religious (Sisters) of the Assumption.
- 4° The Oblate Sisters of the Assumption.
- 5° The Little Sisters of the Assumption.
- 6° Our General Chapters.
- 7° The alummates (N.B. institutions where young boys from poor families were being trained for the priesthood).
- 8° Our novitiates.
- 9° Our colleges (called Grammar Schools in England, and High Schools in the States).
- 10° Our different residences.
- 11° Our overseas missions.
- 12° Our studies.
- 13° Correspondence.
- 14° Notre Dame de Salut<sup>106</sup>
- 15° The Third Order.
- 16° Our Lady of Vocations.
- 17° Catholic committees.
- 18° The Conferences of St. Vincent de Paul<sup>107</sup>.
- 19° The Ladies of Mercy.

*November 26, 1878*

*(to Mother Marie-Eugénie)*

**Prayer: Aridity and Fruitfulness**

I do not know what advice to give you about your retreat. I always

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<sup>105</sup> Dom Alphonse Guépin (1836-1917) was a Benedictine monk, scholar, and abbot of the monastery of Silos. He wrote several lives of the saints, including one on St. Josaphat.

<sup>106</sup> A whole network of Christian enterprises, including pilgrimages, centered in Paris.

<sup>107</sup> There is little argument against the claim that Frederic Ozanam was the principal founder, or animator, of the organization of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul as we know it today, but clearly Emmanuel Bailly, Ozanam's mentor and the nephew of a prominent Vincentian priest, presided with wisdom over the Society's development during its first decade. Emmanuel and his wife had six children, of whom two eventually became early Assumptionists, Emmanuel and Vincent. They both encouraged support of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul and its Conferences within the new congregation they entered. As a matter of fact, both Ozanam and d'Alzon belonged to the same circle of young students organized by the elder Bailly in Paris.

spend as much time as I can in prayer. It is strange, but I have proved by experience that I do more good to souls after having endured the sheer boredom of a period of mental prayer full of nothing but emptiness, aridity, tastelessness and endless distractions. Learning how to pray has become the craft I am seeking to master by my efforts. I don't know what other advice to give you that what I myself do. Remain before God and tell him that you're nothing and that you have great need of him. Ask Our Lord to send us his Spirit—ask the Spirit to send you his love. It's as simple as saying, "Hello!"—yet it provides me with all strength and hope I need. I know of no other goal so great than seeking God with all one's strength. In other words, I make it as simple as I can—and I can wish you nothing better than simplicity in prayer.

*January 14, 1879*

*(to Mother Marie-Eugénie)*

#### **Feeling Weak**

Without being actually ill, I am feeling so weak, that unless my strength returns by the end of the winter, I'm afraid I shall not last much longer. So I wish you, as I wish myself, the abiding thought of heaven, and the grace to perform all our actions in view of eternity. I do not wish you fear of God's judgment—but I wish you the sentiments of the bride awaiting the return of her spouse and giving him every reason to rejoice. Age must set a seal on our actions—giving to all we do that character of divine gravity which reflects and befits the gifts God bestowed on us. What remains for us but to establish ourselves firmly in the divine reality and the truth—so that by being utterly sincere, you may, when the day comes, experience this truth as everlasting joy?

Yes, all this is perhaps a little serious. But what else am I expected to tell you—since I am speaking to you as a man who must make haste to prepare himself?

#### *Personal Reflection at the Close of his Life*

Of all I have ever accomplished, what seems to me the greatest achievement, that which will give me the most confidence when I appear before God, is the number of souls I have been enabled to dedicate to his service—the vocations and the virgins won over to Christ. Everything else seems puny in comparison. This, it seems to me, has been the best and most important contribution of my priestly life.

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# I. PIETY

*Piety, as it is recommended to us by Fr. d'Alzon, consists mainly in:*

*1° the love of God drawn from the wellsprings of mystical theology;*

*2° the love of Our Lord drawn from the frequent meditation of the life, the doctrine, and the mysteries of our Divine Master;*

*3° the love of the Blessed Virgin and of the Church, where, in their privileges and history, the perfections of Our Lord can be found reflected in a way that is closer to us.*

## The Love of God

*Fr. d'Alzon wrote to Fr. Picard on June 9, 1872, "I dream of a mystical theology based on the thought of St. Thomas. That might sound tough to do and yet it is easier than you might suspect. Every morning I make use of it to come up with a half-hour reflection for the Oblates. Imagine that they find what I am saying clear and yet I am speaking to them of the processions of God, of creation, and of the origin of evil." This course which he drafted for the Oblates was given in 1874 to the novices in Nimes. Fr. d'Alzon instilled in them, in a fresh way at once more profound and more edifying, the true spirit of the Assumption. From this course we are presenting here; following the edition of Fr. Alexis Dumazer who was Fr. d'Alzon's assistant with the novices at the time; the introduction and several lessons on the attributes of God. These pages will illustrate by way of example the guidelines on the spirit of our prayer that he was addressing to the members of the Chapter at the same time.*

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# A COURSE IN MYSTICAL THEOLOGY

## *The need for studying mystical theology*

Mystical theology may be defined as the science of the union of the soul with God. The majority of mystical writers restricted themselves to studying the effort whereby the human soul can rise to union with God. As for us, we propose that we study the two terms of this union, God and the soul.

Positive theology and mystical theology certainly have the same object that is God, but they differ in that the latter particularly proposes the study of divine beauty so as to stir the human heart to greater love. Consequently, these sciences must offer each other mutual support, and any true mystical theology avoids any abuse of St. Augustine's saying, "*Ama et fac quod vis*; Love and do what you wish"<sup>108</sup> and of Our Lord's saying, "*Abscondisti haec a sapientibus, et revelasti ea parvulis*; You have hidden these things from the wise and you have revealed them to the childlike" (Mt 11:25). It is, like positive theology, and relying on it, both science and wisdom.

There are six main reasons that should stir us to embrace this study enthusiastically because there we find:

- 1° a way to get souls interested in supernatural matters;
- 2° a powerful way to avoid the errors of sentiment and fanaticism;
- 3° a magnificent development of the love of God;
- 4° a wonderful weapon to combat modern errors and defend the rights of God;
- 5° a source of light for human beings;
- 6° a powerful tool for the apostolate.

### *1. Getting souls interested in supernatural things*

Since original sin entered the world, all the objects of the material

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<sup>108</sup> *Sermon on the Epistles of John, Tractate 7*, column 2033, line 35; also *In Iohannis epistulam ad Parthos tractatus* (CPL 0279) - LLT-A-tract. 7, col. PL 2033, linea 35 (in fact, Augustine says "*Dilige et quod vis fac*") (Augustine&Tractate on the Letters of John&CPL&tractate 7, col. PL 2033, line 23)

world have become obstacles to our perfection; nevertheless, our soul has the same need to rise to God: mystical theology allows it to reach such lofty spheres where the practice of the good becomes all the easier as one gets closer to God. Undoubtedly this study is not equally needed for all, but it is indispensable for directors entrusted with the formation of souls to the supernatural life you can apply to it what St. Thomas says of dogmatic theology, “*Sacra doctrina est necessaria homini ad salutem*; Sacred doctrine is necessary for man to be saved”<sup>109</sup>.

## 2. *Avoiding errors and fanaticism*

After the Revolution<sup>110</sup>, there was a time when directors went about their work by inspiration; they affirmed, as descending from the heavens, decisions based on their musings and not on science. They backed them up with the obstinacy of ignorance at the grand peril of souls. We will not avoid these dangerous errors but through study, we who have responsibility not only for our own soul, but those of others as well.

## 3. *Developing the love of God in us*

There are some mystical theologians who wanted to see in this science nothing more than a method, something much too limited, since it is impossible to consider God’s being, his perfections, his merciful goodness toward men without being drawn to love him more and more each day.

## 4. *Combatting modern errors and defending the rights of God*

The Church, once it had condemned the quietism of Fénelon<sup>111</sup>, had to fight against the pantheism that came after it. God better known and loved will help us reverse these errors and give us the strength to affirm his

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<sup>109</sup> *Summa theologiae* I<sup>a</sup> q. 1 a. 1 co. (Thomas Aquinas&ST&CPL&I<sup>a</sup> q. 1 a. 1 co.)

<sup>110</sup> I’m sure Fr. d’Alzon means the Reformation because in 1874, when he wrote this, what he called the “Revolution” was still in full swing. (Fr. Raynor’s note).

<sup>111</sup> François Fénelon (1651-1715) studied at the seminary Saint-Sulpice in Paris, where he was ordained as a priest. Fénelon published his pedagogical work *Traité de l’éducation des filles* (*Treatise on the Education of Girls*) in 1681, which brought him much attention. At this time, he met Jacques Bénigne Bossuet, Bishop of Meaux, who soon became his patron and through whose influence Fénelon was contracted by Louis XIV to carry out the re-conversion of the Huguenots. He was inducted into the Académie Française in 1693 and named Archbishop of Cambrai in 1695. During his time as the educator and teacher of the Duke, Fénelon wrote several entertaining and educational works. In Church history, Fénelon is known especially for his part in the Quietism debate with his earlier patron Bossuet. In his work *Explication des maximes des Saints sur la vie intérieure* (*Explanation of the Adages of the Saints on the Inner Life*) in 1697, he defended Madame du Guyon, the main representative of Quietistic mysticism. He provided proof that her “heretical” teachings could also be seen in recognized saints. In 1697, Fénelon called on the pope for a decision in the Quietism debate. After long advisement, the Pope banned the *Explication* in 1699. Fénelon complied with the pope’s decision immediately and allowed the remaining copies of his book to be destroyed.

rights.

5. *Providing a source of light*

By means of mystical theology the soul approaches God more by the heart than by understanding. If reason is enlightened by positive theology, mystical theology floods the heart with light and invigorates it with its warmth.

6. *Providing a tool for the apostolate*

A professor is one thing; an apostle is another. They must come together in mystical theology so that the apostle, in preaching, can bring to life the truths of the faith which the professor can at times envelop in an envelope that's pretty cold. Dogmatic theology teaches the soul to know truth; mystical theology should teach it to love it.

These two sciences, then, should be united: the dogmatic more speculative, the mystical more practical; the first going to God by way of the truth, the second by way of charity. Mystical theology misunderstood and separated from dogmatic theology becomes sterile contemplation or a source of errors. Forgetting mystical theology deprives positive theology of an element of invigorating warmth. And it may be that it is from this forgetfulness that arose the unjust discrediting of Scholastic theology when it gave too much importance to vapid quarrels.

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## ***On the Inner Life***

### **Three kinds of masters**

The inner life has been studied and described by three kinds of people: theologians, saints, and finally saintly theologians. The first, like Grenade, Fr. Grou, Bossuet, etc. carried out their investigations on certain pious yet adventuresome ideas and were in this way able to show the errors of certain mystics without knowing themselves the mystical life from personal experience. The saints treated the same questions and weren't canonized until a close study of their writings was undertaken, a study that serves as a guarantee for us. It should be noted on this matter that women often transform the doctrines of their directors into heavenly communication (St. Teresa, María d'Agreda<sup>112</sup>, etc.). Theologians write

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<sup>112</sup> Mary of Jesus of Ágreda (Spanish: María de Jesús), OIC, also known as the Abbess of Ágreda (1602 – 1665), was a Franciscan abbess and spiritual writer, known especially for her extensive correspondence with King Philip IV of Spain and reports of her bilocation between Spain and its colonies in New Spain. She was a noted mystic of her era.



methodically; saints proceed more by personal experience. Saints who were at the same time theologians offer us both advantages, and their doctrine can't help but be more certain. Therefore, it is to them that one should hold onto (St. Bonaventure, St. John of the Cross, St. Francis de Sales).

### Three states of the inner life

One distinguishes different states in the mystical life, but not all authors divide them in the same manner: in general, saints list those through which they have passed. One shouldn't confuse the states on the inner life with the states of prayer.

In general, there can be distinguished three states in the inner life: the purgative, the illuminative, and the unitive. In the first the soul seeks to rid itself of all stains and imperfections; in the second, it begins to consider all things in the light of God; in the third it is aflame with the desire to be at one with God. The saints used different comparisons to explain the three states. St. Teresa of Avila compares the soul to a garden. In the first state, the gardener only has a well from he must draw water with great difficulty; in the second, he waters his garden from a spring and need only open the sluices to direct the water; finally in the third state, he has no difficulty because the water falls in abundance when desired.

For St. Bonaventure the soul can be likened to one of the six-winged seraph who with two wings veils his body, with two others his face, and with the last two takes flight toward God.

St. John of the Cross says that the soul is like a traveller who begins walking towards dusk; night falls and the soul is stripped of its senses and walks under what remains of natural light. Soon midnight arrives where the soul lives only from faith alone. After midnight, there comes the dawn, the beginning of supernatural light, when one awaits the full light of day, which is heaven.

Other spiritual authors compare these three states of the soul to 1° the state of slaves, who are motivated solely by the sheer terror of God's Judgment; 2° the state of those hired who work in view of the reward they'll receive; 3° the state of sons who fear only disappointing their father.

As for the relationship between these three states and the three theological virtues: some make the first correspond to hope, and the second to faith. But Our Lord puts faith first: "*Nisi credideritis, non intelligetis*"; Unless we believe we cannot understand (Is 7:9, Vulgate)<sup>113</sup>; and St. Paul says: "*Accedentem ad Deum, oportet credere quia est*; Nobody reaches God's presence until he has learned to believe that God exists" (Heb 11:6). And this is only logical, for as St. John of the Cross puts it, faith shows us

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<sup>113</sup> Also *De Libero Arbitrio* Book II, ch. 2, 5-6 or *De libero arbitrio* (CPL 0260) - LLT-A-lib. 2, cap. 2, linea 67 (also found in many other of Augustine's writings) (Augustine&On Free Will&CPL&bk. 2, chap. 2, line 67)

the nothingness of creatures and the “everythingness” of God<sup>114</sup>. Faith begins by opening our eyes to supernatural light—in the light of which hope yearns for God as the supreme good, waiting to possess him by love.

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## ***The Foundations of Mystical Theology***

### **1° The Bible**

Obviously we derive our Mystical Theology from the same sources as our Dogmatic Theology, but they are used in different ways. The first and foremost source is the Bible. It is the surest guarantee of authenticity having the Word of God as the foundation of our life. Therefore, we must make a serious effort to know it thoroughly. As we study it, we should have before our eyes two guidelines which St. Augustine left us if we are to draw the maximum benefit from studying Bible<sup>115</sup>.

#### **Guideline #1**

Some passages of the Bible are transparently clear, others veiled in deep obscurity. God gave us the former so that every Christian who reads the Bible should find therein rules of conduct. He gave us the latter for pastors and professors to exercise their wisdom, explore its hidden treasures, and there to find the solution to difficult problems and to counter the objections of adversaries. The solutions drawn from the Bible will always be of two orders: the dogmatic and the moral. Nothing need here be said of the former. The latter supplies our intellect with various points of view, there where the Church encourages us to investigate without imposing any particular interpretation. Thence the progress to be made in the study of mystical theology—and we can achieve such progress even by making use of what is obvious to throw light on what is obscure. “*Quomodo dilexi legem tuam, Domine, meditatio mea est; Lord, how I have loved your law! It is my meditation all day long*” (Ps. 118:97 Vulgate).

#### **Guideline #2**

*The Holy Spirit has supplied Scripture with every shade of meaning it could possibly have.* Its literal meaning, dogmatically invariable, may yet contain various moral meanings each of immense practicality—and here St.

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<sup>114</sup> e.g. Ascent of Mt. Carmel, Bk. 1. Ch. 1. #5; Bk. 1. Ch. 4. #5; Bk. 1. Ch. 5. #6. (John of the Cross & Ascent of Mt. Carmel & Peers & bk. 1, chap. 1. #5 and others)

<sup>115</sup> cf. *De doctrina christiana*, Preface 1; 1.36.41; 2.6.8; 2.9.14; 3.27.38. For greater explanation, go to <https://conversantfaith.com/2016/02/11/interpreting-scripture-with-augustine> (Augustine & On Christian Doctrine & CPL & preface and others)

Augustine's second guideline comes into play. Take Our Lord's miracles. Literally, historically, they are the most magnificent proof of his revelation—but besides this, look what moral lessons they have to teach us. The raisings from the dead, the cures, and perhaps still more the parables raise our minds from authentic events to supernatural truths. St. Thomas Aquinas tells us: "*Est naturale homini ut per sensibilia ad intelligibilia veniat*; It is in the nature of man to proceed from the visible to the intelligible"<sup>116</sup>—and St. Denis tells us: "*Impossibile est nobis aliter lucere divinum radium nisi varietate sacrorum velaminum circumvelatum*; It is not possible for the divine ray to manifest itself to us except when it is enfolded in a variety of sacred veils"<sup>117</sup>. These parables are beneficial to everybody, for those most advanced in human knowledge are often the most ignorant and clumsy when they come face to face with the things of heaven. Pope St. Gregory calls Scripture the "Science of Sciences," because it instructs us even by facts: "*Dum narrat gestum, prodit mysterium*; While it tells the deed, it proclaims the mystery"<sup>118</sup>. As for St. Denis, he points out the admirable proportion between the Old Law, a figure of the New, and the New Law, a figure of the glory to come: "*Ipsa nova lex est figura futurae gloriae*; This new law is a figure of glory yet to come"<sup>119</sup>. Familiarity with the sacred texts will lead us to discover their richness and beauty, as happened to St. Augustine. We will come to understand that, no matter how important theological debate is, there is nevertheless far more to discover in the Bible, because the Word of the Holy Spirit, who is love, must necessarily contain sublimity to ravish, and nobility to inflame, the human heart. Mystical Theology will acquaint us with this whole realm of thought and we will even find there a source on new reading.

## 2° Our Lord Jesus Christ

"In times of old God spoke to our fathers in many ways and by many means, speaking through the prophets. Now at last, in these times, he has spoken to us through his Son; *Novissime locutus in Filio* (Heb 1:1, Vulgate). He wants us to listen to this beloved Son, "*Ipsum audite*; Listen to him" (Mk 9:6). It is therefore to Our Lord that we must go in search of

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<sup>116</sup> *Summa theologica* Vol I, QI, A9, 3 (Thomas Aquinas&ST&CPL&vol. I, QI, A9, 3)

<sup>117</sup> N.B. editor--- the text is actually from pseudo-Dionysius, *On the Celestial Hierarchy*, 1 9; quoted by Aquinas: *Quaestiones disputatae de anima* - LLT-A-quaestio:15, responsio (corpus), pag. 135, linea 333 (Thomas Aquinas&ST&CPL&question:15, responsio, corpus, page 135, line 333)

<sup>118</sup> *Moralia in Iob* XX,1 quoted in *Summa Theologiae* ST I.1.10 *sed contra*. Thomas Aquinas&ST&CPL&I.1.10 *sed contra*)

<sup>119</sup> N.B. once again the passage is from pseudo-Dionysius as quoted in the ST I, 1, 10, conclusion (Thomas Aquinas&ST&CPL& I, 1, 10, conclusion)

Perfection. Is he not, moreover, our Mediator?: “*Unus mediator Dei et hominum homo Christus Jesus*; For there is one God: and one mediator of God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim 2:5, Vulgate). Did he himself not tell us: “*Nemo venit ad Patrem nisi per me*; No one can come to the Father except through me.”? (Jn 14:6). There are three ways of going to Our Lord Jesus Christ: 1° by study; 2° by love; 3° by imitation.

### I. Studying Jesus Christ

To study Jesus Christ is to study perfection itself since in him “*inhabitat plenitudo divinitatis corporaliter*; The plenitude of the Godhead is embodied” (Col 2:9). In him God assumed a body so as to come within our reach. Our Lord’s humanity is no less perfect, since St. Paul also tells us: “*In quo complacuit omnem plenitudinem inhabitare*; It was God’s good pleasure to let all completeness dwell in him” (Col 1:19)—and what is this completeness if not the very perfection of God? So Jesus Christ is the living book that we are to study—the perfect book in which unlike in any other book, the human writing is as perfect as the content. For, as the Apostle also says: “*In quo sunt omnes thesauri sapientiae et scientiae absconditi*; In him are stored all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col 2:3). Wisdom and knowledge—these are what we are to extract from the study of Jesus Christ: wisdom which corresponds to supernatural means and knowledge which implies study, using natural means.

There can be no doubt of our obligation to study Our Lord Jesus Christ by natural means. St. John Chrysostom answered St. Basil when the latter remarked that St. Paul had not been a man of books. “You may exempt yourself from study,” he said, “when you receive the same assistance from the Holy Spirit as he did.” The meagre results of our apostolate are often due to our neglect of studying Our Lord, even by natural means. We who are members of an apostolic Order, are we not extra-specially bound to defend him with our knowledge against those who attack him on what they claim to be scientific grounds? And ought we not to learn how to present him more attractively, so as to make him better loved?

But this obligation becomes far more serious when we look at it from a supernatural point of view. How is it possible to do good to souls if we ourselves have not digested the food we intend to give them—if we ourselves have not enlivened our natural studies with supernatural reflection? “*In ipso vita erat et vita era lux*; In Him there was life—and this life was the light of men” (Jn 1:4). This intellectual light is knowledge, and this knowledge must be alive—otherwise it will never be light, but simply darkness. If it is not alive it will never be Jesus Christ. Is this not the reason why so many sermons bear so little fruit? They’re delivered with nothing but knowledge, without any heart or faith and so one neither succeeds to do any good or overcome any evil.

### II. Loving Jesus Christ

Study and knowledge of Jesus Christ leads us to love—for “*Ignoti*

*nulla cupido*; One does not desire what one does not know”<sup>120</sup>. There are two kinds of love, natural and supernatural. Lots of good people, even pious ones, stop at a natural love of Jesus Christ. We have to go further. Without entirely dismissing sentimental affection, it is above all in a supernatural way that we should advance toward Our Lord—and it is in this way that we should encourage souls who are all too disposed to end their progress with the sensitivity of a natural love. How are we to develop this supernatural love? By faith—a faith that enables us to know Our Lord more perfectly, a faith that reminds us continually of everything he has done for us and of how grateful to him we must be. So with St. John we exclaim: “*Diligamus ergo Deum, quoniam ipse prior dilexit nos*; Let us, then, love God because he first loved us” (1 Jn 4:19). We remember these words God himself spoke: “*In caritate perpetua dilexi te: ideo attraxi te, miserans tui*; With unchanging love I have loved thee, and now in mercy I have drawn thee to myself” (Jer 31:3 Vulgate). For the aim of Our Lord is to unite Heaven and Earth—and this he does by his self-sacrificing love: “*pacificans per sanguinem, crucis ejus*; making peace between them through his blood shed on the Cross” (Col 1:20).

Our first reaction will be one of profound awe. Our soul, in Bossuet’s words, will be unable to prevent itself from crying out: “Oh Jesus Christ! Oh Jesus Christ!”<sup>121</sup>. Love springs from awe—and with St. Paul we will proclaim: “*Caritas Christi urget nos*; The love of Christ impels us” (2 Cor 5:14). Thus Our Lord, known by the means we have already enumerated, will bring us to perfection by uniting us with himself. Thus will we come to recognise our own insufficiency. We will come to understand that humility finds its source in the contemplation of God and we will cry out with St. Paul: “*Si quis not amat Dominum Jesum Christum, sit anathema*; If anyone does not love the Lord, let him be accursed”! (1 Cor 16:22). And since our Saviour’s love for us calls for gratitude on our part, our thoughts and feelings will take an altogether different direction. Loving Our Lord in his humanity will raise us to the love of God. And by way of application to our present situation, we will recall these prophetic words uttered by St. Augustine: “*Fecerunt civitates duas amores duo, terrenam scilicet amor sui usque ad contemptum Dei, coelestem vero amor Dei usque ad contemplum sui*; Two kinds of love are constructing two cities. Earthly love is building the earthly city where men worship themselves and despise God. Heavenly love is building the City of God where men despise themselves and worship God”<sup>122</sup>.

From this we would conclude that we need a new kind of piety.

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<sup>120</sup> Ovid, *Ars Amatoria*, III, line 397 (Ovid&The Art of Love&CPL& III, line 397)

<sup>121</sup> from a prayer by Bishop Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet, « *Ô Jésus-Christ ! Vivez et régné dans mon cœur* »

<sup>122</sup> Book 14, *De Civitate Dei*, par. 28 or *De ciuitate Dei* (CPL 0313) - LLT-A-SL 48, lib. 14, cap. 28, linea 1 (Augustine&The City of God&CPL&bk. 14, chap. 28, line 1)

Modern society has expelled God from its midst—so we must rebuild the City of God. Moreover, our souls, penetrated with the need to love Jesus Christ, are too narrow to love him enough, so we must get everybody else to love him as well—and this is how one can understand our apostolic zeal. Was not love of souls the driving-force of Our Lord’s ministry? So a priest will find himself sent by Our Lord and filled with love at being so sent. This twofold reality will make him grow in holiness “*Ascensiones in corde suo disposuit*; In his heart he hath disposed to ascend by steps” (Ps 83:6 Vulgate); “*Mihi vivere Christus est*; For me life means Christ” (Phil 1:21).

### III. Imitating Jesus Christ

Love wants to see proof. Our Lord said: “*Non omnis qui dicit mihi: Domine, Domine, intrabit in regnum caelorum, sed qui facit voluntatem Patris mei*; Not everyone who calls me, Lord, Lord, will enter the Kingdom of Heaven—but he who does the will of my Father in Heaven” (Mt 7:21)—and again: “*Si diligitis me, mandata mea servate*; If you love me, keep my commandments” (Jn 14:15). So we must show our love by putting it into practice; we must copy off our model, Jesus Christ: “*Aspice, et fac secundum exemplar*; Look, and make everything according to the pattern” (Ex 25:40 Vulgate). This pattern is God Himself—this pattern is perfection. “*Estote et vos perfecti, sicut Pater vester caelestis perfectus est*; So be perfect, as your Heavenly Father is perfect” (Mt 5:48). Jesus Christ, who is God, proposes God to all men as their model. From all human beings he demands at least a relative degree of perfection. But the highest degree of perfection is to be sought in religious life, which means that we religious are obliged to become better and better. For this we must imitate Our Lord himself. “*Mitis sum et humilis corde*; Learn of me, for I am meek and humble of heart” (Mt 11:29). “*Exinanivit semetipsum. Christus sibi non complacuit*; He emptied himself and took the form of a slave” (Phil 2:7). Gentleness, kindness, above all humility—we witness this humility at Bethlehem, on Calvary, and in the tabernacle. At Bethlehem Jesus reduces himself to the form of a babe asleep in the manger: “*Invenietis infantem...positum in praesepio*; You will find the infant wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger” (Lk 2:12). On Calvary he is reduced to pain and disgrace: “*Virum dolorum. Posuit in eo Dominus iniquitatem omnium nostrum*; A man of sorrows, acquainted with grief...the Lord had crushed him with the weight of all our iniquity” (Is 53:3-4). And in the tabernacle he reduces himself still further (as if it were possible!).

He who can both create and transform substances takes on the appearance of a little bread and wine. He submits to the priest who, unworthy, approaches the altar, and even to a sinful Christian who profanes the sacrament: “*Agnus tanquam occisus*; The lamb standing there as if to be slain” (Rv 5:6)...“*Obediens usque ad mortem*; Obedient unto death” (Phil 2:8). Wherever we look, we find poverty, humility and obedience—together with self-sacrifice and total abandon into the hands of God. And this is why

Jesus Christ must be the origin and the fulfilment of our perfection. “*Ego sum alpha et omega*; I am the Alpha and the Omega—the beginning and the end” (Rv 22:13). And we must be restored in him: *Instaurare omnia in Christo*; All things must be restored in Christ” (Col 1:20). The religious must imitate him so as to be able to say to the people: “Imitate me, as I imitate Jesus Christ; *Imitatores mei estote, sicut et ego Christi*” (Phil 3:17). And here you have what our work is all about.

### 3° The Church

#### I. Its Nature

We have seen how God spoke to us first through the prophets, then through his Son. Jesus Christ, ascended into heaven, now speaks to us through his Church—this Church which prolongs his presence and activity and to which we must listen. The Church’s teaching is, as far as you and I are concerned, the source of truth and the guide to holiness. It is expressed in two manners: publicly by the teaching of doctors and privately by individual counsel. The teaching of the Church is infallible—but what we call “spiritual direction”, that takes place in secret, may sometimes be incorrect, and for this reason must be subject to control on the part of the ecclesial “powers that be.” Serious heresies have, at different times, owed their origin to faulty spiritual direction: Gnosticism, Jansenism, Molinism<sup>123</sup>, etc.

In his personal Incarnation Jesus Christ unites Man to God. His incarnation continues mystically in humanity. *Ipsium dedit caput supra omnem Ecclesiam, quae est corpus ipsius et plenitudo ejus*; God made him the head of the whole Church which is his body and his fullness” (Eph 1:22-23, Vulgate). So the Church is one with Jesus Christ and completes him in some way. This is what led St. Anselm to say: “*Nihil magis dilexit Deus in hoc mundo quam libertatem Ecclesiae suae*; Nothing pleases God more in this world than that his Church should be free”<sup>124</sup>.

We can therefore regard the Church as the fountain of that perfection coming down from Jesus Christ, head of the Church. And the

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<sup>123</sup> Molinism is named for the 16th-century Jesuit, Luis de Molina. Molinism is a system of thought that seeks to reconcile the sovereignty of God and the free will of man. The heart of Molinism is the principle that God is completely sovereign and man is also free in a libertarian sense. Molinism partly seeks to avoid so-called “theological determinism”: the view that God decrees who will be saved or damned without any meaningful impact of their own free choice. It became a source of debate between Jesuits and Dominicans. Although never declared a heresy, some have concluded that Molinism is not biblical and should be rejected because it does not properly represent God’s eternal independence and non-contingency in his nature as well as his knowledge.

<sup>124</sup> *Cant 1*, IV, ep. IX; Patr. lat, t. CLIX, 206 or *Epistulae* - LLT-A-Vol. 4, epist. 235, pag. 143, linea 21 (Anselm&Epistles&CPL&epist. 235, page 143, line 21)

union between Our Lord and his Church can be looked at from two points of view. We can say about the Church what St. John says about Jesus Christ: “*plenum gratiae et veritatis*; full of grace and truth” (Jn 1:15). Bossuet tells us the Church provides teaching and the Sacraments. The teaching of the truth is the source of freedom, according to these words of the Sacred Scriptures: *Qui facit peccatum, servus est peccati*; sin makes us slaves of sin (Rm 6:16) and “*veritas liberabit vos*; the truth will set you free” (Jn 8:32). As for the Sacraments, they are the channels of grace. “*Euntes, docete omnes gentes...docentes eos servare*; Go and teach all nations...teaching them to observe all I have commanded you (Mt 28:19-20). Yes, the Church has to teach us what to believe and what to do, and the law can be summarized in one word, love: *plenitudo legis dilectio*; the fullness of the law is love (Rm 13:9) and in two commandments: *In his duobus mandatis, tota lex pendet et prophetae*; Upon these two all the Law and the Prophets depend (Mt 22:40). Our Lord adds: *Baptizantes eos*; baptizing them—and here we find the grace of the Sacraments. By the grace and truth which the Church provides, Jesus Christ is with us until the consummation of the world. He is with the Church teaching and with those who are taught. He is with the body of shepherds in their teaching of all the faithful and all the saints: “*Omnia vestra sunt, vos autem Christi, Christum autem Dei*; For all is yours and you are Christ’s. And Christ is God’s, (1 Cor 3:22-23) and “*Omnia propter electos*; All things for the sake of the elect (2 Tm 2:10).

The two principal Sacraments which unite us to Jesus Christ through the Church are Baptism and the Holy Eucharist. Baptism cleanses us from sins, purifies our soul, and makes us children of God and of the Church. And it is here that the action of Jesus Christ and the Church is united. Why does the Church baptise us? To render us capable of assimilating God’s truth. “*Quotquot autem receperunt eum, dedit eis potestatem filios Dei fieri*; But to all those who did welcome him he gave power to become children of God” (Jn 1:12).

Having become incarnate in the womb of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary and in the Church, Jesus Christ assumes a further mode of Incarnation in the wonderful sacrament of the Eucharist in which he comes to life in all of us: “*plenitudo ejus, qui omnia in omnibus adimpletur*; from whose fullness we have all received, and grace for grace” (Jn 1:16). Through the Eucharist our soul becomes more perfect. Not only this, but Our Lord himself seems to wish to become more perfect through it, according to other amazing words of the Divine Master: “*Pro eis ego sanctifico meipsum, ut sint et ipsi sanctificati in veritate. Donec occuramus...in virum perfectum, in mensuram aetatis plenitudinis Christi*; I have sanctified myself for their sake, so that they too may be sanctified through the truth...until we all attain to...mature manhood to the extent of the full stature of Christ” (Jn 17:19 and Eph 4:13). So by our own holiness we are to give Our Lord the opportunity of sanctifying himself within his own Mystical Body. The



Eucharist has a double effect: an individual effect, “*Vivo ego, jam non ego, vivit vero in me Christus*; Yet I, no longer I, but Christ lives in me (Gal 2:20)—and a collective and social effect: “*Unum corpus, multi sumus, qui de uno pane participamus*; We, though many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf” (1 Cor 10:17). Hence the tremendous advantage of the Catholic Church over separated Christian bodies who do not accept the Real Presence. No wonder St. Teresa cried out joyfully on her death-bed: “After all, my God, I die as a child of the Catholic Church”!

## II. Our Duties towards the Church

These are all the more important since the Church is a perfect society—since the Church is the Spouse and Body of Jesus Christ, our Mother and our homeland.

*Our First Duty:* Filial love.; Too many priests look upon the Church as an “establishment,” to be re-enforced by one’s own personality. As a result, because there is no real zeal, a destructive element comes into play. Priests and religious who are not full of zeal harm the Church. Let us therefore become devoted sons of the Church. Remember that the Church leads us to God, so we cannot have too much love for her.

*Our Second Duty:* Study.—The Church is a society of human intellects, nourished on truth. We are therefore under a serious obligation to study. We must study natural truths, but above all supernatural truths, introduced by Jesus Christ to the world.

“*Filius qui est in sinu Patris ipse enarravit*; The only begotten Son who is in the Bosom of the Father, he hath declared him” (Jn 1:18 Vulgate). All these truths are to be studied by us in a supernatural light. Unfortunately, too few priests are interested in divine studies—even their human studies take on the form of a disagreeable drudgery. God only knows what happens to their preaching. They become like false preachers; *adulterantes Verbum Christi* (cf 2 Cor 2:17). The longer such a situation lasts the greater the damage done. We can become dangerously ignorant and culpable of real scandal before God. Why? Because truth studied from a merely human standpoint is preached in like fashion and will do nobody any good. This ineffectiveness will lead us to complete spiritual and intellectual lethargy. Is this not the plague affecting seminaries and novitiates nowadays? Is this not spelling the very downfall of France? And yet, we have received the sacrament of Confirmation—we have received the Spirit of Wisdom and Understanding. But because we seem to have lost the Spirit of Fear of the Lord, we set about our task in a natural way only; *ad oculum servientes* (Eph 6:6 Vulgate). We no longer study from Christ’s point of view: “*Finis legis Christus ad justitiam omni credenti*; For Christ is the end of the law for the justification of everyone who has faith” (Rom 10:4). We will fall into a state of indifference and lethargy, a state that precedes death and that at times is death itself.

*Our Third Duty:* A spirit of holiness.—“*Verba manent, exempla trahunt*; Words stand, but examples move.” Are we to remain just ordinary men? The blessings we receive are treasures for which we must render an account. “*Domine, quinque talenta tradisti mihi, ecce alia quinque superlucratus sum*; Master, you gave me five talents. Here are five talents more” (Mt 25:20). The reason God gives us his graces is to sanctify us. “*Haec est voluntas Dei, sanctificatio vestra*; This is the will of God, your sanctification” (1 Thes 4:3). If, after all that, we do not become saints, then we’re monsters and we would merit these terrible words: “*Ex ore tuo te iudico, serve nequam*; Out of your mouth I judge you, unfaithful servant” (Lk 19:22). It’s up to us to choose where we want to be: in the assembly of the Saints or in the company of the damned, “*in Ecclesia malignantium*; in the Church of the damned”<sup>125</sup>. When you want to give yourself to God, you are thinking of becoming a saint. What have we done with this idea? We do not nourish it; we lie to ourselves and to the Holy Spirit, what with all our disgusts, complaints, back-biting: we ruin our own vocation and that of our brothers. Our life is a lie that corrupts souls. It is better to remain in the world as a good Christian than to become a coward in the army of apostles and so confirm the word of the prophet: *Filii matris meae pugnaverunt contra me*; The sons of my mother have fought against me” (Sg 1:5).

*Our Fourth Duty:* A spirit of evangelization.—We love ourselves so much that we find no time to love others. Let us be less concerned for our own interests and more for those of the souls entrusted to us.

*Our Fifth Duty:* A spirit of initiative.—Our works<sup>126</sup>.

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## *The Attributes of God*

### 1° The Love, Justice and Mercy of God.

I.—“*Deus est caritas*; God is Love” (1 Jn 4:16). Love is part of our human “make-up,” one of our faculties. Love is more than just a part of God. He actually is Love; it is his being. God has a will. This will relates to certain objects. The result is Love. For love is a force which unites us to an object (something or someone) in which (in whom) we find our good. *Amor*

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<sup>125</sup> an expression which dates to the Albigensian heresy apparently and a Dominican preacher by the name of Friar Reiner

<sup>126</sup> The text ends abruptly with no further development.

*est vis unitiva*; love is a unifying force”<sup>127</sup>. Now, creatures have to love an object other than themselves, because no creature can be its own good. Whereas God must necessarily love Himself. This divine order would be completely contrary to ours because an infinite being, infinite good must love itself infinitely with infinite intellect and will. With us love is never unaccompanied by some passion or emotion—we cannot attain God without passing through the channel of our senses. Whereas God’s love is elevated and calm—and it is towards this tranquillity that we must strive, separating ourselves from the senses. The more we know God, the more perfect will be our love. Now nothing is more perfect than faith. We must therefore get rid of our personal ideas and through faith make divine ideas ours. “*Accedentem ad Deum, oportet credere quia est*; anyone who approaches God must believe that he exists “ (Heb 11:6). Let us beware the things we tend to love outside the faith; let our love rise above material things and “for the sake of God; *propter Deum*”<sup>128</sup>.

Does God love creatures? *Diligis omnia quae sunt, et nihil oditis eorum quae fecisti*; For you love all things that are and loathe nothing that you have made” (Wis 11:24). He loves their being, but nothing which is the privation of being. He detests the evil effects caused by their will. He even loves the being of the damned and of the devils, and that is why He keeps them in existence. He hates their evil deeds which are defects of nature.

Does He love them equally? No! He loves more the most perfect. He endowed them with reason together with will and freedom. Each being can use these gifts for good or evil, can fulfil God’s designs or turn away from them. In other words, each free being can become more or less perfect. And it is because of the good use certain men have made of the gifts God gave them that they rank even above the angels and that the Blessed Virgin has become their queen. We too have the capacity to keep climbing higher and higher and acquiring an ever greater perfection.

II.—*Is there justice in God?* No, if one means commutative justice; yes, if one means distributive justice. Natural talents differ from individual to individual, but God gives to each what is proper to his nature. God owes us nothing; his gifts are pure grace, and, marvel of marvels, He desires to be in debt to us. He grants us rewards for the good deeds we have performed. “*Corona justitiae, quam reddet mihi Dominus in illa die justus iudex*; The crown of justice that the Lord, Just Judge, will give me on that day” (2 Tm 4:8). First of all, he deals with us mercifully by showering free gifts on us and exercises his justice according to our use of the gifts. “*Per quae quis peccaverit, per haec et torquetur*; How each one sinned is how each one

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<sup>127</sup> Aquinas, ST I, 2, 1, 3; also found in *Summae theologiae prima pars* - LLT-A-quaestio 20, articulus 1, argumentum 3, linea 1 and several other writings of Thomas Aquinas (Thomas Aquinas&ST&CPL&prima pars, question 20, article 1, argument 3, line 3 and others)

<sup>128</sup> ST II, 2, 104, 3c (Thomas Aquinas&ST&CPL&II, 2, 104, 3c)

will be tormented” (Wis 11:17 Vulgate). In what does God’s mercy consist? It is not as in man—*miserum cor*; a compassionate heart.<sup>129</sup> God cannot experience what we call compassion, but he acts as if he did. Infinitely good, he loves the being; and when this being rebels, he does not exact complete retribution. “*Misericordiae Domini, quia non sumus consumpti*; It is thanks to the mercies of the Lord that we are not consumed “ (Lam 3:22). To his Son alone, therefore, did he reserve such justice. “*Proprio Filio non pepercit Deus*; God spared not his own Son” (Rm 8:32). His mercy extends even to hell by not punishing the damned as much as they deserve.

III.—Let us therefore fear God’s justice, yet trust in his mercy. Let us tremble yet hope. The saints have learnt to strike this balance within themselves. “*Confige timore tuo carnes meas*; Pierce thou my flesh with thy fear (Ps 118:120 Vulgate), *et misericordias Domini in aeternum cantabo*; and the mercies of the Lord I will sing forever (Ps 88:2, Vulgate). *Misericordia et veritas obviaverunt sibi, Justitia et pax osculatae sunt*; Mercy and truth have met; justice and peace have embraced” (Ps. 84:11 Vulgate). The religious has embraced a holy state, yet he isn’t always holy. He cannot therefore afford to live without fear, “*in timore et tremore*; in fear and trembling” (1 Pt 1:17) and having recourse to love that will solve all his problems.

## 2° God’s Providence

St. Thomas says of this about God’s providence: “*Nihil aliud est Dei providentia quam ratio ordinis rerum ad finem*; God’s providence is nothing other than the rational ordering of things to an end”<sup>130</sup>. God’s intelligence and God’s will produce order: “*Tua omnia, Pater, providentia gubernat*; In the unity which governs all things” (Wis 14:3). God’s will is motivated by his infinite kindness. It is in accordance with the principles of this infinite kindness that the infinite intellect and will of God created everything. So his Providence produces an increase of goodness, and consequently an increase of being, in whatever he has created—and this explains what Our Saviour means when he says: “*Veni, ut vitam habeant, et abundantius habeant*; I have come to give them life, and give it more abundantly” (Jn 10:10).

Scripture gives us two definitions of God. The first (Ex 3:14) simply speaks of the notion of being: “*Ego sum qui sum*; I am who am.” The second (at the very end of the New Testament) shows us that in God is the origin and the term of everything that is: “*Ego sum alpha et omega*,

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<sup>129</sup> cf St. Augustine, *De moribus Ecclesiae catholicae* 27.53; St. Thomas, ST II-II, q. 30, a.1 (Augustine&On the Morals of the Catholic Church&Migne&27.53)

<sup>130</sup> ST I, 22. 2 or *Summae theologiae prima pars* - LLT-A-quaestio 22, articulus 2, corpus, linea 30 (Thomas Aquinas&ST&CPL&question 22, article 2, corpus, line 30)

*principium et finis*; I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end” (Rv 23:13). Man is situated between this infinite Being, so considered as the beginning and the end and whatever issues from God must return to God. In a manner beyond our conception, God wishes nothing but his own happiness. He desires to communicate it to his creatures—a happiness which is not capricious, but intelligent.

If we look at all created beings, we can consider the good with respect to the substance of each being in particular or in the general order of things. Substance *qua* substance is good, but if by this substance, beings disrupt God’s harmony, they thereby become something evil. There must therefore be intelligence to assure universal order.

Whatever there is must have been thought of by God, who is the Word: “*Omnia per ipsum facta sunt*; It was through Him that all things were made, and without Him nothing could exist” (Jn 1:3). And, having made everything, God’s infinite intelligence must necessarily rule over everything, and look after everything down to the last detail. Were God’s Providence to overlook the details, this would mean that God was bored, impotent, or ignorant—in other words, God wouldn’t be God, he would be imperfect. For the more perfect the cause, the more out-reaching the effect to the least detail. Therefore, God even knows the thoughts of men. He is according to the Latin word, a perfect “*provisor*; provider (one who looks after).”

If this is so, why is there evil? Such an objection arises from our placing ourselves on a lower level of vision, and comparing God’s Providence to our own. God’s infinite Providence can permit evil in order to derive good. To suppress all evil would entail the suppression of a lot of good. Do not reply by quoting the maxim: “*Non sunt facienda mala, ut eveniant bona*; that we must never do wrong to bring about right” (cf Rom 3:8), since God causes no evil, but merely tolerates it.

*God Governs Everything*; So he does. We must, however distinguish between God’s Foreknowledge, an attribute He alone can possess, and God’s Power which he can, and sometimes does, exercise through intermediaries so as to honour them.

Does God govern his creatures by compulsion? St. Thomas replies: for some, yes; for others, no. God puts everything in its proper place. He governs unthinking creatures by compulsion, and thinking creatures by their freedom of choice. He makes use of this very freedom to bring about His own purpose and design.

I am a creature that is intelligent and free. God is my Supreme Good. In Him is my destiny and my happiness. So I must turn to Him freely. God is infinitely perfect. I issued from a perfect cause—I must return to whence I came and this is what God wants me to do. “*Haec est voluntas Dei, sanctificatio vestra*; This is God’s will, that you should become holy” (1Thes 4:3). So I must aim at accomplishing God’s will. “*Fiat voluntas tua*;

Thy will be done” (Mt 6:10). My will must adhere at all times to God’s. Such is the happiness of the saints just as the unhappiness of the wicked comes from their choosing freely to deviate from this order by sinning. My intellect and my will must be brought into conformity with His. Thence the necessity of intelligent prayer (“the illuminative way”), that seeks to grasp the reasons for God’s will: “*Da mihi intellectum, et scrutabor legem tuam*; Give me understanding, and I will search thy law” (Ps 118:34 Vulgate).

### 3° Predestination

#### Some Principles

We are not going to treat this question dogmatically; that would entail lengthy exposition, and we would finish by coming face to face with a “brick wall.” Let us first of all list a few principles:

1° Predestination is a mystery beyond the scope of human understanding.

2° In speaking of it, one must above all rely on the faith.

3° Either there is no God—or He is supremely just.

4° He would still be supremely just, even if we didn’t understand how.

5° As we have already seen, God’s will follows his intelligence.

6° An infinitely intelligent will can only act with supreme wisdom.

#### Predestination and Freedom

This being said, God predestines us to salvation by calling all men from all eternity, according to a general plan. In the execution of this plan he must, however, proceed in accordance with our nature—consequently our freedom of choice must be no less safeguarded than his own Almighty Power. The question is: how can these two elements be reconciled?

Predestination must necessarily be an element of the will of Him who predestines—God must wish us all to be saved. So if, on the contrary, we are damned, this must be because he permits it without intending it. “*Sicut praedestinatio includit voluntatem conferendi gratiam et gloriam, ita reprobatio includit voluntatem permittendi aliquem cadere in culpam, et inferendi damnationis poenam pro culpare*; Just as predestination includes the will to confer grace and glory, so reprobation includes the will to permit somebody to fall into sin, and because of this sin to incur damnation”<sup>131</sup>. Theologians have debated this text but it is accepted by the Church. So it is part of God’s will, not to bring about, but to permit, damnation. The foreknowledge of our merits cannot be the actual cause of our predestination, because God must have smiled on His elect before knowing how good they were going to be. St. Thomas insists that predestination must

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<sup>131</sup> Aquinas, ST I, Q23, A3, corp. or *Summae theologiae prima pars* - LLT-A-quaestio 23, articulus 3, corpus, linea 17 (Thomas Aquinas&ST&CPL& I, Q23, A3, corp.)

depend upon God's will because it cannot be explained in any other way. This troubles our mind. To our way of thinking, we are tempted to say that God is capricious. But it is precisely here that we must remember St. Thomas' axiom: "*Voluntas intellectum consequitur*"; the decision depends on the understanding"<sup>132</sup>. We are dealing with an infinitely intelligent will. So how can God's foreknowledge of what, in fact, is going to happen to you and me be reconciled to our complete freedom of choice? This is the essence of the mystery.

Faced with this mystery, let us take a look at ourselves. We thinking creatures are incapable of achieving supernatural happiness "under our own steam." The most to which we have a right is natural happiness; besides, we lost that right by sin and so merited everlasting misery. Those of us who are called to supernatural happiness are so by grace—and in the state of fallen nature this grace becomes all the more remarkable.

God's justice is applied to those who refuse to respond to his grace. They have no cause for complaint. God has proved by the Incarnation that he wished to do all he could for them. He placed all the means of salvation at their disposal—and yet only a limited number get there. Here is another mystery!

We must adore and we must tremble before such truths. We Christians must try to realise what we owe to God for having bestowed such favours upon us. How could God's justice punish anyone who has spent this life adoring him and serving him in filial fear? "*Servite Domino in timore, et exultate ei cum tremore*; Serve God in fear, tremble as you adore Him" (Ps 2:11, Vulgate). How could God's justice not possibly turn to mercy in the case of anyone who, mistrusting his own strength, bows down humbly before his infinite Majesty?

#### **Practical consequences**

There are two conclusions to be drawn from this doctrine of predestination: 1° The necessity of prayer. The gift of prayer is always granted to man, and by it he may obtain other gifts. Let us respond to these gifts by the effort of our will to attract more. In trembling think of the great number of those who were lost.

2° Hope: Remember this is the second of the theological virtues. By it we are ordered to depend on the merits of Jesus Christ—and to make requests with complete trust. From this point of view, the mystery of predestination provides us with a powerful incentive—shaking us out of our torpor and preventing us from becoming like lazy men who say: "What's the use of trying, since my fate has already been decided?" St. Augustine tells us that if you are not predestined, then predestine yourself, because God will never be the one to abandon first: "*Non deserit, nisi deseratur*"; one

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<sup>132</sup> ST I, Q19, A1, conclusion or *Summae theologiae prima pars* - LLT-A-quaestio 19, articulus 1, corpus, linea 1 (Thomas Aquinas&ST&CPL&I, Q19, A1)

may abandon God, but God will not abandon him”<sup>133</sup>.

It will become clear to us one day that God has always treated us like free men. We will be rewarded or punished according to the use or misuse we have made of our freedom. Follow the example of the saints. They didn’t just sit there twiddling their thumbs. By constantly striving they reached perfection.

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### *On the Trinity*

In the beginning God said: “*Faciamus hominem ad imaginem et similitudinem nostram*; Let us make Man, according to our own image and likeness” (Gn 1:26). Man destroyed this image. Jesus Christ came down from heaven to repair it and he said in turn: “*Euntes docete...baptizantes eos in nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti*; Go and teach all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Mt 28:19). Jesus Christ wishes to restore God’s image in Man in an even more perfect way—to add to the word of creation the word of regeneration.

God Our Father is the beginning who generates the Son and communicates himself to the Son: “*Tecum principium* (Ps 109:3 Vulgate); *in principio erat Verbum* (Jn 1:1); With thee before the start of time—In the beginning was the Word”. He, being the Principle of all that is, possesses power over all and this is why Omnipotence is attributed to God the Father. God the Son is God’s knowledge of Himself—who thus becomes his Understanding, his Word, his Wisdom, his Scheme and his Law. God the Father knows himself and knows all things in his Son. This is how Christians avoid pantheism, since, for them, everything is not God but all is contained within the mind of God. God knows himself—God looks at Himself—God loves Himself...and this love itself is substantiated in the Person of God the Holy Spirit.

Man is regenerated by this image of God. God the Father supplies him more particularly with Being, God the Son with Understanding, and God the Holy Spirit with Loving. But being images of the Blessed Trinity obliges us to establish a relationship with each of its three Persons. To the Father we owe submission and obedience. It was on these terms that Jesus

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<sup>133</sup> *De natura et gratia* 26,29 or *De natura et gratia* (CPL 0344) - LLT-A-cap. 26, par. 29, pag. 254, linea 28 (Augustine&On Nature and Grace&CPL&chap. 26, par. 29, page 254, line 28)



Christ satisfied his Justice—“*Factus est obediens usque ad mortem*; He became obedient unto death” (Phil 2:8). To guide our steps in the path of obedience God has established two tiers of submission: that to his precepts and that to his counsels. Our vow of obedience honours God the Father more than anything else and allows us to resemble the Son.

*God the Son* is understanding and truth. We must go to him by contemplating the truth first of all; then we must apply his maxims to our everyday conduct. Truth, moreover, is God’s wealth. Our vow of poverty enables us to procure this wealth; since the happiness of heaven consists in this “*gaudium de veritate*; treasure in heaven” (Lk 18:22), we must strip our heart of created riches here on earth, and seek the truth wherever it may lead.

*The Holy Spirit* is rightly entitled to our gratitude and affection because of the gifts he bestows upon us. We must love him because he is God. “*Dixi Domine: Deus meus es tu*; I said to the Lord: You are my God” (Ps 15:1 Vulgate). Him we honour by our vow of Chastity, because in the Scriptures he is called “*Sponsus castarum animarum*; the Spouse of chaste souls”(cf Sg ch. 2).

#### Practical Consequences

Let us become completely dependent on the Trinity. Let us apply our whole mind and our whole strength to becoming truly obedient. Let us reproduce in ourselves the image of the Trinity. In this consists a religious’ happiness and constant concern. Let obedience hold our pride in check. “*Scientia inflat*; knowledge inflates us” (1 Cor 8:1), but supernatural knowledge breaks through this routine and that is why we must request understanding. “*Da mihi intellectum, et scrutabor legem tuam, et custodiam illam in toto corde meo*; Give me understanding and I search your law and observe it with all my heart” (Ps 118:34 Vulgate). This divine knowledge cannot be learnt; it comes through prayer and meditation.

God gives us grace wherewith to develop our spiritual self, but we ourselves must co-operate in this development. “*Apud te est fons vitae*; With you is the fountain of life” (Ps 35:10 Vulgate). Our spiritual life will grow provided we draw water from this source that is the Father, for the Son himself received life from him: “*Sicut Pater habet vitam in semetipso, sic dedit et Filio*; as the Father has life in himself, so he gives it to the Son” (Jn 5:26). Let us draw nearer to God the Son if we wish to understand what spiritual reality is all about. “*Revela oculos meos, et considerabo legem tuam*; Open my eyes, and I will meditate on your Law” (Ps 118:18 Vulgate). We ought to spend our whole life contemplating this uncreated Intelligence and pose questions in meditation to this Inner Teacher. Last, but not least, let us love the Holy Spirit and ask him to help us to put into practice the things of God.

Thus we will joyfully develop within ourselves the image of the Holy Trinity: “*Signasti super nos lumen vultus tui, Domine, dedisti laetitiam*

*in corde meo*; You have stamped me, Lord, with the light of your countenance, and you have filled my heart with joy” (Ps 4:7 Vulgate). Moaning and groaning come from the Devil. Remember that Jesus Christ endured with gladness of heart. “*qui, proposito sibi gaudio, sustinuit crucem*; who, having joy set before him, endured the cross “ (Heb 12:2 Vulgate).

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*Fr. d’Alzon was inspired with these lofty considerations in his preaching, even when speaking to young people like the “Children of Mary” at the St. Maur Convent School residence in Nimes as the following outline of a retreat he was to give there bears witness:*

### **On the Rights of God**

1. Adoration. 2. Obedience. 3. Understanding. 4. Gratitude.

Since He alone exists of Himself, He must be the origin of everything else. Everything else derives from Him.

Since He is the Supreme Good, everything must aspire towards Him.

Since He is Perfection, everything must imitate Him.

Since he is Life, everything takes life from Him.

Since His is Will, everyone must wish what He wishes.

Since He is Love, everyone must love Him.

Since He is Justice and Mercy, all must fear Him and at the same time fling themselves into his arms.

Since He is Power, everyone must obey Him.

And since He is Happiness, all must seek happiness in Him alone.

Holy, Holy, Holy!

## The Love of Our Lord

*Our Lord was always the preferred topic of Fr. d'Alzon when he gave a retreat or did a Lenten series. On this topic he felt he could go on forever. He would speak just using some hastily put together notes. "Study," he would say, "helps you gather material and put it in order. The night before preaching, it's best to set books aside unless you need to pin down a quotation. Prayer alone anoints you and gives you the power of penetration. The sermon which is most effective may not always be the most perfect from a literary point of view, unlike the one that is prepared before the Blessed Sacrament, with penance, meditation, and prayer." One should not be surprised at how rare it is to find fully developed sermons or retreat outlines in Fr. d'Alzon's hand, when he had reached full maturity.*

## ***Retreat on Knowing our Lord Jesus Christ***

*From a retreat on knowing Our Lord Jesus Christ, we present 7 of the 29 topics edited by Fr. d'Alzon that are found in the table of contents. They deal with meditations more than instructions. This retreat was scheduled around 1870. In the third and fourth meditations Fr. d'Alzon takes up again the basic thrust of the fourth letter to the Master of Novices which he had left as a work in progress in 1869. Also, there was inserted; by Fr. d'Alzon, no doubt; after the "adoration of the shepherds," a meditation on the Epiphany that can be dated to 1878-1879, when he actually gave it. Might it not have come from the second booklet of meditations for use by the Augustinians of the Assumption that was begun by Fr. d'Alzon at the end of his life but which remained incomplete? Or perhaps it deals with a series of meditations begun around 1873-1874 that Fr. d'Alzon wrote to replace the fourth letter to the Master of Novices and that, in 1879, he hoped to complete. That is why this series of meditations, unfortunately never completed, demands special attention from us.*

### **I. THE IMPORTANCE OF KNOWING JESUS CHRIST**

*"Non enim judicavi me scire aliquid inter vos, nisi Jesum Christum, et hunc crucifixum; For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified" (1 Cor 2:2).*

Everything is summed up in Jesus Christ. Whoever knows Him, knows all we have to know in order to go to the Father, that is, to God and heaven. So let us turn our attention to our divine Master. We must reflect on everything that he tells us of perfection in him and that must serve as our light and our life.

Let us make clear that he is 1° our Saviour; 2° our Model; 3° our King; 4° our Judge.

#### **1° Jesus Christ Our Saviour**

How merciful it was on God's part to come down from heaven to earth in order to rescue us from the pit into which we had fallen! What sheer

kindness on his part since we were entitled to nothing; we were in fact “*natura filii irae!*; children of wrath” (Eph 2:3). Before all time he has had compassion on us. “*In charitate perpetua dilexi te, ideo attraxi te, miserans;* I have loved you with an everlasting love, therefore I have taken pity on you and drawn you to myself” (Jer 31:3). This God who has always been thinking about the beings that would one day be the product of his wisdom and power loved them. He has always loved us in spite of our sins. In his goodness he called us into being—in his mercy he called us from sin to the life of grace. He called us to happiness by humbling himself and clothing himself in our humanity, by enduring every form of ill-treatment, by suffering more than we can imagine, and by dying the cruellest of deaths. And all this was to save us and to persuade us to love him by giving us such overwhelming proof of this love.

Let us gaze upon him as he hangs on the cross—as he tells us with his dying lips: “Have I loved you enough? What more does my Father’s justice require to be appeased? What more does your indifference require to turn it into gratitude and love?”

## 2° Jesus Christ Our Model

In the accomplishment of our redemption, our Divine Redeemer does not wish to do everything himself. He gives each of us a part to play. But what will we do? Jesus Christ became man, thereby becoming the perfect model for us. “*Exemplum enim ddi vobis, ut quemadmodum ego feci vobis, ita et vos faciatis;* I have given you an example, so that what I have done for you, so you should do the same” (Jn 13:15). He is, of course, God, but he is also a man—and as a man he provides an example of every virtue. Are there any circumstances in which we cannot look upon him as our model? You won’t find any. Look at him, the perfect man.

Jesus Christ is the man of poverty, born in a stable, rejected by men. Jesus Christ is the man of work. To whom else can these words of the Prophet refer: “*Pauper sum ego, et in laboribus a juventute mea;* I have been poor and have had to labour since my youth” (Ps 87:16 Vulgate)? Jesus Christ is the man of disappointment. How kind he was to those crowds to whom he preached the Good News! What miracles he performed for them! And look how ungrateful they were in spite of all these blessings! They all let him down or abandoned him. The crowds demanded his death. Jesus Christ, the man of every sacrifice. Follow him through all the stages of his sufferings. To whom else could these words of the Prophet be truly applied when he speaks of “the man of sorrows, acquainted with grief; *virum dolorum, et scientem infirmitatem*” (Is 53:3). Sufferings of body and of soul—he accepts them all. All he wishes is to lead the way along the path we are called to follow: “*Si quis vult post me venire, abneget semetipsum, et tollat crucem suam, et sequatur me;* If any would be my followers, let them deny themselves, take up their cross and follow me” (Mt 16:24).

### 3° Jesus Christ Our King

*“Domini est terra, et plenitudo ejus: orbis terrarum, et universi qui habitant in eo; The Lord’s is the earth and the fulness thereof, the world and all that dwell therein”* (Ps 23:1 Vulgate). Who would dare deny God’s sovereignty over every creature? Well, God has transferred this sovereignty to His Son. *“Dominus dixit ad me: Filius meus es tu, ego hodie genui te. Postula a me, et dabo tibi gentes hereditatem tuam, et possessionem tuam terminos terrae; The Lord said to me: Thou art my Son—this day have I engendered thee. Ask of me, and I shall give thee the nations for thine inheritance, and the ends of the Earth for thy possession”* (Ps 2:7-8 Vulgate). What is clearer—what is more evident? Therefore, if we do not wish to imitate Christ, we do, nonetheless, have to obey him.

Jesus Christ is our King; we are his subjects. Yes, but in what does his Kingdom consist? It is first of all a kingdom within. *“Regnum Dei intra vos est; The Kingdom of God is within you”* (Lk 17:21). It’s a secret kingdom which he wishes to extend to the innermost recesses of the heart. This is what he is most jealous of. He wishes to touch human souls: their intellect, their will, their insights which come from him if they are pure, their desires, and their need for happiness, a happiness he alone can fulfil, provided that in their heart of hearts they obey him.

But his is also an exterior kingdom—a kingdom not of this world but, nevertheless, in this world. His subjects must mix with other men and bear witness to him. They must know how to take up arms, to defend against all the many enemies who attack him from within and without. Since Jesus Christ is our King, what are our duties in his regard?

### 4° Jesus Christ Our Judge

*“Neque enim Pater judicat quemquam, sed omne iudicium dedit Filio; For the Father judges no one but has given all judgment to the Son”* (Jn 5:22). Yes, Christ is the judge of the living and the dead. Not a single soul is separated from the body without having to be judged by Our Lord Jesus Christ on the threshold of eternity. One day we shall all thus be judged by him, and our future will be pronounced by this supreme judge. What is more, *“He who sits at the right hand of the Father will come one day to judge the living and the dead; Inde venturus est iudicare vivos et mortuos”*<sup>134</sup>. And this is our faith!

Jesus Christ, my Saviour, my Model and my King, will one day pass judgment upon me and when I present myself before his tribunal, where all the good and evil I have ever done will be openly displayed, what will I have to say? For at that moment it won’t be a question of mere approval or blame, of a fleeting honour or a shame that can be hidden. It won’t be a

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<sup>134</sup> from the Apostles’ Creed

question of happiness for the next few hundred years nor of punishment which, however severe, will eventually come to an end. It will be either heaven with God or hell with the demons...and it will be for ever. Will I be judged fit for eternal joy or eternal torment? This, and nothing less, is what I must think about as I place myself in the presence of Jesus Christ my Judge. I must imagine myself being summoned before this redoubtable tribunal. Will I be saved? Will I be damned? What a scary thought! Unless I throw myself during this life into the loving arms of a merciful Jesus, I will discover that the hand of Jesus, this uncompromising judge, will be rejecting me.

So, from now onwards, I will embrace the goodness of my Saviour. I will make every effort to imitate Jesus my Model. I will be faithful to Jesus my King, so that when I appear before Jesus my Judge, he may see in me one of the blessed of his Father and lead me into that place prepared out of love for me from the foundation of the world.

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## II. THE SELF-ABANDONMENT OF JESUS CHRIST

*“Semetipsum exinanivit formam servi accipiens; He emptied himself, taking on the form of a slave” (Phil 2:7).*

What a disconcerting sight! God, the fullness of being, reduces himself to the very limits of nothingness. And this is the sight which the Son of God—God Himself—wishes to offer us in the mystery of his Incarnation.

This is the emptying of himself that we must study in its various manifestations. Let us take as our guide Pope St. Leo the Great, known as the Doctor of the mystery of the Incarnation. Let us listen to him describing the prodigy of a God becoming nothing.

*“Salva igitur proprietate utriusque substantiae, et in unam coeunte personam, suscipitur a maiestate humilitas, a virtute infirmitas, ab aeternitate mortalitas; Without detriment therefore to the properties of either substance which then came together in one person, majesty took on humility, strength weakness, eternity mortality”<sup>135</sup>. The Majesty, the Power and the Timelessness of God accommodating themselves to the human condition...here are the three degrees of self-emptying of a God who freely became humble, infirm and mortal in order to save us. It is these three degrees that we must contemplate in order to learn how to offer God our own nothingness, our own weakness, and all our life unto death.*

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<sup>135</sup> Pope St. Leo, *Tractatus septem et nonaginta*, tract. 21, linea 43 or *Tractatus septem et nonaginta* (CPL 1657) - LLT-A-SL 138, tract. 21, linea 43 (Leo the Great&97<sup>th</sup> Tracate&CPL&tract. 21, line 43)

## 1° The Humility of Jesus Christ

“*Suscipitur a maiestate humilitas*; majesty took on humility”. What is the Word? St. Paul gives us the answer: “*splendour gloriae et figura substantiae eius*; the radiance of his splendour and the full expression of his very being” (Heb 1:3). “He is God from God, Light from Light, True God from True God; *Deum de Deo, lumen de luminis, Deum verum de Deo vero*”<sup>136</sup>. What more is there?

But now we come upon another extraordinary sight: Two travellers, a young carpenter and his wife, trying to find accommodation in the town of their ancestors. They have been ordered to come here to be registered by a decree of the Roman emperor. They can find no haven and because the young woman’s time to give birth has arrived, she gives birth to her child in a stable and lays him in a manger wrapped in swaddling clothes. Who is this child of the poor? He is God! And by what sign will he be recognised? A child wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. Has he come down far enough? It seems that all human pride is turned upside down. What mother would ever dream of giving birth to her son in a stable? What man, if he had a choice, would ever boast of having a manger as his cradle? Yet this stable, this manger was chosen by the Son of God made Man for his first palace and his first throne.

He came down to Mary’s womb... “*non horruisti virginis uterum*; he did not disdain the virgin’s womb”<sup>137</sup>. He foresaw all the humiliations which awaited him—and he accepted them all in advance even to his condemnation to death in the midst of the shouts of the crowds, the biting sarcasm of the Pharisees, the blasphemy of the priests. Yes, he accepted it all.

And what about us, conceited, full of self-esteem and pretensions, we who hunger and thirst for approval and applause, when are we going to accept humiliations, scorn and disdain? When are we going to learn to do without this artificial praise of which we are so jealous? When are we going to do away with our absurd pretentions? It is time to set aside the lie of all these false ambitions. It is time to replace it by the desire to live a life of self-emptying and of humiliations. Otherwise we must admit that we do not accept the teaching of a God who became nothing for our sake.

## 2° The Weakness of Jesus Christ

“*Suscipitur virtute infirmitas*; strength took on weakness”<sup>138</sup>. St. Paul describes that the Son of God “sustains all things by his powerful word; *portansque omnia verbo vitutis suae*” (Heb 1:3). He is the Word of

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<sup>136</sup> Nicene Creed

<sup>137</sup> *Te Deum*

<sup>138</sup> Pope St. Leo, op.cit. (Leo the Great & 97<sup>th</sup> Tractate & CPL & tract. 21, line 43)



God; He is “the very power of God; *Christum Dei virtutem*” (1 Cor 1:24).

To what has he condemned himself by being born, this poor little child “wrapped in swaddling-clothes and laid in a manger” because he was unable to provide for his feeble body; *pannis involutum et positum in praesepio* (Lk 2:12)? At Nazareth you will see him as an ordinary working man, no stronger than any other. These hands which were made to carry the sceptre not only of David but of the whole universe, what are they carrying now? Nothing but the hammer and the saw of a carpenter. At his death, he reveals his weakness! He really knows how it feels to be helpless, this “Man of Sorrows; *virum dolorum et scientem infirmitatem*” (Is 53:3). His divine weakness is hidden in the Eucharist where he comes to abide with us. Who protects him there against Christians who are lukewarm, indifferent, and thoughtless? Who defends him there against sacrilegious profanation?

Weakness seems to be one of the characteristics he clings to the most. What a contrast to my life! No sooner am I conscious of having achieved anything at all, than I begin patting myself on the back and crying: “Good old Me”! This halo I like to put on my head, I have to remove it if I want to enter into relationship with Jesus Christ. I must henceforth dismiss the illusion that I am invincible and tireless when it comes to working out my salvation. No doubt I can do all things in Him who gives me strength, but I must begin by having recourse to him. My weakness and powerlessness must become for me treasures for it is here that the Lord Jesus Christ supplies me with his own power to fight and overcome. “*Virtus in infirmitate perficitur*; My power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor 12:9).

Yes, Lord, I want to be weak and helpless like you were. I don’t want to be able to do anything except through you, by virtue of your divine weakness.

### 3° The Power of Jesus Christ’s Dying

“*Suscipitur ab aeternitate mortalitas*; eternity took on mortality”<sup>139</sup>. What a contradiction in terms: an Eternal God—a dying God—a dead God! And this death of God, this scandal and folly, is what the Word chose to assume in order to give us life! How can we imagine God ceasing to live? What utter confusion! What chaos! What reversal to nothingness!

What would happen to the universe if God died? But of course God couldn’t die! Nevertheless, the mystery is resolved by God’s becoming Incarnate. Yes, God will experience these things. God is going to unite Himself with humanity in a single person. He will die. He will be nailed to a cross—and when he has drawn his last breath he will be taken down and placed in a tomb. His Divinity, still united to this lifeless corpse whose human soul has departed, will accompany this corpse behind this stone

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<sup>139</sup> Pope St. Leo, *ibid.* (Leo the Great & 97<sup>th</sup> Tractate & CPL & tract. 21, line 43)

sealed by hatred of the doctors of the law. This is how far he intended to go. He wanted to pursue sin, whose end is death, to its very limit, its last stronghold. This is why he wanted to die.

This is what he accepted by becoming a Man. He accepts not only human life but human death as well. We will go into the details of this divine death some other time. For the moment I want you to consider the destruction and the devastation into which God seems to fling himself. The point, as far as I am concerned, is this: Am I prepared to embrace death of my own accord? Am I ready to turn my whole life into one continual death by destroying everything that I destroy in it, in order to destroy sin, whose end was the death of my God? By dying to myself, do I wish to uproot all those sinful propensities which dwell within my soul? What demolition do I intend to undertake in that part of my nature which is the daughter of wrath?

I will do away with all these human standards—with all these sentiments unworthy of a Christian. I must abase myself. I must accept my weaknesses. I must not cover them over with my pride. I must die to self, and allow my life to be hidden with Jesus Christ made Man—so as to live a new life in God, who will give me his glory, his power, and his eternal life.

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### III. THE ANNUNCIATION.

#### *THE FORMATION OF JESUS CHRIST IN THE SOUL THAT SEEKS PERFECTION*

I contemplate the wonder of a God taking shape in the most pure womb of His Blessed Mother—and I ask myself how this can be applied to me. I note three wonderful phrases spoken on this occasion.

The message of the angel to Mary: “*Spiritus Sanctus superveniet in te, et virtus Altissimi obumbrabit tibi*; The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you” (Lk 1:35).

The word of Mary: “*Ecce ancilla Domini, fiat mihi secundum verbum tuum*; Behold the handmaid of the Lord—be it done unto me according to your word” (Lk 1:38).

The word of the Holy Spirit: “*Et Verbum caro factum est*,” and “*abitavit in nobis*”; And the Word was made flesh—and dwelt amongst us (Jn 1:14).

These three phrases are so important that the Church proposes them for the meditation of Christians three times a day (i.e. the “Angelus”).

1° The work of the Holy Spirit in his divine initiative.

2° The consent of the creature in carrying out this mystery.

3° The result of a human will cooperating with the Will of God.

## 1° The Work of the Holy Spirit in his divine initiative

The time has come. The Promised One, the Desired of all Nations, is about to appear. An angel is sent to a humble virgin, to inform her of the part God wishes her to play in the fulfilment of his purpose. What will she say to him? “*Spiritus Sanctus superveniet in te, et virtus Altissimi obumbrabit tibi*; The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.” Here we see manifested each Person of the Blessed Trinity: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

The Father is going to exert his power and produce a divine action more wonderful, say the Holy Fathers of the Church, than that of creation itself—*Virtus altissimi*; the power of the Most High. It requires nothing less than this power to form the God-Man in the womb of a virgin.

The Holy Spirit offers the flames of his purest love: *Spiritus Sanctus superveniet in te*; the Holy Spirit will come upon you. Mary’s womb becomes the most wonderful, the most perfect of shrines, exquisite as it is under the action of the Holy Spirit whose incomprehensible ways would respect the Virginity of a daughter of David, yet make her the Mother of the Incarnate Word.

The Son, by an incalculable act of self-emptying, gives himself to the world for the salvation of sinners. This is what I contemplate in Mary. This is what I can contemplate in myself if I know how to look at it with the eyes of faith.

Does not the Apostle say to Christians, “*Filioli quos iterum parturio; donec Christus formetur in vobis*; My little children, I am once more giving birth to you until Christ is formed in you” (Gal 4:19)? There is a Christian birth which follows the first. *Nisi quis renatus fuerit*; unless a man be born again” (Jn 3:5). Jesus Christ states it clearly. Having been born into sin, we must be reborn into grace; the Blessed Trinity participates in this grace when we are baptised in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit and we become “a new creation” (Gal 6:15). It is a source of unending wonder and gratitude for the creature called to this regeneration.

## 2° The consent of the creature in carrying out such a great mystery

So here is the scene: for its part the Trinity sends a heavenly ambassador to a humble virgin, and awaits her consent in order to act. The virgin accepts the un-heard of privilege being offered her and replies: “*Ecce ancilla Domini, fiat mihi secundum verbum tuum*; Behold the handmaid of the Lord—be it done unto me according to thy word.” And thus the wonder takes place—a God steps into the world. He will restore truth to it as well as holiness. He will die for sinners, and by the merits of his blood, he will introduce them into the Kingdom of his Father, thus conveying to them eternal happiness

And what takes place in Mary takes place in every Christian who wishes to participate in both the marvel and the munificence. Do we wish to share in it? Then let us study Mary's dispositions. "Behold," she says, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord." What a word of wonderful obedience! The most perfect of creatures submits herself to whatever the Trinity wishes of her. *Ecce ancilla*; the handmaid of the Lord. She is a mere handmaid who is to be made mother of God.

What a word of self-sacrifice. A ray of heavenly light reveals to Mary what she will have to suffer. Who would dare suggest that she was not enlightened as to what would happen to the Savior of mankind and what being his Mother would entail? Yes, she will have to suffer much, for suffering is the rule of holiness. Jesus will be the first victim of the salvation of mankind; she will be the second. She will be the mother of the Savior of mankind, she will be the Mother of Sorrows. So here is your model. Mary shows us the conditions for following Christ perfectly: obedience and self-sacrifice. Do I wish to follow in this way? Is my soul willing to say, "*Ecce ancilla Domini*; Behold the handmaid of the Lord"?

Am I prepared to let God take me at my word? Will I welcome whatever comes my way in terms of possessions, family, reputation, ill-treatment, loneliness, and all the inner struggles to which our soul is exposed when we give of ourselves unreservedly?

This is a terribly important question upon which I cannot spend enough serious reflection.

### 3° The mystery takes place

Mary has given her consent. Now the Son of God can come and reduce himself to nothingness on this earth. Now the angels in heaven can sing: "*Verbum caro factum est*; the Word was made flesh." A few privileged souls will be able to reply: "*Et habitavit in nobis*; and dwelt amongst us."

See how Jesus takes shape in Mary! By faith this same Jesus wishes to take shape within us too, but what dispositions are required on our part! If the Word is, indeed, to be made flesh, then is it not necessary that "*caro non potest quidquam*; the flesh be of no avail" (Jn 6:64)? The flesh has nothing to do with this, nor the senses either. For Jesus Christ to come and live in souls, it depends on the triumph of Faith. "*Christum habitare per fidem in cordibus*; may Christ find a dwelling place in your hearts through faith" (Eph 3:17).

Our intellect must submit; it must be ruled by faith. In its weakness it can only be raised to the supernatural order unless it relies on faith. At the moment of the Incarnation Mary certainly did believe she would become the Mother of God, but it took a far greater act of faith than Abraham's which earned him the title, "Father of believers". Like Mary I must believe, and with undiluted faith I must adhere to whatever is proposed to me,

devote myself whole-heartedly to Christ being formed within me. My will too must submit and do whatever is requested of me, “*Fiat mihi secundum verbum tuum*; be it done to me according to your word.” Speak, Lord—your servant is listening. I wish to obey you to the utmost of my capability—and what limits will there be to my capability once you have given the word of command?

Above all, my heart must submit, because this is above all a question of love. Jesus Christ cannot dwell joyfully in a heart which isn’t burning with love for him.

What a mystery! Jesus wants to dwell in me. “*Et verbum caro factum est, et habitavit in nobis*; the Word was made flesh, and dwelt amongst us.” What obedience, what love, what purity must I not offer him if he is to be happy with this miserable child of man and if he, as with Mary, is to consent to be united with him!

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#### IV. THE BIRTH OF JESUS CHRIST IN THE CHRISTIAN

“*Verbum caro factum est, et habitavit in nobis*; The Word was made flesh, and dwelt amongst us.”

The birth of Jesus Christ takes place in two ways: that in the crib and that in our souls. In fact, the Word was made flesh in Mary; he manifested himself in Bethlehem; he continues to manifest himself each day in us. St. Ambrose tells us: “*Ubi enim secundum altiore rationem nascitur Christus, nisi in corde tuo et in pectore tuo*; Where is Christ born in a deeper sense of the word, but in your heart, within your breast?”<sup>140</sup>. Today I wish to speak about this deeper birth by studying the remarkable effects it produces in us. I have boiled them down to two main ones. Jesus Christ becomes incarnate in us: 1° to make of us a new man; 2° to make of us a son of God.

##### **1° Jesus Christ creates a new man in us**

1° Our Divine Saviour, in his measureless mercy, wishes us to participate in his birth. How? By Baptism. By being born in us he obliges us to be re-born. Listen to St. Leo: “*Universa summa fidelium fonte orta est baptismatis, sicut cum Christo in passione crucifixi, in resurrectione resuscitati, in ascensione ad dexteram Patris collocati, ita cum ipso sunt in ista navitate congeniti*; As the entire body of the faithful being born in the

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<sup>140</sup> Ambrose, *Expositio euangelii secundum Lucam*, CPL 0143 LLT-A, lib. 2, linea 534 (Ambrose&Exposition on the Gospel according to Luke&CPL&bk. 2, line 534)

font of baptism is crucified with Christ in His passion, raised again in His resurrection, and placed at the Father's right hand in His ascension, so with Him are they born in this nativity"<sup>141</sup>. This is indeed a new birth—and this new birth is the starting point of the Savior's great transformations, in his suffering and death, in his victory over death, and even in his triumph in the highest heavens. In all these epic events we must become and remain true imitators of Jesus Christ. St. Leo said "*Frustra enim appellamur christiani, si imitatores non sumus Christi*; In vain would we be called Christians if we are not imitators of Christ"<sup>142</sup>.

2° He destroys sin in us. Would we dare to say it without fear of exaggeration had not a great pope already said it? Listen to St. Leo again: "*Omni homini renascenti aqua baptismati instar est uteri virginalis, eodem Spiritu replente fontem qui replevit Virginem, ut peccatum quod ibi vacuavit sacra conceptio, hic mystica tollat ablutio*; Everybody being reborn in the waters of Baptism is like Mary's sacred womb. The same Spirit fills the fountain who filled the Virgin—and the sin from which she was preserved by her holy conception is washed away by this mystic ablution"<sup>143</sup>. I can think of nothing more forcible than this comparison, carried to its extreme, between the Holy Spirit shaping Jesus in Mary and the same Holy Spirit shaping a Christian in the waters of baptism. But with what esteem must we not regard our baptism! The very idea grabs our attention and transports us right up to heaven. It not only purifies us but works in us something similar to that which took place inside the womb of Mary. "*Ut peccatum quod ibi vacuavit sacra conceptio, hic mystica tollat ablutio*; The sin from which she was preserved by her holy conception is washed away by this mystic ablution."

3° He gives us humility. St. Augustine exclaims, "*Ipse vobis ostendam gratiam humilitatis, qui caepit habitare in cordibus vestris*; He gives us the gift of humility, by coming to dwell in our hearts"<sup>144</sup>. And who could be more humble than the Divine Saviour—and what greater proof of humility could he give than by coming to dwell in hearts defiled by so much passion and so enslaved by sin? Yet he comes. He overcomes whatever repugnance his dignity might produce. He descends to the very depth of our wretchedness—it doesn't frighten him...and he thereby sows within us the seeds of Christian humility.

4° He changes the orientation of our life. It would require a separate talk to treat this subject. Who has the power to change the course of a

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<sup>141</sup> *Tractatus septem et nonaginta* (CPL 1657) - LLT-A, SL 138, tract. 26, linea 32 (Leo the Great&97<sup>th</sup> Tractate&CPL&tract. 26, line 32)

<sup>142</sup> *Tractatus septem et nonaginta* (CPL 1657) - LLT-A, SL 138, tract. 25, linea 154 (Leo the Great&97<sup>th</sup> Tractae&CPL&tract. 25, line 154)

<sup>143</sup> *Tractatus septem et nonaginta* (CPL 1657) - LLT-A, SL 138, tract. 24, linea 82 (Leo the Great&97<sup>th</sup> Tractate&CPL&tract. 24, line 82)

<sup>144</sup> *In Iohannis euangelium tractatus* (CPL 0278) - LLT-A, tract. 3, par. 15, linea 8 (Augustine&Tractate on the Gospel of John&CPL&tract. 3, par. 15, line 8)

human life; who can do it but God alone? Humanity, by its innate corruption, is sliding down toward hell; humanity renewed by Jesus Christ will rise toward heaven. And who can tell to what height this new life will rise, which transforms an obedient humanity under the inspiration of Jesus Christ? Sin changed mankind into something diabolical, damned, the child of God's wrath. Then Jesus Christ became incarnate, he dwelt among us, and, ever since, new blood has been coursing through our veins, new life has penetrated all our faculties. We are filled with the energy to practice God-like virtues. Life is in him, and this life is light. Come out, come out from the darkness of evil, O creature in whom a God comes to dwell. "Life is in him—*in ipso vita erat*—and this life is the light of men" (Jn 1:4). To the extent that man is more alive, the more he shines—*et vita erat lux*. "The light of men; *lux hominum*." How these words are worth considering!—what deep meaning they convey! But what is this life of the spirit if not an intelligent life, whereby one is aware of who he is, to the goal toward which he is going? This is what Jesus Christ has come to bring us. By his light he tells us who we are, what we must accomplish, and what we are to desire and hope for. Infinite light sparks light of our souls...*accende lumen sensibus*; inflame our senses with your light"<sup>145</sup> and we will live a new kind of life, we will have become new men.

## II° Adoption as Children of God

1° This is the crowning mercy of God's stupendous love. Sin made us his enemies. He desires to make of us his children. And the Church, our Mother, might ask how, as Mary did with regard to the Incarnation, this is to come about, "*Quomodo fiet istud*; how can this be?" (Lk 1:34).

God sends his Son to be reborn in them—and to those who welcome him he accords the immense privilege of becoming his children. "*Quotquot autem receperunt eum, dedi eis potestatem filios Dei fieri*; but to those who did receive him he gave power to become sons of God" (Jn 1:12). Who would ever have imagined something so remarkable? Yet that is what the Gospel affirms from the very beginning; and to give us a clue into this mystery—it speaks also of a God being born in a stable.

2° Having welcomed Jesus Christ, they become born of God himself—*ex Deo nati sunt* (Jn 1:13). And if they are born of God they must necessarily be his children. How? This is a mystery. Surely if we are permitted to penetrate something of it, let us say that God sent his Son to dwell among men. In men, he sees his Son—and this makes him regard men as his own children. "*Quotquot autem receperunt eum, dedit eis potestatem filios Dei fieri*; to those who did receive him he gave power to become sons of God." If we wish to plumb the depths even further, listen to St. Augustine: "*Ut homines nascerentur ex Deo, primo ex ipsis natus est Deus,*

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<sup>145</sup> from the hymn *Veni, Creator Spiritus*

*Christum enim Deus; for men to be born of God, God had to begin by being born of men. Christ being God makes God born of men*<sup>146</sup>. Jesus Christ is born of men. God sees his Son a man and in this perfect man he wishes to see all of humanity in order to divinize it by adopting it. In God's eyes we have undergone a new birth. The Word has been ceaselessly engendered within the bosom of his Father from all eternity, in an infinite present; and in this perpetual eternity, in this "today" of God it leads the prophet, speaking of the Son, to say, "*Dominus dixit ad me: Filius; I engendered thee*" (Ps 2:7 Vulgate). What God says to his Son in eternity he says to us in time. The Word is now born in us and it is in this double birth that he gives the titles of our adoption. "*Noli ergo mirari, o homo, quia efficeris filius per gratiam, qui nasceris ex Deo secundum Verbum ejus; Do not wonder how you can become a child of grace. You were born of God according to his Word*"<sup>147</sup>. Beautiful words of St. Augustine which express the dignity of our promotion thanks to this second birth. Jesus Christ doesn't stop here. By being born in us he confers on us not only the title of adopted sons but the right of inheritance which goes with it. "*Si filii et haeredes, haeredes quidem Dei, cohaeredes autem Christi; If you are sons, then you are heirs too, heirs indeed of God, and joint-heirs with Christ*" (Rom 8:17). Now go and look for something greater than God's heritage to be shared with a God! The mind boggles considering such matters. What other conclusion can we draw than that we must co-operate with all our heart and soul in this renovation Jesus Christ wishes to bring about? We must allow him to be born in us and dwell in us, so that God may adopt us as his children, and allow to share his inheritance with Jesus Christ.

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## V. ADORATION OF THE SHEPHERDS

The mystery of a God being born is such that hearing of it leaves me no option but to bow down and adore. This is what the shepherds who tended their flocks on the plains of Bethlehem were invited to do. An angel appeared to them, and said: "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace on earth to men of good will" (Lk 2:14).

Let us explore this mystery and let us consider: 1° the summons; 2° its purpose: the glory to God; 3° peace.

We are all called—have I heeded this call? We are called to give

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<sup>146</sup> *In Iohannis euangelium tractatus* (CPL 0278) - LLT-A, tract. 2, par. 15, linea 2 (Augustine&Tractate on the Gospel of John&CPL&tract. 2, par. 15, line 2)

<sup>147</sup> *In Iohannis euangelium tractatus* (CPL 0278) - LLT-A, tract. 2, par. 15, linea 7 (Augustine&Tractate on the Gospel of John&CPL&tract. 2, par. 15, line 7)



glory to God. Is it my fondest desire to enjoy peace? How can I find it except by surrendering myself to God?

### 1° The Summons

An angel directs the shepherds to the crib. “I have come to bring you glad tidings” (Lk 2:10). What gladder tidings could there be than to be reconciled with one’s God, to behold how he breaches the divide that separates him from my nature condemned as a result of sin. He, the Holy of Holies, has come to me in spite of all my weaknesses. Yes, indeed, this day a Saviour has been born for me. It is the most meaningful of events. He has come so far to meet me—it is only right that I take a few steps and that’s exactly what I don’t want to do. I cannot make my mind up. Overcoming this hurdle is impossible for me. Yet this is the most meaningful of events. It is not said that the inhabitants of Bethlehem who refused to welcome him were called to such a great honour. What a mystery! He came to them in the person of Joseph and Mary. But their doors remained closed to them. He would approach them no more, but would send his angels to the shepherds instead. It is to them that would be announced: “*Annuncio vobis gaudium magnum*; I proclaim to you good news of great joy” (Lk 2:10)—the great joy of their salvation.

These glad tidings are now being brought to you. Like the angel, I announce the gladdest of glad tidings, the tidings of unending happiness. Jesus is born. He has come to save you. Will you make an effort and go to meet him? Will you shake off your sleep? Most of these shepherds were asleep. They were awakened by a great light but had they kept their eyes shut, this light would have served them no purpose. But if they opened their eyes, the light would lead them to Bethlehem, to the manger where Jesus lay.

Is it not the same with you? You have laid aside your usual occupations and retired to a quiet place. Now God’s messenger has proclaimed that the hour of your salvation has struck. Are you going to take advantage of it? Do you desire to enter into relationship with this Saviour?

“*Natus est vobis hodie Salvator*; A Saviour has been born for you this day” (Lk 2:11). He is born and is ready to begin a new life at your side. Ah, don’t be afraid, for this is his sign: “You will find the infant wrapped in swaddling-clothes and lying in a manger” (Lk 2:12). He will make but one demand of you: that your gaze pass from the crib to your own heart. Will you offer your heart to this little child, to this your God who has become man to save you? Search your heart and find a way to respond effectively.

### 2° The Glory of God

No sooner had the angel had his say, than a whole army of angels, the multitude of the heavenly host, chimed in: “Glory to God in the highest

heaven"! In heaven something must have been happening like what happened when Michael drew swords with Satan. The angels were praising God and were giving him all glory because now that the Saviour was born, Satan's empire would be overthrown by the Son of God himself. It is no longer St. Michael versus the Prince of Darkness. It is the Eternal Light, veiling himself in the shadow of our humanity and coming to overthrow the tyranny of that rebellious and seductive Angel. Glory be to God in the highest. To what extent does this tyranny of Satan dominate your heart? Only you yourself can answer this question? Or have you got to the point of you yourself no longer knowing the answer? What, then, are you to do? Left to your own devices, you would go on letting the Enemy increase his strangle-hold. But harken to this new voice resounding in your ears: God's glory has entered the lists. It consists in your being saved, if you so will. But take heed! God will retire from the scene if you refuse to listen to him. His glory could end up consisting in your torture!

Man's destiny can seem so strange: that God offers his glory to save Man and Man seeks his happiness in not wanting to be saved. Have you got to this point?—or are you going to lift up your eyes and see this wonderful invitation given to you to work for God's glory, to turn your life into a means of glorifying God? Do you wish it to be so? Then go to Bethlehem—go to your Saviour—go to the lowliness of his crib. As you gaze upon the self-emptying of a God who has become a little child in order to save you, cry out in your turn: Glory to God who treats me with such kindness as to dispose of his own glory to become my Saviour.

### 3° Peace on earth

Peace was proclaimed around the stable where Jesus was born: peace, reconciliation, sin's destruction, deliverance from slavery to Satan. The shepherds were saying to one another: "Let us go over to Bethlehem; *Loquebantur pastores ad invicem, transeamus usque Bethleem*" (Lk 2:15). And this is what I have come to tell you. If you desire this peace proclaimed by the angels, then show your good will; go over to Bethlehem. What does this mean? Leave yourselves and go over to Jesus. Take a look at what is holding you back. After the shepherds had adored the divine child, there is no indication that they changed their normal routine, that they left their flocks there in order to take up something new. On the contrary, they carried on as usual...except that a great transformation had taken place within their hearts; they had seen the Infant God. Who can doubt that the invitation they had received, that the act of adoration to which they were granted admission so early on, was not followed up with enormous graces? Who can doubt that they pondered it preciously in their hearts and that it became for them a source of salvation? With the angels they had glorified God on the occasion of his Son's birth and they carried with them a heavenly peace.

Why not share in such happiness? Why not accompany them to Bethlehem, to Jesus Christ who emptied himself to receive you? Why not ask him to bring peace and reconciliation? It is a solemn moment in our retreat when one asks himself: Do I wish to devote my life to God's glory by making my peace with Him? Do I desire to come out of myself? It is not a question of changing the exterior frame-work of my daily existence but of giving myself wholeheartedly, in the depths of my being, to profit from the favours that a God has seen fit to bestow on me. But when will I desire it? When will I go over to Bethlehem to discover Jesus, to worship him, to ask him for the grace of being able to glorify his Father and of being able to dedicate my life to his service? All this in exchange for the peace, the pledge and foretaste of which he has given while I await its indescribable fullness in heaven.

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## VI. THE EPIPHANY

Let us go to adore Jesus Christ together with the angels. Let us offer him those symbolic gifts presented by the wise men from the East. They followed the star, they broke their journey at Jerusalem, then they arrived at the place where they found the child. What is this star? What are these gifts?

### 1° The Star

A star is a light, which shines in the sky. But there was something special about this star; it had a special brightness, a special character. It wasn't one of those comets which appear from time to time, then disappear. It was the star of Jacob announced by a prophet, a false one, no doubt, but one whom God allowed to announce the truth (Nm 24:17). How did the wise men recognise this star? The Gospel doesn't tell us anything. It is enough for us to know that they did recognise it and were not mistaken.

This mysterious star shines for all. It shines at that solemn moment in our lives when we have to recognise the direction to take in our journey to Jesus, in our journey to heaven. We cannot overestimate the importance of this moment. However, for me this moment has come and gone. I made my choice and am now well on my way. I entered the religious life. All I have to do now is persevere in it. The wise men broke their journey at Jerusalem. Sometimes we meet with great trials. King Herod's politics and the perversity of the priests, whose ministry was soon to be repudiated, could have proved an obstacle, preventing them from arriving at their goal. But it didn't. They showed such determination that God, faithful as he is, would not allow them to be tempted beyond their strength. The difficulties with Herod and others in Jerusalem did not make them alter their plans.

They carried on and reached their destination.

As for me, who by following through on my religious commitment, may have found Jesus in some way, I must concentrate on a further development of this mystery. For, if on the one hand, I went to Jesus as soon as I crossed the threshold of religious life, on the other hand, I must ask myself how much progress I have made since I entered.

The lesson of Epiphany comes round year after year for me...to good end. I am a religious, but what am I doing to become a perfect one? How have I shown fidelity along the way? Every year I must accompany the wise men to present my gifts to the child Jesus, but every year I must endeavour to offer them to him more abundantly and with purer intentions. Have I brought anything more this year in the way of virtue? What progress in zeal have I made in wasting no opportunity of responding to religious life by practising the virtues my state of life requires?

And above all, what about my religious spirit? Can I say that it has developed since last year? Religious spirit means life—everything else is nothing but a corpse, if I can put it that way. What matters is the disposition to leave everything behind like the wise men left their own country, to suffer come what may like they suffered on their long journey, to proclaim Jesus like they proclaimed him in Jerusalem, and to obey Jesus like they obeyed his angel when they were told to return home by a different route! Such is the perfection of self-sacrifice, of bravery, of surrendering my own will, to go wherever God calls me and to undertake whatever he asks of me. Postulancy was a beginning, novitiate another beginning, profession a third beginning—once profession is made, we are called to begin unceasingly. Such is the teaching of the great spiritual authors: of St. Augustine, St. Catherine of Siena, St. Teresa of Avila, St. Francis de Sales. I must not kid myself. When am I going to learn that for me I shall always have to keep on beginning again?

## 2° The Gifts

Gold, frankincense and myrrh have different meanings. For religious to offer gold to God in his poverty means the self-emptying of the creature and therefore a complete detachment from the goods of this world. Poverty was a virtue unknown to pagans and to the Jews themselves. Who ever wanted to be poor before Christ was born in Bethlehem? St. Jerome tells us that Socrates and some of the other philosophical cynics practised it (*“hoc fecit Crates philosophus; Socrates the philosopher did this”*)<sup>148</sup>...but in what spirit, that's the question. To offer gold to a king is to pay him tribute; it is to acknowledge his power. I must offer my king the poverty of which he himself gives me an example, by dispossessing myself of whatever stands in

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<sup>148</sup> *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, Book III, line 922 or *Commentarii in euangelium Matthaei* (CPL 0590) - LLT-A-lib. 3, linea 922 (*Jerome&Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew&CPL&bk. 3, line 922*)

the way of my spiritual advancement. But above all I must offer him absolute obedience, since he himself was absolutely obedient from the day of his birth until he drew his parting breath. Uniting my adoration to that of the wise men, I offer him not only whatever I possess but whatever I may possess—together with the homage due to his absolute sovereignty over me, and the obedience of a little child which he himself exhibits so strikingly as he lies wrapped in swaddling-clothes in Mary's arms.

The wise men offer incense which symbolises adoration and prayer. Adoration is something reserved for God alone and establishes a relationship between a creature and the Creator. It may happen that such an act of adoration is done in a way that is clumsy or pathetic; but it can also be done in the purest of ways. The life of a religious must be a life of prayer, and this life of increasingly intimate union with God must be his continual aim. Whatever his particular calling may be, he must pray; he has to climb step by step the ladder of progressive adoration, by praying harder and harder, reaching up towards those heights which the common Christian is not familiar—heights reserved for those children who are truly faithful, persevering, completely self-sacrificed and full of love. Am I there yet?

And the wise men's third gift is myrrh, a precious substance used to preserve men's mortal remains. Myrrh reminds Jesus that he is a man and that he will die. Myrrh reminds me that I must die to self and that my life is to be hidden with Christ in God. This continual death to self is a daunting process to which I am condemned in my Saviour's footsteps and without which I cannot hope to attain true life.

*“Et responsi in somnis accepto, per aliam viam reversi sunt in regionem suam; And having received an answer in sleep not to return, they went back home by another route” (Mt 2:12).*

No Christian, still less a religious, must ever return the same way whence he came. We go back home, but we take another route. They are no longer the same men; they have been transformed. They do everything with a new outlook. Their life, visibly unchanged, ends up by becoming the life of the saint because it is inspired by God. Lord, help me always to follow the star in this way.

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## VII. JESUS DWELLING WITHIN US

*“Ecce sto ad ostium et pulso; si quis audierit vocem meam et aperuerit mihi januam intrabo ad illum et coenabo cum illo, et ipse mecum; Behold I stand at the gate and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him—and I will sup with him and he with me” (Rv 3:20).*

These words which Our Lord addresses to sinners in order to invite them to return, he is addressing to all of you who wish to offer him a dwelling-place that is permanent and full of consolation. At this very moment he is saying to each of you: “Here I am at the door of your heart and I am knocking.”

And he adds: “If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him—and I will sup with him and he with me.” Is this not, my brothers, what happens each time you open the door of your heart to welcome Jesus Christ? In this wonderful supper, if Jesus says, “I will sup with him and he with me,” let us examine what the Divine Saviour contributes to the banquet, and what we, in turn, ought to contribute.

Jesus Christ brings us his body to feed and fortify us, his blood to wash us clean, his soul to love us, and his Godhead to invest us with glory.

### 1° What Jesus Brings Us

Behold, brothers, this celestial food prepared by Wisdom that has built herself a house, “*Sapientia paravit sibi domum*; Wisdom has built itself a house” (Prv 9:1). This house is none other than your heart. And “*paravit mensam*; and she has set up its table” (Prv 9:2)—which she has covered with the most sumptuous dishes. What you will receive from this holy table is nothing less than the body of a God. Why? In order to feed you. And when you have eaten of this bread of mystery, you will hear the prophet heard, “*Surge et comede, grandis enim tibi restat via*; Arise and eat, for a long journey lies ahead of you” (1 Kgs 19:7 Vulgate). Arise and eat. You are an exile, your homeland is distant, you need your strength, so partake of it. The land to be conquered is yet far off. *Surge, comede*; Arise and eat—you will need strength in order to fight the enemies and there are plenty of them awaiting you. Ahab and Jezebel were after Elijah; Satan and the world are after you. You will have to go into battle—*surge, comede*—so arise and eat. A first time Elijah, awakened by the angel, ate and dropped off to sleep again. You too will want to relish the sleep of love, but the angel will wake you a second time. It is good to be nourished with one’s God; but one must take advantage of it and venture forth. You must prepare to do battle, to work, to fight temptation—“*surge, comede*; so arise and eat!”

Divine Wisdom has not only laid the table, but served a most exquisite wine, the Blood of Jesus you receive together with his Body. This Blood has already been poured over your heads to cleanse you. But since the soul, as it draws nearer to God, goes from beauty to beauty, you are called to enhance that beauty drinking this “wine which gives birth to virgins; *vinum germinans virgines*” (Zec 9:14, Vulgate). It is a heady wine which provides the soul with every virtue as proof of the love Jesus has for it. So come and get drunk on it! You are invited to it. Become intoxicated with all the virtues it brings to you, virtues whose fruit will be demanded of

you.

Come and receive the soul of a God. Jesus raised from the dead dies no more; his soul is henceforth inseparable from his body. He is your friend. No one can show a greater sign of friendship than to lay down his life for his friends (Jn 15:13). This is what he did on the Cross and this soul, separated from his body on Calvary, then reunited with his body for ever, turns to you and says: "Do you wish me to love you?" What an indescribable invitation! Very well, do you wish the soul of Jesus to offer you his loving kindness? Well, this is the question he asks you as you sit down to table together at this intimate meal.

He wants to offer even more. He wishes to clothe you with his divinity. When the priest says: "*Corpus...in vitam aeternam*"<sup>149</sup>, what does he mean if not everlasting union with God eternal; you are been offered immortality.

"*Si quis audierit vocem meam et aperuerit mihi januam intrabo ad illum...et ipse mecum*; So if anyone hears my voice and opens the door to me, I will come in to him...and we will sup together" (Rv 3:20).

## 2° What We Must Offer Jesus in Return

Let us count the gifts we have received, one by one. First of all, divinity. See the upper realm into which faith and hope have transported you. You are not yet enjoying the full possession of God's gifts, but you have been promised them. "*Qui adhaeret Domino, unus spiritus est*; Whoever is united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him (1 Cor 6:17). What more could you ask for? This union, established at baptism, grows with the Eucharist. You and God have become one. "*Qui adhaeret Domino, unus spiritus est.*"

Are you conscious of this new life which flows through your veins? Are you conscious of how the perfect is perfecting the imperfect? Are you conscious of that divine perfection to which you are being called in this union of your soul with God? "*Qui adhaeret Domino, unus spiritus est.*"

I have been speaking to you of the love to which the soul of the Saviour bears witness to you. It defies description! The Saviour, he who died and rose again, he himself comes to you. He shows you his hands and feet, his open side and he says: "It is through these wounds that my soul, my life, were poured out for you on Calvary. What shall you return to me? What sign of your love do wish to give me? I want your entire soul, your entire self. I want your feet to bring you to me. I want your hands, because whatever you do must be done with a special loving kindness. I want the thoughts which go on inside your head; my own head crowned with thorns

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<sup>149</sup> In the traditional Latin Mass, the priest would recite these words before distributing Communion to the faithful, "*Corpus Domini nostri Jesu Christi custodiat animam meam in vitam aeternam*; May the Body of Our Lord Jesus Christ keep your soul unto life everlasting"

for you demands that all of your thoughts be dedicated to me. You will prove that you love me if henceforth you begin to think as God does. My heart has been slit open to make room for yours, if in fact you wish to place it there. This is how my soul, the motive-power of my feet, my hands, my head, and my heart insists on your loving me in return.”

You drink this divine blood, poured out for you. This is the real reason for inner purity. Ah, how much Jesus has a right to insist that we be pure, since it is by his blood that we have the capacity of having all of our sins washed away; but with what care must we not approach such a cleansing if we are to profit from it! Ah, the Blood of Christ is at our disposal. Let it not flow in vain. Let us know how to put it to the salutary use of keeping ourselves in the brightness of innocence.

You hear the words: “*Corpus Domini...*; the Body of the Lord...” Remember that the goal is eternity, but that the condition for getting there is doing battle. “Come and eat! *Surge, comede*”...Arise once more and eat! But afterwards, life begins anew with its many struggles. Well, you will set out on your way, you will enter into battle “*in fortitudine cibi illius*; in the strength of this food” (1Kgs 19:8). And if you feel afraid, listen to these words that Jesus Christ addresses to you, words that follow my opening quotation, “*Qui vicerit, dabo ei sedere mecum in throno meo, sicut et ego vici et sedi cum Patre meo in throno ejus*; He who conquers, I will make him sit beside me on my throne—just as I conquered and am now sitting beside my Father on his” (Rv 3:21).

What source of hope...sitting next to Jesus for ever on his throne! Do you really want this? Then go to Communion. Feed yourself, purify yourself. Love and adore your God and he will give you his very self throughout this life and his glory in the eternal homeland to come.

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## VIII° THE HOLY SPIRIT DWELLING IN OUR SOULS

“*An nescitis quoniam membra vestra templum sunt Spiritus Sancti*; Do you not know that your members are the temple of the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor 6:19)?

St. Paul himself tells us: we are temples of the Holy Spirit. And we have the satisfaction of knowing that, unless we chase him away, this Spirit of truth and comfort lives within us. Then why does the Holy Spirit remain inactive in so many Christians? Because they forget their immense privilege of being his temples—and above all they forget how a temple where God lives ought to be.

A temple calls for a sanctuary, an altar, a priest, and victims. Let us examine each of these four requisites.



## 1° The Sanctuary

For God to reside in a place, he must have special accommodation set aside for him. Consider the Tabernacle of Moses and the Temple in Jerusalem. Even the pagans had their special shrines set apart—archaeological traces are found of them everywhere. Divinity implies some mysterious reverence that calls for something intimate. Why? Because there is something intensely intimate about communicating with God. Within these temples it was necessary to provide for an enclosure to which the public was not admitted. Here God was supposed to come: to issue orders, invitations, advice, and blessings. Well, in virtue of our Law of Love, we are specially privileged. We have a God who chooses to come and live—not in a stone temple or a marble temple or a golden temple—but in the spiritual temple of our hearts and souls. It is here he chooses to reside. He wants to walk about in his temples: “*ambulabo en eis*; I will walk in them” (2 Cor 6:16). He wants to be “glorified and carried about in our bodies; *glorificate et portate Deum in corpore vestro*” (1 Cor 6:20). Here it is not so much our body which is being honoured. Our body is only the “outer circle”; our heart is the “private enclosure,” and it is here we must go to listen to the voice of God. Well, men don’t want to listen to him—they block their ears to his words. That is why the Holy Spirit says to us, “*Praevanitores, redite ad cor*; Take it to heart, you rebels” (Is 46:8). What an insult to have God in one’s heart and not to glorify him as one ought! Yet we treat the Holy Spirit in the same off-hand manner.

But what would he have to tell us if only we listened? When will we understand what it is that God wants to say to us? It is during these intimate communications that sinners convert, that lukewarm hearts begin to burn, and that saints are made.

## 2° The Altar

The altar is, if I may say so, a stage upon which the Drama of Divine Worship is enacted. It is the focal point of the temple. It is there we go to acknowledge his supreme Dominion with a Holocaust, his right to punish us with a sin-offering for our sins, acknowledge his kindness by offering propitiatory victims, and his bounty with offerings of thanksgiving.

Well, there was only one altar in the Old Law to stress there being only one God and only one form of worship. But this one and only altar became, in a sense, many because of many sacrifices. However, at the same time we had to learn to offer God a perpetual sacrifice, whether of adoration, repentance, petition or thanksgiving. And it is in the depths of our heart that this altar has been built. It is there that I must keep on adoring, begging forgiveness, asking for the help I need, keep on acknowledging my gratitude, for the favours I have received.

To whom must I address my adoration? To God, the Third Person of

the Blessed Trinity. From whom must I beg forgiveness? From an all-loving God. Whom must I ask for help? To him whom being the Spirit of Truth, understands and appreciates the nature of all my needs. Whom must I thank? I must thank God, the giver of all good things who, because he knows I cannot pray properly pleads and gives thanks on my behalf “with unspeakable groans” (Rom 8:26). This, then, is the God to whom I must commit myself in my inmost being. Yes, I will build him an altar, and I will offer him a sacrifice of praise (Ps. 115:7 Vulgate)—and I will implore him to consume all these sacrifices offered on the altar of my heart in the burning fire of his love.

*Editor’s note: the rest of d’Alzon’s reflections on these matters have not be found.*

## ***The Theme of the Mystical Incarnation***

*The Incarnation, the formation of Christ in our souls, is one of the principal themes of Fr. d'Alzon's spirituality. He keeps coming back to it, adapting it to the various audiences he addressed: priests, religious men, religious women, Third Order members, the Children of Mary, and Christians in the world. In order to complement the third meditation on knowledge of Our Lord Jesus Christ, we are providing here two other instructions where we see how Fr. d'Alzon works on an idea that is particularly dear to him.*

*On December 14, 1868, he wrote to Mother Marie-Eugénie de Jésus, "I am quite taken up with urging a few people to give themselves to Our Lord, especially for the feast of Christmas. It seems to me that there isn't anything to be admired more than taking advantage of the Church's feasts each year to have Jesus Christ be born in souls ever more perfectly and to have them grow and develop in imitation of the Divine Teacher living within us. The triple Incarnation of Jesus Christ, born in a manger, on the altar, and in our souls, is a mystery that should thoroughly absorb us."*

## The Incarnation of Jesus Christ in the Soul of a Religious

“*Ecce ancilla Domini*; Behold the handmaid of the Lord”.

Such were the words whereby a humble creature expressed her adhesion to the mightiest work of God—the work of which the Prophet had said: “*Excita potentiam tuam, et veni, ut salvos facias nos*; Stir up your might, and come to save us” (Ps 79:3 Vulgate). In creating the world God acted alone; for the Incarnation he consulted one of his creatures. There’s a great lesson here, full of practical lessons. The mystery whereby Mary became the Mother of God can, on a much smaller scale, be accomplished in each of us in the way that the Apostle desired that Jesus Christ dwell in us by Christian faith: “*Habitare per fidem in cordibus nostris*; Christ dwelling in your hearts through faith” (Eph 3:17).

Let us study Jesus’ Incarnation in Mary so as to understand what ought to be his Incarnation in us. “*Et Verbum caro factum est, et habitavit in nobis*; and the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us” (Jn 1:14). We will consider 1° how God’s grace precedes and accompanies our actions; 2° then how our wills must cooperate with it.

### I. God’s Grace

#### The Annunciation

The time has come. The angel of God is sent to the Virgin of Nazareth. God is to become man in the womb of the purest of creatures...a creature, a daughter of Adam, yet sinless because the graces she receives rise to a degree beyond words. The angel addresses her. “*Ave, gratia plena*; Hail, full of grace.” She cannot be said to possess the fullness of grace, as in Jesus Christ, “*plenum gratiae et veritatis*; full of grace and truth” (Jn 1:14). Nevertheless, the Lord who had made her his from the beginning of his ways had decided, through his almighty power, to work in her and for her great things. “*Fecit mihi magna qui potens est*; For he that is mighty has done great things for me” (Lk 1:49). But all of these privileges Mary owes to God; she attributes them to him alone.

I too (admittedly on a much smaller scale) have received graces from God. One of those attendant spirits whose task it is to watch over those destined to receive the inheritance of salvation was assigned to me. It is up to me to listen to his voice. He will tell me that the Lord is with me, as the angel told Mary, as another angel told Gideon, as other angels told other famous men of the Old Law, as Jesus himself told his Apostles just before ascending into heaven, “*Ecce ego vobiscum sum*; Behold I am with you all days” (Mt 28:20).

Like Mary, I have received my allotment of grace, less than she received, but I can, like her, say that the Lord is with me, far more than with most ordinary Christians. In any case, I was given this period of my novitiate for this purpose. I ought to spend it in forming Jesus Christ in me. Since I took my vows, Jesus Christ ought to have been growing within my soul more and more. Just as the Angel Gabriel put Mary in touch with the three persons of the Trinity, so shall I enter, if so I wish, into intimacy with these three Persons, ever-to-be-adored.

The angel told Mary, "*Ecce concipies in utero, et paries filium*; Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son" (Lk 1:31). Is this not the very purpose of religious life: conceiving Jesus Christ in oneself? "*Filioli, quos iterum parturio, dones Christus formetur in vobis*; My children, for whom I am again in labor until Christ be formed in you" (Gal 4:19). To conceive Jesus Christ in oneself—this is what the inner life is all about. To give birth to him around us by our manner of living, to reveal him by our words, our actions and our virtues—this is what the inner life consists of. This is how we should practice it, so that it can be said of us, "*Dominus tecum*; The Lord is with you" (Lk 1:28).

#### **The Three Divine Persons**

And nothing is more marvelous than how it is brought about. "*Spiritus sanctus supervenit in te, et virtus Altissimi obumbrabit tibi*; The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you" (Lk 1:35). Conceiving Jesus Christ, giving him birth by the working of the Holy Spirit, under the protection of the Father, what in Mary is more to be admired! And just as in the beginning God made man to his own image and likeness, so Jesus Christ makes us into Christians, then goes a step further by making us into religious, by creating in us the likeness of God-made-man and incarnate in Mary.

Such is the masterpiece of the Father's power, "*Et virtus Altissimi obumbrabit tibi. Dabit tibi Dominus sedem David patris tui, et regnabit in domo Jacob in aeternum, et regni ejus non erit finis*; The power of the Most High will overshadow you...and the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David—and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever—and his kingdom will have no end" (Lk 1:32-33). Has not this prophecy been sufficiently accomplished in Jesus Christ? What person has ever reigned as long and as universally as he? He reigns from one end of the world to the other. He has reigned for nearly twenty centuries—and we do not see it coming to an end.

Now we can, through the Father's power, establish this reign of Jesus Christ in us and around us...in us by giving him absolute dominion over all our faculties, our intellect, our will, our affections, our feelings; the absolute dominion of Jesus Christ over us, this is holiness. Around us...by our zeal to make him known—and this zeal is another word for the apostolate. And how can all this be brought about? By a relationship with

the Blessed Trinity similar to that of Mary. Jesus Christ will be formed in me by faith, under the intervention of the Holy Spirit and by the intervention of the Most High. Once having become sufficiently convinced of the honor accorded to me, when will I once and for all surrender myself thoroughly to this wonderful combined operation of the three divine persons in my soul?

I have to allow the Blessed Trinity to work in me if the reign of Christ is to be formed in me. Here is a level of contemplation that is completely new: to allow the Blessed Trinity to form Jesus Christ in me, just as it formed Jesus Christ in Mary. And the more supple, obedient, and responsive I am, the more perfect this likeness will become. O, how wonderful! When will I allow this fully to happen?

But for how long? For as long as Christ's Kingdom endures—and this Kingdom will have no end; *et regni ejus non erit finis* (Lk 1:33). So it will go on forever—and isn't this wonderful! Become immortal like God himself, I will have entered into an unimaginable realm where he will be my master and king forever, "*Et regni ejus non erit finis*; and his kingdom will have no end." Grant, Lord, that your dominion over me may, indeed, have no end. Let it be eternal. Let me contribute to its extension far and wide. As an instrument of your power, let me overcome its every barrier. Let me be able, as much as possible and wherever possible, to keep repeating the cry, "*Adveniat regnum tuum*; Thy Kingdom come!" But you desired that your grace not operate in isolation; you seek the cooperation of my will. Mary's reply to the angel will indicate the part I am to play.

## II. Our Cooperation

### Obedience.

How does Mary respond to these promises? "*Ecce ancilla Domini, fiat mihi secundum verbum tuum*; Behold the handmaid of the Lord. Be it done to me according to thy word" (Lk 1:38). This is the reply of a dutiful creature. "*Dixitque Deus: fiat lux, et facta est lux*; God said: 'Let there be light'—and there was light" (Gen 1:3). But here is the difference: God said: Let there be light and there was light. God said, "*Faciamus hominem*; Let us make man" (Gen 1:26)—and man came into being. But when it comes to the supernatural formation of man, it is altogether different. God created man without his permission; however, it would not be without his permission that the spiritual man would be formed. To form Jesus Christ himself, it took the cooperation of a humble and pure creature who would serve as his mother. If Jesus Christ is to be formed in us, we must declare ourselves servants of God and, like Mary, we must say, "*Fiat mihi secundum verbum tuum*; be it done unto me according to your word." Yes, we cannot avoid it. It all boils down to obedience, one hundred per cent obedience. This obedience began at Nazareth; it would be consummated on Calvary, but it would not reach its end until that day when Christ broke the

last link still binding Mary to this earth. It took all that time; perfection was required so that she could truly say, “*Dilectus meus mihi, et ego illi qui pascitur inter lilia*; My love is mine and I am his, who walks among the lilies” (Sg 2:16). Yes, he walks among the lilies. He cannot fix his abode save in those souls who are as pure as lilies. “*Qui pascitur inter lilia*; he walks among the lilies.” All my life I must try harder and harder to become purer and purer, so that Jesus Christ might dwell in me and bring me greater comfort and joy, “*Dilectus meus mihi, et ego illi qui pascitur inter lilia*; my love is mine and I am his, who walks among the lilies.”

#### **Praising God.**

And while Jesus was taking shape in Mary’s womb, what were the sentiments of this most admirable of mothers? She herself tells us. She had no other thought than to praise God and extol his glory. “*Magnificat anima mea Dominum*; My soul magnifies the Lord!” (Lk 1:46). This was all she was concerned about; her life had no other object. She was totally taken up with the thought that God, the all self-sufficient God who needed no one to give him the glory which was his due, had nevertheless chosen one of his creatures to do so—and that, in order to confer appropriate worthiness on human praise, had decreed that his Son should himself become human. The Word was made flesh and whoever among God’s creatures unites himself to the Word will be given a tongue to praise him with pure voice. And just as this praise is the everlasting occupation of God’s angels in heaven, so too will it be that of the saints in their homeland, after their lives on earth. All of them must proclaim as well, “*Magnificat anima mea Dominum*; My soul magnifies the Lord!”

Such is the enthusiasm of every Christian soul who understands the work of perfection. “*Et exultavit spiritus meus in Deo salutari meo*; And my spirit rejoices in God my Savior” (Lk 1:47). What a delight for this soul to feel his very identity being absorbed into that of Jesus Christ! Why?—Because the Lord sees the lowliness of this servant and raises him up. Look at Mary. Was she humble enough, poor enough, insignificant enough? “*Quia respexit humilitatem ancillae suae: ecce enim ex hoc beatam me dicent omnes generationes*; For he has looked on the lowliness of his handmaid—behold from this day forward all generations will call me blessed” (Lk 1:48). Once again we have something prophesied—a prophecy to be fulfilled throughout the ages. Every evening the Church chants this prophecy ever confirmed as time passes by, in the triumph of humility. “*Quia respexit humilitatem ancillae suae: ecce enim ex hoc beatam me dicent omnes generationes*; For he has looked on the lowliness of his handmaid—behold from this day forward all generations will call me blessed.”

What must one do to arrive at such a happy state? Be truly obedient and say throughout the day, “*Ecce ancilla Domini*; Behold the handmaid of the Lord.” What else is there to be done? Dedicate ourselves entirely to the

glory of God and become the best possible instruments in the hands of Jesus Christ for the extension of his Kingdom. And what else? Not putting our hope in anything else but the perfections of God: “*Et exultavit spiritus meus in Deo salutari meo*; and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.” As we enjoy these gifts, we must preserve the deepest humility—“*Quia respexit humilitatem ancillae suae*; for he has looked on the lowliness of his handmaid”, be willing to contribute to God’s glory by embracing our own humiliation, and ceaselessly proclaim his goodness, attributing all our personal success thereto. “*Fecit mihi magna qui potens est, et sanctum nomen ejus*; For he that is mighty has done great things for me—and holy is his name” (Lk 1:49). Happy the soul who, following Mary’s example, loses himself in an absolute love of God’s will and whatever God may have in store for him.

#### Conclusion

What are we to conclude from all this? That we must allow Jesus Christ to act in our souls and there to shape himself in whatever manner he sees fit. We can be sure it will be in the best and purest possible manner, and that in no other manner could we ever come so close to God.

Secondly, we must take Mary’s virtues as models to imitate: her obedience, her humility, her prayerfulness, her love. These are the ideal conditions to assure the triumph of Jesus Christ in souls. We will dedicate ourselves to the work he came down from heaven to accomplish. We will dedicate ourselves to the triumph of the Church, to which Jesus Christ gave birth on Calvary, obtained through his blood poured out. He purchased the Church with the price of his blood.

And we must never forget that, just as the Son became incarnate in Mary by the working of the Holy Spirit, and under the shadow of the Father’s power, so, too, must we by faith form Jesus Christ by the working of God’s almighty power.

So may it be. And may the glorious Trinity, completely at work in our souls, be pleased to find a dwelling place therein, so that we one day may find there our everlasting fulfillment, *in perpetuas aeternitates*.

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## Jesus Christ becomes Incarnate in the Soul of a Religious

“*Christum habitare per fidem in cordibus vestris*; May Christ find a dwelling place through faith in your hearts” (Eph 3:17).

Jesus Christ was not content in being incarnate once in the womb of the Blessed Virgin; he wishes, it seems, to become incarnate day by day in every one of us. The Apostle tells us so throughout his letters. So let us endeavor to reflect on this great mystery in which we are so intimately



involved.

### 1. The Annunciation

Let us imagine that solemn occasion when God the Father sent an angel to Mary. What does he say? “*Ecce concipies in utero, et paries filium*; You will conceive in your womb and bear a son”. Mary acquiesces and so the mystery of the Incarnation takes place. But what does the Apostle mean when, addressing the first Christians, says to them, “*Filioli, quos iterum parturio, donec Christus formetur in vobis*? My little children, I am in labor again until Christ be formed in you”? The immensity of the task!—God wishing to be formed himself again within each Christian soul! Let us remember that he is baptized and that Jesus Christ was already formed in him through baptism. The Apostle had already given birth to them a first time; this is why he said, “*Filioli, quos iterum parturio*; I am in labor again.” What is being spoken about is a new effort, a new development of the Christian life—and it is Jesus Christ who works in the soul. That is why he wishes to be fully formed in him, “*Donec Christus formetur in vobis*; Until Christ be formed in you.”

And how are we going to cooperate in this operation? Listen to Mary’s reply to Gabriel. When the angel tells her the entire Blessed Trinity is to cooperate, Mary has nothing to say except “*Ecce ancilla Domini; fiat mihi secundum verbum tuum*; Behold the handmaid of the Lord—be it done unto me according to your word.” Need we say more, for these few words express the complete surrender of any human creature to the wishes of the Creator? We are also told, “*Spiritus sanctus superveniet in te, et virtus Altissimi obumbrabit tibi*—The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.” Very well, do we wish the Holy Spirit to come upon us to bring about the formation of Jesus Christ in the very depth of our inmost being? Do we wish from now on to acquire the mind and heart of Jesus Christ—to live one hundred per cent the life he wishes to live within us? The Divine Master is here, knocking at the door. Do we want to carry Jesus Christ within us? For this to happen, he must be formed in our souls, *donec Christus formetur in vobis*.

Is it not evident that Jesus Christ is formed in each soul depending on the degree to which he is welcomed and supported? So here is the task of this retreat: to form Jesus Christ in me. If I am half-hearted about it, the work will hardly begin. If I set about it energetically and whole-heartedly, I shall certainly achieve a certain level of virtue. But who can tell the perfection that would be mine if I gave Jesus Christ a free hand in turning myself into a new creation and completely transfiguring me into himself? Just imagine, Jesus Christ formed in me—me becoming another Jesus Christ! And how will this happen? Could I not say with the Virgin Mary, “*Quomodo fiet istud?* And how can this come to pass?” (Lk 1:34). It is on this that I wish to pursue my reflections.

## 2. To clothe oneself in Christ

For the baptized Christian Jesus Christ is a kind of garment. “*Quicumque baptizati estis, Christum induisti*; For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ” (Gal 3:27). So this is the spiritual garment. When I was baptized I became clothed in his grace. And what can this clothing mean except that my whole being—whatever I think, feel, say or do—must bear witness to him by whose blood we have been cleansed, renewed and rejuvenated? This is no trivial matter. The Apostle keeps repeating it, “*Induat vos Dominus novum hominem*; May God clothe you with a new self” (cf Eph 4:24). And what is this “new self” if not Jesus Christ compared to the old man, Adam? I am, indeed, a son of Adam. I bear his mark that is none other than that of Original Sin. But my new self has stripped away the old. “*Exuat vos Dominus veterem hominem cum actibus suis*; May the Lord divest you of the old man and his acts”<sup>150</sup>. This, then, is the task: to divest myself of Adam, of his sin, his inclinations, and his punishment—and clothe myself, through living out my baptism, with Jesus Christ, with the new self, with his grace and his gifts. But this requires my cooperation. I am offered the new garment—I must put it on, and prove myself worthy to wear it.

What more splendid garment than this which Jesus Christ has dyed with his own blood! Such a crimson red! Such a royal robe! I am being clothed with Jesus Christ himself and what dignity am I not receiving when I am established in the justice and holiness of his truth! *In justitia et sanctitate veritatis*. What lessons there are to learn if I were only to pause and meditate on the qualities of this spiritual garment! It is woven with justice, that is to say, the very source of the law; with holiness, that is to say, with everything God stands for; with truth, that is to say, with no one other than the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity. These are the qualities I must now show forth in my life: the justice, the holiness, the truth of Jesus Christ. *Quicumque baptizati estis, Christum induisti. Induat vos Dominus novum hominem, qui secundum Deum creatus est in sanctitae et justitia veritatis*; You who are baptized in Christ’s name have put on Christ. May the Lord clothe you in the new man, created according to God’s image—created according to justice, holiness and truth” (cf Gal 3:27).

## 3. To impregnate ourselves with faith

But Jesus Christ intends to become more than just a garment for me to wear. He wishes to penetrate me through and through—enter the deepest recesses of being. How? By faith. That is what the Apostle means when he speaks of Jesus Christ dwelling in us through faith, “*Christum habitare per fidem in cordibus vestris*; May Christ find a dwelling place in your hearts

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<sup>150</sup> cf Col 3:9 ----*editor’s note*: these last two Latin phrases refer to the ancient ritual used when a religious made final vows

through faith” (Eph 3:17).

Faith should bring Jesus Christ deep into the recesses of my soul, just as the Holy Spirit brought him deep into Mary. No doubt there will be corners of those recesses that he will never reach; nevertheless, if I wish, faith can allow him to penetrate my soul and dwell there, *Christum habitare per fidem*. What is this dwelling of Jesus Christ within me but a kind of Incarnation? Jesus Christ, who wants to be my inner garment, wants to reign deep within me, through and through. When will I surrender the keys of my heart to him and give him supreme dominion? When will I stop making it so hard for him to dwell within me as he wishes? When, in inviting him, can I be sure that with His Father he has set up a permanent abode deep within me? *Et ad eum veniemus, et mansionem apud eum faciemus*; We will come to him and make our dwelling with him” (Jn 14:23). What spirit of faith must I not rekindle in my soul to make myself worthy of such a union!

Elizabeth, greeting Mary on the day of the Visitation, said to the Virgin in whom the Son of God had just taken flesh, “*Et beata quae credidisti, quia perficientur in te quae dicta sunt tibi a Domino*; Blest is she who trusted that the Lord’s words to her would be fulfilled” (Lk 1:45). Mary’s happiness consisted in her faith. Let ours consist likewise in a similar faith, through which Jesus Christ, fulfilling his promise, will come to dwell in the depth of our being. O God, I do believe. “*Veni, Domine Jesu*; Come, Lord Jesus” (Rev 22:20).

#### 4. Until our Complete Transformation

Now, when Jesus has penetrated to the very center of my being I will necessarily have to make way for him; my life will necessarily have to change so that I can say with the Apostle, “*Vivam jam non ego, vivit vero in me Christus*; I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me” (Gal 2:20). And here the mystery deepens. This garment which is nothing less than Christ himself has been promised to all who have been baptized. Faith, which is the way whereby Jesus penetrates into my soul, is a gift offered to all Christians. Yet there remains one abyss and very few have the privilege of crossing it, an abyss which the Apostle crossed and to which he alludes when he says, “*Vivam jam non ego, vivit vero in me Christus*; I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me”. It is certainly a privilege that all do not enjoy. It is a privilege of those summoned to a high degree of perfection. It is the privilege of religious, for whom perfection consists in suppressing their life, or rather fusing it and losing it in that of Jesus Christ. Let us take good stock of ourselves and ask ourselves in all sincerity if, as our vocation demands, we can say that Jesus Christ is fully alive in me.

To what degree of holiness, love and self-sacrifice am I not being called if I really wish to establish within me this unadulterated life of Jesus Christ—if I wish to bring about this Incarnation whereby Jesus becomes the soul of my soul, the heart of my heart, the life of my life? Ah, who is there

to fathom the depth of the Apostle's words, "*Vivam jam non ego, vivit vero in me Christus*; I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me"? Who is there to teach me this stripping of self, whereby I am to live a life which is no longer mine, whereby I must completely put on the mind of Jesus Christ, until it becomes the driving-force of whatever I do? "*Hoc sentite in vobis quod et in Christo Jesu*; Let this mind be in you as it was also in Christ Jesus" (Phil 2:5).

What will I do then? Like him I will "empty" myself. Like him I will become a slave. "*Exinanivit semetipsum, formam servi accipiens*; obedient unto death, even unto the death of the cross" (cf Phil 2:7-8) as I wait for God to raise me up like him. And then I will be able to say with the Apostle, "*Mihi vivere Christus est*; For me life means Christ" (Phil 1:21). See what a life is offered to the religious! He and Jesus Christ—they are one, since the life of one is the life of the other. What a mystery! The union of the creature with God Incarnate—could any union be closer? But think of the obligations imposed on the soul that, enlightened by faith and overcome by gratitude, has come to discover this love of God! This is the union Jesus Christ requested that his Father bestow on those he loved, the evening before his Passion. We can sense that in this request he had in mind all the members of the Church, but also that he was especially thinking of a chosen few, his apostles. And this is the same union, the same favor, that Jesus Christ offers me, if I myself choose to accept it.

Once again, Come, Lord Jesus, Come! Come and live within me. Become incarnate in me, as you become incarnate in the Eucharist for all, as you become incarnate on the lips of the priest who proclaims your Word, as you become incarnate in your Church, through which your grace circulates to each and every one of its members. "Come, Lord Jesus, Come! *Veni, Domine Jesu*" (Rv 22:17), and let the bridegroom and bride say, Come!

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### ***On the Passion of the Lord***

*Christ who is born in our souls must continually grow there in virtue and in wisdom, before God and man, till the climax on Calvary, till the complete renewal of the Resurrection. If Fr. d'Alzon pondered the mysteries of Our Lord's life, he paused at great length on his Passion. He preached many retreats on this subject; he gave many talks to his high school students on it, to Third Order members (e.g. "Instructions to the Third Order of 1879," Bonne Press edition); to it he dedicated ten conferences to the Religious of the Assumption in 1870-1871. Here we give two extracts. Later, one will find the highly inspiring instructions addressed to the "Adoratrices" ("Adorers") on the well-known text entitled, "One's Every-day Friend" ("l'Ami de tous les jours").*

*The following sections include:*

*1° A series of short meditations on the Passion that appeared in « Le Pèlerin, » in 1879.*

*2° Extracts of the Conferences given to the Religious of the Assumption in 1870-1871.*

*3° Two meditations on the five wounds and the Resurrection which date to the last years of Fr. d'Alzon's life.*

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## I. Short Meditations on the Passion

And so we enter Holy Week. It begins on a note of triumph. Then comes the scheming against Jesus' life—to which he reacts with humility by washing the feet of his Apostles, with unparalleled love by instituting the Eucharist, and with the most sorrowful prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane.

The scheming continues and takes effect. Act One: a betrayal and a denial. Act Two: a two-pronged condemnation. Act Three: a series of tortures. Act Four: the Savior's death. Act Five: his burial in the tomb, awaiting his resurrection.

I'd like to present to my readers a few brief meditations on these extremely important topics.

### I. The Triumph

After the raising of Lazarus from the dead, all the Jews who had gathered in Jerusalem for the Passover wanted to see Jesus. And although the Savior had been "lying low" for some time, out of the reach of the priests and the doctors of the Law, he believed he had to make a triumphal entry into Jerusalem.

"Fear not, daughter of Zion," the Prophet Zechariah had said. "Behold your king shall come to you, the Savior and the Just One. He is poor, riding upon an ass—upon a colt, the foal of an ass" (Zech 9:9). We see how his prophecy was accomplished to the letter. The Fathers of the Church tell us that this "foal of an ass" upon which no one had ever ridden represented the Gentile nations in their rebellion against the law of God. Can we not say (which is more to the present point) that it represented those untamed characters whom Jesus Christ knows how to subdue when he sets out to conquer a soul? It also refers to those who had heretofore refused any curb on their way of doing things, but would now, albeit gradually, bow to the Gospel.

Isn't this the ongoing story of the Church? The Church is pursued by the hatred and continual plotting of the very powers of hell. It nonetheless manifests its glory and its prestige at the moment when least expected; then it sinks back into its struggles, its humiliations, and its apparently useless sufferings. Why should Jesus enter Jerusalem in triumph if not to provide his enemies with further ammunition? But he had to provide his friends with a measure of courage as well. Come what may, he would manifest himself to the world to prepare the way of faith and hope for some and at the same time to give others no excuse.

## II. The Scheming

The High Priest convened a council at his residence. Arguments were presented including their fear of the Romans. Fear can be a powerful tool of domination. In fact, it does not always produce the desired effect, as we witnessed in recent days. But finally, Caiaphas takes the floor and says: “You know nothing, nor do you consider that it is better for you that one man should die instead of the people, so that the whole nation may not perish” (Jn 11:50). St. John tells us that he did not say this on his own, but being High Priest that year, he prophesied. God often speaks and reveals his plans through the mouths of evil men.

Go ahead, Caiaphas, fuel your scheming! Clever politician, you think you’ve cooked up a brilliant plan, in which your hatred and your ambition, a vile union, will be well served. Mandate through your Sanhedrin the death of Jesus; but beware, this is not going to prevent the Romans from coming to the City, and just as Jesus, the real prophet, said would happen, they will lay siege, they will burn your temple, and those people they did not massacre they will sell into slavery. The sacrifices of the old dispensation will cease for all times. Because you and your gang immolated the true sacrifice, Jesus, the old altar will disappear and there will be no other altar but the Cross.

All this will take place as God wills. At the desired moment, in the fullness of time, when the crimes of earth reached to the heavens, behold mercy appeared, “*ubi abundavit delictum, ibi superabundavit gratia*; where sin increased, grace overflowed all the more” (Rom 5:20). The Redeemer will be put to death, Jerusalem will perish as a result, the Jews will cease to be a nation, but the world will be saved and God will make for himself a new people.

Let us serve God’s purposes, but always seeking to cooperate with God’s merciful plan, never seeking vengeful punishment. Let us be apostles not henchmen or their lackeys, as the Jews proved to be. Let us give our lives to Jesus and let us remember what a sacrilege it is to attack Jesus or his Church, which is the extension of Jesus. The day of reckoning for such a crime can wait a few days, but it will inevitably come. Does God need to be in a hurry? It is sometimes useful to impose a delay and allow the impious to gloat in their victory and require that the good exercise patience because the latter may be too anxious to see the results of divine retribution.

## III. Washing the Feet of his Disciples—Act of Humility

However, Jesus prepared for death, and in order to teach the disciples he loved till the end a hitherto unknown virtue he rose from table, removed his outer garment, put an apron on, poured water into a basin, and began to wash their feet, despite Peter’s protestations. When he had finished he put on his outer garment once again and returned to his place. “You call

me 'teacher' and 'master,' and rightly so, for indeed I am. If I, therefore, the master and teacher, have washed your feet, how much more ought you not to wash one another's feet! (Jn 13:13-14)".

While the Pharisees are plotting every kind of iniquity Jesus, by his example, is teaching his followers every kind of goodness. You must be humble; you must help one another; you must set an example for one another; you must work together with one common aim, the glory of my Father, who will reward you for your goodness.

Let us be everything that the divine model teaches. Let us learn to be humble, not to stand on our own dignity. Let us be filled with a longing to walk in the footsteps of a self-abasing Jesus.

#### IV. Jesus Institutes the Eucharist

The Passover, as figure, had been duly celebrated, the Paschal Lamb eaten according to the Mosaic prescriptions. Now here comes the true Paschal Lamb, the lamb slain from the origins of the world who will give his life willingly, "*se dat suis manibus*"<sup>151</sup>. He takes bread, gives thanks to his Father, blesses the bread, and distributes it, saying: "Take and eat; this is my body." The same for the chalice: "Drink of this, all of you; this is the chalice of blood of the new Covenant, shed for you, unto the remission of the sins of all" (cf Mt 26:26-28).

Yes, this body which is going to be delivered to the Gentiles, this blood which is going to be shed, is food and drink offered to all the baptized. This is how much the Savior loves us. Hereupon a new dimension is introduced into divine worship, love. Who was ever tempted to experience any affection for Jupiter, Juno, Mercury or Venus? They were invoked in fear; no one ever thought of loving them. Why should anybody love such personages? Jesus loved us till the end, unto death; he calls us to a reciprocal love. He devotes himself, he inaugurates a new degree of devotedness. He sacrifices himself, and through his daily sacrifice on the altar he teaches us how we too must become sacrificial victims. The Eucharist will produce prodigies. The most intimate and powerful union with Jesus Christ will give rise to generations of saints. To what distances will Christians not travel sustained by such nourishment, with the energy supplied by such drink? They have scaled the heights of every virtue....to martyrdom, to life in the desert, to the cloister, to missions on unknown shores. The life of Jesus Christ was within them. They were filled with Jesus' life and his love while awaiting the day when they would live forever in his glory and in eternal union.

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<sup>151</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, *Officium de festo corporis Christi* - LLT-A-ad primas vespas, hymnus 'Pange lingua', versus: 13, pag.: 275, col. 2 (Thomas Aquinas&Pange Lingua&CPL&verse 13, page 275, col. 2)



## V. Jesus in Agony

The Apostles hear the Savior's Last Testament in that admirable discourse after the Last Supper which ought to be the theme of our constant meditation. In it are contained the most inspiring lessons; in it are revealed the most longed-for expectations; in it is manifest how much God loves us. He rises from table, intones the prescribed hymn and goes out. He goes to the place where treason awaits him, but does not surprise him it. He prepares himself for the worst by a period of prayer during which he will be assailed with all possible terror and turmoil.

He is afraid, in a manner in which a God-made-man can be afraid. "Father, if it is possible let this chalice pass me by—but let your will be done, not mine" (Mt 26:39). Does he regret having accepted to die for the children of Adam? Is he terrified at the prospect of such a fearful expiation which his Father's justice has in store for him? No, but he is allowing Satan, who had "left him for a time" (Lk 4:13) after tempting him in the desert, to return to the attack by torturing his ultra-sensitive humanity in advance. Satan hates Jesus with an implacable hatred, but nevertheless would have not wished for his death if it were to be the source of humankind's salvation. His attacks must be viewed in the light of attempts to discover who exactly this extraordinary man was whose whole life was God-driven, but who did not convince everybody beyond a shadow of a doubt that he actually was God. So Jesus conceals himself beneath his humiliations, his anxieties, his sheer fright, as if he had withdrawn into an impenetrably dark night.

This is what all the saints have done after Jesus to follow his example. They have accepted suffering; they have withdrawn to the mountains. There they knew they were safe—safe from the powers of evil. When will we learn to do likewise? When will we imitate their example and win the victory by the repudiation of worldly values and by attaching ourselves to God's will?

Christ's agony continues. It is all the more painful for his having to endure it all alone. The only reaction of his three chosen disciples is to feel afraid, then drop off to sleep. The only witness to delve into the mystery of this prayer is the angel sent to comfort the King of Angels. May we too learn to suffer and pray—uncomforted by humans, and apparently uncomfortable by God.

## VI. Jesus Betrayed and Denied

Jesus is praying in the Garden of Olives. Judas knows it. Judas had been paid thirty pieces of silver to betray him to the priests. In order to take hold of their victim, Judas brings with him the military guard that belongs to the authorities, ten in all, the lackeys of the chief priests. "Jesus knew that the Father had left everything in his hands" (Jn 13:3). St. Augustine, commenting on this passage, marvelously points out that even the traitor

himself had been left in Jesus' hands; otherwise he would not have served the purposes Jesus intended. "*Ergo et ipsum traditorem, nam si eum in manibus non haberet, non utique eo uteretur ut vellet*; Therefore even the traitor. Had he not disposed of him, he could not have used him."<sup>152</sup> Yes, Jesus foresaw the crime of Judas—so he asked the Father to deliver Judas to him. Judas would commit the supreme sacrilege and Jesus would use this horrible deicide, so as to be able to bestow upon men the very greatest of privileges, that of being redeemed by his blood. Why didn't Judas benefit from this? Because he didn't want to. Why didn't he want to? Because he had already rejected his apostolic vocation.

Soon, however, as St. Augustine goes on to say, he will repudiate his crime. He will be filled with remorse and despair. He will deliver himself up to those same priests to whom he had delivered Jesus. He will deliver himself to Satan and Satan, for his part, will abandon him to his own rage... "*jam traditor traditus*; the traitor in his turn is betrayed"<sup>153</sup>. He wants to confess the crime of Jesus' death to his co-schemers but they reply with the bitterest of sarcasm. He proceeds to throw the price of his betrayal back at them—but what's the use? He goes and hangs himself on a self-made gallows. Then cynical scrupulosity takes possession of these legalistic minds. They gather the money and decide to purchase a field that becomes known as "the field of blood; *ager sanguinis*" (Mt 27:8). And the name of "Judas" would become the cruelest insult of all time.

Now what about St. Peter who had assured Jesus, "*etiamsi omnes, ego non*; even if everybody else loses courage over you, I will never lose mine"? (Mt 26:33). Peter follows his arrested master. He had been warned of his coming denial—it would serve him right for being so boastful. He had scorned such a suggestion. But now he is surrounded by peril—and Peter denies three times that he even knows his Master! However, whereas Judas had hardened his heart still more when our Savior asked him, "Judas, are you going to betray the Son of Man with a kiss?" (Lk 22:48), one silent look is sufficient to convert this presumptuous disciple. Without saying a word, so as not to compromise him, Jesus turns and looks at Peter and Peter's heart is pierced through and through. He goes out and weeps bitterly. Tradition tells us these were no transitory tears. He wept whenever he recalled the scene. These tears bore furrows on his face so profound was his sorrow and so bitter his regret. Happy is he who, like St. Peter, with great love, detests his sins however great they may be. His sins will be remitted in proportion to his repentance.

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<sup>152</sup> *In Iohannis euangelium tractatus* (CPL 0278) - LLT-A-tract. 55, par. 5, linea 2  
(Augustine&Tractate on the Gospel of John&CPL&tract. 55, par. 5, line 2)

<sup>153</sup> *ibid.* linea 3 (Augustine&Tractate on the Gospel of John&CPL&tract. 55, par. 5, line 3)

## VII. Jesus before the Tribunals

It is amazing how many judges Jesus had. First there was Annas, then Caiaphas, then Pontius Pilate, then Herod, then the populace, finally Pontius Pilate for the third or fourth time, because he alone had the power to inflict the death-penalty. On the one hand he was convinced of Jesus' innocence, "*non invenio in eo causam*; I can discover no fault in this man" (Jn 19:6). On the other hand, he dared not face Caesar's displeasure with which the accusers threatened him.

And you too, Holy Church of God, you too have become well acquainted with these multiple tribunals! Sometimes it is jealousy, skillfully disguised as piety, but betrayed when it comes to action. Sometimes the legality of the written text can be manipulated in such a manner as to condemn the most obvious innocence. Sometimes adulterous sensuality steps forward and sneers at the most basic principles. Sometimes popular fury blinds itself. And sometimes ambition rears itself indignantly and refuses to accept certain injunctions.

The Church is not unaware of all this. It will always face betrayal, will always face chains. It will always be threatened with extinction somewhere in the world, but always it will survive and invariably will see the rock sealed over the tombs of its enemies.

Nowadays it seems as if it is here in France where this death is being brought about. The Church is aware but seems untroubled. Alas! Somewhere or other in the world, the Church will always be very much alive...but God has not promised that it will always be alive everywhere.

## VIII. Jesus Condemned to Death

They didn't wait for the death-sentence before beginning to torture him. His agony began in the Garden of Olives. It continued on the High Priest's premises. There he was spat upon, blindfolded, mocked and beaten. They had to make sure that there was absolutely no pity, that every form of cruelty be freely indulged in. He is taken to Pilate, and thence to Herod who treats him with the utmost contempt. But perhaps there does remain some trace of humanity in this prince. Who would condemn a madman to death? Herod expresses his opinion by dressing him in a fool's cloak.

Now take note of how Pilate attempts to save his victim from the full force of Jewish fury. Jesus is scourged, then crowned with thorns. The soldiers clothe him in a scarlet robe, and hit him over the head with a mock scepter. What more could they want? Ah, it's not good enough! Egged on by their priests, the mob that had acclaimed him in triumph only a few days previously has now nothing to shout except calls for his death. Ah, this is public goodness and tenderness! This is what it really amounts to!

Bear in mind that the more perfect a body is, the more it suffers when it is subjected to pain. Whose body is more perfect than that of the

Divine Savior? And what pain did he not suffer! What patience was he not called upon to practice!

May we learn how to gain two lessons in these torments, precursors of his death. By suffering as he did, he showed us how much he loves us. I repeat and insist upon this because no greater truth has ever been told. This is how much he loves us. But also notice the example he gives us. Jesus, by being buffeted, insulted, tortured, and scourged, teaches us how to purify our pain. This, in a nut-shell, is the Christian life. Horror at one's sin and the acceptance of punishment are a creature's way of proving how much he loves God, just as God proved how much he loves his creatures. Happy are those who understand this mystery. The saints understood it—this is why they became saints. May we too become saints by following in the bloodstained footsteps of Jesus.

### **IX. The Cross and Death**

The death-sentence—brought about by priestly hatred, the stirring-up of an angry mob, and ambition put to the test—is now going to be executed. After the scourging, there is the crown of thorns, the mock scepter and the scarlet robe. And then the Cross. It is placed upon the shoulders of this new Isaac, and he carries it up to the mountain where he is to be sacrificed. How many stumbles and falls—how many cruel blows—how many shouts and curses—added to what he already has to suffer! His mother approaches and in such a moment is it possible that seeing Mary was a source of consolation to him? A devout woman wipes his face covered with blood, tears and all kinds of filth. Some other women make their mournful cries of commiseration rise up—but Jesus has no wish for this sort of sympathy. “Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me—weep for yourselves and for your children” (Lk 23:28). The sufferings of the Man cannot obscure the prophetic gaze of God, aware of what is going to happen to this decide city. The guards wonder whether he is too weak to reach the site of his execution. They seize upon a passer-by—a foreigner from Cyrene named Simon. He is requisitioned to carry the Cross with Jesus. Happy the Christian who can assist this Victim par excellence to consummate his sacrifice by entering into his sentiments and by making his pain less stinging, the weight of his Cross less onerous.

And so they reach Calvary. The Cross is laid upon the ground. Jesus is stretched upon this painful (but soon to be glorious) instrument of death. His hands and feet are nailed—then the Cross is lifted up. The Priest and Victim is suspended between earth and heaven; his blood flows out from so many wounds, sources of life to heal sinners. The voice of our crucified Pontiff rings out at rare intervals. He prays for his executioners: “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do” (Lk 23:34). He commends John to Mary—and in the person of John, all of humanity to his mother. He says he is thirsty. It is a mysterious thirst—the thirst for souls is the cause of

this new torment. He cries out to his heavenly Father that he has been abandoned. In so doing he wishes to remind Christians called to a state of perfection that they will have to undergo trials, loneliness and darkness before they achieve that purity of heart necessary to enter into intimate union with God. Finally, he cries out with a loud voice—and dies, committing his own soul into the hands of his Father. And it's all over.

What more could you ask of him? Has Jesus loved us sufficiently? Has our salvation been costly enough to him? What more could he do than die for us? And now what are men to do for him? Some will ignore him, others will drive him away. He will be persecuted in the person of his Church, in the person of his most cherished followers. It has to be so. Heaven's mercy and hell's hatred will have to fight it out to the end. But woe to the one who does not take advantage of this great tenderness, to the one who cannot grasp the love and the inexhaustible gifts of the Savior! Happy, on the contrary, are those who do take advantage of it and welcome in their own hearts the blood that flows from the pierced heart of their Master! Happy those who, contemplating these sorrowful mysteries, enrich themselves with the living fruits thereof for all eternity!

### Epilogue

The sacrifice is accomplished. Now, what to do with this lifeless body? Pilate hands it over to two of his discreet devotees. Hitherto cautious, they now come forward full of courage. His body is taken down from the cross. Mary is there, together with a group of pious women, to honor it with the ointment they have brought. A tomb in which nobody has ever been laid is providentially close at hand. In it the body of Jesus, still united to the divinity, is reverently posed, as in its first tabernacle. So let the Pharisees come along with their authorization from the Governor to seal the entrance to the tomb and surround it with sentries to prevent the Apostles from removing it. However, the Apostles will do nothing of the kind; they are far too timid. But who is going to stop the angel of the Lord from intervening when the time is ripe? In spite of the seals put in place he will roll back the stone and send the sentries scampering with fright. And he, the first witness of Jesus' Resurrection, will open the tomb of him who is forever "free among the dead; *inter mortuos liber*" (Ps 87:6 Vulgate).

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## II. The Crown of Thorns<sup>154</sup>

### Our King

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<sup>154</sup> extract from the 18<sup>th</sup> conference of Nîmes given on November 27, 1870 to the Religious Sisters of the Assumption

It is remarkable how at certain periods the mysteries of Our Lord's life become very real and "down to earth." Setting aside any commentary of a personal nature, let me refer rather to the times in which we live. How very fitting it is that in these days we should have a particular devotion to Our Lord presented by Pilate to the Jewish people when he says, "Here is your king! (Jn 19:14)". A king: manacled, scourged, clothed in scarlet military cloak, crowned with thorns, and holding a reed for his scepter...does this not depict the present situation of the Pope? Let us not belabor the point—the similarity is too striking and has too often been stressed. But does it not describe Our Lord himself face to face with modern societies—and what description is more disheartening?

Once people were Catholics, and if Our Lord has been driven out of modern society, Catholics themselves are at fault. We must first consider the long list of crimes our ancestors committed through the ages; then, and above all, we must consider those we ourselves have committed. If today we are assisting at the sorry spectacle of Our Lord being presented to people as if he were nothing more than a mock-monarch, as he was in days gone by at the Praetorium, it is our fault, my dear Sisters.

What will happen now? We don't know. What will they do with this king crowned with thorns? Only he knows. But what are your duties towards this humiliated, despised and derided king, towards this king the object of doubt, skepticism, and even denied on principle? Do you not feel this places you under an obligation to proclaim the Kingdom of Jesus Christ? I am speaking to you as to intelligent young women, able to understand what I mean. Having stated the case, I ask you: has your order, considered as a corporate entity, no role to play? You who belong to it, you who have taken as your motto, "*Adveniat regnum tuum*; thy Kingdom come," you have a mission to accomplish. Because you repeat over and over again at the center of your very life, "My God, may your Kingdom come," you must add, "Yes, I must ceaselessly and relentlessly destroy everything in and around me which stands in opposition to the Kingship of Jesus Christ. I must direct all my energy to raising this kingship up from the pit of humiliation into which its enemies have thrust it and I must surround Jesus with majesty and glory."

#### **Our Weapons**

And what means did you yourself, Lord, use in order to establish your Kingdom and to have it penetrate the social order? There I see you standing outside the Praetorium, covered with insult and injury! For the next three hundred years you will permit your Church and your martyrs to share these indignities; in their person you will continue the humiliations of your Passion. So what must I do about it, I who also wish to reestablish your sovereignty over human society, I too who long to be a witness to your Gospel? I may not be destined, as were your martyrs, to be tortured on the scaffold or burnt at the stake, to suffer all sorts of torments, but all my life

must bear witness to you. So what must I do? Ah, you yourself provide me with the answer. I must establish your sovereignty by emptying myself; I must reveal to all the power of your humiliated majesty in a world that withdraws from you.

Can we deny this, my dear Sisters? Civil government is having less and less to do with God. Society is splitting up into two distinct camps. This situation is fulfilling more than ever the thinking of St. Augustine when he divides the world into two cities: the City of God and the City of the Devil. Because you are fighting for one City and the enemy arrays his forces against you, you have to take up arms in defense of the heavenly Jerusalem. What will your weapons be? Take up no weapons other than those of Jesus Christ. He chose to fight by being humiliated, by emptying himself, by not deeming equality with God something to be grasped. How can you do otherwise? Look at your Master. He left you this example so that you might follow in his footsteps in order to bring about his Kingdom in this world. There are no other footsteps for you to follow. So let us follow the grand principle of humility. It is the polar opposite of the principle of the City of Satan; it is the force and the power of the City of God. Satan is all pride. Your humility will prove to be his undoing.

Consider, then, how your entire life needs to be taken over by the guiding principle of humility. Resolve thoughtfully and with determination that no room will be left in you for pride, vanity or self-worship. Assimilate this master-thought of St. Paul which I have repeated to you over and over again: “For Christ did not please himself” (Rom 15:3).

Look at him, Sisters. Look at him who is a Priest for ever—of whom angel choirs sing in the words of David: “*You are a priest forever*” (Ps 109:4 Vulgate). There he stands robed as a king, before being stripped as a victim.

When will we learn to bring humility to the life of society as the martyrs did when they allowed themselves to be butchered by the axe or burned at the stake? At this supreme moment of death it seemed that they sought nothing but the total gift of themselves. So when will we make our mind up to say to God: “My God, happen what may, I intend to accept—by virtue of obedience and observance of the Rule—every single humiliation which crosses my path? It doesn’t matter what indignity or disgrace I experience for you have given me an example in that paradoxical and contradictory royalty with which Pontius Pilate invested you. He said, ‘So you are a king!’ (Jn 18:37). This was how he presented you to the mob who was screaming for your blood. And having allowed you to be tortured by your executioners and mocked and insulted by the crowds, he nailed at the top of the Cross the proclamation of your Kingship.”

See, then, my dear Sisters, what you must do in the face of such a scene. You must place yourselves before your crucifix and adore Our Lord, dying, his head crowned with thorns. Go and adore Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, whether in the tabernacle or in the monstrance—but him who

always remains hidden, stripped of any sign of royalty, emptied. And when you receive him in Holy Communion, is he not buried inside you, concealed in the innermost recesses of your heart? What thoughts ought to pass through the mind of a religious whose heart is burning with love and who is seeking to follow her self-emptying Savior? Who ought to be insulted and despised—her or Jesus? Her—for she has been so constantly unfaithful to her spouse. If her heart is capable of being touched, how can she restrain herself from begging God to revert the roles, from being accorded that little extra amount of honor and glory which she is capable of obtaining for him by her loving adoration and love, and from taking on herself some of the pain and disgrace of Jesus Christ? This, my dear Sisters, would be to restore the right order of things: Glory for God, the All-holy One, humiliation for the sinful spouse!

#### **Drawing out the practical consequences**

So now we come to the practical consequences for us? What do you possibly have to complain about before the incredible silence of Our Lord, scourged and crowned with thorns? Imagine Pilate presenting him to you and you yourselves mingled with the crowd—or, if you prefer, imagine yourself as one of the holy women gathered near the Praetorium. Pilate proclaims: “Here is your King”—and the people reply: “We have no king but Caesar” (Jn 19:15). You raise your voice and say, “Yes, he is my King—and in defiance of a society which repudiates him, I intend to restore his reign.”

Never, my dear daughters—never was time more ripe for this mission. For several centuries the Reformation has been gnawing at the foundations of his throne—nowadays we see the Revolution bent on completing the destructive process.

Do you wish to remain subjects of this dethroned King? Do you wish to devote yourselves, as daughters of the Assumption, to the cause of this restoration—for the next three or four centuries if need be? Our Lord is offering you great happiness. Accept this wonderful charge—and pray every day for a deeper understanding of your motto, “*Adveniat regnum tuum.*” Do you wish to stand beside Our Lord on that rickety platform where Pilate placed him to be mocked by the Jewish crowd? Do you really want to do this, accepting all of the humiliation and suffering it will mean for you? The question has been clearly put to you. Now is the time to answer!

Don’t you feel that your motto, “*Adveniat regnum tuum*” placed side by side with “*Ecce rex vester; Behold your king*” (Jn 19:14) is a wonderful answer? Part of the crowd is shouting, “*Non habemus regem nisi Caesarem; We have no king but Caesar!*” (Jn 19:15). We don’t want your king—we have chosen Caesar, that is to say the world with all its passions, Satan and his empire.” And you, his chosen and faithful flock—you who love the Master and stand by him in his disgrace—you are crying out: “No, it is



Jesus, wearing a purple mock-robe and holding a mock-scepter. It is Jesus humiliated, battered, and covered with indignity who is our king. *Adveniat regnum tuum!*”

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### III. The Crucifixion<sup>155</sup>

There are just three aspects of the crucifixion I wish you to reflect on very carefully: the subjugation of Our Lord, the shame and humiliation, and, finally, the suffering.

1° *The subjugation*. He was fixed to the Cross with three nails that represent the holy vows. The nails attached Our Lord to the Cross—your holy vows attach you to the religious life. They attach you to the instrument of your torture, and you will remain attached until your dying breath.

The salvation of the world and the sanctification of his elect depended on Jesus remaining attached to the Cross. The salvation of the world and the sanctification of the elect depended on the subjugation of Our Lord. In yours is found your salvation as Christians, your sanctification as spouses of Our Lord. And the closer your attachment, the greater the assurance of your salvation and the greater the degree of your sanctification will be. If, on the other hand, you attempt to loosen the bonds, to deliver yourself from the nails, then you will compromise your salvation and render your sanctification extremely unlikely.

2° *His Shame and humiliation*. You must be ready to participate in this “divine shame” which has always been the lot of Christ’s spouses and is particularly so at the present time. This was Jesus’ lot on Calvary, and it will always be so.

What kind of humiliations lie in wait for you during the course of your religious life? I do not know. But who among you has not already undergone some form of confusion—and how did she accept it? Did she react with her pride? You know, Sisters, one thing has always surprised me (in myself as much as in you). It’s how we have the gumption to look at a cross, yet continue to find time for pride, conceit and self-worship. We make the sign of the Cross a hundred times a day: during Office, during Mass, before beginning any of our habitual occupations. And how often we kiss our crucifix. We are always being blessed with the sign of the Cross. Yet how many of the lessons of the Cross sink in? To what extent are we influenced by the shame and humiliation of the Crucifix? We retain our conceit and vainglory, the sense of our own importance, the cult of our own pretensions and all the other off-shoots of pride, so that our life becomes one big lie. Think on this, my dear daughters: Jesus demonstrating how

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<sup>155</sup> Extract from the 19<sup>th</sup> Conference to the Religious of the Assumption at Nimes, November 28, 1870

much he loves you by his degree of self-abasement. I would like you to be heartfelt in seeking similar humiliations, that you show Jesus how much you love him by longing to be humiliated! A convent filled with religious acting in such a way would be a convent of saints. No doubt, this is why there are none!

3° *Our Lord's sufferings.* Not only were they as frightful as we could possibly imagine—they were so frightful as to defy imagination. We would need God's heart to enable us to understand what God-made-man had to endure in the susceptibility and the perfection of his human nature. Having contemplated your Divine Savior reduced to such a state, you will say, "My God, having seen how much you love men by your loving acceptance of submission, shame and torture, how can I love you in return? By accepting every humiliation to which you wish to subject me and every pain sent to afflict me. I will find them in the accomplishment of my vows, in the requirements of the Rule, in the irritations of community life, in the hundred and one hardships connected with my vocation."

Will you be satisfied with standing at the foot of the Cross? No, you will aspire to greater heights. And what will you do when you are beset by trials coming from three different sources: God, your neighbor or yourself? You will nail yourself to the Cross by your holy vows, as Jesus hung nailed to his—and there, fixed to your tree of torture, you will accept your sorrows, pains and shames—as Our Lord accepted the insults of the Pharisees, the derisive cries of the on-lookers, the hatred of his enemies who tossed their heads. Put yourselves before God the Father with Jesus-Victim on whom God discharges the weight of his anger and revenge in his place. Identify yourselves with Christ the victim. Then see how much of it you can take!

And before I end, dear Sisters—and having shown you what you must do as religious in view of your personal sanctification—may I now ask you to forget you are consecrated persons. Our Lord wasn't thinking about himself as he hung on the Cross—what happened to him didn't matter at all. So you must do the same. Don't be yourself for your own sake. Turn yourself into a victim—and offer yourself up for the salvation of souls and for the Church. You are spouses of a crucified Lord dying to save all men. So can you not resolve to forget yourselves, to spend your lives carrying the Cross, and to rise up to Crucifixion?

Even if Jesus Christ wished to redeem the human race single-handedly, did he not invite your participation? Go, therefore, and say: "Take me, Lord, of little worth though I be. Take what limited capacity for self-sacrifice lies in my heart—I trust you to increase it day by day. I want to follow you in the simplicity of my love. I want to share in the shame of your Cross—so as to satisfy your Justice by expiating the sins of men and making up for the sufferings of your Church. And thus embracing the humiliation of your Passion, may I become one of those who contribute to the mystical treasures of your Church in such a way that I may be able to

fulfill what your Apostle says, ‘*Adimpleo ea quae desunt passionum Christi*; I am filling up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ’ (Col 1:24). And if you do me the honor of allowing me to contribute some modest donation towards the work of redeeming the human race, this will also enable me to love you more and more and enlarge that love immensely by your grace.”

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## IV. The Five Wounds

The Lord has laid upon his Son the iniquity of us all and this is why Jesus is tortured through and through. “*O vos omnes qui transitis*; O all ye that pass by, see if there be any sorrow like to my sorrow” (Lam 1:12). His head has been crowned with thorns—his body bruised all over by the scourging. Now they are driving nails through his hands and feet—and the human soul united to his body makes it a perfect recipient of pain. For no soul is as perfect as that of our Savior—and there is nothing that can make his body more capable of suffering.

### 1° Atonement

There he is hanging on the Cross. Feet are instruments of life—they take us wherever our bodily presence is required. But now they are painfully immobile.

Where has sin not taken you? To what shows? To what gatherings? To what business? The servants of your will, your feet have led you into sin—this is why Jesus’ feet have to suffer.

“*Foderunt manus meas et pedes meos*; They have pierced my hands and my feet” (Ps 21:18 Vulg).

Our hands too have been instruments of sin. To engage in gluttony, in vanity, and in the desire to win the favors of others. So Jesus’ hands have had to be pierced. “*Foderunt manus meas et pedes meos*. They have pierced my hands and my feet.”

But his entire body is having to atone for our sins by hanging there. “*dinumeraverunt omnia ossa mea*; They have dug holes in my hands and my feet—they have counted all my bones!” (Ps 21:18 Vulgate). This sacred body is atoning for all the sins we have committed with our bodies.

Look at those feet nailed to the Cross! Who else but he is the “Man of sorrows...who has born our infirmities...healed us” (cf Is 53:4)?

And so he atones. Hanging there between earth and heaven, he atones for all sinners—and for us in particular. Which sins do we most often commit? He atones especially for them. It’s up to you to ask him. For which sin is not expiated by these bloody, holy wounds?

Look at this victim so cruelly fixed to the altar of sacrifice to expiate

all the sins of humanity! Must you not too endeavor to expiate? See how you yourself in some way must attach yourself to the Cross and say, with the Apostle, “*Christo confixus sum cruci*; With Christ I am nailed to the Cross” (Gal 2:19).

## 2° The Proof of His Love

Surely there is no greater proof than this. What else do you think Jesus Christ could do to show how much he loved us? Die for us? He did that. And with what accompanying tortures! He was tortured before—he was tortured during—he was tortured to the very end.

Now, it is needless for me to gather all the great sinners; that would be useless. I will ask those instead whom I have reason to suppose are the saintliest among God’s people. Leaving aside original sin, are you certain that you have never once in the past offended God grievously? So take the Father’s love for his prodigal son. You were dead—he restored you to life—but in order to do this, he died on your behalf. Your hatred, manifested by grievous sin, appears to have spurred him on to love you more than ever. How did you sin? Was it in your mind? Were you not shown his head bruised with a crown of thorns? Was it with your senses? Then look at his pierced hands and feet—see him being tied to the pillar and scourged—watch his blood being shed to wash you clean.

How he loves us! How can we not burst out in song “*Sic nos amantem quis non redamaret*; Who would not love thee, Loving us so dearly?”<sup>156</sup> And how can we show we love him, else than by accepting whatever suffering he sees fit to send?

## 3° A Model to Imitate

We will all be punished according to the nature of our sins—this is what Our Savior teaches. He atones for each of our sins down to the last detail—but he does expect us to follow in his footsteps. So when are we going to take each sin in turn and endeavor to offer suitable reparation? Ah, what mastery of the art of penance would we not acquire if we knew how to undertake the appropriate expiation! Our guilty ways would be undone.

You say that these are minor offences, petty mistakes. Very well, then, undertake light penances. And perhaps if we reinforced this modest expiation with an additional dose of genuine contrition, we would feel better about it; we would obtain a clearer insight as to our degree of culpability. Jesus invites you to repentance by exhibiting his wounds; it is the plea of innocence itself who suffers on behalf of the guilty. When will your hearts be sufficiently Christian to make you willing to suffer for sinners and to share in the fecundity of Our Master’s Savior’s wounds?

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<sup>156</sup> from *Adeste fideles*—O Come All You Faithful

#### 4° Union of Hearts

Each of the major basilicas in Rome has five doors, symbolizing the Savior's five wounds. People enter the holy place through these five doors—and so they reach the sanctuary, the major martyr's tomb (i.e. the 'confession') or side altars, there to solicit the favors God dispenses more bountifully in certain chosen places.

Now, when the Savior chose a figure of speech to make the Jews aware of his coming death and resurrection, he said to them: "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will build it up again" (Jn 2:19)—and the evangelist tells us he was referring to the temple of his own body.

Indeed, what more magnificent a temple than this one in which, as St. Paul tells us, the fullness of the Godhead dwells in bodily form (Col 2:9). Well, these five wounds received on the Cross are the mystical doors through which we are invited into the Divine Temple—a temple temporally demolished by the Jews, but gloriously rebuilt within less than three days. Yes, the Godhead dwells there. Yes, behind the curtains, behind the walls of this body, we find God. It is there that the bond of union is struck, when the sacred wounds have shed enough blood to purify our souls. This union is painfully "tattooed" into our flesh here below, but shines gloriously in the Kingdom above. Christ risen from the dead wishes to maintain the mark of his wounds. Jesus glories in his wounds; these five divine doors are never shut.

Let us approach our Savior's wounds. Let the nails of the Cross pierce our hands and feet. Let our heart escape through our own pierced side and unite itself with that of our Divine Master. This union will culminate by a love that suffers on earth and that triumphs in heaven.

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## V. Resurrection

*"Surrexit, non est hic; He is risen—he is not here"* (Mt 28:6).

"This," says Bourdaloue, "is what could be written on the tomb of Jesus Christ, the only inscription that makes sense on the tomb of a man raised from the dead. His is the one tomb in history which our faith teaches us will have nothing to deliver up on the Last Day."

Let us examine why this supreme marvel of the Resurrection had to take place.

1° From the point of view of the Blessed Trinity, the resurrection had to take place because of the humiliations by means of which he rendered it glory and reparation.

2° From the point of view of Jesus Christ, the resurrection is the very essence of Gospel teaching and of our faith.

3° From our point of view, it is, as the basis of the faith we have received, the guarantee of our reconciliation, of our hope, and our glory.

### **1° The Blessed Trinity**

The three Persons in the one God had to assure that Jesus Christ rose again from the dead. When I express myself thus, I must bear in mind (following the teaching of Saint Thomas and of St. Augustine) that God could, no doubt, have redeemed us from sin otherwise than by our Savior's death; but from the moment God had decided on this means, certain consequences were bound to follow. Jesus was innocent of all sin—he could not deserve to die. He was God and man. His divine nature rendered his human nature incorruptible. He did, however, wish to die in order to satisfy divine justice—and in order to give God glory such as no other creature could have given him, because no other creature than he was so personally united to God.

But how could God, who abounds in all riches, allow that a creature give him more than what he would have received from him? That would be inconceivable. Jesus Christ presented his Father with the gift of his human life—so in return, God the Father gave him back his human body one thousand times more precious and sublime.

I am not concerned at present with this human life as Jesus had received it from the very first moment of his Incarnation. It was restored to him after death....and seen by others. And this had to happen for the reassurance of Christians redeemed by his death. But Jesus Christ had offered his Father such bitter sufferings, such deep humiliations—and a homage which alone was worthy of the Blessed Trinity, since it was offered by God himself. See with what glory, what power, what brightness, Jesus Christ had to be endowed! This is the real reason why he had to rise again. "*Nonne oportuit haec Christum pati, et ita intrare in gloriam suam?* Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" (Lk 24:26).

### **2° Our Lord Himself**

The Resurrection was the basic historical fact the Apostles proclaimed. St. John is careful to remind us that grace and truth came to us through Jesus Christ (Jn 1:17). Grace was given, as we have seen, when mankind was pardoned through Jesus' death. As for Truth: St. Ambrose points out that it is only right and reasonable for whoever commands our faith to begin by proving it. Jesus Christ, "author and consummator of our faith" (Heb 12:2), had to provide a proof that his teaching was true. The proof he provided was his Resurrection. "If Christ has not risen, then our preaching is groundless, and so is your faith" (1 Cor 15:14). "If this is the case," he goes on to say, "then we are the most deluded of men, so let us eat

and drink because tomorrow we will be dead.” Indeed, what would be the point in living good lives and listening to the Gospel? What authorization would our preaching have? What obligation to the faith we insist upon?

But if Jesus did rise again, it proves that 1° he is God because he rose by his own power; and 2° that he is everything he says he is—everything he preaches or commissions his envoys to preach is the truth. Consequently, we are bound to believe him—and our faith based on this. He had to die so as to rise again and prove thereby that he was who he claimed to be.

*“Ego autem constitutes sum a Deo super Sion, montem sanctum ejus, praedicans praeceptum ejus; Here am I, appointed by God over Zion his Holy Mountain—appointed to preach his precepts” (Ps 2:6 Vulgate).*

### 3° Ourselves

From our point of view the Resurrection is the very foundation of faith we have received—the guarantee of our reconciliation—of our hope—of our future glory.

Jesus, as I have just said, brought faith to the world by rising again. He is not only the “author,” but the “consummator” of faith (Heb 12:2). See how many people hear the word of God but have no intention of understanding it! Jesus is the author of faith—yet neither he nor the truth he teaches is listened to. See how for so many his message “goes in one ear and out the other”; it remains a closed book, a sealed letter. But see what riches it brings to those who are disposed to listen! God offers men this gift—but men must be willing to receive it.

But Jesus Christ has arranged things in such a way that the resurrection is a fact and if we deny it, then we can be certain of no other event in human history. I do not intend to set about demonstrating this proposition right now, but it is beyond doubt. For the past nineteen hundred years the Church has had every right to proclaim: “Believe the Resurrection happened—or go through life wondering whether anything else ever did.”

It is the guarantee of our reconciliation. Victims used to be offered, even human victims—but of what use were they? They had to be destroyed and replaced. Jesus died, but to show the permanent value of his sacrifice, he remained in the tomb no longer than was necessary to establish his death. “He was delivered unto death for our sins and raised to life for our justification” (Rom 4:25). To prove the success of his reconciliation he came to life again.

It is the guarantee of our hope. See how we are invited to take part in his Resurrection. *“Si consurrexistis cum Christo, quae sursum sunt, quaerite, ubi Christus est in dextera Dei sedens; quae sursum sunt, sapite, non quae super terram; If then you were raised with Christ, seek what is above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Think of what is above, not of what is on earth” (Col 3:1-2).* So we must disregard transitory matters and desire what lasts forever. A new world ushers in new

aspirations. We have not yet reached heaven, but we belong no longer to earth.

It is the guarantee of our glory. This is God's work. I told you a few days ago that this is worked out on this earth chiefly through the Holy Eucharist. But what exactly is the result of this work? The work is the ongoing effort transforming us. Listen to the Apostle, "*Aeternum gloriae pondus operatur in nobis*; producing for us an eternal weight of glory loaded with everlasting glory" (2 Cor 4:17). It is such an immense weight of glory that we ourselves are incapable of bearing it. Imagine some huge boulder rolling down from the mountain-side, and sinking itself into the rain-soaked earth. This is how God's glory operates on us. It's God's work—and the result is that we begin to adhere to his glory. The operation will never be completed here below, but a start has been made—"*Aeternum gloriae pondus*; producing an eternal weight of glory". We are just beginning...*Initium aliquod creaturae ejus*; a kind of first-fruits of his creatures (Jas 1:18).

Let our divine Savior carry on with the good work—and "God will give us grace and glory; *Deus gratiam et gloriam dabit Dominus*" (Ps 83:12 Vulgate).

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## ***Meditation on the Eucharist***

*The Eucharist is the memorial of the Savior's Passion, a memorial that becomes all the more alive the more one productively meditates on the life, the doctrine, and the mysteries of the Divine Master. Eucharistic devotion is the crowning of our love for Our Lord.*

*In 1874<sup>157</sup> Fr. d'Alzon edited a series of meditations for an Octave of the Blessed Sacrament<sup>158</sup> that he presented to Fr. Picard as a commentary on what our Eucharistic devotion should be. He was inspired by an Octave of the Blessed Sacrament that he had given in Alès in 1861; seven of the presentations were preserved by a group of the faithful. The eighth was entitled, "Jesus God." Four of these instructions were given again, during Lent of 1862, to the Adorers of the Blessed Sacrament<sup>159</sup>. What we are presenting here are:*

*1° a meditation on the Eucharist, inserted by Fr. Picard in his edition of the Directory; the original has never been found;*

*2° the Octave of the Blessed Sacrament of Alès, while borrowing the instruction on Jesus God from Lent 1862;*

*3° some thoughts on the Eucharist found in his correspondence.*

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<sup>157</sup> Conjectural date. The original text is lost. The present text is from Fr. Picard's edition of the *Directory* in which he inserted this meditation that he attributes to Fr. d'Alzon.

<sup>158</sup> *cf. Méditations sur la perfection religieuse*, volume 1

<sup>159</sup> *cf. Eucharistie Lumière de vie*, in the Cahiers du P. d'Alzon, 1953

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## MEDITATION ON THE EUCHARIST

If I really love Our Lord I will seek him, above all, in the Sacrament of his love. He is there as the object and the model of my adoration—and it is there that I will acquire the strength of persuasion in order to get others to come and adore him too.

### 1. Eucharist, the Object of My Adoration

Jesus is my God, the Eternal Word. He may have adopted the form of a slave; he may have reduced himself to the supreme humiliation of Calvary and to the helplessness of the tabernacle. But he is still the splendor of the Father and God eternal, worthy of my adoration.

The thoughtless negligence to which he condemns himself present in the tabernacle, the insults he suffers there, the patience he exhibits there, far from diminishing my respect or my worship should, on the contrary, lead me to a devotion and submission that is all the greater since Jesus has made himself small out of love for me.

Under the Eucharistic species my faith discovers the very essence of God, an ocean of power, of light, and of love.

*An Ocean of Power.*; He is the fullness of being. He is entitled to the fullness of my obedience. Have I felt his power? Do I place myself at his feet as a creature does in the presence of the Creator?

*“Substantia mea tanquam nihilum ante te; My life is as nought before you; only a breath is any human existence”* (Ps 38:7 Vulgate).

*An Ocean of Light.*; Jesus Christ is the lamp which lights up the Jerusalem of souls (*“et lucerna ejus est agnus; and its light is the Lamb”* Rv 21:23). He must shed his light into every corner; he disperses all darkness. I must see everything in him. I ought to share his views, base my judgments on his, look on things from his point of view. How do I dare prefer my own human view-point, my own limited wisdom, to this wisdom of my Master?

Submission of my spirit, adhesion of my intellect, total adoration—this is what I owe to this hidden light—else how can I describe myself as truly adoring him? Have I understood this? Have I made up my mind to submit my clouded wisdom to his infinite wisdom?

*An Ocean of Love.* *“Exinavit semetipsum; he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave”* (Phil 2:7). It took God’s heart to perform this marvel. Why is my heart so hesitant? Why is my will so rebellious? Let there be no more revolt and no more resistance. My heart belongs to God. Let me kneel in front of the tabernacle, there to sacrifice my will and my capacity to love.

## 2. Eucharist, the Model of My Adoration

Jesus is my God. As God he is the object of my worship. But who will teach me to adore him “in spirit and in truth?”.... He alone. And in the tabernacle he presents himself as the most perfect adorer. “*Agnus tanquam occisus*; a lamb standing upright, yet slain in sacrifice” (cf Rv 5:6).

What characterizes us religious vowed to virginity is “*hii sequuntur Agnum quocumque ierit: virgines enim sunt*; following the Lamb wherever he goes” (Rv 14:4). To attain the glory of following him into paradise, we must begin by following him in his real and mystical life in the tabernacle and to learn from him how to worship our heavenly Father in purity, patience, power, gratitude, and self-sacrifice.

*Purity.* “*Agnus sine macula*; He is a Lamb without blemish” (Ex 12:5).—The virginal brightness which emanates from the Lamb must be reflected in the soul of the religious, having washed our garments clean. We must present ourselves to the Father, separated from every creature. Like incense, we must be consumed with fire—and thus our prayer must rise, pure and disinterested, to the Father’s throne.

How is it that I pray so badly? How can I dare present myself before God to adore him, when my mind is preoccupied with worldly matters, and my heart full of imperfections?

*Patience.* What is the Lamb doing in his Eucharistic silence? He is waiting. He is patient. He has rights, but he does not claim them. He is all-powerful, but he does not make use of his power. He sees somebody distracted coming to him, someone overwrought by his passions, someone who is ungrateful. He welcomes him; he doesn’t get irritated with him; he puts up with him; he engages in adoration on his behalf. Listen to what he says: “*Discite a me, quia mitis sum, et humilis corde*; Learn from me for I am meek and humble of heart” (Mt 11:29). Are meekness and humility the characteristics of my adoration?

As a religious I offer the Holy Sacrifice; I receive Holy Communion; I visit the Blessed Sacrament; I adore him. Do I adore with a truly humble heart, that patiently bears the weight of grace or the weight of souls, that is ready to recognize the rights of his God with a patience capable of undergoing every sacrifice?

*Power.* The Lamb is mighty. He appears as he did to St. John carrying on his shoulders all the sins of the world for he alone can take them away. “*Ecce Agnus Dei, ecce qui tollit peccata mundi*; Behold the Lamb of God! Behold him who takes away the sins of the world!” (Jn 1:29). As Pontiff<sup>160</sup> he is seated at the right hand of the Father forever interceding for us. As one who adores, he has reduced himself to nothing in the tabernacle—but there he makes intercession with the same power and the same authority.

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<sup>160</sup> editorial note: this word means bridge-builder

The religious who adores can participate in this powerful intercession of Jesus. The Risen Christ can die no more, but he carries on his work of intercession in his mystical body which is the Church.

What is the religious doing while he adores? He is representing the Church; he is praying with an authority greater than his own, but with an all-powerful authority. With human lips he is transmitting the prayer which issues from the divine lips of our heavenly Mediator for souls. And so he prays: freeing souls from the flames of purgatory, obtaining the conversion of sinners, fervor for the lukewarm, and perseverance for those who are holy, triumph for the Church and the extension of the Kingdom of God.

How many souls are brought back, fortified and sanctified by the feeble prayer of a religious who adores because it is united with the all-powerful prayer of the adorer par excellence!

*Gratitude.*; After the priest has received the Blessed Body of the Savior, he recites these words: “*Quid retribuam Domino, pro omnibus quae retribuit mihi*; O how can I repay the Lord for all he has done for me?” (Ps 115:3 or 116:12 Vulgate). God has rights which are due to him in justice; the Lamb has restored these rights. But the Lamb has rights over me. He is entitled to everything because I owe him everything; I offered everything to him, gave everything over to him at my profession. What am I to answer when he asks me: What have you done with the graces you received? Alas, I said in muffled voice: “*Quid retribuam Domino*; how can I repay the Lord?” I have misused his blessings to me.

*Self-Sacrifice.* The Lamb is the victim. From the very beginning Christ desired to adopt this character: “*Occisus est ab origine mundi*; slain from the beginning of the world” (Rv 13:8). But nowhere is his sacrificial aspect so clearly or lovingly emphasized as in the Eucharist. Having been called to follow the Lamb, I too must become a victim led out to be sacrificed, “*Sicut ovis ad occisionem ducetur*; a sheep led to the slaughter” (Is 53:7). It is not on a prie-dieu or even on the bare ground that I must bend the knee. I will have to be stretched out on the altar—a victim prepared to be slain and exposed to divine justice.

What remained of the victim once it had passed through the fire of the holocaust? Nothing. So what must remain of me if I wish my adoration to be as perfect as that of the Lamb that was sacrificed or that of the Host on the altar? Nothing. The complete destruction of my own life, of my personality, of my demands, of my will, of my sinful nature—that is the exalted goal of my adoration. Have I understood it so far? “*Deus det nobis sensum*; Help us, O God, to understand” (cf Jn 15:20).

### 3. Eucharist, a force for drawing true adorers to Jesus

What power is entrusted to the heart of the priest who summons down to the altar the Victim offered up since the world began! What power is entrusted to the religious who, by receiving Communion and by voluntary

self-sacrifice identifies himself with the Eucharistic Jesus! How is it that I am availing myself so little of this sovereign power?

The century which has witnessed the foundation of my religious family is a century in revolt. It makes gods of men and denies God his rights. That is why the Church has made of this century the Century of Mary and the Century of the Blessed Sacrament. With the same end in view I have taken for my motto: "Thy Kingdom Come!" To proclaim God's rights, the rights of Jesus Christ in the humiliations of the Eucharist, to enhance devotion to the Blessed Sacrament, to love the liturgy, to encourage Forty Hours and outdoor processions—in other words, all those acts whereby man affirms the rights and the triumph of Christ in the Eucharist—such has become my mission.

Jesus alone can enable me to understand this mission and give me the strength to accomplish it. His love draws me to the tabernacle. He wishes me to be united to him every day. He wants to use me to produce a rich harvest or eternal life. "*Qui manducat meam carnem, et bibit meum sanguinem, in me manet, et ego in illo...Hic fert fructum multum*; He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood lives continually in me, and I in him (Jn 6:57). He will yield abundant fruit" (Jn 15:5).

What have I done with this force? Am I an apostle? Am I united to Our Lord as a true adorer? Is my entire life dedicated to him so that every word I utter—every prayer I breathe—every action I perform—every sacrifice I make—contribute to the re-establishment of his Father's rights and to the multiplication of true worshippers?

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## *Octave of the Most Blessed Sacrament*

### I. JESUS THE LIVING BREAD

*“Ego sum panis vivus qui de caelo descendi; I am the living bread that has come down from heaven”* (Jn 6:51).

The Eucharist is living bread, divine bread, entirely heavenly food, and it is on this mystery of food which nourishes the Christian soul that we must focus all our attention. The catechism<sup>161</sup> gives the following definition of this wonderful sacrament: “The Eucharist is a sacrament containing really and truly the body, blood, soul and divinity of Our Lord Jesus Christ.” We are going to reflect on Our Lord’s body, symbol of purity; on his blood, symbol of life; on his soul, symbol of holiness; on his divinity in its fullness, symbol of glory.

#### **1. The Body of Christ, symbol of purity**

To begin with, the adorable Body of Our Lord Jesus Christ is for us the symbol of all purity. Since the sin of the first man, all flesh has corrupted its ways upon earth (cf Gn 6:12)—and this is why our flesh, our body, all our natural inclinations, tend towards corruption. Indeed, we are continually seeking for personal comfort and yielding to bodily demands. We run after material satisfactions that appeal to our senses and that is how our life becomes completely “earth-bound” and materialistic. Thus blinded by the things of this world, we can no longer understand anything of that pure and angelic life led on earth by a few souls that have understood what respect we ought to have, not only for the body of Our Lord Jesus Christ, but also for their bodies which have become temples of the Holy Spirit. Reparation had to be made for all this corruption in the world. It was to repair what is corrupt by what is incorrupt that Our Lord took a human body—and in giving us this body in the Eucharist he wishes to communicate his purity to us, to deliver us from the life of our senses, and to deliver us from our own flesh which is all corruption, so that our souls, created for him, might be free to soar to the eternal heights.

Oh, why must our body, so often the place where the God of purity comes to dwell, defile itself ceaselessly in the pursuit of so much frivolous

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<sup>161</sup> From the Council of Trent: Council of Trent (1551): DS 1651.

satisfaction? “It’s no sin,” we may reply—and this is perhaps the case. But it’s a chain which holds our soul captive, an obstacle to the expansion of divine life within us.

### **2. The Blood of Christ, symbol of life**

This divine life is communicated to us by blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Although in human life body and blood combine to make up a living person, the principle of life dwells principally in the blood-stream. This is why in more than one passage of Holy Scripture Our Lord’s body and blood are always mentioned separately: “He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood lives continually in me, and I in him” (Jn 6:57)—there are many similar passages. Elsewhere it is written: “With joy you shall draw from the wells of salvation” (Is 12:3). What are these “wells of salvation”? They are the wounds inflicted on Our Lord’s sacred head by the crown of thorns. They are the wounds in his hands and feet and his side. These are the sources from which escapes this adorable blood that then fills our souls with the Eucharist: to liven, permeate and transform us.

Think about the effects of this Precious Blood from the day of your baptism to that of your last communion. To what extent will divine life have superseded human life within you? And if after so many communions we continue to languish in a state of luke-warmness, is it not because we have been diverting this life-stream from its intended direction and preventing it from watering our soul, preventing it from flooding and revivifying this divine life with which Our Lord desires ardently to fill us?

### **3. The Soul of Christ, symbol of holiness**

Oh, who could tell, let alone measure—who could even begin to understand the wonders of holiness dwelling within the human soul of Our Lord Jesus Christ? God the Father declared that he had given him all his favors and the heavenly Father cannot do so in anything that is tarnished? Our Lord, coming into our hearts, wishes to communicate this holiness to us. If we are not already saints, it is because his love evokes little or no responsive echo—so he passes through with little effect. Our soul is like a cold stone or a slab of polished marble. We do not allow Our Lord to work the miracle that the Prophet Elijah once worked on the widow of Zarephath’s son when Elijah stretched himself over the dead boy’s body and breathed new life into him. Holy Communion offers us holiness. But how can a soul so preoccupied with itself, so involved in the affairs of this world, appreciate the beauty of that hymn which the Angels sing before the Most High: “*Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus*—Holy, Holy, Holy!”? Why do we refuse to identify ourselves with this thrice Holy God? It’s because holiness looks so difficult and irksome. So instead of raising ourselves up towards God, we prefer to sink back into a life of ease—a comfortable existence, but contrary to the life God is calling us to.

### **4. The Divinity of Christ, symbol of glory**

This Godhead of Our Lord Jesus Christ, which we receive wholly

and entirely every time we receive the Holy Eucharist, is for us a symbol of glory as the words pronounced by the priest when distributing Communion indicate, “*May the body of Our Lord Jesus Christ preserve your soul for everlasting life.*” Our Lord wishes to imprint his life and likeness on us as a seal of eternal glory, and we refuse to allow him to act! He would, as it were, “make gods of us” and we turn down this divine transformation! We all stand condemned—either those of us who approach the Sacred Table frequently or those of us who hardly ever do. Some say: “I am not good enough for frequent communion”—but isn’t this precisely their offense. What? In the Eucharist Jesus Christ offers us holiness—but we turn down the opportunity because we don’t wish to take the trouble of preparing ourselves! We are wrong not to go to Communion. And we are wrong to receive Communion without fervor, and consequently without fruit. We turn down the purity of the adorable body of Jesus Christ, the divine life of his Blood, the holiness that is in his soul and, last but not least, the seal of his divinity with which he wishes to sign us for all eternity.

Before leaving this chapel, my dear ladies, I want you to kneel before Our Lord and take one single resolution: to give him the freehold of your soul, and place no more obstacles to the effects of his love in Holy Communion.

## II. JESUS THE VICTIM

And then I saw—in the middle where the throne was, amid the four living creatures and amid the elders—a lamb standing there, standing upright yet slain in sacrifice. (cf Rv 5:6-8).

Who is this Lamb the Apostle saw when he was granted to contemplate the wonders of heaven? This lamb, this victim in the middle where the throne was is Christ Jesus Our Lord—and today we are going to contemplate him in the Eucharist as the Lamb sacrificed for the salvation of the world. What do you see when you go to Mass? A priest clad in symbolic vestments ascends the altar. At the moment of Consecration, his words bring Jesus Christ down onto this same altar. Having himself partaken of the victim, he distributes it to the faithful who approach the Holy Table...and so this venerable sacrifice in which Our Lord is always the victim is renewed day by day, an infinite number of times, all over the world from East to West.

We will consider in the first place what makes Our Lord Jesus Christ a victim, then how he fulfils his role of victim, and finally what he expects of us, having been the victim for our sins.

### **1° The Victim Offered to Our Heavenly Father**

Who is this victim offered to Our Heavenly Father? It is Our Lord Jesus Christ with his human intellect and human heart, with his body united to the Godhead; his entire human nature united to his divine nature receives



a perfection we cannot imagine. So it is this absolutely perfect victim who stands before the Father's face and says: "You did not ask for the blood of bulls and he-goats. Here I am instead—I have come to do your will" (cf Heb 10:8-9). And then the Father accepts this sacrifice. He takes all the sins ever committed since the dawn of human history, and all those which ever will be committed until the end of time and he lays the lot on the shoulders of this one and only victim. Oh, how can we conceive what Our Lord Jesus Christ must have suffered, he who was endowed with such a uniquely perfect human understanding, when he saw himself charged with all these crimes? How his most pure understanding must have felt itself crushed beneath the weight of all this iniquity! And what about the sufferings of his heart—this heart which loved men so much and foresaw how little it would be loved in return? Did he spare his body on which union with the Godhead had conferred a sensitivity far keener than any of us could understand? Was Jesus spared in the Garden of Olives—on the steps of the Praetorium—on Calvary? In the Eucharist Christ can suffer no more bodily pain or bodily death—but he is still a victim nonetheless. From the moment when the priest's words bring him down onto the altar, he becomes really and truly that "Lamb slain in sacrifice" whom the Apostle beheld in his vision. Laden with all the sins of men, his intelligence, his heart, his body, his very Godhead, all is crushed. And he is all the more hidden, more veiled under the heap of this human sinfulness he has to expiate than under the Eucharistic species.

#### **2° What Our Lord Does as a Victim**

What is he doing, this Eucharistic victim? He not only offers himself—he also accepts. He accepts all the disappointments which inflicted on him from the continual ingratitude of men. He is abandoned by those very people for whose sake he reduced himself to the lowliness of the Eucharistic state. Our divine Savior, from the depths of the tabernacle, sees them indifferent to his love, taken up with worldly concerns, turning their backs on the wondrous gift of Holy Communion, and often allowing a lifetime's interval between First Communion and death-bed Viaticum.

Think, if possible, about the anguish suffered by this unclouded intellect at the sight of such neglect and still more of such insults offered to his Father—on the part of guilty men! Oh, if only we could understand what a mortal sin means to the pure mind and loving heart of Our Lord Jesus Christ, what wouldn't we do to decrease their number? Let us at least think about it every morning when we come to Mass that Our Lord is offering himself up to atone for all the sins committed all over the world, that he is being crushed beneath the weight of all these crimes. Leaving aside what goes on all over the world, what about the mortal sins committed here in this very town since only yesterday? Wouldn't these be sufficient to overburden our divine victim?

Yet he accepts all this, every day and many times a day. We pay no

attention because we're used to it. We even take advantage of the abundance of his grace, only to forget them in no time.

What else is Our Lord doing in the tabernacle? While the vast majority of men abandon him in his complete solitude in order to run after a happiness they will never find, this divine Savior never stops praying for them and interceding to save them from the hand of God ready to strike such ungrateful hearts. But Jesus never tires from such suffering and humiliation for amid this indifferent crowd who don't want to listen to him, he finds just a handful of generous souls willing to become victims with him.

### **3° What This Victim Expects of Us**

It is here, my dear ladies, that we must ask ourselves seriously what this victim, Our Lord Jesus requires of. Having instituted the Holy Eucharist, and being about to be delivered into the hands of his persecutors, Jesus Christ said to his Apostles: "I have set you an example, so that you should do as I have done" (Jn 13:15). Although these words may have been addressed only to the Apostles and their successors, they nevertheless apply to whosoever participates in the Sacred Banquet of the Eucharist and is thereby called upon to imitate the self-sacrifice of Christ. He, the first victim, expects us, his privileged guests, to become victims after him. When the priest places the sacred host on your tongue, it is Jesus Christ he places there, Jesus laden with the sins of the world, as these words point out: "*Ecce Agnus Dei*, etc.; Behold the Lamb of God, etc." (Jn 1:29), who has come to ask you to suffer, to expiate, to become his fellow-victim. We cannot determine the kind of sacrifices each of them will be called to offer Our Lord. But of this we can assure every one: that whatever your situation, you will have to sacrifice yourself, offer yourself up, and learn how to suffer for Jesus Christ who underwent every form of suffering for your sake. And the more someone is possessed by the love of Jesus, the more he will long to suffer for him.

A flame requires fuel to continue burning and the fuel for the flame of divine love is suffering, because suffering, so to speak, continues the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. So how, if we had any faith at all, could we gaze upon the Crucifix and then go out in search of satisfying our senses and anything that pleases us? How can we offer so much to the world, and so little to God?

If one understands anything at all about Holy Communion, one must understand that the more one unites himself with Jesus Christ in the Sacrament, the closer one must associate himself with his sacrifice. Our Lord is being persecuted today in the person of his Vicar upon earth and is calling for so much sacrifice to atone for so much crime. He is looking for valiant souls ready to jump into this blazing furnace of love, a fire lit by the Holy Spirit to consume the divine victim—a fire from which flames leap up which can be compared to no other flames on earth. These flames must

devour and destroy whatever is inhuman in us, so that, once having received Our Lord Jesus Christ in Holy Communion, we can say: “Jesus the victim dwells within me. I must associate myself with his sacrifice all the days of my life so that I may proceed with confidence towards everlasting life and reap the harvest of his sacrifice.”

### III. JESUS THE PRIEST

“For it was fitting that we should have such a High Priest” (Heb 7:26)

Having considered Our Lord Jesus Christ as the victim in the Eucharist, today let us consider him as the priest. Our Lord is not content with being the victim. His love for us is two-edged, so to speak: he wishes to be not only the lamb sacrificed on our behalf but the priest who performs the sacrifice. It is this priesthood of Jesus Christ which the prophet had in mind when he said: “*Juravit Dominus et non paenitebit eum; tu es sacerdos in aeternum secundum ordinem Melchisedech*; The Lord has sworn with a mighty oath which he will not retract. You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchisedech” (Ps 109:4 Vulgate). And we too—we are all priests. If our divine Savior wishes us to become victims with him, he also wishes us to become priests with him. It is to every soul reborn in baptism that these words are addressed: “*tu es sacerdos in aeternum*; you are a priest forever.” United with Jesus Christ, we are also clothed with his royal priesthood. Let us examine the various aspects of Our Lord’s priesthood—like this we will understand what he expects of us as priests. The priesthood of Jesus Christ is eternal—it is all-powerful—it is unblemished—last but not least, it is effective.

#### 1° The Eternal Priesthood

It is an eternal priesthood—as we have just said, “*Tu es sacerdos in aeternum*; You are a priest forever.” Let us penetrate for a moment the splendors of heaven. We pass through the successive choirs of angels. We reach the seraphim who stand forever with pure and burning love before the throne of the Most High. We see Mary, exalted above all the angels and interceding for us—but this isn’t yet the supreme prayer of sacrifice. We will have to immerse ourselves in the very center of the Godhead. Here at last we will contemplate Our Lord Jesus Christ, clothed in his humanity, standing at the Father’s right hand, continually offering his blood and his sufferings for the salvation of men and the reparation due to God’s offended majesty.

At every moment of our life, we can picture Jesus Christ as priest before the Most High—offering himself with his own hands. After being

offered on the altar by the hands of a man who is only his instrument, but one endowed with the very special status of priesthood, Jesus Christ goes up to heaven once again and presents his sacrifice to his Father. He then comes down again with his hands full of the most precious treasures of grace, but those for whom he has earned this treasure refuse to embrace the fruit of his self-oblation. Is this not a never-ending priesthood? And is Jesus Christ not entitled to stamp his servants with the seal of a priesthood which is likewise never-ending? In other words, our life too must be a never-ending sacrifice. He has endowed us with a “royal” priesthood which calls for “royal” victims: choice victims, splendid victims, victims worthy of him to whom they are to be presented.

But where shall we find these “royal” victims? Jesus Christ wishes himself to be the victim whom we offer with our own hands—and although only an ordained priest may mount the altar-steps and perform the actual rite, each and every Christian must combine in offering up this most pure victim to God. Then, taking in our hands all our own meanness and misery, all our own efforts to be purified, and placing them too on the altar of sacrifice, the fire consuming the divine victim will at the same time purify our individual contributions, and turn them too into “royal” victims fit for the King. And this is how every Christian, in virtue of the “royal” priesthood with which he or she is invested, must offer sacrifice to God—and the sacrifice we must offer is that of our self.

Like Jesus Christ we must be both priests and victims. The blood of self-denial and self-immolation must flow upon the altar of each individual heart and unless we offer this sacrifice of self, not just occasionally but at every moment of our life, can we truly call ourselves Christians?

#### **2° The All-powerful Priesthood**

The priesthood of Jesus Christ is all-powerful—and its supreme power lies in his sufferings and humiliations. Amid the torments of his Passion, amid the annihilation of Calvary, Jesus Christ remained all-powerful, even when he was fulfilling this prophecy, “He seemed like a worm, not a man” (Ps 21:7 Vulgate). He was offering himself, he was making atonement; knowing that his offering was all-powerful, he knew its power increased the more he allowed himself to be crushed. It is also in the annihilation of the Holy Eucharist that I perceive the supreme strength and irresistible force of Our Lord Jesus Christ’s priesthood. It is when he has been placed on our tongue, and absorbed into us to the extent of losing his identity—as if he were no more than common food and drink—it is then that he attains the summit of his triumph. Only God could be powerful enough to sink into such a state of nothingness. It is thus that the strength of your own priesthood will depend on the extent of your own humiliation and self-emptying. Just as Jesus Christ allows himself to be destroyed by being received by us in Holy Communion—so you, by aiming at the destruction of your very self and that which is closest to you, will become truly strong

and powerful so that you may sacrifice to God whatever he asks of you, because if you destroy yourself, Jesus Christ our divine High Priest will grow in you.

### **3° The Priesthood Unblemished**

Our Lord's priesthood is a priesthood unblemished. What, indeed, do we witness in the work of Redemption? We witness Jesus Christ, the one chosen Mediator, approaching the altar of sacrifice unaccompanied. No human creature can hold him back. Like Melchisedech of old, he has no father and no mother (Heb 7:3). And when his Blessed Mother, to whom he said good-bye in order to go and preach the Gospel, when she and some of his relations wish to have a word with him but cannot get near him because of the crowd, he replies: "Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?" (Mt 12:48). Concentrating exclusively on the glory of his Father, he wishes no human attachment to affect his bonds—he wishes to "go it alone." And even at the moment when his sacrifice is about to be consummated, even then he accepts the most frightful loneliness of all, that of being abandoned by God—leading him to cry out on the Cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mt 27:46; Ps 21:2 Vulgate).

How we tremble to think of the supreme solitude to which he has condemned himself! In pondering these mysteries of abandonment and detachment, let us consider how pure and single-hearted we ought to be as we approach the altar. Our Lord Jesus Christ is the spouse of chaste hearts who have sacrificed all things human. Without aspiring to attain the condition of certain privileged souls whose degree of detachment from human love has reached heights of heroism incomprehensible to the multitude, we must nevertheless form some idea of the purity Our Lord insists upon from every one of us who must offer him sacrifice. We are not angels, but we must work continually to cleanse our hearts, so that with the purest of hands we may offer ourselves up to our heavenly Father in union with his divine Son.

### **4° The Effective Priesthood**

Last, but not least, Our Lord's priesthood is effective. Recall the scene of the Divine Savior standing in front of the tomb of a man whom he loved; he raises his eyes to heaven and says, "Father, I know you always answer my prayer" (Jn 11:42). The heavenly Father always accepts the sacrifice of his dearly beloved Son and grants the pardon he beseeches through his blood. No other priesthood save that of Jesus Christ could be effective. No other priest and no other victim would do to bring about what Jesus Christ, priest and victim, has obtained. So to make our own priesthood effective, to make our own offerings acceptable, we must unite ourselves to the divine intercessor, to offer him, and ourselves with him. Our priesthood, rendered effective in time by this union with Jesus Christ, will continue throughout all eternity, when, transformed and glorified by the Resurrection, we will contemplate in heaven the sacred humanity of Our

Lord and will understand these words, *“Tu es sacerdos in aeternum; you are a priest forever.”*

#### IV. JESUS THE TEACHER

“Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life” (Jn 6:68).

Our divine Savior had just given the citizens of Capernaum an insight into the mystery of the Eucharist. But the reaction of these material-minded men had been to drift away from him. *“This saying is hard; who can accept it?”* (Jn 6:60). So Jesus turned to his Apostles and asked them, *“Do you also want to leave?”* (Jn 6:67). To which St. Peter, acting as spokesman, replied: *“Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.”*

We can re-echo these words of the prince of the Apostles. It is above all in the Eucharist that Our Lord Jesus Christ teaches us the words of eternal life. It is above all in Holy Communion that Jesus gives the Christian soul three silent instructions—three truths which make up one truth: the truth about God, the truth about man, and the truth about man’s union with God.

##### **1° The Truth about God**

What other teacher except Christ himself could ever get us to understand all the greatness of God, since to satisfy his justice, only such a complete act of self-immolation would do. God is so wise that we could not possibly conceive his wisdom unless our intellect were illuminated by a few rays of his light. God’s love for us is so prodigious, as the Scriptures say, *“God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son”* (Jn 3:16).

Let us consider for a moment the immensity of God’s love for his creatures. One single sacrifice on the part of Jesus Christ was, indeed, necessary to satisfy divine justice; but it was not sufficient to satisfy divine love and so the heavenly Father consents to his only Son continuing that sacrifice and consents that his beloved Son, every day and several times a day, obeys the voice of a man who brings him down on the altar and holds him in his hands—even if, alas, these hands are sacrilegious. Why this constantly repeated sacrifice? In order to give this beloved Son to a few favored individuals who take him for granted—who spare little thought for the trials and ignominies through which Our Lord Jesus Christ wished to pass in order to reach them! And to think that God the Father consents to his beloved Son being so constantly insulted and ignored! For the sake of these few souls who are privileged to receive Our Lord Jesus Christ frequently in Holy Communion, God the Father consents to renew the mystery of

creation every time he renews that of transubstantiation, for the Eucharist is a summary of all the very unfathomable mysteries of God's almighty power. The Eucharist renews the mystery of the Incarnation, because in receiving Communion Jesus Christ becomes incarnate within us—and if we envy our Blessed Virgin the privilege of having carried Our Lord in her womb, we can comfort ourselves with the knowledge that after receiving communion we enjoy the same happiness.

The mystery of our Redemption is also renewed in the Eucharist, and it is here we can repeat the words of the King-Prophet, "*Memorian fecit mirabilium suorum*, etc.; He has left us a memorial of his wonderful works" (Ps 110:4 Vulgate)—for, indeed, the Eucharist really sums up and commemorates all the wonderful works of God. It is here in the Eucharist that Jesus Christ teaches us the lesson of Love—of a love fit to embrace and consume the entire universe in its burning flames. God's love for us in the Eucharist does for our soul what the air we breathe does for our body: it surrounds us and pervades us. And after the lesson of love comes the lesson of sacrifice. We prove our love by our readiness to give—and Jesus Christ teaches us the divine science of the total gift of self to God.

What Christian soul is there who after a fervent communion has not heard the voice of Jesus, this quiet voice which reveals marvelous things, wonderful things such as no other voice could possibly convey? It is like a flash that blinds one's eyes and if the divine insights of this science have soon worn off, can this be attributed to anything but our own carelessness? Who among us has never felt the love of Jesus urging us to give ourselves, to sacrifice ourselves, for him? (2 Cor 5:14). O how guilty we are for allowing our lukewarm carelessness to pose an obstacle to this divine science in us! It is Jesus Christ, the Word of God, Knowledge par excellence, who himself wishes to instruct us, but we turn a deaf ear to what he has to say!

### **2° The Truth about Man**

In the Eucharist Our Lord Jesus Christ teaches us the knowledge of men—and this is the most important lesson to learn after the knowledge of God. The light of God enables us to measure the depth of our own insufficiency, and thereby to begin to appreciate how much he loves us. Look at the good resolutions we keep on taking and then forgetting! Yet, God never tires of loving—he is more persevering in his forgiveness than we are in our offending. Some people imagine they ought to cease receiving Holy Communion because of their offences. This is just where they go wrong. They recognize their weakness, yet abstain from the very source of strength which is Jesus Christ himself. Why must we allow ourselves to be restrained by senseless scruples? Why continually ask ourselves whether we are ready to receive Communion or not? We must always go to Jesus Christ who never ceases calling us. We must always go to him without making calculations—without asking ourselves, "Am I to sacrifice this? Must I still

give that?” We must be ready to sacrifice everything, to give everything, and a soul so disposed is always ready to go to Holy Communion.

### **3° The Truth about Man's Union with God**

The third lesson Jesus teaches us is knowledge of man's union with God—that is to say, the knowledge of the mediation between God and us. Jesus Christ, who is one and the same God with his Father, took unto himself a human nature, and in doing so united it with the divine substance. But this union is achieved still more admirably in the Eucharist. When you receive Holy Communion, you and Jesus Christ Our Lord become fused into one and consequently you bring about a “oneness” between yourself and the Father in heaven. Isn't it a wonderful mystery, this divine union Our Lord urges us to contract with him! And where but in the Eucharist and in Communion can we learn this divine knowledge? It also teaches us how all Christian souls become united in God—because just as each individual by receiving Communion becomes but one with Jesus Christ, so too the many individuals united to this Divine Savior become together one and the same body. The Eucharist is not like the food we eat—it doesn't turn into the substance of our body. On the contrary, this divine nourishment turns our souls into his own substance. It is Jesus Christ who absorbs us completely—so is it not true that by nourishing our souls with the body of Jesus Christ, and thus being absorbed into him, we are wonderfully united with him? And this wonderful unity will be consummated still more wonderfully in the life hereafter when our entire being becomes totally absorbed into God. Since such is our glorious destiny, since complete “oneness” with God will constitute one day our everlasting happiness, is it not right and reasonable that all the aspirations of our being should be directed towards God? And by our endeavor to unite ourselves with him in this life, we are already inaugurating that “full life in him” which will be ours throughout eternity.

## **V. JESUS OUR JUDGE**

“Let a man examine himself” (1 Cor 11:28).

These words were addressed by St. Paul to the Corinthians after he had described the institution of the Eucharist. They equally apply to every Christian who partakes of the body and blood of Jesus Christ: “*Let a man examine himself first, and then eat of this bread and drink of this cup.*” Our Lord manifests himself to the world seated on three thrones. At his first coming we see him on a throne of weakness, the manger of Bethlehem. At his last coming, at the end of time, he will appear in the brightness of his glory, seated on a throne of majesty. But between the two, there is a third throne, on which Our Lord is revealed to us, that of the Eucharist, in the



tabernacle, on a throne of justice.

In the Eucharist Our Lord is truly Judge—and this is why St. Paul warns us: “Let a man begin by examining himself.” From which certain scrupulous people may conclude, “In this case I had better abstain from Communion, since it entails examining and judging myself—and, besides, I dread the judgment of God.” But let them listen to what St. Paul has to add, “*and let him then eat of this bread and drink of this cup.*” Our Lord Jesus Christ in the Eucharist judges four categories of people: the sacrilegious, the thankless, the lukewarm and the holy.

Let me not stop to consider the first category. That sacrilege does occur in the world about us is, alas, a terrifying but undeniable truth. One of the greatest proofs that Our Lord loves us is that he consents to be delivered into the hands of evil men because he hopes to find next to them those who are pure of heart.

#### **1° He Judges the Thankless**

Yes, Our Lord Jesus Christ judges the ungrateful. Can any of us here present claim that we are never ungrateful? Who among us can claim that she has always rendered to God a worthy thanksgiving after Communion? I am not going to tell you exactly how long your thanksgiving after Communion ought to last. A good thanksgiving does not consist in rattling off a certain number of prayers or going through the list of all the possible virtues. St. Francis de Sales spent no more than seven or eight minutes on his thanksgiving. Once he went to say Mass in the private chapel of one of his friends, a Monsignor Camus. He shocked him and the other persons present by beginning Mass immediately and leaving afterward right away. But St. Francis de Sales spent several hours a day at mental prayer. He knew that thanksgiving consists in far more than a few minutes’ prayerful recollection after which you can go away and carry on with your daily chores just as if you hadn’t been to Communion. Thanksgiving should last the whole day, and the whole of your life.

Are you really being grateful to Our Lord, when having given him half an hour or even a whole hour, you leave church and the same tongue which has just received the author of all holiness sets about tearing your neighbor to pieces? Or if you are habitually impatient, make no effort to acquire the contrary virtue, and keep falling into the same faults. No, this is no true thanksgiving. You would do better to recite less of those glorious formulas—and remind yourself the length of the day and throughout your life, that you have received none other than the God of all holiness and say with David: “*Quid retribuam Domino...? What shall I render unto the Lord for all he has rendered unto me?*” (Ps 115:12 Vulgate). You will never be able to love Our Lord as much as he loves you, but you are under the obligation of giving him as much as you can!

#### **2° He Judges the Lukewarm**

In the Eucharist Our Lord Jesus Christ judges the lukewarm. I do not

want to spend time here talking about this revolting luke-warmness which the apostle St. John reproaches in writing to a bishop of the early Church, But I will speak of that ‘softness’, that nonchalance, that leads a soul to say, “so far but no further.” Let’s face it. For your sake Our Lord came down as low as God’s love could descend to give of himself to you and how have you responded? You don’t know how to do your part courageously and go as far as he asks of you by way of self-discipline and self-denial?

I place myself in spirit on the altar-steps in presence of the adorable Sacrament, and I ask each one of you: “Are you giving Our Lord Jesus Christ everything he is asking of you?” You will all say, No!”. But whereas some of you have a genuine desire to attain that perfection to which God is calling you, others sincerely will be forced to avow that they lack the courage to leave their state of nonchalance and listlessness.

Our Lord will judge those tepid souls who for fear of being judged keep away from the holy table. How wrong you are!—This is no way of avoiding judgment. Every time you pass in front of a church Jesus sees and judges you from the privacy of his tabernacle—and you will feel like a criminal passing in front of the one who must condemn her. And woe to you if you do not experience this fear—but woe to you also if you do communicate frequently yet make no serious effort to amend your life!

You will be severely judged for not receiving Communion. What keeps you away from Our Lord is no filial fear—it is the fear of having to reform yourself. No, you must receive Holy Communion; otherwise, you will not have life in you. And if you approach the Holy Table, you must yield to this pressing love which will never be satisfied with less than everything. Fear, then—but not with the fear of a slave in case he gets punished, nor with that of an employee in case he loses his salary. Fear with the fear of children who are afraid of displeasing their father. This is the fear of the Saints.

### 3. He Judges the Saints

Finally, in the Eucharist Our Lord Jesus Christ judges those who do have life in him—he judges the saints. In the language of Holy Scriptures, the saints always need to wash their feet, that is to say, that the Christian life and Christian progress entail constant purification, constant sanctification—a continual effort which those who wish to remain pure must never interrupt.

In the Gospel we read that before the Last Supper, Our Divine Savior, who never shrank from any act of humility, desired to wash his Apostles’ feet before feeding them with his own sacred body. St. Peter, seeing that his Divine Master was about to wash his feet, exclaimed: “*No, Lord; I will never let you wash my feet*” (Jn 13:8). To which Jesus replied: “*Unless I wash your feet, you can have no companionship with me.*” “*If such be the case, Lord,*” answered St. Peter, “*then carry on; wash not only my feet but my hands and my head.*” But all Jesus washed were his feet. So

the pure-hearted do not have to wash their hands because all their actions are pure. Nor do they have to wash their heads because their thoughts are pure. But they do have to wash their feet since in this daily contact with the world they pick up a certain amount of dust that sullies parts of their souls in touch with external things—and so the dust has constantly to be removed. And this wonderful purification lasts the whole of their life. No sooner have they washed off one stain than they perceive another. And the more these souls are united with the God of all purity, the more they sense the need for purification. So Our Lord judges these saints—and judges them with an eye to their future glorification in heaven. Let yourselves therefore become worthy of being judged along with the saints in this world. Let yourselves be judged by the God of the Eucharist. Let him witness and judge your efforts during this life. You will then have no fear of appearing in his presence when he calls you to give himself totally to you in the joys of the eternal homeland.

## VI. JESUS OUR FRIEND

“I no longer call you servants—I call you my friends”  
(Jn 15:15).

These words were spoken by our Divine Master to his Apostles at the close of the Last Supper, when he was about to die for them. And this comforting assurance of his friendship is addressed not only to the Apostles but to each and every Christian soul. Yes, Jesus Christ wishes to be your friend and it is in the Eucharist that he especially offers you this precious gift of friendship that we cannot turn down without being guilty of the most appalling ingratitude. What are the characteristics of this divine friendship? It is unselfish, full of foresight, patient, and considerate.

### **1° Unselfish Friendship**

Who would dare say there is anything selfish about Jesus Christ’s love for us? Does God need us? Would his happiness be incomplete without us? Of course not! It is as an unfathomable result of his goodness that he bothers to insist on loving us. Was it not sufficient for him to save us creatures to whom he owed nothing at all? But his love is not content with this. He has nothing to gain by offering himself up in the Eucharist for us who prove to be such ungrateful creatures.

But, you may answer, does he not dwell at times in magnificent edifices erected by human hands? Without mentioning the continual insults Our Lord often has to put up with in places where seemingly the most magnificent embellishments have been put in place to honor him, please let us begin by remembering that most of them were constructed, not directly

in his honor but in honor of his Mother or one of his Saints. So let us admire the extent of this Divine Savior's humility. He lives, hidden unobtrusively in the house of someone he calls his friend. And let us admire as well another form of this humility—Our Lord dwells in gold and silver vessels, but if the poor have need of these treasures he is only too pleased to be stripped of them.

Indeed, how often we read in early Church history about holy Popes and bishops sensing the intentions of their Divine Master, melting the sacred vessels, and distributing the proceeds to the poor! So this is the friend who offers himself to us. And what does he ask in return? Is it not only fitting that, having given his creature all the treasures contained in this divine friendship, he should expect us to love him as much as we can? Draw near, then, to the Holy Table, since Jesus Christ offers to be your friend. Do not be so ungrateful as to refuse him the key of your heart. After all, you belong to him by baptism—so doesn't he have a right that we prepare an adequate place for him?

#### **2° Friendship full of Foresight.**

Our Lord exercises foresight in his friendship. Jesus Christ has loved us from all eternity. He knew each one of us in particular and even if there had only been one soul on the earth, from all eternity he would have foreseen to save him and offer him his friendship. From all eternity Jesus knew when you would be born, and when you would make your First Communion. He foresaw all your infidelity, all your resistance to grace—and nothing could prevent him from loving you before you were ever able to love him. Is this not the Divine Savior who, when he first came to you in Holy Communion, came as a friend—a friend who foresaw showering you with all kinds of precious gifts because he so strongly longed for you to be his friend too? So, as St. John tells us: “let us love God because he first loved us” (1 Jn 4:19).

#### **3° A Patient Friendship**

Our Lord Jesus Christ is not only full of foresight in his friendship; he is also patient. He never tires of the half-heartedness of our response whenever he asks us to make a sacrifice! I am not implying that you turn round and strike Our Lord Jesus Christ him in the face. Your meridianal vivacity will, nevertheless, help you to realize the extent to which you try Our Lord's patience.

All those times you lacked patience, showed weakness, acted uncharitably—in other words, all those shortcomings that fill your life are like so many pins and prickles inflicting Our Lord and thus it is, if I dare say so, that you provide Our Lord Jesus Christ with lots of reason to practice virtue. Yet he never wearies of tending his friendship to those of you who seem to have no intention whatsoever of meeting him half way. Here again we have to admire his utter selflessness. He wishes you to make up for your carelessness in his service by being, in your turn, more patient

towards your neighbor—and he will regard as done to him whatever service you perform out of love for others. So put up with the faults of others who try your own patience, since you yourselves have so often tried that of Jesus. And take the resolution to cleanse your heart of all these miserable little spots and stains that constitute so many obstacles, small perhaps yet numerous, to that divine friendship which Jesus longs to share with you.

#### **4° A Friendship full of Consideration**

Our Lord Jesus Christ is full of consideration in offering us his friendship—think of his umpteen stratagems for gaining a foot-hold in our heart! It might be a sudden inspiration, a flash of insight while reading a book. It might be some act of humiliation, some joy, some trial. Who knows? Who can count all the inventive ways the love of Our Lord takes in reaching our soul? And how does he expect us to respond to such goodness? Here, my dear ladies, you must also find in the inexhaustible resources of a woman's heart creative ways to respond to all the love God shows you in the Eucharist. What, you who know how to be so amiable, who know how to be say just the right thing to everyone, will you be at a loss when it means repaying tact with tact, to the very Lord who made you so tactful? It cannot be. Having received him in Holy Communion, you will know how to prove by the sanctity of your life that you do understand just how reassuring it is to have him as *friend* and you will not refuse him entry into your heart because you know that it is there alone that he wishes to make his tabernacle. If in this life he is already your greatest friend, how much more will he be your joy in heaven.

## **VII. JESUS OUR KING**

*“Ecce rex vester; Behold your King!”* (Jn 19:14).

These words, addressed to the Jews, were spoken at Jerusalem by the representative of the “sovereign people”. They were words pointing out Jesus, bound and fettered, and about to be delivered unto death.

And today I am addressing the same words to you and I am pointing to Jesus Christ, whether before Pilate, whether on Calvary, or whether on our altars. Yes, here is your King, who bears on his shoulders the mark of his royalty, your King nailed to the throne of the Cross, with a crown of thorns preventing him from finding relief from his suffering by resting his head on the timber of this throne. It is of his divine Kingship that I have come to speak to you today and to consider in what it consists and what it obliges us to do.

#### **A Universal Kingdom**

The Kingship of Christ extends throughout the world and to every nation. “All the nations I have given for your inheritance,” say the

Scriptures (Ps 2:8). He is their king—whoever would maintain the contrary would no longer be a Catholic. So he is our king, because the Father has given him all authority in heaven and on earth. It is essential for us to have a broad and adequate idea of this sovereign power in order to know and understand that we owe everything to him.

Jesus Christ is our king by right of conquest; and by this kingship of love, he is entitled to rule over our thoughts and feelings, our intellect and our heart.

#### **We Must Submit Our Body**

Since all power and authority has been given to Our Lord Jesus Christ in heaven and on earth, it follows that our body belongs to him, created by him and redeemed by him at the price of his blood. Let us remember this, my dear ladies: having become Christ's subjects in baptism, we must let him rule over our senses; if we don't, our subjection to him becomes meaningless. The senses are like an intermediary between God and our soul and it is precisely here, in this arena, that Jesus Christ wishes to reign.

#### **Our Senses**

Satan attacks our soul through the five senses—the five doors which give him access to our heart. If, by acts of mortification and sacrifice, you do not make way for Jesus Christ to reign there, you will soon be the slave of your enemy. I know the kind and degree of mortification must differ according to the needs of each individual, but the principle of it applies to everybody. Our Lord Jesus Christ must be allowed full control over these doors to your heart.

#### **Our Minds**

Jesus Christ is the king of our intellect—of that noblest part of our being, the part which requires to be fed on nothing less than eternal Truth. Since this intellect, regenerated in the blood of Jesus Christ, cannot be satisfied but by the Truth, Jesus Christ, the Word of God, does not the Truth in its essence have a right to reign over it and the right to insist that it should apply itself to the purpose of its creation, namely, to the ever deeper and wider knowledge of God? Dominion over our intellect entitles Our Lord to dominion over our thoughts. Ladies, what are you thinking about? Is Jesus Christ the unique object of my preoccupations? As you sit around the living room discussing all manner of trivialities, what would you say if Jesus Christ your king suddenly appeared among you and asked you whether you belonged to him or not? You do belong to him—do not renounce this supreme honor. So surrender to this divine king, the only one worthy of captivating all.

#### **Our Hearts**

Last but not least, indeed last but above all, Jesus Christ longs to reign over your heart. He lays claim to every movement of affection, to

every heart-beat; he truly wants to be the king. Look how you have divided your life into two. You give Our Lord one small part, saying: “Here, Lord, take and be content with so much of me. I will love you a little, even enough; but then the rest of my heart will be for my family, for my friends, for my fortune—in a word, for me. This isn’t the ways things should be and Jesus Christ our king does not want just a share of us: he wants us to love him and him alone, and every other affection must be loved as part of him or not at all. Holding back something will lead our hearts soon to forfeit membership in his Kingdom.

## VIII. JESUS OUR GOD

Let us speak first of all of the divinity of Jesus Christ as demonstrated in the Eucharist.

### **1° Jesus Our Almighty God**

Jesus Christ—second Person of the Blessed Trinity—God made Man—equal in all things to the Father—proves to us his divine power by instituting the Holy Eucharist. God the Father proved his power by creating the universe, and creating man. Later on he went a step further—he manifested both his power and his love by giving us his only-begotten Son in the mystery of the Incarnation.

God the Son goes a step further still. This human nature, to which by his Father’s decree he became united, does not yet satisfy his love for men. He goes so far as to reduce himself to seem to be nothing more than a little bread. He will empty himself to the point of being contained within the limits of lifeless matter known as the host. God the Father, in creating man, had in view this perfect man, who is none other than Jesus Christ.

But Jesus Christ, going beyond his Father, wishes to become in a sense the creature of man. He bestows upon some of these creatures, who issued from nothingness with him in view, the power to create, and they would exercise this power on Him, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity! Through the words of consecration, man will have the right to create God Himself. He will have the power of bringing God down to earth at any time of the day and at any point of the globe. He will be able to multiply him to the extent that he consecrates hosts, because in all of them is to be found Jesus Christ, at once God and man.

What a miracle! It surpasses everything that preceded it. By the Incarnation, the Son of God came down and took flesh in the womb of a virgin. But in the mystery of the Eucharist, when a man speaks, he comes down on our altars, there to be at the disposal of all those who wish to receive him, there to nourish them, and there to bring about a further incarnation in the hearts of those he visits.

### **2° Proof of His Infinite Love**

By dwelling among us in Eucharistic guise, Jesus proves his love as much as his power. As God he could give us nothing more precious than himself, since it is in him that the Father is well-pleased, and as man, after giving up his life for us, he conceives a way of giving us his divine flesh to eat. Despite how harsh and how hard his words are, I am not afraid to use them such as they are found in the Scriptures. Could anyone imagine more emphatic words than these? Could anybody else ever love us to such an extent? Well, it is God himself who pronounces these words, who lowers himself and empties himself out of love for us, to the point of becoming our food. He becomes one with us and gives us the power to share in his divinity for this bread is the Bread of Life. He sows within us eternal life. While it is the bread of life, it is also the bread of death; it leads us to die so that we may live with Him eternally. All of this requires explanations that will come later on. For the time being it is enough for us to recognize that God could not love us more than he does; he destined us to participate in his Godhead; He calls us to be like gods and one day in heaven he will give us a share of his own happiness.

### **3° Adoration**

So what are we to render God for having loved us so much? The answer is: we must adore him. We must give him all that we are: our senses, our hearts, our bodies, our minds, and our souls. How few of us adore him to this extent! How many of us question God with regard to these very gifts he gave us in order to love him alone and him entirely! To adore Jesus hidden in the Blessed Sacrament we need the three theological virtues: faith, hope and charity. Faith reveals him to us emptied, humiliated, reduced to naught, and limited, Him, the Infinite God, the strong God, the mighty God. Hope reveals him as everything we could possibly desire, as the one alone on whom we can and must depend, for who has ever loved us, and can ever love us, as much as this uncreated Love? And how can we separate hope from love? They blend together. How is it possible not to love this God, who obedient to the voice of one of his creatures, comes down on our altars time and time again, encloses himself under the Eucharistic species, and there remains until man is united to Him in the most intimate union imaginable? How is it possible not to love this God of ours? In order to come and dwell within us, he submits to the voice of a man who may be unworthy of the power with which he has been vested, who allows himself to rest on lips which may have been guilty of sacrilege and blasphemy, and who resolves to enter into a heart which may be impure.

O, how can we return to such a God whose readiness to sacrifice himself for us knows no limits? He bestows gift upon gift and we refuse to give anything in return. When does his Blood cease to flow on our altars? When is his Body withheld from us? In Communion he gives us more than life, for he is the very author of life. He gives us more than grace, for he is the very source of all graces. In a word, he gives us his very Godhead. So



let us be consumed with Him throughout our life here below; let us not seek to rest. How can you with Jesus there in the tabernacle? Does he rest? He spends all his time giving of himself. Let us give of ourselves as well, first by receiving Communion, but then coming to adore him in the Sacrament of the altar. Utterly incapable though we feel of worshipping him as would befit Him, we must endeavor to fortify ourselves with faith as we adore this God-made-man who became bread for love of us. We must offer him all we can, confident that it will be an acceptable sacrifice to Him. Let us offer this Son himself to his Father; he himself will supply our deficiencies.<sup>162</sup>

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### *Some Thoughts on the Eucharist*

(excerpts)

*May 3, 1853*  
*Nimes*

*to Ms. Amélie de Pélissier*

You tell me that you only have moments of weakness and despondency when you are away from the Blessed Sacrament and that when you are at his feet you feel ready to surrender everything to him. Here is a way out of this circle into which you have fallen: listen to what Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament has to tell you. If I were you, I would spend as much time as I could there and would feed my heart with thoughts of sacrifice and self-denial. I would endeavor to overcome my natural repugnance. I would resolve to live from day to day until it pleased him to open the horizons before me. Everything I'm telling you I've learned from experience.

*August 24, 1855*

*Conference excerpt*

It is in our union with the glorified yet continually immolated body of the Savior in the Sacrament of his love that we will find the strength to die enough to ourselves in order to work for his glory and the growth of his Mystical Body.

*September 28, 1856*

*Mère Marie-Eugénie de Jésus*

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<sup>162</sup> borrowed from Lent 1862

*Lamalou*

I cannot tell you, my dear daughter, how pleased I am with your attitude towards Our Lord. Your devotion to the Blessed Sacrament is the same as mine, you know, if I still have one. Plunge into the depth of his love. Ask him to turn you into that drop of water which the priest mixes with the wine of the chalice, a symbol of the union of the Church and, in particular, of each saint with the divine substance.

*October 9, 1856  
Lavagnac*

*to Ms. Josephine Fabre*

Let Communion become more and more the center of your life. Become humble, self-effaced, silent, patient and obedient like Jesus and in accordance with Jesus' dispositions in the Sacred Host. Like him, become "all things to all men"—within the limits of your strength and your duties of state but giving unbridled rein to a heart which beats in unison with our good Teacher. Make this your aim, and you will soon become a saint.

*End of August 1857  
Clichy*

*to Fr. Victorin Galabert*

Don't slack off. Keep up your efforts: efforts to remain in God's presence, efforts to be humble, efforts at good behavior. Your life has got to be a continual fight. Every morning you prepare the hosts for Mass, the bread of the strong. May everyone notice that you have been completely nourished with it.

*January 13, 1859  
Nimes*

*to Sr. Marie du Saint-Sacrement de Gouy*

**Dying to Self**

In reminding you that unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it produces no fruit—let me also remind you that in due course this grain will have to be ground in order to produce bread and that the grain of your soul is specially destined to become Eucharistic bread. In fact, your whole being must be geared to this purpose. Your life is Christ and, if he gives himself to you in Sacred Host, it is meant to teach you to become this wondrous bread that he offers to his Father and that continues in his followers his sacrifice and self-offering.

*June 25, 1859*

*to Madame de Rocher*

*Nimes*

**Sacrifice**

Our Blessed Savior, divine victim on the holy altar, presents himself to us there as the one perfect sacrifice—and what made his sacrifice perfect from the start was its being the sacrifice of a God. But this same sacrifice, reproduced by us, requires that we keep on performing it because our human weakness is such that we cannot hope to perform it perfectly, once and for all. We must simply persevere with energy and generosity that will, after a series of efforts, enable us to reach our goal. What God is asking of you is, indeed, extremely difficult. But little by little you will see yourself reaching that goal, provided your tenderness for Our Lord grows.

*July 7, 1860*  
*Nimes*

*to Madame Paulin de Malbosc*

**Communion**

I insist on your overcoming this fear of receiving Communion; I want you to approach the Sacred Table as often as you can....Once convinced that going to Communion has got to become the very purpose of your life, you will begin to orientate whatever else you do to the fulfillment of this central activity. You will make of it the source of whatever you feel in the course of the day. You will become patient and gentle as you prepare yourself for Communion, and you will thank our Blessed Lord for having come to visit you by being very charitable and as hard-working as your duties of state permit.

*March 26, 1862*  
*Nimes*

*to Sr. Marie-Marthe Giberton*

**Gift of Self**

The smooth running of the community depends upon you, as Superior, making a continual gift of yourself. Our Lord wants us to keep on giving ourselves to others, just as he keeps on giving himself in the thousands of consecrated hosts. How good it would be to imitate our Divine Master in such an unmistakable manifestation of his love!

*October 4, 1864*  
*Lamalou*

*to Fr. Victorin Galabert*

**Perpetual Adoration**

Here is something for you to think about: In the East, the heresy of Iconoclasm was counteracted by the increased veneration of sacred images—in the West, that of Protestantism by the increased veneration of the Blessed Sacrament. But the East has a lot to answer for to Our Lord: the schismatic East for its sacrileges; the Catholic East for allowing its Eucharistic devotion to wane. So let the East revitalize itself by participating in our Western renewal. Unity will come about when we are able to say: “*Unum corpus multi sumus omnes, qui de uno pane participamus*; We, though many, are one body by sharing the same bread” (1 Cor 10:17). The more we partake of the body of Christ, the more united we will become.

I think you ought to encourage devotion to Our Lord in the Holy Eucharist. If you were to institute Perpetual Adoration when you reserve the Blessed Sacrament in your chapel, I am sure this will bring about many blessings. I am not suggesting Perpetual Exposition—just make sure that a few of your very good boys are always before the Blessed Sacrament. Think it over. This, it seems to me, goes to the heart of the matter. The happiness of being constantly united to Our Lord in the Sacrament of his love will make them wish they belonged to that Church in which Eucharistic devotion is most encouraged.

*May 15, 1865*  
*Nimes*

*to Ms. Angelina Chaudordy*

**At the foot of the Cross**

When you attend Mass place yourself on Calvary and ask the Blessed Virgin to hold you tight, unworthy though you be, between her and St. John, beneath the blood of Jesus Christ.

*January 19, 1867*  
*Nimes*

*to Ms. Céline Favier*

**Love of Our Lord**

Urge your Sisters to an ever increasing love of Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. I'd like to see this devotion grow tremendously. It seems to me to be what is needed in our day.

*April 1, 1857*  
*Paris*

*to Ms. Eulalie de Régis*

**Suffering**

How can you expect any good work to be unaccompanied by suffering? Where would be its pangs of child-birth? Jesus Christ gave birth

to the Church on the Cross—and you expect St. Teresa’s Sodality<sup>163</sup> to be born on a bed of roses! We need to suffer much...suffer first of all to atone for your own shortcomings, secondly to show Our Lord that you are truly his spouse. Why did he wish the symbol and the sacrament of his love to be bread changed into his own body? Because to become saints we must begin by being crushed and then transformed. Can this be done without pain?

*September 6, 1867*  
*Le Vigan*

*to Madame Doumet*

**Self-abnegation**

At any moment we may feel the need for self-abnegation. But in order to develop the right spirit to undertake it, we should prepare ourselves in advance by receiving Communion where we receive a God who renounced himself to a degree which makes us all tremble. By receiving Communion we fling ourselves into an ocean of limitless love, a love to which Our Lord bears witness and which will drive home to us the degree of gratitude that we should show him in return.

*October 8, 1878*  
*Lavagnac*

*to Fr. Emmanuel Bailly*

**Survival**

Let old Picard<sup>164</sup> shout his head off—and do not look for our survival in the depths of the cashbox. Look for it in the depths of the tabernacle, my dear son. Go there to find it.

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<sup>163</sup> for little Protestant girls

<sup>164</sup> Pierre Picard, the treasurer at the Collège, and not Fr. François Picard, AA

## Love of the Blessed Virgin

*The “Month of Mary,” included in the “Meditations on Religious Perfection,” vol. I<sup>165</sup>, was presented by Fr. d’Alzon to Fr. Picard as a commentary of our devotion to the Blessed Virgin. It is not reproduced here; rather, what is gathered here are some instructions or ‘feverinos’ on the principal mysteries concerning the Blessed Mother, addresses to various audiences. The Annunciation, as has already been noted, and Compassion made up a large portion of Fr. d’Alzon Marian preaching.*

*“I have a great devotion to the Compassion of the Blessed Virgin,” he would say. He knew from experience that like Our Lady of Sorrows “here on earth suffering is a precondition for bearing all fruit.”*

## *The Immaculate Conception<sup>166</sup>*

“Inimicitias ponam inter te et mulierem, et semen tuum et semen illius; ipsa conteret caput tuum, et tu insidiaberis calcaneo ejus; I will put enmity between you and the woman—between your seed and hers. She will crush your head while you lie in wait for her heel” (Gn 3:15).

What a strange prediction—but we see it happening every day. The devil disguised as a serpent comes to tempt the first woman. She yields, and involves the father of humankind in her downfall. And thus Adam’s posterity is condemned to labor and death. The woman too receives her punishment. Satan, already punished, is condemned to still worse torture. But God, in pronouncing the sentence itself, includes a seed of hope: “*Inimicitias ponam inter te et mulierem, et semen tuum et semen illius; ipsa conteret caput tuum, et tu insidiaberis calcaneo ejus*; I will put enmity between you and the woman—between your seed and hers. She will crush your head while you lie in wait for her heel.”

Let us study the characters in this opening round of the contest—the characteristics of the two opposing forces—and the final outcome of this war which is to be waged throughout the centuries.

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<sup>165</sup> Reedited in 1954 in the “*Cahiers d’Alzon*”

<sup>166</sup> delivered to the students of Collège d’Alzon in Nîmes, 1877

## I.—SATAN AND HIS OFFSPRING

### Satan: His Condemnation

The first figure I will spend time on is the serpent. Satan adopts the form of this repulsive creature. Lucifer, an angel, one of the Seraphim, has degraded himself to the guise of a reptile. So here he is, this fallen angel—and what is he up to now? Since he first raised the banner of revolt against God, what has he been capable of except continuing his rebellion? And just as he dragged a proportion of the angels in his suite, so now he seeks to attract the human race too. He who enjoyed such power in heaven, why should he be less successful on earth? He is proud, and yet he creeps along. The Lord condemns him to this vile condition: “*Super pectus tuum gradieris*; You will crawl on your belly” (Gn 3:14). What a degradation of angelic nature! Those admirable qualities with which he was initially endowed are of no further use to him now, except to increase his torment and enable him to accomplish evil on a wider scale.

Behold him, this fallen star—this Lucifer who rose every morning with such splendor and whose downfall involved a third part of heaven. “He goes crawling on his belly; *Super pectus tuum gradieris*”—what could be more humiliating?

Hell wasn’t enough for him; he left it and started roaming round the earth, seeking to devour its inhabitants. So here is this angel—“*terram comedes cunctis diebus viate tuae*; eating dirt all the days of his life (Gn 3:14). What must it be like for an angel to eat dirt! This isn’t all—he comes in for still further malediction. To be cursed above all the angels was, in his pride, something to boast about—he was greater than the rest in the sense of having fallen from a superior height. He is now deprived of this consolation by being cursed “alone among all the beasts of the earth.”

Are we referring to the serpent or to Satan? It is the serpent which is being cursed, because the devil has made it the instrument of his wiles. But who can doubt that additional opprobrium is being piled onto the Prince of Darkness himself? He will seek out whatever is vile and loathsome. Whatever is evil will become his “stock in trade”; he will draw all into his web. “*Maledictus inter omnia animantia terrae*; You are cursed among all the beasts of the earth” (Gn 3:14). What a terrible destiny! *Super pectus tuum gradieris*. This curse, according to St. Augustine<sup>167</sup>, was inflicted to confound Satan’s pride. He had risen up against God—he would forever be marked with the imprint of his arrogance. And to prove how much God already despises him, he isn’t even interrogated. His condemnation had already been set after his first fall; now, without being interrogated, he is cursed once again: “*Super pectus tuum gradieris*; You will crawl on your belly.”

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<sup>167</sup> *De Genesi ad litteram libri duodecim* (CPL 0266) - LLT-A, lib. 11, par. 36, pag. 370, linea 21 (Augustine&The Literal Meaning of Genesis in Twelve Books&CPL&bk. 11, par. 36, page 370, line 21)

He has no excuse whatsoever. Condemned once, he will be condemned over and over again for every single crime he persuades men to commit. Nothing will ever restrain his wickedness—but he experiences such evil delight in bringing about the ruin of the human race, that his own punishment will be augmented by that of each individual whom he succeeds in seducing. For, as St. Augustine says, “*poena enim ejus est, ut in potestate habeat eos qui Dei praecepta contemnunt*; he will be tortured all the more for having within his clutches those who despise God’s precepts”<sup>168</sup>. Why? Because the punishment meted out to them for having offended God will be at the same time meted out to him for leading them astray. Multiply the torment of every damned soul by that of the demons who brought about his or her damnation. Multiply the torment of those in hell who persuaded their brothers and sisters here on earth to follow Satan’s seductions! Add it all up if you can—attempt, if you can, to measure the formidable Justice of God. Try to imagine, if you can, the torment that awaits those unhappy souls for having been Satan’s agents here on earth in the seduction of their fellowmen. Yes, Satan disguised as a serpent is the enemy of mankind. What is his aim? To decrease God’s glory, and to turn man against man. Let us not be deceived.

#### **Satan’s Aims**

That he aims at diminishing God’s glory is evident enough by his revolt. Out of envy he hated God in the majesty of heaven. How much more is he going to hate him when his torment increases? How his inexpressible torments must drive him to blasphemy! And how this incessant blasphemy brings further torment! But herein lies his despair. How he longs to deprive God of his glory! But the torture he undergoes forces him to acknowledge the divine justice and infinite power of this God, from now on his enemy or rather his eternal judge. What, then, will be the outcome of such a state of mind? Here’s the answer: the most appalling schemes imaginable of this angel in perpetual revolt. Since he has no hope whatsoever of doing injury to God himself, he will, as much as it depends on him, do so against his creatures. And thus from the very dawn of creation he has been pursuing the human race with his rage and thereby confirms the Savior’s word when he said, “*Ille homicida erat ab initio*; he has been a murderer from the start” (Jn 8:44). He is par excellence the great murderer of men. Look, in fact, at the long human generations bent under his yoke. How did death enter the world? By sin. And who was the great instigator of sin if not Satan? Yes, this is the great murderer of the human race: “*Ille homicida erat ab initio.*”

#### **Satan’s Offspring**

It is not, however, one single angel (be he the chief of the fallen angels) who fights against the woman and her children. We are up against

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<sup>168</sup> *De Genesi contra Manichaeos* lib. 2, col 209, linea 48 (Augustine&On Genesis against the Manichees&CPL&bk. 2, col. 209, line 48)



the whole of the serpent's offspring. Who are they, this "offspring of Satan?" They comprise, first of all, those other wicked angels who enlisted under Satan and share his downfall. Being cursed, they are the ones mentioned when Jesus says to the damned, "*Ite, maledicti, in ignem aeternum, qui paratus est diabolo et angeli ejus*; Depart, you cursed, into everlasting fire which was prepared for the devil and his angels" (Mt 25:41). But I would like to speak of other offspring and, as I mentioned before, I would like to examine their characteristics.

### Threefold characteristics:

#### Revolt

*1° A race of rebels.* Like Satan, they have revolted. In what ways have they not revolted against God? The Scriptures describe how they pursue their desires: the fulfillment of ambition, the acquisition of wealth, the satisfaction of the flesh, and the urge to revolt. What do they get out of it? They get what Satan got—punishment. So what! They keep up their rebellion, they continue to say to God: "Go away and leave us alone." "*Qui dixerunt Deo: Recede a nobis, et scientiam viarum tuarum nolumus*; Who say to God: Depart from us, for we have no desire to know your ways!" (Job 21:14 Vulgate).

No, they do not wish to obey. They pride themselves on their perpetual revolt. And isn't this what can be seen everywhere? What is wrong with the world, if not the revolt against God and, in its place, the kingdom of man? Philosophy, politics and general behavior: they are all part of it; everyone says to God, "Depart from us, for we have no desire to know your ways; *Qui dixerunt Deo: Recede a nobis, et scientiam viarum tuarum nolumus!*"

From where has God not been driven away by paganism? From where has he not been dismissed, especially over the past three hundred years? For a while we kept up the external forms, but since then? Where is God respected in society? You are too young to have experienced it. Well, in how many families does he play a role? What about with some of the people you know? Nowadays everything is being judged, people are pointing fingers everywhere—above all with regard to God's revealed truths and the teachings of his Church. And little budding unbelievers make it their business to get those they know to disbelieve. These too have no time for God, and still less for his commandments: *Qui dixerunt Deo: Recede a nobis, et scientiam viarum tuarum nolumus.*"

Is this outrageous enough? Apparently not; for, despite the severest measures being taken, they pursue their course—adding corruption to their impiety and assassination of bodily innocence to that of spiritual integrity. What Our Lord told the Jewish leaders of his time can be applied to them: "you belong to your father, the Devil—*vos ex patre diabolo estis* (Jn 8:44). Is there anyone among you to whom this applies? If so, there is only one thing for him to do. Let him remove the sacred seal of Baptism from his

forehead, and replace it by the seal of Satan—because they belong to his offspring; *vos ex patre diabolo estis*.

And all this has been going on, with greater or lesser perversity, since the very days of Cain. It went on among those called “the children of men”—those giants who were swallowed up in the Great Flood. It went on, with a certain blindness to evil, from the age of paganism up to the time of Moses; it went on from the time of the prophets up to the time of Christ. And ever since the time of Christ, within the very framework of Christianity, it has still been going on—not only among the heretics, but in certain States. Satan and his offspring have always been at work; *vos ex patre diabolo estis*.

#### Murder

2° *A race of murderers*. Moreover, like their father, *Satan’s brood is a race of murderers*. How they love dead bodies! How they relish the odor of blood! Just as a flock of vultures, attracted by the stench of a corpse, gather round giving vent to raucous squawks—so do the children of Satan seek out dead souls and regale themselves on their putrefaction. “*Laetantur in rebus pessimis, et exultant cum invenerint sepulcrum*; Who are glad when they have done evil, and rejoice in the most wicked things:” (Prov 2:14 Vulgate).

And to what lengths will they not go in order to get hold of a spiritual carcass? Their tortuous procedure resembles the coils of the tempter serpent. See how they make use of provocation, looks, talk and scandal. And while, on the one hand, their campaign to ensnare Christian souls is organized on a grand scale, see how they select their victims one by one. They know how to take their time in view of a “bumper” crop—the stench of death whets their appetite. Their infernal propaganda knows no limits. It’s no good telling them they are doing harm, since harm is, precisely, what they intend to do. Harm, plenty of harm, such is their delight. Harm to legitimate authority: to civil authority which they seek to subvert, to that of the family whose sacred bonds they seek to shatter, and above all to religious authority, because behind religious authority they see God himself, and it is God himself they wish to get at. The sacrilegious conspiracy between the damned in hell and the rebels on earth makes use of every available means and opportunity. If only they could, as their ultimate assassination, manage to kill God, as once they succeeded in killing his Incarnate Son on Calvary! Unable to kill God, they will at least prevent people from paying attention to him in worship. If he can’t be eliminated, they will work at least in having him ignored. Did not the Psalmist express the thoughts of these men three thousand years ago when he wrote, “*Quiescere faciamus dies festos Dei a terra et non memoretur nomen ejus amplius*; Let us suppress every one of God’s festivals on earth and his name will no longer be remembered” (cf Ps 73:8-9 Vulgate). Let us act as if there were no God!

Look how modern civilization has suppressed religious festivals and how it is driven to violate the Sabbath in spite of laws that are constantly being undermined! “*Quiescere faciamus dies festos Dei a terra et non memoretur nomen ejus amplius.*” Where does God come into modern legislation? God’s right has been abolished. Science claims that God is a useless hypothesis in explaining earthly matters, “*et non memoretur nomen ejus amplius!*”

Having brought about the expulsion of our first parents from the Paradise of Delights, this wicked serpent, it would seem, is close to expelling God from the face of the earth. He has mobilized his entire progeny in the pursuit of this goal. They have armed themselves with their choicest weapons, rebellion and murder. To these Satan adds another.

#### Falsehood

3° *A race of liars.* “*Et in veritate non stetit;* There is no truth in him,” the Savior of men says of him (Jn 8:44). He began his career with a lie when he said, “*In coelum conscendam, et similis ero Altissimo;* I will scale the heavens...and will be the rival the Most High” (Is 14:13-14 Vulgate). He pursued his career of falsehood by deceiving our first parents when he told them, “You will be like gods; *et eritis sicut dii*” (Gn 3:5). And ever since then he has proffered one lie after another.

As for his offspring, they are recognizable by this common denominator—they are all liars. Voltaire told his disciples: “Lie and keep on lying—some of it is bound to stick”<sup>169</sup>. And since then, lying has become the order of the day among the enemies of God: barefaced lies, disingenuous lies, idolatrous lies. Their politicians tell lies; their diplomats tell lies. There are the lies of the ambitious, of so-called “scientists” and so-called “philosophers”, the lies of self-indulgent libertines and of hypocrites. Nothing but lies. Satan’s offspring are no more capable of telling the truth than Satan himself. They would burn their feet by attempting to tread the pathway of rectitude and loyalty. Truly it can be said of them, as of their leader the father of lies, “*in veritate non stetit.*”

And thus they pursue their evil course, this abominable brood of the serpent—rebellion, murder, and lies. I’ve really abbreviated things. There is so much more I could add on the subject of this satanic and sacrilegious race. But the time has come for me to point out Satan’s great enemy—to describe her offspring and the war they wage.

## II.—THE IMMACULATE ONE AND HER OFFSPRING

“*Inimicitias ponam inter te et mulierem;* I will put enmity between you and the woman.” This is what God said to Satan. To which woman was he referring? To Eve? For sure, but Eve had been utterly defeated, dragging with her the progenitor of the human race. She must, indeed, have had

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<sup>169</sup> *Letter to Thiriot*, October 21, 1736 (Voltaire&Letter to Thiriot&October 21, 1736)

profound enmity toward Satan; he had conquered her and destroyed her sons and daughters. But as for the war which resulted from her enmity, I look for it in vain. Satan had won an overwhelming victory in the earthly paradise. He followed it up with a second victory, even more painful to her mother's heart. Cain killed Abel, bringing her and Adam face to face, in their footsteps, with the first victim of murder, their own son. The devil was not going to let his first prey die that natural death to which God had condemned the human race. He was out for blood, the blood of the innocent, but blood that contented itself with crying out vengeance from the depths of the earth which had sucked it up, to no avail. The tragedy called for another woman—and another son put to death, other blood shed—it called for Mary most pure.

#### The Immaculate One

1° Behold God's wonderful providential plan! A woman had been the first to be attacked; by an act of incomparable grace, a woman would be the first to be preserved from all stain. A woman would be raised to the unique privilege of sinless beauty. "*Tota pulchra es, amica mea, et macula non est in te*; You are all-beautiful, my beloved, and there is no blemish in you" (Sg 4:7).—thus cries the heavenly spouse of virgins. Absolute destruction of sin, no stain, not even a shadow of sin in Mary. All is beauty, all is perfection, all is light.

And it is in this beauty that she will proceed like her Son: "*specie tua et puchritudine tua, intende, prospere procede, et regna*; with thy comeliness and thy beauty set out, proceed prosperously, and reign (Ps 44:5 Vulgate). She is to be the queen of all queens, and the queen of all virgins: "*adducentur regi virgines post eam*; virgins will follow her into the king's presence" (Ps 44:15 Vulgate). What makes her so beautiful is her humility—this humility which does away with pride, the source of all ugliness: "*quia respexit humilitatem ancillae suae; ecce enim ex hoc beatam me dicent omnes generationes*; for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant—and behold from henceforth all generations will call me blessed" (Lk 1:48). Satan inherited atrocious and everlasting torments as the inevitable consequence of and punishment for his pride. In her humility Mary will inherit inexpressible and everlasting joy. Even here on earth all generations will proclaim her glory, bless her name and beg her intercession—*Quia respexit...*

Humility and purity—these are two sisters who walk hand-in-hand. At times, after the fall, humility walked alone in humiliation; purity without humility prepares the way, as we have said, for demons in mortal bodies and this purity will not last long.

Mary is to be both pure and humble—and completely obedient. "*Ecce ancilla Domini*; Behold the handmaid of the Lord" (Lk 1:38). Satan had decided it was beneath angelic dignity to serve God; Mary, queen of the angels, will aspire to nothing but serving him. On being asked to become

the mother of him who would be made for us obedient unto death, she welcomed him into her chaste womb with a supreme act of obedience. “*Ecce ancilla Domini; fiat mihi secundum verbum tuum*; Behold the handmaid of the Lord—be it done unto me according to your word” (Lk 1:38).

#### **The Mother of Men**

2° Satan, powerless to destroy God, seeks to destroy men. Mary will become the real mother of life. Jesus is the resurrection and the life and Mary is his mother. By an act of incomparable love, she will sacrifice her Son for the human race, saved by the death of her Son. What a wonderful contrast: Satan bringing hatred into the world, Mary bringing love, the most effective love. We can, indeed, understand the enmity between this woman par excellence toward Satan. What can the hatred of human kind’s enemy achieve against such overpowering love? Is she not the mother of love most beautiful? Not only does she possess love; she communicates it: “*Ego Mater pulchrae dilectionis*; I am the mother of fair love” (Eccl 24:24a Vulgate). And she instills hope into the hearts of her children: “*Et timoris, et agnitionis, et sanctae spei*; The mother of fear and of knowledge and of holy hope” (Eccl 24:24b).

Here is our true mother. She loves us as only a mother among all living creatures knows how. Mary loves God, she loves her Son, she loves all men. She is anxious for them. She loves getting to know them and making herself known to them and filling hearts with the assurance of heaven: “*Ego mater*; I am the mother.” Yes, she is the true mother who really loves us, the true and divine mother, whose love will save all men provided they consent to being saved.

#### **Mother of the Eternal Word**

3° Mary is the mother of the Eternal Word, of the Infinite Truth that became man. Mary loves the Truth as her Son and as her God who comes to dwell in her most pure womb. Mary loves the Truth as no other creature can love truth—and this is what opposes her to Satan, the father of lies. This is the profound reason for the words with which the Church addresses her, “*Gaude, Maria Virgo, cunctas haereses sola interemisti in universo mundo*; Rejoice, O Virgin Mary—thou alone hast conquered all heresy throughout the whole world”<sup>170</sup>.

This is why the apostles of truth have always loved her. The Church calls her the Queen of Apostles. She taught the Apostles in the Cenacle. She sustained them in their work and she continues to sustain missionaries. She is *Regina apostolorum*; the Queen of Apostles<sup>171</sup>. Where is this treasury of wisdom and all truth? Where is Wisdom that grants such love and understanding? It can be found in this divine throne which is the heart of

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<sup>170</sup> Opening words, 3<sup>rd</sup> nocturn of Matins for feasts of Our Lady, old breviary

<sup>171</sup> Litany of the Blessed Virgin

Mary: *Sedes sapientiae*; Seat of Wisdom. Look for a love greater than that of Mary for her Son—her Son who is Truth. Did he not say, “*Ego sum veritas*; I am the truth?” (Jn 14:6). Imagine if you can how much love Mary had for the Truth that is her Son Jesus.

#### The Woman's Offspring

So how can we now describe this warfare between the serpent's offspring and that of the woman? Just look at her: the queen of angels, of patriarchs, of prophets, of apostles, of martyrs, of confessors and of virgins—the queen whose retinue is made up of all the saints! What tongue can tell of the obedience of the saints, their love, and their purity: “*o quam pulchra est casta generatio cum claritate*; O, how beautiful is this chaste and glorious generation” (Wis 4:1 Vulgate)? Assemble, if you can, into one single concept, whatever is brightest and best—and multiply its human excellence by the infinite grace of God. Look for the very noblest example of moral achievement. Look to Jesus—look to Mary—and find whatever is worth admiring and imitating among the ranks of Mary. She has touched them with her gaze, her breath, her blessing, and her love. It would be beyond me to be able to recount the marvels of this beautiful, pure and generous race: “*o quam pulchra est casta generatio cum claritate*; O, how beautiful is this chaste and glorious generation.” The world does not understand them, but Mary encourages them and they march forward, guided by Mary, their mother. Forward they march: in obedience, lovingness and truthfulness, accomplishing their task here on earth, the living condemnation of the serpent's offspring. This is why Satan pursues them with such profound hatred. This is why he seeks to destroy them: by rebellion, murder and lies—by every means worthy of hell. But he will not have the last word: the woman's foot is there with which to crush his head. In spite of all the traps he sets, it is necessary that the serpent's head be crushed: “*ipsa conteret caput tuum*; she will crush your head.”

### III.—PRACTICAL CONCLUSIONS

My dear sons, as I gaze on you with all the affection our Blessed Virgin has given me for you, I cannot help asking myself with deep concern: are they all true sons of this woman, the Mother of God? Through her, have they all become worthy to be called brothers of Jesus? Showered with incomparable blessings which have not been accorded to others, will they live up to what might be rightfully expected of Mary's race? Are they too not infected with that spirit of independence and revolt which precipitated the fall of the rebel hosts from heaven? Do they too not harbor that spirit of inquisitive pride which, in their insatiable curiosity to become acquainted with the good but especially with evil, caused our first parents to be expelled from the earthly paradise? Have none of them ever said, as Satan said: “*Non serviam*; I will not serve?” (Jer 2:20). Has none of them

ever killed his brother by evil example, foul conversation or deliberate provocation to sin? Has God never said to any of them what he said to Cain, the first of the accursed: “The voice of your brother’s blood is crying out to me from the earth (Gn 4:10)—the blood not of his body, but of his soul which you have slain by mortal sin?” Ask yourselves if anyone among you, by dint of lies, false representation or blasphemy, has ever caused some young intellect to lose the faith? Do any of you deserve to be told what Jesus Christ told the Jewish leaders, “*Vos ex patre diabolo estis*; You belong to your father, the devil.” Do any of you take refuge in his lies in order to escape the truth which condemns you?

If so, think what an appalling destiny you are preparing yourselves for! And understand with what jealous care we expel from your midst those companions who have become perverted, those companions whom we have no choice but to classify as belonging to the serpent’s brood!

We must preserve, in all its purity, the offspring of this woman “full of grace,” not only for herself but for her children. As “Mother of God,” she is the mother of men to bring them to God. Like her, you too must be humble in exercising obedience. Like her, be full of active charity. Frank and loyal, convey sincerity, truth’s daughter, in all that you say, in all that you do, in the simple way you approach things. Let your hearts be pure and your bodies as well. Then will you be able to prepare yourselves for the epic combat. Sons of Mary, offspring of her race, you will be able to go forth to face the serpent and his offspring! Who knows if God might not allow certain members of this accursed tribe to sit side by side with you in these classrooms in order to have you exercise fortitude and in these initial skirmishes to acquire spiritual weaponry, to develop ways to triumph over God’s enemies, the slaves of hell. You will become stronger every time you are determined to do so. In order to do so, you must vigorously embrace Mary’s cause, which is so beautiful.

Today pray for the Church, for the Pope, its head, and for France exposed to such peril. The day will come for the forces of the serpent to be dispersed and confounded. The day will come for Mary’s heel to crush the serpent’s crest and hurl him into the abyss. Let us be standing there at the side of our divine Mother; share her triumph on the battle-field in the glory of God.

## *The Immaculate Conception and Papal Infallibility*

March 29, 1870  
Rome

to Most Rev. Dupanloup, bishop of Orléans<sup>172</sup>

It was pointed out to me that in your open letter to eminent Archbishop (Deschamps) of Malines—Mechelen<sup>173</sup>, you wrote, “As for me, the observations I made were in response to certain pulpit provocations uttered by certain vicars-general in cathedrals themselves.” Perhaps those who were listening on your behalf to these provocative vicars-general in the cathedrals themselves discovered several culprits. I freely admit the possibility of my having been the one and only. It really doesn’t matter. Since you, your Excellency, have also been provoking me, allow me to express a deep personal conviction which has been mine for many years. It is a conviction based upon what I consider to be a very Catholic outlook—and here it is.

The truth is light; it is what nourishes our intellect. So the more truth gets fed into our intellect, the more our intellect develops and gains strength, the more enlightened it becomes. In the Church, truths, all of which flow from the supreme Truth, can be placed into either of two categories. There are truths which the Church teaches with its divine authority, and insists on our accepting under pain of anathema—and others which it teaches without going so far as to expel from its ranks those rebels who refuse to accept them. There are some who call it “freedom of conscience” to accept only those tenets which have been rigorously defined, as if in matters of faith only formal heresy constituted sin. Most Catholics, desirous to fulfill their duty entirely, do not wait for the Church to lay down the law, provided the Church points the way. While they let others restrict themselves to a rigid independence, these Catholics are eager to learn more by believing more, in order to love more.

Who of these are happier? The Church may tolerate, without approving, the perilous freedom exercised by some, but only the perfect docility of the others responds to the full scope of her teaching. Such is the opinion of many a great theologian, of Suarez<sup>174</sup> in particular. Let us apply this principle to present circumstances. More than twenty-five years ago it

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<sup>172</sup> Félix de Dupanloup (1802-1878), a churchman considered to be of liberal tendencies and the leader of the minority group against the declaration of papal infallibility at Vatican I

<sup>173</sup> Victor-Auguste Deschamps (1810-1883) was a Belgian churchman who became a Redemptorist in 1836. He was a professor, author and preacher and was subsequently appointed bishop of Namur, archbishop and then Cardinal of Malines—Mechelen. He was an Ultramontane and defended the dogma of infallibility at Vatican I.

<sup>174</sup> Francisco Suárez (1548–1617) was a Spanish Jesuit priest, philosopher and *theologian*, one of the leading figures on Aquinas.



was being foretold that the future development of Catholic doctrine would be along certain lines; the first flower on the stalk would be the definition of the Immaculate Conception, after which would follow that of papal infallibility. So that when the Immaculate Conception was defined, many Christians (and a few vicars-general) permitted themselves to opine that papal infallibility would soon follow.

Indeed, other motives apart, there does exist between these two Christian truths a complementary relationship whereby one definition would pave the way for the other. Jesus Christ always placed Mary his Mother and the Church his spouse on an almost equal footing. As St. Augustine puts it, both are mothers and both are virgins: “*Ecclesia quoque et virgo et mater est; the Church too is a virgin mother*”<sup>175</sup>. If Mary is the purest of virgins, the Church is none the less so. The former gave birth to the Truth; the latter is the custodian of Truth. Is it not eminently fitting that the pope who crowned the head of Immaculate Mary should be the same pope to proclaim in his own person what might be called the triumph of the Church’s virginity? The doctor of Hippo shows how he and his fellow-bishops were quick to guard the virginity of the bride of Christ. “*Quomodo virgo non est, cujus integritate consulimur; How could she not be a virgin, when we are charged with maintaining her integrity?*”<sup>176</sup>. Now where are we to look for this virginity in all its splendor? Not, I fear, in the ‘Church instructed’ (i.e. the faithful). Can one say with absolutely certainty that it can be found among the episcopacy, for there have been so many heretical bishops, and still are? It is contained, as in a reservoir, within the mind and heart of our Sovereign Pontiff, from whence it flows like a river onto those bishops truly loyal to Peter.

And what a great Council this will be that by proclaiming the infallibility of the Pope will have proclaimed the principle of the virginity of the Church....

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### *Purity*

“*Ego flos campi et lilium convallium; I am the flower of the field and the lily of the valley*” (Sg 2:1).

These are the words from the Song of Songs which the Church applies to the Most Blessed Virgin Mary. A simple creature, but the purest

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<sup>175</sup> *De sancta uirginitate* (CPL 0300) - LLT-A, cap. 6, par. 6, pag. 240, linea 9 (Augustine&On Holy Virginitate&CPL&chap. 6, par. 6, page 240, line 9)

<sup>176</sup> *ibid*, cap. 38, par. 39, pag. 280, linea 5 (Augustine&On Holy Virginitate&CPL&chap. 38, par. 39, page 280, line 5)

of all creatures, she is presented to us as the model of our purity and virginity. That is why St. Ambrose, addressing a congregation of virgins, tells them, “*Sit vobis tanquam in imagine descripta virginitas vitaque beatæ Mariæ, de qua velut in speculo refulgent species castitatis, et forma virtutis*; Let the life and virginity of Blessed Mary be a picture upon which you constantly gaze—a mirror reflecting chastity and every other virtue<sup>177</sup>. But this chastity, this virginity, so beautiful in Mary, finds its source elsewhere. Before showing it to you in the queen of virgins, let us trace it back to its origin, its source, which is none other than God himself and his most wonderful channel which is Our Lord Jesus Christ. So let us arrive at the throne of God who is virgin beyond any creature. Then let us go to Jesus Christ and afterward come down to Mary, the queen of Virgins. Finally let us contemplate all the virgins who follow the Lamb.

#### 1° Purity in God

The essence of virginity is, surely, detachment. So the very purest of beings is God himself in his divine aloneness. There he is alone and because he is infinitely pure and perfect, he is infinitely happy in himself. The purity of his Being is a condition of its perfection—absolute perfection entails absolute purity. The contemplation of his own perfection produces joy and it is in this joy that his timeless happiness consists. He wishes to be pure because if he ceased to be pure he would cease to be perfect and therefore he would cease to be happy. He wishes his purity as much as he wishes his happiness; and, let me repeat it, since his happiness is as infinite as his glory, he can give it to no one, any more than he can give his glory to anyone: “*et gloriam meam alteri non dabo*; My glory I give to no other” (Is 42:8 Vulgate).

So to look for the source of all purity we must go back to the divine essence itself. Paganism, with its limited view due to a weakened reason, was unable to go very far and saw in creation a degradation of the divine. For the sages of the ancient cults, God could not have created matter without dirtying his hands. It’s a notion underlying many ancient religions. It’s a false notion because in God there are two modes of emanation: that which we call emanation by generation (God engenders his Son who is of the same substance as the Father—infinite, perfect, simple and pure as he is); and emanation by spiration (by which proceeds the Holy Spirit, infinite, simple, pure as the Father and the Son from whom he proceeds). In addition to this inner emanation in the divine substance, one must note the emanation by creation; this last does not dirty God’s hands because it is entirely distinct from him. God, being infinitely superior to his creatures, contracts none of their imperfections. Whatever is “perfect” about them comes from him, whatever “imperfect” from the nothingness out of which he created

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<sup>177</sup> *De uirginibus* (CPL 0145) - LLT-A, lib. 2, cap. 2, par. 6, linea 1 (Ambrose&On Virgins&CPL&bk. 2, chap. 2, par. 6, line 1)

them.

### 2° Purity in Our Lord

But all this comes to us, in the supernatural order, through Our Lord Jesus Christ “in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col 2:3); we beheld him who came to bring to the world the fullness of grace. So it is through him that we are to receive whatever comes to us from God—and this includes purity. For since purity has its very source in Him, insofar as he is God, it is in him as in a most perfect channel, insofar as he is a man. To be capable of absorbing the immeasurable perfections of God, our soul would have to be as immeasurable as God himself. So Our Lord’s perfections are proportioned to the limits of our being. But who could describe what beauty, what grandeur, what brightness they maintain in the Son, in whom God was well pleased to place them?

And since purity is the subject of our considerations, what words have we to describe the One who wanted to be called the Lamb of God by the Holy Spirit because of his innocence? He desired to take flesh similar to ours in order to cleanse this flesh from sin. Follow him step by step from the crib to the cross, and consider how wonderfully pure he was. And so it was only fitting that it was such in the One who came to wipe away the sins of the world, in the One who bore within himself, as God, the splendor of his Father’s glory and the expression of his substance.

Follow him step by step, what shadow of imperfection, what evidence of stain will you find in him? Here’s your model par excellence. Probe, search, you will find nothing more pure, more chaste, more virginal than Jesus Christ in his holy humanity.

### 3° Purity in Mary

But if the Savior of the world, by virtue of his divinity, abides in the bosom of the Father, God with him, by his humanity he desired to take flesh from the purest of all creatures. God set her apart. She came in some way, according to the expression of Scripture, “Out of the mouth of the mouth of the Most High; *Ego ex ore Altissimi prodivi*” (Eccl 24:5). Without a doubt, all beings, as a result of the mere act of being created, share a similar origin; but there was a special election of Mary, conceived before the mountains came to be, that is to say, in the mind of God, and before all the imperfect creatures represented by those masses who walked on the face of the earth.

Examine Mary’s virginity. Consider the expressions the Creator uses to depict her perfection: “I am the flower of the field and the lily of the valley; *Ego flos campi et lilium convallium*” (Sg 2:1). She is hidden away among the solitude of the meadow, unsullied by the dust of the common thoroughfare. When the Bridegroom speaks, he says, “*Sicut lilium inter spinas, sic amica mea inter filias*; as a lily among thorns, so is my daughter among the daughters of men” (Sg 2:2). Such is Mary’s superiority over those creatures who do not share her purity—that of a lily over thorns. Just compare them. The Bridegroom in the Song goes on to say, “You are all-

beautiful, my beloved, and there is no blemish in you” (Sg 4:7). What beautiful descriptions! We should depict here all of Mary’s perfections—but that would be impossible to do. What we can say is that the Church (which St. Augustine tells us is also a virgin and a mother) has always greeted her as the virgin par excellence: a virgin before the Savior’s birth, a virgin after the birth of the Divine Lamb in her most pure womb, a virgin to the day of her death, a virgin forever in heaven above.

In God we have a model we cannot imitate; in Jesus Christ a model to whom we can relate in some way, because in him is found what is human. In Mary we behold only a creature, but the purest of all creatures, a creature who, as St. Bernard puts it, “out of all her perfections, pleased God by her humility and by her virginity gave birth to the Word of God; *humilitate placuit, virginitate concepit*”<sup>178</sup>.

#### 4° Purity in Us

So what can we say now about the manner in which this purity is transmitted from God the Father to Jesus Christ and from Jesus Christ to Mary and us? Mary is, no doubt, a channel through whom God’s grace reaches us, but, let me repeat, it reaches us primarily and essentially through Jesus Christ. Let me compare Mary to a vast inland lake of purity and she conveys it to us through her superabundance. But its source is God and the “channel” through which these living waters flow to us is above all Our Lord Jesus Christ. We are depriving the Mother of none of the superabundance bestowed upon her by the love of her Son; but neither are we depriving the Son of his unique privilege, the one from whom all purity descended from heaven itself to Mary. Now let us place ourselves between Jesus and Mary. Let us gaze at the purity of the Son and at that of his Mother—a wonderful sight indeed for us to see!

Well, here on earth certain souls are called to participate in this purity. May they be virgins like Jesus and like Mary and what a privilege they would have. Several times a day you repeat the prayer: “Holy Mary, Mother of God.” In the strict sense this is Mary’s privilege. Yet the Fathers of the Church assure us that every virgin can be said to be both mother and spouse of Jesus Christ. Take a priest. In virtue of his priesthood he gives birth to Jesus Christ every day on the altar. He may be a saint or he may be a scoundrel, but this is his privilege, acquired by the sacrament of Holy Orders. On the contrary, the motherhood of virgins is a privilege that grows in the measure that she becomes more of a virgin by the efforts of purity she makes and that can be explained in a certain way.

Absolute purity issues from the very nature of God. It overflows into

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<sup>178</sup> N.B. in fact, the phrase of St. Bernard in the fourth set of homilies of *De Laudibus Virginis Matris*, the homily entitled *Homiliae super ‘Missus est’* - LLT-A, hom. 1, par. 5, vol. 4, pag. 18, linea 9 reads *virginitate placuit, humilitate concepit*—she pleased (God) by her virginity, she conceived (God) by her humility” (Bernard&Homilies in Praise of the Blessed Virgin Mary&CPL&hom. 1, par. 5, vol. 4, page 18, line 9)

Jesus Christ and from him to humankind. Every Christian who receives it preserves it or destroys it. But the more we endeavor to preserve it in all its shining transparency, the closer likeness this admirable virtue gives us to God's own infinite perfection. Such is the endeavor of every saint. It called for no painful effort on the part of Mary, but it calls for unceasing effort on the part of the rest of us. This is what St. Paul is referring to when he tells us that "every creature groans and gives birth" (Rom 8:22). Gives birth to what? To Jesus Christ. But the souls that give birth to him most purely, who reproduce him most faithfully, are those St. Augustine calls the virgins of Jesus Christ—those to whom Christ promises a very special reward in heaven.

But, you may well ask, why to virgins only? To which St. Augustine replies: "In heaven there will be glory for everyone—but over and above this common glory there is a special glory reserved for virgins. The others, indeed, belong to Christ, but they aren't his virgins." But what about so many saints who in their time had sinned grievously? Will these not be rewarded in proportion to their repentance? Of course they will. Let me employ a comparison. Here is some pure, clean water poured into a basin where it gets dirty. So we empty the dirty water down the sink, and replace it with clean water—but this time we must be careful to keep the clean water clean. And thus it was with the penitent Augustine. By penance and love he repaired the damage of his early years.

What shall we say of purity's fruits? It guarantees our salvation. It draws us closer to the divine image. It increases our capacity for contemplation. It nurtures in us a stronger disposition of self-giving. Need we go on? But let us ask Mary to obtain this beautiful virtue for us. Let us ask Jesus, the Bridegroom of chaste souls, for it. May we merit one day the ability to lose ourselves in the ocean of God's purity.

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### ***Compassion: A Meditation***

*"Stabat juxta crucem Jesu Maria mater ejus; There stood beneath the Cross of Jesus his mother"* (Jn 19:25).

Jesus is hanging on the tree of the Cross. All the Apostles, with one exception, have taken to flight. John stands silently by, faithful to the end; friendship with Jesus retained its divine charm. So many topics to contemplate! Let us fix our attention on its main characteristics: 1° compassion; 2° respect; 3° courage; 4° obedience.

#### **1° Compassion**

What suffering does she not experience seeing our Blessed Lord reduced to such a state! She is a mother and mothers are the most loving of nature's creatures! Her love condemns her to stand there and watch her son die. She wishes to remain there until he has drawn his last breath. She refuses to be parted from him although the sight of him breaks her heart; it is torture. What would cause her the greatest pain—staying or leaving? A mother and the most perfect of mothers—a creature and the most perfect of creatures, the most sensitive in her feelings. No one is as able to appreciate the joys of motherhood; no one is able to suffer its sorrows. The painful circumstances in which she finds herself are such that her perfection itself increases her suffering.

No one underwent Jesus' agonies; no one experienced his sorrow and brokenness. His body itself, the temple of his soul, took part in it. Now here is this woman, blessed among all women, who suffers atrociously in consequence of her great privilege. Mary is a mother, the holiest of all mothers; but there she stands at the foot of the Cross—and there hangs the blessed fruit of her womb, the most beautiful of the children of men, the God-Man. From the first moment of the Annunciation, she has been exercising such a love with the heart of the most loving of all mothers and the most chaste of all virgins. How much this love must have grown expressed in the dispositions of her exquisite nature, in the continual exercise of her motherhood, and thanks to the never ceasing action of a God who had chosen this creature to be loved more than any of the other creatures formed by his hand.

The love of a mother, the love of the most perfect of all mothers, the love of God's own mother, the love of a mother augmented by all the blessings God could bestow in the heart of her whom he chose to be his mother: such love possesses Mary's—and such love causes her to suffer so terribly at the moment of Jesus' death. The more perfect she is, the greater her capacity for pain. The more sublime the object of her love, the more it caused Mary to suffer.

And so, on Calvary I see the heart of Jesus and the heart of Mary as two centers transmitting pain to one another, as in the realm of science two complementary hearths reflect heat to one another. Sorrow passing from one heart to the other assumes inexpressible proportions because they love one another so much. I adore Jesus who silently experiences increased suffering as he sees his own sufferings being endured by his mother. I admire Mary who accepts his suffering which only adds to hers. She knows her suffering is making him suffer all the more. Yet she accepts to be the creature who causes him such suffering because she is most loved by him. I am lost in contemplation of so much love and so much pain. "Why, Jesus—and why, Mary—are you suffering so terribly?"—"It is for me that you are suffering so." When will I, standing at the foot of the Cross next to Mary, learn how to accept the suffering that will come when I love more?

### **2° Mary's respect at the Cross**

Think of all the insults Mary must have endured on Mount Calvary! It was bad enough listening to the sarcastic comments of the Pharisees against Jesus; but the soldiers joined in and the crowds continued their blood-curdling cries. And there she stood, the mother of sorrows next to the source of her sorrows. The rest of her relatives and friends remained at a distance; *Noti a longe stabat* (Lk 23:49). These were the cautious ones, shaking with fear. But you, O Mary, your mother's courage knew no fear. The more your son was insulted, the more you acknowledged him as your God. Your suffering for me can be explained by the sublime mission you were carrying out at that very moment. You adore and you are there. Your very presence coupled with your adoration shape the worship of honor, praise and respect that you render to him. This respect clothes your silence. Faith reveals that no other creature could have loved and adored as you did. It teaches me the kind of respect it took from you to make up for all the scorn which is being poured upon him. Teach me, O Mary, how to offer him similar worship so that I may make up for all my past irreverence and repair the insult and injury others inflict on him.

### **3° Courage**

*“Noti autem respiciebant a longe; But his acquaintances beheld these things from afar”* (cf Lk 23:49). See what is happening: she who loves him the most tenderly, she who respects him the most deeply, she is the most courageous. In spite of everything that might keep her away, she is unafraid to approach Jesus. This trial is just one more arrow piercing her heart. Mary, the sight of your motherly courage makes me ask myself: have I never been ashamed of acknowledging Jesus? I want you now to be witness to my resolutions of courage in serving your son. Your posture at the foot of the Cross will be my model to imitate. You are not giving way to paroxysms of grief which, under the circumstances, would be only too understandable. No, you are standing there quietly. Your suffering is only all the greater to the extent that you are so focused. If your son gave you the gift of such depth, he also gave you the gift of great generosity. O Mary, my mother, when I have to face trials, help me to face them with your generosity and your courage.

### **4° Mary's obedience**

Jesus is both her God and her son. As son he must provide for his mother. In this testament of Jesus I see the proof of his esteem for his beloved disciple; he leaves him his mother. O Jesus, teach me to take your mother's interests to heart. O Mary, teach me to obey Jesus as you did when he mapped out the remainder of your life by saying to John: *“Ecce Mater tua; Here is your mother”* (Jn 19:27)...and from that day John took you into his home. But Jesus had said to Mary, *“Here is your son”*—and the entire Church looks upon John as the representative of humanity. O men! Here is your mother! And you put me to death. Having delivered myself up for you,

I am offering you in return the most loving heart, the heart of my Mother. And Mary obeys and in her obedience she accepts as her children those who have killed her son. For the Roman soldiers were mere instruments. The real executioners were all who have sinned. O Mary, what an immense effort of loving obedience it took you to accept us! With what motherly affection you adopted us! May I, from this day forward, accept as a brother whomsoever Jesus sends my way. And if I experience repugnance towards any, let me take as my model your obedience to Jesus, you who adopted those who had just killed him.

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### ***Sermon on the Holy Virgin's Compassion*<sup>179</sup>**

*March 31, 1871, Nimes*

This feast of the Most Holy Virgin's Compassion<sup>180</sup> presents us with two distinct lines of thought. The sufferings of God's own Mother remind me of what mothers of families have to suffer. I also see in the martyrdom of this purest of virgins the feast of all those souls called by divine choice to have their perfection buried and transformed through suffering. In a word, Mary at the foot of the Cross, Mother and Virgin...these are the two considerations I bring to your notice in examining the feast of her Compassion: the nobility and fecundity of suffering of the Christian mother and of the Virgin, bride of Jesus Christ.

#### **I.—Model of mothers**

##### **What mothers have to suffer**

Let me first consider the mother of a family. As I embark on the subject, ladies, I feel I have a lot to say and yet very little. Where is the mother who has never suffered, and suffered grievously? What can I tell you that you don't already know? So many worries in her heart! So many responsibilities weighing on her mind! She loves—therefore she has to suffer. Every one of her duties is a cross to bear; she is surrounded on all sides by burdens she cannot refuse to lift...she has a husband she loves and who loves her, her children, her servants, all the worries of running a household. Everything that surrounds this mother invites solicitude and suffering. Her sphere of activity is forever widening—in the family and in the area of friends. The larger it gets and the more she accepts means more

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<sup>179</sup> given at the priory of the Religious of the Assumption to a mixed audience

<sup>180</sup> In 1482 the feast was added to the Missal under the title of "Our Lady of Compassion." Pope Benedict XIII added it to the Roman Calendar in 1727 on the Friday before Palm Sunday.



anxiety. O yes, she has to suffer: this wife who has identified her destiny with that of her husband, this mother who has to watch over each of her children, from the time they are born till the day of separation. By turns she will have to take care of their childhood and then the matter of their education. And having given them all her love and attention, she may have to watch these young hearts (whom she has warmed with her own) being turned against her. And apart from the bitter pain of ingratitude, the time will come when this child of hers will leave home in order to set up another household and give somebody else the affection hitherto reserved for his mother.

Such, Christian mothers, such is your common lot—not to speak of the many other sorrows issuing from the limitless depths of your heart. Loving entails getting hurt, getting wounded. All through life you will have to journey through a vale of tears—bruised and torn by the thorns which beset your path. And this, ladies, is because you are Christians. You know every Christian soul has to give of itself and you know that to give of yourself means suffering. Unless you give of yourselves, you cannot be Christians; you will not attain the perfection of Christianity until you have given of yourselves in the midst of pain, sorrow and heart-break. Will you escape this? Alas, ladies, I fear not. Granted, there will be laughter; from time to time you will enjoy the charms of family life and your heart will be gladdened. Yes, these moments will be granted to you. But it always happens that, on leaving the feast, a time of mourning will come, that your greatest joy will be followed with a tear. Look at the world in which you live. Look at the journey of every traveler here below—is it not a pilgrimage of pain?

#### **Fruitful suffering**

But since it must be so, have you never thought of all the merit you can accumulate, all the value you can give to your sorrow instead of allowing it to remain sterile and vain? I am not speaking of those who reject suffering nor those who abandon themselves to despair. I am speaking of those whose inexcusable negligence allows all these sufferings to become useless.

Ladies, all of you who suffer and desire that your suffering bear fruit have in this feast of Our Lady of Seven Sorrows an incomparable model. The Blessed Virgin standing beneath the Cross is surely the Mother of mothers, the very prototype of mothers who mourn. These sufferings, towering as the waves of the sea, are like an ocean of bitterness that inundates her souls “O, all you who pass by, approach and see: is there any sorrow like my sorrow?” (Lam 1:12). There is, indeed, no sorrow like her sorrow—how, ladies, can I compare yours to hers? Nevertheless, you have your own heavy duty to fulfill: you must turn your own suffering into something useful for yourselves first of all, then for your families, your friends, and the Church of God. Therefore, no more grumbling, no further

complaints. Look at Mary! What, in God's name, have you to complain about in the face of such suffering? Have you, I ask, suffered one tiny fraction of the sorrow which broke the heart of the Blessed Virgin? Have you so much as sipped that chalice of which she had to swallow the whole contents? If you are not Christians, I have no comment to make. Escape pain and the divine influence it has; repudiate it. Surrender to despair; harden your own hearts, and thus succeed in deadening the pain—it is possible. But if you really belong to Jesus Christ, if you really intend to follow in his footsteps, then learn to suffer as Mary did. Don't be afraid. Don't try somehow to blunt your soul's sensitivity. To be sure, the more sensitive you are, the more acute your pain will be. But you mustn't regret it, because you will become more like the Blessed Virgin herself.

I think I have already told you on a previous occasion, that as she stood beneath the Cross, bathed in the blood of Jesus Christ, the Holy Mother of the Savior kept on singing her "Magnificat." She stood there in quiet adoration—and from her heart, racked with sorrow, she rewrote the hymn of her exultation and her humility. This being so, why should a song of praise in the midst of suffering not appear on your lips? Why should one not see your humbled hearts bend under the hand of God? Is this really asking too much of you...to accept suffering, not extraordinary suffering like the unimaginable suffering of Mary, but that portion of pain which Our Lord sees fit to send you, as he does with every created being?

#### **An apostolate of suffering**

And so, ladies, you must remember your obligation (and I insist it is a rigorous obligation) to accept whatever suffering God sends you in this life. It is a consequence of your being Christians; it is a duty you are not free to shirk. But it is not enough. You must say to yourself: "I have the power to save souls—I can give birth to souls for Jesus Christ. Like Mary I am a mother, and like Mary I must exercise my twofold motherhood at the foot of the Cross." Mr. Joseph de Maistre<sup>181</sup> wrote: "The noblest title of women is Maker of Men." Let me suggest something even greater: Make souls! Why not participate in this mystery of the Blessed Virgin's motherhood of suffering? Why not allow your sufferings to be used for the conversion of many souls: the souls of people you know, and of others you don't know? The Blessed Virgin may well have been granted a prophetic vision: that of those many generations over the centuries to come who would proclaim her Blessed, that of souls who would be redeemed by the

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<sup>181</sup> Joseph-Marie, comte de Maistre (1753 – 1821) was a French-speaking Savoyard philosopher, writer, lawyer, and diplomat, who advocated social hierarchy and monarchy in the period immediately following the French Revolution. A key figure of the "Counter-Enlightenment," Maistre argued that the rationalist rejection of Christianity was directly responsible for the disorder and bloodshed which followed the French Revolution of 1789. The following quote is taken from *Des Femmes*, ch. 2. The French reads: "le grand honneur (des femmes) est de faire des hommes" (de Maistre, Joseph-Marie & On Women & chap. 2)

blood of her Son...and if so, she must have, at this incomparable moment of suffering, experienced immense consolation despite the horror of the scene. It may well have been so—but it is none the less true that she suffered, that she united her sufferings to the Passion of her Son, and that, by the passion of her soul, she cooperated and collaborated in the salvation of the human race.

And you, ladies, are you incapable of doing anything with your suffering? Can you not also play your part in the salvation of your brothers? No Christian woman is incapable of bringing to her home the treasure of her sufferings accepted and who cannot become, she herself, following the example of the Most Blessed Virgin, someone who distributes enormous blessings in the world. This, ladies, is your role as ‘mothers of sorrow.’

## II.—Queen of Virgins

It is, however, as “Queen of Virgins” that I wish to emphasize Mary’s role in this mystery of her Compassion. We stand at the last hour in the mortal life of Jesus Christ. The Son of Mary is about to expire. Death is now taking possession of this sacred body formed in the chaste womb of his Virgin Mother. One might say that her task as his mother has now been achieved. She is still a mother as she stands there beneath the Cross, but even more so the Virgin. And in this mystery of suffering there appears in all its beauty this hitherto absolutely unknown phenomenon of virginal motherhood.

### The sufferings of the Virgin

Yes, she is a virgin who stands there on Calvary. She has preserved intact her crown of white roses. They are perhaps spattered here and there with drops of blood flowing from her Son’s body. To gain her the title of “*Regina Martyrum*; Queen of Martyrs” with which the Church honors her, Jesus Christ wishes, before he dies, to give her back some of that purest blood which she herself provided him to shape his wonderful human body. Therefore, Mary is the model of those who follow the Lamb: “*Sequuntur Agnum quocumque ierit...laverunt stolas suas in sanguine Agni*; they follow Lamb wherever he goes...(Rv 14:4) and “wash their robes in his blood” (Rv 7:14). Virgins they are. They have washed their souls in the blood of Jesus Christ and, like the Lamb, they bring salvation to the world.

Let me consider the soul of one who has surrendered herself completely to God and to his justice, who says: “Strike me, Lord. My love has prepared me for whatever you may send my way.” My dear ladies, only a virgin can talk like this. To envisage chastity without the total sacrifice of self would be to sink into darkness. All these things are mysteriously intertwined; we cannot understand what makes a virgin suffer unless we take into account the ardent love she bears to him whom she has given herself as Spouse. Who is he, this “*virum dolorum et scientem infirmitatem*; man of

sorrows, acquainted with grief” (Is 53:3)? He is the Man of Sorrows par excellence. He assumed the totality of human suffering in the person of God in order to give it infinite value. And this soul who has surrendered herself unconditionally to her Spouse, to him who became the “Lamb slain in sacrifice ever since the world began; *Agnus qui occisus est ab origine mundi*” (Rv 13:8); this soul, I say, must adopt the sentiments of her Spouse. She must enter totally involved into that sacrifice whereby he has redeemed the world. The great knowledge of this Virgin becomes that of the Cross, the mystery of our salvation. Her love for him will be such that she regards it a great privilege and joy, to be able to suffer because Our Lord has suffered.

What did Jesus wish to immolate through his suffering? What was the purpose of the Passion? To save the world; yes, but also to sanctify his Mother’s sufferings, to enrich her with the dignity of martyrdom. From the height of the Cross he seems to tell her: “See how much I love you. Not only am I suffering on your behalf, but I am making you a partaker in my suffering. See I am granting you this privilege in recognition of your having retained absolute purity.” To which Mary replies: “And as for me, who am your Mother, I wish to unite to my sufferings as your mother all the suffering you reserve to those virginal and espoused souls. In order to resemble you all the more, I wish to suffer with you and...there will be delight in resembling you in suffering.”

Place yourselves in spirit, my dear ladies, between these two combatants in suffering, if I may speak this way. Place yourselves on Calvary between the sufferings of Jesus and those of Mary. Try to understand the need of Our Lord to suffer in order to beautify the soul of his Mother. Try to understand the happiness, touched by suffering, that floods the heart of Mary purifying itself evermore and increasing her resemblance to the Savior of the world.

#### **Following the Virgin’s example**

If Our Lord calls you to the dignity of becoming his spouse, see how suffering becomes the inseparable sign of love. Let me suppose for an instant that there are only two people in the world: Jesus Christ and you—Jesus Christ, God of Sorrows, drunk with suffering out of love and a virginal soul that has surrendered itself to him. Well then: here is Jesus hanging on the Cross and here are you kneeling at his feet, collecting each drop of his blood. My dear ladies, from the top of this cross flowing with blood and love, this soul would hear but one word, “You must suffer. You must journey along this king’s way to be transformed by the pain you will have to endure.” See what an entirely new outlook the Christian virgin acquires by kneeling at the foot of the Cross! What have you now to complain about when sorrow comes your way? Jesus Christ offers you his blood, in return for which you offer him your pain; you unite yourself with Jesus’ sacrifice to be able to participate in the wonders of his salvation. So

be aware of this inner life of the cross the way of which you are able to enter by the humiliations of Jesus Christ and of the Virgin! Understand what your crucifix means. It is the image of your dying God; it summarizes a life of insults and afflictions. You will learn from it, ladies, what your own life ought to be. It shows you how to welcome suffering, constantly, generously, lovingly until the day you draw your dying breath.

#### **The Virgin at Holy Mass**

Consider now, my dear ladies, you who enjoy the privilege of assisting so often at the Holy Mass, consider what this mystery has to say to your souls. The image you are to have of the Mass is that of a sacrifice of a God offering himself up in a bloodless manner. My dear ladies, you will probably never have the privilege of shedding your blood; martyrdom will not be your lot, though you never know what the future holds in store. But you will have a secret kind of martyrdom to endure, a prolonged, albeit “bloodless,” martyrdom which will cost you none the less. And when by receiving Communion you unite yourselves to the “Man of Sorrows,” you are training yourselves in the school of suffering. So when you assist at the sacrifice of Calvary being renewed on our altars, contemplate the Cross itself—contemplate the mystery of a God being nailed there for your sake. Look at the nails with which his sacred limbs are fixed to the instrument of his torture. Ask yourself what you too can do to get yourself nailed to a cross. You can do it by curtailing your freedom of action. You can do it by accepting the slavery of suffering. You can do it, dear ladies, by accepting everything in your turn that makes you voluntary slaves of the Cross.

#### **Fecund Suffering:**

##### **a) at prayer**

But, dear ladies, I must speak to you not only about having to suffer. For those who would be perfect imitators of the Virgin, there is more to it than this. Having emphasized that a virgin spouse of Jesus Christ must open her arms to suffering, I must endeavor to show you how fruitful it is. What does Jesus long for as he hangs on the Cross? He longs for souls—he thirsts for souls. What can you do about it? Apostles have work that you are not called to share. As for preaching, the Apostle says, “*Mulieres taceant in ecclesiis*; Let women keep silent in church” (1 Cor 14:34). Then there are those good works originally reserved for deacons, but in which there is every reason why you too should participate. I do not wish to dwell on these for the moment. One special branch of apostolate does seem to be especially reserved for you—the apostolate of prayer. It is that of Jesus Christ on the Cross, when in great silence his prayer saves the world. From his mouth there do descend a few words pregnant with meaning, heard by the few faithful friends gathered round him and by the soldiers in charge of the Crucified; but these words are rare. It is in silent prayer, in quiet adoration, that Jesus reconciles the world to his Father. There he hangs: the great Intercessor, the great Mediator, inviting every soul that by chastity has

gained the right to approach him to join him in this grand and unique act of mediation. Enter, ladies, enter into this mystery with great faith, with great courage. Where will it lead you once you have plunged into these mystical depths? Who knows? But could you possibly do better? And what is the best time to do it, my dear ladies? When you receive Communion! This is the time when your power of intercession is at its greatest. Do we realize how much a Christian virgin can obtain from God as she adores Him in prayer and says to him, “Lord, you are my one and only love. For your sake I have renounced all earthly affection. Since by suffering I can give birth to souls for you, I now accept whatever pain, sorrow and humiliation you see fit to send me. Here am I, Lord—here am I in solitary silence. I belong to you alone; I live for you alone; I am united to you heart and soul, and all I ask is to be allowed to add my quota of suffering to the indescribable afflictions of your Sacred Humanity. Pour forth the treasures of your Passion into my heart and soul. Let them acquire merit, let them participate in your Godhead, and let them bring down blessings upon the souls of those whom you have chosen to save.” Is there not in these reflections, dear ladies, something to strengthen your courage? Is it now possible for us not to love suffering, when we consider the sufferings of God? How can we sit back and “take things easy,” now that we are being given the opportunity of showering on lukewarm souls, sick souls, even dead souls, the blessings, the divine life, the marvelous love of Jesus Christ?

**b) in good works**

Now what about these good works already mentioned? I am not advocating a beehive of activity; that is not your vocation, at least not on the outside. But you do have work to do—and may I comfort those of you who are in fact very busy, by reminding you that the first Christian martyr was a deacon, a man of good works. You too can give to your charitable enterprises a character higher than mere material giving; you can transform them into an apostolate. So when you set out, my dear ladies, to visit the poor or the sick, I am asking you to remain in spirit at the foot of the Cross. As you reflect, think of Jesus, think of his Mother, and ask yourselves this question: “What are the souls I can save?” Think seriously, my dear ladies: is it not high time you began this apostolic mission? When will you give yourselves over to this action on behalf of souls? When for their sake will you unite prayer with suffering?

**c) in offering oneself up**

But let us go a step higher—over and above the apostle, there is the priest. I am not speaking of the indelible character of the priesthood conferred by the Sacrament of Holy Orders, but of the priest in the sense of somebody offering a sacrifice. It is in this sense that St. Paul says, “*Tu es sacerdos in aeternum secundum ordinem Melchisedech*; You are a priest forever, according to the order of Melchisedech” (Heb 6:20; Ps 109:5 Vulgate ). So although the Christian virgin has no call to the Sacrament of

Holy Orders, it is nonetheless true that whoever loves suffering has a sacrifice to offer. And this is precisely the role of the Virgin: to offer a sacrifice. Who is to be the victim of this sacrifice? She herself, upon the altar of her own heart. She holds the sacrificial sword in both hands, and offers herself up. She offers herself to God, being priest and victim simultaneously, just as Jesus offered sacrifice on Calvary.

By opening her heart generously, she sees an enormous career unfolding before her and so the virgin spouse of Christ arrives at the moment of supreme sacrifice. The sword of sacrifice is her love; she herself is the victim. And if you wish to know how far her love will carry her along this painful road, then look at our Blessed Virgin on this feast of her Compassion. As for you, my dear ladies, how far will you go by imitating such a perfect model? I don't know—but the further you wish to go, the more careful you must be to do away with your complaining. Whether the trial strikes your wealth, your health, or the most sensitive region of your heart...whatever it may be, here is a sacrifice you must offer to God, "The Lord has given, the Lord has taken away, blessed be his holy name" (Jb 1:21). You must surrender yourself unconditionally to God as well as everything you possess and everything you love. Yes, you must surrender yourself unto death, this being the ultimate sacrifice of suffering. And if you can do this, my dear ladies, then death, when it comes, will be not only the supreme loss, not only the supreme penalty to pay for sin; for the chaste and pure soul, it will mark the final consummation of her union with her God.

#### **Conclusion**

Such is the final outcome of whatever suffering we endure with Jesus here below. Such is the promised reward for a Christian virgin who has promised to follow the Lamb on the way up to Calvary. So pray to the Blessed Virgin that she might be your doctor, your teacher. Ask her to teach you something of the price, of the fruitfulness of suffering. Once thoroughly convinced of these admirable truths, you will no longer complain of anything. When you will kiss the feet of your crucifix, those sacred wounds from which flowed the world's redemption, you will ask Our Lord to bring forth from your sufferings, from the depths of your heart, this virtue of fruitfulness which saves the souls of men. You will stay with Mary at the foot of the Cross. And just as Jesus Christ poured out his blood in love, so will you pour out your love in suffering so that it may be purified, renewed, transformed for you in heaven. Amen.

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### ***Mystery of the Assumption***<sup>182</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> Closing sermon of a retreat preached by Fr. d'Alzon to his religious

“*Veni de Libano, veni, coronaberis*; Come from Lebanon—come and be crowned” (Sg 4:8).

As we come to the end of our retreat and as you are filled, I am sure, with the worthiest of dispositions, I can think of nothing better than to speak to you about the mystery under which our Congregation has been placed. We did not choose this title; it was, so to speak, already carved out for us. The stone placed on the entryway of our house was inscribed several years before we took possession of what was to become the cradle of our religious family. It can be said that it was not we ourselves who chose Mary triumphant in heaven to be our protectress. It was Mary, from the heights of heaven, who seems to have said, “This house was given to me—I, in turn, give it to you. Grow in the thinking that my glory should inspire in you. Be true sons of my victory, my triumph and my coronation.”

And so, my brothers, let me urge you to assimilate, more and more, day by day, those rich and wholesome lessons which Mary in her Assumption has to teach us. What do you see, in fact, as a religious, in this special favor granted to a creature, the mother of God, that she be enthroned as queen of the angels and of the saints? Is there anything more worthwhile thinking about, anything more uplifting to study?

#### **God's grace-filled foresight**

Let me begin by contemplating what God is capable of doing for his humble handmaid. He exempted her from the universal law; alone among the children of Adam and Eve, she was created pure. “You are all-beautiful, my beloved, and there is no blemish in you; *Tota pulchra est, amica mea, et macula non est in te*” (Sg 4:7). An exceptional privilege, I must acknowledge, but a privilege shared by our first parents, who responded to it with a fall that was all the more shocking. Mary was showered with blessings but she rose to the occasion in her response.

To what heights can I not raise myself if from now onwards I begin to make a serious effort towards becoming perfect? Here is a prospect that defies imagination. What is the present state of my soul? What could it become if I truly wish it? But do I really wish to attain such heights of Christian virtue? How sincere is my determination? I see a vast horizon stretching out before me and with what strength and energy I possess, I sense that I will never be able to reach the goal. But God is there to strengthen my feet...if I really wish him to. I say, “O, who will give me the wings of a dove to fly away and seek my resting place; *Quis dabit mihi pennas sicut columbae, et volabo, et resquiescam?*” (Ps 54:7 Vulgate). I will not stop in this flight, powerful and rapid, until I reach, at last, that destination God has prepared for me. And as I journey on, I will comport myself like one of his true disciples, of whom it is said, “*Ibunt de virtutem in virtutem*; they shall go from strength to strength” (Ps 83:8 Vulgate). Yes, I will find myself growing stronger and stronger in virtue. With my eyes



fixed on my glorious Queen, I will see clearly the distance that separates me from her, but I will not listen to that discouraging voice which whispers hopelessness into my ear. I will say to Mary, "You are, indeed, far away. But I do not ask you to bow down toward my misery; I ask you to keep beckoning me on toward you!"

And who can tell how far I will go, provided my prayers are sincere, provided my efforts are bold? For as long as I stick to my course, as long as the distance diminishes, I will perceive with greater clarity what God wishes me to do and how much he wishes me to give. I will acquire a deeper insight into Mary's perfection and how I should imitate it. I may begin by being dazzled by the wonders I see, but this doesn't matter. I will go to Mary, and Mary will disclose to me the secret of the touching charms of her virginal soul.

#### **Christ born in me**

Now, the deeper I delve into the wonders God worked in Mary, the better will I understand my duties and my relationship with God. Mary, chosen from all eternity, welcomed in her chaste womb a God who wished to take on our nature there. But did I not receive in the sacrament of Baptism a spark of divine life which it is up to me to develop? Am I myself not a son of God? Did I not welcome Jesus Christ? The evangelist says, "*Quotquot autem receperunt eum, dedit eis filios Dei fieri*; To those who did welcome him he gave the privilege of becoming sons of God" (Jn 1:12). But just as a child has to grow and keep on growing, with what spirit of faith and love must I develop Jesus Christ in me and make him grow? In what way must I grow with him?

Mary carried Jesus in her chaste womb for nine months. How ought I to bear him in my heart when he comes to me there in the Eucharist? What a transformation took place in the Virgin par excellence as she concentrated her entire being on the Infant God, who, undoubtedly perfect from the very first moment of his conception, poured into his mother's womb the most abundant blessings and nourished her with the most exquisite spiritual gifts, while he asked her for the purest of her maternal blood so that he could form a body for himself similar to ours! So how can I, in turn, operate a similar exchange of my entire being with that of Jesus? "*Vivo jam non ego, vivit vero in me Christus*"; yet I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me" (Gal 2:20).

Who will ever help me understand this exchange, whereby God takes my life and gives me his?

#### **The life of Christ manifested in me**

But it is not simply a question of a hidden, intimate life; it is a question of a life the world must learn to know. It must be a source of condemnation to those who have sold their soul to this world. By giving birth to Jesus, Mary pronounces judgment on the world, "*Nunc judicium est mundi*"; Now is sentence being passed on the world" (Jn 12:31). The

Christian, too, must manifest Jesus Christ by his entire life.

From the day of his birth until he was thirty, Jesus' life was identified with that of Mary. Here is where I must come to seek lessons. Here is where I must come to be instructed by Mary in the perfect ways of Jesus in his hidden life. What an admirable training! What a model for a novice, with Mary as the novice-mistress and Jesus as novice! I must, of course, listen to what my directors teach me; but how their task would be facilitated were my primary concern to listen to Mary teaching me how to imitate Jesus?

And can I not follow Mary to the Cross, which is the terminal point of her Son's ministry? If all the days of my life the Cross is the goal of my labor, if I work, if I act, if I preach, if I evangelize, if I suffer in order to prepare myself to become a worthy disciple of the Cross, does this not entitle me to stand between Mary and Jesus at the feet of the crucified Savior, there to learn how to suffer and to die?

And when Mary has taught me how to live as Jesus lived, imitating as much as it depends on me his perfections and his virtues, may I not venture to hope that Mary, my hope, *spes nostra*, will permit me to share her crown and the glory of her Son whose faithful servant I will have become?

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## Love of the Church

*It is in his devotion to the Church that Fr. d'Alzon gives us the fullest expression of his love of Our Lord, founder and head of the Church, and of the Blessed Virgin, its ideal model! The Church: such was the theme of innumerable sermons, innumerable lectures on contemporary events. Much, unfortunately, has been lost; all except the echo. The congregation was electrified by the meridional warmth with which he spoke. People said they would have sat on red-hot pokers to listen to such a preacher!*

*Often already it was a matter of the Church in this collection. Here are a few other extracts, reminding us of our duties towards the Church Militant on earth, the Church Suffering in purgatory, and the Church Triumphant in heaven.*

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## ***The Revolution: Enemy of the Church***

*The 26<sup>th</sup> Nîmes Lecture, December 11, 1870*

### **I.—The Revolution: Enemy of the Church**

My dear daughters, today let us begin to study the third distinctive characteristic we have tried to give to the Assumption—our love for the Church.

Let me repeat what I have so often said to you: the Assumption is a small regiment of the Church. We stand face to face with a relentless enemy who seems to be winning all along the line. He triumphs through democracy, he triumphs through aristocracy, he triumphs through kings and emperors. And the name of this arch-enemy is the Revolution. The multiple aspects of this Revolution can be summarized in one phrase, “*Non serviam*—I will not serve!”<sup>183</sup> This phrase was proclaimed before the creation of man. Emblazoned on the banner of every rebellion, it began by causing dissension in heaven itself! It destroyed the harmony of the earthly paradise. It disrupts all human society. It breeds heresy within the bosom of the Church. It even takes root at times in monasteries and convents which ought to be the citadels of sanctity.

And when a religious Sister, overcome by pride, adds to the chorus by proclaiming: “I will not obey!”, it means that the Revolution has taken possession of her soul. She is now a member of that immense revolutionary organization which originated in heaven before time began, which perpetuates itself here on earth under diverse but equally iniquitous shapes and colors, and which, chastised from the beginning, will be definitively dealt with on Judgment Day by being consigned to the everlasting flames of hell.

This Revolution, which rises today like some engulfing tidal wave, begins by denying all truth. “*Ille homicida erat ab initio, et in veritate non stetit, quia non est veritas in eo; He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in truth*” (Jn 8:44). So the devil is called the Father of Lies, the deceiver-in-chief. The Revolution is opposed to God’s law, since its war cry is the shout of disobedience: “*Non serviam!* I will not serve!” In the face of God’s love, summarized in Our Lord’s words, “*Sic enim Deus dilexit*

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<sup>183</sup> In the Latin Vulgate, Jeremiah laments that the people of Israel speak “*non serviam*” to express their rejection of God (Jer 2:20). The words became a general expression of the basic manner of rejecting God, such that it would apply to the fall of Lucifer. The words have thus been attributed to Lucifer.

*mundum, ut Filium suum unigenitum daret*; God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son” (Jn 3:16), the Revolution spews out nothing but hatred. Its leader is he whom Jesus Christ describes as having been “a murderer from the start.”

By these three infernal characteristics (falsehood, disobedience, hatred), the Revolution sets itself up as the great enemy of the Church. In the order of ideas it results in free thinking<sup>184</sup>; in the social order by anarchy; in everyday life by immorality, the worship of pleasure, and material well-being; and in human relationships by personal egoism carried to the point of deification and self-worship.

What more can we expect once the Revolution has attained such terrifying proportions? God only knows! But it is all too evident that there are men who carry out the orders of their leader, Satan, and fill the ranks of his empire. It would seem that in this very day and age power is being handed over to the Revolution and that the terrible words pronounced by Our Lord on the night of his Passion are once again being accomplished: “*Sed haec est hora vestra, et potestas tenebrarum*; but this is your hour, the time for the power of darkness.” (Lk 22:53).

On one side stands the Revolution, that woman of the Book of Revelation (Rv 7:4), seated on a dragon, holding in her hand a cup filled with the blood of the martyrs and on her forehead is written a mystery (cf Rv 17:5) Yes, there are mysteries of iniquity and falsehood which she is thinking up! And on the other side stands the army of Jesus Christ. The Church stands up to the Revolution—Satan on one side, Jesus Christ on the other.

But having thus defined and thus exposed the situation means that we have to face very special duties. We must thank God our little Congregation has arrived on the scene in these troubled times, because there are new tasks for us to perform. The enemy is the same, and the same battle must be waged. Satan is carrying on the fight which he began under the tree in the Garden of Eden; but different weapons are required to deal with each successive stage of the combat. God has put these weapons into our hands; and although “the children of this world are wiser after their own fashion than the children of light” (Lk 16:8) we can have high hopes of victory.

So what must we do? Defend the Church and fight the Revolution with all our heart and-soul! And how must we do it? By making good use of those means the Church provides. You see, my Sisters, the Church possesses three tremendous advantages. We have the truth on our side. We have the law of God and the evangelical counsels, the grace which supplements our human weakness, enabling us to have faith, to observe his

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<sup>184</sup> **Libre pensée** (“free-thinking”) is an expression attributed to Victor Hugo designating, in its ideal form, a way of thinking and of acting that avoids all religious, philosophical, ideological, or political assumptions, but relies principally on the free-thinker’s own existential experiences, on logic, and on reason; it is an attempt to avoid all dogma.

law, and to follow the counsels of perfection.

## II.—The Church, guardian of the truth

There is, we are forced to admit, an insurmountable barrier between the acceptance of truth and the scope of the human intellect. Left to his own resources, man cannot raise himself up to a knowledge of supernatural truth; grace is needed. Not only this, but there is something in the human heart opposing the truth; it is that point where it meets our pride in order to condemn it. The human spirit repulses the truth because it does not want to abdicate its rights and in every act there is an act of humility. Enlarging on this theme, St. Augustine points out that although Plato seems to have grasped some conception of the Blessed Trinity<sup>185</sup>, he expresses no hint of the possibility that God the Son could become Man. Among the pagans we do, indeed, discover some fuzzy notions about certain transcendental concepts such as the nature of God, and his attributes, but we search in vain for anything corresponding to the crucifixion and death of Jesus Christ.

God's attributes, wonderful though they be, imply no direct connection between God's life and ours; they don't impose any requirement to put things right in this world. But when God shows him his Son being born in a stable, spending his entire life living in scorn and poverty, dying on a Cross, our poor, humiliated human nature cries out. Protestants get round this by maintaining that faith without works suffices for salvation, but the Catholic Church affirms that Christ suffered for us, leaving us an example to imitate, "*Christus passus est pro nobis, vobis relinquens exemplum, ut sequamini vestigia eius*; Christ suffered for us, thereby leaving you an example—you must follow his footsteps" (1 Pt 2:21). Bloody footsteps they are: signifying suffering and sacrifice. It looks too hard; man prefers not to follow such a doctor. This is the bottom line.

The Revolution tells us: "Let us eat, drink and be merry—let us drown our sorrows in pleasure. Let us crown ourselves with garlands and enjoy life while we may—because tomorrow we will all be dead" (Wis 2:6-9). Such is the practical philosophy of the present day (universities; Jules Simon<sup>186</sup>; the prohibition of speaking about God in our schools; debauchery)! And it's perfectly logical. Since they deny the existence of the soul, eternal life, God and his Church, since they regard this life as the only life, and the pleasures of this life as their only goal, then what else is there to live for?

We must fight against this onrush of materialism with Christ's own weapon, that of the Cross. Then look at the beauty of the truth; it penetrates human hearts by the Cross, because the Cross is its very foundation.

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<sup>185</sup> cf. Confessions VIII.3; City X.23 (Augustine&Confessions&Pine-Coffin&bk. VIII, chap. 3)

<sup>186</sup> Jules François Simon (1814 – 1896) was a French statesman and philosopher.

### III.—The Church, guardian of God's law

Furthermore, the Church possesses the deposit of God's law, that is to say, everything that falls within the realm of what is most unknown in our day. I will not insult your intelligence by reminding you to what extent it is violated. As you sit in the parlor at Auteuil, all you have to do is listen! What abominations are going on, from blasphemies to work foolish men respond to him, saying "*Dirumpamus vincula eorum, et projiciamus a nobis jugum ipsorum*"; Let us throw off the chains; let us rid ourselves of the yoke!" (Ps 2:3), how can you, I say, expect God's rage to be ignited against them?

It is written in the Scriptures, "*Et terra infecta est ab habitatoribus suis, quia transgressi sunt leges, muta verunt ius, dissipaverunt foedus sempiternum*"; And the world has become contaminated by those who live there. They have broken the laws, they have twisted the rules, they have made a mockery of their everlasting covenant" (Is 24:5). Moreover, they have changed the meaning of right; they wanted to shake up the weight of the law, "*Vae qui dicitis malum bonum, et bonum malum: ponentes tenebras lucem, et lucem tenebras; ponentes amarum in dulce, et dulce in amarum*"; Woe to you who call evil good, and good evil—who call darkness light, and light darkness—who call bitter sweet, and sweet bitter!" (Is 5:20). This is what is happening today and it is the Revolution's triumph!

God comes, he gives us his laws—not only his law but that of the Church. For, if the law of God was promulgated on Mount Sinai, he also desires that certain applications of moral practice be enshrined in the commandments of his Church. And there is more. He invites some to be perfect, so he established the evangelical counsels and this is precisely what religious life is all about. And it is because you are bound by these Counsels that the world hates monasteries and convents. How can those who object to the disciplinary rigor of the Ten Commandments be expected to tolerate the counsels of perfection? Religious life is a condemnation of human and sensual appetites. So the Church is charged with safeguarding the deposit of truth and preaching God's law. It is also entrusted with the treasury of support necessary for man to believe the truth, receive God's law, put it into practice, and achieve perfection.

These treasures include: sanctifying grace, the sacraments, preaching, and various special, personal graces. After the initial grace—what I will term the "social" grace—whereby we are admitted into the Church by being baptized, grace after grace flows ceaselessly into our soul through these living waters of baptism. And it all comes to us from the Church. So how can you expect them not to hate the Church, those enemies of God, those who say: "I will not serve," those who are intelligent but refuse to believe, those who have a heart but refuse to obey, how can you expect them not to hate the Church with a bitter and persistent hatred, because they know only too well how much the Church hurts their cause?

#### IV.—DUTIES TOWARDS THE CHURCH

Let me now describe three spheres of duty incumbent on all Christians, on all religious, but most especially incumbent on daughters of the Assumption. The three duties of every member of our Congregation towards the Church with regard to the truth are studying, teaching and spreading the Gospel.

##### Study

Whether, my Sisters, you are very intelligent or not so intelligent, it is your duty to expand what intelligence you have to its full capacity in order to become soldiers of truth, trumpeters of truth! “*Nemo dat quod non habet*; you cannot give what you don’t have”<sup>187</sup>. You cannot transmit truth to other souls, save in the measure that you yourselves possess it. It is criminal to set yourselves up as teachers, as they do in certain convents, without being thoroughly acquainted with the truth. False notions have paved the way for many to lose their faith by providing our enemies with plenty of ammunition to attack us. They were wrong in using them to draw conclusions against the faith, but they were justified in rejecting such propositions that seemed to come from Catholicism because they were in fact untrue. So woe to the religious Sister who dares claim to be an instructress when she doesn’t know what she is talking about! Lots of religious do so and it’s a real crime.

Let me repeat today that the needs are great. The Church is calling upon you to fight; your mission is particularly concerned with minds. The great evil of our times is that the truth has faded. So it would be criminal on your part not to stretch your intellect to capacity, not to furnish it with all the arms necessary to fight and to win. Let it therefore be a matter of rigorous obligation towards the Church that every daughter of the Assumption must study hard and enrich her mind. Of course, you must take care not to allow knowledge to puff you up, as the Apostle reminds us (1 Cor 8:1); but I do wish you to become instruments of the truth.

\*\*\*It is so essential nowadays to be firmly grounded and established on truth, as St. Paul puts it, “*In fide fundati, et stabiles, et immobiles a spe evangelii*; True to your faith, grounded in it, firmly established in it—immovable in the hope of the Gospel” (Col 1:23). If you wish to carry out the work of the Assumption, you must study. I give you strict orders to do so because you are soldiers of the Church. I exempt those of you who, for one reason or another, are employed elsewhere than in the class-room and are taken up with all the practical matters which have to be attended to. I exempt also those who, owing to sickness or fatigue, have to rest from your

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<sup>187</sup> This an ancient Latin phrase. Albert the Great uses it in one of his works (*De sophisticis elenchis* [In Aristotelis libros Elenchorum] - LLT-B-liber: 2, tractatus 2, cap. 6, pag. 678, col. 2, linea 44), as do many others, including Bonaventure and Duns Scotus. Something similar can be found in St. Thomas, *Errores contra Gracecorum* (Albert the Great & On Aristotle’s Organon & CPL & bk. 2, tract. 2, chap. 6, pag. 678, col. 2, line 44)



labors. Apart from these cases, you must bear in mind these words, “the Kingdom of Heaven is like the head of a household who can bring from his storeroom both the new and the old” (Mt 13:52), signifying what is contained in the Old and the New Testaments. You have a similar task to perform. You must constantly work hard to discover the teaching that is most fitting and applicable to the needs of the present time.

A century or two ago, whenever a priest died who had been considered talented, his sermons were carefully preserved and later they were given again. What was the result? The Revolution! These sermons were worthless—all the juice had been sucked out of them. The retailing of truth is something which has to be done over and over again. A good teacher knows how to attune her teaching to those who are actually listening to her. The conferences of Monsieur de Frayssinous<sup>188</sup> did a lot of good; but that wouldn’t be the case today. Times have changed—needs are different—the battlefield has shifted. The same applies to Fr. Lacordaire, prodigious orator though he was. We have to change our tactics. With the exception of certain Fathers of the Church, immortal writers like St. Augustine, St. John Chrysostom, and Bossuet, this is a universal law—and even they said things in a way which wouldn’t go down today.

So you must study antiquity. You must delve into the depths of this vast mine of knowledge which the wisdom of our forefathers has placed at your disposal. You must absorb its contents; you must re-think it; you must not only memorize it but understand it. Then you must mould this solid mass of ancient material into modern shape; you must put new clothing on ancient truths. *Non nova sed nove*; not something new but experienced in a new way. Were you to change the substance of your teaching, you would no longer be teaching the changeless truth; we are simply called to present it in a way that it is understood. And none but Our Lord’s words are applicable to all times and to all situations. The Gospel will always provide sublime answers for every need of the human soul.

#### **The Apostolate**

Finally, my Sisters, you are bound to spread the Gospel. You must make sure that the truth fills your conversations. You must become apostles to everyone you meet. God’s law can be explained in so many ways. So many pages have been written about words first spoken in the Garden of Eden or from the summit of Mount Sinai. Your special obligation is to preach obedience to God’s law, that is, to teach people how to observe it intelligently. Underlying the law of God, there is one great notion to which your life must bear witness, the theme of duty.

Our duties towards God derive from God’s rights. Since God is

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<sup>188</sup> Denis-Antoine-Luc, comte de Frayssinous (1765–1841) was a French prelate, statesman, orator, and writer. He owes his reputation mainly to the lectures on dogmatic theology, known as the conferences of Saint Sulpice, delivered in the church of Saint Sulpice, Paris, from 1803 to 1809, to which admiring crowds were attracted by his lucid exposition and by his graceful oratory.

entitled to command us, we are obliged to obey him.

This fundamental principle of divine law we must stoutly maintain, as opposed to the theory of independence whereby duty is for duty's sake—like Victor Hugo advocates art for art's sake. To do our duty for the sole purpose of satisfying our conscience is patently absurd. What is conscience where there is no sanction? Would there be a sanction were there no authority? And what authority could there be, save the almighty authority of God himself? But all this is being forgotten. It is imperative for us to proclaim the clear and rigorous obligation of duty—and we preach this best by the very life we lead. Here I touch upon the supernatural order. “*Sine me nihil potestis facere*; Separated from me you have no power to do anything” (Jn 15:5). And elsewhere we read, “*Deus est enim qui operatur in vobis et velle et perficere pro bona voluntate*; It is God who works in you, both to will and to accomplish, according to his own loving purpose” (Phil 2:13). It is impossible to keep God's law without the help of grace.

There is still more for you to do—and here I come to your very special obligation as daughters of the Assumption. Notice that fewer and fewer of our contemporaries have any idea of what it means to aspire to perfection. If you have any relations with people today, even the best of them, you have seen how much a Catholic outlook has been destroyed. I need not tell you that unpleasant remarks get passed about you—sometimes even to me. The world judges you harshly. There are two ways to conduct yourselves in the face of such attacks: the un-Christian reaction would be acrimonious self-justification; the other, to which you are obliged, consists in resolving to live up to the height of your calling to holiness and making it loved, understood and appreciated by the example you set. Believe me, this is the most effective of sermons. “*Verba movent, exempla trahunt*; Words move—deeds compel.” Remember this in your dealings with one another, with your pupils, and with the outside world. Let your virtues be the most effective means of serving the Church and of showing her your love.

You have your role to play in the distribution of God's grace. The fruit of the sacraments are there at the disposal of religious. Confession does you good. But who is responsible for the follow-up? You are! You attend an annual retreat. The preacher's words shake your soul to its foundations—that's excellent! But who will interpret these exhortations, who will shed light on the more obscure passages, who will draw out the practical consequences? This is where you come in—and you must be deeply aware of what you are doing. Who is going to inspire a sense of reverence? Once again, it is you! How useful a sense of reverence is for everyone, provided you inspire in others authentic reverence, reverence that is enlightened, and not the kind of reverence as most people today understand it. Such authentic reverence is what you must pass on to your students.

#### **Conclusion**

So here are the three great services you are obliged to render to the

Church: 1° studying the truth and, in certain circumstances, teaching the truth, the word that comes from the apostles; 2° the example of obedience to God's law, an intelligent obedience, a profound sense of duty, the Christian virtues, and a genuine desire to become perfect; 3° the use of the supernatural means that are at your disposal.

To achieve the aims you are setting for yourselves as soldiers of the Church, you must overcome the Revolution with anti-revolutionary weapons. The Revolution is founded on pride—attack it with humility. It is founded on willfulness—attack it with obedience. Against Satan who wishes to destroy the Kingdom of Christ, it is yours to uphold the supernatural order. (Beware of the school of naturalism with its 'good intentions' and 'bad breath'.) You must fight against this trend of naturalism; rather adopt a divine outlook, look for the divine order in the truth. Yours it is to raise the level of human conduct. Here is your golden opportunity for preaching to God's Church by means of the catechism, by your teaching, by your involvement in student organizations, and by your relationships with people. Trying to raise the level of behavior must be a constant effort on your part—by whatever you say, by whatever influence you exert. Look, you must begin by raising people's hearts. They are slipping away, being corrupted day by day! Watch them rolling down the slope like loose stones detached from the mountain-side and thrown into the torrent—broken into pieces, polished by the current, and reduced to nothing but grains of sand when they arrive at the seashore!

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## *Suffering with the Church*

*Closing sermon of a retreat to the Religious of the Assumption  
August 24, 1860*

Let me present you with something fundamental to think about, something we owe to the Church, the way we should love it. I am not going to talk about the current difficulties the Church is facing. Certainly for a worthy daughter of such a mother, there would be enough to get her concerned, but on one condition, that she would be able to forget herself.

Amid all these tragic events, the sufferings of the head of the Church, this stream of revolutions that arise continually, I come across individuals totally preoccupied with themselves, groaning over what they, personally, have to suffer. They say: "Such and such a superior does not understand me"—"my confessor is too abrupt"—"nobody seems to care what happens to me."

Would you like to know what I think of them? Well, I think they're a lot of stupid little scatter-brains. I say this with all the respect I have for you, but also because it's the truth and I mean it.

Had we a little faith in our heart, all these trials would dissolve into thin air when we consider what the Church is going through. When silly little things upset me—you know I have mine just as you do—I will tell you simply, I see it as a golden opportunity to offer it up to our Blessed Lord who is being crucified at this very moment! It is a mistake to imagine there is no connection between the infinitely small and the very great. Christ's vicar is suffering—so ought I to be suffering. It's a privilege, for it reminds me I'm a Catholic. The servant is not above his master, nor a disciple above his teacher.

*“Omne gaudium existimate, fratres mei, cum in tentationes varias incideritis;* Consider yourselves fortunate, my brothers, when you encounter various trials,” thus St. James exhorts the faithful (Jas 1:2). Do you have anything to say after that? If only you put these words into practice, how easy your superiors' task would become, how shorter your confessions would be! They would provide you with ample scope for meditation. You would have no more time to think about yourself, you'd be too busy thinking about the Church. You would be happy to have something to endure for Jesus Christ. It would be for his Bride, the Church. Let this be the product of your retreat. It would be the best way to sweep from your souls a ton of little troubles.

Excuse the expression, but “let all of this become for me ‘blessed bread’. If one of the sisters gets on my nerves, treats me with scant consideration, she isn't tormenting me half as much as Garibaldi<sup>189</sup> is tormenting the King of Naples. My superior has given me a painful, urgent order. Is this going to make me suffer as much as Pope Pius XI must have suffered when he had to flee to Gaeta<sup>190</sup> or to some other place one day.” You must embrace all these situations with great joy: *“Omne gaudium existimate, fratres mei, cum in tentationes varias incideritis.”*

You will find happiness in temptation, sorrow and trial. If you are convinced of this, if you are filled with the genuine feelings of daughters of the Church, then all your sorrow will be turned into joy. You will be “joyfully sad” to be able to bear witness to the Church you love and to suffer with her. You will welcome pain, contradiction and distress, in your

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<sup>189</sup> The Expedition of the Thousand was an event of the Italian Risorgimento that took place in 1860. A corps of volunteers led by Giuseppe Garibaldi sailed from Quarto, near Genoa, and landed in Marsala, Sicily in order to conquer the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, ruled by the Bourbons. The expedition was a success and concluded with a plebiscite that brought Naples and Sicily into the Kingdom of Sardinia, the last territorial conquest before the creation of the Kingdom of Italy Eugénie on 17 March 1861.

<sup>190</sup> During the year of revolutions (1848) which began in Sicily, all Europe was ablaze and Pius was faced with demands, both liberal and nationalist, much beyond what he had been prepared to grant. Eventually he was forced into exile in Gaeta.

longing to resemble more closely that Church which is the bride of your Savior. Let me leave you in the hope that you have taken this resolution.

After all, what I'm telling you is nothing more than the catechism. What is baptism? It is a sacrament which makes us children of God and of the Church. Therefore, learn to feel like your father and mother. Your Mother suffers, then suffer with her. This is but the corollary of our first sacrament whereby we are reborn and made citizens of heaven. So this community will be the happiest, the most agreeable, the most joyfully holy of all communities. The sufferings of the Church fill us with interior gladness, and will allow us to say with Isaiah, "*Ecce in pace amaritudo mea amarissima*; Behold my bitterness is bitter—but therein I find peace" (Is 38:17).

In the midst of all trouble, whether difficulties in prayer, the drudgery of daily observance of the Rule, being annoyed with my fellow-religious, unjust orders, failure with my students, or unfounded judgments made of me, etc., etc., my God, I will be take pleasure in having something to offer you. After all, this is the happiest attitude to adopt in life. What does life consist in? Not much, St. James tells us, "*Vapor est ad modicum parens, et deinceps exterminabitur*—It's a puff of smoke—appearing for a moment, then being blown away" (Jas 4:15) and the whole Bible is filled with similar comparisons. Look at the railway. Watch the steam issuing from the locomotive. See how it envelops the landscape, but before touching down, it's all gone. For me that's an image of life: there are times of happiness, times of sorrow—but it all passes so quickly. In these sad times you must unite your little efforts to the struggles of the great saints for the sake of the Church. There must be soldiers manning the ramparts of Jerusalem, protecting the Church from frontal attack. But what goes on behind the walls is of equal importance. Tears must be shed to appease the heavens. Comparing what the Church suffers with what you suffer, just be happy. Am I wishing you many trials and many tears? No, but I do wish that each of you bear as much as you can, to the extent of your love and to the extent of how well you understand the things of the spirit and the ways of God, so that, refined *quasi per ignem*—as in fire—one day you will form the better portion of the triumphant Church in heaven. Amen.

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## ***The History of the Church***

*Reflections on a book by Abbé Darras<sup>191</sup> entitled*

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<sup>191</sup> Abbé Jean-J.-Epiphane Darras (1824-1878) was a priest of the diocese of Troyes, an historian, seminary professor and author.

**Of interest to Young People**

This book strikes me as being particularly suitable for young Catholics who have recently completed their classical studies. Apart from our big cities where, it is to be hoped, adequate intellectual guidance is readily available at this moment of their lives, intelligent young men of eighteen or twenty, beginning to be aware of their own ability and filled with the thirst for knowledge, waste valuable time because there is no one to guide them on their way. They search in vain for real mentors; their minds are not yet sufficiently mature to stand on their own. Take a young man, one full of faith, gifted with a fertile intellect and a heart loyally attached to the Church. He sees God's truth being attacked from all sides—and he longs to do something. If only he knew at least how to refute the errors he hears day in and day out! He would like to engage in pro-Christian propaganda as some lay Christian are capable of doing today. Well, to such a young man I could make no warmer recommendation than to read Abbé Darras. He provides an arsenal of information. He provides more than this—he provides the most helpful initiation to all intellectual work: a carefully designed plan of studies, second to none in its usefulness and quality. *Filia temporis veritas*; Truth is the daughter of time. Truth unrolls itself with the passing of years. And as History unrolls the treasures of Christian teaching, I can't say how many new and vast horizons reveal themselves to our view! Church history is the history of that portion of humanity who have always retained the truth, for whom all times were made, and for whom divine knowledge offers genuine solutions to all human problems.

At this time of their life when these young men feel the hot blood coursing through their veins, they also experience an onrush of intellectual curiosity. Their virtue may have remained intact, but how can we help longing to provide solid guidance to quench the thirst of this consuming passion? Their mind needs to be solidly nourished. And unless they are to be plunged into the realms of evil, they must be shown the way to the heights of what is good, what is beautiful and what is true.

For it is not sufficient to have ploughed through twenty or thirty volumes of Church History in order to learn all there is to be known. No, one needs to stop at every moment, at every stage of this march of peoples, and reflect on all the problems which keep on cropping up. You can't just rapidly pass from page to page, and expect to absorb the lot. Each page is filled with facts, affirmations and denials, more or less developed. Pen in hand, you must sift the material and extract the essential. At times the truth stands out as clear as daylight; here one must extract undeniable truths. At other times it is difficult to see your way, so you must advance patiently and prudently, but with dogged persistence. Underline passages by all means,

but ask yourself questions as you go along. It is said that that Bossuet's Bibles and St. Augustine's Commentaries were smothered in notes. So I would like this young man I am thinking of, this young man condemned to the kind of solitary study which Monsieur de Bonald<sup>192</sup> describes as both requiring and creating genius, I would like him to deface and massacre his Church History text book by scrawling all over it. Let him wrestle with it in hand to hand combat, if I can use that expression. Having read it once, let him read it all over again in order to identify errors, insufficient conclusions, anything that might be missing. Such a fundamentally sound book will enrich his memory, strengthen his judgment, and it will fan the flame of his enthusiasm for God's cause, which seems to be so seriously lacking in our day.

This, then, is what I think of this work of Monsieur l'Abbé Darras: it is the most valuable guide available for young Catholics condemned to completing their studies in isolation, but determined to complete them, come what may.

#### **The Advantage of Historical Method**

True knowledge is acquired not only by a more or less ordered exposition of truths which take place one after the other and are related to one another. When God chose to reveal himself to man, he took, if I might say it thus, the historical approach because it was easier for most people to understand. Take, for example, the Sacred Scriptures: look at the place historical narratives play. Both the Old and the New Testaments are filled with them. History is, to the human mind, the most effective way of conveying truth, by the presentation of facts.

Truth itself is a fact; revelation is a fact, as is creation, the fall of man, his redemption. They are all facts. The mission of Jesus Christ is the greatest of all facts, to which the Church bears perennial witness. By nature, man more easily grasps historical facts than theological systems and their intricate studies. Heaven forbid that I should demote theology, the science of sciences, by comparing it unfavorably with history. All I am saying is that this young man—who, in the absence of a mentor, has to manage on his own will be far safer studying history than studying any amount of learned dissertations on ancient or modern theology.

For although this young man appears to be studying nothing but the course of the ages, is he not thereby enriching himself with a very

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<sup>192</sup> **Louis-Gabriel-Ambroise, viscount de Bonald** (1754-1840), a political philosopher and statesman who, with the French Roman Catholic thinker Joseph de Maistre, was a leading apologist for Legitimism, a position contrary to the values of the French Revolution and favoring monarchical and ecclesiastical authority.

comprehensive culture? Does not Bellarmine<sup>193</sup>, in a text placed at the beginning of his polemic works, if I'm not mistaken, point out that the development of heresy leads logically to the clearer exposition of Catholic truths, promulgated by Councils and sovereign pontiffs?

Notice. We read how God's unity had to be defended against paganism and Gnosticism; then the Trinity against Arians and the Macedonians<sup>194</sup>. Nestorius and Eutyches<sup>195</sup> appear on the stage only to be anathematized, each for attacking the Incarnation from a different point of view. Donatus<sup>196</sup> introduced, if I may say so, the question of the Church; Pelagius, that of grace. Later in the course of history these various errors would become the underpinning of Protestantism.

Nowadays we are witnessing the absolute negation of the supernatural. It would seem that God, having taken possession of the world through Jesus Christ, is now being expelled by a radical revolt of men inspired by Satan's own revolt.

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### *The Feast of All Saints*

*Nîmes, 1878*

*to the students of the Collège of Nîmes*

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<sup>193</sup> St. Robert Bellarmine (1542-1621) was an Italian Jesuit and a cardinal. He was one of the most important figures in the Counter-Reformation. He was a professor of theology and later rector of the Roman College. Bellarmine supported the reform decrees of the Council of Trent. He was canonized in 1930 and named a Doctor of the Church.

<sup>194</sup> **Macedonianism**, also called the **Pneumatomachian heresy**, a 4th-century Christian heresy that denied the full personality and divinity of the Holy Spirit. According to this heresy, the Holy Spirit was created by the Son and was thus subordinate to the Father and the Son. (In Orthodox Christian theology, God is one in essence but three in Person—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who are distinct and equal.) Those who accepted the heresy were called Macedonians but were also and more descriptively known as Pneumatomachians, the “spirit fighters.”

<sup>195</sup> At various times, Eutyches of Constantinople (c. 380-c.456) taught that the human nature of Christ was overcome by the divine, or that Christ had a human nature but it was unlike the rest of humanity. He maintained that Christ was *of* two natures but not *in* two natures: separate divine and human natures had united and blended in such a manner that although Jesus was *homoousian* with the Father, he was not *homoousian* with man. The response to Eutychianism resulted in the Fourth Ecumenical Council in Chalcedon in 451.

<sup>196</sup> Donatism was a schism in the Church of Carthage named after the Berber Christian bishop Donatus Magnus (d. 355) that existed in the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries. The Donatists claimed the Christian clergy must be faultless for their ministry to be effective and their prayers and sacraments to be valid.



“*Ut sit Deus omnia in omnibus*—so that God may be all in all” (1 Cor 15:28).

Such is the reward of all the saints. For them God is all in all, the fulfillment of all their longings. The days of combat being accomplished, they are summoned to their everlasting crown. Let us consider how happy they are. Let us begin to appreciate how the eternal Trinity becomes “all in all” for all his saints; *Ut sit Deus omnia in omnibus*. The Father bestows a more perfect being in them. The Son envelops them in the radiance of his infinite light. The Holy Spirit fills them with the delights of his love and thus they become inextricably united to the divinity. *Ut sit Deus omnia in omnibus*.

### **I.—The Father conveys to the saints an incomparable perfection of being**

To the Father is more particularly attributed the work of creation. In the Book of Revelation we see the Son represented through the figure of a lamb, whereas the Father is especially represented as seated on his throne, surrounded by millions of angels and saints. “And he who sat on the throne said: “Behold, I make all things new; *et dixit qui sedebat in throno: ecce nova facio omnia.*” (Rv 21:5). This renovation of all things does not apply to the angels. It applies to the elect who are renewed. How? Listen to St. Paul, “*seminatur corpus animale, surget corpus spiritale*; What is sown a natural body rises a spiritual body” (1 Cor 15:44). This body was meant to be incorruptible. Sin had condemned it to corruption, but by God’s grace it has become the body of a saint. “*seminatur in corruptione, surget in incorruptione; seminatur in ignobilitate, surget in gloria*; It was sown in corruption—it rises incorrupt. It was sown in disgrace—it rises in glory” (1 Cor 15:43).

But if this is what happens to the body, what about the soul? The soul, for its part, had fallen because of sin to the lowest possible degree of sickness, weakness, disgrace. “*Seminatur in infirmate, surget in virtute*; it is sown in weakness; it shall rise in power (1 Cor 15:43). What a transformation!—it is that of having become perfect. Do we not feel the difference when, having been sick, we are restored to health? It is the same with the soul; it has its periods of sickness and of vitality. But when it gets to heaven, God will endow it with an altogether superior vitality, a divine vitality. Its faculties will be expanded, perfected, divinized. And who will have accomplished this prodigy? The Creator of all things who will bring about a new creation for his elect and will renew everything within them. “*Ecce nova facio omnia*; Behold, I make all things new”, he who is all things in all.

Remember, however, that this prodigy is reserved for the elect. On the one hand, there are the saints—to them is reserved the munificence of

divine liberality. On the other hand, there are the damned—those for whom, according to Scriptures, are reserved the most frightful torments. Look up, and contemplate the happiness of the elect; then look down and get some idea of suffering of the damned. Now it's up to you to choose.

## II.—The Word gives his light to the elect

The Word that was from the beginning, through whom everything was made, eternal like the Father, was the light that enlightened everyone who came into the world. This light shines upon us here below, but only in the measure of our eyes' weakness. It shines on us through faith. It continually increases in intensity, like that moment after night comes to an end and the first rays of the dawn appear. But the eyes of our soul will never experience the full light of day in this life. Here below we can enjoy no more than “a glimpse of glory; *inchoatio quaedam gloriae*”<sup>197</sup>. Let us be content with this. Here below we have God's word, accommodated to our weakness by Revelation and the teaching of the Church. How different things will be when we get to our homeland!

The One who is God from God, Light from Light, True God from True God”, he it is who dazzles the Saints with his brightness. God the Father had given them more perfect eyes to see and they see, they contemplate this more abundant light of truth. For our soul light consists in understanding the truth. The Word, the eternal pronouncement of God, presents himself to their gaze—and in his light, in his eternal light, they see the light that suits their needs. “*Signasti super nos lumen vultus tui, Domine, dedisti laetitiam in corde meo*; Lord, you have shone the light of your countenance upon us—you have filled my heart with joy” (Ps 4:7 Vulgate). And what do they see? They behold the happiness of the saints; they marvel at the company to which they have been raised. They admire the royal vesture in which they themselves are now clad. Above all, they admire God's own glory and everything this glory offers them: its drunken delights, its rapture, its contemplation. Yes, they are fully satisfied, “*Satiabor, cum apparuerit gloria tua*; Lord, I shall be satisfied when thy glory appears” (Ps 16:15 Vulgate).

To see God, to look at God, such is the happiness of the elect. We may admire a picture, a statue, a portrait, a panorama—but what are these compared to God: to his nature, his attributes, his power, his justice, his goodness? “And we shall see him as he actually is; *Videbimus eum sicuti est*” (1 Jn 3:2). No more clouds, no more shadows, no more puzzles or enigmas. We will contemplate him in his light itself: “*Videbimus eum sicuti est.*” O thou eternal truth! The joy of contemplating You will make your saints happy for ever and ever! And it won't be from afar off that we behold thee. You will dwell in us: “*Ut sit Deus omnia in omnibus.*” Now let us

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<sup>197</sup> cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *In Ps 30, n. 16* (Thomas Aquinas&On Psalm 30&Migne&#16)

listen some more.

### III.—The Holy Spirit conveys to us the perfection of love

How do you feel when you give your mother a hug? You love her so much that you long to identify yourself with her; unfortunately you cannot, because your body is distinct from hers.

But God is a pure spirit, so your soul can become attached to him so closely as to form but one spirit: “*Qui adhaeret Domino, unus spiritus est*; he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit” (1 Cor 6:17). This attachment to God, inaugurated here below by the grace of Our Lord, can never be fully consummated until we reach our heavenly home. There will our whole being become renewed, expanded, fortified by God the Father Almighty. There will we be enlightened by the glorious splendor of divine truth. The Lamb himself will be our light. We will be capable of far more intense activity, of far deeper thought, of far more ardent love. We will better be able to see God in all his beauty. We will long to approach that beauty with incomparable intensity.

Such a loving union would be beyond our human capacity. But that which already takes place here below through the love of God, conferred upon us by the Holy Spirit, will reach its perfect completion “when God will be all in all; *Ut sit Deus omnia in omnibus*.” “Ah,” exclaim the saints, “my God, how wonderful you are! And who can imagine what your light will reveal of Infinite perfection! But what can I do to attain you?”

Already, something of the mysterious has taken place here below. Of ourselves we are incapable of love, but God communicates his love to us by bestowing upon us the Holy Spirit: “*Charitas Dei diffusa est in cordibus nostris per Spiritum Sanctum qui datus est nobis*; The love of God has been poured out into our hearts by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us” (Rom 5:5). But in heaven, what barrier will remain between God and us, save the distinction between creator and creature? God will come to dwell within us. There will be in us a being enlarged, a vision flooded with light, a heart turned white-hot with love! In other words, God has become “all in all” for every one of his saints. You wish to love? Then receive God’s own love. You wish to burn with love? Then receive the fire of the Holy Spirit. You wish, in your rapture, to become but one with God? No matter how deeply you delve into your own heart, God will delve deeper yet...in order to love you more, and in order to teach you how to be united with him, “*Ut sit Deus omnia in omnibus*.”

Moreover, besides what can be called the “common happiness” of heaven, the Holy Spirit gives each his own particular recompense. And there will be three very special crowns: for those who were teachers of truths, for martyrs and for virgins, because these, according to St. Thomas,

will have fought the longest and most decisive battles<sup>198</sup>.

And for how long? Forever! This is why Jesus Christ, having spoken of poverty, the tears and the persecutions his followers would have to endure, adds, “*Gaudete et exultate*; Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is very great in heaven” (Mt 5:12).

“What the Scriptures tell us,” exclaims Bourdaloue, “is not a mere ‘perhaps’—it is a certitude!”<sup>199</sup> Here is a reward upon which we can depend; the rewards of this life can never be so. Here is a superabundant reward; those of this life prove to be disappointing because they are so shallow. Here is an everlasting reward, awaiting us where eternity reigns. So go toward God. Ask him to become your “all in all.” With a hope that will prove no delusion, despise this world and work your passage to heaven, there to possess him who will be all in all.

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### *The Lives of the Saints*<sup>200</sup>

Who would deny that the saints are a bit unsettling for a lot of people today? The pleasure-seekers don’t like them—they find their moral code far too severe. Nor do the Church’s enemies—because they do such credit to the Church. Nor, above all, do those “Free-Thinkers” who reject the supernatural. What a legion of opponents line up against the saints!

However, we need to stand up for them; they are an undeniable fact. Besides, they are the glory of fallen humanity; they furnish the Church with such powerful influence; they manifest so clearly the existence of the supernatural. Christians cannot abandon them to the cynical hatred of those who don’t have the ability to follow in their footsteps.

The time has come to honor them more than ever. I believe that these “Lives of the Saints” provide an increasingly necessary and effective antidote to the helplessness and hopelessness which pervade contemporary literature.

#### **Countering bad literature**

If by reading about the lives of saints we could only reduce the effect of the barrage of bad literature that is at every moment assailing human imaginations and rousing them in the most unhealthy ways, would we not already have done a great deal of good? Many readers (I am thinking of women especially) have become incapable of reading anything serious—

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<sup>198</sup> *ST Supp*, #96,1 (Thomas Aquinas&Supplement&Migne&#96, 1)

<sup>199</sup> *Sermon pour la Fête de Tous Les Saints: Sur la Récompense des Saints*, Part II (Bourdaloue& *Sermon pour la Fête de Tous Les Saints: Sur la Récompense des Saints*&Part II

<sup>200</sup> a collection that appeared in the review, *La Croix*

cheap novels have sucked them dry.

We must react against this softening of souls, caused too often by reading sordid books. Imaginations begin to drift. People spend hours in useless daydreams. They are no longer able to concentrate on their daily work. Any strenuous effort becomes out of the question as well as any resistance before the dangers and the most important struggles of life.

#### **Leading us into a supernatural world**

Reading about the Saints transports us into a new world, the world of goodness. “My God,” exclaimed St. Vincent de Paul, “how good you must be since Monsieur de Genève is so good”<sup>201</sup>! With very few exceptions, this reflection of God’s goodness shines in the lives of the saints. It is the attractiveness of Christ himself, of whom, during his life on earth, it was said, “No one has ever spoken like this man” (Jn 7:46).

The same can be said, albeit to a far lesser degree, about the saints. The Son of Man was lifted up on the Cross, the supreme symbol of goodness, by which he drew all things to himself. But look at the early Christian martyrs. Though frequently victims of popular fury, they nonetheless—from the stake, from the scaffold—from the sword and from the jaws of wild beasts in the bloody amphitheater—attracted thousands to the cause of Christ. Hundreds of people at a time would ask to be put to death after the execution of one single martyr. God gave his witnesses the power to be loved and imitated by granting them such goodness that contrasted with the cruelty of the onlookers’ overlords, to the hatred of others, and to an egoism incapable of believing any kind of such unselfishness possible.

Yes, it is goodness which conquers souls, which encourages them to do good after having uprooted them from evil. Look at those saints who were even kind to animals. The fascination they exercised over beings without reason can hardly be explained other than by the superhuman power of their own goodness.

So much for the effects of their goodness—but where must we look for its cause, if not in their sense of humility, the consciousness of their own shortcomings that made them merciful towards others, but also in the knowledge of how patient and kind Jesus Christ had been to them? They did not become saints as soon as God started bestowing special favors on them, but they did so eventually out of gratitude when they recognized the Savior’s ongoing benevolence of their behalf.

#### **Models to be proposed**

One of the greatest triumphs of the Church has been to show forth the ideal of the great, the beautiful and the just in the wonderful figures of those of its children whom it selects for people to admire and to invoke. This is a secret possessed by none other than the one true Church, the

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<sup>201</sup> “Monsieur de Genève” refers to St. Francis de Sales, bishop of Geneva.

spouse of Christ. Where outside the Church can we find the memory of men and women who died hundreds of years ago, and are still the object of pious and tender affection? Their memory lingers and is maintained through the generations as a never-fading fragrance. We call upon them, we beg their aid from their place in heaven where they obtain rich favors from God on our behalf. They inspire us to lift up our eyes and cultivate hope in us. Their help can be experienced in that supernatural providence whereby God sees to the needs of Christians, like the other providence by which he sees to the needs of all men and the entire universe.

And it is impossible to penetrate these upper regions without being overcome by a tremendous feeling of joy, enthusiasm and respect at what God has made out of human clay, distorted by sin, but reshaped into a new creation through the blood of his Son. This Son is the perfect man. It pleased the Father to make present in this object of all his love the fullness of all perfection, *omnem plenitudinem* (Col 1:19). And when Jesus Christ gathered up in his divine Person every conceivable goodness to an unparalleled degree, he seems to dip into his heart and scatter the grains of this goodness on the poverty of men to partake of in such a way that each receives a portion of goodness sufficient to turn him or her into a saint. Each saint, though having received a different portion, will become perfect, but each will reproduce a different aspect, to a different degree, of the perfection to be found in the universal model, that is, as Bossuet puts it, from this man who is Jesus Christ.

Study the lives of the saints as much as you please—you will be forced to recognize this phenomenon: that no two saints resemble one another one-hundred-percent, yet each one bears a striking resemblance to Jesus Christ. They all resemble in some way the divine head of this great family unknown up till now. All of them reproduce something of him: humble, courageous, meek, loving, zealous, unselfish, ready to give of themselves in sacrifice, to accept suffering and death with equanimity. In short, they all reflect the image of him who is their perfect, ideal and unique prototype.

#### **Let there be saints**

It would be a dangerous temptation to imagine that the saints “have had their day,” that the blood which sowed the seeds of sanctity on Calvary has become diluted, and that consequently it would be futile to prepare saints from the up-and-coming generation. There are, no doubt, bleak periods in human history when saints are conspicuous by their absence, *defecit sanctus*, (Ps 11:2 Vulgate), periods when we must cry to heaven with greater energy. Thus cried the Psalmist! But may God always raise up courageous servants who will never bow the knee to Baal (1 Kgs 19:18). It happened in the Old Testament; it has happened, and will continue to happen, in the New....

And since every age has produced its saints, its own special kind of

saints suited to the times, suited to the falsehoods which had to be combatted, suited to the human misery which had to be relieved, and suited to the ideals which had to be restored, I entertain no doubt that the Church, severely tested at this time, has its saints in the making. So it was after the Reformation—so it will be after the Revolution. The Reformation is not yet dead, but our saints will outlive it. The Revolution too will experience its decline. So make way for the saints in the making...who may already be here. The Church, ever the same Church, passes through different phases. It is afflicted today, tomorrow it will give birth to its saints—of this we can rest assured.

But a common effort may prepare the way for this new state of things, i.e., we can all try to imitate the saints. And to imitate them we must know them. This is why these lives of the saints are about to be published. Our valiant predecessors! May reading about them stir up noble desires to tread the paths they trod. May God guide our pens. After we have produced our imperfect sketches, other erudite men will delve deep into the annals of our Christian past. May a greater love of the saints foster a greater zeal for holiness. The hope of reaching such heights, with God's help, is not impossible for Christians!

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## *Commemoration of the Dead*

1878

*to the high school students at Nîmes*

One of the most loving signs of the Church's divine mission is our commemoration of the dead. The Church sees to everything. The pleasure-seeker, the worshipper of this world, avoids thinking about death. The Church escorts the mortal remains to her churches and buries them in her cemeteries. Thinking of death can be salutary. Modern society places its cemeteries as far away as possible. They can't stand such unpleasant reminders. But, as for us, let us think of the dead: 1° in order to pray for them. 2° in order to pray to them; 3° in order to give ourselves a healthy reminder of what awaits us.

### **I.—Let us pray for the dead**

Who are these dead people for whom we have to pray? People we have known, loved, and in some cases, people we have led into sin. Which one of us, even those who are yet quite young, does not remember some person whom we knew very well and who is no longer among us?

Where are they now? They are in hell, in purgatory, or in heaven. Charity prevents us from envisaging damnation. On the other hand, to think

of them as already enjoying heavenly bliss might be harmful because it might be exonerating ourselves from the duty of praying for them. So is it not kinder to presume, in all reverence, that they are in purgatory? This thought reminds us that we must do what we can to help them. It is, indeed, a comforting thought that we Christians have the power to extend our kindness beyond the grave.

I can be of help to them—but am I? This ought to humble my heart, reduce my pretensions, and produce some level of sensitivity. Am I not being very selfish? Here am I, preoccupied with all my affairs, with my pleasure, with my own convenience. I am abandoning them to their pain, these people for whom I falsely professed friendship, fondness and affection. Where did all these vain promises go? To oblivion and nowhere else.

Yet who are these people? Let me consider first of all my own parents, whose memory I may have maintained for a certain time: my father, my mother, their fathers and their mothers. We don't have to climb very far up the genealogical tree—we can imagine them all lying in their graves. Or can we? What has become of the ashes of the fourth and fifth generation of those who gave me birth? Apart from those of certain privileged individuals, most of the graves have been dug up, most of the bones displaced. In any case, what would remain? A handful of dust and ashes, nothing more. Let us raise our sights. These ancestors of ours had souls. Where are they? Where are the souls of all those Christian men and women who belonged to my family? Who ever thinks of praying for them? Where are the souls of my father, my mother and my closest relatives? I just don't know! Does the fact of their having been virtuous people permit me to believe they went straight to heaven? What an excuse for being lazy and negligent, wanting to place them so quickly in halls of eternal happiness so as to get rid of the duty of praying for them. On the contrary, we must pray for them, we must expiate on their behalf, precisely because we just don't know where they are. I loved this or that person very much. She may still be enduring pains beyond anything we can imagine; yet I no longer worry about her. I tend to exaggerate her virtue to deaden my anxiety, because faith is pretty weak as well.

But if this person's soul is in purgatory because of me, because I have led them into sin, because of scandals I may have committed, because of sins we may have committed together...what then? Is it not in my own interests that I should pray for this person? Do I wish her to be my accuser before the judgment-seat of God? She has already appeared before him. She has not been condemned to hell—but she may still be suffering in the flames of purgatory. She is there because I too was guilty—so the least I can do is endeavor to alleviate her pain. One day it will be my turn—how do I wish her to react? Do I wish her to rise from her bed of flames, and insist that I should suffer my share of the penalty, since I am equally responsible for the guilt? Let me cast about me with the eyes of my



memory. Let me think of all those I have known, all those who have loved me, all those to whom I could have done so much good, yet to whom I did so much harm. What a frightful responsibility is mine! What a lot I have to answer for! How much I need to call to my assistance the blood of Jesus Christ to extinguish those flames that perhaps I myself did so much to kindle!

## **II.—We must pray to the Dead**

But not all the people I knew are in purgatory. Some have already been admitted to everlasting happiness. And if these already in heaven can help me, so too can those in purgatory. The citizens of heaven will remember me in their prayers, especially if my own prayers helped to shorten their purgatory. How grateful they are for these prayers! Their gratitude matches their happiness such that it makes them not forget their friends and benefactors.

As for those still undergoing purgatorial expiation, they too can be of great help to me. For though they are no longer capable of meriting for themselves, God in his mercy permits them to intercede effectively for others. So why not seek for patrons among those souls who can do so much for me if I so wish? Look what friends I can make, if I do all I can for my part to hasten their entry into our homeland, into the welcoming arms of God! Such is the privilege of being a Christian: to pray for the souls of purgatory, and to get them to pray for me.

I've never thought of this. Well, from now onwards I'm going to do all I can for these souls in purgatory. It will put me in touch with friends I do not know but who do know me. They know I am helping them, and they won't forget it. What a pleasant and profitable deal which pays such good dividends to everybody concerned! If only my heart were large enough to empty purgatory and increase the inhabitants of heaven in countless numbers!

## **III.—The Dead must remind us of our future**

Every day, all around me, I watch people die—people I have known. Their bodies are taken to the cemetery, there to remain till the last trumpet sounds. And although I don't know when my turn will come, its coming is as certain for me as theirs was for them. O bygone generations, where are you now, and what has happened to you? Once again: are you in heaven, in purgatory or in hell? These three alternatives await me too. And though by God's mercy I hope to escape everlasting damnation, what chance is there of my going straight to heaven? What am I to do? Where am I going to look for friends when I see the dead being so neglected? But there is a sure means of insuring myself against that terrible day, a means at my disposal. Let me acquire a tender devotion for the souls in purgatory. The living may

forget me (they invariably do) but not the dead. If I have thought about them, prayed for them, suffered for them, then they will never, never forget!

Holy souls, this is the deal I propose. You are suffering in the flames of purgatory. Very well, I for my part am going to offer God, through the hands of Mary, the little I have to offer him in the way of atonement from henceforth till my dying breath. I'm going to offer it all for you, so much so that whatever merit I acquire goes to the relief of your pain. And in return, when my time comes to depart this life, whether by that time you are up in heaven or still down in purgatory, you will pray and intercede on my behalf; you will obtain mercy and pardon for me, as I have endeavored to obtain it for you. Meanwhile I will think about the sufferings you have to endure. May this salutary meditation help me to amend my own life, to diminish my own punishment, and to merit that God in his loving kindness may hasten to admit me to that abode of everlasting happiness where I am begging him to admit you. Amen.

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## **II.**

# **INSTITUTIONS**

- I. THE AUGUSTINIANS OF THE ASSUMPTION
- II. THE RELIGIOUS OF THE ASSUMPTION
- III. THE OBLATES OF THE ASSUMPTION
- IV. THE ADORER OF THE BLESSED SACRAMENT
- V. THE COLLEGE DE L'ASSOMPTION

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## I. THE AUGUSTINIANS OF THE ASSUMPTION

This section includes:

- A.—Various instructions
- B.—Fr. d’Alzons’s preoccupations from 1869-1871
- C.—Formation of young religious
- D.—Alumnates (minor seminaries)
- E.—Instructions on Religious Life

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### —A—

## VARIOUS INSTRUCTIONS

### Directives to Brother François Picard

*He was studying in Rome, not yet ordained a priest, but already entrusted with the interests of the new Order.*

*April 10, 1856*

...When you are asked to describe us, I want you to emphasize that our *raison d’être* lies somewhere between the Jesuits and the Dominicans. We wish to restore monastic customs, and we are ready to receive young men whose health would not permit them to practice Dominican austerity. Emphasize our charitable aims by describing the good works in which we intend to employ these young men. If you see Monsignor Bizzarri<sup>202</sup>, point out to him that there are excellent Christian parents who do not wish to send their sons to the Jesuits. You must also point out that we wish to help the diocesan clergy, not to compete with them, and also that our teachings are those of Rome.

If you have any requests to make, I want you to base them on the initial chapters of our Constitutions, of which you must keep a copy yourself. My own introduction to the Constitutions, which I wrote recently,

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<sup>202</sup> Cardinal Giuseppi-Andrea Bizzarri (1802-1877) was an Italian prelate in charge of the Congregation of Religious (Regular) Priests.

ought to do, by changing a word here and there<sup>203</sup>.

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*December 1, 1856*

This question of the Augustinians is playing on my mind more and more. I am reading their Constitutions with the utmost attention<sup>204</sup>. Some parts of them would suit us perfectly—others just would absolutely need to be modified. I am writing a “memorandum” on the subject which I suppose I must finish before I think of applying to Rome. If you could only come across a recent edition of their Constitutions, and post it to me with the least possible delay.

I want you to keep your ear to the ground...discreetly. Here is what you must insist on above all: an Order of Augustinians situated half way between the Jesuits and the Dominicans. The Jesuits have discarded monastic forms and practice few austerities, in order better to dedicate themselves to good works. The Dominicans go in for preaching and practice austerity while having retained monastic customs. We wish to cater to those who are attracted both to monastic forms and good works, but whose health would not stand up to great austerities. There are many young men in this day and age who would be put off by the severity of the Dominican Rule of Life, who could not assimilate the Jesuit outlook, but who are longing, nevertheless, to devote their lives to the Church of God.

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*January 7, 1857*

I would have the following observations to make in case the appointed consultor to our case asks you certain questions.

1° We wish to be called the Augustinians of the Assumption, not the French Augustinians.

2° If we do not impose great austerities, it is because, as I have told you, we wish to cater for men of modest health. The others can join the Dominicans or the Carmelites.

3° We don't wish to merge with either the Hermits or the Canons of St. Augustine. The latter seem to follow the Rule too loosely, and the former admit elements into their Constitutions which would impede us in the pursuit of much of what we intend to undertake.

4° We do insist on the practice of poverty. We regard it as

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<sup>203</sup> D'Alzon is referring here to the first draft of the Constitutions found earlier in this volume and specifically the section entitled, “Overview”.

<sup>204</sup> There was a question of our merger with the Hermits of Saint Augustine, the O.S.A. It was seriously considered more than once but definitely discarded by the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars on July 9, 1880, shortly before d'Alzon's death.

indispensable in modern times, a protestation against current practices. We are undecided as to whether we ought to own any property apart from our houses and schools. Ownership of property may expose us one day to losing our sense of poverty. On the other hand, property could be used for founding orphanages or similar good works.

5° We also insist on reciting the Office in Choir. We would prefer to have fewer houses than to abandon this practice.

6° We are particularly interested in performing social work, because we wish to remain in contact with ordinary people and as much as possible prevent their becoming demoralized.

7° And above all, we wish to develop a great devotion to the Roman Church in the minds and hearts of our contemporaries.

And such, my dear friend, must be the basis of your explanations and recommendations as you put our case to the Consultant.

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### Advice to Assumptionist Superiors, 1858

*A note of Fr. d'Alzon*

The thought of my giving advice to others when, according to certain individuals who will remain nameless, I myself am sadly lacking in wisdom, may appear outrageous. I am nevertheless entitled to speak to my brothers about the consequences of my own follies. The mistakes we make are as good an experience as any. What matters is that we learn from them. So may you at least learn how and why not to imitate me.

The first thing I have to tell you is that I do not here intend to give you a formal treatise, carefully indexed and divided into chapters. No, just a medley of observations which I think may be of service to you, but thrown together here and there when circumstances allow for them.

An Assumptionist Superior must, above all else, endeavor to make Our Lord loved and everything he loved, and in the order that he loved it. Here we have it “in a nutshell”: to love Christ, and to love what he loved. Carry this to its natural conclusion and we will find ourselves loving God and loving his holy will. We find ourselves fighting the battles Jesus Christ fought, as he fought them—in peace, gentleness, and humility.

An Assumptionist Superior must endeavor to be, in all things, another Jesus Christ. He must find his strength in praying, suffering, self-sacrifice, and in spreading the Gospel, as Jesus Christ did.

If the novitiate is to be established at Nîmes this coming month of October (1858), it is imperative that one Religious should be charged with seeing that the Rule is carried out—and he himself must be a living exemplar of the Rule. It must also be decided from the very start who is to be charged with doing what so that everything will run smoothly from the word, “go”! The novices must be occupied exclusively with observing their

Rule, with their presence in chapel, and on Sundays with giving religious instruction.

I myself must instruct the novices at least three times a week—let us say on Mondays, Wednesdays, Thursdays (and if possible, Saturdays, at 11 a.m.).

Each novice must be given a Bible and an Imitation of Jesus Christ.

In order to maintain the novitiate, the Superiors of each community must contribute an annual contribution in proportion to their available resources. We must keep a Mass register in all our houses. It must be kept in the sacristy, and one of the priests must be in charge of it.

What matters in the reception of applicants is to study their character and interior dispositions. Some need to be treated bluntly in order to force them to show themselves for what they really are. Others must be handled with kid gloves if we are to get anything out of them. How are we to attract applicants? I know of no other means than prayer.

To love much and to suffer much: this must be the motto of any Superior who aspires to engender souls for God.

By and large, we are not humble enough. We must learn to approach souls with greater tact and consideration. We must learn to meet them more than half way in their search for God.

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### **Assumption and the persecutions of the Church**

*December 2, 1861*

*to Fr. François Picard*

I don't see what use our little Congregation can be unless we commit ourselves for the cause of the Church of God. So I wish to remain on the Board of the Association of St. Francis de Sales<sup>205</sup>, unless my presence will do harm. If it is thought that the Council would enjoy greater freedom of action by my withdrawing, that's a different story. I am only too ready to compromise the Order, but I would never dream of compromising the Association by staying on the Board. So let Monsignor de Ségur

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<sup>205</sup> The Association—Society of St. Francis de Sales was founded in October 1872 by Fr. Henri Chaumont, a priest of the diocese of Paris who was personally influenced by Msgr. de Ségur. Fr. Chaumont's life and work can only be explained and understood from the perspective of the conditions in France and the world in the second part of the XIXth century. He saw parallels between his own times and those of St. Francis de Sales: time of war and insecurity, time following a council, time of questioning for the Church, time of diminution of faith and increase in atheism, time of expansionism and colonization. Therefore, the association was inspired by Francis' spirituality and example. The members of the association sought their personal sanctification and involvement in apostolic activity to address the needs of their times.

decide<sup>206</sup>...

Goodbye for now. Let us pray hard about it. I cannot abandon the notion that those of us who wish to become saints nowadays have a hundred more opportunities of so becoming than in normal times. Too bad for those who insult Our Lord, but all the better for those who stick up for him!

*December 14, 1868*

*to Mother Marie-Eugénie de Jésus*

**Affirming Convictions**

We are concerned not with opposition but with affirmation. We clearly state our Catholic convictions and we spread them. We oppose those who deny them. Too bad for whoever gets in our way!

*Le Vigan, July 13, 1876*

*to Fr. François Picard*

**When defections occur**

Yes, I'm afraid Père François<sup>207</sup> is about to leave us. Where will he go? What is to become of him? I do not think the time has yet come to forbid him to say Mass. I have little or no doubt that he is in the state of mortal sin, but I don't think the stage has yet been reached for his superiors to accept responsibility. Superiors must seek out the greatest good of the whole community rather than that of each single individual. As St. Paul says about the pagan husband and the Christian wife, "*Si discedit, discedat*; If he wishes to depart, let him depart" (1 Cor 7:15). We are no longer responsible for him. We are doing him no harm. Having warned him kindly, we must now allow him to go his own way. But we are not in a hurry to get rid of him. Had we followed this policy in the case of Sr. Marie-Louise, she would have left of her own accord and we would not have had to plaster the situation over in a manner which cannot last for long.

So under the circumstances it seems to me much better to give certain individuals a kindly and timely warning, as Fr. Vincent de Paul has given Fr. François, and as I have given Sr. Marie-Louise, and then to allow them to go their way. St. Teresa of Avila, in her *Way of Perfection*, is of exactly the same opinion. Is Fr. François committing mortal sins? It's more than likely. Are we responsible? I don't think so since we have warned him. And if he goes it will be because he chose to go. Then he will not be able to celebrate Mass. That will be his business, not ours. Oh, it is so very

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<sup>206</sup> Msgr. Louis-Gaston Ségur, a good friend of Fr. d'Alzon, was a French prelate, the author of numerous religious pamphlets and the director of many social works like the Association of St. Frances de Sales, which had been recently prohibited by the Government from holding meetings.

<sup>207</sup> Fr. Charles François, ordained in 1872, left the Congregation in 1876.



important to get rid of such individuals. But it is wiser to open the door graciously, in such a manner that they have nothing to complain about. In other words, we agree about what to do, even if we disagree about how to do it.

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—B—  
CONCERNS OF FR. D'ALZON  
1869-1871

*In the years 1869-1871, Fr. d'Alzon was taken up with the new direction, more doctrinal, that the Council was going to stamp on modern Congregations, and the more special character with which the Assumption was to be provided. He clarified the aim of the fourth vow in order to facilitate its approval by the Church and dreamed of a distinctive 'particular examen' for the Assumptionists. He gave directions to his religious on how to produce the most at the Council: the Assumption, as he said elsewhere, must be an example of the Church in full bloom. He himself would preside over the launching of this wonderful apostolic vision that characterized the last ten years of his life.*

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Quid agendum?

*Rome, November 19, 1869*

**What must we do at the Council?**

At the opening of this Council, let me collect my thoughts. How am I to benefit from the privilege of being invited to attend this universal gathering in Rome itself?<sup>208</sup> Among the many questions on the agenda there will, no doubt, be many the solutions to which will rivet my attention. But what is really on my mind is my future standing as the founder of a new religious family.

**The Holiness of the Church**

The Church finds itself face to face with humanity which, in some respect, seems to be drifting away from it. It is not up to the Church to be reconciled to human society, but to convert it, not by making concessions, but by shedding more abundant light and adopting more vigorous action. How can we hope to transform others unless we begin by transforming ourselves? We must be converted; to make saints of others, one must be a saint himself.

The Council must sanctify the world. So here is the first conclusion: it must begin by sanctifying us. Each period in history has its vices. So it is

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<sup>208</sup> He attended the Council as advisor to the Bishop of Nîmes.

our business to acquire the counteracting virtues. It is in this vitally important sense that we must be “men of our time.”

#### **Truly Catholic holiness**

The Vatican Council has one great advantage. All its precedents were made up of a majority of Eastern bishops or a majority of Western bishops (except the Council of Florence where there was a minority of any kind of bishops). This time bishops have flocked from the five continents of the earth. In this respect it will be the most universal Council ever to take place. As a result the problems of each particular country will have to yield priority to those which affect all nations—to the truly Catholic, universal problems. Therefore, all concepts of this or that country, all principles adopted by this or that nation or people, must necessarily give way. We have to take up universal principles which apply everywhere—and must abandon the others that, strictly speaking, are not.

#### **Teaching**

People from certain countries are proud of what they call “modern society”, proud of those concepts it calls its principles. To collide headlong with these so-called principles could cause tensions. But why need we bother about these so-called principles? Why not ignore them for what they are truly worth? Why not take our stand on what is true, genuine and faithful? Why not communicate unto men the superabundance of divine truth—which we alone possess because we possess Jesus Christ? “*In quo sunt thesauri sapientiae et sapientiae absconditi*; in whom are stored up all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col 2:3).

Thence the necessity of a teaching which is highly developed, but above all impregnated through and through, in all its branches with Catholic truth. Hence, another conclusion: the absolute necessity of our gaining control over the whole gamut of education, from top to bottom—from the university to the elementary school.

#### **Gathering round the Pope**

The more we find ourselves menaced with social disintegration, the closer we must gather around the center of unity. And what stupidity to think that the center of unity can possibly be subject to error? Such would, nevertheless, be the case were the Pope not infallible. However, I do not wish to discuss papal infallibility now. What I wish to consider is the Pope as the center of unity for Christian action. Around the Pope, as the center of this action, converges, no doubt, the universal episcopate, “*quos Spiritus Sanctus posuit episcopos regere ecclesiam Dei*; those whom the Holy Spirit has appointed to rule the Church of God” (Acts 20:28). Some of their connections with the Holy See might well afford to be discontinued, as being purely administrative, but only on condition that other, more essential, relationships be strengthened. Pius IX has done all he could to strengthen these fundamental relationships by assembling the Catholic hierarchy in Rome more and more frequently.

### **Religious families**

But the Pope has other means of worldwide influence at his disposal, his 'spiritual armies,' that is to say, religious families. Rome must be made to understand how much the Pope, defended by his troops, must in his turn defend them. The bishops are his primary auxiliaries; they are not the only ones. The bishops help the Pope to govern the Church. Religious are his special means of direct action when it comes to defending and extending the Church. And for their part as well, Religious must gather round the Pope; they must not allow themselves to be separated from him and they must draw their strength from his. The days are past when Religious Orders were mutilated. At certain deplorable periods of history the civil powers were able to oblige Rome to appoint a vicar general over each Religious Order in certain countries. The result was a weakening of the Orders concerned. Their central authority became ineffective. It was then easy for the Church's enemies to overthrow one citadel after another, its defenders being isolated and weak, unable to hear the voice of their primary leader.

So the need for Religious to gather round the Pope to defend the Church and the need for Religious to gather round the Pope to extend the frontiers of the Church.

### **The Assumption**

Looking at things from the point of view of our Congregation, I am wondering if we shouldn't now consider the importance of Pius IX's special request he himself made to us, that we should concern ourselves with the Church in Bulgaria and with all the branches of the wider Slavic family. Schismatic Russia is one of the gravest dangers to the Church. If ever the Tsars captured Constantinople, it would be with the prospect of capturing Rome soon—humanly speaking, what a danger!

So the papacy is steering its way between two sources of danger: the Revolution and the Eastern Schism. Our little Congregation must fight the Revolution: firstly by the holiness of our lives, then by teaching at every level and by social works which will earn us the confidence of the working classes. We must above all fight the schism: firstly, once again, by the holiness of our lives, then by our overseas missions and everything connected therewith.

### **In Conclusion**

So let me sum up. It's a question of holiness, genuine Catholic holiness; a question of teaching, in all its forms; a question of all good works capable of transforming democracy; a question of waging war on schisms through overseas missions and works capable of putting a stop to its encroachments. These are the fundamental principles of our apostolate. Let me add to this spirit, which is so essentially Catholic and on which I cannot insist too much, our steadfast fidelity to the Holy See, source of all life, center of all unity, the mainspring of all activity.

## Notes on the Vatican Council

November 1869

### The Work of the Council

The Council should aim to wage war on unbelief, rationalism, naturalism and socialism.

....on unbelief, by boldly proclaiming the doctrines of our faith.

....on rationalism, by the proclamation of the most clearly defined principle of authority, by the proclamation of papal infallibility.

....on naturalism, by insisting that happiness is to be found in a higher life and that the means of getting there have been given by Jesus Christ, Our Lord.

....on socialism<sup>209</sup>: by a new proclamation of those great social principles of which only the Church is the custodian and by preaching the principle of charity, which alone is capable of healing the wounds inflicted on a sick society marked by a spirit of selfishness, hatred and revolt.

### Role of modern Congregations

In the face of such ideas, what is the role of modern Congregations?

*To combat unbelief:*

1° affirming Jesus Christ, the leader and perfecter of our faith—and in order to preach him more effectively, we must study him more than ever;

2° devoting ourselves to teaching, in the widest sense of the word;

3° developing a zeal for preaching Jesus Christ—not only to Christians, but to non-believers, heretics, Jews, and pagans.

*To combat rationalism:*

1° showing the superiority of knowledge when it takes unchanging authority as its starting point;

2° emphasizing the necessity of strengthening the power of the Pope from a moral and intellectual point of view, insofar as his temporal and political power has begun to wane.

*To combat naturalism:*

1° beginning by seeking holiness oneself in order to preach by example;

2° then working to have Christian values spread everywhere.

There remains socialism. Here Religious Congregations come face to face with the most terrible ills. It is incumbent on Congregations to heal these ills by penetrating those most afflicted. Democracy has come to stay. We must make the best of it by devoting ourselves to all the good works that may Christianize it.

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<sup>209</sup> Fr. d'Alzon was thinking of the continental brand of socialism which was atheistic.

## **The Council and the Oblates of the Assumption**

*Rome, December 4, 1869*

*to Mother Correnson*

### **Goal of the Council**

An attentive study of its aims makes it clear that we wish above all to re-assert the supernatural order brought by Our Lord when he came to dwell among us and attacked by unbelief, (naturalism), rationalism and by socialism—this is what's wrong with the world today.

Against unbelief, we propose the principles of the faith; against naturalism, the whole supernatural order and sources of supernatural hope; against rationalism, the unshakable foundation of divine authority, strengthened by the doctrine of papal infallibility; against socialism, the more perfect concept of social principles, as conveyed by the great Christian society, the Church. So the affirmations of our faith, the transcendence of heavenly happiness and how to obtain it, the power of the reasons for our belief, and our ideal of human society: this is what the Council will take as its starting point.

### **Practical consequences**

But once the groundwork has been laid, we must draw out the consequences. Affirming our faith more vigorously means teaching it more emphatically: we must renew our studies. Our hope in the world to come in opposition to modern naturalism implies a more vibrant notion of holiness. If we acknowledge more energetically the authority of the Supreme Pontiff, we must be prepared to follow his directives more resolutely. If the social doctrine of the Church is thoroughly set before our eyes, we must see it as a light to heal society's ills. Other consequences, no less impressive, flow from our acceptance of these key principles.

### **For the Oblates**

In view of the fact that the foundation of the faith must be more firmly established, this means that Oblates must study religion more seriously in order to teach it one day and that you must develop a greater zeal to carry this flame of faith to foreign lands.

If you are to teach about the supernatural order of things, then there are certain consequences: 1° the obligation to become saints; 2° the conviction of the sublimity of their calling, which calls them to approach schismatics, heretics, Jews and pagans, and to make them saints too.

From the promulgation of papal infallibility inevitably flows: 1° the need to attach themselves wholeheartedly to this imperishable center of the Church; 2° the privilege, no less great, of serving her in order to extend the Kingdom of Our Lord.

Finally, from the promulgation of the great principles of a Christian society social teaching implies an admirable mission, if the Oblates desire to make themselves worthy of it. Be you in Europe or elsewhere, there will be

the endless work of tending intelligently to the tasks assigned to you, which in Europe will entail combating socialism, but elsewhere will mean being ready to undertake similar work wherever you are sent.

In these few works I have tried to summarize a book which is taking shape in my mind—the chapters of which are beginning to stand out clearly in my mind. I would like to call this book, *Religious Congregations and the Council*. Please pray that these ideas may develop in my mind. It seems to me that on such a topic there is great need for something good to be written.

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## The Hallmark of the Assumption

*January 29, 1870*

*to Fr. François Picard*

### A fourth vow

This is for you, for Fr. Vincent de Paul and for Mother Superior<sup>210</sup>. It appears we are having difficulty in obtaining permission to pronounce a fourth vow: that of extending Christ's Kingdom in souls. Could we not perhaps replace it by the vow of undertaking whatever tasks are requested by the Sovereign Pontiff in view of combatting the Revolution and Freemasonry, which is the great and satanic incarnation of the Revolution? In one corner of the ring stands Jesus Christ with his Church; in the opposite corner stands Satan with his Freemasonry, in other words, the Revolution. This I believe to be as plain as daylight!

So I have drawn up a "manifesto" which I think will be accepted; I will try to make sure it is. It would be an anti-Masonic association and the Assumption, small though it be, would take the same stand against the Revolution today as the Jesuits took against the Reformation three centuries ago.

### Plans for a particular examen

*January 24, 1870*

*to Mother Correnson*

My dear daughter,

I have just held a conversation which has given me much food for thought as regards our common work. Somebody who is quite serious said to me, "If your bishop dies, it will be said of him as of many bishops, that he has left no trace of his passage because he will have ruled the diocese arbitrarily, and founded no institutions." Alas, how true! If he is succeeded

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<sup>210</sup> presumably Mother Correnson

by a Gallican<sup>211</sup> bishop, what resistance will there be to his poisonous influence among the Canons, in the seminary, among diocesan intellectuals?

Well, what about you and me? If we were to die now I wonder how much of our work would remain. What principles would we have established? What cohesion would we have given to this family? I know it's only a recent foundation, but I think it is of the utmost importance to establish it firmly, in such a manner as to last.

I have ideas on the subject which I intend to express in my letters to you; so prepare yourself! I am confident that together we will be able to do something quite good, but convince yourself that you must add this question to your nightly examination of conscience: "What have I done today truly to found my Order?"

In this regard, you must study above all the lives of the saints and everything they did to organize their foundations. Be, as far as you can, the very model, if not of the entire Rule (your health does not allow this), then at least of its spirit. Do not be surprised at discovering that you have lots of nasty little faults. Find out why—and cut them down to ground level if you can't uproot them altogether.

I think I had better convoke a General Chapter of the Augustinians of the Assumption, at which I shall insist on our adopting some distinctive hallmark. St. Ignatius gave his disciples the Spiritual Exercises, one hour's daily meditation, and two daily examinations of conscience. We will have to adopt something similar....

#### **The particular examen of the Oblates**

*January 31, 1870*

*to the same*

For some time I have been preoccupied with the fourth vow our Assumptionist religious ought to take. This is what I would like to try with the Oblate Sisters: I should like to insist that every morning they should spend some of their meditation time deciding what to do during the day in order to fit themselves for the foreign missions. In the evening they would examine what they have actually done.

And here are some of the questions they could ask themselves:

- 1° What does being a religious mean to me?
- 2° In what respect am I poor, chaste and obedient?
- 3° How humble and charitable am I towards my Sisters?
- 4° How am I keeping the Rule?

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<sup>211</sup> Gallicanism consisted of three basic ideas: independence of the French king in the temporal order; superiority of an ecumenical council over the pope; and union of clergy and king to limit the intervention of the pope within the kingdom. The word was coined in the 19th century to identify the position opposing Ultramontanism, which emphasized papal authority.



5° Will I apply myself to serious study when I have the time?

6° To what extent am I prepared to sacrifice my own will and become truly unselfish?

7° With what fervor am I going to offer up my prayers and penances for the salvation of souls?

These are but suggestions put forward. But if you make sure that you make two examinations on these questions each day, one in the morning to think about what you will do and one in the evening to review what you have done during the day, emphasizing one point or another, then, I am sure, you will certainly produce good results. I am already trying it out on myself. I urge you to do likewise.

My own self-examination is reduced to the following: 1° How have I increased Christ's Kingdom within me by destroying that of the Satan in me? 2° How have I fought against Satan's Kingdom in the world by extending that of Jesus Christ?

There were certain passages in my letters to the Adorers of the Blessed Sacrament<sup>212</sup> which could be useful for you. In fact, let's just say that it's an idea of mine that you could help me to perfect, and, if you are willing to help out, I'd be ever so grateful. What I am writing to you is more important than you imagine because the draft I am sending you is intended to contain the distinctive hallmark of the Congregation of the Assumption, and I would like it to be yours as well, because I feel we are bound together in a lot of fundamental ways.

#### Explanations

*February 1, 1870*

*to the same*

Your letter dated the 29th has just arrived. I have a minute to spare, so let me reply. When I wrote to you yesterday my mind was jumbled with umpteen disconnected thoughts. I think I can express myself more clearly today. We must entertain no illusions. Human society is living under a deadly threat. It needs every help it can get to save it from the Revolution and from the Revolution crack troops, Freemasonry. I do hope the Council will do something against Freemasonry. But since so many objections are being raised to our taking the vow of dedicating ourselves to the extension of the Kingdom of Our Lord in souls, I thought that no one could prevent us (that is to say, us Religious) from changing this vow into one of performing whatever good works the Holy Father may suggest against the Revolution and against Freemasonry. Such activities must, however, be imbued with a certain spirit. And with this in view, I am going to recommend our coming General Chapter to include the following proposition, or one couched in

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<sup>212</sup> The Adorers of the Blessed Sacrament were a group of devout women brought together by Fr. d'Alzon in 1854, on whom Fr. Georges Tavard wrote a small and well-documented study. This apostolic initiative, in some ways, foreshadows the founding of the Orants of the Assumption in 1896.

similar terms:

“The Assumptionist Religious will examine his conscience twice a day, morning and evening. In the morning he will ask himself what he intends to do for the destruction of Satan’s Kingdom (in his heart and in the world about him) in order to extend the Kingdom of Our Lord Christ (in himself and in the world). In the evening he will examine what he has achieved in this respect.”

I have already indicated to you a few points on which your daughters, by using a similar examen, can prepare themselves to carry out their fourth vow.<sup>213</sup>

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### Hope for the approval of this fourth vow

*Rome, February 4, 1870*

*to Fr. François Picard*

My dear friend,

I have already spoken to you about my plans of changing *our fourth vow*. Instead of vowing to dedicate our lives to the extension of the Kingdom in souls, why not vow to undertake whatever good works the Holy Father suggests to us in view of combatting the Revolution and Freemasonry? Well, yesterday Monsignor de Lucca, the Under-Secretary of the Congregation of Regular Clergy, came to see me. Having spoken to him on various matters, I dropped a hint about our fourth vow. He replied, “In general, the Sacred Congregation disapproves of fourth vows as unnecessary, since they are no more than expressions of the general outlook of each particular Institute, but that, at first sight, I am confident an exception would be made for the vow you are proposing because it is something very distinctive and because it seems totally attuned to the present needs of the Church and of the forces against which she must fight.” As he was leaving, he assured me we could count on his help. And if ever I wished to speak to him again, I was to ask him to come and see me because our discussions could be more friendly and informal.

### Trying out the examen

*February 7, 1870*

*to Fr. E. Bailly*

I have just received your letter dated the 3<sup>rd</sup> which ought to have been handed to me yesterday.

So you wish to become a saint? Well, I promise to assist you to the

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<sup>213</sup> editor’s note: for Fr. d’Alzon the examen would aim at preparing a religious for the fourth vow and then facilitate his carrying it out.

best of my ability and with this in view, allow me to take advantage of your excellent dispositions to try out on you what I intend to try out at our first General Chapter.

If you approve of our *fourth vow*, in its present terminology, then you must examine yourself twice a day. In the morning you must ask yourself how you intend to expel the devil from your soul and put in its place Jesus Christ, how you wish to serve the Church by warring against the Revolution and Freemasonry; at night you will examine yourself to see what you did to maintain your resolve and how you put into effect these resolutions and you will report the results to me. We must seek together a good formula for this examen, which will then become the cornerstone of our work just as the particular examen of St. Ignatius is the cornerstone for the Jesuits.

Look, try it, just as I am trying this examen on my side; let me know what results you get. Don't hesitate to speak about how this would apply to the Congregation, neither to our Religious nor to the Superior General of the Oblates. Perhaps after ardent prayer, we shall obtain great light and much strength.

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## Present Policies

### I.—To the Paris Assumptionists

*Rome, February 10, 1870*

*to Frs. Picard and V.de P. Bailly*

My good friends,

I am following the progress of this Council most attentively—not so much its actual discussions as the turmoil which results, be it publicly aired or going on quietly behind the scene. There are as well the effects that may arise from so many contrary ideas being expressed and so many opposite tendencies. Well, it seems obvious to me that the Congregation which decides to draw out, as much as it can, all the practical consequences of this Council, will be the one to receive greatest blessings from the Lord. So it would be of the utmost importance that we Assumptionists should be aware, before God, of what we have to do. We must restrict our activities up to a point and focus them so as to be as effective as possible and in such a way as to not waste our man-power.

Without creating a “hullabaloo,” yet with a clearly determined plan, you must gather around you a group of laymen and priests and, through your conversations, set yourselves the goal of appealing to men of fertile intelligence over whom you exert any influence that they get involved in the Council. Believe me, work as hard as you can with this aim in view. The work of the Council will be embodied in a new treatise on religion and the

Church; the other questions will be but corollaries of this main theme. Therefore, take the decrees to heart, absorb and assimilate them as much as you can, implement them, less by your own direct efforts than by getting others to do so.

But here is what you yourselves must set out to do at first:

1° extend as much as you can the Confraternity of St. Francis de Sales<sup>214</sup>.

2° give a religious tenor to the bibliographical newsletter.

3° work to increase the amount of Peter's Pence.

4° have people pray a lot in view of recruiting solid religious vocations.

5° while not harping on the Council, take the spirit of this great assembly and, without being contentious, spread its teaching everywhere (even at the risk of being a crushing bore!).

6° encourage every kind of working-class activity—either by directing them yourselves, or by getting other Catholics to do so.

## II.—To the Assumption in general

*February 15, 1870*

*Mother Correnson*

I have just spoken to you about yourself. Let us now speak about what I think the results of this Council will be as regards the Assumption in general. It is plain to me that we lack manpower, if it pleases God to send us any, there will be enough work for ten thousand of us.

I see, however, no reason why we shouldn't get started right away.

1° We must assemble an organization with the help of which we will be able to undertake lots of scientific research. Imagine, people asking me to see to this, but I have accepted.

2° We must lay the foundations of a Catholic university. This would, of course, be much easier if we had the aforementioned human resources at our disposal.

3° We must begin to make our influence felt in the press. Believe it or not, the presidents of the various sections of the Council have authorized me to open a journalistic offensive to reach out to thinkers of our day and improve the current situation. We must undo the harm done by certain "liberal-Catholic" newspapers which have been stirring up public opinion against Rome.

All this is a brief "resume" of my present undertakings, which I'm supposed to do in my "spare time." I am studying as much scholastic

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<sup>214</sup> An association founded by Fr. d'Alzon and Msgr. Ségur in 1856 to combat Protestant influence.

philosophy as I can—and I marvel at what is being done in Naples<sup>215</sup> in this regard....

### III.—to the Assumptionists at Nîmes

*February 16, 1870*

*to Fr. E. Bailly*

...Your holiness can grow by imparting a supernatural dimension to your own studies and to those of your religious. Not for one moment should you lose sight of this guiding principle. What is more, make every effort to attain holiness through teaching.

These days I am up to my eyes in philosophy, and I have reached certain conclusions which are:

1° that we must go back to St. Thomas (Aquinas);

2° that philosophy went completely off-track under the influence of the Reformation;

3° that philosophy is a far more constructive science than is generally supposed. This truth has been lost to sight in the confusion of Babel, which Descartes, in the wake of Protestantism, brought to Catholic thinking itself. So we must reconstruct our whole philosophy on the solid base of Medieval Scholasticism and I am beginning to wonder if this complete overhaul of Christian studies should be one of our primary tasks.

Ah, my dear friend, what a lot of things there are to do and re-do! Direct your desire to become holy into these channels.

### IV.—To the Assumptionists at Nîmes

*Rome April 11, 1870*

You will be enjoying a greater degree of leisure during the Easter Season. Allow me to make a few recommendations.

1° Remember that the special aim of our Institute is teaching at all levels. Now Cardinal Reisach<sup>216</sup> was telling one of our friends the other day that the greatest achievement of this Council would be the renewal of ecclesiastical studies. Yes, but in order to bring about this renewal two things are necessary: men and time. As for time, make sure you are not

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<sup>215</sup> In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century a group of Jesuits who were spearheading a renewal of Thomistic studies left Rome to pursue their initiative in Naples where they found a more receptive atmosphere. Their initiative would lay the foundation for the rise of Thomistic studies throughout the Church.

<sup>216</sup> Cardinal Karl-August von Reisach (1800-1869) was a German theologian and a member of the Redemptorist Order. Pope Pius VII appointed him rector of studies at the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith in the early 1830s. In the 1860s he returned to Rome and held many high-ranking positions and was instrumental in preparing Vatican I.

wasting any. Secondly, make sure you are preparing yourselves to undertake such studies as are really useful. Let us not deceive ourselves—intellectual standards throughout the Church have fallen to a level of hopeless mediocrity, and this is because sound theology based on sound philosophy has become generally discredited. Since theology, that queen of sciences, has reached such a deplorable state, the sciences, with the exception of the material sciences, have fallen just as much and, as for the purely material sciences, they have lost touch with their divine origins.

What is to be done? You must commit yourselves to reestablishing, by serious and strenuous study of the various branches of science you are given to learn, true wisdom in your minds and that you shed light on that science which is the goal of lower reason and has as its object created things with a higher reason which has wisdom as its goal, that is to say, the knowledge of divine things.

There are two ways of achieving this: either through intellectual work or through prayer. And here we find so much proof that we have prayed badly because, although we have prayed, we get so few results. The obvious conclusion—both our prayers and our studies have, evidently, been a mere matter of routine and rote memory. If in all these areas we were to exercise both our mind and our heart, we would certainly make progress in every way possible.

It is so very important to convince yourselves of this truth because, as religious, your mystical and intellectual growth must develop along parallel lines.

2° Another truth you must be convinced of is that the world, even if it is decadent, is governed by ideas. After this Council, those religious who make themselves sowers of ideas, but ideas that are true and vital, will become the true transformers of society....Therefore, make sure you try to be penetrated by true ideas and great principles. And these ideas, these fundamental principles, where are they to be found if not in the infinite treasures of divine knowledge, of which the Church is the custodian and is charged with distributing to the world? It hurts me that I express myself so inadequately! I see the salvation of so many men at stake, whose vision is obscured by so much falsehood. How can anybody fail to be heartbroken who has any love for the Kingdom of God and for the triumph of Our Lord in souls?

3° Nor must you blind yourselves to the immediate future. Once papal infallibility has been proclaimed, the Church will find itself in a really extraordinary situation. The Pope will be like the supreme commander of a vast army some of whose regimental commanders are in open revolt. As commander-in-chief, he will have to bypass their authority and rely on the loyalty of his junior officers and lower ranks.

The rebel colonels are none other than our Gallican bishops. On the one hand, the Pope will have to depend on his priests and laypeople for support. Thereby will commence his ordinary and immediate jurisdiction

over every single diocese. On the other hand, he will also need his own “shock troops,” and encamp them in the very midst of those regiments whose colonels are fomenting mutiny. These “shock troops,” these personal papal guards, are none other than the Religious Congregations—and this is the very reason why their privileges and exemptions must be extended rather than reduced.

All this I may clarify in a letter or a more detailed document. Meanwhile I just wish to express what may have been insufficiently understood as coming from Fr. Laurent (Fr. Charles Laurent<sup>217</sup>) or Fr. Emmanuel (Fr. Emmanuel Bailly). These ideas seem to me to go to the heart of what we are to take from the Council.

Fare ye well, my dear Brothers, I am all yours in our Blessed Savior.

We have been promised a copy of the schema on infallibility immediately after the session of Quasimodo Sunday<sup>218</sup>.

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*April 29, 1870*

*from Fr. V. Galabert to Fr. V. de Paul Bailly*

**Our more special goal**

Father d’Alzon will always lend his wholehearted support to any good works you undertake, but he does not wish any of them to become the main focus of our Congregation. What he does consider to be the essential aim of our small Congregation is the fullest possible development of the teaching of Catholic doctrine. This must be brought about by our own studies, by our works of education, and by our preaching. He does not wish the multiplicity of our social works, howsoever beneficial, to distract us from our main purpose. And just as he opposed Father Hippolyte’s<sup>219</sup> tendency to turn our young religious into rural missionaries, so he will oppose any tendency on our part to become absorbed in social activities.

*Le Vigan, October 25, 1870*

*to Fr. E. Bailly*

**Precise Aim**

I have nothing special to tell you—but I am preoccupied with an historical fact which has struck me whether I consider the foundation of the Church itself, or of any Religious Order in particular, or of any of the secret societies, or whether I consider wars between nations. It is this: there is never any success without a precise aim. Our Lord said, “*Quaerite primum*

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<sup>217</sup> Fr. Charles Laurent (1821-1895) was a priest from the diocese of Nîmes who definitively joined the Assumptionists in 1852. He worked as a teacher and preacher.

<sup>218</sup> the Sunday after Easter from the first words of the introit in Latin.

<sup>219</sup> Hippolyte Saugrain (1822-1905) was one of Fr. d’Alzon’s first companions. He was general treasurer his entire life. In this task he was devoted and capable, but perhaps a bit skittish and temperamental. As master of novices, he tended to have a character that was more apostolic than contemplative. He was instrumental in the foundation of the Oblates.

*regnum Dei et justitiam ejus, et haec omnia adjicientur vobis*; Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and his justice and all these things will be added unto you” (Mt 6:33). So the Church, the Kingdom of God, was founded. Now, consider famous bishops. They always had a goal. Consider wars: success has always gone to the general who had the best thought-out plan and whose actions corresponded best with his resources. Now, take the secret societies. It stands out a mile! Even if their success means destruction and never construction, it is because as soon as they begin to succeed they begin to dissolve. Their members start fighting one against the other. Personal interests disrupt their unity. This is why ordinary good citizens, in spite of their stupidity and apathy, don’t all get swallowed up by the Revolution...though they may have richly deserved such a fate.

Now, what practical conclusions do I draw from this? Here they are. It is our wish to bring about the Kingdom of Our Lord on earth. Then every action in our lives, and every thought in our minds, must be subordinated to this primary preoccupation. We must carefully draw up our plans, carefully consider how to utilize our available resources, not to waste them, and how to combine them in a united effort. This is true for everything we do: our teaching, our theological studies, our missions, the assistance we give to certain women’s Congregations, our own involvement in social activities.

I wish us ceaselessly to perfect our plans, always building on the same basic and timeless principles, but knowing how to apply them to concrete situations. You must therefore draw up a *ratio studiorum* (plan of studies) for our Congregation and what we’re doing in education. Fr. Hippolyte will present a similar “schema” for the novitiate. Fr. Picard will report on what we are doing in Paris: our apostolate to priests and laymen and our ministry with women’s Congregations. Fr. Vincent de Paul’s specialty will be our social work. And if anyone were to work in this way, within his own sphere of activity, and provided the Superior General with preliminary documents that could be discussed at the first general session or the first Chapter, perhaps we will end up getting a clearer picture of our future.

Allow me to summarize:

1° Teaching and education.

2° Specialized studies.

3° Missions.

4° Social works.

5° Charitable works.

6° Our ministry with women’s Congregations.

I have changed the order of procedure on purpose.

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October 27, 1870

to Fr. E. Bailly

A War Council



Every day they come here to drill under the chestnut trees. I am duly impressed by all the arm and leg movements they have to perform, and equally impressed by all the orders given, whether they are followed to a tee or not. The idea is to turn them into soldiers, but the net result will be nothing but a peace-time National Guard. God help the nation which has nobody but them to guard it! And God help the nation which needs so many of them!

But isn't it the same thing with religious life? So much drill having to be performed before we start turning into what God wants us to be, not to mention the drills which never get performed! Even if all France were one big National Guard or even a First Class Army, what use would it be without competent leadership? So we, as members of a Congregation, must practice our various crafts, all of us, from the youngest postulant to the Superior General. But instead of having only one commander, we do need some kind of general staff, so that the founding charism not die with the leader. We must have what I call a permanent War Council. It need not be in continual session, but it must assemble frequently, and there must be the maximum consultation by writing among its members.

I have just been interrupted. I will be back later....

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### **Taking an Oath of Fidelity**

*from Fr. P.E. Bailly*

*to Fr. d'Alzon*

#### **I. Urgent request of Fr. P.E. Bailly**

....I would like to insist that you, my Father, work at requesting yourself or having someone else request as soon as possible that the Pope approve the fourth vow of which we have spoken: the vow to fight to the death the Revolution, its ideas, its works, etc. Couldn't we implore God to enable us to combat the Revolution and Freemasonry as St. Dominic did with the Albigensians? Wouldn't the moment a captive Pius XI is crucified by the Revolution be the right time? We may be few in numbers. We may be devoid of all apparent human resources. We may be incapable of putting an effective army into the field. But can we not rely on God's mercy? Will he not bless our efforts, howsoever inadequate, inspired as they are by our sincere longing to re-establish and defend his Kingdom?...

*Adveniat Regnum Tuum.*

#### **II. Formula of the Vow**

*Faced with the social upheavals of our epoch, we, the undersigned Religious of the Assumption (Assumptionists), hereby promise to remain faithful to the practice of our Rule and to the common life, whatever be the circumstances in which we find ourselves, and whatever be the effect of current events on our Congregation and its works.*

*Wishing thus to bind ourselves by closer links than ever to our religious commitment, we accept all the difficulties and trials which may thereby result; the only limits to our readiness being those imposed by obedience.*

*Nîmes, February 14, 1871; Feast of the Commemoration of Our Lord's Passion.*

*Signed:* E. Bailly, A. Dumazer, Germer-Durand, Br. Pierre, Joseph Maubon<sup>220</sup>

*Approved by the Superior General:* E. d'Alzon

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<sup>220</sup> Fr. Alexis Dumazer succeeded Fr. d'Alzon as headmaster of the Assumption College, Nîmes. Fr. Joseph Maubon ruled the Congregation between the death of Fr. Emmanuel Bailly in 1917 and the election of Fr. Gervais Quenard in 1922. He was never officially appointed Superior General.

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## ON THE TRAINING OF NOVICES

*September 7, 1850*

*to M. Marie-Eugénie*

You have asked me to draw up a syllabus of instructions for the novitiate. I have endeavored to do so. This is an outline. Please let me know what you think of it.

I begin by asking this question: Why are we here? Four reasons: 1° to save our souls; 2° to lead a life of perfection; 3° to render glory to God; 4° to extend the Kingdom of Jesus Christ.

1° To save our souls: What is salvation? What does it mean for the majority of people? For Christians? For Religious? For the Assumptionists? For each one of us in particular?

What are the enemies of our salvation? Our passions, our feelings, the world, the devil. How are we to fight these enemies?

2° To sanctify ourselves: We are here to save ourselves by becoming holy. As Christians we do this by faith, hope and charity. As religious we set about it in a more perfect manner by adding chastity, poverty and obedience. With St. Thomas we then study the virtues which derive from these, and their contrary vices or sins.

3° To bring about God's glory: What does God mean for us? What of his glory, his power, his wisdom, his love, his perfection, his providence, his grace? The triumph of divine grace, which is the glorification of man, takes place within the framework of God's glory. The religious must nourish his soul with these thoughts in prayer and these thoughts will commit him to the extension of Christ's Kingdom.

4° To extend Christ's Kingdom: What is this Kingdom of Jesus Christ? It is the Church. Love of the Church, love of souls. There are two kinds of souls he must love. He must love the pure souls, those of the children entrusted to his care. He must love the ignorant who have to be instructed and sinners who must be converted. Hence our schools and our missions.

A.—Education: 1° Education, properly speaking: the good influence we exert on our pupils and on their families by our conversation and good example. Are we taking this education seriously?

2° Instruction:—and for this, we must study; supervision of the pupils; work in the classroom; advanced studies; the spirit in which we study and teach.

B.—Our Missions: The qualities they call for: courage, prudence, perseverance.

Finally, I take up again every aspect of religious life and compare it to some aspect of the life of Christ, This, it seems to me, will provide ample material for the whole year. I intend, when I speak to the novices, to insist that they study everything thoroughly and at the beginning of each session I return to the topic. In this way they will be able to develop their own religious ideas and advance in the same spirit.

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### **Topics of conferences for the Assumption novitiate**

*Note from 1858*

1° Since the spirit of the Assumption consists in a deep love for Our Lord, the best way to acquire this love is to take your crucifix and say to yourself: “This is the extent to which Jesus Christ loved me. Am I going to love him, even unto death on the Cross?”

2° Loving Jesus Christ means imitating him. Let me once more take hold of my crucifix, and say to myself: He is my model. Do I intend to imitate him: in his disgrace and deprivation, in his suffering and death?

3° To enter into his dispositions, let me follow the Way of the Cross step by step. Do I wish to die with Jesus? (Jn 11:16).

4° Do I wish to carry my Cross with Jesus?

5° Jesus fell under the weight of his Cross. Am I prepared to fall under the weight of mine?

6° Mary was there to console him. What strength do I derive from her consolation?

7° A religious is called to wipe away Jesus’ tears, his sweat, his blood. What strength does this not give me to bear my own sufferings?

8° And when a religious falls beneath the weight of his Cross, what comfort does it give him to remember that Jesus too fell on his way to Calvary?

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*April 2, 1874*

*to Fr. Alexis Dumazer*

#### **Directives for the Novitiate**

You do deserve to have your ears pulled for not having told me how the novitiate is getting on. It was very wrong of you not to mention it. Very well, I’m going to talk to you about it. I hope you will soon have fifteen or twenty novices and postulants. First you must find room for them, then you must find work for them, and thirdly you must train them much better than others have been trained so far. With this training in view, I intend to write a commentary on the Rule (of St. Augustine), on the first book of our *Constitutions*, and on the *Directory*. I will also give a course of meditations. In addition to the meditations I am preparing, I am going to teach them how

to meditate. I would like to begin in May. It seems to me that, in this way, we will be able to establish a tradition of our religious life.

It is understood that you will assist me. The whole course will last, approximately, from May 1 until January 15. I will tell you why I will stop at that moment. Well, it seems to me that nine months is sufficient time for the effective training of a large group of young men. Don't forget that a strict novitiate must comprise the study of Holy Scripture, the Fathers of the Church, Church history and liturgy. Add that of mystical theology, and there won't be much time left over.

But they must be enabled to study all this in depth. So you must teach them how to take notes intelligently. I'll give you a rough idea of what I intend to do so that you can decide how much of it you can deal with yourself, and to what extent you require my assistance.

Do you have a copy of *The Liturgical Year* by Dom Guéranger<sup>221</sup>? In my opinion, it's a most important book for you to get hold of. Darras or Rohrbacher<sup>222</sup> would be very useful too. As for the Fathers of the Church, a rich field of choice is open to you, but you mustn't leave St. Augustine out because he is an inexhaustible mine of everything and, believe it or not, especially for the principles of solid piety. As soon as I arrive, I will come down to the novitiate. That will spare me much wasted time and will enable me to lay a solid foundation for the formation of religious, the most important work we have at this time.

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### Thoughts on the Novitiate

*after 1870*

The course of novitiate studies ought to last two years...in the course of which the second part of St. Thomas' *Summa* must be studied. The lectures must be given in Latin and in order to get the novices used to Latin, we will have to give them a few preparatory talks in Latin, explaining the basics. Then, after a few days, the actual lectures on St. Thomas would

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<sup>221</sup> Prosper Louis Pascal Guéranger, O.S.B. (commonly referred to as Dom Guéranger, 1805-1875, Solesmes, France) was a French Benedictine monk and priest, who served for nearly 40 years as the Abbot of Solesmes (which he founded in the abandoned Priory of Solesmes). Through his efforts, he became the founder of the French Benedictine Congregation which re-established monastic life in France after it had been wiped out by the French Revolution. Guéranger was the author of *The Liturgical Year*, which covers every day of the Catholic Church's liturgical cycle in 15 volumes. He was well regarded by Pope Pius IX, and was a proponent of the dogmas of papal infallibility and the Immaculate Conception.

<sup>222</sup> Church historians: René François Rohrbacher, *Histoire universelle de l'Eglise catholique*, 1850; Abbé J-E Darras (1825-1878), *L'Histoire Général de l'Eglise*, 44 volumes.

begin in Latin.

This Part Two (of the *Summa*), having been divested of umpteen secondary considerations which don't matter, would serve as a foundation for the doctrine of perfection based on the teaching of the Angelic Doctor. These lectures would train the minds of our young men for the study of moral theology.

It may be objected that moral theology ought to be taught before ascetic theology. Logically I cannot deny this. But it would be thoroughly impossible under the current system whereby the novitiate must precede theological studies.

As for the philosophical considerations which are constantly cropping up under St. Thomas' pen, these must be either developed and dealt with, or waived aside depending on the novices' intellectual capacity. But let us not forget how important it is to raise their intellectual level unceasingly. By obliging them to pay closer and closer attention, we are developing their ability to conceive and reason.

I think every year we ought to dedicate about twenty lessons to explaining the *Rule*, and about thirty to explaining the *Constitutions*. Let each year's novitiate course begin with these lessons...and when it comes to explaining the *Constitutions*, we don't have to enter into every detail.

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### Higher Studies for religious

*note of 1874*

1° Having completed their secondary education and undergone their novitiate, our young religious must embark on their higher studies.

2° The normal gamut of these higher studies embraces three years of philosophy and four years of theology. To these may be added, in the case of particularly gifted students, other branches of knowledge co-related to the centerpieces of philosophy and theology.

3° Our less gifted students may be put through an abbreviated course: one year of philosophy and two years of theology.

4° Our students must constantly bear in mind that in order to avoid the kind of knowledge which "puffs up," they must simultaneously cultivate the kind of charity which "edifies". They must keep an eye on the spirit in which they pursue their studies. Therefore, in directing their intellects to God, the source and goal of all knowledge, they must approach him, the perfect being, with their hearts.

5° The formator entrusted with their scholastic studies must ceaselessly remind them to cultivate the three theological virtues because these serve to establish their relationship with God: faith that adheres to the truth, that bows down in humility, and that adores; hope that prays, that is trusting, and desires to be possessed by Jesus Christ, the infinite good; and

charity that leads them to seek to unite themselves to him who first loved us.

6° They will prevail on themselves to understand that all would be dead in the human sciences, were life not communicated thereto by the Word of God; but this divine Word is communicated far more abundantly to the living science of sacred doctrine.

7° Professors (or if our students are studying theology at a university, our own scholastic staff) will see to it that progress in learning and progress in the virtues related to such learning will go hand-in-hand.

8° It is, indeed, so essential to our study program for virtue to increase with knowledge, that anyone who neglected his own perfection (no matter how brilliant his intellect) would be sent back to “square one” in philosophy and theology, and would be disqualified from membership of our General Chapter. Or, even if he were too far advanced in the curriculum to be excluded from it, his record would be submitted to the General Chapter in the unlikely event that someone would propose that they be admitted.

9° St. Augustine and St. Thomas are to be our guiding lights in both philosophy and theology. We must always return to them to resolve problems which they have addressed.

10° If any of our students did not commit himself enthusiastically to the study of the sacred sciences, it might be wiser to remove him, since chances are that he would become still less interested as time went on.

Formators must make it plain that the sacred sciences are not dead sciences. We are not teaching vague abstractions, as variable as the four winds, dependent on the shifting sands of public opinion. We are teaching a science that is as unchangeable as God himself, as luminous as his Word, as living and life-giving as his love.

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October 3, 1876

to Br. Mathieu Lombard<sup>223</sup>

**Advice to a young student in philosophy**

My son,

Thank you for your kind letter. Write me another one from time to time. That's the best way not to lose touch and it gives me such pleasure to recall your charming face. So you have been on retreat. May I suggest a good resolution to take? It's this: to be quite disciplined in the recitation of the Office. You are not yet obliged to do so but the day will come. I warn you that when it does come you will find it difficult to resist the temptation of forgetting all about it. Recite it well. A priest who recites it well is on the

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<sup>223</sup> Mathieu Lombard (1858-1951) first attended an Assumptionist aluminate, did his novitiate in 1875, took final vows in 1877, and was ordained in 1882. He eventually became a teacher.

way to holiness.

Another piece of advice: spare no effort during your first few months of philosophy! You have no idea how difficult I found it to understand later on what I had neglected to master right from the start. It's a hundred times harder and a thousand times less beneficial. Torment your teacher until he has explained everything. Don't waste your time on meaningless objections, but, on the other hand, don't let anything pass which isn't clear and clearly proven.

Remember me kindly to everyone at the novitiate.

I am,

Yours with deepest affection

*December 6, 1876*

*to Fr. François Picard*

#### **Studying St Thomas**

I have instructed Father Gery<sup>224</sup> to get hold of Zigliara<sup>225</sup>. I myself am studying him hard. I find him, on the whole, easier to follow than Goudin<sup>226</sup>. He is better acquainted with recent developments, and more methodical in his approach and he can easily be divided into sections covered in a period of two or three year. Some of his passages may be obscure, but others are crystal clear. I would like us to take advantage of it.

The General Chapter has decided on Goudin, but some of his physical theories are unacceptable. His Logic is interminable! His treatment of new systems is worth nothing. Zigliara starts out with the same basic principles as Goudin, but, in my opinion, develops them in a far more satisfactory manner.

In any case, the Dominicans regard Zigliara as the best contemporary author. I am, of course referring to the "major" course of philosophy. Those following the "minor" course would do better to stick to

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<sup>224</sup> Fr. Gery Dellalleau (1844-1895) was a diocesan priest and teacher who became an Assumptionist in 1875 and served as a teacher and then a missionary in Chile.

<sup>225</sup> Tommaso Maria Zigliara, OP (1833-1893) was a Roman Catholic priest of the Dominican Order, a theologian, philosopher and a cardinal. Zigliara taught at the Collegium Divi Thomae, the future Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas, Angelicum, from 1870 to 1879, becoming a master in sacred theology and serving as regent of the college after 1873. The most important, however, of Zigliara's works is his "Summa Philosophica", which enjoyed a worldwide circulation. Zigliara had a role in composing Papal Encyclicals important for the revival of Thomism and in response to the modernist crisis.

<sup>226</sup> Antoine Goudin, OP (1639-1695) was a Thomist philosopher and theologian. In 1672 he became the prior of the renowned St. Jacques monastery in Paris. He is particularly known for his magisterial course of Thomistic philosophy which gained great success and usage and which greatly influenced the Neo-Thomism of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. One characteristic of his work was an insistence on a return to the original texts.



San Severino's<sup>227</sup> abridged version.

I spend my time reading and re-reading these authors.

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<sup>227</sup> Fr. Gaetano Sanseverino (1811-1865) was an Italian philosopher from Naples who was an author, professor, founder of several journals, and librarian of the city of Naples. He was instrumental in the Neo-scholastic revival of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

—D—  
ASSUMPTIONIST  
ALUMNATES<sup>228</sup>

*published in the Revue L'Assomption, 1875*

Although much has already been written in *l'Assomption*<sup>229</sup> about the alummates which we Assumptionists founded, I think it will still be helpful to write a little more. What I am about to write may lack cohesion, but I hope it will not lack persuasion. The topic of the alummates has taken greater and greater importance.

**1° Providential**

Who can doubt that our alummates were a divine inspiration? Think of their humble beginnings and their marvelous progress! Who among us ever dreamed of them before the Vatican Council? What resources had we? What men? What money? What property? We had nothing, absolutely nothing! Yet, little by little, along came the men and the money—and so did the boys. We had six boys on the first day, who soon were only two. But today there are a hundred or more. Very few of their parents can afford a penny but the upkeep of the lot is provided by generous benefactors. Every day we receive new applications. It upsets us to have to turn away so many of them. “*Messis multa, operarii autem pauci*; The harvest is great, but the laborers are few” (Mt 9:37). We could take, literally, thousands of boys—but the teachers? “*Pauci, paucissimi*; Small, very small.”

**2° An Education that is fully priestly**

God forbid that we should criticize other methods of training our future clergy, other systems of Christian teaching. All we ask for is the right to bring our own method to light and tell everybody why.

In order to train those who aspire to the priesthood, we must, it seems to me, surround them with a truly priestly atmosphere and, to do so,

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<sup>228</sup> The alummates were special schools for peasant and working-class youngsters, who would otherwise have had no opportunity to pursue their priestly vocation. They were one of Fr. d’Alzon’s most successful initiatives. The Assumptionist alummates, which were tuition-free, offered thousands of the alumnists a chance to join the Assumption or, as d’Alzon had hoped to swell the ranks of the diocesan clergy, which the alummates did far beyond his or anybody else’s expectation.

<sup>229</sup> *L’Assomption* is a magazine that, since the time of Fr. d’Alzon, has been publishing information on the activities of the Assumption family to its friends and benefactors.

give them a priestly outlook and priestly manners. One of our great bishops used to say that it isn't sufficient for a priest to be a man of God; he must also be a man of the Church. He must acquire the habits of the Church, its manners, its virtues, even its joys and sorrows. He must daily breathe the air of the sanctuary. He must think with the Church and be inspired by the Church. Above all, he must be thoroughly imbued with the Church's doctrine.

For the young person who aspires one day to mount the altar steps, everything must combine to enthrall him and to reflect the sacred mysteries he will one day be called upon to dispense.

This depends on his tutors, and on the means of instruction placed at their disposal. This depends on the moral climate the future priest and his companions are called upon to breathe! Nothing must be artificial or merely conventional. Everything must reveal those holy realities which give our life its true meaning.

The influence we are to have must not come from imposition but rather from inspiration, and this would be difficult if there were too many. That's why we limit their number. We need a family atmosphere in which to shape them. Is there any such thing as a family composed of two hundred, one hundred, or even fifty individuals? Once you have topped the thirty mark, it becomes quasi-impossible to run the establishment without having recourse to punishment. But in the training of souls such as we envisage it, punishment can play no part.

### **3° Under the watchful eye of their superiors**

How are we to manage without having to punish them?

1° By taking very careful note of the newcomers: their intelligence, their piety, and their character.

2° By administering entry exams: not so much to learn about what they know already, as about how much they are capable of learning.

3° By finding out all we can about them. Those whose duty it is to inform us about their background and circumstances, those whom we would ordinarily approach with complete confidence, do not always turn out to be sincere.

4° On arrival they must be submitted to a probationary period of from three to six months.

5° At the conclusion of which period, they must either be definitely admitted, or sent back home, depending on whether we are satisfied with them or not.

6° Frequent examinations during their junior aluminate<sup>230</sup>. Those who are lazy, incapable of serious study, or unsuitable in character, must be

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<sup>230</sup> The Junior Alumnates, called "Grammar" Alumnates served boys between eleven and fourteen. The Senior, or "Classics," Alumnates then took over. By the age of sixteen a boy would be ready to enter. Fr. d'Alzon insisted on Junior and Senior Alumnates being situated miles apart, in different parts of the country.

weaned out. I am not speaking about those who prove to be really bad; these must be pitilessly got rid of right away.

7° A final and very stringent test before admitting them to the senior aluminate. We do not punish; we warn. If our repeated warnings are of no avail, we expel them.

#### 4° An Elite

In ordinary colleges<sup>231</sup> including Christian establishments, the headmaster may often be faced with the alternative of unlimited expulsions or of getting rid of the worst, and keeping the “not too bad” in the hope that they improve. In our aluminate we keep only the best. Ours are not diocesan institutions. Our aim is not just to provide priests—it’s to provide good priests. We are entitled to take, and to keep, only those we will. It’s a tremendous advantage that avoids any appearance of blame toward others who are obliged to act differently.

#### 5° Learning and Humility

Above all let it be clear that our aluminate do not produce academic qualifications. Why not? Because there are colleges for that purpose, and academic qualifications (state baccalaureate) ruin priestly vocations. St. Paul tells us that “knowledge puffs up,” (1 Cor 8:1). This applies particularly to certain state examinations. Frogs get puffed up, inflated—after which they deflate...what else can they do?<sup>232</sup> As for training young men by using modern standards....Come on! I am not saying that later on we may not present them for the state baccalaureate, but we do this so much later on that it isn’t even worth talking about.

#### 6° The Life of Christ

What we do seek to communicate especially is life, divine life. Our Lord tells us: “*I have come that they may have life, and have it more abundantly*” (Jn 10:10). Our aim is to release the blood of Jesus Christ, to make it flow with the greatest abundance into souls. With this in view we turn our young men’s minds above all to loving God, loving his Son, loving the Blessed Virgin, loving his Church, loving the Saints, in a word, loving that noble cause in which the powers of heaven are drawn up in battle array to confront the powers of hell. Ah! Who will help us sculpt our children into warriors who pit themselves against Satan and the world, into physicians who heal the spiritually sick and wounded, into true friends of the working classes whose minds have been constantly poisoned against whatever is good, just and true, into teachers who will refute the distortions of so-called “modern science,” and into characters of such caliber that, far from contenting themselves with mediocre virtue, they will strive generously, in

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<sup>231</sup> “Collèges” in England are usually called “grammar schools,” and in the United States, “high schools.”

<sup>232</sup> An apparent reference to a fable of Jean de la Fontaine (1621-1695), “The Frog and the Ox.”

the face of modern depravity, to reach the very heights of Christian perfection, and do all they possibly can to get others to follow in their wake?

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*February 12, 1874*

*to Mother Marie-Eugénie*

**Alumnates, a critical cause**

The Alumnates are one of the noblest causes to which we could possibly devote ourselves.

*November 6, 1874*

*to Fr. Bailly*

The Alumnates must be our constant preoccupation. The future of our Order depends on them.

*April 25, 1875*

*to Mrs. d'Escure<sup>233</sup>*

Before I die I would like to push this work of the Alumnates, because I believe it's one of the most important works for the Church.

*October 1, 1875*

*to Fr. Alexis Dumazer*

Don't forget: the Alumnates are perhaps the most important thing we are doing.

*October 5, 1875*

*to Numa Baragnon<sup>234</sup>*

I am 65 years old. God is smiling on the humble beginnings of an enterprise which, in my opinion, if God gives it growth, will produce the new kind of clergy we need so badly today. You will appreciate that such an enterprise is worth the life of more than one man—and I would be only too pleased for God to take this epilogue of my declining years and turn it into the prologue of this truly gigantic work.

I feel as if I am sitting on a hilltop, within sight of three feudal fortresses at the base of which they are still digging up the occasional medieval lance. We have constructed one of these fortresses already where students are being prepared to become parish-priests, missionaries, and

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<sup>233</sup> A spiritual directee of Fr. d'Alzon from Nimes

<sup>234</sup> Mr. Numa Baragnon was a statesman from Nimes, a former student of Fr. d'Alzon, a lawyer who believed in the legitimacy of the monarchy. He was also a journalist as well as Undersecretary of State and a senator.

religious. The divine sap is already circulating in their veins, and the sight of them gives me a thousand times more satisfaction than if I were the vicar-general of the largest dioceses in the world.

October 25, 1875<sup>235</sup>

to Fr. Bailly

I have been here at Notre Dame des Châteaux<sup>236</sup> for more than a month. Let us bear in mind that we hold the key to the future—but it's up to us. Ah, there is a crying need for priests who understand alumnates. It is unbelievable what can be done with this charming 'soft wax' we call an alumnist!

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### Thoughts on our Alumnates, 1877

Yes, it is essential that our boys come from good Christian families. Say what you like, something of the blood in their veins and the milk they have sucked remain.

The Alumnates depend:

1° on our trust that God will provide for our needs;

2° on the holiness, the firmness and the vigilance of the superior, whose task cannot be performed by anyone else;

3° on the spiritual outlook we communicate to our young boys, who must always be made to feel we love them;

4° on the high intellectual standards we impose upon them;

5° on the enthusiasm we ourselves must radiate so that the solitude that surrounds them not turn into home-sickness;

6° on our effort to instill in them an ethic of hard work;

7° on a careful choice of staff. As the Congregation grows, more and more discrimination will be needed in their appointment.

Every three months a written report must be drawn up on the boys and sent to the Superior General. The statutory dates are: end of October, end of January, end of April and end of July.

In the October report it will be stated how many boys were moved up to a higher form after the summer holidays. In the July report there must be a general recapitulation of the year's work.

Should we promote the more intelligent students more quickly than their classmates?—A question to consider.

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<sup>235</sup> There is some uncertainty regarding the date of this letter. Other sources indicate it was written in August 1875.

<sup>236</sup> Notre Dame des Châteaux was a shrine in Savoy that became the first alumnate in 1871. It is located on a promontory some 3300 feet above the Beaufort Valley and features the remains of a fortified medieval castle. The Assumptionists have managed to maintain this historical site even if the buildings of the alumnate had to be razed.

Here is a grid to be followed as a model for reports:

1° In what particular direction does his vocation seem to tend?

2° Is he pious?

3° What are his faults?

4° What kind of character does he have?

5° Is he intelligent?

6° Does he work hard?

7° What progress has he made?

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—E—  
INSTRUCTIONS ON RELIGIOUS  
LIFE<sup>237</sup>

*I. Lent 1874*

I. Supernatural Outlook

Men are motivated by different outlooks.

**1° A Diabolical Outlook**

This we come across whenever the Church is persecuted by the “powers that be.” But not all our enemies are identifiable with these “powers that be.” Others beset our path. There are those who “wish to crush the loathsome thing”<sup>238</sup>. There are cunning men who manage to disseminate anti-Christian attitudes, thereby contributing to the expulsion of Jesus Christ from modern society. We are rubbing shoulders with them day after day, with these men, self-proclaimed conservatives. Some of them are “plain stupid”—and the devil knows just how to utilize their stupidity. Others are full of vanity, others simply weak of character who preach tolerance in matters of doctrine.....which is quite dangerous because it’s very treacherous. “*Nunc saeviebat, nunc docet*; at one time he was raging, now he is teaching”<sup>239</sup>: teacher and journalist.

The spirit of charity is altogether contrary to their brand of “tolerance.” To love truth means to affirm the truth: “*Qui me confessus...*; Whoever acknowledges me...” (Lk 12:8). To the contrary, their kind of tolerance is negation. It is the source of the loss of many souls and as such does irreparable harm. We often listen to these men. We find them “reasonable,” “moderate,” “kind and polite,” in fact “tolerant,” provided

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<sup>237</sup> from the notes of a participant

<sup>238</sup> “Crush the loathsome thing” refers to the well-known cry of Voltaire, “Ecrasez l’infâme”. It was the climax of his attack upon Christianity. He repeated it a hundred times and in a dozen forms; occasionally using it as a signature. (Voltaire&Crush the Loathsome Thing)

<sup>239</sup> cf. Augustinus Hipponensis - *Enarrationes in Psalmos* (CPL 0283) - LLT-A-SL 38, psalmus 39, par. 1, linea 43 (Augustine&Commentary on the Psalms&CPL&psalm 39, par. 1, line 43)



one consents to betray the truth. So the Holy Father is abandoned, and “diplomatic lies” are brought into play in an almost successful attempt to destroy the Church. Yes, our spiritual outlook may well land us in prison—in the name of this diabolical “tolerance.”

### 2° The Tyranny of Sin

“*Qui facit peccatum, servus est peccati*; Whoever sins becomes the slave of sin” (Rom 6:16). In these days of freedom, how many men are slaves! Freedom does not give one the right to do evil; it is by committing evil that we lose our freedom. We are sinners, “moderate” sinners, committing only little sins—but we dwell under their shadow. We have become their slaves. Habitual sin becomes a tyranny.

### 3° The Worldly Outlook

In the light of this outlook we judge everything by its worldly advantages. Thence the absolute necessity of training an entirely new generation of priests, because a worldly outlook has crept into the seminaries. How often, even in religious life, do we allow ourselves to be guided by worldly considerations! So the rot sets in among the clergy, and consequently the laity lose their fervor

Where do we stand? A priest ought to be a saint, not just a ‘good guy’. The same applies all the more to a religious. The result is what I call “vulgarism.” Yes, sooner or later we become “vulgarized.” Like the devil, “*super pectus tuum gradieris...comedes terram*; crawling along on our bellies and eating the dirt” (Gn 3:14). “The devil is a mediocre being” (Hello<sup>240</sup>). He crawls along, not only on his belly, but on his breast and his heart.

### 4° A Supernatural Outlook.

This is the spirit which challenges all other spirits. “*Spiritus Domini replevit orbem terrarum*; The Spirit of the Lord has filled the whole world” (Wis 1:7). Therefore, everyone may possess it, everyone who has not driven it away by sin. “*Quicumque Spiritu Dei aguntur....*; Whoever are led by the Spirit of God...” (Rom 8:14).

It expresses its presence in different degrees.

1° It is the Christian Spirit we receive in Baptism, that fosters in us Christian motives for acting. Catholics must bring this spirit back to society in our time. The Spirit of our Baptism is the Spirit of our Savior’s blood and of the Holy Spirit’s flames that will lead us to root our motives in the faith and in the conviction that God made us for himself. But “there are many mansions; *manisiones multae*” (Jn 14:2) and many degrees in the angelic hierarchy. Let us aspire to the highest.

2° The spirit of perfection itself is the highest point to which our supernatural outlook can lead us. There is such a thing as false perfection. True perfection is expressed by these words: “*Estote et vos perfecti*; Be

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<sup>240</sup> Ernest Hello, cf. *L’homme*, 1872. (Hello&L’Homme)

perfect” (Mt 5:48)—addressed to everyone; “*Si vis perfectus esse, vade, vende omnia quae habes*; If you wish to be perfect, go and sell whatever you have...” (Mt 19:21)—meant only for a few.

Do not be like the apostles (James and John) in Lk 9:54: “*Nescitis cuius spiritus estis*; You do not understand what spirit impels you.” We must endeavor to become detached from our own impulses. We must endeavor to be influenced only by the sheer perfection of Our Lord, in every detail of our life. Thus we will attain true perfection which consists in imitating Our Lord. Thus the goal of every true religious is Jesus Christ: “*Mihi vivere Christus est*; For me life means Christ” (Phil 1:21). To live more and more with Christ’s own life—what an uphill struggle, but what a magnificent achievement!—till we arrive at the understanding of these other words: “*Cum apparuerit vita nostra Christus*; When Christ appears, who is our life....” (Col 3:4).

## II. The Gift of Self

This is what religious life consists in, self-giving, but there are different degrees of self-giving. A religious gives of himself to the point of perfection. So we must ask ourselves this question: “Have I really given of myself?” We do tend to retain little bits of “this or that.” We hang on to our own opinions, which we refuse to renounce. We perform the act of self-surrender casually but with every reason to dread the consequences, for we have become false religious; our self-surrender is nothing but make-believe.

Have we not retained certain sinful habits? And with what dispositions have we given ourselves? Perhaps with merely human dispositions, reserving the right to pass judgment on our superiors, on the Rule, on the duties given us to perform. We may appear to be pleasant, agreeable, cheerful—but there is nothing supernatural there.

Sometimes we give ourselves to God, then take ourselves back. It happens to many. We start off prepared to do our best, then we go back on our word...and henceforth we will perform the bare minimum. We have become slaves “*ad oculum servientes*; while being watched” (Col 3:22). We flatter our superiors, we poke fun at the genuine religious, we hold ourselves hypocritically before them!

This gift we make of ourselves tends to lose its luster; we must constantly refurbish it. Years ago we surrendered ourselves on certain solemn occasions—but what has happened to us since? Or perhaps we never even intended to surrender ourselves? In which case.....: “*Amice, ad quid venisti*; My friend, why did you come here?” (Mt 26:50).

It’s all a question of self-surrender. You get secular priests who work little because they hold themselves back, they lend or hire themselves out...but never really give themselves. There are religious who do so little because they give as little of themselves as possible. They give themselves

with their lips, in bad faith. Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-10) were struck dead for cheating, yet their cheating was only a question about the value of their property. For us the issue is far more serious. What will we answer Our Lord, and how severely can we expect to be punished? “*Nomen habes, quod vivas et mortus es*; You pass for a living man and you are a corpse” (Rv 3:1). You call yourself a religious, but you’re nothing more than a corpse! The very title of “religious” is a lie!

This religious is living on his own power when he should be living from the grace of God. He doesn’t have to be a ‘criminal’ religious, but rather of a religious who may be a perfectly good-living citizen, but one without any supernatural depth.

Now, what can be said about the ever-changing religious—giving himself to God one moment, and taking himself back the next? He’s like a spiritual weathervane, a prey to whatever wind comes along. It may not be that they are “carried about with every wind of doctrine; *omni vento doctrinae*” (Eph 4:14), but by any word whatsoever. Fickle, flippant, flighty.

But here is the most appalling thing of all...the facility with which he breaks his vows. Mere weakness may be excusable—but surely when we make promises to God, we must take them seriously!.... One will easily fail to take seriously what is most important. How offensive this is in the eyes of God!

A young man has given himself to God. He understood the terms of this transaction. He knew much suffering lay ahead. He realized that, despite his stumbles, vigorous efforts would have to be made. He gave himself, deliberately and unconditionally. The devil was able to tempt him, but did not triumph. This young man has transcended human motivation. His faith and his courage have enabled him to endure. Faith showed him what God and Jesus Christ mean and he said, “I will go. He gazed upon God (Is 6:5) and Our Lord Jesus Christ (Jn 1:14)—and he said: “Yes, I will go.” He made this decision after many an inward struggle. But having said, “I give myself,” he was true to his word because he is a man of honor. Yes, religious must be honorable in their dealings with God, as God himself said of himself, “*Juravit Dominus et non poenitebit eum*; The Lord has sworn and he will not repent” (Ps 109:4 Vulgate).” An honorable religious may be tempted to opt for an easier life, but he will repel this temptation. He has promised God not only the fruit but the tree. And this religious is like the wise man who built his house on the rock (Mt 7:24-25). He cannot be shaken because he has given himself wholeheartedly.

Let us ask ourselves on what we have built and how solid the foundations are. Have we built on Jesus Christ? (1 Cor 3:10-11). Three replies are forthcoming. The cowardly religious will answer: “I gave 50%, but I just can’t give the other half.” Then there is the tepid religious who only wishes to give of himself at the very last moment. Finally, the genuine religious searches his soul and promises that henceforth he will give himself

whole and entire, to the point of becoming one with Jesus Christ: “*qui adhaeret Domino, unus spiritus est*; he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit” (1 Cor 6:17)—so that he may have God as his recompense.

### III. A Gospel commentary<sup>241</sup>

Here are three Gospel scenes: verses 17-20, a model of a genuine vocation; verses 20-24, how human standards destroy the divine in a divine calling; verses 24-28, a human side and how Our Lord deals with it.

1° *The Stark Reality of our Vocation.* Our Lord is putting the apostles through their novitiate. He treats them like men, even though they are not brilliant and he initiates them into the mystery of suffering. He speaks of Jerusalem, the Priestly City, where Jesus is to be condemned to death. Our Lord tells this to those he is training, those who, in turn, will be in charge of others. Our Lord will be handed over to the chief priests, those who retain what is left of Jewish government, and to the scribes, i.e. the legal consultants and lawyers, the enemies of the Church, the men of false knowledge. These men will condemn Jesus to death, just as the Church is being condemned today by kings, who then hand it over to the populace. If I intend to imitate Our Blessed Lord, I too will have to be delivered up “*ad illudendum*; to be mocked” (Mt 20:19). “*Et tertia die, resurget*; on the third day he will rise again.” The martyrs don’t have to wait till the third day; they go up to heaven immediately. The Church itself may have to wait sometimes, but wherever there are martyrs, there is always resurrection. So let us religious learn to imitate our divine Master.

2° *Human versus Divine Standards.* No sooner has Our Lord pronounced this sad warning, than along comes the mother of the sons of Zebedee. She has her sons’ human interests at heart, even if she comes forward to make her request with all due piety and respect: “*adorans et petens*; she falls on her knees, asking a favor” (Mt 20:21). It is she who asks the favor, but Jesus notices the two young men and replies to them, or perhaps to all three. He asks them if they are prepared to drink with him out of the cup which he mentioned before. They are full of zeal and accept. But Jesus Christ as man has no jurisdiction over who sits at his right or at his left—this is a condemnation of ambitions and a lesson to those who must assign places of authority; they must bear God’s interests in mind. Subordinates must learn to accept the decisions of their superiors as coming from God. The other ten Apostles were indignant! They themselves aspired to these places of honor. It happens in all walks of life and it happens among the clergy. The happiness of religious life consists in being nothing!

3° *Divine Sympathy for Human Weakness.* The other apostles were

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<sup>241</sup> from the Wednesday after the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Lent, Mt 20: 17-29. This corresponds to the revised lectionary which presents Mt 20: 17-28.

put off. Our Lord gathered them round him and explained the differences between the lords of this world and religious superiors within the Church. What mattered was that they should do all they could to place themselves at the disposition of others. They must exercise authority humbly, without making their power felt, but only God's spirit. Whoever is in charge must be the servant of all like the Son of Man, who came to serve and deliver himself up for others.

## IV. Character

That a disagreeable character makes other people suffer, there is no doubt! But people with agreeable characters can delude themselves into thinking all is well with God, when it isn't. A nasty character causes scandal; a pleasant character can lull its possessor into a sense of false security.

So what kind of character must we have? Let us endeavor to be fully human, Christian and genuinely religious. We must learn how to conquer what is bad and sanctify what is good.

### Ways of conquering what is bad

1° Foreseeing occasions of sin<sup>242</sup>; 2) Being watchful to take advantage of victories we've had. Our character is like a house. Constant daily maintenance will save us the expense of major repairs; 3) Learning to fight back openly when we are assailed by obvious and violent attacks; 4) Energetic determination to conquer ourselves; 5) Adopting practical means such as self-chastisement. Our character is like an untamed horse—we must know how to tug the bridle and apply the brakes. "*Castigo corpus*; chastise the body" (1 Cor 9:27)...and even more so our character. Be aware of what form of self-chastisement will be the most effective, will get to the very root of the trouble..."*per quae quis peccaverit*; by which means one had sinned" (cf Wis 11:17); 6) Striving to acquire those virtues which are the opposite of our faults and vices of our character. People with disagreeable characters suffer more than they make others suffer. They are prone to melancholy, discouragement, etc..

### Ways of sanctifying what is good

Having a pleasant character is no passport to heaven and may even merit punishment unless we put it to good use. Therefore, let all our good actions be stimulated by faith. This is all the more necessary nowadays when mere "humanism" is the fashion. "*Accedentem ad Deum oportet credere quia est*; he that comes to God must believe that he is" (Heb 11:6). It is by being imbued with faith that we do everything to please God. This "spirit of faith" transforms the intentions of our character. We become

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<sup>242</sup> editor's note: here d'Alzon gave examples according to the note-taker

propelled by supernatural zeal, no longer by some kind of instinct.

So let us search our hearts, and ask ourselves whom we are working for. God measures our success by this criterion: we are obliged to do all we possibly to obtain it. We must seek God with great purity of heart and entertain no illusions. It is, precisely, people of kindly disposition who fall victim to illusion when their kindness has no supernatural foundation. “*Job vir simplex et rectus*; Job was a simple and upright man who feared God” (Jb 1:1). So let our intentions be directed towards God.

Another means is humility. Good, kindly people so easily give way to pride. Humility prevents us from thinking too highly of ourselves and is conducive to inner peace. “*Cum mihi molesti essent, induebar cilicio*; But when they came to annoy me I put on a hair shirt” (Ps 34:13 Vulgate). Retire to your own little corner, and be content to remain there.

We need energy. “*Gaudium cum in variis tentationes incideritis*; Consider yourselves happy indeed when you encounter trials of every sort” (Jas 1:2-3). Take advantage of your trials in order to reach sanctity by means of being energetic.

We need a model of character to imitate Our Lord Jesus Christ. If you feel he is too sublime a model, take the life of a saint whose character resembles yours more or less.

## V. Assumptionist Teaching<sup>243</sup>

St. Paul writes, “*Non arbitratus sum me scire aliquid inter vos, nisi Jesus Christum, et nunc crucifixum*; I had no thought of bringing you any other knowledge than that of Jesus Christ, and of him as crucified” (1 Cor 2:2). This is our teaching in a nutshell.

Jesus Christ is all we propose to teach. Consider a sculptor gazing at a big block of marble. The statue he eventually produces will first have to take shape in his mind. Jesus Christ is at the back of our mind. We must have him in view at all times. Under what conditions will he thus become our model, and under what condition will this be realized?

1° Under the condition of our being united to him. “*Vosmetipsos tentate si estis in fide*; Test yourselves to make sure you are in the faith” (2 Cor 13:5). There is a chasm between the Christian teacher and the other type who calls himself a “freethinker.” Unless we fortify the Christian faith of our pupils, we will have achieved nothing at all. The faith must be communicated to them in every way, shape, and form. And this is what a religious who transmits the faith does. “*Justus ex fide vivit*; The just man lives by faith” (Rom 1:17). St. Paul adds, “*An non cognoscitis quia Jesus Christus in vobis est, nisi forte reprobi estis*; Do you not realize that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless, of course, you be reprobates” (2 Cor 13:5

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<sup>243</sup> One of Fr. d’Alzon’s typical lectures

Vulgate). How is it that so many Christian teachers fail to communicate Jesus Christ? Because he is dead in them by mortal sin, or asleep in them by venial sin. The Christian teacher runs the terrible risk of reprobation if Jesus Christ is not alive in him and communicated by him. By not teaching Jesus Christ he is unfaithful to his calling, and is damning himself. “But,” you may say, “I am not teaching anything against Jesus Christ!” I’m afraid this isn’t good enough. The worst way we can insult God is by not paying attention to him. By disconnecting our teaching from Jesus Christ, we are denying that all was created by him.

2° Remember these words, “*Coepit Jesus facere et docere*; Jesus began to do and to teach” (Acts 1:1). Teach Christ by good example. Strive to imitate Jesus Christ. Our efforts to do so must be practical. There is little hope of our pupils acquiring any of Jesus Christ’s virtues unless we endeavor to acquire them ourselves. So let us strive to imitate him and, to do so, to study him in the Scriptures and gaze upon him on the crucifix. It calls for reflection and it calls for willpower. Jesus Christ is the perfect type of every virtue. He is too perfect for anybody to imitate perfectly. But he has stamped the different aspects of his virtue on his saints—each reproducing one or the other of the model’s perfection. The Christian teacher, having to deal with so many diverse characters, must study the different ways that will enable Jesus Christ to be known, for each student requires a special application. St. Vincent de Paul, for example, exhibits a different facet of God’s goodness from that of St. Francis de Sales. In Jesus Christ, “*plenitudo divinitatis corporaliter...in quo sunt thesauri sapientiae et scientiae absconditi*; in whom the fullness of the Godhead is embodied...in whom the whole treasury of wisdom and knowledge is contained” (Col 2:9 and Col 2:3). Jesus Christ distributes his treasures among the saints, in each of whom he dwells in a personal fashion. This gives us a kind of “family feeling” with the saints. The crime of the Renaissance was to replace saints with mythical deities. Belonging to the vast family of the saints gives us all a “family spirit” that helps us to know Jesus Christ.

3° Teaching is a task which involves painstaking zeal. “*Filioli, quos iterum parturio, donec formetur Christus in vobis*; My little children, with whom I am in labor once more until Christ is formed in you” (Gal 4:19). All teaching is a child-birth—it entails pain. We must take the unbearable student and make a Christian and a saint out of him! To win his soul we will have to kneel before God and shed many a tear. We cannot fall into the ways of the university, which limit education to man alone. It cost Jesus Christ his life to save the world; so too will it cost us if we wish to form Jesus Christ in souls. But this ministry of education will raise us to great heights...“*libentissime impendam, et superimpendar ipse*; most gladly spend and be spent” (2 Cor 12:15) in the process. We have souls to save. We must do so as Jesus Christ did...in pain and sorrow.

4° We ourselves must acquire that knowledge which relates

everything to God through Jesus Christ. Human knowledge is a tree with multiple branches—and in every branch, we find the God of all knowledge. Everything points to God—He “is” knowledge. This is clearly evident in some branches of knowledge, but it is true for all of them. Man was made to the image and likeness of God and since all creatures bear the stamp of God, we will find God everywhere and in every branch of knowledge. The laws of being are established by the author of being. So we must rethink our science. We must see God and his Word at the root of every science. We are separated from modern science which, if it doesn’t actually deny the existence of God, claims to do without him.

“*Sicut nemo a seipso esse potest, ita etiam nemo a seipso sapiens esse potest, nisi ab illo illustrante, de quo scriptum est: Omnis sapientia a Deo*; As nobody can be his existence to himself, so nobody can owe his wisdom to himself. We can be wise only by being enlightened by him of whom it is written: All wisdom is from God”<sup>244</sup>.

## VI. Self-Centeredness<sup>245</sup>

We often come across religious who have lost taste for the things of the spirit. The reason for this is their having become self-centered, which is often not only the cause of their trouble but the result.

Cause #1: Selfishness. Selfishness dries the soul up like a potted plant which hasn’t been watered. They lock themselves up in a self-made sanctuary. They do nothing and are pleased with nothing—they carry death around with them. They love themselves so much that they cannot love others. What a horrible kind of self-centeredness!

Cause #2: Vanity. They are not very clever, yet they regard themselves as “somebody.” They feel like they have to do ‘acts of humility’ which do nothing but humiliate them. This kind of vanity is quite obvious to people.

Cause #3: Over-sensitivity. “*Tange montes, et fumigabunt*; Touch the mountains and they go up in smoke” (Ps 143:5 Vulgate). The self-centeredness of teachers feeds on “touchiness.”

Cause #4: Pride. Basking in the fullness of self. Such pride brings decadence to religious communities, for such love of self is the very negation of loving God.

Result #1: Loss of a spirit of community. The self-centered man is pleased only with himself.

Result #2: Loss of a spirit of faith since one thirsts for compliments and the things of this world.

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<sup>244</sup> St. Augustine, *Enchiridion ad Laurentium*, ch. 1 (Augustine&Enchiridion on Faith, Hope, and Love&Migne&chap. 1)

<sup>245</sup> In French, ‘amour-propre’



Result #3. Self-centeredness, rooted in pride, will stop at nothing. It respects nothing, it adores nothing but itself. In this matter it's God versus the devil.

Self-centeredness produces self-interest, and nothing is quite so horrible in a religious. It makes him see everything from his own vantage-point and none other—whatever is not to his advantage is worth nothing. This self-interest is the plague of the priesthood. Already, St. Paul said, “*Coeteri quae sua sunt quaerunt, non quae Jesu Christi*; One and all have their own interest at heart, not that of Jesus Christ!” (Phil 2:21). A religious who seeks his own personal advantage is incapable of acting supernaturally. The essentials of Christianity disappear when self-interest prevails. It will take saints and unparalleled efforts to redress the harm he has done. “*Dominus det vobis sensum....ut sitis in vero Filio Jesu Christo*; May the Lord give you the sense to become true followers of Jesus Christ!” (cf 1 Jn 5:20).

Self-centeredness seeks earthly dwelling-places—one loses a taste for heaven. Remember St. Peter on Mt. Tabor, “*Bonum est nos hic esse*; Lord, it is good for us to be here” (Mt 17:4). And we begin to imagine all the wonderful things we can achieve. How can we be expected to think of God and of prayer in such a state of mind?

Self-interest destroys charity; then we lose interest in things of the spirit...and fall in love with personal comfort and ease.

In our day when the spirit of faith is on the wane, we must make up for it by giving of ourselves wholeheartedly and leading a life of sacrifice.

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## *II. Instructions on Religious Life*

### VII. Supernatural Refinement<sup>246</sup>

#### **In what it consists**

When the soul is great and noble, this greatness and this nobility show themselves on one's face and other features. It is above all when we are young that our looks are shaped by the heart. When our piety is genuine, when our intellect attains its full stature, when virtues are flourishing in our lives and bear fruit, when our conscience is tranquil, there does shine forth from our physiognomy, from our demeanor, from our behavior and speech, some brilliant reflection of that beauty which lies below the surface.

On the other hand, if we allow mediocrity to take possession of our soul, if our thinking remains shallow and sterile, if our heart becomes entangled with unworthy affections, if the memory of goodness which once was ours has soured us into a state of bitter remorse, it will all take its toll on our outward appearance. Our features will set into an unpleasant mould—unrefined and lifeless. Our eyes will no longer sparkle. Our very physique will take on a certain heaviness. Our accents will lose their tuneful lilt. It will appear as if our whole person has fallen prey to our decayed soul.

It is this alliance between inward and outward beauty, this radiation of the soul on its outer vesture, which constitutes spiritual refinement.

#### **Accessible to all**

Such refinement, the companion of holiness, is not the privilege of noble birth; it is as accessible to the shepherd as to the prince. St. Vincent de Paul brought to the parlors of Anne of Austria<sup>247</sup> his religious poverty and the humble memory of his peasant ancestry. A Christian peasant is as capable of exhibiting the innocence of youth and the venerable dignity of old age as any of the world's luminaries.

Man is placed on a wide highway. At a crossroad, he can choose, in one direction, a steep mountain and, on the other, a pleasant valley. The mountain way is almost deserted, but on the valley road there are crowds of joyous travelers. The choice represents what distinguishes one who stands out from the crowd and one who does not.

To stand out from the crowd, one must climb up that difficult slope. It's much easier to walk down into the valley—but beware! There are

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<sup>246</sup> a talk edited by Fr. Edmond Bouvy, who was a teacher and patrologist.

<sup>247</sup> Anne of Austria (1601- 1666), a Spanish princess of the House of Habsburg, was queen of France as the wife of Louis XIII, and regent of France during the minority of her son, Louis XIV from 1643 to 1651.

terrible ways down there that lead to disaster.

Up you go, higher and higher still! You can see the mountain top, and there's where God lives and is waiting for you. Efforts will be called for, pain and perseverance—but take courage. Keep your eyes fixed on the goal and the loving presence of our God will give you strength to surmount every obstacle.

#### **The fruit of education**

Christian refinement, resulting from a truly God-centered upbringing, can nevertheless, even after one has triumphed over the early temptations of youth, phase out into mediocrity on the threshold of middle age. Routine, lukewarmness, prolonged idleness, and indulgence in creature comforts can drag us downwards little by little, to conduct that is hardly inspiring and make our very appearance unattractive.

But the contrary is equally true. Your childhood may have been entrusted to unworthy educators; you may have lived for many years under the influence of that narrow egoism which seems to govern most men; your spirit, up to now, may have dwelt in the penumbra of worldly thought and fashion. But it's never too late. Deliver yourself up to the action of grace. Fight energetically against the dead weight which has hitherto held you captive and you will conquer your erstwhile earthliness—and you will soar upwards towards the heights of spiritual distinction and refinement.

#### **Varieties of 'Spiritual Refinement':**

##### **Of the layperson**

There is the refinement of the layman; it is a kind of Christian nobility. God has given him a duty of hope by virtue of his destiny to life eternal. His heart should be detached from this land of exile and attached to his homeland.

##### **Of the Priest**

His is a special distinction—the halo of his priesthood. His speech must be filled with knowledge, his conversation must be edifying, his whole being clothed with the supreme distinction that is Jesus Christ's.

##### **Of the Religious**

But there is also the distinction of being a religious, an apostolic religious, an Assumptionist religious. Ours is the vocation to be the knights and heralds of God. What a sublime mission! But think of the corresponding sublimity of soul which it entails! It isn't good enough for us to have overcome our earthly tendencies; they must disappear!

So let us banish that "vulgarity" of laziness which weakens our noblest faculties and makes us look weary and powerless. Let us banish that "vulgarity" of presumption which centers everything on "self", which envisages nothing but our own success and aims at nothing but our own glory. Let us banish that "vulgarity" of resistance to grace which sets limits to our divine calling, which turns a deaf ear to the voice of God, which is

constantly calculating the amount of work we do, the level of our prayerfulness, and the extent of our commitment.

Let us be distinguished by a generosity that knows sacrifice, by a zeal full of initiative, by the edification of our good example, and by the enthusiasm of our love.

#### **Of the Saint**

Being a saint is a distinction and refinement, carried to the highest level. There is something indescribably beautiful about the face of a saint. It's not physical beauty; mere bodies do not radiate such purity of light. It's a beauty which derives from the mind and heart. Watch a saint at prayer. His actual features may be plain and nondescript, but they are bathed in the very beauty of God. His speech is kind and gentle in its simplicity. His appearance, his every action, denotes refinement and repels vulgarity. As he approaches, one senses that God is with him, that God speaks and acts through him, and that God blesses us through his hand.

#### **Of God**

God's essence is refinement, just as it is holiness. There is only one God because there can be only one infinite being. There are few saints because there are so many ordinary men. This one and infinite God invites us to become perfect, and offers us none other than himself as a model.

#### **Of Jesus Christ**

Yet, so that our weakness not lead us to shrink away, He sent us his Son, the Son who is one with him, this Son who was made flesh and became man. "*Ecce homo*; Behold the man" (Jn 19:5). Yes, let us behold the man. He is the unique exemplar of both holiness and refinement. He is that pattern which we behold far off on the mountain and beckons us to come close to him and lose ourselves in his light. He is one whose divinity radiates through the pores of his humanity. He is the prototype we must endeavor to reproduce by imitating his life and embracing his Cross. Our hearts must learn to beat in unison with his, to die to ourselves so as to live through him and in him.

Oh! If our prayers, meditations and communions were truly fervent, if at that moment of all moments when Jesus, having passed through our lips, enters into the sanctuary of our hearts, we were touched by the inexpressible depths of his appeal, if we allowed ourselves to be consumed by that fire he came to cast over the earth, if we united ourselves to him with a bond which could not be broken, if we loved him as much as the human heart is capable of loving, how our whole lives would be transformed!

Our beloved who enjoys dwelling among the lilies would cause these flowers he loves to germinate within us. A chastity that had disappeared would flourish once more in a second springtime. Rich fruits would follow: the fruits of grace and salvation.

It is then that our intellect rises up in the strength of its humility. It is

then that our heart would expand to make room for God himself. It is then that our soul would take wings like the dove and escape the ordinariness of this world. It is then that, seeking this distinction which here below is the crown of holiness and hereafter the crown of the elect, we would take flight to the upper regions of perfection, bearing on our faces the reflection of the splendors that await us.

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## VIII. The Call to Religious Life<sup>248</sup>

*sometime after 1870*

Let us imagine God having just created heaven and earth. Up in heaven the angels are already singing his praises, but what's it like down here on earth? Chaos. "*Terra autem erat inanis et vacua*; Earth was but an empty waste" (Gn 1:2) The world is shapeless, fruitless, devoid of all beauty, and so far incapable of producing anything. "*Et tenebrae erant super faciem abyssi*; And darkness hung over the deep" (Gn 1:2). From this profound darkness over the abyss, the Lord is about to produce numerous creatures of every species. And yet, this chaos, this formless matter, this bottomless deep has itself been created. But in what state it is! It looks like my soul before God called me. What am I, indeed, but a dry, weary land, without form, without virtue, a soul full of iniquity, perhaps, and ingratitude, no doubt, and covered over with thick darkness? *Et tenebrae erant super faciem abyssi*. Quite a lot to be humble about if that's all I am: shapeless, empty, buried in the thickest darkness.

But let me not give way to despair, because the sacred text continues, "*Et spiritus Dei ferebatur super aquas*; And the Spirit of God moved over the waters" (Gn 1:2). This earth was shrouded in waters as impure as itself. But the Holy Spirit was there, and his creative power, ready to brood over the waters as a mother hen, St. Jerome tells us in his commentary. "*Incumbibat*—brooding over it and hatching something out of it," according to this Father of the Church<sup>249</sup>. Whereupon God said: "Let there be light. And there was light; *Dixitque Deus: fiat lux, et facta est lux*" (Gn 1:3). This is an image of the state I was in and of God's indescribable plans for me. The Holy Spirit, who calls me to a new, personal creation, hovers over me: "*Et spiritus Dei ferebatur super aquas*; And the Spirit of God moved over the waters". And he will soon say, "*Fiat lux*; Let there be light." And light will be created within me, a prelude to that further creation of grace whereby this Holy Spirit will stir in the depths of my being. "*Emitte spiritum tuum, et creabuntur et renovabis faciem terrae*; When you

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<sup>248</sup> This instruction is 1 of 7 written for a retreat. Only three of them were published. Cf., CD: C00817, C00838, and C00839 in the French data base.

<sup>249</sup> *Commentary on Genesis 1:2* (Jerome&Commentary on Genesis&Migne&1:2)

send forth your spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the earth”(cf. Ps 103:30 Vulgate).<sup>250</sup>

#### 1° From all Eternity

And when did God decide to bring about such wonders in my soul? From all eternity, because he has loved me from all eternity. “*In caritate perpetua dilexi te*; I have loved you with an everlasting love” (Jer 31:3a). His love for me, his thought of me, his pity on me, had no beginning. The world did not yet exist, but his Word has always been there. And in this Word, he saw me, he knew me, and he loved me. “*In caritate perpetua dilexi te*; I have loved you with an everlasting love.” Such is the origin of my being as a Christian and as a religious. No credit to me. Nothing but mercy on his part. “*Ideo attraxi te, miserans tui*; so I have taken pity on you and drawn you to myself” (Jer 31:3b).

How, then, am I to respond to this love as timeless as God himself, a love that seems to have been waiting for me in time at the threshold of my existence, a love that enveloped me in the most wonderful way? How else could I respond than by loving him in return as much as is possible for my heart, aided by grace, to love? How am I to respond to this mercy which calls me, which attracts me, which longs for me, than by a total abandon of myself to God’s influence in my life? O my God, you have loved me from all eternity; I wish to love you forever. You have seduced me and I have allowed myself to be grasped by your grace. I will resist no longer, I surrender myself to you all the days of my life.

#### 2° At this very moment

Yes, Jesus is calling me at this moment, during this retreat. “*Ecco sto ad ostium, et pulso*; Behold, I stand at the gate and knock” (Rv 3:20). How many pretexts would I not like to raise to keep me from God’s call! But how can I, when he is there, knocking at the door of my heart? Ah, why this annoying pursuit on his part? How I wish I could tell him I don’t hear! No matter how hard I try, I cannot leave the door unopened. He is there. He’s there and so is my uneasy conscience with its nagging doubts that leave me restless. I can hardly hide all my specious pretexts; that won’t work. That’s him at the door all right—I recognize his voice.

What can I do? Send him away? But supposing he goes away and never comes back? Supposing he tells me what he told the Jews, “*Ego vado, et quaeritis me, et in peccato vestro moriemini*; I am going away, and you will look for me—and you will die in your sin” (Jn 8:21)? What is there to be said? Do I so want to turn Jesus away that I won’t be able to find him again and that I will be condemned to die in a state of sin which I have no intention of giving up? Ah, I am aware of this sin and I know that it cannot

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<sup>250</sup> The *Veni, Sancte Spiritus* is a traditional prayer asking for the grace of the Holy Spirit. It has been used for centuries as a prayer of private devotion. The texts appear in the propers for the feast of Pentecost in both the Mass and Divine Office, and also in the votive Mass of the Holy Spirit.

remain if this Divine Master is to dwell there. So what shall I do? Is not this retreat the acceptable time, the day of salvation? I can, no doubt, say: “Lord, I’ll open the door for you later.” But who do I think I am to make God wait? And if he goes away, what guarantee is there that, having been offended by my rebuff, he won’t come back? My good Master, you are knocking. Very well, I’m going to open the door. Enter my heart and purify it. Take possession of it and reign there forever.

### 3° Admission Free

Our Lord is calling you *without your deserving it*. To which of us can it not be said what the Pharisees said to the man born blind: “*In peccatis natus es totus*; You are steeped in sin from your birth” (Jn 9:34)? But that doesn’t matter. God is calling us. He wants us for himself, irrespective of our personal merits. We can truly say with St. Augustine, “*Misericordia ejus praevenit eos secundum gratia, et non secundum meritum*; He offers us mercy according to his grace, not according to our deserts”<sup>251</sup>.

Ah, if everything comes from his mercy, why then do we keep relying on ourselves? We came into existence without being entitled to live. We are re-born to the supernatural life of grace without being entitled to any of God’s gifts. So when are we going to acknowledge the depths of our nothingness, the depths of our misery? What is not the sense of humility that we should have from now on so that we might not jump from there into the arms of Jesus Christ who bids us come to him? Happy is the soul that is humble enough to walk in this way. Happy is the religious who, penetrated by his own nothingness and convinced that humility is the first step to perfection, hears the voice of Jesus Christ and commits himself to follow him from Bethlehem to Calvary in order to be re-born in him, to live a new life with him, to die with him on the Cross, and to go wherever the Divine Master chooses to lead him.

### 4° Towards Sanctity

Jesus Christ is calling you to be saints. In order to appreciate the degree of perfection we are being called to, let us meditate on the opening passage of the Epistle to the Ephesians, “*Benedictus Deus et pater Domini nostri Jesu Christi, qui benedixit nos in omni benedictione spirituali, in coelestibus, in Christo*; Blessed be God, the Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ, who has filled us, in Christ, with every spiritual blessing from heaven above” (Eph 1:3). First of all, notice all the spiritual blessings we have received, as expressed in this hebraism, “*Benedixit nos in omni benedictione spirituali*; He has blessed us with every spiritual blessing.” Every blessing, every gift, every grace, all our strength, all our light has come down to us from heaven above, *in coelestibus*. And all these graces, all these spiritual blessings, have been given to us from heaven above *in*

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<sup>251</sup> editor’s note: St. Augustine’s text reads *debitum* and not *meritum*: *De praedestinatione sanctorum* [CPL 0354] – LLT-A col. 985, linea 38 (Augustine&On th Predestination of the Saints&CPL&col. 985, line 38)

*Christo*. Jesus Christ is always the mediator, the one sent by God, through whom every blessing from heaven above has been transmitted to us by his Father, our God. “*Benedictus Deus et pater*; Blessed be God the Father.”

And for what purpose? “*Sicut elegit nos in ipso*; He chose us in him” (Eph 1:4). It was in Christ, who is his Word, in him in whom were contained all creatures that he would draw out of nothingness, in him that God chose us: *Sicut elegit nos in ipso*. Time was not yet, the world was not yet—but already the universe, already all creatures, existed in the mind of God. He chose a certain number and we were among that number: *Sicut elegit nos in ipso*. It was a wonderful choice—a mysterious choice. It depended on nothing but God’s pure will, God’s kindness, and God’s infinite mercy. *Sicut elegit nos in ipso, ante mundi constitutionem*; he chose us, in Christ, before the foundation of the world. But why? *Ut essemus sancti et immaculati in conspectus ejus, in charitate*; That we should be holy and spotless in his sight, for love of him” (Eph 1:4).

He chose us, he called, “*Quos autem praedestinavit, hos et vocavit, et quos vocavit, hos et justificavit; quos autem justificavit, hos et glorificavit*; And those whom he predestined, he also called; and those whom he called, he also justified; and those whom he justified, he also glorified” (Rom 8:30). What a wonderful chain of events! Having been chosen, we are predestined. If we respond to our predestination, we will be called. If we respond to this call (to this “vocation”), we will be justified, and, having been justified, we will be glorified. That’s the chain. But bear in mind that, before being glorified, and after being justified, there is this mystery of holiness and purity to which we have been called. God said that no other living creature would be just in his sight; *Non justificabitur in conspectus tuo omnis vivens*” (Ps 142:2 Vulgate). But when we are justified by him, not by any justice of our own, but by his, which he grants to us in his mercy, then he sets no limits to his divine requirements of us. He wants us to be “holy and spotless; *sancti et immaculati*” (Eph 1:4). How deep is this holiness! How perfect this spotlessness! How deep? How dazzling? Sufficiently deep and dazzling to be in his sight; *in conspectus ejus*! It is his eye, and none other, which will scrutinize our inmost being to make sure we are truly holy and spotless, as he understands it: “*Ut omnes sancti et immaculati in conspectus ejus*; So that we may be holy and immaculate in his sight.’

But if God’s divine favor rests upon us, his love is present as well. Why, then, should we tremble before his face, unless it is because of our inadequate response to his love? The bottom line, then, is that God chose us because he loves us. God chose me—therefore he loves me. Do I wish to respond to his choice, to his love by being holy and pure? That is the question.

When the Divine Savior went to console Martha and Mary at the death of Lazarus (a death he had permitted for God’s greater glory to shine forth), Martha came out to meet him first. Then, having listened to his



words of hope, she went back to her sister and said to her quietly; *silencio dicens*, “The Master is here, and he is calling you; *Magister adest, vocat te*” (Jn 11:28). So Mary approached and after a moment Jesus, Martha, and Mary came to the tomb from which Lazarus was going to be called out.

Something similar happens with you—except that you are both Mary and Lazarus. Lazarus is dead, dead and buried these past four days. But Jesus Christ arrives on the scene. He comes to Mary, to your soul, and I say to you on Jesus’ behalf what Martha said to Mary, “*Magister adest, vocat te*; The Master is here, and he is calling you.” Do you want to listen? Do you want to follow him? You may be dead but that makes no difference. Listen to the Savior, “*Ego sum resurrectio et vita. Qui credit in me, etiam si mortuus fuerit, vivet*; I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me, even though he be dead, shall live” (Jn 11:25). Are you dead? Here is an offer of life. Do you want to accept it, this offer of life? It will provide you with justification in time, but complete liberation in eternity. “*Qui credit in me, non morietur in aeternum*; He who believes in me will not die for ever” (Jn 11:26). Do you wish to live forever? Then go to Jesus forever. He is here, and is calling for you. *Magister adest, vocat te*.

## IX. Religious Life

*“Amen dico vobis, auferetur a vobis regnum Dei, et dabitur genti facienti fructus ejus; Amen, I say to you: the Kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people rendering the fruits thereof”* (Mt 21:43).

What a frightening sentence pronounced by the Savior on the Jewish people, on nations which used to be Christian, and likewise on religious families on whom numerous graces had been conferred, only to be unworthily abused! And have we not ourselves sufficiently witnessed this lamentable outcome? Has it led us to ask ourselves, despite our very recent beginnings, whether we do not merit similar condemnation? “*Amen dico vobis, auferetur a vobis regnum Dei, et dabitur genti facienti fructus ejus*; The Kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people rendering the fruits thereof.” So it is of supreme importance that we should reflect seriously on where we stand as regards our religious life. And in order to do so without deceiving ourselves, let us examine: first, the duties imposed by such a holy state; second, the practice of the virtues which this state requires of us.

### I.—The Duties of Religious Life

There is nothing sadder to note than how so few people seem

acquainted with their elementary duties. We follow our own interest and pursue our personal plans. We orient our lives according to merely human standards which, alas, often lead us to settle for the most ordinary of lives. But when it comes to organizing the time we have to spend on this earth in a supernatural way, in conformity with God's wishes and God's laws, ah, how restricted is the number of people who seem to spare it a thought!

And what applies to Christians in general, applies still more to us religious. Is it not obvious that those linked to God by holy sacred vows thereby incur more serious obligations? We content ourselves with knowing this, as long as we don't have to do anything about it! What gives rise to this nonchalance? Because we don't reflect and because we think nothing of missing out on our religious exercises. Since we no longer reflect on these spiritual exercises, we cease to appreciate their value; we forget to perform them and soon we even forget what they are! ...and how can we be expected to perform them? If only we gave the matter some serious thought, it would be easy to bring them back to a few simple points.

1° Firstly, we must remember what we were taught when we were novices. However imperfect our novitiate may have been, it is certain that some very serious responsibilities were treated there. Perhaps they were presented as a mere list of "do's and don'ts"; perhaps in our hearts there were areas of resistance that prevented God's word from penetrating them. Lots of lukewarm parishioners just "sit through" the Sunday sermon; in like manner, a certain species of religious just "sits through" his novitiate, and for a few it's been that way throughout their years of formation and religious profession. Their novice-masters and superiors may have told them, as Our Lord did to the Pharisees, "*Sermo meus non capit in vobis*; My words have not taken root in you" (Jn 8:37). With such an attitude what could possibly remain from all that they heard? Yet think of the amount of solid doctrine taught, think of all the talks geared to their state, think of the private and individual counseling they were offered.

2° Secondly, in order to become familiar with various religious duties, there is plenty of solid material available to do so. It takes more than a "flash in the pan" to recapture the sense of being a religious, once we have lost it. But if a religious, once he has "put his hand to the plough," cannot save his soul otherwise than under the sacred burden he has willingly assumed, what efforts must he not make to get back on track and what benefits will he not derive from solid and substantial spiritual literature? Can it not shake him out of his lethargy and oblige him to look to the future and, beyond the horizon of this world, to the eternal, limitless world which awaits him?

And, alas, while we're on this topic, how important it is to choose your readings wisely! What deadly illusions are fostered by certain pious publications which lack any substance! We feel we have gotten quite a "kick" out of them, but, in fact, they're built on sand. We catch fire like a pile of dry branches that goes up in a flash and leaves nothing behind. We

may have started out with good intentions but others soon intervene and snuff them out. For a while, we were ablaze, but quickly nothing is left but a few ashes.

3° Thirdly, we must examine ourselves conscientiously. We must compare what we set out to become in the days when God spoke to our souls and what have we become in fact. How many firm resolutions we took then, yet how many of these resolutions seem to have been blown away like the clouds of a self-centered imagination!

The painful effort required to rummage through the depth of this ugliness is, indeed, painstaking and most humiliating. It gives any man extreme repugnance to have to admit that there is something askew in his life, but we all have to end up by getting there. It's all the more repugnant when we realize that these self-examinations bring us back to good resolutions we took at previous retreats. Before your First Communion you went on retreat. You have made other retreats since, in the course of your training. Go over these retreats. Remember what you promised to do and how little was honored. The list is long and repeated infidelities pose more than a problem.

There is one point I wish to stress. There comes a crucial moment when the soul of a religious, wounded by years of lukewarmness and culpable aridity, looks back on what he now calls "the illusions" of his pristine fervor and fails to realize that this time was, after all, the "reign of truth," because at that moment his relationship with God was sincere. If he hasn't persevered, he has only his own laxity to blame. However, as he looks over, in detail, everything that he promised to do and to become, perhaps he will realize that he has a lot more to do and become, and to do so in a lot better fashion, in order to repair past damage.

4° Finally, what better can we do if we want to retrieve the true concept of our religious duties and return to an effective prayer life than to keep on repeating these words, "I will listen to what the Lord God has to say to me" (Ps 84:8 Vulgate) and to make them our own? After all, doesn't that say it all? Do we truly wish to know God? Do we truly wish to serve him? Then sit at his feet and take a look at yourselves; delve into your very depths during these days of blessing on retreat. There, knowing yourselves as you do, and in all sincerity of heart—*in fide non ficta* (cf. 1 Tim 1:5) think about what you know you should be and compare it with what you are. Listen, it's time to return to the way of God's commandments and to embrace it in order to make up for lost time. Then perhaps you will begin to grasp what transformation, what complete renewal, what radical conversion God demands of you.

## **II.—The Practice of the Virtues which the Religious Life Requires**

As I see it, this practice is summed up, first and foremost, by the permanent resolution to tend towards perfection.

You have not, I clearly understand, made a vow of perfection, like St. Teresa (of Avila); but all theologians are unanimous in telling you we ought to be disposed to becoming more and more perfect. Why? Because you have bound yourselves by a vow to practice the three evangelical counsels. For the Christian laity, these counsels are a matter of mere invitation. For you they constitute a rigorous obligation, by which your whole life is caught up and everything within you must be transformed. Here's a question to make you tremble: how do you look upon your vows? What do they mean for you? And when I ask myself this question, I am terrified because God alone knows the depth of my sincerity and He alone can judge.

This disposition to become more and more perfect: how intense is it in your heart of hearts? You will soon know, by the answers you give yourself, how fervent a religious you are. For, listen, your actions will serve as an answer to this question. It is easy for you to perceive how far you can be described as "poor," "chaste" or "obedient"—whether you engage in practices of mortification or are a man of prayer. It isn't difficult for you to know whether you are being faithful to your Rule or whether you continually break it. This, I repeat, is terrifying. It gives you the means of judging yourself, and all God has to do is ratify this judgment.

You have other means of knowing where you stand. You are subject to temptations—how do you resist them? What is their nature? How intense are they? What about your victories? And your defeats? Your defeats show you how small you are. Your victories are a sign of progress in the virtues which pertain to your state. Be aware of the sins into which you habitually lapse. Why these regrettable chains which make you the slave of sin, venial perhaps, but the frequency of which ends up making them a matter of grave concern? And take note of which vices you have allowed to infect and poison your heart.

Do you still wish to know where you stand? A religious is a man of penance. Every member of a religious order must be a man of penance. What kind of penance do you practice? Are you not living a life that is just too ordinary—the life of a respectable citizen, and nothing more?

A religious, more than anyone else, must take to heart the word of the Psalmist concerning the just, "*Ibunt de virtute in virtutem*; They will go from virtue to virtue" (Ps 83:8 Vulgate). If you cannot acquire a new virtue every day, you should at least be able to register some progress in the virtues you already have. In point of fact, what progress have you made? Is it veritable progress, and what hopes does it hold out for the future?

"But," you will protest, "I'm a nice fellow—I have a pleasant character—what more do you want?" Why? Because merely natural qualities will never acquire supernatural worth. Perfection, for a religious, lies in the acquisition of supernatural qualities.

Let me stop there. One will know how much you love Our Lord by your constant desire to please him. The genuine religious never thinks he

has achieved anything as long as there is more for him to do. As he moves forward, he feels that God's love is asking new efforts and sacrifices of him. He must make these sacrifices; he must bring these efforts to the feet of Jesus Christ as proof of his love. He needs to see progress.

The bridegroom in the Song of Songs says, "*Veniat dilectus meus in hortum suum, et comedat fructus pomorum suorum*; Let my beloved come into his garden and eat the fruit of his apple trees" (Sg 5:1). The beloved's garden is the soul of a religious. It is a garden where Jesus loves to come: to find rest and consolation, to comfort himself for all the insults he has to endure, for all the enmity by which he is constantly pursued. "*Veniat dilectus meus in hortum suum*—So let my beloved come into his garden." There let him pluck the fruit from his own trees; there let him eat and enjoy them. What are these trees, but the gifts we have received from God, the virtues poured into our soul and the virtues proper to our religious state? And what is their fruit, but every act we accomplish with sentiments required by the holiness of our calling?

My God, where do we stand? And when will we apply ourselves energetically, wholeheartedly, and with the help of thy grace, to the fulfillment of our duties and the practice of the virtues of that perfect state to which you call us?

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## X. Progress toward Perfection

*"Ibunt de virtute in virtutem; They will go from virtue to virtue" (Ps 83:8 Vulgate)*

The religious that has made the unshakeable resolution to advance in the way of perfection must ask himself a few questions. What, then, must you do about it? To which basic question, the holy books of the Bible summarizes an answer in two words: suffer and advance. St. Augustine's commentary on Psalm 83 treats this question admirably. All I am going to do is to follow his thought reflecting on the sparks he produces by hammering away at the royal prophet. Let us see how, in fact, suffering and marching forward are, indeed, the two great means of drawing near to God.

### I.—Suffering

Nothing in Holy Scripture is devoid of significance. The very titles given to the Psalms have meaning and a message. Therefore, what do these words mean: "*pro torcularibus filiis Core*; to the choirmaster, melody: the wine-pressers, the sons of Korah" (Ps 83:1 Vulgate? Presumably that the sons of Korah sang this melody while they were pressing the grapes).

Our 'doctor' goes on to explain, "Consider the grapes and the olives.

As long as they are attached to the vine or the olive tree, they dance about in the wind, without a care in the world.” “But what fruit do they bear in this condition? Whereas when you pitch them into the press and crush them, they turn into rich wine and abundant oil”<sup>252</sup>.

It is the same with a soul who places his destiny in God’s hands. Is it not said, “*Fili, accedens ad servitutum Dei, sta in justitia et timore, et praecepta animam tuam ad tentationem*; My son, when you enter the Lord’s service, stand in righteousness and fear, and prepare your soul to be put to the test” (Eccl 2:1). There is no form of Christian life without rules laid down by God’s righteousness. And if we apply these words to a religious, he must necessarily envisage the rules of his religious family as the expression of that superabundant righteousness which Jesus Christ came down from heaven to bestow upon us. It is already the cause of much suffering to have to bow our heads, submit our hearts, and surrender our will, to this winepress: “*sta in justitia*; stand in righteousness”—this is the Rule—“*et timore*; and in fear”. Yes, we must be expected to experience a salutary fear, undoubtedly not only because of our own weakness but also because of our waywardness, not to mention the role of our superiors, whose duty it is to inspire such a fear because the matter at hand is so grave, “*sta in justitia et timore*; stand in righteousness and fear.” Live under the weight of the Rule, and under the dominion of your superiors. Otherwise it is useless to pretend you have any intention of advancing in virtue. Say rather that religious life has become nothing but a screen and a disguise and what you really want is to pursue your personal fancies, despite the Rule—and stage your personal revolts against God’s commandment, “*sta in justitia et timore*; stand in righteousness and fear.”

But why should we? Because obedience to the Rule, and to our superiors, is the most potent apprenticeship for this warfare against temptation, which, say what you like, underlies every form of religious life. “*Fili, accedens ad servitutum Dei, sta in justitia et timore, et praecepta animam tuam ad tentationem*; My son, when you enter the Lord’s service, stand in righteousness and fear, and prepare your soul to be put to the test.”

Yes, you will suffer temptations from every side. You will be tempted by the world which will, on the one hand, never forgive you for leaving it, and, on the other hand, blame you for not setting it a high enough standard of good example. You will be tempted by Satan, furious with you for having driven him out of your heart, and turned it into a pure and mysterious abode for Jesus Christ. And you will be tempted by your own sinful inclinations, angered by your efforts to expel them or, worse still, to transform them into virtues. O, yes, you will have to suffer a great deal.

Not to mention what I call the “domestic” temptations, within the four walls of your community. You will be tempted by the character of your

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<sup>252</sup> St. Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos* (CPL 0283)-LLT-A, SL 39, psalmus 83, par. 1, linea 20 (Augustine&Commentary on the Psalms&CPL&psalm 83, par. 1, line 20)

brothers. Temptations will arise from the very good works you will be called upon to perform. You will be tempted by feelings of repulsion towards those pupils who fail to take advantage of all that is offered to them. And there will be so many other temptations that their behavior provokes. There will be temptations arising from parents who insist on your being ridiculously severe, even when their sons are not guilty. You will be tempted by outsiders, forever prying into the secrets of the cloister, looking for something to criticize, blame and pass judgment on. You will even be tempted to adopt their outlook, to agree with their criticism and apply it, and then to defend yourself against allegations which are only too well-founded. These are some of the temptations to which you will be exposed as soon as you begin to make serious headway in God's service. "*Fili, accedens ad servitutem Dei, sta in justitia et timore, et praecepta animam tuam ad tentationem*; My son, when you enter the Lord's service, stand in righteousness and fear, and prepare your soul to be put to the test."

Such is only the beginning. Such are only the preliminaries. Following our 'great doctor' step by step, let us see what he says next, "*Sed, quoniam dictum est: Fili, accedens ad servitutem Dei, sta in justitia et timore, et praecepta animam tuam ad tentationem. Accedens quisque ad servitutem Dei, ad torcularia se venisse cognoscat*; Wait awhile and remember these words: My son, when you enter the Lord's service, stand in righteousness and fear, and prepare your soul to be put to the test. For whoever seeks to enter the Lord's service must be prepared to pass through the winepress"<sup>253</sup>. And what will happen to the soul who accepts to enter this "winepress"? "*Contribulabitur, coneretur, opprimetur*; He will be trodden underfoot; he will be broken; he will be crushed to pieces"<sup>254</sup>. This was no new teaching. Originally sung by David, it was taken up again by Jesus Christ on the eve of his death, "*In mundo pressuram habebitis*; In the world you will find distress" (Jn 16:33). The same message echoed along the African coast from the lips of Augustine, "*contribulabitur, coneretur, opprimetur*; trodden underfoot, broken, smashed, crushed to pieces": such is the lot which awaits whoever tends towards Christian perfection. And this is not some kind of vain challenge that we are posing to the world in view of engaging it in a battle to death. We are not saying, Goodbye to the world, just for the pleasure of leaving it: "*Non, ut hoc saeculo pereat, sed ut in apothecas Dei fluat*; We do not wish this world to perish; we wish it to flow into the wine cellars of God!"<sup>255</sup> The example, the bishop of Hippo tells us, was given to us because the great and magnificent bunch of grapes to be thrown into the press was none other than Jesus Christ: *botrus ille grandis*;

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<sup>253</sup> Ibid. *Enarrationes in Psalmos* (CPL 0283)-LLT-A, SL 39, psalmus 83, par. 1, linea 22 (Augustine&Commentary on the Psalms&CPL&psalm 39, par. 1, line 22)

<sup>254</sup> ibid. *Enarrationes in Psalmos* (CPL 0283)-LLT-A, SL 39, psalmus 83, par. 1, linea 20 (Augustine&Commentary on the Psalms&CPL&psalm 83, par. 1, line 20)

<sup>255</sup> ibid. (Augustine&Commentary on the Psalms&CPL&psalm 83, par. 1, line 20)

this great cluster<sup>256</sup>.

Thus, amid the universal oppression, “*Restat illis desiderans Deus*; God remains the object of all our desires”<sup>257</sup>. So let the faithful soul allow itself to be “trodden underfoot, broken, and crushed to pieces.” What does it matter? “*Restat illis desiderans Deus*; God remains the object of all its desires.” And we finish by appreciating how good it is for us to be thrown into this terrible wine-press. “*Si ergo sentis pressuras hujus mundi, etiam cum felix es, intellexisti esse in torculari*; You may feel overcome by the pressures of this world—yet you are happy because you know you are passing through God’s own winepress”.

Here is the separation between the lukewarm and cowardly soul, the soul that falls, and the soul whose desires attract the light of suffering. “*Si ergo sentis pressuras hujus mundi, etiam cum felix es, intellexisti esse in torculari*; You may feel overcome by the pressures of this world—yet you are happy because you know you are passing through God’s own winepress”<sup>258</sup>. This is, and always will be, the unbridgeable chasm between the souls of this world, whose hearts belong to this world, and the souls of those who, thanks to God’s grace and the example of his saints, have set their sights on heaven.

Let me note in passing what St. Augustine has to say about the concluding words of the title to this psalm, “*pro filiis Core*; for the sons of Korah”<sup>259</sup> which literally means, “the sons of the bald man.” Some biblical interpreters tell us that this “bald man” was none other than Our Lord Jesus Christ who surrendered everything he could call his own. The religious has his head shaven to signify his wish to discard all superfluity, symbolized by his hair. So there stands the religious: completely dispossessed, besides being trodden underfoot, bruised and crushed. He now feels he has nothing to do with the things of this world. And so concludes St. Augustine before embarking on the actual text of the psalm, “*Ergo in pressuris tentationum constituti, edamus hanc vocem, et praemittamus desiderium nostrum: Quam dilecta tabernacula tua, Deus virtutum*; here we are, thrown into the winepress of tribulation. Let us, then, raise our voices and express our fondest yearning: how lovely are your tabernacles, Lord God of Hosts!”<sup>260</sup>. Such is the source of courage for one who is suffering, the desire for the tabernacles of the God of Hosts!

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<sup>256</sup> *ibid.* Augustine&Commentary on the Psalms&CPL&psalm 83, par. 1, line 20)

<sup>257</sup> *ibid.*, par 5, linea 1 (Augustine&Commentary on the Psalms&CPL&psalm 83, par. 5, line 1)

<sup>258</sup> *ibid.*, par. 1, linea 20 (Augustine&Commentary on the Psalms&CPL&psalm 83, par. 1, line 20)

<sup>259</sup> *ibid.* (Augustine&Commentary on the Psalms&CPL&psalm 83, par. 1, line 20)

<sup>260</sup> *ibid.*, par. 5, line 29 (Augustine&Commentary on the Psalms&CPL&psalm 83, par. 5, line 29)



But there are two kinds of “tabernacles,” the ‘doctor’ reminds us, the “tabernacles” of the winepress and the “tabernacles” of our homeland. We must pass through the first before arriving at the second. And in one sense we can say this world is the “tabernacle” of suffering. We can also refer to religious life as the “winepress.” By becoming religious we follow in the footsteps of our divine Master, who had to tread the “winepress” of Calvary before returning to heaven as the conqueror of Satan and the liberator of souls.

Let us examine how one passes through the “tabernacles” of suffering to the tabernacles of joy, victory, and everlasting repose.

## II. Marching forward

The ‘Prophet’<sup>261</sup>, amidst the trials and tribulations which assailed him, cried out: “*Quam dilecta tabernacula tua, Domine virtutum; concupiscit et deficit anima mea in atria Domini*; How lovely are your tabernacles, Lord God of Hosts! My soul is longing and yearning for the house of the Lord” (Ps 83:2-3a Vulgate). His very sufferings give him the desire to march on. He feels that there exists a house of God, who is his father; it is the true family home...and he loves this house a thousand times more than any son could love the place where he was born. Standing in the courtyard, on the porch, in the entrance hall, he experiences a longing, a yearning, which words are too feeble to express, “*Concupiscit et deficit anima mea in atria Domini*; My soul is longing and yearning for the house of the Lord” (Ps 83:3 Vulgate)

The courtyard and the entrance hall can be taken to represent monasteries and convents, which are known as the gateways to heaven, when their inhabitants have their hearts set on heaven. They have already taken the first step of quitting this world for the monastery—and the more they distance themselves from the “land of exile,” the more rapid is their advance towards their true fatherland, towards the “tabernacles of God”... and the more rapid their advance, the more consuming is their desire to get there. “*Concupiscit et deficit anima mea in atria Domini, cor meum et caro mea exultaverunt in Deum vivum*; My soul is longing and yearning for the house of the Lord. My heart, and my very flesh, have found joy in the living God” (Ps 83:3 Vulgate). This soul is longing for life, the life to be found in God. This life is communicated by Jesus, of whom St. John tells us that “in him was life; *in ipso vita erat*” (Jn 1:4). The ‘prophet’ (David) himself hardly knows who this God is, this eternal life in himself, communicated to his own creatures. What can we know about it? We ourselves know that our own life is sometimes such a dead weight that it drags us down to the grave. But this other life which is God himself, not only does it make our heart leap high with joy, but it refreshes and gladdens our very flesh. “*Cor meum*

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<sup>261</sup> i.e. King David

*et caro mea exultaverunt in Deum vivum; My heart and my very flesh have found joy in the living God.*”

For the sparrow has found herself a home and the turtledove a nest where to place her young. For the soul which seeks perfection, its dwelling-place, its nest is none other than the altars of the Most High God. “*Altaria tua, Domine virtutum. rex meus et Deus meus; Upon your altars, Lord of Hosts—my King and my God*” (Ps 83:4 Vulgate). Follow this soul to the altar of sacrifice, to the altar of incense. This soul hungers for the God of all goodness, for the royalty and divinity of its Master. This soul offers itself up. It prays, obeys, adores. It does all that it is most perfect for a soul to do.

“*Beati qui habitant in domo tua, Domine; in saecula saeculorum laudabunt te; Blessed are they who dwell in your house, O Lord. They will praise you for ever and ever*” (Ps 83:5 Vulgate). Let us pause a moment, and endeavor to fully plumb the depths of these words. Obviously, worldly Jews only understood this song to be speaking of the temple in Jerusalem and this was enough for them. But for David the temple represented his homeland; it represented heaven. And for the true religious, “Jerusalem” is not the dwelling place of sinners. It is not heaven, not yet. It is a “tabernacle,” that is to say, a tent, a temporary dwelling place. It is the cloister with all its delights, as we sit at the feet of Jesus Christ. He approaches us, because we are not yet pure enough to approach him. “*Beati qui habitant in domo tua, Domine; in saecula saeculorum laudabunt te; Blessed are they who dwell in your house, O Lord. They will praise you for ever and ever*”.

We are already living in God’s house, my brothers. It is a question of settling in there, so that we may praise the Lord for ever and ever. Our vows are a most precious help. By them we are bound to God for eternity. O happy chains! O wonderful bonds! If we remain faithful to them, they will gain for us the merit of spending eternity singing the praises of God. “*Beati qui habitant in domo tua, Domine; in saecula saeculorum laudabunt te; Blessed are they who dwell in your house, O Lord. They will praise you for ever and ever.*”

“*Beatus vir, cujus est auxilium abs te, ascensiones in corde suo disposuit; Blessed is the man whose help comes from you. In his heart he is disposed to ascend by steps*” (Ps 83:6 Vulgate). Of ourselves we are absolutely incapable of going up to God’s house. But God helps us. Since, in general, he does not wish to bring us there in one single bound, he establishes steps to be taken in our heart. Baptism, a vocation, response to the call, novitiate, vows: these are so many stages whereby he calls us to himself—and the soul, burning with the desire to become perfect, makes them his own. “*Beatus vir, cujus est auxilium abs te, ascensiones in corde suo disposuit; Blessed is the man whose help comes from you. He has set his heart on ascending the steps.*” We have mounted the preliminary steps—and now, day by day, he provides us with further steps to facilitate our arrival at the top of the mountain. But where have we come from? “We have come up from the Valley of Tears, from the place where we formerly

stood; *In valle lacrymarum, in loco quem posuit*” (Ps 83:7 Vulgate).

Let us not forget that we are not yet in our homeland. We are still in the Valley of Tears. Here we have set up a “waiting room,” the seclusion of the monastery: “*in valle lacrymarum, in loco quem posuit*—still in this Valley of Tears, in the place God has chosen for us.” It is here that God bestows his most abundant blessings upon us: “*Etenim dabit Dominus benedictionem*; Here God gives us blessing after blessing”—and it is here that progress in holiness takes place: “*ibunt de virtutibus in virtutem*; we go from virtues to virtue”<sup>262</sup>. What exactly does he mean when he goes from “many virtues” to one virtue? “Ah!” replies this admirable interpreter, “The religious soul may have many virtues, but some of them are only a means of reaching him who is THE virtue, the power, and the wisdom of God: “*Christum Dei virtutem et Dei sapientiam*; Christ the power of God, Christ the wisdom of God” (1 Cor 1:24). The virtues we are called upon to practice in this life are paving the way to that supreme virtue of heaven; and Jesus Christ communicates this supreme virtue to us, in order to enable us to develop our earthly virtues and turn them into heavenly ones. And what is the prize that awaits us? Nothing less than the vision of God. “*Videbitur Deus deorum in Sion*; The God of Gods will be seen on Mount Sion” (Ps 83:8 Vulgate). What is more, we ourselves will become like gods. “*Ego dixi: dii estis*; I have said: You are gods” (Ps 81:6 Vulgate; Jn 10:34). What progress!

Who would not yearn for such bliss? Listen to the cry of the prophet, “*Domine, Deus virtutum, exaudi orationem meam, auribus percipe Deus Jacob*; Lord God of Hosts, harken to my prayer; incline your ears, O God of Jacob” (Ps 83:9 Vulgate).

“*Protector noster, aspice, Deus, et respice in faciem Christi tui*; Look down upon us, Lord God our protector—and gaze into the face of your anointed” (Ps 83:10 Vulgate). O, yes, Lord—look down upon us. And look upon the face of your Christ. But why should God look at this Christ? Because he is the spouse of chaste souls. Look at him: he loves these souls and the Father will love them because of him. So look, Lord, look! Give these souls the beauty of Christ, of him who is “the splendor of your glory.” Protect these souls. May they advance in likeness to your Christ, just as they advance toward the true expression of your eternal virtue.

“*Quia melior est dies una in atriis tuis super millia*; For better one day in your abode than a thousand elsewhere” (Ps 83:11a Vulgate). Let us plumb the depths of these words. A man can live for thousands of days. They begin with the light falling on his eyes for the first time, and they conclude with the last ray of sunshine caressing these eyes as they close forever. With God it is not the same. God lives for only one day, but it is an

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<sup>262</sup> *ibid. Enarrationes in Psalmos* (CPL 0283)-LLT-A, SL 39, psalmus 83, par. 11, linea 28 (Augustine&Commentary on the Psalms&CPL&psalm 39, par. 11, line 28)

ETERNAL DAY without beginning or end. And it is to this day of days that we aspire. “*Melior est dies una in atriis tuis super millia*; Better this one day with you in heaven, than a thousand here on earth.”

And what must we do to acquire it, this day, this sight of God, this participation in his glory, this everlasting triumph? We must humble ourselves; we must renounce ourselves. This is what the soul is doing as it advances towards God. The more that graces are abundantly poured into it, the more it renounces itself. “*Elegi abjectus esse in domo Dei mei magis quam habitare in tabernaculis peccatorum*; I have chosen to be a slave in the house of my God, rather than dwell in the abode of sinners” (Ps 83:11b Vulgate). A great and frightening lesson to be learned: however high a soul may be raised up, the lower it must bow down. But it is comforting to reflect that we have chosen subjection, not just in the house of God, but in the house of “our” God. We may be nothing—we may be destitute and despised. But we do possess something, and this “something” is “everything.” We possess our God. Why worry about not owning the house, when we possess the owner? Ah, God himself belongs to us! To think that God is ours and will remain ours as long as we never give him up! Happy creatures are we. In giving up everything, we have found everything, because in making ourselves slaves, we have found God. In view of being in the house of our God, we consider all the happiness this world offers to be of no account: its honors and its pleasures. “*Elegi abjectus esse in domo Dei mei magis quam habitare in tabernaculis peccatorum*; I have chosen to be a slave in the house of my God, rather than dwell in the abode of sinners.”

And why? Take a look at the world you live in now! “*Quia misericordiam et veritatem diligit Deus*; For God loves mercy and truth” (Ps 83:12a Vulgate). Mercy, kindness and truth...what a choice! “*Gratiam et gloriam dabit Dominus*; God will give grace and glory (Ps 83:12b Vulgate). Here is the means and here is the reward. Could we improve on the bargain? God has no intention of depriving those who walk in innocence. You will obtain it, brothers, this grace and this glory, if you know how to be jealous for it with a saint’s longing. No, God cannot and will not refuse it to those who, day by day, strive to advance in innocence. “*Non privabit eos qui ambulant in innocentia*; God will not deprive those who walk in innocence” (Ps 83:13a Vulgate). “Lord of Hosts, happy is the man who puts his trust in you” (Ps 83:13b Vulgate).

Yes, let us put our trust in God. Whether we have to suffer or struggle, at every moment we will be moving forward. Victory lies ahead—and triumph will be forever.

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## II. THE RELIGIOUS SISTERS OF THE ASSUMPTION

*Apart from extracts that help us to know the inner soul of Fr. d'Alzon, we have been, for reasons of space, unable to publish the considerable and significant correspondence that he addressed to Mère Marie-Eugénie de Jésus. By a vow Fr. d'Alzon consecrated himself to the holiness of this foundress. He considerably broadened his concern to her entire Congregation. He sent them many vocations. The two of them worked together to provide a common spirit for their two Congregations, as the documents here presented bear witness.*

*We only include here several echoes of retreat instructions that underline the originality of Fr. d'Alzon.*

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### *Retreat Instructions*

#### FIGHT AGAINST ONESELF

*“Militia est vita hominis super terram; the life of man upon earth is a warfare” (Jb 7:1).*

*August 18, 1860*

My dear daughters,

Let us continue to enumerate those people against whom we have to fight. We have dealt with men and women in general—what about ourselves?

1° *Against one's body.* Although St. Paul may say, “our fight is not against flesh and blood” (Eph 6:12), it does, nevertheless, include a fight against flesh and blood, against this “dear outward covering,” as the learned ladies would say<sup>263</sup>. We have to pay attention to mastering our bodily passions. Our body is a temperamental conveyance that tips us to the left when we're trying to avoid being tipped to the right. If we don't look after ourselves we become ill...which does us no good whatsoever. But if we look after ourselves too much, the body begins to revolt—we become

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<sup>263</sup> Les Femmes savantes (1672), II, 7, Chrysale de Jean-Baptiste Poquelin, aka Molière

greedy, we become lazy, etc. It is shameful to admit that we are all tempted to over-indulge our appetite.

“Georgy, porgy, pudding and pie”—that was me at the age of six! My nurse had to get up at midnight and fetch me some cold broth! This misery or another affects all of us. We love our bodies and invent a thousand and one excuses for looking after them. Being religious, the only course open to us is that of obedience. But even here we find ourselves in a quandary. Am I going to be perfectly blunt with my superior? Or shall I proceed in a roundabout way to obtain what I want? And what do I do with these words of St. Paul, “*Qui sunt Christi, carnem suam crucifixerunt cum vitiiis et concupiscentiis*; Those who belong to Christ have crucified their flesh with its vices and concupiscence” (Gal 5:24)?

Crucifixion there must be. Is your body crucified? Crucifixion does not always entail austerity—not for everybody. I know a lady who confided in me that she experienced pleasure in giving herself the “discipline.” We must beware of excess. Genuine crucifixion can be a long drawn-out lifetime struggle. You may long to break your chains and you say, “*Cupio dissolvi, et esse cum Christo*; How I long to be dissolved, and to be with Christ!” (Phil 1:23), or even “*Quis me liberabit a morte corporis hujus? Wretched creature that I am! Who will deliver me from this body which drags me down?*” (Rom 7:24). This is not always the way to go about things, however holy you may be. I have known people who destroyed their health by being imprudent, and who trembled to appear before God precisely because of this! So if physical austerity gives you too much satisfaction, count it as one more illusion, one of Satan’s snares. Obedience is the remedy for all this.

2° *Against one’s Imagination*. You are gifted with imagination—what young lady isn’t? Reading the life of St. Philip Neri, I felt like I wanted to be lifted from the earth! Has it never happened to you? He prepared himself for this extraordinary experience by four hours of sustained mental prayer and by going without food for three whole days. We may not aspire to go thus far. We may, however, make other spiritual arrangements, which our own superior is far too “dense” to understand; and this will necessitate our consulting doctors in Israel. You know, I have witnessed contemplative souls in enclosed monasteries going through excruciating torments which couldn’t warrant kicking your cat downstairs! It’s not so much their own fault, I think, but rather the inevitable consequence of living a solitary life. I do not deny the possibility of God’s having called them to that stage of the Interior Life which St. John of the Cross describes as “the holy horrors of contemplation”<sup>264</sup>. But, on the face of it, the sufferings they endure may be no more than the fruit of a vivid imagination.

St. Teresa of Avila claims to have cured many a Carmelite going

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<sup>264</sup> cf. *Dark Night of the Soul*, II, 22 (John of the Cross & Dark Night of the Soul & II, 22)

through hell simply by giving them a great meal. Self-centeredness accounts for a high percentage of these kinds of sufferings. You aspired to be a most extraordinary nun. How about becoming just an ordinary nun, same as the others? The struggle against the imagination will be wafted away by just a little obedience—or at least just a little common-sense.

3° *Against one's Will*. I was once accused, in a seminary where I had preached the annual retreat, of having “gotten under their skin.” Well, with you I'd like to go further still. I'd like to tear your skin off! Self-will is so deeply woven into our fabric, it's anything but skin-deep. Being unduly sensitive and easily upset arise because of our self-will. We wish we were in charge, we wish we had more say in what goes on, or we merely wish to attract attention. You know, someone who hasn't surrendered her self-will may pray, go to Mass, etc., but she may still be unhappy because she clings to her will.

“Our mother superior lacks common-sense” (in other words, of course, that sister believes she has a lot more). “The children prefer sister so-and-so to myself.” “I wish we were a holy community—so we would be if they listened to me, but no one pays the slightest heed to the wisdom of what I suggest.” “It's not a question of my being self-willed. It's a question of whether I'm right or wrong, and if I'm right, then why won't they listen?”

Haggai has this to say, “You have sown much and reaped very little” (Hg 1:6). And Isaiah says, “*Ecce in sacrificis vestris invenitur voluntas vestra*; Because in your sacrifices you are following your own will” (Is 58:3). This is where the vow of obedience comes in, our most precious safeguard. Self-will is the cruelest, and yet most subtle, of all our enemies, precisely because we've got to have a will of our own! I want daughters with wills of their own. I don't want any with wills like tissue paper, to be blown about by the wind. I don't want the sort who won't move till they are pushed (and even then). And so, my dear daughters, be strong—and let obedience reinforce your strength.

4° *Against one's Character*. I could now talk about fighting against our intellect, but I prefer to talk about fighting against our character. You were all well brought up—so none of you can be accused of having bad manners. Our Lord tells us to beware of certain characters. No, I'm not going to quote him. Nevertheless, beneath your impeccable manners there does lurk a personal character. How are you training it? There are sulky characters, “bossy” characters, cunning and deceitful characters. Thank God there is no room in the Assumption for this third category. If there were any, I would look at it as a dire foreboding that the days of our Congregation were numbered<sup>265</sup>.

Well, what about your character? Are you jealous, discontented with yourself and everybody else, always sad? Let charity suppress all of this.

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<sup>265</sup> Note how d'Alzon speaks of “The Assumption” as one religious family.

God does not want the kind of spouses who go through life envying one another. Let a humble heart, a submissive will, and the destruction of what St. John calls “the pride of life” (1 Jn 2:16) correct such tendencies. Jealousy rests on an exaggerated concept of our own rights. “*Quid habes, quod non accepisti; si autem accepisti, quid gloriari?*” Have you anything which you have not received as a gift?—and if you have received it, what right have you to glory in it?” (1 Cor 4:7).

You have heard this story about the Emperor Charles V<sup>266</sup>. Two great ladies appeared before him, each disputing her right of priority. Unable to find a better solution, the emperor declared, “Let the more ridiculous of the two lead the way.” And this is what it usually boils down to.

“But, Father, I’m not concerned with my personal dignity, but with that of the Congregation!” Can you cite any canonized saint who ever spoke like this? While I wait for an answer, I have to say that I have detected this attitude among you! If we had a spirit of detachment, we would soon recognize that one of the causes which disturbs our sense of peace is resentment that our rights are not being acknowledged.

Doesn’t the way your character works sometimes adversely affect your practice of charity? Charity is straightforward, but we have our reservations; we form all kinds of judgments about others. Our self-will together with this character and our way of understanding lead us to judge people and things in a way that is not entirely that by which God will use to judge one day.

5° *Against one’s Entire Self*. Once the devil took Our Lord and led him up to the top of a high mountain, where he said to him, “*Haec omnia tibi dabo, si cadens adoraveris me*; I will give you all these things, if you fall down and worship me” (Mt 4:9). There is a mountain to which the devil leads us and says to us, “Worship yourself!” We sometimes fall into his trap. The ego is to be hated, says Pascal<sup>267</sup>, and Jesuits denounce it as well. Basically they are descriptions of self-worship.

What is adoration? It is the acknowledgement of God’s sovereign dominion over all creatures. When we adore, we attribute everything to God. What honor and glory do we not attribute to ourselves? We may not, I admit, aspire to govern Jupiter or Uranus—but what about our own particular sphere? We do our best to fight this tendency, it is true. But once we let go of the reins, does not this self-adoration reassert itself? Were it not

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<sup>266</sup> He ruled over Spain and Austria during the early 16<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>267</sup> Blaise Pascal (1623–1662) was a French mathematician, physicist, inventor, writer and Catholic theologian. He identified with the religious movement within Catholicism known by its detractors as Jansenism. Following a religious experience in late 1654, he began writing influential works on philosophy and theology. His two most famous works date from this period: the *Lettres provinciales* and the *Pensées*. The expression in French reads, “Le moi est hassable” and it can be found in various places such as *Pensées*, cfl 451, Ro 75, Co 350, Br 455, La 141 (Pascal&Pensées)



so, then why are we so easily offended and why are we so disobedient? I may be exaggerating. Maybe—but when it comes to me, I know this is true of me.

Examine your consciences carefully and you will detect certain areas in which you do attribute everything to yourself. We must fight tooth and nail against this tendency. You must be convinced of the necessity of fighting against this “ego” which would ruin everything you do.

During this retreat, do you want to take the resolution of “fighting like a good soldier? *Labora sicut bonus miles Christi Jesu*”? (2 Tm 2:3). I invite you to battle and to victory through the grace of Our Lord. And if you have no intention of fighting both exteriorly and interiorly, then what are you doing wearing the holy religious habit? You will have to do away with self and become totally committed to Our Lord, placing your trust in him and him alone. As the Psalmist says, “*ponere in Deo spem meam*; I place my trust in the Lord” (Ps 72:28 Vulgate).

I am not here to discourage you. I have come to give you hope, to express the hope that, leaving self behind, you may throw yourselves into God’s arm be able to repeat with the Psalmist: “*Mihi adhaerere Deo, bonum est*; It is right that I should cleave to God” (Ps 72:28 Vulgate). Deliver me Lord, from all my spiritual enemies—*spiritus nequitiæ*<sup>268</sup>—but above all from myself. And by the grace of Our Lord, you will, indeed, overcome all these enemies. You will emerge victorious in the fight: the fight against flesh and blood, against your self-will, your imagination, your personal character, your very self, and thus receive the crown prepared for you in heaven. Amen.

## TO USE AND TO ENJOY

*August 21, 1860*

My dear daughters,

It is difficult to define what I have to talk to you about this morning. Let us call it “Usage and Enjoyment.” By themselves, they would be unclear, had I not some very decisive doctrine upon which to build. I am going to expound some of St. Augustine’s thoughts as contained in Book One of his *On Christian Doctrine*. Those of you who know Latin are invited to read this book, especially the sections I will highlight in what follows.

### **1° The Principles.**

St. Augustine begins by dividing everything into three categories: some things are to be enjoyed, others to be used, and there are others which are to be enjoyed and used. *To enjoy* something means to cling to it with love for its own sake. *To use* something means to employ it in view of

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<sup>268</sup> cf Eph 6:12; Cyprian Ep 55, (58) (Cyprian&Ephesians&Migne&55,58)

obtaining an object that we love. There is only one thing that it is permitted to be enjoyed: God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Apart from the adorable Trinity which is this only thing, the origin and cause of all things, we must enjoy nothing. Everything must be related to God.

He then divides everything into two categories: *God*, who must be enjoyed for himself—and *creatures*, which must be used that we may be able to enjoy God. So I must place all my happiness and rest in God alone. This is what makes St. Augustine exclaim, “O my God, *You have made us for Yourself*, and *our hearts are restless until they find themselves in You*”<sup>269</sup>. Our heart must not be allowed to enjoy what isn’t God and doesn’t relate to God because only God is capable of being loved for himself alone.

And then he goes on to divide everything into four categories of things: the things above us, the things below us, the things equal to ourselves, and, fourthly, ourselves. God hasn’t commanded us to love the beings that we are, i.e. to love *caro et sanguis*; this flesh and blood. That comes naturally; no one needs a commandment to do this. He has commanded me to love those around me, that is to say my fellow human beings. The one above, that is to say God himself, is to be both loved and adored. As for the things below us, we must use them without loving them.

## 2° The practical consequences

### a) in the natural order.

I may love something in the sense of its being good to eat—so I enjoy eating it. Unrestrained delight would be a sin of gluttony. So much for mere sensuality. What about taking pleasure in my personal qualities? If I do this, I am taking pleasure in a creature. I am a man and God has said, “*Woe to the man who places his trust in man!*” (Jer 17:5). The same applies if I take pleasure in my success, in my influence. How have you enjoyed all those things which are not bad in themselves and which may be excellent in themselves? Have you enjoyed them, or have you used them? “*Divitiae si affluent, nolite cor apponere*; If riches come your way, set not your heart on them” (Ps 61:11 Vulgate). And these words apply all along the line, to the spiritual as much as to the material. Whatever it is, use it, but don’t set your heart on it.

Search deep into your inner self. There you will find faculties which must be used, but must not be enjoyed: your understanding, your will, your heart. My heart does not belong to me; it is not the summit of God’s creation. I must not yield to my heart by becoming attached to creatures or by becoming attached to myself through egoism. Both are an abomination to God. Friendship is a virtue; it is charity or the act whereby I love for God’s sake. God must always be the final goal, God the supreme and ultimate delight.

How, up to now, have I enjoyed creatures or how have I used them?

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<sup>269</sup> *Confessions* I,1 (Augustine&Confessions&Pine-Coffin&bk. I, chap. 1)

“*Ut in omnibus quibus utitur necessitas, superemineat caritas*; Let charity reign over all those things which necessity compels us to use”<sup>270</sup>. This is the rule, your rule, because it is an essential part of St. Augustine’s Rule. You will find his own commentary there: God is the center of all things, and therefore all things must relate to God. I am a ray that comes issuing from this enormous sphere. Whatever object I contact must be relayed back from the circumference to the center—whatever creature I meet must be relayed back to God. Cardinal Bellarmine<sup>271</sup> develops this theme in his treatise: “*De ascensu per creaturam ad Deum*; The Mind’s Ascent to God by the Ladder of Created Things.” At this point I would tear apart our hearts to see what sentiments are there and which pertain to God or not?

**b) in the supernatural order**

Of ourselves we are incapable of attaining God. “*Deum nemo vidit unquam; unigenitus Filius, qui est in sinu Patris, ipse enarravit*; No one has ever seen God, except the only begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father—he has made him known” (Jn 1:18). How has the Son revealed God to us? By becoming man. St. Augustine writes in his *Letter to Dioscorus*, “Man was seized by divinity. Man became mediator”<sup>272</sup>. And St. Paul writes, “*Unus enim Deus, unus et mediator Dei et hominum homo Christus Jesus*; There is only one God and only one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Tm 2:5). St. Paul does not say: “Jesus Christ as God became our mediator.” That wouldn’t be exact because God can only be an end. But he says, “*Mediator homo Jesus Christus*.” It is his human nature that is the mediator. Therefore, his holy humanity is a means alone.

You may tell me I am falling into the error of those mystics who maintain that the time will come when Christ’s sacred humanity will be of no further use. This is not what I am trying to say, but simply that Christ’s divine nature, Christ as God, is an end, because he is God. As for his human nature, it is eternally united to his divine nature and we must love him because of this union. There exists nothing more excellent in the world, after God himself, than the sacred humanity of Christ. He is “*primogenitus omnis creaturae*; the first born of all creation” (Col 1:15). And these words must be understood in the strictest sense, and not only in some mystical way. For in Jesus Christ there is not a creature—yet part of him was created; and there was a time before this part of him existed. Moreover, how does the Holy Spirit speak of the Christ? “*Mediator Dei et hominum*; the mediator between God and man.” It was created for the purpose of mediation. It is therefore a means, not an end, an active means, but a means

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<sup>270</sup> *Rule of St. Augustine* V,2 (Augustine&Rule&Tourscher and Rusell&V,2)

<sup>271</sup> Robert Bellarmine, S.J. (1542 – 1621) was an Italian Jesuit and one of the most important figures in the Counter-Reformation. He was a professor of theology and later rector of the Roman College, and in 1602 became archbishop of Capua. Bellarmine supported the reform decrees of the Council of Trent Eugénie.

<sup>272</sup> Letter CXVIII (Augustine&Letter to Dioscorus&Migne&letter 118)

nonetheless. Jesus Christ in his humanity cannot be the final term of all our aspirations for rest.

Where is all this fine theology leading us to? Let us grasp its practical consequences. If I am not allowed to regard Christ's sacred humanity as the apex of all joy, the end of my rest—still less am I permitted thus to regard all the graces which flow from it and are therefore inferior to the sacred humanity itself. I must attach tremendous value to them, but their value consists in their being means, not the final consummation of all delight, even if there are individuals who stubbornly hold on to them. God is all-powerful. God can and does employ this means or that to draw us closer to himself. But I mustn't call a halt at Christ's humanity—still less may I stop at other means of grace which are of a lesser nature.

### **c) in our personal lives.**

So now let us take a good look at the intimacy of our spiritual life. What are we attached to? Do we apprehend the extent to which we will have to strip ourselves in order to become attached to God alone? Do we understand the liberty we must exercise in availing ourselves of the means provided by the sacred humanity without become attached to them? We should be grateful that in his love Jesus Christ is pleased to provide us with these means. If "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son" (Jn 3:16), then trust in the love of the Son to provide you with these means.

These means are well-known: the sacraments of the holy Church. Besides these, we each receive special, personal graces, and who can tell what these will consist in? "*Spiritus ubi vult spirat, et nemo scit unde veniat aut quo vadat*; The Spirit breathes where it will—and no one knows whence it comes or where it goes" (Jn 3:8). And "*Non datus est ad mensuram*; It is not given according to human measure" (Jn 3:34). When you say to yourself, "I would like to advance towards perfection by this means or that," you are being both absurd and impertinent—absurd because you are meddling with divine wisdom, impertinent because God is the master of his own gifts. He knows what means to use in order to bring you closer to him and in order to make himself known to you. Examine your personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Much of it is of your own invention. In your dealings with God, we can be fanciful and ridiculous....yes, that's the word. Here we are, deciding how to pray, choosing our own penances, and so forth. All very well, as long as we don't become attached to our own ways—as long as we remember that's all they are, simply ways and means. It depends on God whether this or that will be harmful or beneficial for you. You may be happy or you may be sad; you may be able to pray or you may not; you may suffer from such or such a trial since you are not the final master of what you have. But whatever happens to you will concur to your greater good. It will purify you and it will become a means of bringing you closer to God.

### **3° Knowledge of God.**

And after all this self-examination, there is a further and most important point to consider while we are on retreat...to seek to know God and Jesus Christ, for we cannot desire what we do not love. Let us not seek to know God in all his glory; it would overwhelm us. But to the extent that we search God with love, it will bring us close to him and make us one with him.

Let us come to know God better and better every day, to penetrate the divine nature or reach this goal through Jesus Christ, because only through him can we find God. Jesus Christ provides us only with a description of God. It is in the order of faith that we must try to know God, and faith necessarily entails much obscurity. As we journey onwards, we must expect to encounter weariness, pain, anguish of mind, and uncertainties in the faith. We cannot see the way. "*Deum nemo vidit unquam*; No one has ever seen God" (Jn 1:18). We have to appeal to Jesus Christ, through whom God has spoken to us. "*Locutus est nobis in Filio*; In these days he has spoken to us through his Son" (Heb 1:2). As a result, man feels powerless talking about God. St. Augustine tells us, "If God is ineffable, the moment I try to say something about him, I am saying something that shouldn't be said"<sup>273</sup>. The triumph of Wisdom has been to give us some inkling into what God is. We can begin to perceive him by relying on the light of faith. "*Haec est enim vita aeterna: ut cognoscant te, solum Deum verum, et quem misisti Jesum Christum*; For this is eternal life: that they should know you, the one, true God—and know Jesus Christ, the one you have sent" (Jn 17:3). To get to know God, to get to know him through Jesus Christ the mediator—such is my aim so that having got to know him, I may enjoy him.

#### **Enjoying God alone.**

No matter whether I have to journey on through the dry wilderness and be deprived of all consolation, my whole life must be a continual desire for God. If God gives us any consolations, that's an "extra," that's a "second helping"; we ought not to need it. What does love consist in? Being attached to God without any consolation. This earth is but exile. Logically speaking, no matter how far advanced we may be in the art of prayer and contemplation, we ought not to enjoy it here below; it is meant for heaven.

What is God? He is everything which is most perfect. And your soul? It is filled with woes and imperfections. When we consider the graces we have misused, don't we think we deserve to undergo trial and need purification? Jesus Christ wished to be known as the "Man of Sorrows". He made himself a victim for our sins. Here below you are entitled to nothing but the suffering that comes from love, from love tested and proven. God may, indeed, grant you consolations, but all you can claim by right is the grace of purification. And God's plan is for the world to be saved through suffering. That is why we must allow ourselves to be penetrated by the

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<sup>273</sup> *De doctrina christiana* 1.6 (Augustine&On Christian Doctrine&CPL&1.6)

examples of the God-Man and show him our love for God, just as he showed his love for us. He shed his blood for us. You may not be called to shed your blood for him, not your physical blood. But what about the “blood” of your soul? What about your tears, not necessarily the tears from your eyes, but the tears of a heart which has had to say goodbye to its fondest desires, which regrets the past and detests its sins? If only we could see things from God’s point of view, surely we would then understand that we are entitled to nothing. God has admitted us into the supernatural order and there we have right to purification alone.

#### **Conclusion.**

Everything is divided into two categories: God and creatures. God alone is for me *to enjoy*; creatures, for me *to use*. How does my conduct conform to this dual principle?

In order of nature: have I never misused God’s creatures? In the moral order: what use have I made of the faculties God endowed me with? In the physical order: what have I done with my five senses? In the affective order: how have I loved? Ascending to the supernatural realm, what use have I made of God’s graces? Have I become inordinately attached to God’s gifts in themselves? And has this inordinate attachment not brought about anguish and discouragement? Has it not caused me to fall?

I must do penance. It is necessary for me to live in that freedom which will break my bonds, which will attach me to God alone, and which lead to my own becoming a saint through the means he wishes. How am I to respond to the light that Jesus Christ grants to me here below so that I may seek to be purified and one day to enjoy God in heaven? And all this is true Catholic teaching.

Here are the practical consequences. On what have you set your heart? In what shall it finally rest? What have you done that may have merited God’s withdrawing from you? You may have enjoyed what was meant only to be used. This may not have entailed a formal sin on your part, but there are vibrations in the strings of your heart which may not yet be in tune with God. Let all these considerations assist your growth in holy charity. Love what you must love for God’s sake. Let not your heart stop at the love of his creatures. Cleanse yourself from any abuse. Thus you will acquire the facility of throwing yourself first into the arms of Jesus Christ and to arrive one day into the very bosom of your Father. Amen.

## THE LIFE OF PRAYER<sup>274</sup>

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<sup>274</sup> Fr. d’Alzon uses two words for prayer: ‘*prière*’ which is prayer in general, of any kind, and ‘*oraison*’ which is something closer to mental prayer, meditation, contemplation, or the “practice of the presence of God.” He is speaking of the latter, “intimate commerce with God,” in the current section.

September 1871<sup>275</sup>

*“Oportet semper orare et non deficere; That we must always pray and never desist”* (Lk 18:1).

In the life of prayer there are many souls who fail to “make the grade.” Just as the Jews said to Our Lord, “These words are hard to accept” (Jn 6:61), in like manner, for many a religious prayer is hard; they come to times of prayer with every intention of being distracted, of resting, or even of falling asleep! And it is thus that time set apart for communicating with God becomes time wasted, if not culpably spent.

If the very purpose of Religious Life is union with God, how can we dispose ourselves more effectively to living this life than by giving ourselves to prayer? And who can measure the prayerful progress of a soul in intimate commerce with God? St. Augustine tells us there are many things we believe without having seen. Take friendship for example. You cannot see the affection of a particular person for you nor can he see your affection for him. But take away mutual trust from love and you will have done away with all the friendship in the world. “And just,” continues this same doctor (of the Church), “and just as we reveal our innermost secrets to those who love us, so it is only fitting that divine wisdom should reveal itself to the spirits, minds, and souls of those worthy of welcoming it. It reveals itself by an inner word and this word is the nearest we can get to God’s manifestation of himself and it is only fitting for us thus to reverence the word of God”<sup>276</sup>.

So the end or purpose of prayer lies in our talking to God, and God talking to us. This is what is expected of you when you pray...i.e. that you be a soul worthy of listening to the voice of eternal wisdom. So you must dispose yourself for the task. To listen to Wisdom, you must be attentive, and when Wisdom has spoken, you must keep its words in your heart.

So how must we render ourselves ready to listen to this Wisdom that reveals to us the secrets of the Father? With what dispositions are we to prepare ourselves to enter into communication with God? And what should be the fruits harvested from our listening to God’s secrets? Let us first study how to prepare ourselves for prayer.

#### **1° Preparing for Prayer**

Do you believe in purgatory? It’s a place where the souls of the just prepare themselves to see God and to enter into perfect union with him. God’s justice calls for such preparation, such purification, for a soul who, though just, is not yet sufficiently ready to stand in his presence at the time of death.

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<sup>275</sup> The French data base gives a different date: August 1872.

<sup>276</sup> [cf. *De utilitate credendi* (CPL 0316) - LLT-A, cap. 10, par. 24, pag. 30, linea: 26] (Augustine&On the Profit of Believing&CPL&chap. 10, par. 24, line 26)

The soul's relationship with God here on earth and in the hereafter differs only in modality. God communicates with the soul up above and here below, except that here below communication occurs through faith, whereas up above it is received by clear vision. St. Thomas tells us that faith is already the commencement of glory<sup>277</sup>. But when here below the soul is insufficiently prepared to see God face to face, a truly terrifying process of purification will have to take place between time and eternity, and this takes place in purgatory. This speaks to us of the purity God insists upon before any of us enter into full communication with him.

This conception of purgatory leads us to ask ourselves the question: how am I to purify my soul in this life if I am to be united with God throughout eternity? And for me this union with God here below is above all a matter of prayer and Communion. And since we are now talking about prayer, then how can the life I am leading dispose me to prayer, and thus bring about the necessary purification of my soul?

First of all, we need to prepare for silence by shutting out as much noise as possible. Then we need to curb our desires since the ultimate end of my happiness is God alone. Finally, there is a preparation that involves fear, because we cannot escape the recognition of our own unworthiness to communicate with God's absolute and uncreated perfection. This is nothing more than the plain truth. So what about this particular religious? She comes, she goes, she enters the chapel, she kneels down, she joins her hands, and is presumably entering into God's presence. But is she really praying?

Consider God's eternal justice whereby he takes hold of the soul of someone who is already good and plunges it into the fire, into the purifying fire of purgatory in order to fit it for union with himself in paradise. Yet it is God's wish that we should be spared this terrible punishment.

There is an uncontestable way of doing this: it is Jesus Christ Our Lord, it is his precious blood. I can cover myself completely in the blood of Jesus Christ and this blood can purify me. I have already received it in Baptism, then in Penance, then in the Eucharist. But how have I treated the blood of Jesus Christ in these latter two sacraments? How receptive have I been in so many confessions, in so many Communions, when grace has been showered down on me like a refreshing and purifying dew? I have become immersed in the blood of Jesus Christ during certain solemn moments when I received the sacraments and at every moment that grace has fallen on me like some endless rain. Have I loved this blood? How grateful have I been? How have I shown my love to him for shedding it for me? To what degree have I entered into communication with him who is the mediator between God and men? How have I absorbed the humanity of Jesus Christ in order to share in his very divinity? What use have I made of

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<sup>277</sup> cf *Summa Theologica* IIa IIae, q. 24, a. 3 ad 2um; Ia IIae, q.69, a.2; *De veritate*, q. 14, a.2. (Thomas Aquinas&ST&CPL&IIa, IIae, Q, 24, art. 3 as 2um; Ia, IIae, Q, 69, art. 2)



the treasures he has lavished upon me? How have I related to this holy humanity of Jesus Christ so that this Divine Savior as man may be the one who introduces me to the Godhead? How grateful have I been to this Divine Savior for becoming man in order to lead me to his Father? How eager am I to purify myself in the merits of this divine blood? The blood of Jesus can do far more to purify me than all the flames of purgatory, but only on condition that I use it, and treat it with all the respect to which it is entitled.

In our relationship with Jesus Christ we must find the means of letting ourselves be led to God. To come back to the words of St. Augustine: if Jesus Christ is the Word, then we must listen to him.

How much attention have you paid to Jesus Christ in your souls? Jesus Christ takes hold of you and lifts you up, but do you wish to be lifted up? There are many souls who say like St. Peter: "Lord, it is good for us to be here" (Mt 17:4). But if Our Lord replies, "Very well, my friend, come up higher" (Lk 14:10), they answer, "No, thank you, Lord. I am perfectly all right where I am. You do me too great an honor; please let me stay here and enjoy my calm and pleasant little existence." Is this what we call leading a life of prayer? This is why you are making no further progress in the inner life. In following Jesus Christ you will, no doubt, have experienced some consolations, but you will have experienced trials too, and it is in trials that the faithful soul finds the great means to purify itself. A soul which is aware of the flames of purgatory and the worth of the blood of Jesus Christ, such a soul prepares itself for prayer by becoming detached. It strips itself of all that is imperfect. It enters into prayer by considering God's greatness and its own nothingness. It prepares itself by faithfully listening to the word of God. It sees with the eyes of faith and thus renders itself susceptible to a deeper and broader insight into the wonders of God.

And thus, despite all the dark shadows here below, this soul will advance in the knowledge of God, provided it allows itself to be purified and guided by Our Lord. A soul that maintains itself in such a state and that waits for these blessed hours when God reveals himself more intimately with it, such a soul is always ready for God, and God will reward it by invading it with his presence.

#### **2° Prayer itself**

What goes on in prayer? We speak to God, and God speaks to us. St. Augustine shows us how the Wisdom of the Father, whereby we come to know this very hidden and mysterious Father, is "the Word"<sup>278</sup>. This Word makes itself heard in the very depth of our heart even though we may be surrounded by darkness... "*Lux in tenebris lucet*; The light shines in the darkness" (Jn 1:5). St. John, indeed, goes on to say, "*Et tenebrae non comprehenderunt eam...In propria venit et sui eum non receperunt*"; and the darkness did not understand it...he came unto his own, and his own gave

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<sup>278</sup> cf *Adnotationes in Iob* (CPL 0271) - LLT-A cap.38, pag. 612, linea: 23  
(Augustine&Notes on Job&CPL&chap. 38, page 612&line 23)

him no welcome.” But those who did receive him, “*dedit eis potestem filios Dei fieri*; he gave the power to become sons of God” (Jn 1:11-12).

So this wisdom is the Son of God who gives us the power to become children of God. And notice this: We welcome Jesus Christ so that Jesus Christ can give us to his Father. This adoption begins when we are baptized. But it is a progressive filiation in which we are to advance day by day. So that when Our Lord comes to us in prayer and brings us before the throne of God, we find ourselves no longer before a king, before a creator, but before the best of Fathers. It is the relationship between a father and a son that is established between God and us. And to think that it’s up to us each day to become more a child of God by prayer, by welcoming the Word of God!

And are you aware how disappointed Our Lord is with certain souls to whom he says, “I not only permit, but I wish you to become my child” and who respond, “I’d be happy to, but let’s not overdo it!”

Can we not understand why so many souls, invited to this wonderful palace of prayer, remain in the gateway? They don’t really wish to become God’s children. They cannot understand God’s word because they do not want to welcome the light. There is a very secret, very intimate word—what St. Augustine calls “an eloquent and harmonious silence”<sup>279</sup> that descends into our souls. Sometimes we hear it when least expected, but only on condition of our remaining in a state of dependence and adoration.

The Creator is coming very close to us. We, in turn, must bow down in continual adoration. We must acknowledge the utter supremacy of God. Herein resides the happiness of being one of his creatures. “I was nothing, and you have brought me into being. I was a daughter of wrath and you have made me your daughter, and more than your daughter, your spouse! I hear the sound of your voice. It is but a whisper to begin with, but little by little it shapes itself to my weaknesses. It is the Word addressing itself to me, the same Word which created the universe, the same Word which forms Jesus Christ in me, which dwells in me.” How can we not adore him? How can we fail to understand the sublimity of our calling? Our vocation is to be most intimately united with God. And prayer is but the means whereby this union is brought about.

Why do we not reach this point in prayer? Jesus Christ not only permits it, he wishes it. He is longing to show himself to you. He is longing to be your master and your teacher. He is longing to purify your mind and to increase its capacity of union with him. How can we say: “Prayer is boring?” You may be right, but, if so, you are not engaging in true prayer. I admit that prayer is a crucifixion, but if you have the courage to accept this crucifixion, then you will draw as near as you can to the crucified Lord, and through him you will draw nearer and nearer to God.

And see the unique position Jesus Christ occupies when we pray,

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<sup>279</sup> ?? cf *De catechizandus rudibus* (CPL 0297) – LLT-A cap. 25, linea 38 (Augustine&On Catechizing Beginners in the Faith&CPL&chap. 25, line 38)

standing between the soul and his Father. We must unite ourselves to Jesus Christ, lean on Jesus Christ, live with the very life of Jesus Christ if we hope some day to live with the very life of God. No human tongue can describe what takes place between the soul and Jesus Christ in prayer provided that the spouse understands that sacrifice and complete gift of self are the only means to merit such divine union.

### **3° The Fruits of Prayer**

Let us consider the following. It is not only he who says, “Lord, Lord,” who will enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, but he who does the will of my Father in heaven” (cf. Mt 7:21).

You can be the recipients of the most sublime contemplation, and yet remain far from perfect. In addition, one must thank God. St. Paul says, “Give thanks to God in all things” (Eph 5:20). The Gospel tells us of the healing of the ten lepers (Lk 17:11-19). Only one came back to thank Our Lord. Off went the other nine. They had their business to attend to and saying “Thank you” mattered little. Similarly, you have engaged in prayer, but you don’t think it’s necessary to be thankful. We often imagine that God’s favors are no more than our due. But lack of gratitude is an enormous mistake, because the more we thank him the greater favors he will bestow. So if, on the one hand, the life of a religious must be one ceaseless prayer, it must, on the other hand, be one continual act of thanksgiving.

You have received Communion. You have engaged in prayer and adoration. The time has come to leave the chapel. How are you to preserve the treasures God has bestowed on you? Instead of which, many of us just ask ourselves what’s next and move on. And thus we split our lives and don’t connect one moment to another. But in the life of a religious, every single thing must be referred to God. Our prayer must be continued throughout our daily activities. God said not only to Abraham, but even more so to his spouses, “*Ambula coram me et esto perfectus*; Walk in my presence and be perfect” (Gn 17:1). Your life must be a continual execution of the good resolutions you took during prayer. If your time with God produces no Christian virtue, it may well be said that your prayer has been one of pure imagination. Think to what a degree of holiness a religious would attain if she was constantly preoccupied with drawing nearer to God and if she spent the whole day long nourishing the graces with which God had favored her soul during her morning prayer! Why should this not always be so? Alas, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a king who sends invitations out for his son’s wedding (Lk 14:15). He tells them everything is ready, but every one of those guests finds a good reason for absenting himself. You too find good reasons for not turning up at God’s invitation. They are not very serious reasons; in fact they are trivialities. You may have to tidy your room up or there may be somebody whom you particularly wish to meet. You may even be preoccupied with a piece of thread, but this thread prevents you from going to meet God. You are a prisoner.

### In Conclusion

The approach to God in prayer calls for generosity. If you fail to make progress along the path of prayer, it's because you are being mean. Yes, mean! We don't like being accused of being mean. But look at the facts. There is God: so lavish with his gifts, so earnest in his pleading, so merciful towards our weakness, but we are making no progress in prayer because we are mean!

But if only we took a firm resolution to prepare our prayer, to launch out into the depths of prayer, by adoring God, by listening attentively, by depending on him, by thanking him for his goodness towards us, then would we show that we know how to derive profit from his communications to us and that we wish to be less and less unworthy of them.

O, my dear daughters! If only a few of you would resolve to become daughters of prayer, I'd not hesitate to proclaim that your entire Congregation would take on an entirely new lease on life. By entering into this life of prayer, by refusing nothing to Jesus Christ and giving him everything, you would also merit to receive everything from Our Lord. Not only in this life through grace, but also in heaven, in his love and in his glory. Amen.

## THE SPIRIT OF SACRIFICE

*“Sacrificate sacrificium justitiae et sperate in Domino—Offer up a sacrifice of justice, and hope in the Lord” (Ps 4:6).*

Human nature fell—but it was restored, and this restoration was effected by means of sacrifice. We were regenerated by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. This sacrifice was sufficient to wipe out all the sins of the world. And yet St. Paul adds, *“Adimpleo in carne mea ea quae desunt passionum Christi; I accomplish in my flesh whatever is still lacking in the sufferings of Christ” (Col 1:24)*. St. Paul does not mean there is anything inadequate about Our Lord's passion and death; this would be a horrible blasphemy. But Our Lord wanted to establish this law: *“Exemplum dedi vobis, ut quemadmodum ego feci vobis, ita et vos faciatis; I have given you the example, so that you should do what I have done for you” (Jn 13:15)*. Jesus said this when he had just washed their feet, and was about to accomplish the supreme sacrifice of Calvary.

So Jesus Christ has left us an example, and he wishes us to imitate him. And our sacrifices will be agreeable to the Father if we offer them in union with the blood of his Son.

Bearing this fundamental principle in mind, let us examine the notion of sacrifice under three of its most important aspects: reparation, conservation, and preservation of the soul by sacrifice.

### **1° Reparation**

There can be no religious life without sacrifice. Do you wish to be daughters of sacrifice? To what extent do you wish it? The heart of religious life is here.

Do you wish to be daughters who willingly expend themselves? Daughters who understand something of the mystery of the Cross? Who understand the necessity of sacrifice? If you do so wish, then what I am about to say will make sense. I know it's difficult to accept, but the difficulty is not one of the mind but one of the heart.

#### **a) For your own sake**

You must embrace sacrifice for your own sake and for the sake of the Church. Bear in mind that you are a sinner. The blood of Jesus Christ will, no doubt, purify you of your sins. But if it pleases him that you should contribute, then to what extent are you prepared to add to the sum-total of the expiations of Our Lord Jesus Christ? Contemplate Jesus Christ dying on the Cross and ask yourself to what degree you must enter into his expiation.

The basic elements of Christian belief would indicate that as simple Christians you are duty-bound to enter into the sacrifice of Calvary to atone for your own sins. And all of you, however blameless your lives may be, have something to atone for. Each of you has her personal expiations to undertake, and just as much as that of St. Mary Magdalene and that of St. Paul, you have a life of expiation to lead. Indeed, if you are guilty of some inordinate attachment and of really grievous sins, I am sure that you will experience a sting of remorse which will turn you into daughters of expiation, daughters of sacrifice, above all if your hearts are burning with only a fraction of that love which won pardon for St. Mary Magdalene. What I would fear the most consists in your being one of those "good girls" who commit only venial sins, suffering from no desire for the things of this world, but equally devoid of any affection for Jesus Christ... in other words, living in an 'honest' mediocrity. If such is your condition, you do need sacrifice, but it will require a greater effort on your part because you will understand neither its use nor its necessity. Superiors must encourage such souls to do sacrifice; they lack energy and it's energy that's needed in religious life. I know of nothing more productive of such fostering motivation than a spirit of sacrifice.

Now let me suppose that you are as pure as the Blessed Virgin, St. John or Jeremiah! It is those who are pure by nature who experience the greatest need to suffer and to give of themselves. Indeed, what man has ever suffered like Jeremiah? Who has ever been as mortified as St. John the Baptist and who, among God's creatures, has ever been so admirable in her suffering as Our Lady of Sorrows?

I'm touching upon a mystery here. Certain souls experience such joy, such happiness, in being able to suffer that they actually redoubt this happiness! If you were one of them you would understand that there is

nothing preferable to suffering. God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son and Jesus Christ so loved his own that he died for them.

A soul seized by the chaste embrace of Jesus Christ longs to give of herself, to sacrifice herself; and before being united to God in the happiness of heaven, she is united to Jesus Christ here on earth through suffering and sacrifice. Here are mysteries we dare not attempt to fathom. Here are treasures and riches which God reserves to generous souls. No one can tell what goes on in these souls. Jesus Christ, the heavenly Bridegroom, is pleased to take these victims and stretch them out on his altar, each in a different way. To convince yourselves of this, read the lives of those virgins whose only martyrdom consisted in love. They did not have to offer their necks to the executioner's sword, nor their bodies to be broken on the rack. They worked at uniting themselves to God in solitude. Look at St. Catherine of Siena being consumed by the flames of love...and who can measure the self-crucifixion of St. Rose of Lima?

These were all daughters of sacrifice. When we enter into this process, there is no telling how far we will go. But a generous daughter is not afraid to surrender herself completely.

#### **b) For the sake of the whole Church**

Let us now look at sacrifice from the Church's point of view. What is going on in the world in this regard and what about in the Kingdom of Jesus Christ? Look at how the Church is being abandoned and witness the conspiracies to deprive God of those lands which erstwhile belonged to him. Jesus Christ has been driven from Jerusalem; he may soon be driven from Rome. And faced with this situation, what can we do? Apostolic action will not suffice. Jesus Christ preached to this world for three years; but his three years' preaching were nothing compared to the few hours he spent hanging on the Cross. The essential reason why he came down from heaven was so as to be able to shed his blood and it is the shedding of blood which constitutes the perfection of human life. So for you, his spouses, will not perfection consist in leading a life of sacrifice? A saint used to say, "O my God, attend to my business, and let me attend to yours." Does this not express the disinterested love of a soul which forgets itself entirely and lives for Jesus Christ alone and which, aware of its utter helplessness, places itself entirely in the hands of Jesus Christ, to accomplish nothing but his will? This soul watches Jesus Christ saving the world by his passion and says, "O my God, here am I. Accept me, whole and entire, as a victim. Since the most solemn moment of your earthly life was that of your sacrifice on the Cross, allow me to work as you worked, but above all allow me to suffer and be offered up". See then how your sacrifice, united to that of Jesus Christ, grows immeasurably. Our Lord also wishes you to be his instruments. By the merits you acquire by uniting yourself to him, you will save souls. This is the work of the Communion of Saints and the reversibility of merit. Not only priests, but Christian virgins as well,

successors of those holy women at the foot of the Cross, take up a cup and fill it with the blood of Jesus Christ. They pour its contents over souls. And if the blood of Jesus Christ is lacking, they contribute some of their own in giving of themselves completely.

This is sacrifice. This is the height of moral beauty to which every Christian should aspire.

The moment when Our Lord was most pleasing to his Father was the moment when he was most repulsive in the eyes of men. God gazed upon his only Son with far more pride on Calvary than on Mount Tabor. And at that moment he had said "*Hic est Filius meus dilectus in quo mihi bene complacui*; This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased" (Mt 3:17; Mt 17:5). So you, my daughters, will become beloved daughters of the Father if you unite yourselves to the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

#### **2° Conservation**

Let us now examine how sacrifice can conserve our souls.

Every created being has a time to grow, a time in which to stand still, and finally to experience decadence. A flower blooms, then it begins to fade; and the mighty oaks in the forest fall in their time. So for man too. As for "moral persons," the Church alone has been promised immortality. The Church alone is a tree destined to rise forever, but its branches, the various religious orders, will shrivel and drop off when their turn comes. The hermits of the desert who performed so many wonders have disappeared. So many of those monasteries we read about, where the monks practiced austerities which make our flesh creep, they too disappeared little by little. But how then are we to react against this inevitable decadence of religious orders? By clinging to Jesus Christ, who said, "*Ego sum via, veritas, et vita*—I am the way, the truth and the life" (Jn 14:6). By clinging to eternal life, that life which was revealed especially on the tree of the cross, because it was there that death was destroyed. "*Ego mors tua, o mors*; O death, I will be the death of you" (Hos 13:14).

We must offer God sacrifices of conservation if we wish to ward off death. What we most frequently forget are the rights of God. What we most frequently neglect is the acknowledgement of his dominion and power—and yet no sacrifice maintains holiness the way a sacrifice of adoration does. Our human nature has become so steeped in falsehood that our relationship with God has often turned into a matter of "make believe." If we wish to retrieve reality, adoration is the most effective means whereby we acknowledge God's supreme authority over us. And the most perfect act of adoration is the offering-up of a sacrifice, of a holocaust which consists in the victim's being destroyed. The sacrifice of Jesus Christ was such a holocaust. For us it will be adoration that re-establishes reality in our dealings with God. It must force us to recognize that he who produced us out of nothing can plunge us back into the nothing that we were. We must understand God's providence in dealing with a mere creature, a mere slave

liberated by God's infinite kindness. On the one hand, we must stop relying on ourselves in order to make reparation for our faults; on the other, we must learn to adore.

I cannot conceive any more potent means of conservation than the holocaust. When a soul perishes it means that Jesus Christ has withdrawn his presence, for Christ is the very soul of regenerated humanity. When the life of Jesus Christ also withdraws from any society, it too perishes. But there is a means of restoring his presence—it is sacrifice, sacrifice first and foremost within yourself, then all around you by good example. A religious community that gave such an example of sacrifice, of regularity, of prayer and adoration...“*hostiam laudis*; a sacrifice of praise” (Ps 115:8 Vulgate) would gather immense blessings, and the fragrance of this sacrifice would rise over the whole earth. God would spread it to the east and west, north and south. Who can say how much, but it would be a source of incontestable richness.

### 3° Preservation

Let me conclude with the sacrifice of preservation.

The religious must offer sacrifice to preserve herself in the first place, and then to preserve others. “*Cum autem dormirent homines inimicus ejus et superseminavit zizanium in medio tritici et abiit*; And while men slept an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went his way” (Mt 13:25).

You have all been very fervent; you have received the word of God with joy. But Satan will come along with his message too, and how are you to preserve yourselves from it? By sacrifice—by the “doing without” which is so necessary for a Christian virgin. It is so easy for us to sully our souls. We are surrounded by all kinds of perils and pitfalls. Our surest safeguard is to remain closely linked to the tree of the Cross. The dove released by Noah returned to the ark; return to the Cross as your place of refuge. The ardent religious finds what is almost delight in making-up to Our Lord for all he has suffered—so she sweeps her heart clean of every vestige of sensual life. It is a wearisome and painful task. The dove too was weary, but she kept on flying until she was safely home in the ark. Your duties oblige you to have relationships with the outside world: with the pupils and their parents, and all sorts of other people. Woe to you if you do not hasten back to the ark. Mark my words! You are obliged to a greater degree of self-sacrifice in proportion to your being exposed to greater perils. See, then, what you have to sacrifice to God! Is it all you feel you can spare, or is it everything you've got?

One thing is certain: by this time next week some of you will be no better than you were before. Others may carry on the good fight over the next two or three months, and keep it up with a degree of enthusiasm. But how many of you are going to take the firm and generous resolution to sanctify yourselves by a never-ending life of sacrifice? These will be the



happy ones; these will be living as true spouses of Christ; these will become true saints.

Please God, these will even be the majority. You are all capable of fervor. Be fervent in sacrifice and self-gift. And let your sacrifice rise up like sweet incense before the throne of God.

Allow Jesus, as both victim and priest, to fulfill his work within you. As victim, let him be your model; as high priest, surrender to his divine blows. The more you act thus and the more his love for you increases, likewise your love for him will increase and the more you will appreciate the excellence of this gift of self you will make which will one day bring about your rising with the triumphant victim of Calvary, as St. Paul writes, “God has raised us up too with Christ, to enthrone us with him in glory” (cf Eph 2:6). Amen.

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## CLOSURE OF A RETREAT

*September 23, 1878*

*“Beati immaculati in via, qui ambulant in lege Domini—Happy are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the Lord.” (Ps 118:1 Vulgate)*

The Church puts these words almost daily on our lips<sup>280</sup>. They ceaselessly remind us of the conditions for reaching happiness. St. Augustine says, “Si vis esse beatus, esto immaculatus—If you wish to be happy, be free from sin”<sup>281</sup>. And at the closure of this, our retreat, I presume you all to be in this purity of disposition, firmly resolved to walk in the way of the Lord.

So to the excellent advice you have been absorbing over the past week, let me add a number of practical suggestions that I would call ‘fatherly advice.’ You will, I am sure, accept them in the spirit in which they are given, and may they contribute a special character to your religious life throughout the course of the upcoming school-year.

### I.—Abandon Self

What I ask of you more than anything is that henceforth you should cease to be concerned with yourself. After all, what are we? What is our body in the vast immensity of space? What is our soul amid the countless

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<sup>280</sup> This psalm was recited daily by religious in d’Alzon’s day.

<sup>281</sup> *Enarrationes in Psalmos* (CPL 0283) - LLT-A-SL 40, psalmus 118, sermo 1, par. 1, linea: 12 (Augustine&Commentary on the Psalms&CPL&psalm 118, sermo 1, par. 1, line 12)

multitudes of spirits? What is our life here below in the ceaseless succession of centuries? Of what personal value are we if we weigh our intelligence against our ignorance and mistakes or weigh our will against the predominance of our faults? Nevertheless, it is this little creature, so puffed up with wretchedness, falsehood and vanity, whom we wish to be regarded as an object of some worth and possessed of rights. How true it is to exclaim with St. Augustine, “*Magna est miseria superbus homo*; Deep is the misery of a proud man!”<sup>282</sup>. Such misery will be yours if you persist in pride, in self-worship. Do you wish to cast it off? Then you must contrast this depth of your own misery with the far greater mercy God has to offer you. He offers you this mercy from the depth of humiliation He himself accepted to undergo, in order to show you how worthwhile it is to regard yourself as nothing. “*Magna est miseria homo superbus, sed major misericordia humilis Deus*; Deep is the misery of a proud man, but deeper still is the mercy of a humble God!”<sup>283</sup>

So when you feel undecided about choosing between the pretensions of your pride and the desire of self-abandonment, fix your gaze upon the self-abasement of your God. This will open the doors of mercy for you. You will find yourself driving away these awful pretensions of a self-centered soul, and allowing God’s own mercy to fall on you as a result of the Savior’s humility. “*Magna est miseria homo superbus, sed major misericordia humilis Deus*—Deep is the misery of a proud man, but deeper still is the mercy of a humble God!” Take stock in advance of all the circumstances in which the misery of your pride is likely to fall foul of the humility of Jesus Christ. You will then understand how beneficial it is for you to suffer humiliation in order to enter the supernatural designs God has in store for you. Then will you be able to exclaim, “*Bonum mihi, quia humiliasti me, ut discam justifications tuas*—It is good for me that you have humbled me, so that I may learn your ways” (Ps 118:71 Vulgate). For there can be no godly insight, no understanding God’s ways, without humility and humiliation. “*Bonum mihi, quia humiliasti me*—it is good for me that you have humiliated me.” This is the great good that I ask you to grant me above all. The rest will follow in abundance.

Hark to the cry of the soul which becomes conscious of its weakness and nothingness, “*Adhaesit pavimento anima mea*; My soul cleaves to the dust” (Ps 118:25a Vulgate). What can this poor soul do but lie there in the dust, stuck to the very pavement of the temple? “*Adhaesit pavimento anima mea*—My soul is stuck to the pavement.” But it is precisely there that God will go and look for it, and restore it to life. “*Vivifica me secundum verbum tuum*; Restore me to life as you have said you would” (Ps 118:25b Vulgate).

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<sup>282</sup> *De catechizandis rudibus* (CPL 0297) - LLT-A cap. 4, linea 76 (Augustine&On Catechizing Beginners in the Faith&CPL&chap. 4, line 76)

<sup>283</sup> *ibid.* (Augustine&On Catechizing Beginners in the Faith&CPL&chap. 25, line 38)

“O God!” exclaims St. Augustine. “Where is man? Where is your property? He is lying there lifeless in your presence, longing to be filled with your very self! *Ubi est homo tuus exinaniens se, ut impleatur a te?*”<sup>284</sup>. And so you will empty yourself, you will turn yourself into nothing, you will forget yourself. This is how I tell you to begin. Having done this, you will proceed to the next step—you will fill yourself up with God’s own Spirit.

## II.—Fill yourself with God

To fill yourself up with the very essence of God, after having rid yourself of all the corruption contained in the human heart, what a program for the creature who is being called to genuine happiness! This happiness is not to be discovered around you, or within you. It can be found only above you—and above you there is nothing except God. “*Quod est anima melius, id Deum dicimus*; That which is better than the soul, we call it God”<sup>285</sup>. So these are the terms: to leave yourself behind, because you are worth very little (if, what with your sins, you are worth anything at all), and to go and look for something better. And there exists nothing better than God himself. “*Id autem quod est anima melius, id Deum dicimus*; That which is better than the soul, we call it God.”

And how will you attain this God, how will you possess him—this God who is so far beyond you? Listen once more to St. Augustine: “*Cui quisquis eum intelligit, junctus est*; We become joined to whatever we understand”<sup>286</sup>. So we become joined to God by understanding God. But what does it mean to understand God? Comprehension of the divine mysteries does not belong to this world. However, among the gifts of the Holy Spirit is numbered that of understanding, whereby heavenly things get revealed to us here below as far as our minds are capable of grasping them. So it is by (this gift of) understanding that we advance towards God.

There are various degrees of understanding, according to the extent with which we open the eyes of our soul to the radiance of God’s grace; but this depends on us. First of all, (there is) the “common light.” But if we close our eyes to it, we cannot blame it for not lighting our way. “*Et lux in tenebris lucet, et tenebrae eam non receperunt*; And the light shines through the darkness, but the darkness did not receive it” (Jn 1:5). What is, then, the duty of a soul to whom God has given the gift of understanding? It is to try to see, to try to understand better and better. It is to unite itself to God by

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<sup>284</sup> *Enarrationes in Psalmos* (CPL 0283) - LLT-ASL 40, psalmus : 118, sermo : 2, par. 2, linea 8 (Augustine&Commentary on the Psalms&CPL&psalm 118, sermo 2, par. 2, line 8)

<sup>285</sup> *Enarrationes in Psalmos* (CPL 0283) - LLT-ASL 40, psalmus : 118, sermo : 2, par. 2, linea 8 (Augustine&Commentary on the Psalms&CPL&psalm 118, sermo 2, par. 2, line 8)  
*Retractionum libri duo* (CPL 0250) - LLT- A, lib. 1, cap. 26, linea 150  
(Augustine&Retractions&bk. 1, chap. 26, line 150)

<sup>286</sup> *De diuersis quaestionibus octoginta tribus* (CPL 0289) - LLT-A quaestio 54, linea 23  
(Augustine&83 Varied Questions&CPL&question 54, line 23)

contemplation. And who is summoned to contemplation more than the religious? These are the souls of whom it is written that “they seek God with all their heart; *In toto corde exquirunt eum*” (Ps 118:2 Vulgate). In this way they seek, and thus they find, but they must sincerely long to find him. Note one of St. Augustine’s guiding principles: “*Sciens verba Dei non posse custodiri per obedientiam, nisi videantur per intelligentiam, hoc quoque oration addit et dicit: Revela oculos*; Knowing that the precepts of the Lord cannot be observed by obedience unless they are first revealed by understanding, we add to our prayer: Open my eyes.”<sup>287</sup>

So now we see how imperative it is to be constantly preoccupied with God through prayer, to be living in him, to be united to him, to lose ourselves completely in God. Ah, if God were our sole concern, if we saw him everywhere, detected him in all the things with which Providence surrounds us, in all the ways the Church guides souls, in ourselves by virtue of the wonders of the interior life in which we ought to be find our happiness, then think of the heights to which we would rise!

### III.—By the most exquisite obedience

How are we to attain such perfection? This is my third request: that you should live your religious life to the full and observe its precepts with sacred zeal. Listen to the Psalmist, “*Tu mandasti mandata tua custodiri nimis*; You have commanded me to observe your precepts with excess” (Ps 118:4 Vulgate). What is this “excess”? Something not all are asked to practice—it’s reserved for privileged souls.

Talking about observing God’s commandments “with excess,” St. Augustine points out the difference between pagan wisdom and that of Christians. Pagans had this as the principle of their conduct: “*Ne quid nimis*; Let there be no excess.”<sup>288</sup> Why? Because their idea of virtue falls within the limits of human nature. Since Christian virtue, on the contrary, aims at God who is without limit, Christian virtue will never be completely satisfied. That is why the prophet exclaims, “*Tu mandasti mandata tua custodiri nimis*; You have commanded me to observe your precepts with excess.” Love is the fulfillment of the law (Rom 13:10). But what creature will ever love God sufficiently? We need have no fear of being asked to love him too much, because we will never succeed in loving him enough.

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<sup>287</sup> *Enarrationes in Psalmos* (CPL 0283) - LLT-A SL 40, psalmus 118, sermo 7, par. 4, linea 1 (Augustine&Commentary on the Psalms&CPL&psalm 118, sermo 7, par. 4, line 1)

<sup>288</sup> “Nothing to excess” (*Ne quid nimis*) is employed by Terence (“Andria,” I. 1) and in various places by St. Augustine: *De beata uita* (CPL 0254) - LLT-A, cap. 4, linea 226; *De diuersis quaestionibus octoginta tribus* (CPL 0289) - LLT-A, quaestio 51, linea 91; *De doctrina christiana* (CPL 0263) - LLT-A, lib. 2, cap. 39, linea 19; *Enarrationes in Psalmos* (CPL 0283) - LLT-A, SL 40, psalmus 118, sermo 4, par. 1, linea 8, 12, 18, 26 (Augustine&Commentary on the Psalms&CPL&psalm 118, sermo 4, par. 1, line 8,12,18,26)

It is, however, your privilege to have been summoned to perfection. You have been invited to practice the evangelical counsels and to venture beyond the ordinary, to attain that “excess” of which common weakness seems incapable, but which nevertheless can be attained by those who seek God with all their heart. What am I telling you except to scale the very heights of God’s commandments, to keep on looking up, to see what love adds to this process by the evangelical counsels, and to apply yourselves seriously to the realization of these words you recite day by day: “*Tu mandasti mandata tua custodiri nimis*; You have commanded me to observe your precepts with excess”?

And when you give your heart to God, when you put on your religious habit, as you “put on the Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom 13:14), when in prayer you yourselves enter into close communication with God, when you submit your body to penance, adding whatever austerities religious obedience permits, when you bravely bear the yoke of the Rule, when you are disposed to become “obedient even unto death” (Phil 2:8), when you love him who gave his life for his friends (Jn 15:13), when you go to adore him with all the sentiments of the angels around the throne of God (Rv 7:11), when, uniting yourself to him in Communion, you ask him to give you his mind (Phil 2:5) so as to reproduce it constantly instead of your own, when, in a word, you become living copies of that supreme religious, the Son of God made man, then you will be able to say, “*Mihi vivere Christus est*; For me Christ is life” (Phil 1:21). Then you will understand the meaning of these words, “My God, you have commanded me to observe your precepts with excess”—because then you will have begun to live like a perfect religious.

Then you will savor the true joys of life, as none but a religious soul can savor them. Then you will be able to repeat again and again, “*In via testimoniorum tuorum delectatus sum, sicut in omnibus divitiis*; I have found my delight in the way of your commandments—I have discovered riches untold” (Ps 118:14 Vulgate). What are the riches such joy may obtain? What creature could support the weight of such overwhelming joy? But this isn’t all. Religious life has turned you into valiant workers! Let us finish by considering the various good works to which you must dedicate your lives, the various good works whereby you sacrifice yourselves, and the correspondence between God’s infinite perfection and the holiness of your religious obligations.

#### **IV.—By the unselfish love of souls**

Since Our Lord is not asking you to hide yourselves behind some monastic grill, he is obviously calling you to an active apostolate. And, as you know, this apostolate concerns the souls of others. There is one thing you must never forget: you look after these souls not for yourselves but for God. They belong to Jesus Christ, not to you. They are God’s, not yours.

You do not own them. And it often happens that our usurpation of God's ownership of souls is the regrettable cause of these souls making so little spiritual progress.

This must not prevent you from loving them, and loving them very deeply, but you must love them for God's sake. At times they are rebellious; you need to calm them down. At times, they become frightened; they need to be encouraged. They can be temperamental; the clouds must be blown away with natural, unfeigned cheerfulness. Show the friendship of good advice. Carry their burdens for them. These burdens are light for you because you are strong, but heavy for them because they are weak. Learn to uphold the souls of others. You are bound to do this for one another. You are doubly bound to uphold the young people confided to your care.

St. Augustine, making use of the Apostle's words, says, "*Ipsa est ergo lex Christi, ut onera nostra invicem portemus*"; So this is the law of Christ, that we should bear one another's burdens"<sup>289</sup>. We can recognize the holiness of a religious by the zeal with which she carries the burdens of others. And think of the good she must be doing. Do not expect me, at this junction, to deliver a lecture on pedagogy. But I could hardly close this retreat without reminding you of your important duties in the training of souls.

Once more: do not spare yourselves! Throw yourselves wholeheartedly into the arms of God. Be holy religious. Be apostolic virgins. Such is what I wish you at the end of this retreat. May God bless my wishes and render them effective so that holiness may be yours one day. Amen.

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<sup>289</sup> *De diuersis quaestionibus octoginta tribus* (CPL 0289) - LLT-A quaestio 71, linea 145 (Augustine&83 Varied Questions&question 71, line 145)

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### III. OBLATES OF THE ASSUMPTION<sup>290</sup>

*The correspondence between Fr. d'Alzon and Mère Correnson (Mère Emmanuel-Marie de la Compassion) was edited in part by the Bonne Presse (today Bayard Presse) in 1933; we have selected several texts which shed further light on the goal and spirit of the Congregation of the Oblates of the Assumption.*

*Under the title, "Spiritual Testament," Fr. d'Alzon bequeathed to the Oblates his notes from an 1877 retreat. Some of these talks have already been included in the section entitled "Meditations destined for the Assumptionists," in 1879.*

*Another retreat on the Blessed Virgin from September 1879 was published in a small booklet put out by the mother-house in 1941. We are simply noting this. Here, after several extracts from letters to Mère Correnson, we have added some unpublished talks addressed to the Oblates during the last years of Fr. d'Alzon's life.*

*A. Extracts from the correspondence of Fr. d'Alzon*

*B. Talks given to the Oblates*

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#### **EXTRACTS FROM THE CORRESPONDENCE OF FR. D'ALZON**

October 4, 1864

to Marie Correnson

##### **A Eucharistic Association for the Near East**

Today I am going to try to explain to you what I should like you to do. Would you like to help me establish an association, the purpose of which is to make reparation to Our Lord in the Near East for the insults to

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<sup>290</sup> This Religious Order of Sisters was founded by Fr. d'Alzon in 1865, mainly to help Assumptionist religious in the Near East. Their co-foundress, Mère Marie Correnson (Mère Emmanuel-Marie de la Compassion) was the daughter of a Nîmes doctor, and Fr. d'Alzon had known her since she was a child. The Oblate Sisters suffered a schism after Fr. d'Alzon's death, that was only resolved after the First World War. Today Fr. d'Alzon and Mère Correnson lie buried together in Nîmes.

which he is subjected in the Eucharist and to promote love and veneration for him in the Eucharist?

What we need above all in modern times to counteract the negations of Protestants is the exaltation of the Church, devotion to the Blessed Virgin, and love for the Blessed Sacrament. For me this is as clear as day. And while unbelief, the daughter of Protestantism, rejects this threefold manifestation of Catholic piety in Western Europe, would it not be beneficial—or, rather, is it not one of Our Lord's own projects, that we should offer him, in reparation for so many insults and sacrileges, an association the aim of which is to propagate the glory of this Divine Master, present in the Eucharist, among the schismatics throughout the Near East?

Would this not be the first step towards the restoration of unity?

#### **The Qualifications for Membership**

The individuals prepared to dedicate themselves to the establishment of such an Association must have:

1° A burning love for Our Lord, demonstrated by his sacrifice on the altar.

2° The desire to make reparation for the insults to which he is subjected: by prayer, penance and good works. Those unable to provide more than prayer and penance should bind themselves even more tightly to it.

Those engaged in charitable works should extend the scope of these good works, or associate themselves with other charitable enterprises already in existence.

#### **How to set about it**

Apart from prayer and penance, what ought we to do in order to repair these insults committed against Our Lord?

1° The building of churches in the Near East.

2° The embroidery of sacred vestments.

3° The instruction of children, to prepare them for their First Communion and encourage them to receive Communion frequently.

4° The opening of schools with this aim in view.

5° The renewal of the local clergy.

6° The organization of Perpetual Adoration in these lands.

I need not develop this line of thought, my dear daughter. It seems to me that it will develop itself spontaneously.

#### **An Appeal**

“But,” you will ask me, “what can I do?” We can both think continuously about this idea, allowing it to mature as we kneel at the feet of Our Lord. You can contribute your communions, your penances, your almsgiving, over a period, to find out whether God really wishes you to do this. When you feel in the depth of your heart that something is, indeed, pushing you to dedicate your life to Jesus Christ in the Eucharist in order to repair the injuries to which he is subjected and to promote the expansion of



Eucharistic devotion in the Near East, then it will be time for you to “put your hand to the plough” (Lk 9:62) and to ask yourself, “What can I do about these things?” I will reply. “What about Pauline Jaricot<sup>291</sup>? Here was a poor girl, always ill. Here was a poor woman of Lyons, without a penny to her name. She nevertheless founded an association of military men who, in many parts of France, and for twenty-five years, persuaded thousands of soldiers to perform their Easter duty. What is more, she founded the Society for the Propagation of the Faith! How could those three little St. Maur convent-school girls in Nîmes have founded the Society of St. Francis de Sales<sup>292</sup>? When Our Lord decided to found the Church itself, he asked a humble fisherman, “Simon, son of Jonah, do you love me more than these?” (Jn 21:15). I myself once asked two good young girls, “Marie and Isabelle<sup>293</sup>, do you love Jesus Christ? What’s so complicated about that?”

#### A plan of action

I know that not everybody has the same vocation. But I also know that there are some individuals that Providence has chosen for special responsibilities, and I am becoming more and more convinced that this applies to you. Let me begin by making it clear that I have no intention of sending you out there (to the Near East). Your work is cut out for you here. Later on you may wish to go further afield, and ask me, “What, then, shall we do once we have thoroughly given of ourselves?” I may begin by asking you: “Do you think that when Our Lord told St. Peter to ‘Feed my lambs—feed my sheep’ (Jn 21:15), Peter became wiser all of a sudden?” I don’t think so, first of all, because he had not yet received the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:4), and, secondly because God’s designs were probably revealed to him little by little, as we see in the conversion of the Roman centurion, Cornelius (Acts 10). I am thinking even further ahead. When I come back (from the Near East) and you say to me, “Father, my life belongs to Our Lord; I am ready for the work you have in mind,” we will still have to

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<sup>291</sup> In Church history, few lay people have had more positive effect on the success of Catholic worldwide missionary activities than a Frenchwoman named Pauline Jaricot. Born into an aristocratic family in 1799, she used her influence to not only help spread the Gospel, but rejuvenate devotion to the Rosary and highlight deplorable conditions of the working class. More than 150 years after her death, the visionary programs Jaricot conceived still resonate and are universally observed throughout the Church. Her life of heroic virtue is exemplified by a pledge of perpetual virginity to Our Lord Jesus Christ.

<sup>292</sup> The “Oeuvre de St. François de Sales” was founded in 1859 under the influence of Fr. d’Alzon and Msgr. Louis-Gaston de Ségur, his close friend, with the assistance of three young students at the St. Maur convent school. It was conceived first of all as an association for the ‘defense of religion,’ what its founders called a defense against the modern ills of ignorance, indifference, and unbelief. It had a particular goal of combatting Protestantism. Msgr. Ségur explained this work in a book entitled *L’oeuvre de saint François de Sales: explications et réponses*.

<sup>293</sup> Marie Correnson and Isabelle de Mérinargues; the latter was a young woman under Fr. d’Alzon’s spiritual direction who was greatly involved in many of his initiatives in Nîmes. She initially joined the Oblates but had to withdraw for reasons of poor health.

consider all the relevant circumstances, the many obstacles to overcome, and the opportunities that may be greater than we could have ever imagined. Here, for example, are some of the plans I have in mind:

1° To establish a community of Sisters of the Assumption at Adrianople<sup>294</sup>, who, in turn, would organize Perpetual Adoration, to be performed either by themselves or by local Catholic women.

2° To train men and women religious for work in Bulgaria.

3° To collect money for the purchase and shipment of books.

And you are telling me you won't have enough to do! Good Lord! You can begin by hemming dish-cloths if you have nothing more urgent on your program. Why not begin, for example, by securing inner freedom so that you might spend more time before the Blessed Sacrament and pray for these intentions? If you fancy the idea of collaborating with Isabelle (de Mérinargues) and she fancies collaborating with you, then why not go to communion together and why not go and adore the Blessed Sacrament together, and ask him for enlightenment, counsel and strength? If you like my suggestions, you may pass this letter on to Isabelle. Although she is a little older than you, she will have less free time than you. She has to look after a sick mother and sort out family affairs. However, having prayed about it, I think it is on the two of you that I can rely for this enterprise, until I can find other people to help you later on.

### **Foundation of our Work in Bulgaria**

(a note of Fr. d'Alzon)

I do not intend to write a history book—just to scribble a few notes on the beginnings and the progress of an enterprise, the origins of which seem to have been guided by Divine Providence.

The very obstacles which ought to have suffocated it from the word, “Go!” turned out to be the reasons for its success. God's blessings fell from heaven just where it was thought it would receive its death-blow before it had even been born! All those who have studied the Near East are convinced that if there is any hope of the ancient Catholic faith being grafted onto the centuries-old schism, this will be achieved only with the help of schools. This conviction, which has been confirmed by experience, prompted a number of individuals to get together and form a modest religious family, the aim of which was to open village schools in Bulgaria, just as had been done in certain parts of Asia Minor.

But for this it was thought there was a need of some dynamic

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<sup>294</sup> Presumably the Religious Sisters of the Assumption, but Mother Marie-Eugénie refused to let them go. Adrianople, now known as Edirne, is in southern Bulgaria, about 100 miles west and slightly north of Istanbul.

character, gifted with both initiative and powers of organization, capable of command, and yet subtle, because he would be faced with an extremely delicate situation. It would certainly be hard to find such a person. Nevertheless, we thought we had found him—we had waited for him long enough! Yet when it came once and for all to “putting one’s hand to the plough” and making a serious start, there were hesitations and apprehensions. So when everything seemed ready, it all blew away into thin air.

One founder and three associated foundresses found themselves faced with a project which, having begun with failure, stood no chance ever of making a fresh start. It was quite hopeless. Human wisdom had done its best, but had nothing to boast about in face of such complete breakdown. God’s wisdom had yet to manifest itself.

But it seemed that Our Lord did wish something to be done. Were it only to protest against our previous lack of success, founder and foundresses got together and considered new possibilities.

About this time, the Augustinians of the Assumption had just opened their small novitiate at Le Vigan<sup>295</sup>. Father Hippolyte<sup>296</sup>, who was in charge, thought that perhaps what had been sought in vain on the plains of the Vistula (Poland) and the banks of the Hérault (a river in Southern France) might be found here in the mountains of the Cévennes. A few young country girls of solid piety, who had been going to confession to him, were inspired by his spiritual guidance to dedicate their lives to God. One or two of them had been thinking about it for a long time, but had been unable to see their way through certain difficulties. Others among them had worthy sentiments, but lacked that certitude of a religious vocation which only a favorable spiritual climate can provide.

So Fr. Hippolyte found he had precious material at hand that little by little he was able to pull together. This was during the winter of 1864-65. The previous attempt, at Nîmes in the springtime of 1864, had come to nought.

At Le Vigan things started to “hum.” We needed a house to begin with. Providential happenings permitted us to rent a large villa for nine years. It was large enough to accommodate twenty or thirty novices with no overcrowding. We could even squeeze in more by putting up with certain inconveniences as all new beginnings require.

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<sup>295</sup> Le Vigan was the birth-place of Fr. d’Alzon, where both his mother’s and father’s families had their origins. It is located in the foothills of the Cévennes Mountains some 60 kms from Nîmes. The family home known as La Condamine was inherited by Fr. d’Alzon. It served many purposes within the Assumption Family—as a novitiate and then as an aluminate for the Assumptionists until 1871 and a residence for the Orants of the Assumption from 1937 to 2004, when it was sold to the town. Fr. d’Alzon was baptized in the local parish church.

<sup>296</sup> Fr. Hippolyte Saugrain was one of the first disciples of Fr. d’Alzon and served as general treasurer his entire life. He also served as master of novices of the Assumptionists and was instrumental in the foundation of the Oblates of the Assumption.

A dozen young women were soon ready to join the Assumption and form our first “nucleus.” Fr. Hippolyte chose six of them—and, together with Fr. d’Alzon, fixed the date of May 24, feast of Our Lady Help of Christians, on which to enthrone the Blessed Sacrament in a poor little chapel where Our Lord had certainly not been honored hitherto.

We wished to add a little solemnity to these, our humble beginnings. Some pious ladies of Nîmes were invited to approve by their presence of what a handful of good, simple girls were setting out to do. Facing the future with unquestioning courage and relying on Providence and on Our Lady of Bulgaria, they were aspiring to become spouses of Our Lord. They had generous hearts—most of them little education—but all of them had the best will in the world to be formed and seemed free of that mistrust behind which independence so often lurks under the guise of a false obedience.

Sr. Marguerite, Sr. Marie-Madeleine, Sr. Marie de l’Annonciation, Sr. Thérèse, Sr. Louise, Sr. Véronique: these were the “foundation stones” of our new enterprise.

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*July 20, 1866*

*to Marie Correnson*

**Essential points**

My daughter, please consider carefully the questions I pose:

1° Do you feel the courage little by little to become totally absorbed in this enterprise?

2° While still remaining a while on your own, do you feel that one day you could become its mother?

3° Will you be sufficiently patient to put up with such reproaches and criticism as are invariably the lot of new initiatives?

4° Are you disposed not to clash too much with some of the thoroughly disagreeable characters you are bound to encounter?

5° If certain persons of your own social class were to join, are you disposed to command them gently, kindly, and, above all, supernaturally?

6° Do you feel you have the strength to acquire the heart of a true mother? (This is the essential question.)

7° Are you prepared to give birth to this enterprise with all the labor pains that it will surely entail?

8° Are you afraid of the inevitable separations that will occur?

9° At times it will be a physically hard and painful life. Given your nature, is this too much to ask?

10° Since you will have to support and strengthen the tottering wills of those who surround you, do you have sufficient willpower to remain steadfast, with the help of God’s grace?

11° Are you ready to become a saint in the truest sense of the word—to anchor your soul in the realm of the Spirit, so that nothing that happens to you is considered except in this light?

12° And, lastly, do you wish to become an apostle, and communicate your apostolic spirit to others?

I am not going to ask you: “Will you help me?” We cannot help being human—but while remaining here on earth, we must build everything in view of heaven. This is something in your life that is great and solemn. When I try my best to sum up our previous conversations and try to focus on certain essential points, believe me when I tell you that my heart burns to recall that I have laid the foundations of the future of a daughter whom I love very much, but to whom I can offer only a crown of thorns and the nails of the cross!

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### Profession of a Foundress

*In the presence of the Most Holy and Adorable Trinity and under the protection of the Blessed Virgin Mary, my Mother, I, Sr. Emmanuel Marie de la Compassion, promise and vow to the God whom I adore, really and truly present in this host, that I will live unto death in poverty, chastity and obedience, and that I will dedicate my life to the foreign missions according to the decisions of my Superiors and according to the Rule of St. Augustine and the Constitutions of the Oblates of the Assumption.*

*Nîmes, April 18, 1867*

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### “Homework”

*by Mère Correnson*

*some time in 1868*

The spirit of the Assumption consists in a great love for Our Lord in the Eucharist, also in a filial love of the Blessed Virgin, and above all in devotion to the Church and to the salvation of souls.

Our piety is straightforward, loyal, unselfish and active. Strength and dynamism must characterize it in a special way. There is no room for any attachment to a particular way of doing things or any narrowness of outlook. Our zealous labors to extend the Kingdom of Our Lord call for the collaboration of all our members. Our spirit of self-sacrifice pushes us to foreign missions where we are happy to win over souls for Our Lord. Our submission and devotion to the Holy See strike me more forcibly than I have seen in other religious orders.

In our teaching, we aim, first and foremost, to produce intelligent and deeply Christian men, but men with no hint of hypocrisy. The qualities we seek to impart are, above all, those of energy and loyalty.

*some time in 1868*

*to Mère Correnson*

### Correction of the "Homework"

My dear daughter,

If I insisted on your writing down what has struck you most about *the Assumption*, it was to oblige you to reflect on how you might play a more active role in it. One of the best ways of obtaining such a self-reflection is to sit down and write.

I can quite understand your not being happy right away with your summary and its first draft, but be patient. Your ideas will sort themselves out little by little. Since it is you who have begun this work, you will no longer be satisfied with saying that the Assumptionist outlook is broad and intelligent; you will tell me in what its breadth and intelligence consist.

So you speak of our devotion to Our Lord, to the Holy Eucharist, to Our Lady, and our submission to the Holy See. But is this not common to many other Orders who have the same objective? What is there so distinctive about our Congregation from this point of view? This is the train of thought I urge you to pursue. And if thought proves sterile, try to remember what I often said to you.

You tell me about our energy, but where does it spring from? This is another question that awaits an answer. Notice that every religious family feeds on ideas. These ideas must be passed on. To be able to pass them on, it is imperative that we should not only have them, but know how to formulate them. It is only through reflection that this happens. So I want you to continue to reflect and to express the fruit of your reflections. Please God, you will finish by becoming so imbued with the spirit of the Assumption (thanks to your own personal efforts) that you will easily pass this spirit on to your daughters.

So I am waiting for something more developed from you in which you will explain:

1° What is so special about the Assumptionist way of loving Our Lord, the Holy Eucharist, and the Blessed Virgin?

2° What is the source of the Assumption's energy?

July 17, 1869

to Mère Correnson

### As if writing to a saint

...Look, would you like me to speak to you as if you were a saint?

1° You must take the resolution to convince yourself a little more by the day that the only reason why you exercise authority is because it has been imposed on you. In this regard, you still have work to do to eliminate from God's sight certain rough edges of your delightful little personality.

2° You must learn to disregard questions personally and to treat them on their own merit and in their broadest sense. Here I am pointing out a pitfall pertaining to your sex rather than to your individual character. I

even think that with your nature you are perfectly capable of overcoming the disadvantages that are yours as a woman and turning them to good account. I regard you as eminently qualified, however little you try, to avoid pettiness, but you still have work to do.

3° You love Our Lord very dearly as your spouse, but perhaps not sufficiently as your King. You are full of deep and delicate affection for him, but you do tend to want him for yourself. The foundress of the Oblates ought to be more concerned with her sisters having him, for all the souls your daughters convert to having him, for the entire Church and all sinners to having him. You try to give him rule over your heart; you ought, too, to be ceaselessly preoccupied with finding the means to have him rule over all hearts. And for this you must not only pray very hard, and cooperate by your sufferings in the cause of Redemption; but you must turn your attention, much more than you are doing, to the great cause of the Church. I believe your understanding needs to be developed much more in this regard.

Learn to ignore all the temptations suggested by the devil; he is very cunning—it's his way of getting you to waste your time. This time would be far more beneficially employed if, as far as your health permits, you seriously studied what would help you understand the Church's greatest needs. Here, a whole new world is opening up before you. What can you do to help it, and what will you? I know only too well by experience that there comes a point when poor health impedes the effective working of the mind. Therefore I am praying for you (for you in particular, not for anybody else) that you may find good health at Vichy<sup>297</sup>.

You don't want your heart to be hardened there; I agree with you entirely! On the contrary, you must expand it a thousand-fold, set it on fire for whatever is noble, beautiful and divine in the perfections of Jesus Christ and in the cause of the Church. You must embrace a new life, by mobilizing that vast intellectual power with which I know you are richly endowed and by expanding your capacity for loving souls as Our Lord loves them.

Marie, come back to me as a true saint! Once again I say without allowing your heart to become hardened; to the contrary, may you carve, prune, expand, enlarge everything within you which can be oriented towards the Infinite and may you discover the full possession of God by the fulfillment of all the plans he has in store for you.

Goodbye, my daughter. Allow me to bless you with a double dose of tenderness and with a consuming desire to see you take flight in the pursuit of your true vocation, with wings as wide as the world and as powerful as a Seraphim.

*July 19, 1869*

*to Mère Correnson*

**It's already been two years**

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<sup>297</sup> A town in the Massif Central of France known for its thermal baths.

In a few days, my dear daughter, you will be twenty-seven. You have already belonged to Our Lord for two years. Do you not find that the quiet solitude of Vichy is conducive to taking a good look at yourself and helping you to see yourself as God sees you and discovering what you should become?

Obviously, looking back over the past two years since that famous June 27, you have suffered; you have made plans which came to nought; you have grown in intimacy with Our Lord; you have gained a little more experience; you have had to envisage your duties from new angles. At times, perhaps, you have experienced a certain sadness; having made plans seeking perfection, you have met with hours of profound discouragement.

Well, having been through these various phases, dominated by one set of feelings, then another, and given all the personal experience you have gained, how do you stand before God? Would you say that love is at the center of your nature? You have an immense capacity for love planted within your heart...do you wish to channel this love completely toward Our Lord? You stand on the threshold of a most precious period of your life. From the age of twenty to that of twenty-seven, you have experienced many emotions and weathered many a storm. From now until you are thirty-three, Our Lord's age, you must anchor your life in holiness. This life is a cake you must cut into two portions: the portion you give to others, and the far more intimate portion you reserve for your divine spouse. It is of this latter portion that I have this to say: Whatever be the circumstances of your outward life, it is evident to me that, if you are willing, your divine spouse will act within your soul in a manner beyond the scope of human telling. He is waiting for you; he is asking you to give yourself to him. New links will be formed between the two of you. This will mean a self-surrender without limit. You will be overcome by the need of making whatever he stands for loved, served and defended. Your whole being will be lost in his, your love in his. It will mean the renunciation of everything that is not him and for him. You will be living in him. It will be a new life, a divine life. Love will overflow into sacrifice. No more room for human self-centeredness, for personal conceit, personal satisfaction, personal pleasure. You will experience the domination of the king, the all-possessive friend. It will mean the total loss of yourself in the one who wishes to be your all.

This, my daughter, is how your life looks to me—from God's point of view. Let us add the perfection of Christian and religious virtues...faith whereby you will stand up against all merely worldly values; hope whereby you will watch the blood of Jesus Christ being ceaselessly shed for you and heaven at the end of the road; love which will turn your heart into a volcano; and that poverty, that chastity and that obedience which, practiced by you, their mother, will constitute a constant lesson to all your daughters. I don't know what fills my heart with so many ardent wishes for you. Come home transformed, Marie! In you I want to meet a saint.

I pray for you always, my daughter. One day we must share a glorious



place up-above.

Goodbye, my daughter. Let me bless you, and let this blessing contain all I wish for you, that you may enter into the utter depths of what Our Lord is asking of your soul.

*December 14, 1869*

*to Mère Correnson*

#### **Lay Sisters**

Let me return to what you were asking me about lay sisters. One of the reasons why I have decided against your having them is because if I had my time over again I might decide against having them at the Assumption. Let us not delude ourselves: lay sisters are becoming a thing of the past. I am now deeply convinced that, if we wish to convert the nations, we must rid ourselves of aristocratic trappings. We are moving toward democracy, the demands of which will be extraordinary. In this regard, your not being here<sup>298</sup> prevents you from seeing what I have seen! The Hungarian bishops—the last grandees of Europe—are no longer given pride of place. People now look to the missionary bishops who walk to the Council meetings because they can't afford a carriage. Even the learned “experts,” those thanks to whose skill the various laws and decrees are drawn up, now take a back seat. You can feel that they are here merely to assist the others. Those for whom the Council is intended are “the friends of God,” the poor and the forgotten. Believe me, the future belongs to them. If the world we live in is to be saved, it will be saved by poverty and lowliness.

Nothing would upset me more than to watch this initiative, which is the Oblates, go astray. What gives me a “soft spot” for you is, above all, your humble attitude. It renders you much more capable of influencing that portion of humanity that Our Lord loves in a special way, those for whom it is urgent that we care above all. What you could aim at henceforward is more careful selection of your candidates. Raise your standards, but let them be characterized especially by that spirit of great holiness that one will sense among your daughters because they take after their mother.

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*February 28, 1870*

*to the Oblates of the Assumption*

#### **Lenten recommendations**

I sometimes wonder whether you have any idea of the esteem in which I hold you and how you are constantly on my mind. The more I think about the purpose of your foundation, the more convinced I become that the elements are there for something wonderful to develop. But, as I have told you time and time again, the seed must be carefully cultivated. This calls for the following conditions which I put before you as we enter the Lenten season.

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<sup>298</sup> in Rome for the First Vatican Council.

*1° A great forgetfulness of self.* An Oblate who is forever thinking about her dear little self will never come to much. It's so easy to fall into this trap. You may see a minor abuse or violation of the Rule or a shortcoming with one of the Sisters and you say, "Why shouldn't I do the same?" You receive a rebuke and inside yourself you say that it's always you they're picking on and never the others. You see people paying attention to a particular Sister and the devil whispers in your ear, "Why always her? Why never you?" You are absorbed in a moment of fervor and you peek out of the corner of your eye to see if others are watching, but you find in the community that in fact all the others ever seem to notice are your faults. Have you met anyone like this?

*2° A spirit of prayer.* My dear daughters, please remember that you will never be given the same opportunities for prayer as are yours now. How I hope that amid all your future labors you may remain permanently united in heart with our divine Master! How often I count on the power of my daughters' prayers to obtain everything I need! It's true. On no branch of the Assumption do I depend as much as I do on my Oblates at Nîmes and at Le Vigan, when it comes to storming heaven on my behalf. Of course, I know many saintly souls are kind enough to remember me in their prayers, and the good works I undertake. But I hope that the richest prayers for the sustenance of these good works issue from your two little chapels. Yours are the prayers. Yours must also be those very special accompanying virtues and that ardor that pierces heaven and reaches up to the very throne of God.

*3° A straightforward and loyal obedience.* I may be mistaken, dear daughters—but I do not think you are afraid of me, or of your Mother, for being too strict. There are times when I reproach myself for not being firm enough—I may become so one day! Meanwhile I feel obliged in conscience, out of loyalty to your Mother, to treat you with a certain directness. I believe that you, on your part, must beseech Our Lord to grant you that gift of obedience which is unto death and death on the cross. If during Lent you were to make some progress in this direction, how very beneficial it would be! I need not describe the harm wrought by disobedience, something you have already seen. So I need not insist on it. But, knowing how disastrous disobedience can be, you must make every effort to shun it.

*4° Sisterly love.* I beg of you: get on well together. We all have our faults. We all need to have people exercise an immense amount of patience towards us. In our turn, let us endeavor to practice such patience joyfully ourselves when opportunities arise. Let not the power nor the obligation of patience ever be diminished. Whenever I come back to see you, let me be particularly struck to find these sentiments deep within you in such a way that one perceives, in the full sense of the phrase, that you are of one heart.

*5° Love of the Church.* You, your vocation, and the circumstances in which you operate must all combine to produce a love for the Church. You must be true workers of the Church. At the same time, you must rejoice in

the privilege of living at the time of a Council (Vatican I). Do everything possible for yourselves to take advantage of all the graces it will provide for true Christians. Remember: it is your task to make the Church loved because to his Church God has entrusted the salvation of the world.

*6° Love of Our Lord.* This must be the beginning and end of everything. What is an Oblate if Jesus Christ is not her very life? What is an Oblate if she receives Communion several times a week, and yet has not become *one* with her spouse? What is an Oblate who attends Mass every day, yet other thoughts possess her mind than that of complete self-sacrifice, whereby she shows her beloved spouse that she loves him as a spouse should? Jesus our Savior has manifested his love by offering himself up for her. So love your divine Master. You must love this divine Master with a love that is ardent, absolute, and jealous of its rights. And above all, you will show how much you love him by the perfection with which you imitate his example.

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*April 20, 1870*

*to Mère Correnson*

**Daughter of the Church**

...Sometimes I get the feeling that God, “choosing the weak to confound the strong,” desires to give the Oblates a wonderful mission.

This depends on you. It will happen if you leave aside a host of petty details and impress upon your daughters all the height, length and breadth of the Catholic spirit. You must become a daughter of the Catholic Church. You can have but this as your major concern; all your efforts must be concentrated on its realization. This does not require brilliant intelligence on your part, but it does require a deep spirit of faith that you must communicate to your daughters. Speak to them often of the Church. Health permitting, read all you can about the Church. May it help you to see how wonderful it is to be able to serve the cause of Our Lord and of the Church. It is my constant concern to figure out what we can do together in this regard.

*November 27, 1874*

*to the same*

**A special mission**

For some time past I have been concerned with giving the Oblates a more special mission vis-à-vis the Assumptionists and the works of the whole Assumption. I am reading the works of Fr. Danzas, O.P.<sup>299</sup> about the origins of the Dominican Order. Blessed Jordan of Saxony<sup>300</sup> had founded a convent in Bologna, dedicated it to St. Agnes, and destined it to provide the

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<sup>299</sup> A French Dominican (1817-1899) who served as provincial for eight years, known for his painting skills.

<sup>300</sup> the German successor of St. Dominic, and the “recruiter” of St. Thomas Aquinas

Dominicans with vocations. He wrote regularly to Blessed Diana<sup>301</sup>, the Superior of this convent. He told her about the recruits he had gathered, and he attributed their vocations to the prayers of his spiritual daughters. He urged her to keep up their prayers and never cease to thank God for all these novices who were taking the habit.

Why not set yourselves a similar task? For since you have been founded to help us in our missions, this entails the additional obligation to pray that God may send us holy missionaries. By your prayers, your penances, your Communion, and your good works, you, my dear Oblate daughters, all of you, are binding yourselves to us with the most intimate family bonds. Can we not expect God to derive great glory from this?

I have been thinking along these lines for a long time. What I am suggesting to you is a beginning. If it comes from God, it will grow bit by bit and produce much fruit with heaven's blessing.

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*January 4, 1875*

*to the Oblates of the Assumption*

#### **The Mystery of the Epiphany**

I wanted to write to you this morning, my dear daughters, but I have been so taken up with other correspondence that it has been difficult to find time. However, time is flying by and your spiritual formation must advance as well. So let me help you by dwelling on the great mystery of the Epiphany, from a special standpoint. Notice first of all that the shepherds come to the crib, and after them the Magi. God was born in poverty, so it was necessary that the first to adore should be the poor, just as it was necessary that the first preachers of the Gospel should be uneducated. Such was the miracle of Christian beginnings—but, having begun with miracles, God does not wish to perpetuate them. This is why after the shepherds, come the Magi, men of instruction. The adoration of the Magi was, indeed, a miracle, but this miracle was due to the star they saw. However, the star would have shone in vain, had they not known it was the star of the King of Judah.

Your Congregation was formed first of all by young women with little schooling. Then little by little more educated members arrived and I hope there are more to come. The shepherds came first; the Magi followed. What happened to these shepherds in later life....we know nothing. But as for the Magi they laid the foundations of Eastern Christianity. The Church has no special feast to commemorate the adoration of the shepherds, but one of its greatest feasts is that of the adoration of the Magi. The shepherds came first in the order of time, the Magi second, but the Magi acquired far

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<sup>301</sup> Blessed Diana degli Andalò, sometimes d'Andalo, a spiritual directee of St. Dominic and a mystic, was a Dominican nun who founded a convent for her order dedicated to St. Agnes in 1218, in Bologna, Italy, beatified by Pope Leo XIII in 1891.

more importance.

What practical conclusion can we draw? It is good that among you there are some who may not know a lot. But until the Holy Spirit comes to repeat the miracle of Pentecost, it is imperative that you dispose yourselves as much as possible to studying and gaining knowledge so as to be able to teach later on.

And these considerations, my dear daughters, do seem to me of the utmost importance. You are obliged to offer Our Lord your very best in the realm of intellectual endeavor. It is essential that you recognize and accept this new set of obligations. Some of you, no doubt, are not cut out for higher studies, which would be useless for your present occupations. Don't be self-satisfied about it—don't be smug. On the contrary, be humble about it. But as for the rest of you, with your wider culture, remember this: a very long book could be written about what you don't know, and a very short one about what you do.

So you, my uneducated daughters, must pray to the shepherds. But you, my learned daughters (obliged to further your studies somewhat) must pray to the Magi. You must all be humble: the uneducated because you know very little, the learned because the little you do know doesn't amount to much. And if you all endeavor to be humble, you will acquire the fruits of humility, given to the uneducated and the learned alike—the greatest of which is the conservation of mutual love.

Yours a thousand times over, in the Christ-Child, adored both by the simple and the sage.

*September 10, 1876*

*to the Oblates of the Assumption*

#### **Spiritual Testament**

I hereby present you with the spiritual testament I have composed for you.

I do not know whether I will ever preach you another retreat. I am sending some of you to Adrianople. This will allow us to establish firm roots in this mission-field. Meanwhile an expanding novitiate gives us every hope for the future. Time has enabled the growth of solid traditions in your motherhouse. Your Mother General and I have appointed a Council to assist her in her work. So it seems to me that the time has come to tell you in what spiritual direction I wish you to develop in order to advance along the road to perfection in accordance with your spiritual vocation.

Maintain the framework of these instructions as the foundation of your spiritual life. I have already provided you with Constitutions and a

Directory<sup>302</sup>. These two works are almost identical with those of us, your Assumptionist brothers. In this retreat I have endeavored to stress more clearly what ought to be your special characteristics...what will make you recognizable as true daughters of the Blessed Virgin, the Queen of Apostles.

Renew within yourselves zeal for that holiness which is demanded of you in order that you might become hardy workers in the fields. You will have to spend a long time fertilizing them with the sweat of your brow before they produce the harvest the Father awaits.

You will not all be doing the same work, but you will all have the same goal. What you cannot accomplish by your words, you must accomplish by your prayer, by your work which must be your principal penance, by your example and by your unity, the result of your obedience to your superiors and the mutual affection among you.

Do not be surprised if I speak to you with a certain amount of passion. The time has come for the least abuses to be suppressed and for me to remind you of the great holiness to which you must constantly tend if you wish to become true missionary religious.

May Our Lord, the Blessed Virgin, and all the Apostles take you under their special protection, so that you can be a light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death and guide their feet in the way of peace.

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*January 30, 1877*

*to the Superior of the Oblates in Adrianople*

**Being a Superior**

...Here are a few observations about what kind of person the Superior at Adrianople ought to be. Meditate at length on my words and give yourself the discipline three times in order to understand them well.

The kind of person an Oblate Superior in the foreign missions ought to be:

1° Her aim must be, above all, to become a saint by completely forgetting herself, always placing Our Lord's will before her own, and being his instrument alone in the salvation of souls.

2° She must continually renew, as often as she can, the gift of herself to Jesus Christ, remembering that she is not only his servant but his spouse. To achieve this, she must seek to love him fully even in the smallest details of her life.

3° She is not only (as a religious) the spouse of Our Lord. She is also (as superior) a mother and she must, therefore, have the most motherly

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<sup>302</sup> A Directory is a spiritual handbook for religious that goes straight to the principles that a founder desires to see govern the religious life of a congregation he founds. Fr. d'Alzon wrote one for his own religious around 1860 that was eventually incorporated into the 1865 Constitutions that present the more juridical rules of the Institute as directed by the Holy See.

tenderness for the sisters under her charge. To be a good mother, she must see that the Rule is observed—not only in its letter, but also in its spirit. She must allow no violations to pass without disapproval; above all, she must inspire them with the ideal behind the law that is so easy to forget unless particular attention is paid to it.

4° She must know how to punish—but cautiously, very calmly, gently, and firmly.

5° She must be a living model, in such a way that the Sisters can constantly say of her, “Our Superior is a true saint.” Unless she becomes one, her influence will be null.

6° But she must be a saint for others, not for herself. For their sake she must acquire the virtues of a superior. These virtues consist above all:

i) in self-forgetfulness, such that people see God working through her;

ii) in motherly tenderness;

iii) in the ability to foresee whatever may happen;

iv) in great prudence;

v) in having a certain sense of initiative in accomplishing good beyond the convent walls;

vi) in maintaining mutual affection among the sisters;

vii) in “nipping abuses in the bud,” in order to avoid painful disorder;

viii) in seeing to it that the sisters waste no time, especially in useless conversation. A superior who doesn’t put a stop to such conversation is very guilty as a result of the sins, often deadly, that she does not prevent.

ix) in keeping eternity ever in mind as well as the folly (when one is a religious) of not doing everything for God, not to mention the terrible account she will have to render for graces that she let slip by!

x) finally, in keeping the thought of heaven before her and the reward set aside for those religious who have fought the good fight.

*April 12, 1879*

*to Mère Correnson*

#### **Love of Jesus Christ**

...May Our Lord impart to you the joy of his Resurrection, but more so its virtues! When we next get together, how I wish we could recognize in each other true disciples of the Risen One! How much I wish you a true longing for heaven and contempt for the things of earth. I wish you preoccupation with the Kingdom of God and the determination to do everything *propter amorem Domini Nostri Jesu Christi*; for the love of Our Lord Jesus Christ (Phil 3:7). Look, we must convert ourselves. We have too much to do not to set our mind to it right away and in earnest.

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**TALKS TO THE OBLATES**

**EASTER TUEDAY**

*March 30, 1875*

Today let us speak about when Our Lord appeared to his Apostles and other disciples gathered together. It was on the evening of the feast of the Passover. It is probable that the two disciples to whom he had appeared on the road had returned from Emmaus (Lk 24:33). The doors of the room were locked, and there was Jesus standing among them and saying, “Peace be with you”!

**The Peace of Our Lord**

There are, my dear daughters, different kinds of peace. There is the peace imposed by the victor on the vanquished—a most disagreeable kind of peace, but they have no option. Or a mother superior can bring about peace by restoring order to the community; but she is unable to establish the kind of peace she would have wanted. Our Lord’s peace, the peace he came to bring, is unique, since he was the victor over death, the death of death, says the prophet (cf. Hos 13:14)! Christ returned in the fullness of his power to bring men peace. For remember this: you cannot be at peace unless you are strong; it is your weakness alone which gives rise to trouble and disorder. If only you were strong you would possess your souls in peace. The impatience which often upsets you only goes to show how weak you really are.

Consider the oak tree: The wind blows in vain; its trunk stands firm and motionless. Its leaves, indeed, are shaken because they are weak. Its smaller branches shake, but the thicker and stronger they become, the more steadfast they remain.

Yet the peace Jesus brings is not exempt from pain. It is written in the Holy Scriptures, “There will be much pain in the peace you enjoy” (Is 38:17). It is Our Lord’s peace as he journeyed to Calvary. It is Mary’s peace, filled with suffering, as she stood by the Cross. It is the peace of the just amid all their labors and tears. It is written in the Old Testament: God put Abraham to the test (Gn 22:1). It wasn’t Satan who put Abraham to the test, it was God himself, and he did it to test his faith. And while Isaac was carrying the wood up the hill, he asked Abraham, “Where is the victim?” (Gn 22:7), to which Abraham merely responded, “God will provide a victim” (Gn 22:8). You see, Abraham was strong and possessed this true peace. So then, do you want peace? Make every effort to acquire strength.

#### **Bearing peace**

“*Pax vobis*; Peace be with you,” Jesus said (Jn 20:19). This is what he had come to bring: not wealth, not honors, but peace. Let us accept this peace Our Divine Master brings us and let us learn that we must in turn transmit it to others. Jesus Christ suffered: that is what entitles him to bring us peace. And you, my daughters, must learn how to suffer in your turn. This will make you into true religious, fervent Oblates who carry the peace and tranquility of the Lord wherever you are sent. Just as Jesus gave himself up for you, you must learn to follow his example and give yourselves up for others. It is really wonderful to seek to resemble Our Lord; yet you must, because this is the very meaning of your vocation. You must bring peace to the world by the example of a virtuous life. But never forget that, before bringing peace to others, you must possess it yourselves and must demonstrate it among yourselves as the angels in heaven. We see the Apostles before the Descent of the Holy Spirit squabbling among themselves. But, during his first appearance, he doesn’t reproach them. He could think of nothing but the joy of seeing them all once again and said to them, “Peace be with you!” (Jn 20:19). A unique way of welcoming them!

#### **The Acceptance of Peace**

“*Pax vobis*; Peace be upon you!” (Lk 24:36). Then he goes on: “Why are you disturbed?” (Lk 24:38). Here is a reassurance for preachers who wish to bring peace and who sometimes upset everyone, “Look and see! It is truly me!” (cf Lk 24:39) says Jesus. How understanding Our Lord is! The earthbound instincts of his Apostles are still wondering whether it really is Jesus. They think it’s a ghost and not a man raised from the dead. What is really going on here? It’s the situation of somebody to whom Our Lord has spoken, heart to heart. “It’s me. It’s your Jesus who has come to bring you peace, strength and love. Are you going to turn these gifts down?”

Alas, there is within us a certain “substratum” of pride, a foolish self-conceit which blinds us and prevents us from doing any good. If only we got to the bottom of ourselves, there we would find Jesus Christ teaching us to begin first by being humble and small in our own eyes. “Look at my hands and my feet, look at these scars, proof of my love! I have come to show you how much I have loved you. Walk in obedience and in peace. Stop pretending you are always right. Believe in my true presence; it is not your imagination. I have suffered in my body, and you too will have to suffer in yours!”

See, my dear daughters, how necessary it is to accept the peace that Jesus Christ brings. He is not a ghost, but a reality. He is a human being who has suffered and is now glorified. But look, the Apostles still doubt, even though they are in awe. So what does Our Lord do next? “Have you anything to eat?” he says, at which they offer him a piece of fish and a honeycomb. He eats it in their presence, and gives them what is left over

(Lk 24:42-43). Such condescension on Our Lord's part in order to convince the Apostles! Following their example, we must let Jesus Christ have his way with us; we must place no obstacles in the way of his divine action. In return he will endow us with choice blessings to attract our souls and inflame our hearts. The honeycomb which the Apostles offer Jesus is the symbol of the Savior's mission on earth and the fish, *ἰχθύς*, is composed of five letters which stand for, "Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior."

The reason why we remain so distant from Our Lord is because we are so weak in faith. I am telling you and I am insisting that whenever a religious receives Communion she must believe that Jesus Christ is really present in her. She must ask him how perfect he wishes her to become, and ask him for the means of attaining it. It's not good enough to enjoy the comfort and consolation of Communion. You must receive Our Lord as "the Man of Sorrows" and become a daughter of sacrifice.

#### **Listening and transmitting a word of peace**

It was necessary that everything that was written be accomplished; then he opened their eyes to understand the Scriptures" (Lk 24:45). There can be no doubt, my dear daughters, that God does communicate with those who walk in lowliness and love and that those who possess pure, upright, frank, and humble hearts receive inspirations that others do not. The story goes that St. Charles Borromeo and St. Philip Neri found themselves at variance over some theological question. So together they went to consult Felix de Cantalice<sup>303</sup>, a simple soul who couldn't even read and he gave them a perfect explanation of the problem they had been unable to understand. Is it not comforting for you, my daughters, to reflect that you, despite your insignificance, may be the recipients of God's own secrets? "I will listen to what the Lord, my God, is saying within me, because he speaks words of peace." (cf. Ps 84 Vulgate:9). "A thousand times blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it" (cf. Lk 11:28).

The lesson Our Lord teaches is a lesson concerning suffering. "It behooved Christ thus to suffer, and rise again the third day—and that penance and the remission of sins should be proclaimed to all the nations in his name" (Lk 24:46-47). You, my daughters, became Oblates. Your mission and your very title oblige you too to preach penance and the remission of sins wherever you are sent. It is the mission Jesus entrusted to his Apostles, to the bishops, their successors, and to his priests. But to you also, by virtue of your role as apostolic daughters, your mission is to preach by the quality of your lives and to set hearts on fire with the most ardent love of God. Take a look at how Our Lord proceeds in the choice of his

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<sup>303</sup> St. Felix of Cantalice, O.F.M. Cap. (1515-1587) was born to peasant parents in Cantalice, Italy, in the central Italian region of Lazio. Canonized by Pope Clement XI in 1712, he was the first Capuchin friar to be named a saint. In 1547 he was sent to Rome as *quaestor* of the Capuchin Friary of St. Bonaventure, where he spent his remaining 40 years begging alms to help in the friars' work of aiding the sick and the poor.

Apostles. He selects uneducated men with little culture and it is to them that he entrusts the task of teaching and spreading his divine doctrine throughout the whole world. The very inadequacy of his instruments will be an additional proof that the Gospel is true. Its rapid diffusion will also serve as proof of what St. Paul writes, “Did the twelve trumpets not sound? Did they not re-echo all over the world? Yes, their sound has gone out throughout the universe, and their message to the uttermost bounds of the earth”<sup>304</sup>.

## AN INVESTITURE<sup>305</sup>

September 25, 1878

*“Quam pulchri super montes pedes praedicantis pacem, evangelizantis bonum; How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who preach peace, of those who bring good tidings!” (Is 52:7).*

How beautiful on the mountains is Christ himself, proclaiming peace, spreading the Good News! St. Jerome tells us the mountains on which he stands are his Apostles. But their feet too are exceedingly beautiful, and so are the feet of everyone who proclaim peace and brings the Good News. Your feet, my dear daughter, are beautiful because they too are destined to bring peace and Good News. And if your feet, like those of Jesus and his Apostles, are beautiful, then what about your hands which are destined to carry the fruits of Christian charity and your head which holds the treasury of truth to be disseminated abroad and your heart which must become a volcano of love the beneficial flames of which must carry far and wide the flames of Jesus Christ’s love. So I have come to tell you how utterly beautiful you are in the eyes of him who has chosen you as his spouse. But on one condition: that besides the virtues of religion that you must exercise, you must acquire those of the missionary virgin—and the three principal of these missionary virtues are selflessness, love, and trust.

### 1° Selflessness

Consider what St. Paul say, “*Infirma mundi elegit Deus, ut confundat fortia, et ea quae non sunt, ut ea quae sunt, destrueret*; God has chosen the weak things of this world that he might confound the strong and the things that are not that he might destroy those that are” (1 Cor 1:27-28). Seek to develop this characteristic of an apostle. Who understood it better than the Apostle to the Nations? To be a powerful instrument in God’s hands, you must be an inadequate one! Why? Because the less adequate the

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<sup>304</sup> An apparent combination of Biblical texts (Rom 10:18; Ps 18:4; Revelation).

<sup>305</sup> Sr. Thérèse-Augustine

tool, the more obvious the skill of him who wields it. And it isn't good enough for you to be inadequate. You must be thoroughly convinced of your own inadequacy; you must recognize that you are nothing. It is with what is nothing that God destroys what is something. "*Et ea quae non sunt, ut ea quae sunt, destrueret*; He has chosen the things that are not that he might destroy those that are." What does this mean? Does it mean that God is bent on destroying the works of his own hands? Not at all, but he is bent on destroying their errors, their ignorance, their vices, their sins. And for this he wishes to make it obvious that he himself, not his mere creature, is doing the work. God alone must be seen to act; but the more it is that God is acting and the more aware a creature understands that he is nothing, the more he must make way for the action of God manifested through his superiors.

There is a waywardness among certain religious that I cannot condemn enough! They are like those idols mentioned by the Psalmist (cf. Ps 113:13-14 Vulgate). They won't understand and they won't listen! "They have eyes and cannot see. They pay attention to nothing; *oculos habent, et non videbunt*." "They have ears and cannot hear; *ures habent, et non audient*." You can speak to them, and it's as if you hadn't said anything to them. "*Nares habent, et non odorabunt*; They have noses and cannot smell"; they are incapable of breathing the precious perfume which their Divine Spouse is so generously offering them. They remain in such a state of coarseness that they are unable to respond to the promptings offered by Jesus Christ. Why? Because their eyes are fixed on the Rule and they don't understand its spirit; because they hear what their superiors have to say but their lack of attention renders them incapable of grasping what the orders mean; they go in one ear and out the other, because they live in a religious atmosphere year in, year out, but haven't got it in them to grasp its mysterious beauty or its lofty ideals.

Don't be one of these foolish virgins. The humbler you feel about yourself, the deeper you will yearn to breathe the pure air of perfection, the more attentively you will listen to the sound advice you are given and the more acutely you will detect the slightest indications of those to whom you have come seeking formation in the religious life. "*Ecce sicut oculi servorum in manibus dominorum suorum, sicut oculi ancillae in manibus dominae suae; ita oculi nostri ad Dominum Deum nostrum, donec misereatur nostri*; Behold, like the eyes of slaves on the hands of their masters, like the eyes of hand-maids on the hands of their mistresses, so are our eyes on the Lord our God, awaiting his mercy" (Ps 122:2-3 Vulgate).

## 2° The Love of God

"*Ignem veni mittere in terram, et quid volo, nisi ut accendatur*; I have come to set fire to the earth, and what do I wish but that it be kindled?" (Lk 12:49), says Our Lord. Whoever wishes to be associated with the work

of Jesus Christ must be consumed with the fire of his immense love. The Apostle cries out: “*Charitas Christi urget nos*; The love of Christ impels us” (2 Cor 5:14). We must experience these flames of love. Like the Divine Master, we must look with pity on those nations lacking their shepherd, “*tamquam oves non habentes pastorem*; because they are like sheep without a shepherd” (Mt 9:36). One day you will be sent to a place where there is no shepherd. There will be plenty of sheep because all these victims have been baptized. But where is their true shepherd? All Jesus Christ has left are mercenaries (Jn 10:12).

Attempt to fathom the mystery of it all! The Kingdom of Heaven is like a net cast into the sea (Mt 13:47). It gathers all kinds of fish. These schismatics have indeed been baptized, but the same applies to lots of Catholics unworthy of the seal they bear. Well, the day will come for the angels, who collaborate with the apostolic fishermen, to sort them all out, and separate the good from the bad (Mt 13:49). But here is the mystery! Who were the Apostles? Who were these first disciples of Christ? Could they too not have been classified as “rotten fish,” as “dangerous ones”? If so, then who turned them into good fish? Who performed that record catch of 153 excellent fish? (Jn 21:11). The Apostles. Yes, but the real author of this feat was Jesus Christ (Jn 21:6). Why Jesus Christ? Because he loved us, because he had come to shed his blood for us.

And so, my dear daughter, see what marvels the love of Jesus Christ has accomplished! And if you so desire, you can perform as many by imitating Jesus Christ. And if your heart is set on fire for souls, you will tread the paths the ill transform these fish and bring about an abundant catch. Love these souls in an act of total self-forgetfulness. Love the souls of your superiors by obeying them with promptitude, intelligently and without pretense. Love the souls of your sisters by edifying them. Love the souls of heretics and schismatics so as to enlighten them and win them over. This is your vocation: loving Our Lord will render you worthy of doing it.

### 3° Trust in God

What human folly it is to desire to overturn the Greek, the Eastern, the Russian Schism with a handful of poor girls! Remember, daughter, remember that dream of the King of Assyria (Dn 2). He dreamed he saw an immense statue—and despite its size, it was knocked over and reduced to dust. Who knows? God in our very day may be gathering these little stones, these little grains of dust, with which to overthrow kingdoms.

God uses all kinds of means. He will even use you, my daughter. You may be as incapable as, even less than—Peter, Andrew, James or John. But he made them his Apostles. On what condition? As long as you are convinced that “you can do all things in him who gives you strength” (Phil

4:13). What will you be up against? A vast empire<sup>306</sup> full of unbelief, drunkenness, and all species of vice from top to bottom. And who do you think you are? Nothing! But who was St. Paul when he first addressed the Athenians? (Acts 17:22). Who did St. Peter think he was when he, that uncultured man, dared pit himself against the Rome of the Caesars? But it is written: “*Perdam sapientiam sapientium, et prudentiam prudentium reprobabo*; I will refute the wisdom of wise men, and upset the calculations of the prudent” (Is 29:14; 1 Cor 1:19).

Who would deny that tremendous upheavals are in store? To whom does the future belong according to human wisdom? To men of revolution and anarchy. But according to the “Folly of the Cross” (1 Cor 1:23), unless we are to fall into the hands of the Antichrist, the future lies with the humble, with those who love, with those who place their trust, not in themselves, but in him.

So come, my daughter, receive the holy habit. Learn to be little in your own esteem; learn to grow in the love of Jesus Christ; learn to place your trust in him. Undertake the great things to which God has called you in your nothingness. Hide yourself in the fertile valley of your novitiate. Bury yourself there for three years, just as Jesus buried himself in the tomb for three days. You will emerge victorious. You will have learned to die to yourself. Humility will have helped you overcome the death of sin. Love will transform you. Your trust in God will help you to recount your triumphs, among which your Spouse placing a crown on your head for all eternity. Amen.

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## BEGINNING OF SCHOOL

*October 2, 1879*

*“Angelis suis mandavit de te, ut custodiant te in omnibus viis tuis; He has given his angels charge over you, to guide you in all your ways” (Ps 90:11 Vulgate—Mt 4:6; Lk 4:10).*

Today we are handing you over to two kinds of angels: your own guardian angels, here present,—and your teachers, entrusted with the mission of angels in your regard. And what about you? What do we expect you to become? Angels, by imitating the angels as well as you can.

Three points to consider:

1° The angels derive their happiness from the contemplation of Eternal Truth. So that you might prepare yourselves to contemplate it one

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<sup>306</sup> Bulgaria still formed part of the Turkish, or “Ottoman,” Empire.

day, you must study this Eternal Truth, aware of limitations of your nature but with a spirit of deep faith.

2° The angels are God's ambassadors. They obey him. Likewise, you must practice the obedience of faith toward your teachers, as the angels obey St. Michael, the prince of the heavenly host.

3° The angels love one another, whereas the devils hate one another. Would you prefer to love one another like the angels in heaven or hate one another like the devils in hell?

This is what I wish you to aim at: Make this place the vestibule of heaven.

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## BLESSING OF THE CHAPEL

*October 15, 1880*

Before celebrating the Sacred Mysteries for the first time in this chapel which, only a few days ago, an eminent art critic called a unique edifice in the city of Nîmes: not for its size and seating capacity, not for the fine stonework of its exterior, but for the gracefulness of its construction, the harmony of its proportions, the sheer perfection of every detail, let me evoke the memory and the thoughts of all those for whom I am about to offer the Supreme Victim.

### **A physical edifice**

Think of the many who, for the past fifteen years, have inscribed their names on the scroll of this new-born association, the Oblates of the Assumption. Some of them are no longer with us. Some breathed their last in this land of France; others, before going to heaven, wished to undertake an apostolate to which the Lord had called them.

Let me recall one person in particular, a most valiant Christian woman. She and I had collaborated for many years in the establishment of this work that she would only be able to greet from afar. But it was she who, on her very deathbed, wanted to give this family about to be born the name by which it is known. And I am pretty sure that, from her place in heaven, she is now praying for you, her sisters and continuing to love you as much as she loved you here on earth. Mademoiselle Eulalie de Régis<sup>307</sup> provided her assistance at the humble beginnings at Rochebelle. And when a small group of Oblates left Le Vigan for Nîmes, she did all she could to help them settle down. By virtue of the help she gave me and by her generosity, she can certainly be numbered as one of the foundresses of the Oblates of the

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<sup>307</sup> Joséphine-Eulalie de Gatimel de Régis (Sr. Marie-Eulalie in religion) was a spiritual directee of Fr. d'Alzon who helped him in almost all of his works of spiritual enrichment. Because of her father's illness, she was not able to be among the first to enter the Oblates as she had wanted. It was only on her death-bed that she took the habit.



Assumption.

How can I not pray for the skillful and conscientious architect who designed this chapel?<sup>308</sup> How carefully he drew up these plans and saw that they were put into execution! And his devoted collaborator, one of those truly good citizens of Nîmes. His intelligence, energy, perseverance and kindness go so well with this ancient faith full of devotion; and it makes of Nîmes a city apart within our beautiful France.

And I will pray for all you gentlemen who came together to contribute to this work for the common good. I will even pray for those who have failed to fulfill their contract. For even if the sisters cannot sit in the choir-stalls that were ordered some time ago, perhaps we should be glad of this, because it has obliged somebody gifted with superb good taste to cover these walls with such magnificent tapestries, thereby proving that in Nîmes are to be found artisans able to produce every form of beauty to its utmost perfection. I will pray for you, you tireless workmen who have carried out so well the directions of those in charge. I have thoroughly enjoyed being with you every day. Your eager cooperation has turned us all into one happy Catholic family, such as is rarely seen nowadays.

But let us now lift our sights above the material edifice. It is meant to inspire us with higher thoughts. Let us recall, with St. Augustine, just what a church dedicated to God is.

#### A spiritual edifice

A church dedicated to God provides us with a perennial lesson. Its very stones are a symbol; they represent the living stones of that holy temple which those who come to pray here are erecting day by day to the Lord. Before building this actual chapel, you had already built for Our Lord something far more precious, that is to say, your small family. You, my Reverend Mother, are its cornerstone. But notice that, whenever a spiritual stone is removed here below, it becomes the Divine Architect's pleasure to transport it up to temple of the heavenly Jerusalem. In this way, two sacred edifices are being built: one on earth, one in heaven—both for the glory of God.

But here we come to an apparent contradiction. While Jeremiah wept over the ruins of Jerusalem, over the destruction of its Temple and saw it as the worst possible disaster that the stones of the sanctuary had been scattered far and wide; *dispersi sunt lapides sanctuarii* (Lam 4:1); and while we are asking Christ to protect this chapel, in order that the virgins who are prepared may daily arrive in greater numbers to take part in the wedding feast of the heavenly Bridegroom; *et quae paratae erant, intraverunt cum eo ad nuptias* (cf. Mt 25:10); we take hold of the stones of our spiritual edifice and we seem to take pleasure in scattering them afar! And unlike the Prophet in his Lamentations, we do not mourn, we rejoice when we can say in another sense, "*Dispersi sunt lapides sanctuarii*; Scattered are the stones

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<sup>308</sup> Antoine-Henry Revoil (1822-1900)

of the sanctuary.” Where is the sense of this contradiction? What is the meaning of this mystery?

Jesus Christ, the Divine Architect “through whom all things are made” (Jn 1:3), wishes to make in the world something more beautiful than the world. He is laying the foundation of an immense edifice. These are the stones that he is casting about in order that they might serve as part of his building-plan. Thus he acted with the Apostles—thus he acts with his missionaries. He scatters them in view of constructing a much greater Temple.

Jesus Christ made two of them—the one of the Old Law, the temple of Solomon (2 Chr 3) and that of Zerubbabel which continued the first (Ezr 3). He built another one with living stones. At the dedication of Zerubbabel’s temple, they sang the psalm, “*Cantate Domino canticum novum; Sing a new song to the Lord*” (Ps 97:1 Vulgate). St. Augustine asks, “*Quid enim habet canticum novum, nisi amorem novum. Cantare amantis est: vox hujus cantoris fervor est sancti amoris. Amemus, gratis amemus: Deum enim amamus quo nihil melius invenimus. Ipsum amemus propter ipsum; et nos in ipso, et tamen propter ipsum. Ille enim veraciter amat amicum, qui Deum amat in amico, aut quia est in illo, aut ut sit in illo. Haec est vera dilectio. Propter aliud si nos diligimus, odimus potius quam diligimus*; What, after all, has a new song got, but a new love? Singing is what a lover does. The voice of this singer indicates the fervor of a holy love. Let us love, let us love freely and for nothing. It is God, after all, whom we love, than whom we can find nothing better. Let us love him for his own sake, and ourselves and each other in him, but still for his sake. You only love your friend truly, after all, when you love God in your friend, either because he is in him, or in order that he may be in him. That is true love and respect; if we love ourselves for any other reason, we are in fact hating rather than loving.”<sup>309</sup>

God is the cement which holds this spiritual temple together wherever the truth is proclaimed, wherever charity is kindled, wherever holiness rises up. In this temple even the light bursts into song; *cantabit claritas*<sup>310</sup>.

## A RELIGIOUS PROFESSION

May 3, 1880

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<sup>309</sup> *Sermones ad populum* (CPL 0284) - LLT-A, sermo 336 (= Maur. 336, 1-5), ed.: PL 38, col. 1472, linea 32 (Augustine&Sermons&CPL&sermon 336, col. 1472, line 32)  
Fr. d’Alzon kept this text from Sermon 336, 1 and 2 of St. Augustine in his breviary, and frequently meditated on it.

<sup>310</sup> *Sermones* (CPL 0284) - LLT-A sermo: 337, ed: PL 38, col. 1477, linea  
(Augustine&Sermons&CPL&sermon 337, col. 1477, line 1)

*“Non enim judicavi me scire aliquid inter vos nisi Jesum Christum, et hunc crucifixum; For I came among you with no knowledge to impart, save that of Christ, and him crucified” (1 Cor 2:2).*

Today, on this day when you are about to become the spouses of Jesus Christ, is there a more beautiful topic to speak about than Jesus Christ and him crucified? Jesus Christ and him crucified was the source of all the knowledge of the Apostle to the Gentiles; it must be the source of all yours. In what does it consist? In four conditions which I will develop for you rapidly: humility, obedience, self-sacrifice and zeal.

#### **1° Humility**

*“Exinanivit semetipsum; He emptied himself” (Phil 2:7).* Despite being God, he reduced himself to nothing.

We can achieve nothing without Jesus Christ. We can do nothing without Jesus Christ: *“Sine me nihil potestis facere; Without me you can do nothing” (Jn 15:5).* In order to render ourselves capable of being moved by Jesus Christ, we too must do our part. We will achieve nothing of any value for heaven except in as far as we allow Jesus Christ to operate in us and as far as we, like him, allow ourselves to disappear.

#### **2° Obedience**

*“Factus est obediens usque ad mortem, mortem autem crucis; And he became obedient unto death, to the very death of the Cross” (Phil 2:8).* So much for pride! Our entire life must be regulated by obedience. Nature inclines us to revolt, but you must follow the perpetual lesson the Savior gave us hanging from the Cross. *“Vir obediens loquetur victorias; The obedient man speaks of victory” (Prov 21:28).* Do you wish to do any good? Then follow the standard of obedience, the standard of the Cross.

#### **3° Self-Sacrifice**

Man has a tremendous urge to take and a tremendous fear of giving himself. The Cross teaches us the science of self-gift. *“Bonus pastor animam suam dat pro ovibus suis; The Good Shepherd gives his life for his sheep” (Jn 10:11).* Let us learn to give of ourselves by considering Jesus crucified. Let us learn to surrender everything he asks of us.

#### **4° Zeal for Souls**

*“Et ego, si exaltus fuero a terra, omnia traham ad meipsum; And when I have been lifted up I shall draw all things to myself” (Jn 12:32).* What is this magnetic power whereby he draws everything to himself? It is the power of his tremendous love; he attracts us by loving us. Nobody ever loved like he did; so nobody attracts like he does. But, following his footsteps and aided by his grace, we too must attract by the flame of charity. What is the price of a soul? It is nothing less than the blood of Jesus Christ poured out on the Cross. It is in self-giving that he attracts. It is from the

heights of the Cross that he attracts others. And it is from the heights of our own Cross that we must attract them. Such is the secret of the saints: they sacrifice themselves, they attract, they triumph.

Above the virgins and above the anchoresses, there stand the apostles.

What a happy coincidence! You are taking your vows on the anniversary of the Propagation of the Faith. A poor girl that I knew<sup>311</sup> created a wonderful work to support missionaries. May you too always be upheld by the one who “gives food to those who are hungry; *dat escam esurientibus*” (Ps 145:7 Vulgate).

## AN INVESTITURE

*May 24, 1880*

“Ut scivi quoniam aliter non possem esse continens, nisi Deus det, et hoc ipsum erat sapientiae. scire cujus esset hoc donum: adii Dominum, et deprecates sum illum; And knowing that otherwise I could not remain continent, unless God gave me this gift—and this too was wisdom, to know from whom this gift emanated—I went unto the Lord, and besought him” (Wis 8:21).

Chastity is what binds up a religious vocation. Chastity goes further than the renunciation of riches and possessions. It prepares us for that perfect obedience whereby blessed spirits take their name (messengers): “*Qui facit angelos suos spiritus*; He makes the angels his messengers” (Ps 103:4 Vulgate).

But however enthusiastically we surrender ourselves to God by poverty, chastity and obedience, we will never succeed therein unless God gives us the strength for it, “*Aliter non possem esse continens, nisi Deus det*; knowing that otherwise I could not remain continent unless God gave me this gift.<sup>312</sup> This assistance has to be asked for; it has to be asked for in prayer.

St. Augustine develops this theme admirably in one of his letters<sup>313</sup>: addressed to the grandmother and mother of a consecrated virgin named Demetriades. This young woman had consecrated herself to the Lord. And one of the great heresiarchs of the time maintained that, on her own, she had been able to lead a perfect life. The bishop of Hippo refutes this error.

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<sup>311</sup> Pauline Jaricot

<sup>312</sup> Wisdom 8:21. This quotation or a paraphrase can be found more than 25 times in the writings of St. Augustine. One well known passage is in the *Confessions, Confessionum libri tredecim* (CPL0251) LLT-A lib 10, cap 29, linea 3

<sup>313</sup> cf. *De gratia Christi et de peccato originali* (CPL 0349) - LLT-A-lib. : 2, cap. : 26 (Augustine&On the Grace of Christ and on Original Sin&CPL&bk. 2, chap. 26)

Without grace, he insists, we cannot dedicate our chastity to God. He draws on this sacred text that speaks only of continence; all the more necessary God's special help will be when it is a question of consecrated virginity.

So were you to ask me in what your novitiate must consist, I would answer: in the acquisition of those virtues proper to the religious state. But if you wish to get to the very heart of the religious state, then I must tell you that your novitiate is to consist in constant prayer. It is above all to the soul of a religious that Our Lord addresses this exhortation: "*Oportet semper orare, et numquam deficere*; that we must keep on praying and never be discouraged" (Lk 18:1)<sup>314</sup>. So I have never believed that I could find words more appropriate to the new life you are about to begin than in speaking about the necessity of prayer for a novice, of the progress she must make in prayer, and the perfection to which her prayer must attain.

#### 1° How Necessary Prayer Is

You didn't begin to pray yesterday, my dear daughter. You spent your childhood in a house of prayer and for the past few years you have been determined to consecrate yourself to God. There were, however, obstacles to overcome. Poor health seemed to be one of these obstacles; but since you entered, your health has greatly improved, and this improvement seems to be a confirmation of the calling you have received.

You have become one of those "Daughters of Mary" of whom St. Bernard speaks, and who, by the favor of him whom they choose to espouse, receive such abundant blessings. "*In omnibus siquidem et per omnia providens miseris, terpidationem nostrum solatur, fidem excitat, spem roborat, diffidentiam abigit, erigit pusillanimitatem*; In all circumstances, and in every possible way, he strengthens our weakness, soothes our anxiety, rouses our faith, reinforces our hope, calms our fear, overcomes our hesitancy, and gives us courage to forge ahead"<sup>315</sup>.

This is what Jesus Christ has done for you in answer to your prayers. In union with the whole Church you have prayed to Mary, "*Sancta Maria, succurre miseris*; Holy Mary, come to the help of the helpless"<sup>316</sup>. You will have experienced the depth of helplessness common to every child of Adam. But you have besought Mary and, as the great Abbot of Clairvaux reminds us, the Mother has besought her Son, and the Son denies nothing to his Mother. "*Quia sic est voluntas ejus, qui totum nos habere voluit per*

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<sup>314</sup> In fact, d'Alzon, in the original, says that it is the "apostle" who addresses these words and not Our Lord. Usually the "Apostle" refers to St. Paul. In his commentary on St. Paul's First Letter to the Thessalonians, St. Thomas Aquinas does refer to this passage in Lk 18:1, par. 130.

<sup>315</sup> *Sermo in natiuitate beatae Mariae Virginis* - LLT-A, par. 7, vol 5, pag 279, linea 9 (Bernard of Clairvaux & Sermon on the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary & CPL & par. 7, vol. 5, page 279, line 9)

<sup>316</sup> Composed by Bishop Fulbert of Chartres (ca 951-ca 1029), it appears in his *Sermo IX, De Annuntiatione Dominica*. The prayer appeared in the Roman breviary for various Marian feasts.

*Mariam*; For such is the will of him who gives us everything (even himself) through Mary”<sup>317</sup>.

## 2° Perseverance in Prayer

So you have called upon the name of Mary, and she has enabled you to obtain whatever you need from Jesus by her intercession, “*Quia sic est voluntas ejus, qui totum nos habere voluit per Mariam*; For such is the will of him who gives us everything (even himself) through Mary.” Ah, if you have received from Jesus that most precious of gifts, the gift of a religious vocation, it is through Mary. So see how your prayers have already been answered. For some time now you have already been wearing some of the emblems of religious life; with what joy you have put them on! Today something more will happen. In a few minutes I shall be telling you: “May the Lord strip you of your old self, and clothe you in the garments of the new man” (cf Col:3:9-10). But this stripping and this change of clothing will be nought but symbolic, unless you have made a complete break with merely human values.

I know you are in eager haste. I know we can say of you what St. Ambrose said<sup>318</sup> of Our Blessed Lady as she hastened on her journey to visit St. Elizabeth, carrying within her womb the glorious burden of God’s own Son: that “in those days Mary set out in haste” (Lk 1:39)—concerning which the great Archbishop of Milan comments that the impulsion of God’s Holy Spirit disregards all the obstacles of such a tedious journey. And since it is God’s Holy Spirit who is urging us on, let us see beyond our penitential robe—beyond the cincture of our obedience—beyond the linen cloth which surrounds our head and the veil which symbolizes our modesty—beyond the bright candles carried in procession by the company of wise virgins (Mt 25:10) as they escort their bridegroom to the wedding feast. Let us set our eyes on the bright crown which awaits you. You will be a queen when you have become his spouse. Let us delve down and explore the temple of your heart—let us see what God’s Holy Spirit is asking you to turn yourself into. He is asking you to persevere in prayer. He is urging you to understand that the gift of prayer is already a stupendous gift indeed.

“And this too was wisdom, to know from whom this gift emanated—I went unto the Lord and besought him” (Wis 8:21).

With this prayer on your lips, you, like Jacob, will wrestle with the angel (Gn 32:24). Unlike the Apostles in the Garden of Olives (Mt 26:40), you will stay awake. You will advance rapidly along the road to perfection (Ps 18:6 Vulgate). You will pass successively through the hands of those entrusted with your formation. But you will remember that this formation,

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<sup>317</sup> *Sermo in natiuitate beatae Mariae Virginis* - LLT-A, par. 7, vol 5, pag 279, linea 7  
(Bernard of Clairvaux&Sermon on the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary&CPL&par. 7, vol. 5, page 279, line 7)

<sup>318</sup> St. Ambrose’s commentary on Luke (Lib. 2, 19.22-23. 26-27: CCL 14, 39-42)  
(Ambrose&Commentary on Luke&Migne&bk. 2, 19.22-23. 26-27, CCL 14,39-42)

in the hands of the holy priest who has been your spiritual father for so long—and in the hands of those superiors you have found here, is nothing in comparison to the formation you have received from God himself whose grace enables us “both to will and to accomplish.” The spiritual director and the rest of us who have had the happiness of taking over from him—you must regard us all from St. Augustine’s point of view. In his letter to Juliana, mother of the virgin Demetriades, he states: “When she has vowed herself to sacred virginity, let her regard this as a most precious gift of God. We, God’s servants, may have planted and watered it—but God himself gives it growth” (1 Cor 3:6)<sup>319</sup>.

This life of perfection is, then, a gift of God. Born and bred on earth, it increases and develops, to attain its consummation in heaven. Grow, my dear daughter; grow, and become perfect. Amen

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## FIRST HOLY COMMUNION<sup>320</sup>

May 27, 1880

*“Tota pulchra est, amica mea; You are beautiful, my love, and there is no stain in you” (Sg 4:7).*

Such are the words Our Blessed Lord is whispering in the ears of each one of you, my dear children, on this happy day. He is telling you how beautiful you are: beautified by your Baptism; washed clean of any subsequent stain by the blood of Jesus Christ before the sacred tribunal. And what you need to perfect your beauty, you are now about to receive.

Harken to the mystery! Your spiritual mothers love you tenderly, and wish to turn you into the most loveable of creatures. But their power to achieve this is sadly limited, and their longing to do so would be in vain, were it not for the Lord himself.

But this Divine Lord who chooses to come and dwell within you—he who is called “the most beautiful among the sons of men” (Ps 44:3 Vulgate)—he has the power of conferring this beauty not on your body, which matters nought, but on your soul. What he is, he wishes you too to become. Sin had deprived you of this beauty; he gives it back to you at the cost of his blood. He gives it back to you when he comes to visit you, as he

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<sup>319</sup> op.cit. *De gratia Christi et de peccato originali* (Augustine&On the Grace of Christ and on Original Sin&CPL&bk. 2, chap. 26)

<sup>320</sup> Editor’s note: These little girls, presumably pupils of the Oblate Sisters, would have been about fourteen years old. Children were not admitted to their First Communion at the age of seven until the Papacy of Saint Pius X: 1903-1914.

is about to do—and it is from the depths of your own heart that his own voice will resound: “O, my beloved, how beautiful you are!”

But think of the beauty he expects of you! Were I to describe it in all its details, I wouldn’t know when to stop. So let me confine myself to two of its aspects: Our Lord Jesus Christ brings you the beauty of his grace and the beauty of his truth.

### **1° The Beauty of His Grace**

This beauty of Christ’s grace is the power, coming down from heaven, which renders you capable of performing all good deeds on earth.

But this grace is very demanding. Jesus Christ is coming, not only to bring you gifts in abundance, but to give you himself. He is coming to quench your thirst from the river of life (Rv 22:1)—not only from the river, but from its very source which is himself. He who is “the splendor of his Father’s glory, and the full expression of his being” (Heb 1:3)—He who “upholds all creation by the word of his power” (Heb 1:3)—He who “sits on the right hand of God’s Majesty, making atonement for our sins” (Heb 1:3)—he has come to give you his purity, his power, his beauty, his splendor. But in return for having thus embellished you, for having thus filled you with his goodness, he claims dominion over your will—he demands prompt and utter obedience.

Holy Scripture provides us with many a frightening example of how God punishes those souls for whom he has done everything, yet who refuse to obey him. Take the example of Lot’s wife (Gn 19:26). The Lord had urged Lot to get out of Sodom as fast as he could: he, his wife and their two daughters. “Flee for your life! Don’t look back! Don’t linger in the plain, but make straight for the hills!” (Gn 19:17)—a reasonable stipulation in return for having rescued this one family from the flames of divine retribution which encompassed the sinful city of Sodom. But Lot’s wife—either from curiosity, or out of regret at having to leave such a rich and fertile valley—disobeyed God and looked back. She was immediately turned into a pillar of salt! She was no longer a living being—she was transformed into lifeless matter.

All the perfection of this soul had gone to rack and ruin, because she looked back at what God had ordered her to leave behind!

And you, my dear girls: if you wish to remain beautiful and pure, if you wish to be worthy of Jesus Christ, never look back! None of those who, having put their hand to the plough, look back are fit for the Kingdom of God (Lk 9:62). Keep looking ahead—keep on trying to do better and better. This is what Our Blessed Lord requires of you. Advance with the strength of him who supplies you with strength. Allow him to embellish you with every virtue. For every one of you, if so you wish, a new day has dawned, a new life has begun, that of Christ. “For me, Christ is life” (Phil 1:21). “Christ is your life,” adds Saint Paul (Col 3:4). So live this life, and shine with this beauty. As we say in Psalm 44:5 (Vulgate), “with all your beauty,



ride on in triumph, hasten forward, and win!”

Such is the beauty and the goodness the Lord confers on you today. And besides his grace, he gives you his truth.

### **2° The Beauty of His Truth**

Whom are you about to receive? God made man. But this Eternal God is also the Eternal Truth, and this we must never forget. He is “the radiance of his Father’s splendor” (Heb 1:3). He is that “light which enlightens whoever comes into this world” (Jn 1:9). He is Jesus Christ, Son of Mary. Beneath the veil of his humanity dwells this light which never goes out, “a light which shines through the darkness, and which the darkness cannot comprehend” (Jn 1:5), but the light in which infinite beauty consists. St. Augustine observes that every being derives its beauty from light. You may come face to face with the most magnificent panorama, but unless some ray of light shines upon it you can see nothing. It may be beautiful in itself, but unlit it conveys nothing but blackness.

It is, therefore, light which gives things their beauty. And Saint Augustine adds: “Is not the sun the most beautiful object in creation, since it provides light for everything else?” But what is the sun compared to that Light which is divine, that Light which is God, that Light which is “the radiance of his Father’s splendor?” (Heb 1:3).

This infinite Light is coming down to you, to endow you with something of its infinite beauty. And when, with his Light, he has communicated his beauty—then he will say to you: “O, my beloved, how beautiful you are!”

He will not complete the process at one go. Truth has to be thought about, gazed at and adored. Truth is communicated by beautifying those who accept it.

If I may use another comparison: today is “Corpus Christi,” and the Church has chosen as its first antiphon at Lauds (Morning Prayer) these words: “Wisdom has built herself a house” (Prv 9:1), wisdom, that is to say, truth. “She has prepared her wine; she has laid her table.”

The house? You are the house. The wine? Our Lord’s own Precious Blood. The table? It is the Holy Eucharist. All is ready to bring us health and strength of soul. All is ready to fill us with radiance and make us beautiful.

Come, then, and eat. Come, then, and drink. Receive your God. Absorb everlasting beauty—everlasting power, everlasting wisdom, everlasting light and everlasting truth. Amen.

## **IV. THE ADORERS OF THE BLESSED SACRAMENT**

*Introduction: Adorers of the Blessed Sacrament by Athanase Sage*

*The idea for this Association goes back to the years 1854-1855. Fr. d'Alzon was directing at that time a group of women whose situation in life or whose health excluded them from religious life. Nevertheless, they were able to devote themselves in the world to the service of the Church. Guiding them to the heights of Christian perfection, Fr. d'Alzon counted on their prayers, collaboration and good works. This Association was founded at Pentecost 1857. It was in fact a kind of "Secular Institute" long before the 20<sup>th</sup> century. One can think of it as a special Third Order which could in the future open itself to community life among its members.*

*Fr. d'Alzon followed these women very closely as witnessed by his many letters to them in which he gave spiritual direction of the highest tenure. His relations with this association inspired him with some of his most fruitful intuitions. One can see this in his letters on the Crucifix. Moreover, his letter on the particular examen addressed to them in May 1859 contains seeds of our future Directory; his conferences on the Eucharist (1870-1871) to the religious were already given in outline form to the Adorers in September 1862.*

*This section includes:*

*A) Circular letters, addressed to the Adorers through Sr. Marie-Walburge, superior of the Religious of the Assumption convent.*

*B) Several presentations gathered by the Adorers*

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## A.—CIRCULAR LETTERS

*between 1857 and 1860*

*to the Third Order of St. Teresa*<sup>321</sup>

### **Imitating Mary**

The aim you must set for yourselves is to live in the world as if you were dedicated religious, and deepen your spiritual marriage with Our Lord. I offer you the Holy Virgin to be your Mother. Let her be our common protectress. Let us gather together at her feet. Let us gather round the Mother whom we all love—round the model whom we must never cease trying to imitate.

You will endeavor to live in the world the way she lived. Our Blessed Lady, though the model of all religious, was never protected by a convent wall—her modesty sufficed to protect her. By imitating her in her relationships with other people, you too can aspire to the highest degree of Christian perfection.

You will endeavor to imitate her humility, her prayerfulness, her obedience and her charity. Let the practice of these four virtues nourish your faith, and bear fruit in the straightforwardness which must characterize whatever you do.

I cannot draw you up a timetable which would account for every minute of the day. (This may be a treat in store!) For the time being, all I ask is: fixed sleeping hours, then up and about within half an hour—at least half an hour's daily meditation—daily Mass—three hours' silence (which can be either in the morning or in the afternoon)—visit to the Blessed Sacrament—five decades of the rosary—a chapter of the New Testament—some other pious reading—and your examination of conscience.

If you wish me to establish some chronological order in these daily exercises—and in keeping with your duties of state—it's up to you to suggest one.

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*between 1857-1860*

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<sup>321</sup> “Third Order of St. Teresa” was the first name given to the Adorers of the Blessed Sacrament Association. One of the aims of the association was the conversion of Protestants. They supported among others the “Saint Teresa Works” which cared for young women converts from Protestantism.

### **Madly in Love with Our Divine Master**

If, as God seems to will it, I am destined to be of any use to you, I must not restrict myself to banalities. I expect you to be firmly resolved to train yourselves for the kind of life which will justify your existence as religious living in the world. I expect you to be more restrained in your comportment, and in your external relationships. You must be more charitable in your conversation. You must be less extravagant (if this is possible) in your make-up. To put it “in a nutshell,” you must conform your behavior to what is going on in your heart.

Your activities must consist in the performance of good works. And I wish you to concentrate on bringing about the Perpetual Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament and the conversion of Protestants. These two aims must be combined, because they both amount to the triumph of Our Blessed Lord in individual souls—in other words, you are extending his Kingdom on earth.

With which end in view, you will have to fall “madly” in love with our Divine Master in the sacrament of his love. Day after day, you will have to offer yourselves up to him as loving victims. You will have to make constant efforts to purify your hearts, since they must become his tabernacles. You must mortify yourselves in order to console him whose tender love for men meets with naught but contempt. Nor must you lack the courage to speak out on this subject which people of the world tend to “sweep under the carpet.”

As for the conversion of Protestants, we will talk about this at greater length some other time.

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*June 10, 1857*

*to Mother Marie-Walburge*

### **Love of Our Lord and Perfection**

I do wish my dear daughter would give me more news of herself—more news, at least, of that little association<sup>322</sup> which I have confided specially to her care. Allow me, at least, the satisfaction of resting assured that the two of us agree about what is best for these excellent persons.

Why is it so important that we should be of one mind? Because one day some of them are bound to enter the convent. You, on your part, can do so much to prepare them for this. I, on my part, can furnish you with many a helpful indication of how to proceed if the two of us are to bring about a true resurgence of Christian piety among the influential classes, here in the south of France.

From the apostolic point of view, our little association can, I am convinced, produce such beneficial results! And if our Mother<sup>323</sup> is in a

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<sup>322</sup> Sister Marie Walburge, Religious of the Assumption, was put in charge of the Adorers of the Blessed Sacrament in Nîmes.

<sup>323</sup> He is probably alluding to Mère Marie-Eugénie.

position to advise you about those of your daughters who are destined for the convent, then perhaps my advice will be of assistance about those of them who are destined to remain Tertiaries.

You must, therefore, let me write to them from time to time, with you as official intermediary. What I have written up to now is for you—what I am about to add is for all of them.

So please transmit to our dear daughters the following observations on my behalf. The other day I was reading “All for Jesus” by Fr. Faber<sup>324</sup>. Our Lord once revealed to St. Teresa that he preferred one soul concentrating on its own perfection to a thousand souls just living together in community. Here’s food for thought. Here’s courage to be incited, enthusiasm to be stirred, and weakness to be overcome. Is any effort, any sacrifice, not worthwhile in order to increase our love for Jesus Christ?

In today’s Divine Office I read about the Kingdom of heaven being compared to a pearl of great price—of such great price that the merchant sold all he had in order to purchase it (Mt 13:46). What is this “pearl of great price?” It’s none other than love for Our Lord. It’s the guarantee of our salvation here below. It will constitute our infinite and everlasting happiness in the hereafter. Let us hope, then, that this thought of being loved by Jesus Christ, more than a thousand other Christians, will dispose them to every possible and imaginable sacrifice. “Lord,” they will cry with St. Paul, “Lord, tell me what you wish me to do!” (Acts 9:6).

Their own perfection, their own love for Our Lord, these are the two points I wish them to meditate on during this octave of Corpus Christi. Let them go and adore Our Lord burning with love for us.

Let them beg of him to set their own hearts on fire with the love which devours his. Then will they spend the rest of the day asking themselves whether their behavior is conformed to such sublime dispositions. One octave of Corpus Christi spent in urging themselves to grow in perfect love would be the ideal recipe for their attainment of sanctity within a very short space of time.

*June 15, 1857*

*to the same*

#### **Practicing Solid Virtue**

I am continuing to write to our daughters in the Assumption. My letters are filling them with immense and holy joy. And when their joy is complete (1 Jn 1:4)—when their hearts are basking in delight—will they then give way to self-satisfaction? O no, they won’t! Their hearts will be

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<sup>324</sup> Frederick William Faber C.O. (1814 – 1863) was a noted English hymn writer and theologian, who converted from Anglicanism to Roman Catholicism in 1845. He was ordained to the Catholic priesthood subsequently in 1847. His best-known work is *Faith of Our Fathers*.

too full to spare a thought for themselves.

How can I tell you how pleased I am with the zeal you put into the progress of this new association? You have often told me in the past that you hated hard work and were utterly incapable of pushing anybody! Yet you have shown that you push them very well when you put your mind to it. You are frightened of taking your “fourth vow” like the Ladies of the Assumption—but you are behaving exactly as if you had taken it!

So carry on, and do not “let up.” See that they practice solid virtue. Teach them to overcome their personal faults. Above all, teach them to practice that charity which is not overcome by evil, but overcomes evil by good.

Unfortunately, these excellent ladies do not dispose of sufficient funds to take in elderly invalids. So let them be content with visiting them at home—the rest will follow in God’s good time. It is an excellent practice to bring knitting and keep your fingers busy during the meetings. It permits the meetings to be prolonged, for those who so wish—in fact, it’s a good excuse for getting together! Pay attention to their conversation—it is during casual conversation that the religious spirit can be so easily instilled.

*June 21, 1857*

*to the Adorers*

I am awaiting a letter from our Mother Marie-Walburge. It is due any moment—but I cannot wait to speak to you. Thoughts are going through my mind which may be of assistance to you. There are so many things I am unable to do for you. Thank you for allowing me this comfort, for giving me the occasion of exercising at least a minor apostolate.

Elaborate theories do not fit into my brain. But I think I have something better to offer you than theory—it’s something very practical.

#### **The Crucifix**

Have you a crucifix, and what is your attitude towards it?

Let me begin by promising to get you one, such as religious wear. These are the most practical kind. Tiny crucifixes inspire little devotion; I, at least, don’t like them. Enormous crucifixes simply encumber.

So have a crucifix. If your dress permits you to wear it, then keep it on as much as you can. Wear it in such a way that you can use it whenever you will. Place it on your desk while you are writing, and on your knees while you are knitting or sewing. Look at it from time to time, and kiss it. Clasp it in your hands as you drop off to sleep.

Nothing is more precious than Holy Communion or kneeling before the Blessed Sacrament. But we cannot always enjoy Our Lord’s substantial presence in our heart, nor can we spend all our time prostrate before him. We can always wear his image and carry it about with us, and this image has a lot to say to us.

#### **A Friend for all Seasons**

If, when you get up in the morning, you kiss your crucifix lovingly, and resolve to carry your own Cross throughout the day, following in the footsteps of our crucified Saviour; if, while you do your daily meditation (unless you are doing it in church) you grasp your crucifix in both hands, and resolve to offer yourself up on this altar of Christ's supreme Sacrifice; if you touch your crucifix from time to time in order to awaken your fervor; if you grasp it tighter than usual in moments of pain, anxiety, sorrow, weariness and temptation; if, as you leave home on some errand of mercy, you bow down in spirit before Jesus on the Cross, remembering that it is Jesus on the Cross whom you are going to assist in the person of his poor; if, as you are about to perform some act of corporal austerity, you kiss the five wounds of Our Savior because these five wounds are the fountains whence the Church derives its life of grace, and the sources of our own purification; if, every night before going to bed, you fling yourself at his feet and render an account of your day: of your pride, as opposed to his humiliations—of your vanity, as opposed to his self-effacement—of your selfishness, as opposed to what he had to put up with—of your laziness, as opposed to the sweat of his sacred brow—of your petty-mindedness, as opposed to his infinite love—of your impatience, your sulkiness, your downright lack of charity, as opposed to his hours of patient waiting and his inalterable good humor; if such is your constant practice—then, my dear daughters, it is difficult for me to doubt that your crucifix has, indeed, become your friend and confidante.

Or, rather, that Our Lord loves you, is instructing you, is fortifying you, by means of his crucified likeness. And by this means, by this constant interchange of sentiments, by this silent, yet eloquent, intermediary, between you and your Divine Spouse, your entire outlook, your entire being, will be radically transformed.

#### **Our Transformation into Jesus Christ**

It will no longer be the wood—it will no longer be the metal—which reproduce the Savior's features. They will become vividly imprinted on your soul. You will experience the direct action of him who was nailed to the Cross for your sake. Your most earnest longing will be transformation into him. "For me," cries Saint Paul, "life means Christ" (Phil 1:21). Your life will adopt this new dimension of "Christ fullness." You will uncover vast spiritual horizons to which you will lovingly resort—and every form of life, every degree of knowledge, every extent of happiness, will be summed up in "Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Cor 2:2). That's all, but that's everything.

#### **As we drop off to sleep**

Let me confess to you in all simplicity that my happiest moment is at night, as I drop off to sleep. It entails no great effort to switch my mind onto the thought of this Good Master whose crucified likeness I hold in my hand. I tell him I love him. I ask him to forgive me my mistakes—and all of

a sudden I feel overwhelmed by the forgiveness which falls over me from the height of the Cross. I feel such a weight of remorse when I think of how my sins have hurt him—when I think of the favors he has done me. I thank him for having been so kind. I earnestly promise him to do better in future. I feel so ashamed of lying in a comfortable bed when I think of him dying nailed to a gibbet. Let me love him more than hitherto—let me make up for so much lost time.

I adore God the Father by presenting him with God the Son. I call upon God the Holy Spirit whom he sent us. I pray for the Church which was born on Calvary. I am ashamed of being such an indifferent Christian. Then I take courage at the thought of God's infinite love and power...and if sleep does not come immediately, I feel happy in such company.

And so, my dear daughters, I have given you something to think about—something which will deepen your relationship with your crucifix. It will increase Our Lord's continual presence within your mind and heart.

I am looking forward to hearing that your little association is growing day by day in solid virtue, in humility, in God's love. Ask Our Blessed Lady to teach you how to press your lips to the sacred wounds of her Divine Son—thereby to absorb that courage and zeal which will make you stand out among those faithful virgins, spouses of God.

And may the Cross of Christ be forever your treasure, your hope, your life, and your reward.

*June 24, 1857*

*to Mother Marie-Walburge*

#### **Looking at the Crucifix**

I am waiting impatiently for a letter from you, my dear daughter. If you expect to escape from mine by not writing to me anymore, you are making a big mistake. I don't know why I am so convinced that our little association is going to do a vast amount of good, but I have every intention of bringing this about.

Tell them this: I am going to write them a series of letters on the lessons they can learn by looking at their crucifixes. Would this not be an excellent opportunity of giving the "Priory" where they gather a suitable name, in keeping with the spirit I wish to inculcate? What about calling them: "The Adorers of Christ Crucified," or simply: "The Adorers of Jesus Christ?"

Having spoken to them about the Crucifix, I intend to speak to them about the Blessed Sacrament. Like that we can call them simply: "The Lovers of the Eucharist." Tell me what you think about it.

If you intend giving me any sign of life, my address is: Lavagnac—near Montagnac—Hérault.

Goodbye, my dear daughter. Kindest regards to your daughters at the convent.

Yours affectionately in Our Lord.



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## ***WHAT THE CRUCIFIX TEACHES US***

### **I. Contrition**

*June 24, 1857*

Among the many sentiments to be derived from the proper use of your crucifix, there is one of the utmost importance to any soul interested in tending towards perfection. “If you wish to become perfect...” (Mt 19:21). It is a sentiment which I think is grossly neglected—it is the sentiment of contrition.

Most pious people make little progress towards perfection because they neglect to wage war against their own faults—and they neglect to wage such war because they are hardly aware of these faults, or of the sins to which they lead.

Well, what progress have you made recently?—and why have you made so little? Because you experience so little need of being converted—perhaps not from evil to good, but at least from good to better, and without such an urge to conversion we fall into spiritual torpor and lethargy. We must not remain in this state of soul. We must “snap out of it,” and in view of this I urge you to take a good look at your crucifix.

#### **Why we must be contrite**

Why did Our Lord have to die? To atone for our sins. And you who profess to be his spouses—have you no horror of sin? Let’s get our terms straight. I’m sure you detest mortal sin—but how do you stand as regards habitual venial sin? What about your self-centeredness—your touchiness—your antipathies—the wanderings and meanderings of your imagination—your desire to create a favorable impression—your lack of seriousness about the things of God—your neglect of prayer...all this, and much more, all these infractions of God’s law which make up the spiritual luggage of a typically pious person on her way to confession? What about all this? Does the burden of it become lighter each day? Does it grow heavier? Or is its weight constant and continual?

You see the consequence, don’t you? You haven’t actually killed him whom you call your spouse, between one confession and the next. But you are continually wounding him: by your petty revolts—by your constant neglect—by your superficiality—by your lack of interest...and it all accumulates your culpability because it’s God you’re dealing with.

Think of all those temptations to rebel; to grumble—to lose heart—to give up the fight, which periodically take hold of you. I do not claim to

be painting the whole picture. The truth is that once a week, or once a fortnight you promise God to correct yourself, even to sanctify yourself—and like this you manage to keep yourself “on an even keel.” But is this good enough? No, and I’ll tell you why. Among many possible reasons, it’s because you are insufficiently acquainted with your crucifix. You don’t love him enough whose image you carry about with you. You have not acquired that necessary knowledge of Our Lord’s Passion. It is a knowledge your crucifix will give you if you pray for it.

Let us forget about mortal sin for the time being—the kind of sin responsible for Our Savior’s actual death on the Cross. But meanwhile he is hanging up there—and it is because of you that he is lacerated by scourges, crowned with thorns, and suffers such a cruel thirst. These sufferings alone could have killed him. But think of the blood already shed—think of the pains in that thorn-crowned head—think of his torturing thirst, and think how he thirsts for the souls of men! Take responsibility for all this—it is your so-called “venial” sins which have brought this about. You may not have driven the spear into his side—you may not have nailed him to the Cross. You have, nevertheless, inflicted intolerable pain upon him—and continue daily to do so—when, by your tepidity and lack of fervor, you ceaselessly relapse into what you call your “usual” sins. Yet you are “brazen” enough to declare that you love him!

Ah! my dear daughters, one of God’s faithful servants achieved heroic sanctity. Do you know how? Well, every night for several years, her husband used to tie her to the bedpost and beat her till she bled!—and she put up with this, and never complained. This is the stuff saints are made of! You do well to admire her but, tell me, what do you think about her husband? He must have been a monster, mustn’t he?

You are like this husband! He beat his wife for no motive. Then what is your motive for beating Our Lord? This husband deserved his wife to go away and leave him. How do you deserve Our Lord to treat you?

Take a good look at your crucifix. Look at Jesus whom you have so frequently abandoned, insulted, despised—spat upon, scourged and crowned with thorns. And I defy you to tell him you love him, if you are not resolved to remove from your sentiments whatever could conceivably upset him—down to the least of your imperfections!

#### **Making a Good Confession**

I want you to prepare your confession either before the Blessed Sacrament or before your crucifix. Let me presume you have never committed a mortal sin—but which of you can be sure of this? And even if you are sure you have never lost your baptismal innocence—does this mean you have nothing to be sorry for or atone for, as you kneel in God’s presence?

I expect members of your little association, with their love for the Divine Master, to prepare for confession earnestly. I do not wish you to be

troubled in your mind—I have no time for scruples. But I do call for a greater horror of sin. I am not asking you to scour your conscience like a greasy pot. I am asking you to detest your shortcomings with greater energy and efficacy. Measure them against the depth and cruelty of the five Sacred Wounds—and, kneeling in front of your crucifix, take the firm resolution to destroy within yourself everything, absolutely everything, which could conceivably offend Our Blessed Lord.

My best to you, my dear daughters, with my ardent desire that your souls may be delivered from the Kingdom of Sin.

## II. Hatred of Sin

*July 3, 1857*

By condemning his Son to death, God wished to show the world how much he hated sin. You, in turn, must be able to kneel before your crucifix and tell yourself: “This is what sin reduced God to!”

And this God who hangs there dying, amid the most atrocious pains: he is your spouse. He is at the same time “the head of his body, the Church” (Col 1:18)—and the Church is your Mother, through whom he conveys his grace to your soul—your Mother, through whom he nourishes you with his own Body and Blood—your Mother through whom you become God’s children.

The more you love God—the more you love Jesus Christ and his Church—the more you will hate sin, not only the sins you yourself have had the misfortune to commit, but sin in itself: the sum-total of revolts against God—the sum-total of ingratitude in return for his love, of sacrilege in return for his gifts, of blasphemy against his supremacy, of deliberate refusal to believe in his very existence. The sight of Christ, your Divine Model, being nailed up on the Cross to expiate sin is a continual reminder of what sin really is, or ought to be for those who love him.

From which reflections let us draw a few practical consequences which will make you think.

### I. Horror of the world

And since sin is so hateful to you, you must avoid with horror those places where sin is committed. Sin is committed in what we call the “world”—so you must avoid the “world.”

You will, no doubt, answer: “But I do avoid the world! I hate the world!” Is this good enough? You must stand up to the world. You must be able to declare, like St. Paul: “The world is crucified to me, and I to the world” (Gal 6:14).

What, my dear daughters, does this mean? What is this mutual crucifixion? Out of several possible explanations, let me choose this one. The world must be a cross which a Christian has to bear, and his

relationships with the world must constitute a perpetual crucifixion. The world crucified its Savior, and a disciple cannot expect to be treated any better than his Master (Mt 10:25). The more you love your crucified Lord, the more will the world become a cross to carry and a crucifixion to endure. So the world will be crucified, that is, turned into a cross, for you. And you, in turn, will be crucified in the eyes of the world, because the world cannot understand how happy you are to belong to Jesus. The world will heap blame and criticism on you—the world will submit you to every kind of persecution—and this ought to make you happier still, by increasing your similarity to Christ, your Divine Spouse.

Yes, you must be crucified in the eyes of the world, in order to perpetuate that terrible mystery of the world being already judged, and its prince already condemned, as Our Lord tells us in his discourse after the Last Supper (Jn 16:9-11). You must manifest your horror of sin, for the whole world to see, by the voluntary crucifixion in which your whole life consists (Gal 5:24). Let the world know—not merely by listening to what you have to say, but by witnessing your very mode of existence—that the doctrine of the Cross is the true one, and that “there is no other name under heaven given to men whereby we can be saved” (Acts 4:12).

### **II. Mortification**

A second consequence of hating sin is that, if you hate sin, you must follow the example of our Divine Master who died to destroy it. And you must fight against it with your utmost energy, using the same weapons he himself employed.

You may not be destined to die in the combat—but you must mortify yourselves. And every act of mortification, apart from the personal expiation it implies, must be an act of hatred of sin and love of God. In other words, you must do penance not only for yourselves, but for everybody else too.

And this is one of the most precious privileges enjoyed by a spouse of Jesus. Leaving aside the preoccupation of her own personal salvation, of her own personal debt for her own personal sins, she devotes her life to augmenting the precious treasury of Our Lord’s own merits, those of Our Lady, and those of all the saints. Her penance is no longer the act of a debtor who gives himself the “all clear.” It becomes that of a noble-hearted wife who takes in extra work to compensate for her husband’s financial losses. Happy the soul of her who so loves God that she longs to comfort and console him, to make up for the insult and injury he has had to endure (Col 1:24).

### **III. Love for the Church**

Our hatred of sin surely implies loving the Church. It takes courage to stick up for this Mother. She has been so insulted. She has had so much mud slung at her, by both her sworn foes and her renegade children. So how glad we ought to be, to be able to come to the aid of our abandoned

Mother—to contribute generously to her defense—to serve her all the more zealously now that she stands alone.

My dear daughters, we do not love the Church sufficiently. If we did, we would begin to understand that our whole life must be geared to extending her conquests over the Empire of Sin.

I have further considerations to put to you—these can be postponed to a future letter. Meanwhile my earnest longing is for you to appreciate how grateful you ought to be to Our Lord. He has delivered you from sin (Col 1:14) and called you to that pure light which the saints inhabit (Col 1:13). Let him be your love and the source of your joy, now and forever. Amen.

### III. The Precious Blood

*July 6, 1857*

Yesterday we kept the Feast of Our Lord's Most Precious Blood. Many a time have I urged you to shelter beneath the Tree of the Cross. It was from this Sacred Tree that Our Lord's own blood, shed for the remission of our sins, was absorbed into the earth and sanctified it. Let me describe to you some of its wonderful effects.

#### **The Destruction of Sin**

This shedding of Our Savior's blood was the necessary condition, laid down by God the Father, for the salvation of all mankind (Heb 9:22). So let us never cease to thank him who, because of his immense love for us, did not refuse to shed the last drop of his blood for our sake. Yes, God shedding his blood, down to the last drop, whereby to wash away our sins and render us capable of being admitted to heaven...surely the thought of this must revive our horror of sin. Surely it must overcome our ingratitude. Surely it must decide us, once and for all, to set about wholeheartedly the task of our own conversion.

#### **The Seed of Virtues**

But let me proceed to extol the inexhaustible merits of this, Our Savior's blood. Let me describe what it means to those of us whose aim is not only self-conversion but self-perfection. Our Lord's blood not only wipes out sin—not only atones for the most abominable crimes. It gives birth to all goodness, and growth to the most exquisite of virtues. Does not one of the Prophets call it “the wine which produces virgins?” (Zec 8:17). And it is from this point of view that I wish to speak to you about it today.

You see, Our Lord's Precious Blood, being part of his human nature, was united in the same divine Person to his Godhead—and this gave it its infinite value. Therefore, it was to produce not only a negative effect, that of cleansing us from the disastrous malady of original sin. It was to purify

our souls and restore them to their pristine beauty. It was to do better still—it was to add to this pristine beauty.

God the Son who reigns on high is surrounded by a worthy retinue—he is surrounded by the angels. God is spirit (Jn 4:24)—and his inaccessible throne is surrounded by an army of the very purest spirits. But when God became human—when “the Word was made flesh” (Jn 1:14)—he still desired a retinue composed of beings like unto himself—clothed, like himself, in mortal flesh—clothed in something of that divine purity he himself had introduced into the world. Who were to compose this retinue of angel spirits in mortal bodies, if not his dedicated virgins? And these virgins are produced, the Holy Spirit assures us, by the human blood of God’s only Son.

So this, my dear daughters, is what you are, and whence you derive your wonderful privilege of being his spiritual retinue on earth. You are the virgins who replace the angels around the throne of God-made-man—and what turns you into virgins is nothing less than the powerful fecundity of his Most Precious Blood.

#### **Precious Fruit of Precious Seed**

Let us gaze on the mystery from a new angle. Later on I will revert to the concept of your surrounding the throne of the Lamb, and following him wherever he goes (Rv 14:4). Meanwhile let me regard you as the most precious fruit of that most precious seed which the Divine Sower (Mt 13:4) went forth to scatter over the earth, and which he fertilized with his own blood.

1° You are products of Our Lord’s Precious Blood. Daughters of Eve though you be, look what this Precious Blood has turned you into! The Blood of Our Savior strikes me as being represented by that “Sea of Crystal Glass” which St. John saw in front of God’s throne (Rv 4:6). It is there that the virgins go to wash and whiten their garments in the blood of the Lamb (Rv 7:14). This blood, then, is transformed into water, and it transforms those who bathe therein. Everything about you must be pure, sparkling white, dazzling bright, without the slightest stain.

2° You are products of Our Lord’s Precious Blood. It gives you the “trade-mark” of your spiritual origin. This is the blood shed by Our Lord as he hung lifeless on the Cross (Jn 19:34). You are the children of his pain—and it is pain, penance and sheer anguish which will enable you to preserve your privileges. Make no mistake about it—unless a barricade of sharp thorns is erected around your hearts, you will be robbed of your treasure. Genuine virginity cannot survive unless you fight to preserve it by means of penance.

But in return this Precious Blood transforms you—turns you into something entirely new. All you need is to remain attentive to this divine transformation going on inside you.

Jesus has turned you into virgins by washing you in his Blood. This

Precious Blood is kept circulating in your veins by fervent reception of Holy Communion. You must welcome the infusion of this new blood which brings you new life so that by more perfect participation in the infinite goodness and effectiveness of Christ's Precious Blood, you will come to participate in his very Godhead. Everything about you will be divinized: your thoughts, your words, your entire mode of life.

3° You are products of Our Lord's Precious Blood—and in the most sublime fashion! The Holy Spirit tells us in the words of St. Paul that virginity gives us greater freedom to concern ourselves with the work of the Lord (1 Cor 7:32)—and, consequently, to love him better. So by chastity we set ourselves on the road to charity—and by chastity we open the door to ultimate perfection.

Endeavor to realize what you must offer up to God in order to live up to what God expects of you. No, you must no longer belong to this world—you must become citizens of heaven (Eph 2:20). God wants every one of you for himself. Is he not entitled to the very best you can give, because it is the very best?

And so, my dear daughters, let the flower of your virginity ceaselessly watered by Our Lord's own Precious Blood—let it blossom and bloom for him, and him alone. Fear not to make the greatest and most painful sacrifices in order to preserve and develop it. Jesus Christ has given you his very self, because he longs to be able to crown you with the diadem of virginity and espouse you to God (2 Cor 11:2). And you yourselves must respond by giving him not only something but everything.

The blood of Christ! Let this be your strength whenever you feel weak. Let this be the pond into which you will dive headlong whenever you contract the slightest stain, whenever the slightest spot taints your wedding dress. Ah! my dear daughters, embrace the Cross with the full force of your consuming love! United with your Divine Spouse beneath the shelter of this wonderful tree: there it will be given you to appreciate the gifts with which he endows you—and there you will receive the necessary help from God, to enable these gifts to grow and grow, until that glorious day when you will be united with him for ever and ever. Amen.

## IV. Striving for Perfection

*July 31, 1857*

For the past few days, I've been wanting to write to you: several things prevented me. Nevertheless, I find it useful from time to time to give you a few words of encouragement so that the good that, with my help, has begun to grow in you may continue to develop.

### **Getting rid of the old self**

All efforts at attaining perfection consist of two things: getting rid of

the old self and putting on Jesus Christ, as St. Paul tells us. One gets rid of the old self by working to destroy in ourselves every fault, every human bond, and every imperfection. Character defects, all too human sadness, discouragement, self-centered love, touchiness, love of creatures, love of consolations and of human pleasures, vanity, selfishness, purely human motivations even in the best things, laziness, the desire to rest when the going is rough: all of these and similar things must with the greatest care be banished for the good of our souls. And for sure the effort must be constant if we do not want tepidity and laziness to cede back to the enemy the ground that we had wrested from him. Yes, we must get rid of the old self, for as long as we cling to some piece of it, we cannot hope to receive the glorious robe that Christ wants to put on us.

For sure you have heard of this comparison: what are we who hold on to some miserable little fault, to some human crutch, but poor little beggars in rags who refuse the wonderful new garment that the king is offering us? Look into yourselves, my dear daughters, and ask yourselves what is this old rag that you hold on to and which blocks all progress. Very often it is but a puny thing but how we hold to it! We think it is impossible to get rid of it, because we fear that if we put off that old tunic which sticks to us so snugly it will rip off our very skin. Ah! It's all to our loss if we hold on to that ignominious garment; those faulty habits are so ingrained in us that they seem to be part of our very nature. Alas, we still have to get rid of those old, dirty rags that prevent us from putting on the glorious garment the Lord is offering us. Ask yourselves this question: "What in me prevents the Lord from giving me my nuptial dress?"

You see, I am broaching here a great mystery. Woe to you if you do not appreciate the full import of this mystery and woe again if you, spouses of Christ, hold on to anything that displeases him! You will rip these bad habits off completely. If you hold on to anything at all, you are not worthy to be the spouses of Christ. This work will take time, all the more so if you are not generous. Generosity can make it shorter. Everything here depends on the will power you apply to the task of uprooting from your souls sin and all its stains.

#### **Putting on Jesus Christ**

Once you have thrown away all the old rags, you must put on new clothes. What does this work entail? St. Paul tells us in a few words: "Put on Our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom 13:41). This most holy humanity of Our Lord's, this mysterious tunic with which he vested his divinity when he came down to save mankind: this is the vestment you must put on. Make your own the sentiments of Jesus Christ, his words, his actions; make these your own sentiments, your own words, your own actions. Do nothing, say, think nothing but what the Lord himself would have done, would have thought, would have said. This, it seems to me, is what it means to put on Jesus Christ. Take your life and mould it on this model. Indeed, one virtue



of this divine garment is that it so penetrates those who wear it, that their entire being is transformed in God. Have you taken up this work? How many years ago did you receive the baptismal garment? For how many years now has the Lord frequently come at communion to the very depths of your soul to dress it, to embellish it, to make it radiant? Why is it still ugly?

Anyone who considers these matters cannot but be struck by this contrast: on the one side we see all that God wants to do for us; on the other we see all the ways we resist his action! Of course we want all the benefits and privileges of holiness, but we do not want its demands, and as St. Paul says, we want to be well dressed but only with the clothes of our own choice.

My dear daughters, at some other time I'll tell you more about what it means to put on Jesus Christ. For now, just mull over how you are going to get rid of your old dirty garments.

May the Lord help you in everything!

## V. Putting on Jesus Christ

*August 12, 1857*

When I try to grasp fully what St. Paul means by inviting us to “put on Jesus Christ” (Rom 13:41), I must admit that I'm a bit embarrassed. The union of the soul with Jesus Christ is such that any metaphor is inadequate to express it. That's the reason why it is sometimes depicted as the union of a husband and wife, at other times as a soul so filled with Christ that the body becomes an image of Christ: every gesture, every action reveals Christ.

1° So when the Apostle says: “Put on Our Lord Jesus Christ,” he is only repeating the same mystery in a different way. A person reveals him—herself by the clothes he—she wears. And yet the clothes do change the person to some extent. The rags of a beggar are not the robe of a king. If then you are to put on Jesus Christ, you must present yourself in a divine way. Good examples, Christian life, holiness in all your actions, supernatural mores, if I may put it thus, is what everyone has a right to expect from you. In all this it must be evident that you have put on Christ, and that you are conscious of the mission you have to make Christ visible through your person.

2° We can also say that St. Paul wants to show us that the action of Christ is manifested in us in various ways. He grows in us just like a seed planted in a vase. He grows, he blossoms little by little and, if I may say so, he moves from our interior to our exterior. His action works through every pore of our being. It penetrates us through and through if we do not put up obstacles against it. We experience this especially right after communion when Christ has entered the most intimate part of our being. But the Lord

can also come to us the other way around from without to within. He invests us with his grace, his light, his power. Thus he puts his glorious garment on us which protects and warms us. Christ himself protects us from all sorts of dangers to which our duties in the world expose us.

3° But in order to understand what this garment is all about, we must accept Christ the way he presents himself and remember that the garment we receive is indeed Jesus Christ himself. St. Paul tells us that Christ in the Trinity is the splendor and the glory of the Father and the form of the divine substance. When Christ deigns to clothe us with the splendor and glory of his divine rays, it is, so to speak, a robe of infinite glory the he puts on us. It will be our reward in heaven. On earth, we cut cloth and design clothes to fit us, but when it comes to putting on Christ, we must train ourselves to fit the robe that the Lord gives; we must make ourselves worthy of such a precious gift. So every part of our being, our faculties, our heart, our sentiments, everything in us must be transformed to become worthy to wear this glorious robe which, I repeat, is the splendor of the glory of God and the form of his substance.

What greatness, what majesty, my dear daughters! But also what efforts, what striving in order to be worthy of so glorious an honor! How necessary it is to get rid of your imperfections, your amusements, your childishness, your thoughtless acts, in a word, all the trivial things that take up so much of your time and deprive you of a truly Christian character!

Let Jesus Christ be your sole preoccupation and may you reject everything that is not worthy of the honor that the Lord wants to give you!

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*May 3, 1859*

Today is the Feast of the Finding of the Holy Cross<sup>325</sup>. Two years ago I was sending you a series of written reflections on the Crucifix, and now, if you don't mind, I would like to add a few thoughts that may seem rather sad—but valuable, in view of what is going on under our very eyes.

#### **The Trials of the Church**

The Church of Christ is destined to struggle its way through the centuries until the end of time—this is why we call it the Church Militant.

The Church has to fight its battles with weapons suited to its purpose: weapons such as the Praetorian scourges, the Crown of thorns, the nails of Calvary—in other words, by being subjected to pain and contempt. “Let me suffer and be despised!”<sup>326</sup> cried St. John of the Cross.

And this, believe it or not, despite what the world has to say, is the

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<sup>325</sup> In the early 4th century the Holy Cross was excavated by order of Saint Helena, the Emperor Constantine's mother. This event was once commemorated in our liturgy on May 3<sup>rd</sup> — one of many feasts suppressed.

<sup>326</sup> “O Jesus, crucified for me, let me suffer and be despised for Thee.” Such was his motto.

surest means of procuring inward peace. For what can he complain of, the one who finds his happiness in pain? Who can upset him whose only ambition is to be despised?

So whatever trial he has to endure who sets his heart on suffering, it is no more than the fulfillment of his wishes. And as for the longing to be looked down on, instead of being looked up to, I ask you, what could trouble your peace of mind if you are a genuine Adorer of the Blessed Sacrament?

“I am,” you tell yourself, “a devil of pride—and this, my pride, must be overcome. The best way to overcome it is to love being humiliated, to welcome with alacrity whatever humiliations come my way. So from henceforth I shall lay myself open to every rebuttal I can possibly foresee.”

So whatever used to disturb you has now become a piece of cake! Think of the inward peace, I tell you once again—think of the deep serenity!

But perhaps I am wrong to overlay this card. We will return to it later on. Meanwhile let me stick to my subject.

The Church, as I say, is going through a stormy passage. Nations are agitated, people are plotting all kinds of evil. The times we live in are times of incertitude. We are everywhere beset with some indescribable anxiety. For the past sixty-five years it has pleased God to lead his Church forward to victory in the teeth of mighty tribulation. But can we foretell what is going to happen to us in the very near future? Will not the sins of some, the cowardice of others, allied to the fury of hell bring about some fearful chastisement on those who may remember that God is infinitely merciful, but forget that he is also infinitely just?

#### **The Hour of Victims**

And it is at times like these, my dear daughters, that the happiness of those who feel called upon to become victims reaches its very peak. They carry on the work of Jesus on the Cross. Let me tell you that the moment has come for you to redouble your fervor—to surrender yourselves unconditionally to God.

What is going to happen to our Holy Father the Pope?<sup>327</sup> How is the freedom of the Church to survive in the face of all this political agitation, the outcome of which no one can foresee? It is evident that deadly plots are being hatched—and that those who imagine they hold the reins of power are no more than instruments of the Power of Darkness (Eph 6:12). Way beyond and above the machinations of evil men and spirits, there is a God who allowed himself to be appeased, 1800 years ago, by the blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ shed upon the Cross (Heb 9:14). And God, before giving armies the power to conquer—before giving diplomats the power to persuade—gave us Christians the power to pray.

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<sup>327</sup> Pope Pius IX had already had to spend a period in exile, and was constantly beset by the intrigues of his opponents.

So I beseech you, my dear daughters, I beseech you to pray in union with Our Lord on the Cross—to pray by accepting all the Cross has to teach us, and applying it to yourselves—to—“victimize” yourselves more than ever—so as to be able to tell yourselves that you truly love the Church, and that you are doing all in your power to assist the Church in her struggles ...for the Church is our Holy Mother, as you well know.

I am writing to you somewhat in haste. This morning I offered Mass for you. I hope that, in return, you will say a few prayers for me. Goodbye for now. Later on I will send you your promised Examination of Conscience.

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## VI. Reasoned Examination of Conscience

*May 10, 1859*

### **Procedure**

The time has come for me to keep my promise—to send you the “brief” examination of conscience I said I would.

You know what to expect. I have already written you a few lines about what I call the Spirit of the Assumption. However, these few lines need to be elaborated, to enable you to grasp the essence of my message and the sequence of my thought.

Let me begin by repeating that our fundamental motivation must be love: the love of Our Lord Jesus Christ, that of Our Blessed Lady, his Mother, and that of the Church, his spouse. So you must bear in mind, not only that every single one of your heart-beats is to be directed towards this three-fold love—but that you must develop within yourselves every single virtue you can discover by looking on Jesus and Mary as your models. You must, likewise, endeavor to acquire whatever qualities are needed in the service of our Holy Mother Church. And you must be prepared for whatever sacrifice may be demanded to prove the sincerity of your love.

Such dispositions need to be nurtured—and for this they must be founded on solid convictions and put into constant practice.

What more solid—and what more practical—than the three Theological Virtues, and those religious and Christian values which derive from them? But among the many virtues and values which flow from these three sources, let us select those most in harmony with our fundamental aim.

Having said which, let us proceed. Faith, hope and charity (1 Cor 13:13).

## **I. Faith**

Faith in Our Lord—the External Truth made manifest to men. Faith in the imitation of Our Blessed Lady. She performed the most sublime act of faith ever accomplished when she said: “Behold the handmaid of the Lord” (Lk 1:38). Faith in the Church, to whose teaching we must subject our reason, our personal opinions, our doubts and perplexities, our inclinations to revolt. We must learn to acquire this attitude of faith whereby we seek, accept and adore God’s will in whatever happens to us. This attitude of faith unites us in a spiritual bond with Jesus and Mary during their life on earth, and makes us do what they would have done reproducing as perfectly as we can the very least of their thoughts, words and actions.

From faith we derive our love and loyalty to the truth. One way of honoring the truth is by being open and straightforward in all our dealings. This tribute to the living truth must be one of our most distinctive characteristics.

### **Obedience in the light of faith**

Faith, let us remember, is essentially the submission of our intellect to the truth. Our heart too must learn to obey. And this submission of mind and heart brings obedience to its highest summit, that of the genuine religious.

So obedience, as you see, derives its value, its beauty and its strength from the light of faith. Guided by this light, we endeavor to emulate the obedience of Our Lord “who became obedient for us unto death, even to the death of the Cross.” (Phil 2:8)—likewise that of Our Blessed Lady, accomplishing within herself the Mystery of the Incarnation by accepting God’s message delivered to her by the Angel (Lk 1:38). We must obey the Church which represents Christ’s own authority on earth—and we must obey all those whom we have vowed to obey.

### **Humility in the light of faith**

But there is more than this. Faith enlightens us as to what we must believe, and therefore practice. But it also enlightens us as to what we actually are, consequently to the littleness of our worth. It shows us our faults, our vices, our evil tendencies, our sinfulness, our corruption. And having surveyed this assemblage of disagreeable elements which compose our make-up—having, in the same light of faith, thrown in all our frequent revolts against God’s grace—what remains for us to be proud of? We find ourselves overwhelmed with a crushing self-contempt. We have to choose between utter despair and genuine humility.

Despair is something we must never give way to—so let us content ourselves with becoming truly humble. Let us get to know ourselves as we really are. Let us learn to despise ourselves, and accept that others despise us too. Let us welcome such a chastisement, for our pride and for all our

other sins. Let us bear in mind the justice we owe to a God who loves us and whom we have offended. Is acceptance of contempt too high a price that we can offer him in reparation?

#### **Self-examination in faith**

From which follows this kind of self-examination:

Have I faith? Am I disposed to believe whatever the Church teaches me? Do I sufficiently worship Our Blessed Lord Jesus Christ, and with sufficient intensity? He is the Eternal Truth—and, as God, he is the final and infinite object of faith.

Have I approached God “through Christ Our Lord?” He is after all, “the author and consummator of all faith” (Heb 12:2). What is my gratitude towards Our Lord for having given me the gift of faith?

Have I tried to imitate Our Blessed Lady’s faith? Has my faith drawn Jesus Christ into me, as her faith drew him into her at the time of the Incarnation?

Have I absorbed the full teaching of the Church? Do I appreciate the value of that deposit of faith, entrusted to the Church’s keeping for my sake—that treasury of truth to which I will owe my salvation?

Is my outlook one of faith? Have I endeavored to give my thoughts and feelings, my words and actions, their maximum value, by uniting them to one of the Divine Mysteries of Our Savior’s life as revealed to me by faith? Knowing him by faith, have I adopted him as my model in all respects—the same applying to Mary, his Blessed Mother? Have I realized how great, how precious, how wonderful whatever I do can become, as long as I do it out of faith? How have I cherished and nurtured this gift of faith?

#### **In Obedience**

How obedient am I to Our Lord and Our Blessed Lady in their promptings and inspirations?—and to the Church in its commandments? What is my attitude towards the Commandments, both of God and of the Church? And what about my obedience as a religious?—How more or less perfect has it become? In what respects am I obedient?—To what extent?—With what in mind?—With what degree of self-surrender?

#### **In Humility**

Faith teaches me to know myself. With what sincerity have I set about the task of self-knowledge? Behind what smokescreens have I not frequently sought refuge because I didn’t wish to see what was wrong with me? How many times have I not deliberately shut my eyes? Have I never opted for discouragement and despair at the painful sight of my own inadequacy—at the futility of all my efforts?

In other words, am I humble? Am I aware of the extent of my nothingness?—of the degree of my corruption? Have I faced up to the conclusion that I’m altogether despicable? Do I truly despise myself? And how do I live up (or rather, down) to the contempt I know I ought to have for myself?

Have I ever begun to understand how despicable I am in God's sight—and how I have insulted his justice, his kindness, his infinite majesty, by my constant revolts and my frequent abuse of his grace? Have I ever begun to appreciate the reparation which is his due—the penances I ought to impose on myself—the humiliations I ought to accept? If only I had any sense of justice, I would long to restore the glory I had deprived him of—by committing so many sins—above all by causing so much scandal. I would long to be despised by everybody else—what better do I deserve?

So to what extent am I going to look for contempt and humiliation? Or am I doing all I can to avoid it?

What do I intend to do about it from now onwards—to keep myself in my proper place: the lowest place, where I can be humiliated and trodden upon?

## **II. Hope**

What do we find when, having examined ourselves on faith, we pass on to hope?

Hope is the virtue whereby we acquire a firm confidence, founded on the merits of our Lord Jesus Christ, that by making good use of the graces God gives us in this life, we will possess God for ever in the next...from which we conclude that our supreme happiness is not to be found here on earth. It is to be found in God—rather, let us say, it is God.

### **Prayer**

This is a conclusion which itself becomes a principle: Since God is our supreme happiness, we must attain him, whatever the cost. But we cannot attain God without God's help—and without using the means God sees fit to provide. God is prodigal in all his gifts—but his primary gift is this ability to reach up to him: a gift he wishes us to ask for. "Ask, and you will receive" (Lk 11:9). Hence the necessity of prayer.

### **The Sacraments**

The means God provides can be interior or exterior—means from within, or from without. The interior means are actual graces, under whatsoever form they come our way. The exterior means are, above all, the Sacraments—and God entrusted their administration to his Church. We must, therefore, hold the Sacraments in deep respect. We must, therefore, be grateful to the Church: their store-house and their distributor.

### **Poverty**

"No man can serve two masters" (Mt 6:24). As long as I remain attached (as my nature inclines me) to the joys, to the pleasures, to the comforts of this world, how can my heart dwell in heaven? So the love of heavenly things, the longing for God as my supreme happiness, cannot go hand in hand with attachment to earthly things. And the more I desire to possess infinite happiness, the more I must necessarily despise the creature-

comforts. And the perfection of this desire to possess God—the contempt of, and the detachment from, whatever is not God or doesn't lead to God—attains its very summit in the profession of religious poverty. By poverty we detach ourselves, not only affectively but effectively, from all creatures, in order to attach ourselves to the Creator, to “that Father of light from whom every perfect gift descends” (Jas 1:17).

But if I wish to be poor, I must, nevertheless, remain alive. Hence the necessity of work! Work can, no doubt, be regarded as a punishment for sin (Gn 3:17)—but it is also a consequence of voluntary poverty. From a purely spiritual point of view, it reminds us we are all beggars in God's sight—whatever we need, we have to ask him for it.

These, then, are the principal aspects of hope upon which I invite you to reflect. And now let us examine ourselves carefully.

#### **The Examination:**

##### **On hope itself**

In what does my hope consist? Where have I situated my supreme happiness? What is my fondest desire? In whom do I trust? Is it in Jesus Christ, and him alone? Or do I place most of my trust in myself? Do I think I can accomplish all things by sheer force of willpower?

What value do I attach to the many graces and blessings Our Lord is continually showering upon me? Do I thank him for them? How do I set about asking him for more?

How do I stand as regards the things of the spirit? Do I relate everything to my eternal salvation—holding in high esteem whatever facilitates it—despising whatever is useless for it—shunning with horror whatever is contrary to it?

##### **On Prayer**

God's grace will be given to me in more abundance, the more I pray. How am I asking him to help me? What am I doing to obtain more grace and greater blessings?

God's grace works invisibly, below the surface. It cannot be obtained mechanically—it calls for a degree of attention on my part. God cannot operate within me unless I cooperate with him. So what about the meanderings of my mind—thinking about other things which absorb my attention and waste my time?

Graces and blessings follow on the footsteps of pious thoughts. How do I encourage these pious thoughts which occur to my mind? What am I doing to increase their number and intensity?

Graces consist in the help I need—they provide me with greater strength in time of trial. How have I profited by this greater strength—and sought to develop it by constant repetition of acts of virtue in the pursuit of my duties of state?

##### **On the Sacraments**

These are the most valuable of all exterior graces—the sacraments.



With what dispositions have I received them? How have I prepared myself for their reception? How have I benefited from them?

I have so often been absolved from my sins. I have so often received Our Lord in Holy Communion. God the Holy Spirit has resided in me since I was confirmed. What benefit have I derived from all these treasures? Far fewer would have been needed to turn me into a saint.

How much genuine sorrow for sin has accompanied my numerous Confessions? With how much genuine fervor have I partaken of the Holy Eucharist?

All these exterior graces have been bestowed on me by the Church. My religious profession has enabled me to supplement them generously by participating in the official Prayer of the Church. In my position I am fortunate enough to be able to recite it publicly, at least part of it. With what attention and respect have I fulfilled these liturgical functions? How have I adored? How have I besought? How have I rendered thanks? In other words: how have I recited my Divine Office?—In union with Our Lord, on behalf of his Church?

#### **On Poverty**

As regards poverty—am I “poor in spirit?” (Mt 5:3). Am I truly detached from all the things I have to use? Would I be ready to give them all up?—And what about some of my spiritual possessions—my good name, my reputation? Genuine poverty implies, after all, detachment from everything, even from myself!

Am I not inordinately fond of my individuality, of my personal comfort and satisfaction? Because, were I a genuinely poor religious, I would be indifferent to whatever I have and whatever I am—as long as I possessed God and the means of attaining him.

Have I reached this stage of detachment? Or am I not, on the contrary, very far from it? And what do I intend doing from now onwards to become completely detached?

Do I always practice poverty in the true sense of the word? If my present situation prevents me from practicing it as well as I ought, am I at least practicing it as well as I can under the circumstances.

What about my work? Can I truly say I am earning my living? I can earn it by the care with which I look after my home and family—by making good use of my two hands—by foregoing lots of meaningless pleasures and amusements—by spending my free time performing good works—and by learning to hold my tongue, and thus get on with my job. It all adds up to living up to the standards of a true religious.

Poverty, having been Our Lord’s background and that of his Blessed Mother, must hold treasures for me. It was one of Our Lord’s ways of showing how much he loved us (2 Cor 8:9). Following the example of his Blessed Mother, it could be one of my ways of showing how much I love him. And what value have I attached so far to those limitations the poor

have to endure, and with which some of the saints were so well acquainted?

The practice of poverty permits me to save money. How have I used the money I saved? There will always be people much poorer than I am. My surplus would relieve their destitution. So what have I done with what I could well afford to do without—and what has been my spiritual motivation? Have my charitable works been nothing but a source of self-satisfaction? Have they simply fed my pride—and thereby turned me into something wretched and repellent? Is there anything God detests more?

#### **Jealousy**

Hope (and charity, with which I am now about to deal) are confronted with one particularly nasty vice. It is a vice from which pious people are not always exempt. It is the vice of jealousy. We allow ourselves to become upset because others seem to be doing more good, achieving greater spiritual success, than we are!

Am I never jealous? Is it not jealousy which sometimes makes me sad—resentful—indignant?—which makes me pass unkind remarks—which causes me to lose heart in face of difficulties?

Have I not yet understood that God's gifts are like the sunlight which shines on everybody without diminishing the brightness of any particular individual? We all welcome the light—does anybody else receiving more of it cause me to receive less?

Let's go over it all again. Have I placed my trust in Our Lord Jesus Christ, and in him alone? Am I a prayerful person? Have I prayed sufficiently for the Church?

Am I poor and hard-working? Is my time usefully employed?

Is my heart free of any traces of envy or jealousy?

### **III. Charity**

We have seen faith and hope—and how each of the two has its subsidiary virtues. The same applies to charity.

Charity disposes us to renounce all earthly affections in order to free our hearts for God (1 Cor 7:32-34).

Thus we get:

1° Chastity: Not even the most legitimate human affection must be allowed to stand between ourselves and God (Mt 12:48).

2° Mental Prayer: In the sense of maintaining constant contact with God.

3° The Apostolate.

**So now let us examine ourselves:**

**on charity**

Am I sufficiently conscious of the immense love God has had for me from all eternity? I am nothing but nothingness—yet God has always been thinking about me!

So what am I doing to respond to his eternal thought and his eternal love? Am I truly grateful to him for all he has done for me? (Ps 115:3 Vulgate).

And since he has given me his Son—and how closer could I be united to him than this?—What have I done to respond to this unique and supreme gift? (Rom 8:32).

#### **on chastity**

With what respect have I treated this virtue of chastity? With what thorns have I protected this lily which makes me the spouse of Jesus—the daughter and imitator of Mary? What efforts have I made to acquire that cleanliness of heart which merits to behold God face to face? (Mt 5:7).

Let us leave the question of prayer for the moment—we'll come back to it in a minute.

#### **on love for our neighbor**

From the love of God let us pass on to the love of our neighbor (Mt 22:39). How do I stand in this regard?

Am I conscious of the good I can do: by living a life of prayer—by defying worldly standards—by giving good example—by talking and listening to people—by performing works of mercy?

In all this, what is my motivation? Do I do it for the love of God, and never for the love of self? Does it never give me great satisfaction to be able to congratulate myself on having done such a lot of good, and done it so well? (Lk 17:10).

#### **on zeal for souls**

Here we come to the principal purpose of the Assumption. It is to extend Christ's Kingdom over the souls of men, and it implies a burning love both for God and for our neighbor.

Jesus Christ lives as God, both in his sacred humanity and in his Church—the Church being his body, his spouse and his Kingdom. None of these expressions is adequate to portray the intimate and loving union which he longs to bring about between himself and the souls of those he died to redeem—but can we think of better? “His delight is to be with the children of men” (Prv 8:31)—his delight is to identify himself with them.

So it is that, having united myself as closely as I can with him, my most earnest desire will automatically be to unite other souls with him—as many as possible, and as closely as possible.

From this point of view, being an apostle, extending his Kingdom and gathering chosen souls to his exclusive services, are all one and the same thing. Is this my aim? Is this what I care about?

How can we say this is no concern of women? Look at St. Teresa (of Avila). This humble and cloistered woman possessed as much apostolic zeal as any man. Why should I too not be possessed of similar zeal? Why should I too not dare my utmost, and achieve my utmost, for the Coming of the Kingdom?

How am I to set about it? We are all placed in different circumstances. It is up to each of us to examine and assess each in our own circumstances, what we have achieved in the past—what we are endeavoring to do at present—and what we aim to do in future.

#### IV. The distinctive characteristic of the Adorers

My dear daughters, there is and must be something very special about you—and on this I particularly insist.

Your business is to “adore”—this, I am deeply convinced, is the very essence of your vocation. Let me tell you what a magnificent privilege this entails. You thereby become, day by day, more and more like those angels who surround the throne of God (Rv 7:11). And allow me to indicate what I consider ought to be the characteristics of your adoration. It ought to be distinguished by your self-abnegation—your expiation, or atonement—your zeal—and your union with God.

##### Four marks

*Abnegation.* What does adoration, indeed, mean? It is the act whereby we acknowledge God’s supreme dominion over every one of his creatures. Under the Old Testament, adoration was expressed by the holocaust, the burnt-offering in which the victim was entirely destroyed by the flames.

The greatest crime of modern times is that God is not being properly adored—not being adequately acknowledged as the Supreme Sovereign of all creation.

So your role as an Adorer is to adore him: on your own behalf, and on behalf of those who don’t adore him. Consider, then, the self-abnegation, the dying to self, to which you are obliged, in order to assert God’s rights, and make up for the insults to which he is being subjected by his own creatures.

*Expiation.* It was, no doubt, to atone for our sins that Our Savior hung on the Cross. But while you are prostrate at his feet, don’t you feel he wishes you to adore him by sharing his sentiments? (Phil 2:5). And though he is now gloriously risen from the dead, “the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep” (1 Cor 15:20), he remains, nonetheless, the victim “par excellence,” “The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (Jn 1:29). And although his self-oblation was “super-abundant,” more than sufficient to atone for transgressions (Rom 5:20), he is asking you to make it “even more super-abundant” (if I may thus express myself). In him and with him, we too can be victims for sin.

And while you are kneeling before the Blessed Sacrament, put yourself in Our Lord’s place, as he knelt there in the Garden of Olives (Lk 22:41) face to face with the stern justice of God the Heavenly Father. Are you absorbing all the sentiments which overcame the human soul of Our

Divine Master in this solemn and terrible moment, making him “ready to die with sorrow” (Mt 26:38)?

What must your prayer be like? What have you to offer? Between that heart-rending prayer of Our Blessed Lord and your own expiatory life, can you not sense the connection? And before rising from your knees and quitting the sacramental presence of Our Divine Victim, is it not only right that you should dedicate yourself as a victim, as unselfishly as you possibly can?

*Zeal.* You cannot be apostles like the men who go out and preach; you can become their spiritual power-house, like Our Blessed Lady was that of the Twelve gathered in the Upper Room. Throughout the ages she remains their Queen—and you who are her daughters must pray, as she prayed, for the success of their evangelical labors. There you are, kneeling before the Blessed Sacrament, kneeling at the feet of him who commissioned the Apostles—obtaining all the graces of the apostolate, needed now more than ever by our Holy Father the Pope, the successor of St. Peter, by all the bishops, and by the army of priests fighting the battles of the Lord.

You see, my dear daughters, the human body has two motors: its head and its heart. The role of the head is to command, to direct, to govern—but the center of life and warmth is in the heart. The heart itself does not drive the machine, but it does supply it with power. As you kneel and adore, you pertain to the heart of the Church, to the very heart of Our Lord. The heart cannot be seen—yet it is there, and how could the body function without its continual, steady beat? You, likewise, do not have to be seen—but think of the holy schemes you can put into motion and sustain in action, if you are aflame with veritable zeal!

*Union with God.* In what will your happiness in heaven consist? In union with God. And your life of adoration here on earth must be the beginning of your everlasting life in heaven.

What will you possess in heaven? God. And in virtue of your zeal, do you not already possess him in the Blessed Sacrament?

What will heaven be like?—How full of deep mystery and sheer delight? No one knows. The union with God brought about in heaven will, no doubt, have to be preceded by much preparatory suffering. Think of the purity, and therefore of the purification, God will insist upon from the soul of someone whom he intends to unite with himself for ever.

It depends on you, my daughters, what price you are prepared to pay here below for what God has prepared for you hereafter (1 Cor 2:9).

#### **The Examination: A Final Word**

This last part need not be long.

*I must die to myself!* Am I not full of pride, vanity, touchiness and self-sufficiency? I may be trodden underfoot—yet I still raise my head and start airing my grievances. I may declare myself to be utterly unworthy—

yet I still claim to be listened to and treated as if I were important.

*I wish to offer atonement.* How do I feel about the many times I have offended God—my impiety, my sacrileges, my blasphemies—my acts of impurity, my crimes which disfigure the face of the earth?

How has my love for Our Lord been manifest up to now? Is my piety not narrow and self-centered—preoccupied with nothing but my own little self—concerned little or nought with my neighbor—with the souls heading for eternal damnation—with the cause of the Church which is being constantly betrayed—with the glory of God which is being constantly neglected? What am I doing about it as regards expiation, mortification and reparation?

Zeal implies forgetting about myself. When will I, once and for all, leave myself behind? With how much zeal am I “praying to the Lord of the harvest to send laborers to gather his harvest?” (Mt 9:38). What am I thinking about as I kneel in front of the Blessed Sacrament? Prayer is at the root of zeal. If I cannot summon sufficient zeal to “set fire to the earth” (Lk 12:49) and set myself on fire—then at least let me pray hard that such fire be kindled in the hearts of those commissioned and sent forth to preach the Gospel. What efforts am I making to imitate Our Blessed Lady? After Our Lord’s Ascension she lived a life withdrawn, but was it not also a life of zeal? Without being cloistered, what a lot she must have done for the Church! How much could I not do if, without being cloistered, I set about imitating her?

*Union with God.* Is it my delight to be one in mind and heart with my Divine Spouse? Does my heart beat in perfect unison with his? Does nothing come between us? Am I prepared to sacrifice everything else for closer unity with him? What am I doing to prove to him that he is the God of my heart—“my inheritance for all eternity?” (Ps 15:5 Vulgate).

#### **Conclusion: Directory of the Adorers**

So here, my dear daughters, is the Examination of Conscience I promised you. I think it contains about everything I expect if you wish to acquire the true spirit of Adoration.

Read it often. You may divide it into four sections. I assure you that if you spend a few minutes every day meditating on it, you will discover many a personal fault to correct—many a virtue to develop—many a deficiency to repair—many a bad habit to eradicate—many a disposition to ameliorate.

Let it be a kind of guidebook—a source from which to draw the pure water of your distinctive spirituality—a common code giving unity to your modest Association—a mould impressing purpose and energy on all the good works you undertake.

I do not expect all of you to take it all to heart in the same way, or to the same extent. We must bear in mind and accept our different aspirations and personalities. Some are called to deeper humility—others to more

severe mortification. Some are more attracted to a life of solitude—others to a life of prayer. I do not intend you to be all the same. You are free, with the freedom of the Spirit which “blows where it wills” (Jn 3:8) and as it wills. But I do exhort you to be attentive to the Spirit—I do urge you to open your ears to his voice (Ps 94:8 Vulgate) and never to refuse any sacrifice he asks you to make.

May Our Lord and his Blessed Mother bless these few lines I have written—and enable them to sow the seeds of sanctity in your souls. May they render you worthy of adoring the Lamb of God for ever and ever amid the brightness of the seraphim (Rv 5:12).

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## B.—TALKS TO THE ADORERS

March 26, 1858

*Feast of the Compassion*<sup>328</sup>

### Mary, Model of an Adorer

#### **Our Lady's Fortitude.**

My dear daughters,

Apart from Corpus Christi, today's feast is one of the most meaningful for an Adorer. What more perfect model could you find for your adoration than Mary the Mother of Jesus who has followed her Divine Son to Calvary, and now stands there beneath the Cross?

The Jewish leaders have consummated their hatred, and the executioners their savagery. Judas has carried his betrayal, and the Apostles have run away. She alone—accompanied by a handful of devout women, and the apostle whom Jesus particularly loved—are there at the foot of the Cross (Jn 19:25).

Can we conceive what atrocious suffering is afflicting her mother's heart? How could she have got there without having to overcome every weakness of her nature—without being appalled by the tremendous suffering which awaited her? She couldn't—and the enormity of her sacrifice must have appeared terrible indeed. She knew she would have to witness the death of him who was both her God and her Son—but she was determined to be present at this ultimate sacrifice, and stay with Jesus until he drew his last breath.

#### **Our Lady's Sorrows**

You must follow her example, my dear daughters. She must be your model as you kneel and adore. You must stay by the Cross, and on the Cross, whenever it pleases Our Lord to nail you there beside him.

Let not your repugnance, your weariness and aridity, the very darkness which often accompanies prayer, prevent you from prolonging your adoration to the bitter end. True, you are going to suffer—true, you are about to be immolated. But God on Calvary, and his Blessed Mother at the foot of the Cross are suffering a thousand times more. All you have to support you, and enable you to remain steadfast, is the grace to be able to master your weakness, to conquer your suffering, and place your sacrifice side by side with that of God himself and his own loving mother, and yours.

Our Lady at the foot of the Cross had no other preoccupation than with the sufferings of her Divine Son. We read, not that she collapsed under

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<sup>328</sup> This feast used to be held on the Friday before Good Friday.



the burden of her sorrow—but that, to the contrary, she stood there (Jn 19:25). She forgot herself entirely. All she thought about was the Divine Victim hanging there. This intensified her grief more than we can imagine—but it also gave her superhuman strength and unbelievable consolation. Who can fathom the depths of pain, issuing from the Divine Heart of Jesus, and finding their echo and deposit in the human heart of his Blessed Mother? Who can put into words this mutual exchange of sorrow and of love? Our Lady standing at the foot of the Cross represented the entire Church—in whose name and on whose behalf, she adored Her Savior.

#### **Our Lady's Self-Sacrifice**

May she remain your model, my dear daughters, the model of those who adore. Forget yourselves, and think only about Jesus. At this very moment he is being attacked, insulted by the majority of men. Not only is the faith meeting with every species of opposition—but those who are faithful and keep up their faith, find themselves accused of entertaining thoughts and feelings contrary to those of Our Lord himself.

If only our faith were alive and true, we would wither up in sorrow at the sight of so much evil and so much ingratitude. At least, let us never join the ranks of his enemies. Let us follow the example of Mary our model—let us forget our own interests and adopt his—let us, by our prayers and good example, win over the hearts of others to his cause. Let us make reparation for all he has to suffer, by consenting to suffer by his side. Then, like Mary his mother, we will experience both the capacity to suffer and the consolation born of sufferings valiantly endured.

#### **Our Lady's Compassion for Sinners**

Last but not least, Our Blessed Lady standing at the foot of the Cross, is the Refuge of Sinners—because it is there she welcomes sinners, welcomes them all as her beloved children, in exchange for Jesus, her dying Son.

With what unbelievable kindness and warmth and generosity she opens her arms to those who have brought about his death, to his very executioners! So now she can say to her Son when she prays to him: “Here are all those rebel souls who hurt you so cruelly. I offer them to you with these same arms which have so often carried you—with these same hands which have so often fondled you. Remember all the fatigues I have endured for you—all the care I have lavished on you. Remember the times when you rested on my knee while I cuddled you close to my breast. Remember all this—and for the sake of all this, I beg you to take pity on all these other children you have given me, and whom I have accepted with the fullness of my love.”

It is, my dear daughters, while you kneel and adore, that you must think of the souls who have gone astray—and, following Our Lady's example as she stood by the Cross, do not forget those sinners who have

hurt you most. Pray especially for them—and recommend them to God that they may be saved. Thus must you emulate the love of Jesus your Saviour, and that of Mary your Mother, in order to fit yourselves to be united forever with the spouse to whom you have given your heart.

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*Holy Thursday, April 1, 1858*

## Jesus at Gethsemane, Model of an Adorer

In my last instruction I presented you with Our Blessed Lady standing at the foot of the Cross, as the model for you to imitate when you kneel and adore. Today let me present an even more perfect model—Our Lord himself during his agony in the Garden. Let his prayer be yours.

Having instituted the final and greatest testament of his love in the Holy Eucharist, and the priesthood whereby it would be perpetuated throughout the ages—illustrated the union which would henceforth subsist between him and his Apostles, by telling them: “I am the vine and you are the branches” (Jn 15:5) and comforted them with many other words of kindness and encouragement—Jesus leads them out to the Garden of Gethsemane. Let us follow him, and watch him becoming the victim of his heavenly Father’s justice...and deserted by all men.

### **God’s Justice**

God’s justice is terrible indeed! “There he stands, enrobed in majesty, girded with might! (Ps 92:1 Vulgate) and “his right hand is full of justice” (Ps 47:9 Vulgate). The Holy Spirit tells us so.

So how terrible this divine justice must be when it is inflicted by God on God himself, “on whom the Lord has laid the iniquity of us all!” (Is 53:6). Just think how the tender heart of Jesus feels as he prepares himself to receive the full force of the heavenly Father’s fury! He is no longer “the beloved Son in whom God is well pleased” (Lk 3:22). He now assumes the personification of sinners—and the sheer horror of the chastisement which awaits him is more than his human nature can bear. Steeped in suffering—crushed beneath the weight of this inexorable justice—he begs and implores for “this chalice to be removed from him” (Lk 22:42) because he cannot sustain its bitterness. Worst of all, he knows what he is about to undergo will be wasted on so many souls whose indifference will render it unprofitable. But God the Father turns a deaf ear to all his pleading. Justice must have its fill.

What can you do, my dear daughters? What can you do except deliver yourselves up to be victims with Jesus? Now is the time to stand there at his side and endeavor to disarm the very justice of God! You must sacrifice yourselves with him—thereby continuing his prayer in the

Garden—thereby expiating the multiple crimes which are constantly being committed against God’s goodness.

#### **Abandoned by Men**

But if Jesus is crushed beneath the weight of divine justice—what about the men for whom he has done so much? Surely they will not forget him! Surely they will stand by him at this terrible moment when he has to face his Father’s anger!

Not at all, my dear daughters, not at all! He took three of the Apostles with him (Mt 26:37): Peter, the apostle of faith (Lk 22:32) James, the apostle of hope (Mt 20:21) and John, the apostle of love (Jn 13:23). But they were overcome by sleep (Mk 14:40)—they didn’t understand or know what to answer—they provided neither comfort nor moral support. The three Apostles dropped off to sleep—the three virtues they were meant to personify gave him no comfort whatever at the time when he needed it most.

Learn from this to depend on nobody’s love, nobody’s help. There will be times when you will have to “go it alone.” Sacrifice everything—cling to nothing and nobody—offer yourself unconditionally for the love of a God who has left everything behind for your sake.

#### **The Angel of Comfort (Lk 22:43)**

So Jesus returned to his loneliness, and prayed more earnestly than ever. The heavenly Father’s justice remained inflexible...Our Lord was now suffering so much that he sweated blood...that blood which was to irrigate the Church—that Church which would be born of his Passion.

And at this moment when his Agony is at its very height, an angel steps out of the heavenly ranks and comes to bring him relief.

This angel is generally presumed to be Gabriel. His name signifies the strength of God. He had been sent to Zechariah to announce the birth of the Precursor of the Messiah (Lk 1:11)—then to Mary to greet her with the title, “Mother of God” (Lk 1:35). Now he is sent to comfort Jesus.

What a humiliation for God to have to be comforted by one of his own creatures! But Jesus accepts the comfort. He consents to be comforted for our sake, to show that he sometimes feels the way we do.

And here, my dear daughters, do you understand the privilege of your own mission? I am not giving you the job of an apostle. Theirs is to accompany the Saviour on his travels (Mk 3:4). But look at them now! They are asleep! (Mt 26:40). To you I am saying: “Go and comfort him!” You have been chosen to comfort your God when so many others have forgotten all about him. You, with your love for him, are to play the part of this angel of comfort.

I will go a step further. You are being called to a still more privileged role, that of representing Jesus himself. Throughout your life you are to re-echo his prayer in the Garden. It is a powerful prayer—it is a fertile prayer—it is a prayer most agreeable to God.

Notice, my daughters, how the angel comforts Our Savior—then goes away and leaves him. It has been but a temporary relief, lasting only a second or two. Learn how to die to yourself. Let your “prie-dieu” become an altar of sacrifice functioning day by day and all day long. Jesus saves souls by suffering and shedding his blood. You, his dedicated spouses, the very heart of his Church—you, in turn must, by shedding both your tears and your blood, cooperate with him in the sanctification and salvation of those for whom he did not refuse to suffer and die.

#### **The Raging of Hell**

And our God is not only crushed beneath the weight of his Father’s justice—not only deprived of all human solace. He has been handed over to the hatred of hell.

Satan had been permitted to torment him (Mt 4:1) though Satan didn’t know who he was—had he known, he would never have dared approach him. Satan returns to the attack.

So here we have the Saviour confronted with all that is most to be dreaded and feared: with the foreknowledge of a terrible death—with being abandoned by his heavenly Father—worst of all, with the certainty that his supreme sacrifice will be useless for so many souls persistent on their own damnation. The crimes of the entire human race are set before his vision. His heart is torn with unspeakable anguish. His strength cannot sustain the fearful onslaught with which he is faced by all the powers of darkness (Lk 22:53). Satan’s hour has come. All Our Savior’s love has been ignored and spat back in his face. Who can express his anguish in words?—Who can even begin to understand the extent and the depth of his inner torment?

Like Our Savior—and following the example of Our Savior—you too, my dear daughters, will have to face up to the powers of hell. And, believe me, hell will have no pity! Nothing will be spared to make you lose heart and give way to despair. You will often be tempted to abandon Jesus.

Ah! my daughters, let Our Savior teach you that it is by perseverance in prayer that you will be able to keep up your resistance (Lk 18:1). Let trial and torment never separate you from him. On the contrary: the harder the trial, the more bitter the torment, the deeper and more tenacious must be your love for him...until this love becomes the very meaning of your life, uniting you closer and closer to your God—enduring it all to please him...until the day comes when, at last, you possess him for evermore.

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*Holy Thursday 1862*

### **Three Characteristics of a True Adorer**

My Daughters,

I have gathered you here on this day, and at this time of day, when the Holy Eucharist was well and truly instituted. It is a day and a time of day, particularly appropriate to you, because each of you is an adorer, specially dedicated to loving and adoring Our Lord in the Eucharist.

So let us talk about what being an adorer means. Bound by holy vows as you are, you must, my dear daughters, have your specific characteristics: I name three of them.

I am going right up to heaven to illustrate the first characteristic of an adorer. But as we study it together, we must come to understand that, howsoever high heaven is, it is really only your starting-point.

#### **You are Seraphim**

Yes, my children—the intensity of your love makes you seraphim! Up there in heaven: high above the angels, archangels, thrones, dominations and powers (Eph 1:21; Col 1:16)—at the highest rung of the celestial ladder—we find the seraphim. They are ablaze with love, and never cease to proclaim this immortal hymn: “Holy! Holy! Holy!” (Is 6:3). Yes, my children, I do not hesitate to compare you to them. You too must be ablaze with the love of God. Yes, the life of an adorer here on earth must resemble that of the sanctuary lamp. Your hearts must be consumed with the love of God, and burning like flames.

Is your heart worthy of him who is the object of your love, and who is himself infinite? Your poor little heart, so limited in its natural scope, ceases to be limited as it expands into the limitless space of his infinite might. You yourself must set no limits to its expansion.

Don’t tell me I am asking for more than you can give, for something beyond your strength. I told you a few days ago that, by receiving Communion, you were receiving the very source of all sanctity, of all perfection, of all purity—the very source of all love.

So he is there, within your heart, the moment the sacred host touches your tongue. He is there to transfer his holiness, his purity, his love—to transfer it all to you. He has no other desire than your participation therein. So allow him to act—place no obstacle in his path—and let him kindle within your heart a love as burning and consuming as that of the seraphim themselves!

Allow Our Lord to assume ownership of your house. He will completely transform it. Love is a fire which burns—and in burning, it both consumes and purifies. Think of what there is to be burnt, to be consumed, to be purified within you. Surrender your heart to him, and he will see to it—and the more his fire consumes, the brighter it will blaze!

Yes, my children: you may aspire to equality with the holy angels, by the intensity of your love. Is not Mary, your mother, the Queen of all the angels? Does she not reign over them all? In her, these words of Scripture are accomplished: “You have placed him only a little lower than the

angels.” (Ps 8:6 Vulgate).

So let your life be, henceforth, an existence of love. Turn your heart into a brazing furnace—and then you will be really and truly an Adorer.

#### **You are Spouses**

And this, your second characteristic, may appear at first inferior to the first—but, as I see it, it is a step forward, as you will soon notice.

Your second characteristic, then, is your being spouses. Yes, my daughters, you are spouses, and of God! Have you ever reflected on what an intimate union this implies between God and yourself?

If, as seraphim, you must love God with all the intensity of a fiery spirit—as spouses you are called upon to identify yourselves with him. The words which the Church puts into the mouth of its ministers in the sacrament of marriage: “The two will be one flesh” (1 Cor 6:16) apply equally to you, my children. You and Our Lord will also be two in one flesh.

This prodigy of “two-in-one” is accomplished at its fullest when you receive him in Holy Communion. Jesus Christ takes possession of your body—and you are no longer two, but one. “He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood, abides in me and I in him” (Jn 6:57). What closer union is there than between bride and bridegroom? There is yours, my daughters, when by dedicated virginity you become spouses of Christ (2 Cor 11:2).

As you perceive, such a close union implies complete accord between the two parties. St. Augustine tells us that in a well-ordered household, the husband commands and the wife obeys. By taking these words seriously, and applying them with deep respect to our relationship with Our Lord, we learn much that is helpful about the submission and surrender which must characterize our attitude towards our own heavenly spouse. His wishes must be ours. Our joy must reach its fulfillment in pleasing him down to the last detail.

So, since Jesus Christ is your spouse, he is also your Master. He is entitled to command you. If you are his faithful spouse, your eyes will be continually fixed on his—you will anticipate his every desire—and whatever you do will be the application of his will, the will of him to whom you are bound by this most intimate of all bonds.

And this conviction, that by accepting whatever happens to you, you are submitting to the will of your heavenly spouse, will sustain and strengthen you on the way.

#### **You are Victims**

Your third characteristic, my dear daughters, is to be, each of you, a victim. The love of a seraph and the union of a spouse would amount to little or naught if it didn’t turn you into a victim with Jesus Christ. Love and union, to be genuine, demand continual self-sacrifice—and this immolation of self binds you so strongly to your Spouse, identifies you with him to such a degree, that you really and truly become “other Christs.”

Jesus Christ offers himself up on our altars—so would you be offering yourself if you too became a victim. See how this third characteristic excels the other two! The first commits you to a zealous and undivided love—the second to an absolute union of mind and heart with him you have chosen as your spouse. But by the third you commit yourself to constant collaboration and identification with him: by offering yourself up with him on the Cross—by the continual sacrifice, with him, of your heart, of your body, of your intellect and will, of your freedom, of everything you have and are.

This, my children, is what God must mean for you. Now ask yourself what you have done for him since you first became an adorer—dedicated to him so very specially by your sacred vows.

Our Lord, by bringing himself down to our human level, (Phil 2:7) has, out of love for us, placed himself under an obligation to us. What have you done for him in return? In what respect has your life become one of sacrifice, and you a victim?

Remember, my daughters, that your life of sacrifice, your status of victim, is something which will endure till death. You have vowed this to Our Lord—and he is a jealous God (Ex 20:5). He will always have extra sacrifices to impose on you. Woe to you if ever he ceases to demand additional sacrifices—it will be a sign of his beginning to reject you! And if ever, in the course of your life, a period of fervor is succeeded by a period of tepidity you must attribute this to your own lack of generosity, to your own refusal to offer him more!

#### **In Conclusion**

Examine yourselves seriously, my children. Go over the past. What should you have done, but didn't do? Then take a few serious resolutions—not general resolutions, because he who claims to have given everything has often given nothing at all. No, let them be precise resolutions, affecting the most important areas of your spiritual life. Some of you will take these resolutions spontaneously, with alacrity—good for them! Others will take them as a result of deep and prolonged reflection—good for them too! Your individual disposition will incline you to make your mind up at once or take your time over it. It doesn't matter, as long as you decide to do your best—as long as you are generous about it, serious about it, enthusiastic about it by really meaning it! You must all become seraphim by the warmth of your love—spouses by the fixity of your union—victims by your determination to sacrifice yourselves.

What matters is that you must never withdraw this gift of yourself. Heaven preserve me from the thought that, one day, one or other of you is going to look back and take back what she has promised to God!

No, you must keep on giving Our Lord more and more, better and better every day.

Reflect seriously on what God expects of a worthy adorer—above

all on what you promised him when you pronounced your vows. You will eventually reach a stage of such spiritual intimacy with Our Lord such as no words of mine could describe. You will be communicating and dealing directly with God about your own perfection and purification.

To sum it all up: what do you wish henceforth to turn into? What kind of seraphim, spouses and victims? Let seraphic love combine with marital fidelity, and together produce that complete self-sacrifice which will earn you everlasting place in the retinue of the sacrificed Lamb whose footsteps you have followed faithfully here below (Rv 7:15). Amen.

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*August 1862*

## Mental Prayer

Two chief means are at our disposal if we aim at direct contact with God. One is prayer—the other is communion. Today let us talk about prayer<sup>329</sup>.

### **God is All-powerful**

One of the reasons that our prayer is rendered sterile is our inadequate awareness of God's presence—of his greatness—of what he really is. God is power, light and love (1 Jn 4:16).

The power of God fills the universe. He is everywhere. We are in him. In him we live—in him we breathe as if in an immense ocean. Yes, we are encompassed by God, more than our bodies are encompassed by air—more than fish are encompassed by water.

So since we are encompassed by the Divinity, to the extent of being unable to think or act beyond his ambit (without, however, losing the personal liberty with which he has endowed us), how much more evident does this become when we cast off concern for anything else, and concentrate on the reality of his presence (Ps 138:1-9 Vulgate). Therefore, his presence should penetrate us with the sentiment of total dependence on him—and this gives our prayer, our adoration, a force and intensity it could not otherwise possess.

In recognizing the infinite extent of God's sovereign dominion over us and all we do—what will happen to all those foolish fantasies in which we habitually indulge? Yes, my daughters, allow me to repeat it over and over again: we never treat God with sufficient respect—we never take him

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<sup>329</sup> editor's note: By which Father d'Alzon means mental prayer, as distinguished from vocal prayer. We can call it private, personal, reflective prayer, or meditation. It's also be called "The raising of our heart and mind to God." The French call it "oraison," for which word we have yet to find a satisfactory translation.



seriously enough. We give ourselves over to him and then we take back half of what we have given. We decide how far to go. We limit the sacrifices we are prepared to make. We forget that God is our supreme master—that we belong to him—that we live in him, that he is the constant witness of our every thought, that he knows every time we feel like becoming independent, and every time we are tempted to revolt.... We seem to assume the right to bargain with him—to tell him: “Look here, Lord. I accept your sovereignty—but in return, kindly give me this, that or the other thing.”

Because whether we accept it or not, God’s rights over us are as unlimited as they are real. His power which encompasses us on every side is going to lead us, whether we like it or not, wherever he wishes us to go. So why not give in, and allow him free rein? Let us accept his complete and unconditional authority. Let us be prepared for whatever he demands, because he has a perfect right to insist upon it. It doesn’t matter what we do, or what becomes of us, provided we are accomplishing his will.

#### **God is Light**

Yes, God is essentially light. He alone knows exactly who is who, and what is what. Light with no trace of a shadow. Wisdom all-penetrating. This light, this wisdom, is such that neither you nor I could look it in the face. We would be dazzled. We would be scorched. We would be annihilated there and then!

So when God manifests himself to us, he measures his manifestation to as much as we are able to take—to the dimness of our vision and the weakness of our intellect. Nevertheless, our spiritual vision and understanding can be stretched—and it is up to us to extend their scope. So, when we pray, we must ask God for the help we need, in order to see clearer and comprehend better. We must ask Divine Wisdom to teach us to look on things from God’s perspective, to judge and appreciate persons and events from God’s point of view.

If during our prayer we forced ourselves to draw nearer to the source of all light, then our eyes would begin to pierce the cloud of mystery. Then we would begin to discover within ourselves forces hitherto ignored. Raising our sights higher and higher, we would begin to understand God better and better—we would begin to make headway into the secret corridors of his “house where there are many dwelling places” (Jn 14:2), to delve into the storehouse of his inexhaustible treasury. Yes, my daughters: if only we ceased to obstruct the passage of these rays of heavenly light—if only we could begin to forget about ourselves and think about him instead, leaving aside our constant preoccupation with what worries and upsets us, then we would find ourselves diving deeper and deeper into the fathomless waters of adoration! What is adoration, after all? It’s the recognition that we belong to him, and that his dominion over us knows and accepts no limits. We would lose ourselves in him!

We would thereby acquire that strength, that freedom of movement

so sadly lacking in our present condition. Fortified and enlightened, we would then become capable of following him wherever he chooses to lead us, and accomplishing any task whatsoever which he wishes us to do.

#### **The Love of God**

God is not only the supreme power, not only the supreme light—He is also the supreme love.

How little we know this love: watching over us all the time—surrounding us with such care and solicitude—sending us grace after grace—and inviting us to share his supreme happiness for ever and ever!

It is, indeed, the most terrifying of all tragedies that such a love should be so little known! How few hearts it fills! We give him but a fragment of our own—keeping the rest for ourselves and other creatures. And we do this with such carelessness and lack of concern that we obviously attach little importance to being loved by God!

Ought not every single human being be overwhelmed by the thought that God loves him or her so much? Ought not every moment of every human life be one continual act of thanksgiving and loving in return?

It isn't! People are interested in politics—in science—in money-making—in love-making, but as for being interested in God? Never or hardly ever!

And without having to look any further, my dear daughters, what about us? We who have been favored with so many graces, we who receive Our Lord so often, can we call the life we lead a life of love? It is astonishing—it is incomprehensible, that we should be so frosty and indifferent—so keen on our creature-comforts—so full of self: we who kneel at Our Lord's feet—at the feet of the God whom we come to adore, and whom we ought to love with our whole and entire heart!

So let our prayer henceforth be taken seriously. Let us surrender to God's power, for him to do what he likes with us. Let us surrender to his light, for him to enlighten us as regards our own wretchedness—as regards the nothingness of creatures, and the “everythingness” of God. And let us surrender to his love, for him to enter into our hearts, and there reign supreme. Amen.

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*September 29, 1862*

*Feast of St. Michael*

### **Similar to the Angels**

The feast we celebrate today provides me with an opportunity for developing this chain of thought which fits in perfectly with all our previous instructions: that, being virgins, you ought to be similar to the angels.

The angels, my dear daughters, are pure and obedient. They carry

out God's orders. They sing his praises. They have other attributes, but these four will do.

1° *The angels are pure.* By her purity, a virgin ought to be an angel. The angels are free of all bondage, and exempt from all attachment. They are concerned with nothing but loving God, giving him glory, and dedicating themselves to his service.

Similarly, the virgin must be free of all bondage, detached from all creatures, and pre-occupied with God's service and his alone. Her heart belongs to God and no one else.

So this, my daughters, is how you ought to be. Have you ever thought about it seriously?

The angels were submitted to a test. They experienced the temptation of pride—but no other kind of temptation ever assailed them. So it is not from this point of view that I suggest their purity as a model of yours—you, unlike them, are subject to other kinds of temptation. It is from the point of view of their detachment. I could also apply to you what is written about the priest Melchisedech (Heb 7:3). He had no father or mother or ancestors—he belonged to God alone. An ordinary bride leaves her father and mother, and attaches herself to her husband. But you are “extraordinary” brides, similar to the angels. You attach yourselves to your one spouse who is Christ—no earthly spouse is involved. Christ is all yours, and you are all his.

You must, therefore sacrifice everything and everybody else who could possibly have a hold over your heart. Similar to the angels, you must be free of all bondage—of every attachment, of every affection—so as to be ever ready to go where the Lord sends you.

To acquire such freedom, you will not have to go away to some remote spot—to become Trappistines. No, it is a simple question of pursuing your present occupations—but with as much love for Our Lord as you are capable of, and with the purest possible motivation. Such is true perfection—it's something which dwells in the heart. It's nothing else than an immense desire to please God—the greater this desire, the more closely you will resemble the angels.

2° *The Angels are obedient.* Where can we find obedience so prompt, so genuine, so complete, as that of the angels? At the least sign of God's will, they rush forward, they hasten to accomplish it. They are burning with zeal for its accomplishment—always and everywhere but especially in their own behavior, and this is the point upon which I wish to insist.

A dedicated virgin cares for nothing more than the will of her divine spouse. She longs for nothing more than that his will be accomplished in all things—but especially in herself. So if you are genuine spouses of Christ—if your heart is detached from everything else, to belong to him alone—then it will be impossible for the will of your divine spouse not to re-echo and reverberate in the very depths of your soul. A thousand sacrifices will be

asked of you. Like St. Peter, you will be girded around and taken where you fear to go (Jn 21:18). God will take everything away, so as to bind you closer to him.

So be it. Nothing must take priority over the accomplishment of God's will in the work of your perfection. You yourself must be as eager and submissive about it, as to rival the enthusiastic obedience of the angels.

You must be eager to cut everything out of your life which could possibly displease your divine spouse—eager, above all, to submit to the purifying process of his love—cleansing flame which will consume and destroy everything within you which prevents your becoming like the angels.

3° *The Angels carry out God's orders.* Their very name makes this clear—the word “angel” means a messenger. The angels, assembled around God's throne, are ready to leave at a moment's notice, and travel to the end of the earth.

As dedicated virgins, my dear daughters, you too have an outward mission to accomplish. You are God's envoys on earth: to manifest his will by whatever you do—by your gentleness, your patience, your humility; in other words, by the example of every virtue it is your duty to exemplify. Your very body belongs to God—every one of its members must be at his disposal, to bring him glory and extend his Kingdom. Yours is a mission of edification, of building up the Kingdom.

From the crown of your head to the soles of your feet (if I may thus express myself) you are God's property. Let me, however, stress the importance of your tongue and your feet. You must walk and you must talk. You must go wherever God sends you, and there, like Jonah (Jon 3), you must say whatever God bids you. You have no wings—but you do have a tongue and you do have feet. So go and express God's orders!

Above all, you will truly be God's messengers by leading a completely angelic life.

4° *The Angels sing God's praises.* And what else has the dedicated virgin, the Adorer, to do, except praise and give glory to God? This is her vocation.

So you are called, my dear daughters, to glorify the Lord (Lk 1:46) and everything in you must be submitted to this primary role. The angels assemble in their millions around God's throne—singing his praises for ever and ever, burning with love for him as they gather prostrate at his feet.

As virgins you enjoy the same privileges on earth as they do in heaven. Here you are, then, assembled round his earthly throne—loving him, intimately united with him.

You can rival the angels. You can even surpass them. One day you will be able to tell them: “Allow me, Angels, to sit with you. I am your sister. I am (if I dare say so) your elder sister. Is not Mary my mother the Queen of all the angels? As a virgin—as Christ's own spouse—am I not entitled, not only to stand by God's throne, but to share in his kingship?”

So you see, my dear daughters, that you can become not only equal to the angels, but greater! You can achieve this by the intensity of your love—by the extent of your detachment from earthly things—by the closeness of your union with God—a union which begins by receiving Our Lord in Holy Communion, and continues forever up above. What is God's by his very nature, can become yours as the result of his grace.

Be ambitious, my daughters. Become as good as the angels and even better. Be ambitious—rival the angels! This rivalry is something I not only permit but desire.

Be jealous even—with a holy jealousy: jealous of their purity by the extent of your detachment and the warmth of your love. Be jealous of their obedience by your refusal ever to compromise with the silent propulsion of his grace. Be jealous of their zeal and enthusiasm by your eagerness to carry out God's orders—by turning your earthly existence into a continual manifestation of these divine precepts. And be jealous—let your heart overflow with this divine jealousy—by turning everything that comes your way into an occasion to give glory to God...and thus may your life be nothing else than a continual, unceasing act of love and adoration. Amen.

## V. ASSUMPTION COLLEGE

*A first series of documents contains a choice of orders and directives addressed to the priests and lay teachers of Assumption College at Nimes. Since 1845 they had become a Third Order. The documents had been classified under four headings:*

*1° Rules of the Association*

*2° The Work of the Association*

*3° Religious Mindset and Secular Mindset*

*4° Frankness*

*The second series of documents includes several instructions addressed to the students of the College toward the end of the Founder's life*



## ***I. Principles of the Association***

*At the meeting on December 27, 1845 Father d'Alzon presented the Rule of the College Teachers' Association. That Association was a prelude to the foundation of the Assumption Congregation and of its Third-Order. The spirit of the new Association was reached, as one will see, during the course of the meetings organized by the founder.*

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### **Rules of the Association**

#### **The Goal of the Association**

The members of Assumption's Association set a twofold goal for themselves, which can be summarized in a single goal: the glory of God and the salvation of their souls by the extension of the reign of Jesus Christ. In that sense, their motto could be this: *Adveniat regnum tuum* (Thy Kingdom Come). The means that they propose for themselves are as follows:

- 1° To seek the help which comes from fraternal collaboration;
- 2° To seek victory over themselves by submission to a rule;
- 3° To protest against the life of the world by a more rigorous life;
- 4° To bring about the reign of Jesus Christ by the evangelization of souls.

#### **The Spirit of the Association**

1° Their spirit is a spirit of love towards our Lord, model and perpetual example for all the associates.

2° A spirit of compassionate and paternal charity towards souls.

3° A spirit of frankness, of openness, and of liberty in the accomplishment of their duties and in their relations towards the Brothers.

4° A spirit of poverty among themselves, which will be their principal mortification.

#### **Members of the Association**

There will be two classes of associates: those who live in the house and those who live outside it and who may even be married. Both categories must adopt as much as possible the spirit of religious life. They must consider themselves as religious in the midst of the world, not standing out by their clothing, but by their mores, by their way of living; not

by certain practices more or less acceptable to all, but by their outstanding virtues.

Henceforth, the associates must be profoundly convinced that, according to the beautiful words of the Abbot de Rancé<sup>330</sup>, religious must be angels, martyrs and apostles: angels by the purity of their life, of their intentions and the fervor of their prayer; martyrs by their generosity in struggling against the devil, the flesh and the world; apostles both by their supernatural zeal to make Jesus Christ known, the eternal truth and the eternal law manifested in time by the mercy of God, and by the continual meditation that they must make on the price of souls and on the honor to which they are called to glorify God by preparing adorers for him.

The associates living in the world must understand to what dangers their fervor is exposed by continual contact with this world, for which Jesus Christ did not pray. Because Jesus did not include the world in his prayer, the associates will recognize the necessity of being humble and of mistrusting their own strength. Likewise, the falls they may take will inspire in them a greater disdain of themselves when they are alone, but a greater confidence in God in whom they can do all things, and a greater confidence in his goodness which supports them by the help they find in the company of their Brothers, according to that expression of the Holy Spirit: *frater qui adiuvatur a fratre quasi civitas firma*; a brother that is helped by his brother, is like a strong city (Prov 18:19).

The associates who live in the house, raising themselves unceasingly to thoughts of faith, will thank God for having made them understand to what they are called and they will continuously ask for new lights by their prayer. Recalling that they form, properly speaking, the central point around which the entire work, in some way, turns and that they are the foundation of the edifice that one proposes to construct to the glory of God and of which the souls who are confided to us are like living stones, they will cement by the bonds of charity the entire union with the keystone par excellence, Our Lord: *ipso summo angulari lapide*; himself being the chief cornerstone (Eph 2:20).

They will consult the Holy Spirit by prayer, in order that he may grant his lights to them and that they may know to what degree of perfection the grace of God is calling them.

#### **Exterior Means**

The exterior means are 1° education, 2° preaching, 3° the writing of Christian literature, 4° the application of the Christian spirit to the arts. But because everything must be considered from the point of view of the Association, it is important to declare first of all that these four principal activities –in order to be understood in the way that we understand them—

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<sup>330</sup> Abbot de Rancé (1626-1700) was abbot at La Trappe in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. He was known as the “stormy” abbot because of the strict reforms he introduced. He also authored a number of spiritual treatises.



need explanations which will be given later on.

#### **On Admission to the Association**

The Director chooses members eligible to be admitted after they are presented to him by members who have already made their profession

The conditions for admission are;

1° To have attained a reasonable age, at least between eighteen and twenty.

2° To belong to an educated class.

3° To be resolved to take as the goal of his life the glory of God, the extension of the reign of Jesus Christ, and the well-being of souls.

The Director does not need to consult the Council to admit candidates to probation. From the various members of the Association he gathers the necessary information to judge whether or not the proposed members combine the necessary criteria and qualities. During the time of probation, the master of novices and the prior are charged with the responsibility of examining the postulants more closely and of having discussions with them in order to know them better, to put them into relation with the other Brothers and to have them come to the assemblies, where they will, however, only attend the recitation of the office. At the end of several months of probation they may be received into the novitiate by the Director, who will take the advice of the Council in which he has the predominant vote.

[...]

We will proceed in the same way for the profession of vows, which will be authorized by the vote of the Council upon the indispensable recommendation of the Director, ordinarily one year after admission to the novitiate. This profession is only made for a year. After having renewed their profession for ten years in a row, the Brothers can be authorized to take perpetual vows. On receiving the Brothers into the novitiate, one will give them a New Testament and a crucifix. The Brothers will ordinarily wear the crucifix under their habit.

#### **Obligations**

By the profession of obedience to the rule, the Brothers make the following commitments:

1° To obey the Director with respect to all works that can be called spiritual, that is to say, which have a direct relation to the service of God and neighbor. The Director, however, may not impose on the Brothers works which they are reluctant to embrace, but the choice is left to them, on the condition that they don't undertake any works that would appeal to them without permission.

2° With respect to poverty the Brothers and Sisters will follow poverty of spirit; they will practice it by regulating their state of life in a way somewhat below than above their means, in order that the poor may derive profit therefrom. They will observe a great Christian simplicity and

Christian modesty in their dress. They will only wear plain colors and they will be obliged by their profession not to wear any jewelry at all. In objects of devotion where the world has no rights at all, they will observe poverty more particularly, having only such things that are suitable for religious.

3° With respect to chastity the Brothers are committed to observe the kind of chastity that is fitting for their state, and if they become widows, not to remarry, unless they have the express permission of the directors.

4° In addition to the commitment that profession includes, the Brothers can, with the permission of the Director, take simple vows of poverty, chastity and obedience on an annual basis. They may even take a fourth vow of dedicating themselves to extend the reign of Jesus Christ into the life of souls.

Every day the Brothers will recite the office of Jesus, unless they recite the Divine Office of the Church. They will give at least a half hour to prayer and a half hour to serious reading that they will have their Director suggest to them; and, in order to acquire more perfectly the Christian spirit that they must work to communicate, they will read each day a chapter of the New Testament, on their knees as far as possible. They will fast on the vigil of the following four feasts: the solemnity of Jesus on January 28, the Blessed Sacrament, the Nativity and the Conception of the Holy Virgin. They will have four communions: on the feasts of Christmas, the Blessed Sacrament, the Assumption, and the solemnity of Jesus. They are committed, besides, to approach the sacraments as frequently as possible and that their confessors judge appropriate.

The Brothers are forbidden to go to worldly feasts, balls, theater performances and the like, and great banquets, except for those events allowed by the Director.

One of the most important duties for the Brothers is to keep watch over their house, inasmuch as their position allows them to do so; to establish there Christian customs, and as much as possible, to pray in common, to observe the Church's laws, to ban bad books and bad speeches, not to tolerate there any kind of scandal, to put order into their affairs, even their temporal affairs, and to apply themselves in a special way to the Christian education of their children.

When the Brothers leave the city in which they are living, they will inform the Director.

When a Brother is sick, the Director will instruct the nurse to go visit him and, in addition, will designate each day two Brothers to visit him and to console him as God would do. If a member of the association dies, the priests will say a mass and the other Brothers will recite the Office of the Dead once for the repose of his soul

#### **Organization**

The Brothers will be under the supervision of a Director. In addition, they will elect a prior annually, whose responsibility is to preside

over the meetings in the absence of the Director, to supervise the Brothers and to direct them in zealous works that they have undertaken outside their residence. The prior will be helped in his functions by a sub-prior, a master of novices, a nurse, a treasurer, and a secretary, who will be chosen annually by the Association and will form the Council

The Director will be able to dispense the Brothers from fasts and other points of the Rule for serious reasons. He will even be able to give the power of dispensation to the prior.

#### **Meetings**

Every fifteen days there will be a meeting at the hour and place designated by the Director. After mass—if it is in the morning—the recitation of the office, and the exhortation that will be given to them by the Director, the Brothers will accuse themselves of faults they may have committed against the Rule. After the chapter of faults, the Brothers gathered under the chairmanship of the Director will see to what pertains to the good of the Association and the advancement of the good works for which they are responsible.

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## **The Work of the Assumption**

*December 27, 1845*

Fr. d'Alzon directs our attention to the commitments that we wish to take on, each commitment according to our position and our particular dispositions, on consecrating ourselves to the work of the Assumption.

#### **Its goal**

The goal that we propose to reach is already known to us. Deprived today of the influence that Religious Orders used to exercise on public education, the Church, nevertheless, could not renounce its most legitimate rights in such a serious matter. In the face of current prejudices the Church can make the sacrifice of some religious orders against which are raised unjust but invincible antipathies, but she must not abandon the deposit of faith which perishes in alien hands, who mean to seize it from her. The Church must save this faith and preserve it at all cost for the generations that are rising up before our eyes.

If people don't want Religious Orders to be involved in education, let priests and the laity unite in a common spirit of devotion in order to realize, God willing, what these same Religious Orders had undertaken, namely, to contribute, by the Christian education of youth, to the advancement of the reign of Jesus Christ. We will try this union of priests and laity. Will we succeed? Let's not worry about the future. Let us go in a spirit of faith, of devotion, of holiness and prayer. Let us be patient and

prudent, and our work will develop by itself, with the aid of God.

#### **Its members**

For the moment we are going to begin by constituting ourselves into a community, a first outline of that association of priests and lay persons. Some impose on themselves the rules of religious life; others try their hand in the novitiate of a Third Order; all reunite in the same communication of charitable influence, mutually edifying each other.

This separation becomes necessary in our association, since we wish to impress on it a religious character. But if that distinguishes us, it does not disunite us. It is only a more abundant exchange of prayers and good example that will take root among us. There will be neither censors nor monitors, only more faithful and more devoted friends, helping one another, in charity, to practice all the Christian virtues. This charity, which will be our rule and our duty, will tighten the bonds that unite us, far from weakening them. It will especially smooth out the difficulties of this new common life, which is nevertheless distinct. In the middle of diverse elements that could make up this new common life, it will be able to form a hidden unity which will bring all closer together.

#### **Its spirit**

With the union thus maintained and fortified among us, in what spirit will the Association develop? It is entirely focused on the goal that it proposes for itself: the extension of the reign of Jesus Christ. Openness of heart and frankness, these amiable virtues that gain souls and that charity inspires, science which instructs, truth which enlightens, especially zeal, faith, and devotion which make sacrifices easy and triumph over obstacles, such ought to be our means of action and influence. Poverty and obedience, among other virtues, will aid the Association in this difficult and laborious apostolate.

Poverty will know how to limit its action wisely, and by restricting its action, poverty extends the scope of that action and preserves it from ambition. In the spirit of poverty it will apply itself to do whatever it has decided to do in the best way possible, before multiplying the elements of its action as much as possible. Obedience, not obedience to this or that person, but to Jesus Christ; in a simple imitation of Jesus Christ, obedience in everything, everywhere, in the children to form as in the Rule to follow; obedience enlightened by faith, disciplining the will and the intelligence, without weakening the one and extinguishing the other. The free and spontaneous obedience submitted to God alone, giving a supernatural character to all actions by an elevated sentiment of faith, will double the energy of the will liberated from pride by humility, and in a free, persevering and conscientious development, will enrich the intelligence, voluntarily ordered and obedient.

## Religious Mindset and Secular Mindset

*June 28, 1846*

Fr. d'Alzon examines the question of uniting the lay spirit with the ecclesiastical spirit.

### **No fundamental opposition**

Is there any opposition between the ecclesiastical spirit and the lay spirit? Assuredly, there ought not to be any kind of opposition. As Christians, we are all one; we are all the same body since we all participate in the same Eucharistic bread. Certainly, the ministries are different. Now these varied ministries only establish nuances, not at all oppositions. If the ecclesiastical spirit is in itself higher and more sublime, if the priest can and must offer a more perfect model of holiness and devotion, spiritual graces can equally abound and do abound in the laity who can aspire as an individual to the perfection of the priest and even surpass that perfection. St. Louis and so many others are illustrious examples of this phenomenon.

To focus on particular aptitudes, the graces that God pours into the heart of the priest, certainly give him more influence and power for the education of souls. But must one conclude from this fact that the priest alone can act on souls? Obviously this would be an illegitimate conclusion to draw. Furthermore, lay persons and the clergy share the same functions, as in teaching itself, where it would be excessive to admit only the laity, thus reserving to him the profane, while abandoning the sacred to the priesthood. Real oppositions exist in the faults peculiar to the ecclesiastical and lay spirit.

### **But diverging tendencies**

Father d'Alzon approaches this delicate question with frankness after having made the necessary reservations. He points out in the ecclesiastical spirit an inclination to pride, to domination, to isolation and to ignorance; he highlights in the lay spirit the abuses of ignorance and independence.

#### **a. The pride of priests**

The very sentiment of the height and the sublimity of his ministry inclines the priest to a spirit of domination. Man glories in himself at the sight of the power in which he is clothed by Jesus Christ. He takes pleasure in exercising this power and is inclined to appropriate that which is only on loan to him. The power comes to him from Jesus Christ, but he lets himself believe that he can make human use of it. He tends to take hold of priestly power and to make use of it as a right. Whether one is named Luther or Pope Gregory VII, these tendencies are natural in the exercise of power considered from a human point of view. One wishes to attract to oneself, to concentrate and to absorb in oneself that which can appear legitimately

below oneself and dependent. Here is the whole crux of the perpetual struggles between temporal power and spiritual power; one and the other power are led to invade the province of the other. Now, the priesthood has merited this reproach; one must courageously acknowledge it, after having made allowances for the unworthy calumnies of the Church's enemies. The priesthood has wished to dominate, it has wished to be served. As a ministry, the priesthood exercises a social function; in doing so, it has relations and communications with society. Several times the priesthood has ceased to envisage the duty of these legitimate and necessary relations; it has considered them as an absolute right. As a result, you have opposition, struggles, deplorable friction, which have ended up with the separation and isolation of our days

#### **Isolation**

It is advantageous isolation in a sense, since it has extricated the priesthood from the influence of social vices. But in a sense isolation is also harmful and regrettable, because it has placed the clergy outside of society, which is no longer exposed to the useful influence of the religious spirit by the constant action of the priesthood. The priesthood itself, withdrawn from all contact with society, ends up ignoring the needs, the exigencies, the real situation and becomes more and more a stranger to society in its solitude.

#### **Ignorance**

Ignorance leads to a deplorable powerlessness. The word of the priest has become a dead word. His language is a foreign language. How can he attract society to himself, if he no longer knows it? He comes to answer objections that no longer exist. He refutes forgotten errors, which are replaced by other errors and other objections. He opposes theological science to religious ignorance, but the other sciences raise their difficulties, and he has not approached the study of these sciences which are fighting against him and of which he could make for himself powerful auxiliary aids. He remains devoted to mysticism, while people ask of him facts, history, demonstrations and reasoning. He no longer has the ear of the crowd; he has only kept an audience of devoted followers. Humanity escapes him and he is unaware of it.

This evil is reparable. It is a question of resisting those pernicious tendencies to be proud, isolated, and ignorant. It is no longer a question of dominating. To build on the spirit of domination is to ruin the work undertaken. There is too much independence around us, too much resistance to absolutism. It is necessary to lower oneself voluntarily, to make oneself a layman in a certain sense, to handle carefully a going over to the lay perspective and even a fusion of the clerical and lay perspectives. It is necessary to resume interrupted communications, to breathe the air of society, all the while isolating oneself by living a religious life. We must no longer study that which is dead, but that which is alive, to familiarize ourselves with objections of all sorts, to get used to current language, to

current ideas.

**b. With the laity**

Pride, isolation, ignorance in the life of the priest; independence, revolt, profound ignorance in the life of the laity. The lay person wants to secularize everything. As much as the priesthood inclines to integration, so much does the lay spirit incline towards the dissolution of every unity. From there arise awful disruptions, exhaustion, the ruin of the principle of authority and an inevitable anarchy. Revolt of the lay spirit; ignorance without measure. The ecclesiastical spirit has withdrawn from humanity, or at least has shared little with it. The lay spirit has not at all engaged itself with Christian society. As a result, appalling nonsense and incredible blunders result. And one has seen some elite intellectuals leave the Church because they failed to study their catechism.

The lay spirit contains elements of death; it also contains elements of life. There is great profit in withdrawing from the ardor which inspires its investigations of all sorts, with that curiosity which makes it pursue the solution of all problems and beckons it to plunge into the ultimate depths of science. It is necessary to transform this misdirected and hostile curiosity into a wholesome curiosity, devoted and armed with the flame of faith, to use it in the study of religion, sciences and letters in view of defending religion and supporting the truth.

**Neutralization of these tendencies**

The oppositions which are inherent in the particular faults of one and the other spirit will therefore cease once they mutually temper one another in daily reconciliation. This is the practical goal of our Association. An Order desires unity and unity is the fruit of obedience. The spirit of domination disappears as soon as it is counterbalanced by the spirit of obedience. As priest, the priest in the Association ought to command; as a simple member, a simple religious, he strips himself of the power to command and becomes a lay person again. Our Association gives us the means to adopt the frank and free behaviors of the laity. The lay person gives them himself and communicates them to the priest. Hence, a merciful, good and understanding spirit is accepted to some extent. The priest unites himself to the lay person without being frightened of what he has been, without basing his opinion on the past, but envisaging only the happy consequences of bringing together the laity and the priest. By joining with the laity he enters into communication again with the world; he gets used to its language; he learns to lead people to contemplate the truth from an acceptable point of view.

Everything then is put back into place in the spirit of Jesus Christ. One makes oneself all things to all people through charity. One no longer appropriates the good for oneself; one no longer makes a monopoly of it. One draws benefits from science, study and work in order to assimilate for oneself the progress of the human spirit. In liberty and in frankness one

obeys in a Christian way. The spirit of domination declines, relaxes, becomes humility; the spirit of revolt submits, is dealt with, and becomes obedience. Isolation ceases and separation no longer exists. Everything is united in a pleasant and peaceful harmony.

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## Frankness

*November 15, 1846*

Out of the midst of the bad ideas which the Revolutions have brought us, one excellent principle of conduct has nevertheless been given to us...frankness. In social relations it is what the world needs today. To say what one is, sincerely, without any ulterior motive, is to gain esteem and confidence, if not sympathy and approval. This frankness particularly suits the Catholic: it is his character, it is his duty. Let us bless God for having obliged us to face the world with this frankness and freedom. The Christian today can profess his faith publically without being suspected of serving his own interests and of seeking success as one might have suspected him of doing at a time when the State protected religion. Christians are no longer protected today. On the contrary we have to protect our faith and cause it to be respected. It is a serious duty for us to present ourselves as Christians in the public square; it is appropriate in the actual state of mores. We must be frankly and openly Catholic.

Let us show ourselves as such. Now, there are several ways to present ourselves as Christians. "*Qui fecerit et docuerit vocabitur magnus; whoever obeys and teaches these commandments will be called greatest [in the kingdom of heaven]*" (Mt 5:19). It is the advice that Our Lord himself gives to us. Whether we be learned or eloquent in teaching religion, our labor will be sterile and we will be infinitely small before God... "*Minimus vocabitur in regno coelorum; Whoever then relaxes one of the least of these commandments (and teaches men so), shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven*" (Mt 5:19). We will be of very little value before men, who will only see in us talkers and people with ready-made answers without real conviction. It is necessary to add to the word of faith the practice of the faith: "*Qui fecerit et docuerit; whoever obeys the commandments and teaches them...*" Therefore, the practice of the faith is necessary. One admits this, but would not want the practice of the faith to be outwardly visible. One believes that it would be more useful not to make visible the practice of the faith. In a word, one would like to be an apostle without appearing to be one. There is only one response to this difficulty: let us remain frank in order to be of our time. The situation that has been created for us permits us to act frankly. May our preaching be frank. Certainly no petty devotions, no overabundant practices, no excessive mortifications: but



practices nevertheless, strong and Catholic practices. Let us not be half-hearted Christians. Let us show ourselves all of a piece. Several years ago, the Knights of the Holy Spirit<sup>331</sup> publically staged a series of public religious demonstrations. That didn't shock anyone. Why not do the same? But if these practices are no longer in fashion, then it is necessary to reinstate them. That is precisely what we are all about.

Frankness places us once again into a life of courage, action, and struggle. Let us not decline this honor. To pose the question simply: Do we wish to be driven by the mores of the day? If so, then, let us wipe from our foreheads the signs that reveal the Christian in us. Do you wish on the contrary to bring the mores to the level of Christianity? Then let us show ourselves to be Christian and do today what it was permitted to do at another time. Let us get back to our forgotten good habits. After all, would not the exaggerations of the anti-Christian mores give us the right, in a certain sense, to position ourselves to engage in an excess of good? Since incredulity hurls us to the extreme of evil, would we not have every right to go to the extreme of good? This is what the spirit of the first ages of Christianity was all about and if we interrogate the history of the progress of the Christian religion, we will find that it conquered paganism because our fathers in the faith placed themselves frankly in opposition to pagan mores.

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<sup>331</sup> A Catholic men's organization, akin to the Knights of Columbus.

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## ***II. Spiritual Guidelines: The Virtues of a Good Teacher***

*Fr. d'Alzon made special efforts himself to develop in his college teachers a lucid, generous and practical piety, wholly oriented toward the coming of the Kingdom of our Lord in the souls of the students confided to their care. These first instructions have been conserved for us through the attentiveness of Mr. Monnier, one of the most distinguished and pious teachers of the College, who was to die prematurely in 1856.*

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### **Seriousness**

*January 17, 1847*

#### **I. Seriousness**

In what does seriousness consist? It cannot be a question here of that gravity the intolerable excess of which slips into pedantry. The gravity recommended by the Abbé de la Salle to his disciples is not at all the gravity in which we have to be formed. In the Christian schools, it suffices for the Brothers to attain a certain seriousness, a certain behavior, which takes hold of the coarse natures of their pupils and requires them to display a respectful fear. The teacher who addresses the upper classes must bring some modifications to this kind of gravity. The one that he will adopt will retain something of the gravity of the disciple of the Abbé de la Salle, but an interior gravity. It will be like a radiance of interior gravity which, reflected in all his actions, penetrates his pupils with respect

Interior gravity! Let us notice that the most serious occupations actually don't cause gravity. The character of men occupied with serious things is not for that reason neither more grave, nor more serious. It is a deplorable result of the indulgent mores of our time. Today, one is singularly disposed to flightiness of character; one does not know how to give things all the importance they deserve and raise them to Christian seriousness. Therefore, every man who doesn't have a Christian spirit is, therefore, no matter what he does, always thoughtless with respect to something.

Nor does gravity consist in a certain dignity, a certain majesty of habits; in that case, it is only a quality, assuredly something felicitous, desirable in every regard; but it is not the virtue of gravity. One does not sense here that constancy, those energetic efforts with the aid of which, placing ourselves in a Christian spirit, we arrive at envisaging everything

seriously, gravely...From this point of view gravity is then the thought of salvation powerfully imprinted on all our acts, religious thought, the remembrance of God, the constant preoccupation with the goal of life.

#### **II. Personal salvation**

If every man who does not give to these ideas the attention that they merit is not a serious man, it follows that salvation, not being solely the work of an isolated act, but of acts of an individual's entire life, everything, consequently, acquires a gravity, no doubt a relative gravity, but in the end something very positive. Simple entertainment, every permitted distraction, must at all times be envisaged seriously and marked with gravity. Neglecting to bring some seriousness into every detail of one's life is then again to lose one's time, and God will ask us all for an explanation for our lost time, since we will have to answer to him for any word that is useless. We fail to fulfill an important duty when we don't get our will used to uniting the deeds, the acts, the thoughts of our entire life to the work of our salvation. The merchant takes his business seriously. He seriously calculates every step, every commitment; that is his mindset. If our calculations, our step, our commitments will all in the end contribute to our condemnation or to our eternal reward, do we wish to put into our profession as Christians less seriousness than the merchant puts into his affairs?

#### **III. Salvation of souls.**

Another consequence of gravity from the Christian point of view— If the work of our salvation is united to the work for the salvation of others, the responsibility for each one of our acts augments the stakes for purgatory. We are gambling with our eternity; we are speculating on the future of our soul. But we still have in our hands the salvation of several souls. This matter becomes entirely serious. As fathers of a family, we become serious in the measure that we become more preoccupied with the future of our children, of their position, of their success in the world. In the face of eternity, how much more our concern must grow! For priests-religious, must not their responsibility become equally serious! If it has its glory, it also has its burden. How many sacrifices are imposed on us! How many obligations spring up for us! But in regard to God and eternity, our duties towards all, in relation to ourselves, in relation to the souls confided to us, take on a character that is extremely serious; we must convince ourselves more and more of this.

#### **IV. The Example of Christ.**

Here is a sad condition, the result of our weakness...superficiality dominates us and nature always takes the upper hand. Let us examine the past years of our life, these years of which there only remains a memory of reward or punishment for eternity. How did we use these moments that passed so rapidly and slipped so quick so soon from our hands? They all served as opportunities to contribute to our eternal glory or eternal

confusion! It is worthwhile to weigh these thoughts. They help us to understand and to define for ourselves Christian gravity. They maintain us in a constant seriousness: they easily help us surmount moral laxity as soon as we indulge in distraction or carelessness. Let us bind our heart to what is serious, let us put on the mind of Jesus Christ. It is summarized in the love of God and in the love of our fellow human beings, the sole foundation of his law. Let us recall that Jesus Christ desires the honor of his Father, the triumph of his Church. For that, each day, at every hour, he brings about the mysterious separation of the good from the wicked. May remembering this cause us tremble and snatch us from our natural moral laxity! When we fully understand the necessity of helping Jesus Christ to save us and to save others, we will possess that Christian gravity, that interior gravity of which Our Lord has been the model; we will make a great step in perfection. Let us not cease in bringing this spirit to God, to Jesus Christ, to the Church, to the very end of life; in entering seriously into these ideas; in thinking about the interests of his eternity; in resisting moral laxity. Note well the effort to be made in order to acquire the virtue of gravity. The virtue once acquired and possessed is easily transmitted. When gravity is in our thoughts, in our heart, it will flow by itself to the exterior world. When everything in our life is impregnated with gravity, we will inspire respect, and, respected ourselves for our Christian character, we will cause the things of God to be respected.

#### V. Exterior Gravity

The teacher preaches using his whole person: to his interior gravity, he must then join exterior gravity. But this latter it acquires by itself when it depends on interior gravity. If by nature we are graced with certain advantages of character, of habits, of experiences that already give us this gravity, let us maintain these advantages, but they do not dispense us from acquiring interior depth. In this way we will powerfully exercise prayer, the presence of God. Let us especially put into practice the words of St. Vincent de Paul and, with him, repeat them: "*Quid nunc Christus*; What would Christ do now!"<sup>332</sup> Above all, let us accustom ourselves to getting rid of all our fondness for that which is superficial: gestures of vanity, stupidity with respect to points of honor, over-sensitivity, a bloated ego. Let us raise ourselves little by little to a certain height: let us ignore the many nothings to which our poor nature attaches itself so strongly; let us calmly take possession of ourselves and let us be pressed on by only one thing: to achieve our salvation.

*February 7, 1847*

#### VI. Remembering one's faults

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<sup>332</sup> Inspired by the spirituality of Cardinal Pierre de Bérulle, St. Vincent de Paul adopted this phrase, "*Quid nunc Christus; What would Christ do now!*"

If there is one sorrowful thought in the Christian soul, it is assuredly the thought of his imperfections and of the inclination toward evil that he keeps within himself in spite of all the graces he receives and of all the invitations Jesus Christ issues to him. These offenses, these acts of ingratitude, these revolts against God, both in ourselves and in others, are indeed something sad to think about. Shouldn't this sadness provide an extremely powerful reason to snatch us from our moral laxity and lead us to gravity? Gravity is born, then, of a double emotion: sadness and terror.

i. *Sadness*.—When we envisage our miseries in the presence of God, on the one hand, how much love there is! Yet, on the other, how much ingratitude we show! This ingratitude renders us repugnant in the eyes of God; we become his enemies. If we can step outside of ourselves, we can see the early signs of evil in the young souls of our students, as they follow the havoc taking place in their heart. Given this view of sin within us and others, are our souls not led automatically to serious reflection?

ii. *Terror*.—Where do these offenses nevertheless lead us? Where does such cowardliness lead us! To a loss of faith, the abandonment of God! God calls us to act on souls; he places in our hands the interests of the freedom of his Church in order to defend them: have we had all of the influence on our students that we ought to have, that we could have had? Have we been as devoted to the defense of the Church as we should have? If we have not done so, what responsibility we bear! What grave consequences there are for our salvation!

These thoughts can be a sufficient preparation for the holy season of Lent. Let us take a good look at ourselves in the presence of evil; let us detest it, let us hate it; in order to struggle against it, let us arm ourselves with the sentiments of faith, of energy, of zeal, of generosity, of devotion. Let us snuff out evil in ourselves, let us hasten to combat it, to defeat it also in the souls of our students. In this struggle of faith and of charity, another sentiment will be an additional support in developing gravity: it is that joy of which the Apostle speaks, that joy tinged with sadness which gives to the Christian, in the midst of his preoccupation with evil, faith in Jesus Christ. Evil makes us suffer when we remember the love of Jesus Christ, at the thought of his anger. But mixed with this sadness comes joy. For we know that in fighting for God, we fight with God and sooner or later God will get the better of evil.

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*February 14, 1847*

## Charity

Charity is the bond of every organization. We must strengthen it in our burgeoning community as much as possible. Let us examine how we

are disposed with regard to this principal virtue of Christianity; let us examine ourselves in this regard by listening to St. Paul who defines for us in so precise a manner the qualities of perfect charity (cf 1 Cor 13: 4-7).

*Patiens!* Patience. — What is patience? Is it the apathy of the will? Is it a certain drowsiness, a certain indifference of character? Assuredly not. In order to be patient, it is necessary to have feeling. Therefore, the definition of St. Paul, as he attacks the character of those who are least roused, leaves no excuse for more lively characters. The life of the Christian is the life of combat. We must struggle against ourselves without ceasing. Therefore, we have no excuses when we fail to overcome our imperfections. Let us turn to Jesus Christ; he will teach us this wonderful virtue of patience. In reflecting on ourselves, in analyzing ourselves in all our misery, we will understand that the virtue of patience consists in this natural benevolence that makes us carefully avoid wounding others. Let us combat those inner impulses; let us avoid all scandal; let us decide to make that law of continual suffering for ourselves that a man experiences in compelling himself to act courageously. *Pati!*—To suffer! This is the profound meaning of patience. Let us be patient human beings voluntarily. May everything become for us an occasion of virtue, of sacrifice; of a real sacrifice, of which charity will be the flame..... patience, the priest; ourselves, the victim by suffering. How many opportunities there are to transform ourselves...broken hearts, unexpected blows from others, the tedium of teaching, the pains of education!

*Benigna;* Kindness. — Kindness is the dullest virtue in the eyes of the world. It only appreciates kindness over time when it develops a taste for it. It agrees to cause no pain to those present, but it must be permitted to speak ill at least of those who are absent. Let us leave to the world such worldly ways of thinking. For us, kindness is good. But also how difficult it is! What do you mean! We shouldn't have any antipathies for certain people! No legitimate exceptions at all! Students, colleagues, all are to be embraced in benevolent charity, universally, daily! Always to sacrifice oneself! Always to offer oneself! It is in truth hardly practical!... There are some trifles one shouldn't pay attention to. But I am not strong enough to rid myself of certain loathings.—Unfortunately, you may be right. But the Christian is stronger than everything because he relies on God.—But, really, isn't this idiotic? -Yes, from a human point of view; but in the divine way of seeing things, foolishness is wisdom. It is necessary to come to terms with it and give up one's objections. Let us burn all these petty, base feelings in the flames of charity. Let us meditate a little on the power that the spirit of benevolence gives to the teacher. What an influence you can have! It attracts souls: it is like a glue in which they get stuck and begin to submit themselves to the lovable yoke of Jesus Christ. What good could we not do if we had this spirit of benevolence which is not at all the foolishness of an exaggerated optimism, but a disposition of sweetness, of love, which makes us desire above all the good of souls! So a student is disagreeable!

Maybe we should master ourselves by reason. But let us analyze our heart: what do we find there? The personal satisfaction of having subjugated or led back someone with a difficult nature. Under the appearance of good, there hides within us a vain complacency. Whatever merit there may have been is wiped away because we didn't simply stop at an act of charity. We began with the child; we finished with ourselves. We contemplated ourselves; and instead of being a channel of grace for him, we are going to become an occasion of relapse perhaps. Let us therefore resemble Jesus Christ. Let us be what he is, in silence, in the forgetfulness of the tabernacle. He is there, author and consumer of grace, ready for all, benevolent towards all, whoever we are. To what heights we would raise ourselves, however, vis à vis our students, if we only knew how to adopt the same sentiments. We would always move forward no matter what may happen; we would lead them to Jesus Christ.

*Non cogitat malum*; It does not think evil. — “Think the worse and you'll usually not be disappointed.”<sup>333</sup> It is a maxim of good sense of which the application is often true. But Jesus Christ wants none of this. He reprimands us and tells us not to think evil of others. The one who does not think evil forces himself to do the good. There is, without doubt, a law of prudence to be observed; but above all it is a matter of zeal and of charity: we will force good to be achieved by believing in the good. In many circumstances, evil consists in the manner in which one looks at things. One looks at them from their bad side, from the point of view of distrust and what happens? The intention, good in itself, disappears under the appearance of the evil one imagines. It is thus that one exaggerates the faults of children and that one takes their natural faults badly. As a general rule, let us abstain from thinking evil. When one lets himself be dragged to that habit of suspicion, to that always unfavorable way of thinking, evil results from the very judgment that we make and it festers all the more; to believe in the good, preferably, is to find the means to avoid evil. Charity as such suspends judgment. How many suspicions, how many suppositions, how many false appreciations are excluded in fact by this character of Christian charity. And what peace does it not establish in the heart, when one knows how to persevere in these sentiments of kindness and of equity!

*Congaudet veritati*; It rejoices in the truth. — To shun distorted views, to back off from them quickly! To remain on the side of what is good, to attach oneself to it, to look for what is true, to love what is true, to remain calm and impartial: how many times we fail to follow these rules of conduct, even though they are so sure and so wise!

*Omnia suffert*; It suffers all things. — Squelching self-centeredness, snuffing out all friction, doing away with a kind of exterior insensitivity: yes, God asks us to do all that as we can read literally in St. Paul.

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<sup>333</sup> “Pense mal et tu devineras juste” is an old French, from Provence, saying that encourages people to think the worst so as not to be disappointed.

*Sperat*; It hopes. — All things are possible with God. Nevertheless, how little we think about this...either out of cowardliness, or carelessness, or lack of faith. When therefore will we live in God, for God, with God?

*Sustinet*; It endures. — Beloved suffering! Let us admit it: we understand nothing of this. Nevertheless, we're speaking of our Christian faith. Yes, this is what Jesus Christ wants of us, suffering offered up, crucified, but joyfully, in all good faith, in peace, without murmuring, without revolt, with resignation, with love. If we wish, let us take hold of our head, and press it between our two hands to prevent its turning one way or the other as we consider St. Paul's words. In the end, whether we like it or not, that's the way it is, all of it...whether one receives blows from an axe, a club, or a sword, or stuck by a needle, the soul must suffer everything, whether great or small. However, let us not make ourselves out to be children. Here we are in the thick of a battle demanding love and courage. What is at stake is the honor of souls redeemed at the price of the blood of Jesus Christ. Yes...our honor, our courage, and our love are at being put to the test!

Yes, we are children when it comes to holiness and piety. Nevertheless, let us accept with confidence the law that is laid out for us. Nature may tremble at the prospect—but we must pay no heed to the frightening promptings of nature. It's a question of seeing in what way we wish to surrender to Jesus Christ who urges us on, to the love which entreats us, to the faith which enlightens us, and to the hope which sustains us. It's a question of applying this sublime law of love to everything we do; it must become the living character of Jesus Christ in us. Let us not hesitate or we would truly merit the name that St. Peter gave to the pagans: we would be loveless creatures—*sine affectione*.

February 24, 1847

**In caritate non ficta—in genuine charity.**

Let us be faithful ministers of Jesus Christ, in sincerity and charity: "*in caritate non ficta*; in genuine charity." Let us apply this phrase to the solidarity of our works, to our individual and communal responsibility, particularly to our conduct in daily affairs. In our relations with one another, let us remember that charity passes and doesn't last, when it focuses on forms, on pure politeness; then it is only skin-deep. The world may be content with this, but Jesus Christ rejects it; there is need for something beyond mere outward show and the simple appearance of charity. Away then with all bitterness. It is, of course, inevitable that tensions arise when one personality rubs up against another. Therefore, let us patiently accept the sufferings that come our way. But let us make a serious effort to look for the motives in these words, in these acts which have wounded us. More often than not, it's our own fault. What offends us in others may well have originated in ourselves. Let us not be afraid to



search our hearts to the limit and let us see whether or not in our sharp exchanges, in our quarrels, in our brusqueness we ourselves are not to blame. Be broad of mind, generous of heart, fertile of imagination. All these ‘ups and downs’—these occasional quarrels and losses of temper...are we ourselves never to blame? *In caritate non ficta*; in genuine charity. Without doubt, it is nice to present ourselves as innocent victims. We insist on not lying to ourselves. We want to be right but sincere charity knows how to go beyond these lies, these surprises to our consciences and to put a finger on the misery of our heart. It admits its wrongdoing, it recognizes with frankness that the wrongs are our doing, that we only got what we deserved. God gives us this limpid self-knowledge when we ask him for it. If we can tell ourselves in all simplicity that we were no-wise to blame, then what is there to add? One remains silent; one does not fester; one accepts the humiliation, the pain, the brokenness; one remains calm and waits for the storm to pass.

Let us practice this peace, this kindness, and we will be able to acquire sentiments above mere human sentiments. Our morality will have become truly Christian and we will no longer remain in a sterile paganism. Have we not a sublime model in Jesus Christ? *Videte qualem caritatem*; see what disinterested charity. Everything is for us men. And how he puts up with our ingratitude! How he condescends to our weakness!

We are inclined to prefer what the world calls ‘good manners’—charming behaviour, a gracious tone of voice; and nevertheless, what hypocrisy is hidden under this borrowed veneer, under this embellished mask! We may find a certain roughness, a certain rudeness in the way Christians bear themselves. Let us know how to act. Yet there is always frankness here. When we are attacked by a bout of frankness and when we refuse to hide behind excuses and not let anything slip by us, what sense of dignity does it not give us and, likewise, what a sense of authority and what rights!

Therefore, in this regard, there is taking place a rude war on our inclinations, on our vulnerabilities, and on our bitterness. Let us carry the love of God in the depth of our hearts and let us make it prevail. *In caritate non ficta*. Alas, we desire the name of Christian, but not the reality. “*Deus caritas est*; God is love.” This is who God is; this is who the supernaturalized man is. Let us be courageous in mastering ourselves; let us let go of our repugnances and resistances, even wipe them out. Let us act according to God’s way of thinking, in a sphere beyond the coarseness of our nature.

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February 28, 1847

Prudence

After the virtue of gravity comes the virtue of prudence, which is no less necessary for us, whether as supervisors or as teachers. First of all, as supervisors. We are all supervisors, more or less, and in the exercise of this daily task, there is something for all of us to learn each and every day.

#### **Regarding supervision**

Here we come face to face with evil. We have to combat the ‘devilish’ prudence of our students, their ruses and subtleties, so often prompted by the cleverness of the devil who wishes to chase Jesus Christ from their souls so that he might take possession of them. But should it be a question of fighting fire with fire? No, such a reaction would be no more than human prudence and nothing else. The prudence of a Christian teacher, in detecting the ruses of a student, avoids hurting him; it corrects him without causing resentment. Is it all that difficult, after all, to discover evil when that is what we’re looking for? But isn’t it all too easy to add insult to injury, unless our prudence is allied to charity—that is to say, unless it is Christian prudence. A good doctor knows how to probe a wound in order to understand it and to heal it better, but he proceeds with a skillful and delicate touch. A clumsy hand, in contrast, would inflame the raw flesh—causing the blood to rush and creating searing pain. It is therefore necessary to see the evil but to deal with it with great care. A student caught red-handedly committing a fault is like an animal trapped in a snare; he revolts and boils over with fury, and often finishes by biting through the trapped limb—sometimes escaping, but mutilated. Take a bad student: he hatches a plot with several comrades, bad like himself, or perhaps only questionable. Say the plot is discovered without the matter being handled tactfully. These students will be severely punished, even suspended. Most of them will assuredly become worse. Authority may triumph..... but what role did prudence play?

We need prudence to temper sternness with mercy. A teacher who over-punishes lacks prudence. At times, he may loosen the reins too much, then he tries to regain control; he may succeed in doing so—but at the cost of unaccustomed severity and excessive punishments. A good supervisor must remain unshakeable and always consistent. Being strong and not giving way are most effective in creating order. Numerous punishments are often the mark of weakness of character and inexperience. If you wish to control your students, begin by learning to control yourself.

Our task is to form the character of our students. If we approach this task without prudence, we risk deforming and not forming them; we risk misdirecting them. So let us be particularly prudent in our enforcement of discipline. Let us exercise prudence in order to know when or not to punish. Let us know how to distinguish with care the moment in which it is necessary to mete out or not such and such a punishment, to know the moment to speak and the moment to remain silent.

#### **In education**

It denotes lack of prudence to pass judgement on other people's words or behaviour, be it among ourselves or in the presence of our students. It also denotes lack of prudence in one's teaching not to reflect constantly and often ask oneself, as one thinks about the diverse characters of the students whom one is addressing, what one must teach on any given subject, and what not. Are we able to be spontaneous at times, and serious at others, according to the circumstances and the personalities involved? Some of our students are naïve and believe anything and everything; others are skeptical and question everything. Do we know how to adapt our teaching to the diverse characters in front of us? Do we choose our approach to the subject in view of doing the greatest possible good? In other words, can our teaching be described as prudent? What kind of progress have we made on this point? Have we nipped evil in the bud? Have we foreseen its causes? A teacher has to keep tabs on everything he says, on every answer he gives. A single word can sometimes cause so much damage, while another can avoid it!

There you have the human side of prudence. Let us envisage it now from its supernatural side. From this side prudence is tough. A teacher may want to speak, has certain ideas, and certain judgments to share. He may feel that he won't be prudent, that it would be better to be quiet. Little matter...he ploughs ahead and yields to the temptation to make a show of authority. The classes we give to students, the way we look at them, should lead us to pay attention. Prudence is sometimes something so subtle that it can very well happen that one lacks prudence without noticing it. Here there enters a question of tact. Undoubtedly, tact is something given; some have it and some don't. Perhaps we have it, but up to now it has been asleep; it has to be developed, has to be formed. It alone will permit the practice of prudence, in our relations of professor to supervisor and of supervisor to professor, in the judgments that we make on one another in the presence of students. Let us never forget that we have a duty to bring the best out of one another. How often does it not occur that pupils pass judgement on their teacher because of something one of the other teachers has said? How imprudent is it to put a stamp of approval on ill-willed criticisms and tactless judgments by the judgments and criticisms of an intemperate tongue?

#### **The virtue of prudence**

What is the essence of prudence? It is a certain disposition which leads the Christian to avoid evil. If the virtue of zeal leads us to do good, that of prudence protects us from danger. Now, dangers lurks everywhere, and if we don't wish to succumb to it, we need to know when to take flight. Often lack of prudence on our part may have deplorable consequences on our students. We don't keep an eye on ourselves, we don't keep ourselves under control, we haven't known how to exercise foresight. And, nevertheless there is merit in prudence; it is a virtue. The more one reads

the Gospel, the more one is struck with the extreme prudence of our Divine Savior in all his words and actions. One admires the responses he gave at the age of twelve; and later, in the days of his public life, how clever he was in foreseeing the consequences of his least word, of his least step. Are we possessed of this Christian vigilance? In order to supervise others, it is first necessary to be prudent in supervising ourselves. The Christian teacher who needs enough prudence for two must also understand that he will not acquire enough to spare, if he does not exercise it at first on himself.

Let us take a really good look at ourselves with a watchfulness that never fails. Let us make of this never-failing attention a personal matter of ours. Let us be prudent on the outside; such exterior prudence will be conveyed by our behavior. Behavior is the daughter of prudence which, in this regard, goes hand in hand with gravity. Let us ask ourselves if, from this point of view, we might not compromise ourselves sometimes. And let us be prudent in order to avoid a certain emotional outpouring, because it gives a young person an advantage which he may willingly abuse. Young people are so clever in getting the upper hand on the teacher who pours out his feelings to him. Nevertheless, such demonstrations of affection are at times necessary; they open the heart of the young and win their confidence; without them, we would have no effective influence on their character and heart. The virtue of prudence will alone be able to indicate to us how far to go and when to stop. We will be able to judge just how far we should go with one or another student, how far we ought to go to open his heart to us, without opening our heart to him because we must remain master of the situation, not losing control of it. All this requires a profound knowledge of the human heart. Let us understand this in ourselves and in our students. In order to acquire such experience and such influence, which ought to be our principal help, we as educators must have tact, a sense of observation, good behavior, qualities which imply a lot of reflection.

Above all, let us understand that what matters is the glory of God. When dealing with our students, we often think too much of ourselves. On the contrary, let us place in God's hands our efforts to form these young hearts. It is only in maintaining this loftier outlook that we will succeed in preserving them from harm and leading them to good.

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*March 14, 1847*

## Wisdom

### **The virtue of Wisdom**

Wisdom is a virtue which consists in giving to our good actions higher motives. It is a gift of the Holy Spirit, a very precious gift, all the more precious for being so rare. If one examines the Christian life overall,

even at its best, one will always find stains and errors that tarnish its radiance. Why? Because all of the actions which constitute it are not performed for the highest Christian motives. Yet, that is what wisdom requires. Wisdom demands that we do everything with the thought and fear of the Lord in mind: “*Sapientia timor Domini*; Wisdom is the fear of the Lord” (cf Ps 110:9, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom”). Yet, far from this being the usual case, we tend to accomplish everything we do in “any old how way,” far from any thought of faith. Let us give to each one of our acts its due importance, and may this importance be enhanced by a supernatural quality, by the quality of faith by which we undertake these acts. Not that this is easy, for sure; we must begin all our efforts with prayer so as to keep all distractions away. Among us, there are some who recite the Divine Office; there are others who attend it. We all undertake acts of piety. Distractions, which come to grab our attention while we’re trying to do so, undermine the supernatural goal of these efforts. That would not happen were we utterly convinced of the importance of what we were doing. Unfortunately, we are not so convinced, or insufficiently so. And herein lies our folly—here is where we lack Wisdom. In these moments in which it seems that inside ourselves we want to draw closer to God, we don’t; in these moments of the most humble and intimate relations with God when we could and ought to do so, we don’t. And what is the result? Our acts lose the character of wisdom that they could have and instead take on a human character, empty and sterile.

What remains, in effect, of a supernatural act lacking due concentration? Nothing, or next to nothing. Therefore, let us make every effort to enter more deeply into the way God sees things, to perfect ourselves as far as we can in our relationship with him. It is imperative that we exercise the greatest possible attention in this relationship if we wish to attain that wisdom that Solomon requested of God in order to govern well: “*Da mihi sedium tuarum assistricem sapientiam*; Give me the wisdom that sits by your throne” (Wisdom 9:4). Let us plead for the assistance of this wisdom so that it might support us and work with us to render us more perfect.

#### **The source of Wisdom**

But where can we draw this wisdom if not from God? Let us consider how important this is. The more we understand how precious it is, the more of it God will supply. In order to estimate the value this wisdom deserves, let us take a look at our lives. When do we give to our actions the lofty aim and intention they call for? In our morning prayer, we make all kinds of resolutions; we raise our minds to the presence of God; we promise to do whatever we have to do in the spirit of Faith. But how quickly we forget these intentions made in the morning; the day unfolds with its foreseen duties and preoccupations and we return to the routine of ordinary life. And, if at a given moment, we stop to reflect on what we are doing and

why we are doing it, we take up each of our acts again, perhaps good in appearance, with common, mundane motives, sometimes even with low and shameful motives, such as we would not willingly avow. For example, we may be acting out of laziness or bitterness; or there may be idle gossip, unclean thoughts, malicious conversations or rash judgments. The wisdom that is at play here is a human wisdom centered on our personal interests. If from time to time, thoughts of faith come to mind, the kind that never miss their mark, we soon let them pass by.

In the end we do not take God as the motive of our actions. We take ourselves and herein lies our folly. We may feel that we are accomplishing Christian duties, but it is in fact something done on the surface. In the depth of our heart there lurks something that impedes us, either because we have said to ourselves: “This is as far as I intend to go” (if so, woe betide the Christian who wishes to pose limits on himself in the pursuit of perfection! He must ascend the ladder of perfection unceasingly and respond to every invitation of grace). Or else, being affected by a deadly indifference, we may have fallen into a state of false security to the point of imagining that God has no wish for us to improve. The wisdom of God always leads us to discover a higher level of wisdom. We are guilty if we do not give to God everything that he asks of us in this regard. A Christian of this sort wears out the patience of God and degenerates into lukewarmness—and probably worse. If we allow ourselves to give way to this mundane way of life, if we’re constantly falling into our day-to-day routine, it is because we no longer have the capacity to see the wisdom of God nor to consider things in the brightness of his rays. Yet His is the only Wisdom whereby we can envisage the supernatural purpose of our ordinary actions, whereby we may discover the means necessary to triumph in our struggles against our baser drives, against that natural weight that brings our soul unceasingly to earthly things, when it would rather desire to rise up. What should we do to acquire this ever so precious wisdom? Pray much. We must establish our center of gravity at the very foot of the Cross and in our prayer of thanksgiving after Communion. Such are the sources of Wisdom—and if we wish to drink of it, we must necessarily draw near to them.

#### **Its importance**

When Wisdom has come to dwell in our hearts, then we can say, Good-bye to the false wisdom of this world. It will entail many a difficult and sustained struggle to achieve. When, thanks to wisdom, we discover a supernatural motive for doing everything we do, then human prudence will arise to oppose these bursts of faith. Other obstacles will also spring up, one after another. If we wish to teach this wisdom to our students—and we must make every effort to teach it to them; because how much will it not raise them up?—what energy and what superiority will it not confer on their character by teaching them to look upon their petty passions as so much emptiness and misery? But in order to inspire their actions with superior

motives, we must begin practicing them ourselves. Now, this is something we do not do. On the one hand, wisdom desires dearly to be characterized by a spirit of sacrifice that is a ‘wise folly’; on the other hand, we don’t really possess it, held back as we still are by the calculations of a worldly prudence. Obligated to acquire wisdom for ourselves and to communicate it to others, we can only do so by leaving human notions behind.

#### Self-Examination

Are we really wise with this wisdom? Let’s admit it: in many respects, the answer is no; the wisdom of Jesus Christ does not dwell within us. In effect what a contrast there is between our lack of spiritual motivation and the perseverance with which our Lord, Jesus Christ, did everything toward his goal, which was nothing but the glory of his Father? Every wise action implies a goal: what Christian goals have we pursued this day? We prayed, we read, we chatted, we studied: how many of these moments were characterized by Christian reason? Wisdom is a light which comes from God and ought to illuminate all our duties. What is the perfection which we have searched to give to our diverse actions during this day? We attended Mass, vespers, etc.... Have we rendered to God all the honor that he has a right to expect? And if we acted in all of this unintentionally, mechanically, have we exercised wisdom? And if our entire life is made up a succession of days similar to this one, in the end to what extent was wisdom revealed in us?

Scripture says of the unjust man: “*Noluit intelligere ut bene ageret*; He did not wish to understand so that he would act well” (Ps 35:4 Vulgate). This phrase applies also to the Christian who does no harm...but no good either, lest he should arrive at the conclusion that God is asking more than he is prepared to give. In lots of circumstances he could take a Christian stand-point. But he doesn’t—it would be too much of a strain to lift up his heart all the time. So he sinks back into his own miserable self and lets himself continue to be guided by the deceptive light of human prudence. Yet we all received the spirit of wisdom in the sacrament of Confirmation. What have made of this gift? We have smothered it or at least haven’t done anything to develop it. It has remained sterile in our heart. Why? Because we are silted up with sin, and sin is the contrary of supreme reason. But the Christian can free himself from this shameful slavery—by allowing himself to be guided continually by higher motives—by living in conformity with God’s own Wisdom. Let us study this Wisdom in its sources. Listen to it in your hearts when Our Lord comes to dwell there. Everything we do, let us do it with God and his glory in mind. Thus we will be able to hope to possess one day this wisdom itself as an eternal reward.

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## Mental Prayer

January 14, 1851

Meditation on *the Pater* (the Lord's Prayer) could already provide us with inexhaustible material. Who would ever think that he had savored these divine words of Our Lord enough? Let us begin, however, by making sure we understand the basic guidelines for prayer. There are two conditions necessary for prayer.

#### **I. Preparation in advance**

It is necessary to think in advance about one's prayer, to recollect oneself. Before seeking an audience with a great personage in the world, we already know what we want to ask. Before being introduced, we carry on a conversation with ourselves about the object of that audience. Prayer is also an audience: we are about to speak to God. Given that this audience is more solemn, shall we put less preparation into it? That is why a spirit of recollection is needed. Have we engaged in such recollection? We have to admit that we probably haven't without feeling overly-guilty. But let us acquire it! In order to do so, let us withdraw from useless reading, idle conversations, dangerous pastimes; in a word, let us keep all our faculties under proper control. These precautions are so many ways to prepare ourselves in advance for prayer. Why do we make so little progress in prayer, if not because we habitually live in useless 'hustle and bustle'? In order to address such behavior, let us exercise regular, sustained, and lively vigilance, trying to engage in more serious reading, in more frequent acts of charity, and avoiding idle conversations.

#### **II. Immediate Preparation**

So with well-disposed mind and heart, we are able to enter more easily into positive preparation. Let us choose then a particular subject and return to it often. The evening before let us think about this subject which we have preferred over others, so as not to have to improvise the next day when it's time to meditate. It is a good practice to call upon the Holy Spirit; doing so allows us to place ourselves better in the presence of God. Then the meditation can begin. One becomes aware of the state of one's soul. To help us, we may contrast our imperfection with the perfection of God. We should look to him first and then lower our gaze to ourselves. Such a comparison will more powerfully reveal our sad state.

#### **III. Method to Follow**

Perhaps we will accept this method. But how many objections will we not make! How many difficulties will nature not bring up as a pretext! First of all, our freedom: isn't it disturbed by such punctual regularity? Then, we may ask, what are we to talk about in this one-on-one meeting with God, and how are we to talk? Are we so afraid to have our thoughts regulated? What do we lose thereby? In order to avoid distractions, is this too much to ask of us? And what shall we talk about? Of what is most urgent, of the most important matter of our lives, i.e. our own spiritual



improvement.

Lots needs to change in this regard. We wish to pray well...we're right. But bear in mind that it's not a question of whether we find it easy to pray—on the contrary, it's a question of whether we find it difficult getting down to pray. It is so tempting to imagine that prayer calls for plenty of time, years of experience, and supreme knowledge. These are only poor excuses. How much of a burden is a quarter of an hour, or half an hour at most, given to prayer! And what if there is need for more time? Then, of course, there are distractions...forget them. Revert gently to the subject of your meditation, by making an act of humility and love of God. Avow humbly that you are unable to contemplate for long the marvellous perfections of God. Let us protest that, in spite of everything, it is our firm desire to be united to him. But quickly our attention turns to our likes and dislikes, to our frustrations; we forget God and the insights we had into our misery disappear. What a wonderful opportunity to despise ourselves and to see what we're worth under trial. But these distractions may render our prayer unfruitful. Are we at fault? Yes, if the cause is a lack of preparation; but we hardly have reason to complain as a result. If our distractions are involuntary, no we are not at fault; but we will have learned, one more time, what sad persons we are, how much our souls are still under the weight of the senses. Since pride is our great enemy, what a good opportunity to combat it by the humiliating consideration of our worthlessness, of our spiritual ineptitude! And in this very humiliation how will prayer not be born? Clear consciousness of our weakness obliges us to have recourse to God—and what is prayer, but recourse to God? So, involuntary distractions, borne patiently, without frustration, humbly, will lead us back to prayer. Might not the very confusion that comes when we feel unable to pray lead us to a most fruitful kind of prayer?

*January 21, 1851*

#### **IV. The purpose of prayer**

We must dig deeper into the very realm of prayer. If we wish to advance in prayer, let us be resolved to harken to the voice of God, to listen to him, and to do whatever we will have understood in the recollection and silence of our soul. If God speaks to us, let us treat his word with profound respect and follow Him wherever he wishes to lead us. Here is the first question to be examined: Are we disposed to submit ourselves utterly...and with complete generosity?

It is not good enough simply to go as far as our weakness can support. No, we must be ready to go further. To remain there, with well-prepared meditations, to be punctual, engaging in a certain regularity of prayer, to recollect ourselves for a moment, at a given time.....all of this is to remain in a state of waiting, in preparation, in a sort of novitiate. God wants more.

How far shall we go in abandoning ourselves? In this matter, it is impossible to establish strict rules. Each one is called according to his way. St. Paul, thrown to the ground on the road to Damascus, cried out: "Lord, what do you wish that I do?" (Acts 9:6). And his readiness is unlimited. One cannot impose such generosity. What is enough for us to know is that we must never stop trying and, with a clear design, to empty ourselves and to rise to that gift of self without reserve, to belong to ourselves no longer, to become, in God's hands, nothing more than his docile instruments. This is the very height of prayer.

What are we doing about it? Do we accept to be deprived of anything? If we are unwilling to sacrifice anything at all, we'll get nowhere. Our prayer life would have been nothing but a vain effort. But if Christian perfection depends on our self-sacrifice, on this stripping of self, do we not see that it is not only beneficial but indispensable to crush ourselves courageously, to say no to our desires and our will, to master this ever-present resistance of our nature, to put a stop to all these movements of the soul that tend to draw us away from these difficult sacrifices? This is how it can re-orient itself and recover its integrity. Yes, there is a price to pay, but the example is there before our eyes. Our Lord during his agony in the Garden of Olives is the image of every Christian who struggles against himself, against every repugnance of his heart. Yes, it is costly, because we have to sacrifice the admiration of others, our own self-esteem, the satisfaction of our desires, of our thoughts, and how we think things should be done. But how are we to carry out to the letter the sacrifice summed up in the words of the Savior, "*Non sicut ego volo, sed sicut tu?*"; Not as I wish but as you wish? (Lk 22:42). Let us not kid ourselves: this is as far as we shall have to go, these are the sentiments which must be ours. Overcoming these dislikes, feeling one's will in revolt and not giving in to it, allowing ourselves to be crushed totally: this is how a Christian is made, or rather this is how God triumphs in him.

Once we have understood this, then we must begin. No need to worry how long it will take us to reach this goal. Let's get going, let's act, without counting the difficulties, or the sufferings; and let's get down to work. Here again is where prayer comes in, prayer in its entirety: we must take up our cross every day. Meditation is meant to prepare us for this rude exercise, for this solemn combat, for this violent state of nature which nips itself in the bud. But meditation is only a means: and a means by itself remains insufficient. Assuredly God does not demand of everyone, to the same degree, these voluntary agonies. We are not all called to engage in the extraordinary feats of an Anthony, of a Paul, or of a Hilary, but to a greater or lesser extent, this is the path we must tread. We have only to recall that the more we love, the more we will do; whereas, the less we love, the less we will give ourselves to God, and also the less our spiritual progress will be. We may arrive at a so-so Christianity; but it will not be a Christianity that is enlightened by faith and enlivened by charity.

### **Conclusion**

Do we wish to remain vague and undecided Christians? Do we really want to bear fruit? What sacrifices are we ready to make for God? When are we going to make our minds up to offer Him this comprehensive and heroic sacrifice of our entire selves? When are we going to unite ourselves to God, to Our Lord, Jesus Christ, with utter self-abandon? And if we feel the interior urge to begin, will we have the courage to keep it up to the very end? In a word, do we wish to listen to God?

## **The Sign of the Cross**

*November 17, 1851*

Let us pay particular attention to being faithful in little things. How many of our acts of piety lose their value because we don't give any thought to what we are doing? Nevertheless, they would have positive value if we were only willing to be more reflective, if we would only make them more personal. What is the sign of the cross, for example? On the face of it, a mere superficial gesture. Yet what a wealth of lessons it contains!

Let us lift up our thoughts. Two great realities ought to rule our life: heaven and hell. Between the two let us place purgatory. Let us clearly recognize that a series of unreflective acts could prepare us for a fall. By remaining indifferent to so many things, we can weaken the vigor of our faith. Supposing we died in the state of mortal sin? Does not this terrifying prospect alone make us tremble with fright? Let us get rid of this thought. Let us stop to consider purgatory. Could not a series of merits resulting from many little deeds obtain for us such graces as to avoid the flames of purgatory? New virtues would take root in us, would be developed in us under the influence of these graces. Let us examine the Sign of the Cross from this point of view alone.

### **Invocation**

First of all, we invoke the Holy Trinity. If we pronounce this invocation with sentiments of faith, are we not, by this act of adoration, being united to God the possession of whom, beyond time, is the ultimate goal of our life on earth? Is it such a little thing to be united to God here below? The image of God is imprinted on man. So does not invoking the Blessed Trinity imply obedience to the Father, union with the Son, and love of the Holy Spirit? Would it be asking too much of us to reflect on these profound truths each time we make the Sign of the Cross? If only once in a while—if only once a week—we gave this gesture serious thought, what a difference it would make! This exercise would make our relationship with God more intense and we would thus arrive at putting ourselves more frequently in contact with Wisdom, infinite Truth, and with sovereignly perfect Love.

### Teaching

Let us get practical. Isn't a professor who makes the Sign of the Cross with faith already providing his students an eloquent lesson? Making it at the beginning of class conveys to his students that what he is about to say will, in some way, be a manifestation of the truth, an initiation to wisdom, a radiation of love from its very source. At the end of his class, the Sign of the Cross can be the sign of a pure sacrifice. He presents to God the fatigue of his labors, the hassles and the suffering he may have experienced, as an offering of resignation and of submission, as expiation for his sins. — Ah! How worthy and how powerful is the instruction emanating from one who thus unites himself to God! What a sense of intensity he takes on, what a character of respect is imprinted on him! In this way, the teacher is speaking in the name of God, "*tanquam Deo exhortante per nos*; as if God is exhorting through us" (2 Cor 5:20). He has become an ambassador of the Power from on high. — As a result, the student grows as well for he likewise is a power whom God wishes to treat well, to whom he has sent, in some way, a Christian teacher. Thinking in this fashion, how much does a teacher not maintain the feeling of his own dignity and the dignity of those young people listening to him!

Isn't this then a way of giving the Sign of the Cross all its meaning? In the end, isn't the Cross everything? Is it not the ladder which Jacob saw linking earth to heaven? — Do we wish to go a step further? We trace this Sign of the Cross on our bodies. What does this mean? We acknowledge the need, or better yet, the duty to carry our cross as Jesus carried his. Yes, teaching has its hassles, study its labors. Let us accept them, let us place them on our shoulders. From early morning let us freely take up our cross, and in advance the pains of our day. It is thus that our life will be thoroughly penetrated by the thought of faith. And thus we will truly be men of duty and of devotion. Let us try to evaluate our past and our present in the light of these reflections.

*Let us conclude* that we must act with these thoughts of faith in mind, to recall unceasingly that we are made for perfection, that we must advance along this path, that to stop is to go backwards, that we have a lot further to go along this path than we ever imagined. Why then this lackadaisical effort on our part? Why these hesitations? Up to what point have we accepted suffering? In other words, up to what point have we loved? Yes, if once a week we slowly, with reflection, in a perfect spirit of prayer and of adoration, made our Sign of the Cross, the Cross would be rooted in our souls and begin to produce much fruit in them. We are called not only to be redeemed by the blood of Christ; the Savior also wishes that we become saints.

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January 12, 1857

#### **Best Wishes for the New Year**

I ought to have responded to you sooner and expressed to you my wishes for a happy new year. These wishes may be summarized in a word of St. Paul that I find so beautiful, especially if one applies it to men dedicated to teaching: “*Tamquam ex Deo, coram Deo, in Christo loquimur*; As we speak from God, before God, in Christ.” May all your teaching find its source in God! May you not pronounce any word except under the eye of God! May your entire being be rooted in some way in the spirit of Jesus Christ! This is the milieu in which I would wish to see you live and undertake your activity, and if this activity has not always been as fertile as one might have hoped, the reason is that we haven’t tried hard enough to maintain ourselves in the presence of God and his Son, “*coram Deo, in Christo*; before God, in Christ.”

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### ***III. Principles of Christian Education***

*Fr. d'Alzon often reminded the teachers of the College of the great principles of Christian education. In this section, one will find: first of all, two instructions which date from 1846, the very beginnings of the Association; second, a series of nine instructions given in 1867-1868 and intended to rally the College after a period decline. The reports are rather schematic, but the informality of the tone doesn't take anything away from the richness and the loftiness of the thought. In part Fr. d'Alzon took up these same themes while adapting them to the women religious of the Assumption, in his last conferences of 1870-1871, which treat of education, (cf. *Aspects of Christian Pedagogy. The Notebooks of d'Alzon, IV, pp. 11-88*).*

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## **The Meaning of Christian Education**

*February 1, 1846*

We must thoroughly penetrate ourselves with Christian thinking, by the strength, by the faith, and by the love drawn from the knowledge of God and of his Church, and we should spread this Christian thinking beyond, in the minds and hearts of our students. We must imbue their whole being in this way without getting discouraged by the obstacles put in our way such as their apparent superficiality and ignorance.

### **Three-fold Communication**

How do we communicate this strength, this faith, this love to our students? What is this triple development?

If a Christian, entering into communication with God, considers his soul as a source of strength, he will discover that it bears continuous fruit by being in touch with the whole being of God. In the Father, the soul develops its strength, in the Son its intelligence. In the measure that it knows the truth, it feels itself raised up towards the truth, and the soul attaches itself to the truth and loves the truth; it is the Holy Spirit who comes down to him, takes hold of him and raises him up. Without this triple movement, the life of the soul is incomplete; and in order to achieve in itself all of the perfection to which it must aspire, the Christian must allow this triple influence of the divine life to act in him by means of this threefold communication of life.

### **I. Strength**

How much we need this strength! Let us look deep into our heart; there we will discover a broken will: at times willing, at other times not. Original sin restrains our movements to do good and renders our efforts sterile. What with our deep-rooted infirmity, how can we hope to manifest God? And what means are there to help us in this regard, were we not to have recourse to our primitive strength, immersing ourselves once again in the very power of God, manifesting in ourselves his power? The stronger we are, the more we will manifest God powerfully and efficaciously; the weaker we remain, the less powerful we will be to spread the Christian life into the hearts of others, and our action will be ineffectual. So come out of your weakness—discard it. With eyes raised on high, let us learn to appreciate the resources God offers us, to lift us up and restore our dignity—to regain all our strength.

Let us see how God himself acts, and how he reveals himself: he creates, he restores. It is by this double action that he reveals himself in the world. Let us imitate God in his work of healing. In such a way we reveal in ourselves this element of strength; we can do this. Let us mend the little world inside us, and then the little world around us. In this work of renovation, God uses us and he wishes that we be his coworkers. How can we be afraid and hesitate? Thus aided by the strength of God, entrusting to Him our divided and fragmented wills, we will be able to effectively communicate to students the strength that they lack and that will have been given to us. Without doubt, we need much strength to struggle against the multiple obstacles that will confront us in the character of our students: against every form of resistance, against the evil in them, and against all the powers of darkness. We need immense strength: but we will find it in God and with God. Let us pray, let us persevere, let us give one another an example, let us be good models, let us act as our Lord did: *coepit facere et docere*; he began to do and teach (Acts 1:1).

## II. Understanding

One of the means of communicating this strength is teaching, by which the truth is made known. But how clouded our understanding is! How much darkness will disappear only little by little! Let us understand what we are and the resistance that exists in our hearts. Let us know the world and weigh its worth. Let us be repelled by how weak our wills are that, knowing what is good, tend always to do what is bad. The light of Faith reveals all our wretchedness. Dispossessed of pride, of falsehood, and of illusion, we will receive the truth to which we must henceforth be willingly and courageously crucified. It is faith that will free us from slavery to our languishing will and give us the desire to leave this confusion which afflicts us in order to attract us towards the truth and allow us to enjoy its clarity.

And once the Truth has become embedded within us—once we have assimilated it—then we need have no fear of whether we will be able to

“put it across”. Our mouth will speak from the abundance of our heart. In the measure that truth has penetrated our souls, it will gush out of us into the open. We will also feel drawn to direct our students towards God, to free them from falsehood, to elevate their souls towards the truth, and to let them be transformed by it; thus we will convince them that nothing but Truth has any value or any reality. With the assistance of charity, we will find ourselves to be ingenious in grabbing their attention and presenting to them the truth under all its forms and we will discover in the turgid elements of their characters the inflammable matter which hides there and on which it suffices to throw a spark to be enkindled.

### **III. Love**

Truth is not only the object of a system or the object of thought for a Christian. Truth is especially an object of love. He who searches for it—he who yearns for it—once he finds it, clings to it, and will not let it go; it has become his consuming passion. Where do we discover this love except in God himself, by delving into the very depths of God, by firmly attaching ourselves to that true life which is in God and in the Church? If we ourselves have this love of the Truth, we will spare no efforts in teaching our students to love it too, in combating the bad influences that prey upon their weakness and the evil which is in their heart. We will be ardent in our endeavour to save them and set them free; likewise, to raise them to the truth, attach them and dedicate themselves to it.

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## **Relations with the Students**

*February 8, 1846*

By the light of faith we must reflect on the value of a human soul. What a wonderful thing the human soul is! It confers a dignity on the Christian such as not even the angels enjoy. When God chose to manifest Himself, he chose to do so in human nature, as a member of Adam’s race. No doubt that this dignity was imprinted on our soul at Baptism, but it is traced upon us only in its general lines, which need to be filled out—which need to be developed. And this filling-out, this development, is the task of education.

### **I. The task to be accomplished**

The soul then can be compared to a piece of metal out of which a medallion must be made, or to a piece of marble out of which a statue must be fashioned. God gives it its initial shape. We must stamp the “haut” or “bas” relief on this metal; we must give the marble its contours. God provides the model, which is none other than Himself. We must reproduce it. We are the workers charged with this reproduction. God puts the tools in



our hands. He not only gives us strength—he himself works alongside us. He will soften the marble and he will prepare the soul of a student to be molded, shaped, and sculpted, just as with the marble or the metal.

But will we work according to God's plans or our own? The chief sculptor entrusts a block of marble to one of his assistants, who must begin by cutting it into the approximate shape; he proceeds to provide the assistant with a pattern or model, with chisels and compasses. Will the latter satisfy the artist if he works only according to his own way of thinking and not according to that which was pointed out to him? Surely if he does not faithfully reproduce what the master specified, he will have failed in his task; he will have substituted his skill for the inspiration of the genius. And so it is with Education. We must model and mould our statues to the likeness of Jesus Christ if we wish them to be successes. For this we must imbue ourselves more and more with the mind of Jesus Christ and synchronize our efforts with his broad work on souls. In the special and personal task that he has entrusted to each of us, we must seek to carry out his will, his plans, and his designs on souls so as to be assured that it is being properly accomplished.

## II. Elements of education

Given this point of view, let us envisage the different facets of education: the soul to be formed, the model to be followed, the tool to be used and the strength that will aid us in reproducing the model.

1° *First, the soul of the students.* It is comparable to a block of marble. We have to know its nature. It may be hard or soft; that will determine how deeply one must drive the chisel. Marble differs from rock and rock differs from plaster. Each one must be treated differently.

It is not enough to know the nature of the marble confided to us. We must envisage it with Jesus Christ in mind. Carving a statue calls for a different procedure than building a house. Next, we must study the folds and the "hang" of the person's garments that will be fixed in marble. We have to set in place the contours of the different members of the body, fix the expression of the face, and provide features to the general physiognomy, imprinting it here or there with faith, purity, and humility.

2° *There is the model to be followed.* The dominant physiognomy must be that of Jesus Christ. But he takes on a different form depending on the characters since "*Non est inventus similis illi*; there is no one exactly like him" (Sir 44:20). Therefore, we have to see in Jesus Christ what it is that we must take to be reproduced in the marble, that is to say, in the soul. To be sure it will be impossible to express exactly the purity and delicate nature of the model. But when all is said and done let us look for that part we are able to reproduce from it. Are we working on gold? Are we working on bronze? Will the model, reproduced in silver, risk being weakened and featureless? Might it not be better if melted in bronze? If we want to assure that we remain faithful to the expression and to the physiognomy, there are

so many metals to be studied in relation to the model. We will acquire this knowledge of the divine model by meditation; and Jesus Christ, once we know him better, will allow us to reproduce him better in souls.

3° *The strength to be used.* Another condition is still necessary if we are to succeed in our task. We need strength. It's no use handing tools to a corpse—a corpse won't be able to do anything with them. We need fire in order to melt metal and the strength of a child's arm will not suffice to polish it. Likewise, beyond our own strength, we must avail ourselves of a superior strength, that of prayer. Like Moses on the mountain, we must learn to converse with God. Let us listen in these intimate communications for everything that the breath of God will inspire in us. Let our eyes take in the light of the vast horizons presented to us. Let us receive the waters that will flow from the channels of life. In a word, let us go to Jesus Christ in order that he himself inspire us, that he himself enlighten us, that he himself warm us.

4° *The Imitation of Christ.* In that divine light we will see clearly where to imitate Jesus Christ in our relations with students. Faith must be a source of inspiration here in a singular fashion because our dealings with them are the same as those of Jesus Christ with souls. Jesus loves souls. He gave his life for them. We, too, can give our lives for these young souls. And here we find the perfection of dedication. "*Fortis ut mors dilectio*; love is as strong as death" (Sg 8:6)...to love souls as Christ loved them, to sacrifice everything, including ourselves for souls! Without doubt, not everyone is called to such sublime sacrifices. But, in the end, let us not forget that perfection is found here: we are capable of sacrificing ourselves for souls. Is not our blood well worth shedding for the sake of one single soul? Is this too much to ask of us since to save them entailed the shedding of every drop of Jesus's blood? Are we ready to go this far? If God so urges us, let us not hem and haw; no, let us sacrifice ourselves as Jesus Christ did. There are, moreover, many degrees of suffering to endure before we reach the self-sacrifice of Christ; let us be ready to imitate him generously. Was not the blood of Christ eager to be shed for men?

5° *Loving our Students.* This is the kind of love we must have for these young souls—the love of the apostolate—a love communicated by God—love communicated by us, because we have become God's ambassadors to them. Ours is an apostolate founded on Truth—a truly saving apostolate—the illumination of souls to whom we communicate God's Love...and these young souls will, in turn, enlighten and enliven us. St. Thomas transports us to the heart of the angelic realm and there shows us how the truth flows through all the grades of the celestial hierarchy. Thus truth will flow upon us and from us it will cascade down on the young minds entrusted to our care.

Let us understand well that the more we pour out our soul, the more this earthen vessel will be stretched and enlarged. The greater the level of

truth will flow in us, the greater that truth will flow out to the students. We must have a veritable passion for this apostolate. Let us make ourselves worthy of it. Priests and lay-people alike, we are all called to communicate this truth and this love through education. May it be the object of our meditations, our desires, and all our efforts.

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## *IV. Talks to the Teachers of the College in 1867*

### 1. Things New and Old

*October 22, 1867*

#### **In the light of Scripture**

As I was looking for a plan for the series of talks that I have to give you, the first thing that came to mind is that contained in the words of the Divine Teacher: “*Euntes docete omnes gentes, baptizantes eos in nomine Patris, et Filii, et Spiritus Sancti*; Go and teach all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” (Mt 28:19-20). Notice especially this phrase *baptizantes eos*: What is Christian education after all, but a veritable baptism? It’s a veritable purification by which we bring about the birth of Jesus Christ in the souls of our students. We could also meditate on these words of the Saviour: “*Simile est regnum caelorum sagenae missae in mare et ex omni genere piscium congreganti: quam, cum impleta esset, educentes et secus littus sedentes, elegerunt bonos in vasa malos autem foras miserunt*; The Kingdom of Heaven is like a net cast into the sea, and catching all kinds of fish. And when it was full they pulled it up and dragged it to the shore—and they sat down by the shore, collecting the good ones in their buckets, and throwing the bad ones away” (Mt 13:48). School brochures serve as the casting nets of academic institutions. Sometimes the catch is plentiful, at other times, as happened to us this year, the fish escape us and among those that remain there may be good fish and bad. It is up to you, gentlemen, to do the sorting-out that our Lord speaks of here. It is true that he adds in the same place that this choice, this discernment, will only be made at the end of the world. “*Sic erit in consummation saeculi*; Thus it will be at the end of the age” (Mt 13:49]. So the judgement passed on those students whom we have to expel is a prelude to the Last Judgement, when the angels, as Our Lord tells us again, will be charged with this separation: “*Exibunt angeli et separabunt malos de medio iustorum et mittent eos in caminum ignis: ibi erit fletus et stridor dentium*; The angels will go out and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth” (Mt 13:49-50). Yes, gentlemen, in a Christian educational establishment the teachers, and still more those charged with spiritual formation, have the task of sorting out the good students from the bad; they must consider themselves as taking the place of the angels.

But the words that I wish to take above all as a basis of the present talk are those which in Scripture come immediately after the ones I have

just commented on. After having explained this parable to his disciples, Jesus asks them: “Have you understood all this? *Intellexistis haec omnia?*” (Mt 13:51) The disciples whom Jesus Christ has just compared to the angels did not wish to be taken as ignorant and eagerly answer: “Certainly, we have understood; *Dicunt ei: Etiam*” (Mt 13:51). Then Jesus Christ adds: “*Ideo omnis scribe doctus in regno caelorum, similis est homini patrifamilias, qui profert de thesauro suo nova et vetera*”; Then every scribe who has been instructed in the kingdom of heaven is like the head of a household who brings from his storeroom both the new and the old” (Mt 13:52). *Omnis scribe*; every scribe, that is to say, every professor, *doctus in regno caelorum*; instructed in the kingdom of heaven. Thus Christian education must always have for its goal to raise souls towards heaven, but I will come back to these beautiful words later, “*doctus in regno caelorum*”; instructed in the kingdom of heaven.”

#### **De thesauro suo**

Permit me first to comment on this phrase for you: “*profert de thesauro suo nova et vetera*; who brings from his storeroom both the new and the old.” “*De thesauro*; from his storehouse”: thus the Christian professor must have a storehouse that he will have acquired from others in the course of his studies, but to which he must add much of what is proper to him, because it is his treasure, *thesauro suo*; it belongs to him. But should he keep this treasure for himself? No, he must communicate it; he must, the Divine Savior tells us, draw from it—*profert*—both the new and the old, *nova et vetera*. The Christian teacher need not, and must not, fear that he is impoverishing his personality by sharing his knowledge with others; he must give all that he has received, he must allow everyone to come and draw from his storehouse. This is, gentlemen, our magnificent privilege, of giving whatever we have received, and as soon as we receive it. If we wished to keep our knowledge to ourselves we would no longer be like that father of a family of which Our Lord speaks: “*Omnis scribe, similis est homini patrifamilias*; every scribe is like the head of a household”. We would, otherwise, be like those University professors who lecture only with their eye on promoting their own interests. If we are truly fathers of a family, we will have in view nothing but the interest of our students; and I do not speak only here of a vile, self-centred interest limited to money (too despicable for me to bear thinking about even for an instant).

There is, however, another kind of interest which it can be extremely difficult to rid ourselves of altogether...looking after own personal interests in teaching rather than those of our students. It’s as when a teacher says, congratulating himself, “My delivery is witty. I rattle off quotations, one after another. I clothe each word with elegant distinction, if I may say so myself, and thus add inestimable value to them.” No, this is not how the genuine Christian teacher speaks and behaves, the one who is *doctus in regno caelorum*; instructed in the kingdom of heaven. Such a teacher,

rather, knows what the kingdom of heaven costs; he knows the price of those souls confided to his care. He is without doubt intelligent, even spiritual, but the words which issue from his mouth are not intended to attract glory to himself. He is the father of a family. He is a big-hearted father concerned with his children's good. He has meditated much on these words from Vespers: "*dispersit, dedit, pauperibus*; he has dispersed it, he has given it to the poor" (Ps 111:9 Vulgate). He has dispersed, that is to say, he has given but given in great measure, *dispersit*. I would even say that he has squandered his wealth. What he has given to these minds, weak and stripped bare, is the wealth of the truth; these are things new and old, *nova et vetera*.

#### **Nova et vetera**

*Nova*; new things. Yes, the teacher must teach "new things". He must prepare his class in order to return to what I already said the last time<sup>334</sup>. *Nova* is what the professor provides from his own resources. The Christian teacher must, if he can at least do it, be original. The word *nova* is a condemnation of the dull teacher who keeps on dishing up "the same old stuff". Christian education must not consist in "the same old stuff. The teacher must not resort to time-worn and tired phrases. He must bring *nova* to his students, that is to say, shed new light on what they learned in their class on rhetoric; he must say something fresh.

But this is not enough. The Christian teacher must also draw from his storehouse of *vetera*; old things, that is to say, knowledge of the ancient authors; he must have acquired a good general knowledge of them himself. He can't be content with preparing such authors just before class begins. *Vetera*; old things...what I mean is knowledge, but especially religious truths, the antiquity of the revealed truth and it is that which the teacher who is truly learned in things of heaven, *doctus in regno caelorum*, will dispense to his students. He knows only too well where his essential duty lies. He knows how precious are these young souls entrusted to his care. The canvas that he paints will be impervious to the wear and tear of time because he has soaked his colors in the blood of Jesus Christ. He is not the type to have in mind either sordid gain or personal prestige. He is on heaven's payroll; he is really a father of a family, demonstrating that he is truly worthy of administering this baptism of Christian education, of which we have spoken. He is not at all miserly with his treasure; he scatters it far and wide. *Dispersit, dedit, pauperibus*; he has dispersed it, he has given it to the poor because he knows that true justice consists in this, "a justice which endures forever; *et justitia eius manet in saeculum saeculi* (Ps 111:9 Vulgate). Those rays of light that he has shared to enlighten minds will also one day be converted into rays of glory for him. "*Et cornu ejus exaltabitur in gloria*; his horn shall be exalted in glory" (Ps 111:9). Amen.

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<sup>334</sup> See the recommendations addressed to the teachers of the college, October 8, 1867, p. 1381.

## 2. Four means of purification

### A new Baptism

*“Euntes, docete omnes gentes, baptizantes eos in nomine Patris et filii et Spiritus Sancti; Go and teach all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit”*. Christian education consists not only in instruction; it is a purification, a baptism. So, before entering into the matter, it is good for you to consider that the Church wishes that the greatest number of people might have a share in this spiritual regeneration of baptism. That is why it permits anyone to administer it, whether heathen, Jew or Muslim. Whereas when it comes to Christian education in which one has also to purify souls not of Original Sin which has already been removed by Baptism, but of those thousand and one miseries which human nature has inherited, then those who purify others must themselves be pure. What a beautiful mission is that of the Christian teacher: he shares it with the priest at the altar, the priest at the tribunal of penance, and especially the catechizing priest. It seems to me that a teacher, before beginning class, should always recite the beautiful words of the deacon before the Gospel<sup>335</sup>: *“Munda cor meum et labia mea, omnipotens Deus, qui labia Isaiae prophetae calculo mundasti ignito. Ita me tua grata miseratione dignare, mundare, ut sanctum evangelium tuum digne valeam nuntiare; Cleanse, Almighty Lord, my heart and my lips, as you cleansed the lips of the Prophet Isaiah with a burning coal and vouchsafe, through your gracious mercy, so to purify me, that I may worthily announce your holy Gospel.”*

Yes, it is the Gospel that the teacher can and must ceaselessly proclaim whether it be mathematics, history, philosophy, or literature, can and must announce without ceasing, and for this his lips must be purified. I repeat, there is nothing in the whole world more beautiful than such a mission, cleansing souls so as to increase their splendor and purity. It increases their likeness to Jesus Christ, the one who is purity itself.

### a. Example

But how is the Christian teacher to set about operating this purification more effectively—administering this baptism? The means are numerous and the first, the most efficacious, is that of example. *“Verba movent, exempla trahunt; Words move people, examples compel them,”* it has been rightly said. Indeed, one can judge the soul of a teacher from the results that he produces on his students from the moral point of view. I don't want to exaggerate: it is possible that a saint might only be able to obtain very mediocre success with respect to the soul of his students and that a teacher unworthy of his mission may be able, on the contrary, to exercise a salutary influence on those he is in charge of. But such

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<sup>335</sup> *editor's note*: in the Tridentine rite

phenomena are rare, and it is here, more than anywhere, where we can talk about the exception confirming the rule. But this good example that we are obliged to give to the young people whose education is entrusted to us meets many obstacles and the greatest is human respect, (“What will other people think?”). Let us speak frankly: does not this concern for human respect, which so often prevents students from doing good, influence their teachers as well? One does not wish to let others in the house know that he has changed his ways and become better. Now, if we wish to be worthy of the mission of Christian teachers, we must fight this concern for human respect. When students see us doing good, they will follow our example spontaneously and openly, you can be sure of that.

#### **b. Hatred of evil**

There is a second means which approaches the preceding one. It is almost identical to it. It's the hatred of evil which the Christian teacher must constantly manifest. And, permit me to speak frankly on this subject. I am not afraid to say that there is “comic opera” even among priests! Yes, there are priests who talk about evil as if it were something comic. One would say that the horror that they have of it is not genuine, that it's a ‘put-on’ horror. If this abomination is found even in the priesthood, might it not also be found in lay teachers? Ah! Let us keep ourselves quite removed from such an attitude, for this comedy will not fool students. For, if I may say it in passing, students are fully aware of our faults. They see them better than we do, better even than our colleagues. They see the smallest details and can guess what's going on. I don't say that they see everything, but they see a lot. So when speaking to them about the hatred they ought to have for whatever is evil, let us speak forcibly and with the utmost sincerity. And be sure of this: if they see we are sincere regarding the horror of evil, our sincerity will readily “rub off” onto them. So what must we do to achieve this? It is quite simple: we must begin by hating evil in ourselves. We must begin, as I started by saying, with purifying ourselves. I don't have the time to develop this idea sufficiently, but I turn it over to your reflection; you can develop it on your own.

#### **c. Good behavior**

Another means that can help us in Christian education is one's behavior. There are two sorts of behavior. First, there is formal, official behavior and I will not waste my time on this kind. You all know what such formal, official behavior is about: official discourses, official ceremonies, official language; they are nothing other than what jumping jacks and buffoons do on stage. That's what official behavior is. But there is another behavior, behavior that is truly Christian, and of which the former is only an imitation. The second is behavior which shows that one respects others and that one respects oneself. Perhaps I myself am not beyond reproach in this respect; but examine yourselves well, you also, and see if, on more than one occasion, you have not been prevented by a lack of such behavior to do for



students all the good that they rightly expect from you. No putting on of airs, certainly. In any case, this is something that you should think about if you don't want to expose yourself to ridicule. We must display behavior that is like a silent sermon, the behavior of a priest at the altar, that behavior which comes from a sense of reflectiveness of soul, that behavior finally which proves that one walks constantly in the presence of God. As God said to Abraham, "*Ambula coram me et esto perfectus*; Walk before me and be perfect" (Gen 17:1). Yes, Christian teachers, walk continually in God's presence and you will become perfect. Admire as well how fruitful this behavior is, this disposition, which consists in walking continually in the presence of God. Just after God says this to Abraham, *Ambula coram me*, he makes, as a consequence, the promise that there will be born from him a great people and that all the nations of the earth will be blessed in him.

#### d. Frequent communion

Finally, I conclude by addressing a last means connected to the one about the hatred of evil which I have already mentioned. What I am talking about is the communication, the insufflation, of the good. Let me return then to the words that I have already cited, those of the deacon before the Gospel. And how can we purify others better than by inviting into ourselves Him who is Purity itself? Like Isaiah, let us approach the altar of the Lord and there, no longer one of the Seraphim, but a priest, will, after having taken it from the true altar, place on your lips and in your heart this burning coal—if I can speak thus of the fire of love—Our Lord, Jesus Christ. I am sure that you have already understood the meaning of my words: what I recommend before all else to the Christian teacher is frequent communion, and note well that I do not say communion as part of a *routine* but *frequent* communion. How wonderful it is to see the Christian teacher approach the holy table filled with the thought of the souls entrusted to him or at least of their guardian angels. May this teacher understand well his mission which is addressed to Jesus Christ himself, and, in order to make the truth shine in souls, is nourished himself with the one who is truth itself, the Word of God, the Word incarnate, who takes his delight in dwelling with the children of men! To whom can one have recourse in order to make light shine on souls, that light which purifies, other than to the One who is the sun of justice, to the One who declares himself to have come to bring the fire of love on the earth, that fire which must enflame every soul. Ah! Understand well, gentlemen, the beauty of your mission, understand all the good that you can do to students by your example, by the dignity and the majesty of your behavior. In one word, understand that you can, in making saints of them, become saints yourselves! Amen.

### 3. The Image of the Trinity

Education consists not only in instruction—and not only in

purification. It is also, if I may put it thus, an “impression” (the impression of God’s image on souls). When our Lord sent his apostles to preach the Gospel to all the earth, he said to them: “*Euntes docete...In nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti*; Go and teach...baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Mt 28:19). In order to create man God had taken a lump of clay and had said: “*Faciamus hominem ad imaginem et similitudinem nostrum*; Let us make man to our own image and likeness” (Gen 2:7). So man bore in himself the image and likeness of God. This image of God, this likeness to God, is destroyed by sin—it is restored in baptism. It is the same for education, and the Christian teacher must in some way *engrave* in the soul of students the image of God. Education perfects this image already restored by baptism; education then supplements baptism. Our commission is to imprint and to carve in souls the image of the most holy Trinity.

*In nomine Patris*. In terms of our human intellect the Father represents the faculty of receiving, or rather the faculty of assimilating, ideas. Every true notion is contained in Him. His is the perpetual emanation of knowledge. He engendered his Son from all eternity. If we do not then have recourse to this heavenly Father in order that we might cause the ideas of which he is the source to descend into our souls, our teaching will be in vain; it will be lifeless and cold. We will be nothing but veritable parakeets who do not even manage to act like parakeets. Let us enter then into these ideas, into the powers of the Lord of which the prophet speaks: “*Introibo in potentias Domine*; I will enter into the powers of the Lord” (Ps 70:16a Vulgate). What are these powers of the Lord? These are the divine mysteries, the acts by which God manifests his power to us. So, see how beautiful is the mission of the Christian teacher, for a man who would have a little enthusiasm for it (the bishop spoke to me the other day of a very virtuous man, of a holy man, who lacked enthusiasm); see, I said, how beautiful is this mission of the Christian professor: to take these hearts which are entrusted to him and to lead them to union with God. In this light how absurd is university teaching, which has the pretension of finding something more beautiful than the powers of the Lord—*potentias Domini*, than the divine mysteries which must be part of Christian teaching. In effect, whether in literature, philosophy, or science, you can introduce the souls of students into these mysteries, into these powers, into these divine points of view of our religion. Consider then the teaching contained in the sum of these sublime truths. Where else could we discover such beauty, such greatness? But to begin to appreciate this beauty, this greatness, we must dip into this beautiful science of religion, of theology. We ourselves must “enter into the powers of the Lord; *Introibo in potentias Domini* “. It is true that the words of the prophet which precede are overwhelming for a professor: “*Quoniam non novi litteraturam*, he says, *Introibo in potentias Domini*; Because I possess such little learning, I must enter into the powers of the Lord” (Ps 70:16 Vulgate). But what is this learning, if not vain

literature, vain history, vain grammar, vain rhetoric, and vain science! Literature is nothing but a garment but a suitable garment only when it is unpretentious. At the very foundation of teaching, at its core, it must enter into these powers of the Lord. We ourselves must enter before admitting anyone else.

*In nomine Patris et Filii.* But the ideas do not suffice at all: they must be placed in a certain order, into an eternal wisdom of which the model is the eternal wisdom of the Son. Ideas are indispensable without doubt; St. Thomas calls them the archetypes. But they do not suffice and there are professors full of knowledge who nevertheless are not good Christian teachers because they do not organize their knowledge according to this eternal and immutable wisdom of the Son. If you gather together a great number of rocks, you will have a pile of them. But in order to build a house or a wall, order is necessary and a certain organization, in a word a certain intelligence. It is by intelligence that the Word has made all things: “*Omnia per ipsum facta sunt et sine ipso factum est nihil quod factum est*; It was through Him that all things came into being, and without Him nothing would be that is” (Jn 1:3). It is by the means of this divine wisdom that he has given life to his works: *quod factum est, in ipso vita erat*; What came to be through him was life” (Jn 1:3b-4a), according to the punctuation admitted by some Fathers of the Church and by St. Augustine in particular. So if you wish to give life to your teaching, you must conform it to this divine wisdom, to this “light which illuminates every man born into this world” (Jn 1: 9). It is you who are destined to be the torch-bearers of this light. So you will never be proper teachers, proper Christian teachers, unless you carry this light—this image of the Word, this image of divine wisdom, this image of God’s Son—graven in the very depth of your heart.

*In nomine Spiritus Sancti* Nor can you dispense with the Third Person of God. Who is the Holy Spirit, if not the love which binds Father and Son together. The Christian teacher must then unite himself to God by love. It is especially here that the following words should be repeated these words: “*Nemo dat quod non habet*; One cannot give what one does not have.” How will you light this flame of divine love in souls if the words you utter do not issue from a heart itself blazing with love? It is necessary to love God and to bring others to love him. This is a truth without doubt accepted in word but too little acted upon in practice. Nevertheless, education is no longer anything without this love to rekindle it and give it life. Whatever the field of knowledge that you have to communicate, never fail to inflame souls at the same time with love for God, in whom resides infinite knowledge.

These considerations may take a long time to assimilate; therefore, I am handing them over to you. Meditate on them and try to become fully aware of the magnificent mission entrusted to you. When you begin your class with these words: *In nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus sancti*, remember that these words are in some way a lesson for yourselves, that

you might speak worthily of the Most Blessed Trinity who alone can, in an efficacious manner, communicate to you knowledge, intelligence and love. In this way you will engrave in your soul the image of the Holy Trinity, you will engrave it in the souls of your students and you will merit that this Most Holy Trinity be your eternal reward. Amen.

#### 4. Good example

Christian teaching is not only a baptism, not only a purification, not only the impression of the Most Holy Trinity in souls. It is also, if I may speak thus, the process of turning men into God. And in order to bring this transformation about, what other model can one study than Jesus Christ who combined in Himself the double nature of divinity and humanity? Through him, all humanity becomes divinized: “*Deus factus est homo, ut homo fieret Deus*; God became Man so that Man should become God. This is the teaching of all the Fathers of the Church wonderfully summarized by St. Thomas Aquinas.<sup>336</sup> We will, then, study Jesus Christ: he will be the model we are to imitate in turning ourselves into genuine Christian teachers.

We must look for a passage in the Bible where we find Jesus Christ teaching. Among other passages from the holy books, I will take as a text these words: “*Coepit Jesus facere et docere*; Jesus began to do and to teach” (Acts 1:1), a text that could provide matter for a great number of instructions. Later on we will see Jesus Christ’s method of teaching, the way he set about spreading and inculcating the truth in souls. For today I will stick to this one single phrase: *Coepit facere*. I will show you how Jesus Christ preached by example, something which a Christian teacher must also take care to do. May I repeat the sound maxim that: “*Verba movent, exempla trahunt*; words move, but examples compel.”

##### Shameful shyness

First and foremost you are to use example in order to combat and destroy a certain ‘shameful shyness’ in students. Let false humility give way to genuine charity. “*Luceat lux vestra coram hominibus ut glorificent Patrem vestrum qui in caelis est*; let your light shine before men, that they may witness your good deeds, and give glory to your Father in Heaven” (Mt 5:16). I recall the excellent example given by Mr. Germer-Durand and Mr. Allemand<sup>337</sup> when they were twenty years younger. So I am addressing myself now, in particular, to the younger members of the staff. You who belong to a lower age-group, not much older than some of the students, are

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<sup>336</sup> *Catena aurea in Matthaeum, praefatio*, linea 26 (pag. 5, linea 26)

<sup>337</sup> Louis Germer-Durand (1812-1880) was a professor at the Collège de l’Assomption, who had been tenured by the French university system. He was an archeologist and historian. Louis Allemand (1815-1890) held a degree in mathematics and taught for many years at the Collège. Both were devoted friends and collaborators of Fr. d’Alzon and members of the Third Order.

in a better position to influence these students by your good example. So it is you, in particular, to whom I appeal. It is thus to you that I say, in particular, to work to destroy this ‘shameful shyness’ in students...and for that it is necessary that you begin to destroy it in yourselves. Ah! I would have pity on those of you who would suffer from this ‘shameful shyness’ like your students. This ‘shameful shyness’ is, among many others without doubt, the greatest evil afflicting our age. In order to destroy it, one must study and study endlessly. And whom must one study? Jesus Christ. For Jesus Christ—it must be acknowledged—came on the scene of history at a strange time, one that has many analogies with our own, that age of the Roman invasion, in which hide-bound legalists appeared affirming this principle: “*Quid quid Caesari placuerit, lex sit*/Let whatever pleases Caesar be the law.” (I am not sure if I am citing the text accurately.) The Christian professor must then take a good look at himself and then a good look at his students in order to know by what means he will be able to exercise the best possible influence on them. He must show them by his example that he isn’t afraid of them, if he wishes to get them used to having no fear of themselves.

#### **The reach of good example**

And in this word *facere* I will further distinguish (forgive me for entering into so many subdivisions) between the example and the savoir faire of giving an example, because some people are awkward even in the good example they give. We must distinguish between “private” good example and “public” good example. You may be nothing better nor worse than a “good citizen.” You may give good example simply because you have to. You may say to yourself “It’s a bit of a nuisance—but I must take hold of myself and give good example. After all, it’s my job.” If this is your attitude I’m very sorry for you. In other terms, if you establish for yourself a soft and accommodating morality in private and an austere morality in public, do not imagine that your students don’t notice the difference and from that time forward you will fail among them; you will, if I can use a popular expression, be “sunk.” Now, this is one thing you must avoid. And if you require proof that the students really do notice this incompatibility between your public and private “image,” I can furnish this proof thanks to a very recent experience. Since Fr. Vincent (Bailly) Eugénie left for Rome, I have been interviewing many Moms and Dads—though I leave most of the interviewing to Fr. Emmanuel (Bailly) Eugénie and I have learned astonishing things from them. They have told me particular things about nearly all of you. There are observations from boarders on outing days and from half-boarders and day students, but especially from the last. You have no idea how much these “kids” notice and how critical they are of everything. There are many occasions on which you imagine you are giving no example at all, either good or bad. It is precisely on these occasions that you are being subjected to the very closest of scrutinies. It is especially

regarding private example that the students judge you in public. The teacher who makes a bit of a “show” of himself, who is obviously “playing an act”, is never taken too seriously. But it is especially the reserved professor that students observe; they want to know what there is there below and very often they hit upon the right answers! Let me give you an example of this: a student named Hedde<sup>338</sup>, whose portrait you will have noticed hanging up in my study, once said of a teacher then employed on this staff: “He won’t last more than a couple of years.” Imagine my astonishment, I who wished to make of this teacher a religious (he now has a wife and children). Yet this student had noticed two years previously that he wouldn’t have the “guts” to persevere! Now I am learning of this judgment pronounced by the student two years before the teacher had worn himself out. How could a student assess things so correctly if not because he was unceasingly observing, capable of sensing in some way the conduct of the teacher? So you see how necessary it is to keep an eye on yourself—not only on your public image, but still more on what kind of person you really are. Following the example of our Divine Master, you must constantly lead your students along the path of virtue. Your personal attitude and behaviour must never contradict those principles it is your duty to instil into their minds and hearts. Never cease reflecting on the divine model who is proposed to you so that, by the grace of God, you may succeed in reproducing him as far as human weakness and infirmity permit. Amen.

## 5. Faith and Science

We took for the subject of our last conference the words of Scripture: “*Coepit Jesus facere et docere.*” Today we will show the divine teacher speaking, preaching by the word; for, even if the Christian teacher must preach by his life, by his conduct, by his example, he must still preach by the word. And this word, in order that it produce abundant fruit in souls, must be inspired by faith, knowledge and love.

### I. Faith

Recently I learned that Mr. Berryer<sup>339</sup>, one of the greatest orators of our time, had these words placed in his chapel: “*Credidi, propter quod locutus sum*; I believed, therefore I have spoken” (Ps 115:1 Vulgate). It is the same with all orators; even among the pagans, to be truly eloquent, they must have faith in something. They have faith in their republic. With no faith, with no conviction, they might have been able to arrange sentences like Socrates, but would they have been truly eloquent? I am well aware

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<sup>338</sup> Félix Hedde (+1851) was a student at the Collège, who later worked there as a monitor. He wanted to enter the Assumptionists but died prematurely in 1851.

<sup>339</sup> Pierre-Antoine Berryer (1790-1868) was a lawyer and politician who defended legitimist causes.

that passion or sordid self-interest can replace faith; but I don't have to examine the question from this point of view. What I do wish to impress upon you is that any Christian teaching worthy of the name must necessarily be delivered by someone who believes in what he says and every Christian teacher must be able to say to himself: "*Credidi, propter quod locutus sum.*" We must believe in it—and we must be enthusiastic about it (because people who don't have enthusiasm are entirely boring). Besides, it is this conviction and this enthusiasm which give life and effect to our Christian teaching. This is also why, apart from this teaching, there are, as it is said, only "know-it-alls" and prigs. I am addressing you today in the hope that you will never become "know-it-alls" and prigs.

#### a. Human knowledge

The words of a Christian teacher must also be inspired by knowledge—and here we must distinguish between divine knowledge and human knowledge. It has always been the case, but now more than ever, that divine knowledge has to be "cloaked", if I may speak this way, in human knowledge if it is to be given a chance to penetrate. So the Christian teacher needs to be endowed with this human knowledge and that knowledge, as I have already said, implies preparation. With insufficient learning, the most brilliant intellect, the highest combination of natural gifts, will get you nowhere. You can put lipstick on a pig, put a ribbon on its tail, but it is still a pig. Human knowledge is a debt we owe our students; we are their debtors and, when we examine our consciences, we would do well to ask ourselves whether we have paid our debts—and to their full extent. And it is not a mere question of one particular class-period which we might have messed up; rather, we must interrogate the entire span of our responsibilities. I implore you not to become one of those teachers who are forever looking at their watches—longing for the end of a period during which they couldn't teach enough because they didn't know enough. This knowledge, I know, requires long and painful work; but must we not all earn our bread by the sweat of our brow and this sentence that Monsieur de la Mennais claims to have pronounced especially for writers, is it not still more true of the Christian professor? Let me tell you this, bluntly and in total sincerity (for it would be a waste of time for you to gather here at seven o'clock in the morning to be fed on nothing but compliments). If some stupid Minister of Education had the weird notion of entrusting the education of girls to a group of lay university professors, it was simply because he found the instruction provided by Christian teachers sadly deficient in more than one respect. Yes, let us face it: we are too often found to be lazy professors and ones who fall into a rut (and I charge you to communicate this information to that considerable number of your colleagues who have absented themselves this morning, I don't know why). So and so because he is lazy, and so and so because he's in a bad mood, are neglecting the serious intellectual work which it is their duty, as Christian

teachers, to perform. We must understand, after all, that the situation is grave; genuine education—that is to say, Christian education—is being compromised by our own negligence. It is the future of such studies that is at stake. So, I repeat, if Monsieur Duruy<sup>340</sup> has had the weird notion, the mad notion—and may I add, the criminal notion, for that’s what it is—of thus perverting the education of young women, is it not because he thinks education has already been perverted in its very source—and this is at least partly due to so-called Catholic teachers who couldn’t care less!

Let us work, then, and work hard, to acquire that fund of human knowledge which we are duty-bound to distribute among those whom we teach. And what is more, I repeat, what is more: it is under the cloak of this human knowledge that we are still more duty-bound to instill the knowledge of things divine.

#### **b) Divine Knowledge**

But, might one not say that task of instilling divine knowledge is, surely, that of the priesthood? True—the priesthood is particularly dedicated to spreading the word of God and making it take root in souls. But is the priest forbidden to call on the aid of lay teachers? And, from another point of view, what is more beautiful than having these lay teachers to assist the priest and lend him a hand? No doubt, priests possess the particular, special, and legitimate privilege of expounding the Holy Scriptures; but it would be grossly erroneous to maintain that Catholic teachers have no business studying the Bible. Furthermore, this Catholic pulpit, established in the Church, has for its sister, if I may speak in this way, the pulpit of the teacher (even if he be a layman) from which divine knowledge can and must be handed down together with human knowledge. Human knowledge will only be the form, divine knowledge will be the substance; and don’t believe that this alliance is some form of adultery, as described by St. Paul: “*adulterantes verbum Dei*; adulterating the word of God” (2 Cor 2:17). On the contrary, it is a happy union and the principal goal of our teaching. Besides, this is not a new thing, this call of the Church for priesthood and laity to “team up.” The renowned school of Alexandria was composed especially at its origins of personages elevated without doubt later on account of their services to the honor of the priesthood, but who at

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<sup>340</sup> Jean-Victor Duruy was a history professor and appointed minister of Public Education in 1863. Among his measures were the reorganization of higher education (*enseignement spécial*), the foundation of the *conférences publiques*, which became universal throughout France, and of a course of secondary education for girls by lay teachers.



first had been lay. *Ammonius Saccas*<sup>341</sup> was, even if Monsieur Durand maintained the contrary, a Christian teacher; Origen, so renowned throughout all the churches of Asia and Africa, was at first a layman. It may be the duty of priests, and still more of bishops, to keep a careful eye on lay people who take to evangelisation. It is nonetheless the duty of these lay people to evangelise with all possible zeal.

This, then, causes us to ask ourselves whether we have always done our duty in this respect—whether we have been duly zealous in distributing the Bread of Truth to souls. Finally let us notice that in the word found in Scripture on the divine seed, Jesus Christ only speaks of the poor quality of the ground. He doesn't speak of the poor quality of the grain, of the impure wheat; let us see then whether this seed has not, so to speak, been partly spoiled by our clumsy handling of it, whether we are partly to blame for the paucity of the harvest in souls. I will come back on this extremely important question of human and divine knowledge in another conference.

I had also indicated that there would be another division, on love; but since I don't have the time to talk about it now, I will reserve this point for next Tuesday.

## 6. Love

The last time we met I was unable to treat the final consideration of the way we must teach. This third consideration is love: to love that branch of knowledge it is our duty to impart, to love the souls of those we instruct, last, and to love God in whose name we teach: Such are the three forms our love must take.

### **First, the love of the branch of the knowledge one teaches.**

In the sciences there is what I will call the fundamental sciences and the instrumental sciences. In fact, there is only one fundamental science, religious science. Thus St. Thomas declares that all other sciences must be the servants of theology and likens her to the wise woman in the Gospel: “*vocavit ancillas suas et misit ad arcem*; she called her handmaids and sent them to the citadel.”<sup>342</sup> Is it not a privilege for the Christian teacher to become the instrument of one of the hand-maids of science and of divine truth? In this regard, does he not deprive his words of all their force and

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<sup>341</sup> **Ammonius Saccas** (3rd century AD) was a Greek philosopher from Alexandria who was often referred to as one of the founders of Neoplatonism. He is mainly known as the teacher of Plotinus, whom he taught for eleven years from 232 to 243. He was undoubtedly the biggest influence on Plotinus in his development of Neoplatonism, although little is known about his own philosophical views. Later Christian writers stated that Ammonius was a Christian, but it is now generally assumed that there was a different Ammonius of Alexandria who wrote biblical texts.

<sup>342</sup> This passage is actually from the Book of Proverbs (9:3) and reads “*misit ancillas suas ut vocarent ad arcem*; she sent her handmaids to invite (them) to the tower.”

energy if he utters them un-inspired by the love of what he is teaching? This love for knowledge implies, as I have told you time and again, preparation. For if we love the knowledge it is our task to impart, we will work hard to present it in its most attractive light.

When (Queen) Esther decided to present herself to (King) Ahasuerus,<sup>343</sup> she adorned herself in her most sumptuous apparel. The Christian teacher must do likewise; he must clothe knowledge with the most fitting ornaments so as to make it delightful to his students. So preparation is paramount. But perhaps you think you have everything on the tips of your fingers, so to speak, such that you don't feel any need for preparation. In this case, permit me to repeat it again one more time, you are bordering on routine...and this is no way of interesting them in this knowledge.

#### **Second, the love of souls**

To this love of what we teach, we must add the love of those to whom we teach it. The human soul has been created in the image of God. How is that men fail to love the souls of their fellow human beings? It's beyond comprehension. So every teacher (whatever he is teaching) can, within the two hours of his class-period, pronounce at least one word of faith, one word capable of doing good to souls. Nearly twenty years ago, a professor of mathematics said to me, "What connection can there possibly be between the square of the hypotenuse and theology?" "Are you not aware," I replied, "of what the Fathers (of the Church) have said? They tell us that divine wisdom rests on the numerical and that consequently in mathematics, that is to say, in the study of numbers, it is not impossible to elevate souls to God." Thus, whatever branch of knowledge you teach, you can always, by means of this teaching, inculcate in souls divine knowledge. A certain canon used to say to the bishop of Digne, "The more I delve into the sciences, the more astonished I become that God has revealed the depths and delights which are ours to discover therein...so much so that they give us a foretaste of the Beatific Vision." And, believe it or not, this Canon was one of the most learned minds, and at the same time, the most modest in France. So the professor of mathematics and the professor of philosophy can and must arrive at the same goal in their teaching. The professor of Greek must tend toward this goal as well. Greek can be useful to us in the sense that it helps us in reading the decrees of a great number of councils, and in this way it opens to us the beauties that the writings of several Fathers of the Church contain. Latin is still more useful and Hebrew serves to help us read the Bible. I am, of course, considering all this from a practical point of view—but, believe me, mine are the sentiments which ought to be yours. The professor of living languages may in his turn ask me how he should set about leading souls to divine truth by his teaching. The answer is very simple: in teaching, go and draw from the works of the English or the

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<sup>343</sup> Esther 5:1

Germans new arguments against the rationalists. As for me, I deeply regret never having learned German in my youth in order to read the writings, not of rationalist exegesis, but of the eminently Catholic exegetical writings which are done in the Teutonic tongue. If I were not fifty-seven years old, I would ask Monsieur Trotmann<sup>344</sup> to give me German lessons.

### Third, the love of God

Furthermore, the Christian teacher must love the God of truth and the God of the souls whom our teaching addresses. First of all, do you wish to know why Christian teachers, Catholic professors in general, succeed so little in making truth penetrate into souls, why their teaching is, pardon me the familiarity of the expression, no more than “cat’s soup”? It is that they are not at all men with an interior life, men of prayer. (It is a point that I will probably approach next Tuesday.) We don’t meditate enough on the word of God and that’s why we are not capable of making it penetrate into the hearts of students, of making them hear it; because “*fides ex auditu*; faith comes through hearing”, St. Paul says to us (Rom 10:17), and adds: “*Auditus autem per verbum Christi*; and hearing comes through the word of Christ.” We can thus create faith in souls by our teaching and by that creation we liberate them from ignorance and sin; we enlighten them and we fire them with the love of God. If you remember what I said to you about Christian teaching, that it is an imprinting of the Blessed Trinity in souls, you will understand that we can still produce in ourselves the imitation of the Blessed Trinity. “*Dixit et facta sunt*; He spoke and it came to be” (Ps 32:9 Vulgate). Teaching is a creation, one gives a new birth to men by plunging them into the treasures of eternal truth, and the Christian teacher is thus the imitator of the Father. *Dixit et facta sunt*. Teaching is an act of redemption since one sets souls free from the burden of sin and of ignorance and thus you imitate the Son. *Dixit et facta sunt*. Your teaching enlightens souls, warms them and kindles love within them and thus you imitate the Holy Spirit. You are then the imitators and the instruments of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. This is what you can imitate in yourselves and produce in souls: that which is more admirable, more beautiful, more glorious in the world, i.e. the Blessed Trinity! See therefore if you do not have any reproach to make to yourself on the manner in which you have sought up to this point to impress the image of the Holy Trinity in your soul and in that of students, and if you can hope one day to be rewarded by this Trinity whose kingdom you will extended here below.

## 7. Prayer

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<sup>344</sup> Edouard-Auguste Trotmann was a German professor at the Collège in Nîmes. He became a member of the Third Order and served at one time as editor of the *Revue de l’Enseignement chrétien*.

### I. The power of prayer

Today I am going to show you Jesus Christ, the model of the teacher who prays, and permit me to tell you that I reproach myself very often for not having pushed teachers enough to pray. When I consider the influence that is promised to prayer by Jesus Christ himself: “*Petite et accipietis, quaerite et invenietis, pulsate et aperietur vobis*; Ask and you will receive. Seek and you will find. Knock and the door will be opened to you” (Lk 11:9), when I consider, on the one hand, this influence, and, on the other, I see the insignificant results that we obtain, I am quite naturally led to conclude that we are not men of prayer. If we constantly asked for the salvation of the souls of those who have been entrusted to us, we would receive a positive answer, *petite et accipietis*; if we looked unceasingly for the means to do good to them, we would find these means, *quaerite et invenietis*; and when we knocked at the door of souls, prayer would be the key that would open them for us, *pulsate et aperietur vobis*. This is an incontestable truth for whoever has faith in the mystery of grace.

In the face of the revolutions with which the Holy See is confronted at this moment, from where does the Church’s greatest strength come, if it is not from the prayers that the faithful unceasingly make for their persecuted father? Likewise, be convinced that if, as in the time of St. Peter, the whole church began to pray with ardor, the successor of St. Peter would be still more quickly delivered. Recognize that I am neither prophet nor the son of a prophet, and I don’t wish to affirm that the ecumenical council promised by the Pope will soon take place, but the indiction of this council was to be fixed for the 8<sup>th</sup> of December. Well, thanks to the prayers of the Church, a petition has been drawn up, dated 5<sup>th</sup> of December, and telegraphed to the Holy Father, from here in France, that the Council should, indeed, be summoned on the 8<sup>th</sup> of December. Mind you, I do not know this for certain, but I have reason to expect it to be the case. It would appear that on the 1<sup>st</sup> of December the Archbishop of Paris declared in a speech that now the “agenda” has been prepared. Can one now hope that things will be settled as successfully in Rome? Several of you can recall, if not the youngest, how the prayers of the faithful were efficacious against that Spanish revolutionary, Espatero<sup>345</sup>. I know well that the rationalists will say: *Post hoc, ergo propter hoc*.<sup>346</sup> But us, we will say: prayers were made to attain this goal, now the goal has been attained, therefore...

### II. The example of Moses (Ex 32:11-14)

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<sup>345</sup> Joaquín Baldomero Fernández-Espartero y Álvarez de Toro, Prince of Vergara (1793 – 1879), was a Spanish general and politician, who served as the Regent of Spain. He also served as Prime Minister of Spain three times. He was associated with the radical (or progressive) faction of Spanish liberalism and would become their symbol and champion after taking credit for the victory over the Carlists in 1839.

<sup>346</sup> A Latin phrase, literally “after this, therefore, because of this,” is a logical fallacy in which one event is said to be the cause of a later event simply because it occurred earlier.

But in order to underline for you more than ever the importance of prayer, I will take Moses, this personage of the Old Testament, for whom I have a particular devotion. Moses led the Hebrews out of Egypt and across the desert to the foot of Mt. Sinai. You have done the same for your students. You lead them to the foot of your chair after having torn them from their families, who are very often a sort of Egypt for them. While Moses was on the mountaintop, his students, that is to say, the Hebrews engaged in “farces,” to use a common phrase. Moses descended in fury and broke the tablets; however, that didn’t serve any purpose and so he went back up to pray again to the Lord. The Lord said to him then: “Leave me alone! *Dimitte me!*” and I am going to put you at the head of another people.” (Ex 32:10). “Not so,” beseeched Moses, “I want them; they are mischief-makers, no doubt, but it is precisely for this reason that I want them.” Very often, gentlemen, we have to raise up a band of rascals, mischievous like those whom Moses led. It would be without doubt easier and shorter to rid the establishment of them all; but is that really the best solution since it suits our laziness? Have we, up to this point, fervently prayed for the salvation of these souls? Have we not too often depended on our authority alone? We must, indeed, exercise our authority, and make it respected. But is it not evident, following this example of Moses, that it is often good to replace the brutality which punishes with the firm but gentle patience which Jesus Christ offers us as the most perfect model? I am aware that a headlong collision sometimes occurs between grace and certain unforeseen obstacles, such as certain mannerisms of a teacher, poor teaching methods, the ill-will of students, etc.

### III. The example of Isaiah

Allow me again to cite an example of another personage of the Old Testament, Isaiah. He had a vision, he saw God on his throne....”*super elevatum et excelsum solium*; he saw angels that had six wings, of which two served to veil their face, two to cover the feet of the Lord, and two others to fly” (Is 6:2). And they sang, *Sanctus, sanctus* (6:3). And what did Isaiah say? Isaiah, terrified at the vision, cried out: “*Vae mihi, quia vir pollutes labiis ego*” (6:5b). Let us take a good look at ourselves, gentlemen. Have we too not to reproach ourselves as Isaiah reproached himself? So let us purify ourselves in prayer—and then one of the Seraphim will come up to us with a burning coal, and whisper to us as he whispered to Isaiah: “*Ecce tetigit hoc labia tua*; Behold, I have touched and cleansed thy lips” (6:7).

### IV. The heavenly host

Since I am on the subject of angels who unceasingly carry their prayers before the throne of the eternal one, let me remind you that you have a similar mission, one that is based on the teaching of St. Thomas, of St. Gregory the Great, and of St. Dionysius the Areopagite. St. Thomas admits no specification among the angels—according to him, there are as

many kinds of angels as there are individual angels, in other words, millions of kinds of angels.<sup>347</sup> They may be divided numerically into “choirs”, but not specifically into categories. St. Thomas, I would say, looks at Christian teachers as accomplishing the function of angels with their students, serving as terrestrial angels. He took this teaching from St. Gregory the Great, who himself had taken it from Dionysius the Areopagite. So this brings us very near to the apostles, since St. Dionysius had received the teaching from St. Paul. This is in effect a weighty matter...just as in the celestial hierarchy, upper angels receive messages from God to be transmitted to lower angels—so you betake yourselves to prayer, and there, from the very bosom of the Father you receive treasures of grace to be transmitted, in turn, to the hearts and minds of your students.

Moreover, the Fathers teach us that although man’s nature is, in itself, slightly inferior to that of the angels—“*Minuisti eum paulo minus ab angelis*; You have made him little less than the angels” (Ps 8:6)—man can, by God’s grace, be raised above the angels, as in the obvious case of the Blessed Virgin and of Jesus Christ Himself. Thus you can directly draw from the bosom of God the truths that you must transmit to your students; all that is needed is that you pray. This is the secret of your sanctity: be men of prayer.

I have yet to deal with Jesus Christ, the model of the teacher who prays. Our time is up and I don’t wish to treat this question which will demand several instructions. Let me conclude today by urging you first of all to examine yourselves thoroughly. Have you prayed enough to make your teaching truly efficacious? Secondly, have you striven hard enough to rid yourselves of all those peculiarities—of all those petty faults whereby, though you are already men of prayer, you are not doing as much good to your students as you could be doing? So next time I will speak to you of Jesus Christ as a model of the teacher who prays. I will show you how he conducted a school composed of twelve imbeciles who asked him the most ridiculous questions. This should teach us convincingly that it is not necessary to despair when in our class we have some students who are a little “flaky” or even unmanageable, provided that we place all our confidence in the help of God, in prayer, and provided that we endeavour to do for our students what the archangels are doing for the lesser angels. Amen.

## 8. The Usefulness of Prayer

### Following the example of Christ

I spoke to you last time of Jesus Christ, model of the teacher who prays. I

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<sup>347</sup> *Summa Theologica*, Ia, Part 1, Questions 50-64, 106-114 (Thomas Aquinas&ST&Migne&question 50-64, 106-114)

showed him forming twelve students, the twelve apostles, and I took the liberty of using a rather scandalous name, “imbeciles,” to describe them—something that shocked a few people. I am not going to retract this expression, justified by a plethora of scriptural passages, where one sees the apostles address Our Lord with the strangest questions. But what I especially wanted to emphasize for you was Jesus Christ, model of the teacher who prays, and it is this theme that I wish to develop today. We see in scripture that Jesus Christ, before choosing his apostles, engaged in lengthy prayer: “Erat pernoctans in oratione Dei—he spent the whole night praying” (Lk 6:12). I am not actually suggesting that you should do the same. If you prayed all night, you would fall asleep in class the following morning—which would be, to say the least, an irregularity.

#### **a) The support of the students**

But why does Jesus Christ spend all this time in endless prayer to his Father? You will reply by saying to me that is because he is about to choose his apostles. Yes, no doubt, but also because he foresaw all he would have to suffer: not only from the Jewish leaders who would have him crucified, but also from these same Apostles who were to show so much weakness and cowardliness. Now, when it comes to choice, we cannot imitate Jesus Christ because he was perfectly free to choose his apostles—whereas we have little or no freedom in the choice of our students. They are in some way imposed on us by the will of their parents. I do admit that there are cases where we can get rid of certain students and parents. But it is good to pray when one wishes to fulfill worthily the role of a Christian teacher, because students can cause us lots of headaches, unhappy moments, and concerns. At such moments it is then that the Christian teacher must take refuge in prayer at the foot of the cross of our Divine Savior on their behalf.

From the height of his ‘pulpit,’ that is to say, from the height of his Cross, as all the Fathers and Doctors of the Church have taught, Jesus Christ teaches how to be patient, gentle, and forgiving. Not only can young people be mischievous; they can also prove to be little torturers, who nevertheless, much less than Our Lord’s torturers, *do not know what they do*, and most of the time, alas, they do not know what they are doing at all because no one has taken the trouble to teach it to them. It is necessary to pray that God change the dispositions of their hearts and that he help us understand what we must teach them. And here let me insist, not so much on how stupid the apostles were, but on how stupid we are. We do not seem to appreciate what powerful means we have at our disposal, the prayer and the Cross of Our Savior. If a monitor or a teacher in his class can imagine himself to be in the place of Jesus Christ on the cross or to be a man of prayer, he will be able to see how one can succeed by this means, so efficacious and so easy, at results much greater than those they have obtained up to this point relying on their authority alone.

#### **b) The outpouring of the Holy Spirit**

But prayer serves not only to give us the strength we need in order to put up with all we have to endure from our students. It is also the means of opening up these souls to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. We say at the beginning of each class and of each study period: “*Veni sancte Spiritus, reple tuorum corda fidelium et tui amoris in eis ignem accende*; Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of Thy faithful and enkindle in them the fire of Thy love.”<sup>348</sup> These words call for a long commentary. Let us leave them for the time being, and consider the words which follow: “*Emitte or emittes* (because one can say one or the other) *spiritum tuum et creabuntur et renovabis faciem terrae*; send or you will send your Spirit and a new creation will come about.”

What is that creation, gentlemen? It is evidently not the creation of the world, but a new kind of creation that takes place in souls.

How can I not groan when I see what little appreciation we have of our own power! Here we are, being permitted to participate in the exercise of a power which belongs to God by right—which is, in itself, incommunicable—the very power to create! And we do not know how to make use of it! Let me quote here the wonderful words of Tertullian: “*Quod limus exprimebatur, Christus cogitabatur, homo futurus*; When God created Adam out of clay, he had Christ in mind, Christ the head of the human race”.<sup>349</sup> The grammarians will perhaps find that it will be necessary rather to write *limo* rather than *limus*, but I cite Tertullian such as he is. Whatever may be the case, we have the mission in some way to form, to create anew the souls of young people, on making use of this divine clay that is Jesus Christ. And to do so, we must pray; it is necessary to pray if we wish to renew souls: *et renovabis faciem terrae*. I repeat therefore: what afflicts me is that we often don’t see in our teaching more than texts to explain, problems to resolve, historical facts to present more or less cleverly and that we do not know how, using this “raw material”, to impress on souls some idea of faith and of the love of God. ||

It is therefore necessary to pray: pray to obtain patience, for resignation in the face of the harassment we may have to undergo on the part of our students; it is necessary to pray that we might become instruments of the Holy Spirit in order that he might help us to set souls aflame. Finally, it is necessary to pray for the ability to make our young people saints and to become saints ourselves. Amen.

## 9. Scrutiny of the Teachers by the Students

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<sup>348</sup> “Veni Creator Spiritus” (“Come Creator Spirit”) is a hymn believed to have been written by Rabanus Maurus in the 9th century, based on Ps 103:30 Vulgate.

<sup>349</sup> *De resurrectione mortuorum*, cap 6, linea 12 (Tertullian&On the Resurrection of the Dead&CPL&chap. 6, line 12)



I would have liked to be able to continue with you the subject that we had begun, but I had to be away for a while. Besides, a series of talks I have to give to students during Lent forces me to interrupt our talks and to bring the series of my considerations on education to a close. In this last instruction, I wish to envisage the teacher who is observed by his students and the good that teachers can do to students using such means that they employ in his regard.

#### **Reasons for this scrutiny**

First of all, what is the purpose of this scrutiny? I can think of three reasons. Firstly, because it is natural for young people to be observant. They want to observe everything. They observe our smallest actions, our smallest words, our smallest steps. Nothing escapes them. They seize the smallest failing, the most imperceptible absurdity. The second reason of the scrutiny exercised by the student vis à vis the Christian teacher: students like ours have nothing else to do, so judging one's teacher is a means of passing the time away. Finally, the third reason is that the students wish to take vengeance on the scrutiny that we exercise towards them; it is a sort of tit-for-tat. "You are supervising us", they seem to say. "Very well, we are going to supervise you!"...and, believe me, nothing escapes their searching scrutiny.

#### **Benefits of this Scrutiny**

You understand consequently what advantage, what immense good the Christian teacher can draw from this scrutiny to which young people submit him. They thereby oblige us to take a very tight hold on ourselves. Our faults and failings—be they involuntary or deliberate—must be constantly kept under control for fear of shocking our students. Sometimes, while confessing that they listen to the criticism, teachers begin to say: "Yes, but if only the students were better." Ah! Gentlemen, let us try to heal ourselves first and to be better ourselves and it is thus that we will make students better. I know. Were these lads reasonable, they would make allowances for their teacher being humanly imperfect. Like Shem and Japheth, they would close their eyes to the faults of their teacher and cover with the cloak of Shem and of Japheth the nudity of Noah Professor.<sup>350</sup> I know it has been written: "Honor thy father and thy mother" and that we are "in loco parentis" as regards these young people. But I know too, that far too few teachers make a serious effort to acquire their students' respect.

It is nevertheless at this moment when students are spying on their teacher in order to surprise him that they say to themselves: "Ah! Watch now. He's going to do such or such a thing, something ridiculous as usual." It is at this moment, as I said, when a Christian teacher, who is observant, ought to benefit in order to offer an unforgettable lesson, a good example, to those entrusted to his care. But very often through lack of mortification,

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<sup>350</sup> Reference to Gen 9:23

through routine or through laziness, we indulge our bad habits. Nevertheless, students, you can be sure, despite their hostile disposition toward teachers, would not be upset, let me say it in good French, to discover in us qualities opposed to our shortcomings, for, as La Fontaine has said: “Our master is our enemy.”<sup>351</sup>

You see, the human soul, infested though it is by Original Sin, retains its natural aspiration towards goodness. Longing to be good—though only those of us who have attained a certain degree of perfection can succeed—we instinctively look for goodness in others.

Be therefore quite convinced, gentlemen, that most often, if we don’t draw any fruit from this scrutiny that they make us undergo, it is usually because we have done so little to correct ourselves. How can a teacher who does not behave well pass on good behavior to his students? And this I can say, because it’s common knowledge: Why are we experiencing such difficulty in training our good Oblate Sisters?<sup>352</sup> They do not lack intelligence, are extremely selfless, and do not shrink from hard, manual labor, nor a tough and penitential regime. Nevertheless, how is it that on so many occasions they can seem to lack intelligence and even appear ill mannered? That simply comes from the fact that in their mountain fastness they had no model to show them the way. Most of them grew up under the gaze of big, peasant fathers whose language was coarse and full of indecent vocabulary—uncouth how could they be expected to communicate it to their daughters? “*Nemo dat quod non habet*; No one can give what he doesn’t have”. This is how it happens that while being endowed with a certain intelligence and a great dose of good will, these poor girls lacked so many things. It is that they have had, I repeat, no model to show them the way.

Exactly the same can be expected of our students: they will become what you turn them into, not only by what you say, but by how you yourselves behave. Each time that they observe you, you will can give them a pleasant surprise (and here I use this word in its Christian sense in the way I just explained to you). It is at the moment when they least expect it that you will do them the most good. You can inspire them to piety—and I take this word in its most elevated sense, that is to say, an intimate relationship with God. But may this piety be sincere, because students know full well how to distinguish sincere piety from narrow-minded and affected piety, not to mention hypocritical piety. I dare to hope that no one among you has this kind of piety, marked by a certain coarseness or insipidness that students cannot put up with. Last but not least, you can inculcate the lofty ideals of

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<sup>351</sup> *Le Vieillard et l’Ane* Livre VI - Fable 8 (*The Old Man and the Ass*)...in French the phrase is: “Notre ennemi, c’est notre maître.” (La Fontaine&The Old Man an the Ass&bk. 6, fable 8)

<sup>352</sup>A few of the first Oblate Sisters had been taken onto the college staff at the opening of the new term. They performed their duties conscientiously, though with the minimum of experience.

self-sacrifice and self-denial—not by a lengthy discourse on the subject, but by the way you conduct your class, by the way you supervise the study-period...by the way you perform all your actions in such a manner as to edify those entrusted to your care. But in order to achieve this, you must take your inspiration from the model I have so often proposed to you; you must put on the mind of Jesus Christ and draw from his life the notions of sacrifice and of love of souls the practice of which can alone produce a perfect Christian teacher. Amen.

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## ***V. Practical Guidelines***

*The practical advice which follows has lost none of its relevance with time. Those in charge of houses of education, faced with the same challenges, will find here many handy suggestions in their desire to maintain the interest and professional conscience of the teachers for whom they have responsibility.*

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### **1. Entertainment**

*January 29, 1849*

The approach of Carnival provides the headmaster an opportunity to speak of the kind of entertainment which men can enjoy, entertainment which gives proof of a Christian spirit. It is necessary to amuse oneself in a useful manner and in order to succeed there, it is necessary to do it with the goal of resting and of forming one's mind. For, a member of the Third Order, in order to protest in the world against the spirit of the world, has need of making himself into a witty person with good taste; for that he needs tact and humility, because the proud man doesn't have the spirit of which the teacher speaks. It is also necessary to know how to use one's mind in a suitable manner, to put it at the reach of all. It is necessary finally to speak and to give good example, not with the intention of making oneself admired, but in order to amuse others. What Jesus Christ tolerates in order that one become good is the search for a Christian thought in the middle of enjoying oneself. Finally, it is necessary to amuse oneself with a certain politeness united with a spirit of charity which can maintain among the members of the Third Order closer relations.

Enjoying ourselves can also be considered a duty, because we can by this means do the greatest good for our students by choosing the kind of entertainment which suits their age the best, keeping in mind the influence that their kind of fun exercises on them. So we will have to ask ourselves the following questions and to meditate on them seriously: first, how do I entertain myself? Second, what good have I looked to achieve for myself and others in entertainment? Third, how in the games in which I have been involved have I looked to take second place? Fourth, how have I sought to improve myself and others in entertainment? And, fifth, in what way should be involved with students in these activities?

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## 2. Punishments

*February 11, 1850*

The headmaster expects us to examine seriously the way in which we punish our students, because the abuse of punishment develops in young people the tendency to do wrong. If you wish students to accept punishment well and humbly, it must be done without anger or sarcasm. We must understand the full extent of our obligations as teachers at Assumption. Our attitude and conduct must inspire respect and demonstrate a devotion that is unquestionable. With unerring instinct, these young people can detect the difference between a truly dedicated teacher and one who is merely “playing the part.” The sole motive of our dedication must be Jesus Christ; it is for love of him that we must do everything.

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## 3. Spiritual Fatherhood

*May 27, 1850*

The director requests that we examine how much time we spend with students and the nature of that involvement. Let us follow the simple rule which is that of Christian fatherhood. It puts us at our ease, and removes artificial restraints. One of the principal characteristics of paternal tenderness is its generality—to extend oneself to all one’s students so that all feel loved with the same kind and degree of fatherly affection. So let our students feel that we are equally fond of all of them; if anything about them displeases us, it must be their faults, but never their personalities! Let there be nothing in the nature of favoritism. If the affection is truly fatherly, one’s authority can also be founded in this; the father must imprint in his son a sentiment of respect which underlies authority. Authority that is influential and effective has no need of punishment, for punishment is often a recognition of weakness. As the mother directs a child by tenderness and persuasion, a father must do so by authority. In our relations with our students, let us act in the name of God. Let us double our efforts and shelter ourselves from any hint of personal caprice.

So let us examine our attitude towards them. Is it based on true affection, on true authority, on true Christian fatherhood? Even if we extend our affection to students who do not belong to us, let give some thought to the fact that although we love them, we must be careful not to let our hearts get overly attached to them.

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## 4. Preparing the Summer Vacation

*July 21, 1851*

Fr. d'Alzon requested that members of the Third Order take care of preparing vacation times and provide students, during the final three weeks, individual, particular advice that would serve as the application and the complement of the general advice given to them with respect to this subject during instructions given in the chapel. These personal, particular words of advice should touch on four principle points: first, the work of young people during vacation time; second, their recreation; third, their relations; fourth, their readings.

1° First, as for work, we should encourage them to consecrate several hours each day...not too much time, two or three hours at most. We must, therefore study their aptitudes—what they are good at. Some of them require our special interest—some of them will respond to our personal influence. With the knowledge that we have thus acquired, or that perhaps we already possess of these dispositions, of these tastes, of these needs, our advice will be able to serve the young and help us to enlighten them on their vocation. How often we hear of young men who, having been “impossible” in school, nevertheless attained eminence in their chosen professions, thanks to one little word, one chance encounter, something we considered hardly anything, that opened their eyes to their veritable aptitudes!

Be convinced of this: this voluntary work carried out by our students, with the counsel and direction of an absent teacher, these vacations well used, can, among other things, reveal to young people what they are truly capable of.

2° Second, as for the readings we recommend to them, some must be serious ones, others entertaining. They are meant (and will have as a result, if they are well chosen) to preserve them from dangerous books. We must select for them in advance good books within their reach. We certainly cannot exclude certain novels such as those of Walter Scott or Fennimore Cooper. And there are still others from which to choose.

3° Third, we can also, up to a point, make use of their recreation time by directing them in advance in the choice of the games they are expecting to get involved in and that they share with us. We are touching here on quite personal matters that require particular, individual advice.

4° Fourth, their relationships, especially with boys their own age, with students from other establishments, are again a matter of utmost importance. They cannot be too carefully warned against bad company—taught the signs whereby to recognise a companion who will do them no good. Teachers here at Assumption can do great good by spending time in the preparation of good vacations for those of our students in whom they take a more particular interest. They might also encourage students to write to them during their vacations. A student writing to his teacher will, no

doubt, try to depict himself as better than he really is—but most of them are still too simple to hide their true selves from an eye that has a little experience. A lengthy, sustained and serious exchange of letters between teacher and student can do the latter a vast amount of good and, for the former, shed light on points that need to be addressed. Even if you write to him about his studies, you can be giving him moral support, raising his sights, and giving helpful direction to his character and thinking.

Therefore, teachers of the Third Order must understand, as the school year draws to a close, how to raise student morale. These young people are dying from the heat and their souls, as a result, are affected as well. That means that teachers must make even greater efforts themselves in order to be more effective with them and to maintain proper behavior, especially moral behavior. The need to maintain such high standards has led to some expulsions in recent days. Let's also be aware of the role we may have played, to a certain point, in this regrettable result. Have we done everything that we should have to prevent it? From this day on, let us resolve to exercise whatever influence we may have on the souls of students so as to prepare them to use their vacations and their freedom in such a way that they might be able, one day, without endangering their souls, to enjoy complete liberty.

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## 5. Conversations with the Students

*November 4, 1851*

As director, I would like to call the attention of Third Order members to conversations with students, what influence they can have and what good we can do through them. Over the coming year let us focus on such conversations to do them good. Do this more in the courtyard than in the classroom. Let us not deceive ourselves; in this regard, a great deal of harm was done last year with several students. Now it is a question of repairing this harm and the task of you, members of the Third Order.

If we are to do any good at all, it is indispensable for us to maintain a spirit of unity. To each of us without a doubt, there is a freedom to act according to one's character; liberty to act according to his character; but it is our duty in conscience never to set ourselves up against official policy. Last year unity was again ruptured more than once—we must make sure this doesn't happen again.

In order to maintain a Christian atmosphere, we must be convinced that we cannot function without Faith—without serious Piety—without Piety being given pride of place. But what influence for good can we hope to exert if our mouth does not speak out of the abundance of our heart?—or if our own hearts hover between lukewarmness and coldness? Members of

the Third Order must bear witness in all things to your profound esteem for holy things. You must be seen to participate in the religious functions—to spend some time in chapel. You must never be afraid of speaking about God. You must steer conversations back to God. And you must be relentless in your attitude towards those who grumble—showing them the truth about things. You must see that authority is upheld, by upholding it yourself. Authority can, sometimes, be wrong—but you must never say so! You can never under-rate the evil done by tacit disagreement, by criticism, by the sound of dissent—in a word, what one may consider nothing at all but which does incalculable harm. Opposition is a natural reaction. Unfortunately, it is not only built into our political constitution—it is primarily part of our vanity and pride. We need a faith that is more courageous; we need to know how to lift ourselves above ourselves, to deliver ourselves from our own pettiness. Authority needs strengthening—always, and all along the line. Authority can be abused (of course it can!) If and when it is, we must not complain about them in public but we, out of duty, must report them to the proper authorities. This is very different from criticizing them publicly.

Think of the good we can do during recreation—and also of the great harm. We can have two attitudes towards these young people: we can enjoy ourselves in their company—or we can amuse ourselves at their expense. To enjoy ourselves in their company is mutually beneficial—is this the mutual benefit we have in mind? Think seriously along these lines; they are worth the trouble of being deepened. We need to be penetrated with such a deep respect for their souls! We need such tact and delicacy in handling them and leading them to embrace the good! Be aware that we have in this moment in the house a certain number of students whose souls are being actively worked on by grace. They are aspiring towards God; their souls are being captivated by the love of God, turning toward piety and the supernatural world. What a crime it would be for us to stand in their way—to block their noble aspirations! But if we cannot make these germs of faith blossom, what greater offense could we commit before God!

Let us form a good core of these young Christians, generous, ardent for the good, filled with faith. And let us convince ourselves of this: we will have set the edifice of our education on a solid foundation. With their help we will overcome whatever evil remains, for there will always be vestiges of evil that remain, but will no longer be able to cause irreparable damage. Are not our zeal, our action reinforced by the collaboration of these young brothers?

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## 6° Distinction

*April 3, 1854*



Father Director comes back to the subject of vulgarity and on the need to root it out.

1° The mere effort to overcome it is a victory because it entails a certain mortification. One must separate himself from pettiness—and that hurts. But no sooner have we begun this process than we begin to grow. Let us set out to then to cultivate in ourselves this sense of distinction. The soul of a Christian always has this sense of distinction. There is not a single one of us that does not have this own. But how many bury it or lose it little by little because they do not know or do not want to develop this precious seed.

But, let us admit it, arriving at this sense of distinction in one's thoughts and sentiments is not easy. Well, yes and no. There are some very simple and very practical means one can undertake to facilitate this process. Consider the daily life of a teacher. What opportunities arise of their own accord to increase his cultural growth and development! First of all, let us establish the principle that we must nourish our spirit with distinguished studies, as is fitting for people who have a certain culture of the mind. Must we not develop those faculties we have to use? If we wish to raise the level of these budding intellects, must we not begin by raising our own? Now, where do we stand in this chapter? In the classroom—in our performance of private classes— at home (for those of us who are married)...what are our usual standards of culture and conversation? Do we think and talk about nothing but trivialities? If we want to “size somebody up” with a fair degree of accuracy in this regard, it would be enough to question ourselves on the content of our daily conversations. Gossip, for example, can be without doubt fodder for vulgar minds but is assuredly a sign of decadence for distinguished minds. So take a teacher—someone whose business is serious study or at least should be, what would we think of him if he became a scandal-monger?

2° A word well considered can quickly put us back on our feet. “*Dominus possedit me*; The Lord possessed me” (Prov 8:22). Let us penetrate the meaning of these words: we will see clearly that it is necessary and that it is possible to reach God by some means. There is here a reminder of what should take place at every moment. Let's get down to everyday details, which often escape our notice. Say that we're in the refectory: why would we not raise our thoughts to God? Why not listen attentively to the reading which is being done? A simple sentence from the *Imitation of Christ* would suffice to raise us up. Fathers of a family, as you are on your way home, why not whisper a pious word to our son? At table, can we not find anything that might benefit ourselves and the world around us, a witticism to tell, a phrase to comment on, a work to recommend? In fact, if we don't do it, it's because we don't want to do it. We find it boring. And thus we leave these young hearts, these budding intellects, to dwell on everyday ideas. We have to understand that in order to raise our minds to higher things, we have to make an effort. Of all that we have read, what remains? Have we digested and how much? Have they fed us? Do we live

with an idea that has struck us, with a model that has manifested itself to our gaze? For our soul is like red-hot iron at the blacksmith's—it has to be beaten into shape again and again. It is a noble metal which must take on a determined shape. It won't take on that shape without our cooperation; neither does God, on his part, wish to work alone in doing it. So what shape are we giving ourselves? Perhaps we're having a hard time taking things from an intellectual point of view. Let's try using our hearts. Yes, what a rich possibility! And yet even here we find such poverty! Instead of refinement, warm affection, courtesy, and true charity, we find disrespect, obstinacy, self-centeredness, a brittle, nervous, and vulnerable personality, a cynical spirit, and above all, every species of antipathy. How right and good, in good form and in good taste, to let go of all of this!

What about our conversations! Why can't we seek the company of more distinguished intellects? Why remain in a world that neither thinks nor reads? Why not seek to raise the level of the conversations in which we find ourselves? Why? That's the question we keep repeating and the answer is: because we don't want to. We are too lazy to make the effort, to take ourselves in hand. We prefer to speak in pairs? Why not in threes....not only with "this" one alone, but with "these and those"? We could do the others so much good. We would finally get out of ourselves; it would be a real act of charity. Or perhaps someone would draw us out of ourselves and how enriched we would be!

3° Here the notion of the spiritual bouquet comes into play, but instead of roses, we have placed thorns. By examining ourselves closely, by taking some distance from the way we usually do things, we quickly come to see ourselves as we really. And it is deeply humiliating to have to admit that we are commonplace, narrow of outlook, with as little room in our hearts as there is in our head. Now, to confess that one is not something distinguished, that there is not great space, a great largeness in one's heart no more than in one's head is very humiliating, very mortifying. So much the better! It stings. It burns. But at least it rouses us from our lethargy! Instead of shutting oneself in one's resentment, in one's sadness, the effort to ennoble oneself enlarges, opens, helps oneself to blossom. We were about to despair, to get puffed up, to suffocate ourselves. Now, on the contrary, we feel we are being born again, we blend in, fresh air filling our lungs raises us a little to the heights. Besides, despair is nothing more than disappointed pride. Even though we were so low, as if crawling along the ground, we can arrive at our destination, we can rise, if we wish to.

Let us then take this resolution, it is an excellent mortification to put into practice during Holy Week. What an excellent manner to do the way of the Cross.

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## 7° Start of the New School Year

October 8, 1867

#### Work

I would first call your attention, gentlemen, to a very important point: work.—When one wishes to make others work, he has to give the example and work himself. It happens too often that one says to a student, “You are lazy” while you yourself neglect to prepare your classes or correct your copy-books. How, gentlemen, can a teacher with any kind of conscience walk into his class-room without having prepared what to say? There is on your part a duty of conscience. Monsieur Durand here is a teacher of no mean talent and many years’ experience—and he will tell us he never enters a class-room without at least three quarters of an hour’s preparation, often a full hour’s. It seems to me that the rest of you—especially the younger among you—ought to take at least as much time. I see parents; I have heard what students have confided in me, remarks that contain not the least bad spirit at all. When I hear it said that homework in certain classes does not get corrected for two months in a row, how can I wonder that some of these students are discontented, that some of them dread being in such and such a class, where they would be exposed to undergo this way of doing things?

#### Love of students

Hard work is not sufficient, my friends. We must get to love these students. Monsignor Gerbet<sup>353</sup>, in his book on the Eucharist, says that God in his love is like a sloping plane directed toward his creatures. Now, you are Christian teachers, gentlemen; and if you must love souls first in virtue of the precept of charity, how much more as Christian teachers must you not love those entrusted to your care in order to lead them to God? And you have no idea what bitter fruits of hatred and dislike are being stored up in these youthful hearts against those of you with acid tongues—those of you who utter hurtful comments, to which they cannot reply because they are too young to have acquired the level of your mind. Some teachers go so far as, unwittingly, to entertain personal antipathy and personal grudges. How they can reconcile this with the duty of charity that is incumbent on them is beyond my comprehension. Without treating students with the deadly distance of the universities, we must be on guard to treat them too often as someone just brought in off the street. We come and we go. We rub shoulders with them, but we’re afraid to mingle with them. It is no wonder that certain groups arose last year that engaged in angry discourse. Such a sorry state of affairs would never have arisen, had some of their teachers not

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<sup>353</sup> Philippe-Olympe Gerbet was a friend of Fr. d’Alzon and a former student of la Mennais; he was eventually named bishop of Perpignan. The book referred to here on the Eucharist:

*Considerations sur le dogme generateur de la piete catholique*, 1829 (French); *Considerations on the Eucharist: Viewed as the Generative Dogma of Catholic Piety*, 1839 (English translation). Among other works, he wrote *Précis de l’histoire de la philosophie*.

been so abominably standoffish. Is that what the charity of a Christian teacher is all about? I don't think so. "*Plenitudo legis delectio*; Love is the fulfillment of the law" (Rom 13:10). The fulfillment of the law is charity carried to the point of tenderness, *delectio*. I entreat you, gentlemen, to ask yourselves to what extent you are culpable in this regard.

#### **Selflessness**

One of the conditions of this affection is selflessness, and I now intend to speak of that selflessness that applies to lay teachers and religious alike. I am not talking about that villainous and base self-interest which is unknown here. I am not even going to broach such a topic because I do not wish to insult you by thinking for a moment that there is anyone here who agrees with such views as forming part of the generous and elevated mission of a Christian establishment. I simply asking you if you really understand that degree of unselfishness which consists in giving not only your help, not only your knowledge, not only the sweat of your brow, but your whole and entire self—in dedicating yourself one hundred per cent to a cause. Nor am I speaking of a cause as would be that of Assumption College in particular, because even this could have a vestige of self-interest, the success of an establishment or of a work. What I am speaking of is this selflessness that spurs us to give ourselves to something higher still, to a great cause like that of making young people, whatever the cost, row up to be strong Christians for the future, to raise up citizens and defenders of the Church. Such disinterestedness does not exclude legitimate motives which may make demands on us, but it must dominate and penetrate our whole lives. We must get to the point that we can say with St. Paul, "*Omnia impendam et superimpendam ipse pro animabus vestris*; For my own part I will gladly spend and be spent on your souls' behalf" (2 Cor 12:15). This will lead you to a life of sacrifice—and to the conviction that their religious education must take priority over the rest of their studies. Having instructed them in what are secondary truths, you should accompany them in adoring Him who is the Eternal Truth and teach them how to adore by the way you seriously undertake everything we do in the chapel. Complaints are being made that fewer and fewer masters are regularly attending chapel. You must be more demanding in your attendance, gentlemen. On seeing these pews deserted and empty perhaps you will have to ask yourselves if it is by your negligence and lack of punctuality that you are not the cause of these absences.

#### **Punctuality**

Punctuality, gentlemen, is another form of penance, a form of self-denial, which the Prefect of Discipline goes down on his knees to implore you to impose upon yourselves. He also asks you to be moderate in dealing out rewards and punishments. He himself will acquaint you with a number of recommendations he has already made to me. He will distribute leaflets concerning the regulations for lay teachers that I wish to see re-introduced

here.

And now, gentlemen let me pass on to another topic.

#### Supernatural Refinement

Gentlemen, it has recently been observed that the social standing of our students is on the decline. It has been repeated that perhaps we are not addressing ourselves to students of the upper classes and therefore, from now on, our methods of education must be geared to suit the mentality of newcomers. Now, I think this is all wrong. We must, on the contrary, retain our high standards, even though many of our students now come from a less refined background. This outward refinement, what I would call an overlay of refinement, does prove to be a most effective barrier between good-mannered and ill-mannered people. For the teacher who possesses it and knows how to put it to good use, it gives an undoubted advantage in terms of the authority he exercises, better than any other means.

Above this outward way, there is, gentlemen, a superior refinement; it is the careful, considerate, tactful and tasteful tone you must give to your teaching. You must, of course, be well versed in your subject matter—but it is also necessary to know how to “put it across”, to make your listeners accept and enjoy it: “*Virtus ex illo exibat*; power went out from him,” Our Lord said (Lk 6:19).

A mysterious strength issued from his soul, from his divinity, that seemed to pass through the very pores of his body; so must you make every effort to render your soul transparent, to use the beautiful expression of Lacordaire<sup>354</sup>. Do not confront the weakness of these youth with a crudeness that takes account of the way it is presented.—This brutal, bullying crudeness doesn’t sink in, it moves no one. In proceeding in this fashion, all you do is to make of Christian teaching a bogeyman and you get rid of all its benefits.

One day the Pharisees, after having heard Our Lord speak returned saying: “*Numquam locutus est homo, sicut homo ille locutus est nobis*; No man has ever spoken like this man spoke to us” (Jn 7:46). Here, gentlemen, is what we must imitate when we speak: to make every to give to our speech this supernatural character that is attractive, charming, and uplifting. To do so, you must prepare your classes, to discover ways to acquire every day what is lacking in you, and not to ignore that mysterious strength that accompanies the higher levels of speech. Consider the history of painting: you have there an example of what I am proposing. Michelangelo took incredible pains in his frescoes in the Sistine Chapel to depict the muscular contours; they are equally remarkable in the way he meticulously executes

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<sup>354</sup> Henri-Dominique Lacordaire (1802 – 1861) was a French ecclesiastic, preacher, journalist, theologian and political activist. He re-established the Dominican Order in post-Revolutionary France. Lacordaire was reputed to be the greatest pulpit orator of the nineteenth century. St. Marie-Eugénie attributes her conversion to the 1836 Lenten series preached by Lacordaire in Notre Dame Cathedral.

them. They are more astonishing than uplifting. Consider on the contrary the figures of Fra Angelico; they are perhaps a little stiff, but at the same time see how they are enveloped, surrounded, animated by a grace of form, which makes of these saints saints who don't seem to be bored in paradise. It is said that a sermon on paradise can be quite boring, and that the saints must be terribly bored, if there is no rejoicing there. However, this sermon in painting which depicts the saints is hardly boring. So we must endeavor, gentlemen, to convey this charm in the way we speak, this way that helps us reach everyone, as the Apostle says: "*Omnia omnibus factus sum*; I have become all things to all men" (I Cor 9:22). Is this meant to make me popular? Such would be the vilest of motives and that's why St. Paul adds: "*Ut omnes Christo lucrificam; to win them all for Christ*" (Gal 1:10).

Here I foresee an objection. But, you will say, the Apostles were rather simple and unrefined men. Listen to the response of St. John Chrysostom in his *Treatise on the Priesthood*.<sup>355</sup> "If you don't have the inspiration of the apostles and of St. Paul, do not attempt to imitate their bluntness in the direction of souls." This is, gentlemen, what golden-tongued one says. Endeavor to become brilliant professors, brilliant in the supernatural sense of this word. Let the older ones among you continue to improve your style. Let the younger ones study for further degrees. For all of us there is plenty of room for improvement. Since you must all try to become what people say of you, that you are brilliant teachers, baptize this natural tendency of every zealous teacher, so that, seeing and the grace-filled influence of your words, they may say: "*Numquam locutus est homo sicut homo ille locutus est nobis*; No man has ever spoken like this man spoke to us" (Jn 7:46). I know that some subjects are as dry as mathematics (something Pascal considered not to be beautiful), which does not include the grace-filled influence of words, but professors of literature must especially endeavor to acquire it.

It is thus, gentlemen, that endeavoring to become Christian teachers, you will win, if not the reward of gratitude on the part of your students (gratitude that is very rare because students are often very ungrateful and the return to this academic year has provided us with ample evidence), at least an eternal reward.

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## 8° Contagious faith

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<sup>355</sup> *On the Priesthood*, 390—391 (John Chrysostom & *Treatise on the Priesthood* & 390-391)

*Lavagnac October 12, 1878*

*to the Reverend Emmanuel Bailly<sup>356</sup>*

...Let us work to make Christians of our students; the rest will follow. Do you think we are too concerned with their shortcomings—and insufficiently with encouraging them in the practice of virtue? We have proceeded by being negative, or if you prefer, by destroying, not enough by edifying or by planting. You will retort: “But before planting good trees, you have to get rid of the bad roots.” Not always. In America, many trunks are left to rot in the fields, and the harvests are only more beautiful as a result. It is the obstacle transformed into an asset. Let us forget about these petty annoyances that appear as thorns. One day we will be able to burn the lot and carry on with our good work. Let us ask our students to acquire many virtues. Let us have the courage to speak to them clearly of their becoming saints, let us train them. If the parents complain, let them do so. Let us do the work of God with humility, confidence, courage and perseverance. Believe me that Assumption is preparing for itself beautiful days ahead, provided it desires only God and the Church. Let us love, let us make Jesus Christ and the Blessed Virgin loved. The rest will follow. But for this we need faith—heroic and contagious faith.

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<sup>356</sup> Fr. Emmanuel Bailly was our third Superior General – from 1902 till his sudden death in 1917. In 1878 Fr. d’Alzon had left him in temporary charge of the college at Nîmes. After Fr. d’Alzon’s death, he became Novice-Master, and the college was taken over by Fr. Alexis Dumazer.

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### *To the Students of Nîmes*

*Fr. d'Alzon has himself presented in the Memoirs of a Former Student the famous Saturday instructions of Assumption College. Two series of these instructions, which have been preserved for us, were edited by P. E. Baudouy<sup>357</sup>. Those on education complement very well; from the point of view of the students; the principles of Fr. d'Alzon. They are being mentioned here without including them since they are easily accessible.*

*This section presents two articles extracted from the Revue de l'Assomption: two sermons, among a number that, at the end of his life, Fr. d'Alzon edited in a definitive and delightful way entitled, "Vacation Advice," the theme of which was the formation of a Christian Europe in the face of a schismatic Near East, and of a still unbelieving world.*

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### 1. Saturday Instructions

It is said that Assumption College has its special character. Assumption owes this character above all to the Saturday instructions. Remembering his own school-days at the Stanislas Academy in Paris, Father d'Alzon decided that every Saturday the Litany of Our Blessed Lady would be sung. But, in order to take advantage of this meeting of the entire student body, he followed the praises of the "Mistress of the House" with certain pieces of advice. This consisted in a series of recommendations—and he wore no vestments save his religious habit. The very informality of this conversation permitted him to enter into certain details, and it is often said that these details had for the students, by their very originality, a special character. We remember them and talked about them because nothing was said here the way it would have been said anywhere else. He had some very fixed ideas which some of the older teachers didn't always like because they were presented categorically. On the one hand Father d'Alzon did not object to being criticised—but on the other hand, he took little notice of the criticisms. On occasion he would yield but when he got

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<sup>357</sup> Ernest Baudouy (1862-1942) was an Assumptionist religious who became assistant general and in 1932 wrote a biography of Fr. Picard, the second superior general of the Assumption.



something fixed in his head, he was going to dig in his heels.

Students don't change; all you need do is tell them one thing and some sharp-witted minds want to say just the opposite. Fr. d'Alzon especially attacked having a high opinion of oneself; that didn't prevent certain students from wanting to debate him and insisting on it. Much of the summer would be spent discussing points. Eventually objections discontinued and in short order those who had been so over-excited let go of their talk of fighting over everything and anything.

However, the particular character of these instructions or, to say more clearly, the way he kept harping on several key ideas touched not only our minds but our hearts as well. A few of us allowed teachers to have a deeper impact on us. The Saturday instructions were followed up by commentaries, usually given by M. Monnier<sup>358</sup>. When they arrived, they bore great fruit by enlightening students' consciences of the students, sometimes providing a light, but more often producing an act of remorse. As a result, the horizon of our minds were enlarged, the character of the school took shape, and the general "school spirit" was reinforced. Assumption wasn't a school like any other, and we liked it that way.

We engaged in charitable works and tried our hand at the conferences of St. Vincent de Paul. We became ultramontane. We practiced religious piety with conviction, and those of us less religiously inclined, with less religious scruples, never mocked at the greater fervour of their classmates. We saw that some of these, once they saw that they were not being mocked, soon began behaving like everyone else, because they realized there was no benefit in standing alone and not falling in line.

The character of our Saturday instructions began to change—above all as we moved from the little chapel (which is now two rooms, the philosophy hall and the reading room for current journals and newspapers) into the big chapel. Then Fr. d'Alzon put on his surplice and proposed a topic that he didn't always stick to. At that time there also began the month of Mary and the Lenten instructions of Lent. In the end Fr. d'Alzon made an effort to become more formal. Did he become boring? One might ask if he would not have done better by remaining what he was, a dispenser of good advice on how to be proper Christians and worthy students of the Assumption.

*from a former student*

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## 2. Broad- and Narrow-Mindedness

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<sup>358</sup> Louis-Jules Monnier, a friend and colleague of Mr. Germer-Durand and likewise holding national University accreditation (*agrégé*), taught for many years at Assumption College in Nimes, joined the Third Order of the Assumption, as well as the St. Vincent de Paul Society

To be broad-minded means to look at things as they actually are; when you're narrow-minded you look at things as they affect you. However, I have known people who would always say that it was necessary to see things in their depth, but who in reality saw things mistakenly; for they had 'twisted' minds.

To be broad-minded consists in devoting yourself to a cause. The narrow mind devotes itself to itself, under pretext of embracing some cause. The broad mind makes every effort to soar, while the narrow mind digs mole holes, and is quite content with taking shelter in a hole, because the essential goal of the narrow-minded is not to commit himself; this he calls prudence.

But genuine prudence is a noble virtue. It seeks to govern people and things in view of the general good. The prudence of the narrow-minded is concerned with nothing more than *his thing and his person*.

Someone broad-minded is quite useless without a strong and generous character; without it, he sees what needs to be done and does nothing. A narrow-minded person may be brimful of energy, but he does more harm than good and makes a lot of noise while accomplishing nothing. And if his outlook corresponds to his character, you can expect all kinds of stupid things, justified by the most comic reasons, if in fact they aren't simply foolish.

A broad-minded person looks on the world with a certain mistrust. He sees far ahead—in fact he is in advance of his times. A narrow-minded person hides himself under a saucepan-lid. He cannot see to the bottom of the saucepan—it's too far down. So he bangs on the lid. He says: "There now! I told you this is as far as we can go. Blessed the mortal who considers the lid the extent of the heavens!"

The *esprit de corps* is a beautiful thing! In 1826 or 1827, M. Bonald<sup>359</sup> published a very remarkable brochure on the *esprit de corps* ('public spirit') and *esprit de parti* ('party spirit'). He supported all the wonderful fruit that this *esprit de corps* can produce, on condition that it is broad-minded. If it is narrow, you can expect to see this narrow-mindedness expand in the inverse sense by those members who make up this body. An isolated, narrow mind can do stupid things, but how much more will the entire body do with such a spirit? *Incedo per ignem*; I will walk through the fire" (cf Ps 66:12 Vulgate)...let us walk on like a cat on hot coals, and say: "Blessed are the broad-minded who have a delightful character! Let us pray that the narrow-minded are not at the same time harmful minds, ignorant of the harm they do.

*A former student*

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<sup>359</sup> French writer and politician (1754-1840), a relative of Fr. d'Alzon. He defended religion and monarchy. When d'Alzon was just 17, he said of him, "I am crazy for Mr. de Bonald's system."

### 3. The Chapel

1877 or 1878

The center of every Christian establishment is the chapel. It is utterly distinct from any other part of the building. The chapel spells the radical difference between young men dedicating themselves to this world, and young men dedicating themselves to God.

Indeed, the chapel is a sanctuary where one finds:

1° God in order to know him in his perfections and to adore Him.

2° Jesus Christ in order to listen to his teaching and to imitate his example.

3° The Holy Spirit in order to perfect oneself under the influence of his gifts.

1.—*The chapel, a sanctuary where one learns to know the perfections of God and to adore Him.* The chapel is a sanctuary, a holy place. Why? Because God is to be found there. “Locus iste sanctus est; This is a holy place” (Gen 28:16), Jacob said after his mysterious dream, and “ego nesciebam; I was unaware of it.” How many Christians are unaware of the sanctity of the chapel! The chapel is such a holy place because God is here more than anywhere else. What am I saying? Isn’t God everywhere? Who doesn’t know this? But it is especially there, where, using our inadequate language, he is more alive. It is here, more than elsewhere that He manifests His power, His justice and His mercy—in virtue of the Sacrifice, enacted once and for all on Calvary and renewed here every day.

*His power.* Is not the wonder of transubstantiation the greatest of all wonders? Creating matter out of nothing—this is a divine act. Still less could anyone else create pure spirits, the purer the greater. But to take a little matter and to transform it into the body and blood of God, given that there is a man there and that this man is God, who could conceive of a greater power than this?

*His justice* is no less a wonder. To atone for sin, infinite justice calls for an infinite victim. Here he is.

*His mercy* is also here. The wonders he performed were done so that we might be forgiven. And how could this hidden God go further than to become our food: “*Misericordia et veritas obviaverunt sibi; iustitia et pax osculatae sunt*; Mercy and truth have met—justice and peace have embraced” (Ps 84:11 Vulgate)?

Here is God within our reach and, despite his humiliation, he is no less to be adored. He is always the Almighty, the All-just, the All-powerful, the All-merciful One to be adored. Adoration, which is vanishing from souls, must be restored, if we desire to restore to ourselves the God who appears further and further away.

II.—*The chapel is a sanctuary, where one finds Jesus Christ in order to listen to his teachings and to learn to imitate his example.* Search wherever you will within yourself. Nowhere will you discover the truth which points the way to the happiness which you need. You will find it nowhere but in Jesus Christ alone, the One of whom the Father said: “*Hic est filius meus electus, in quo mihi bene complacui: ipsum audite*; This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased; listen to Him” (Mt 17:5). In Jesus Christ who is the truth itself. This is a teaching that is true, life-giving, and fruitful, a teaching that shines through every darkness and banishes every uncertainty. This teaching is life and light. Everything is revealed to us in it: “*Unigenitus filius, qui est in sinu Patris, ipse enarravit*; The only Son, God, who is at the Father’s side, has revealed him” (Jn 1:18). He teaches us through his Gospel, through his apostles, and through his Church, and the Church echoes the voice of Him who in essence is God’s Word; *Verbum caro factum* (Jn 1:18). But this “Word made Flesh”, before teaching us with his lips, gave us a living example of virtue. I was speaking of God’s Perfections; such as they are in God, they cannot be imitated. But God’s Perfections as they are in Jesus Christ are placed within our reach: “*exemplum dedi vobis*; I have given you the example” (John 13,15). Do you wish to imitate Jesus Christ? Here he is; he is in the tabernacle. Enter into this holy place, this most intimate place, and here you will find Him: at adoration, at Mass. And yet, there are Christians who are bored in chapel—how miserable they must be!

Go to the find Jesus Christ. Do you think that life is only a question of amusement? Life is a long chain of duties. Do you wish to render this chain sweet? Then go to Jesus Christ. Life is an unceasing effort to become perfect. Go to find Jesus Christ in the chapel, where he is truly present; there will teach you all the virtues, everything to become more perfect. What a folly to be Christian and not endeavor to imitate Jesus Christ in order to become a saint!

III.—*The chapel is a sanctuary where one finds the Holy Spirit in order to perfect oneself under the influence of his many gifts.* Are you so rich that you have no more needs? You need counsel in order to know what your duty is and the strength to carry it out. The chapel will remind you that you yourself are a very holy place, a temple, the temple of the Holy Spirit. Go to the chapel and the spirit of recollection you will find within its walls will lead you to find light, counsel, strength.

Have you no need of counsel in the pursuit of your calling, if you are to treat it seriously? Have you no need of strength to resist the call of unlawful pleasure, of your burgeoning passions? The chapel will remind you that the Holy Spirit lives within you, unless by your sins you have driven Him out.

Do you not feel that to prevent yourselves from becoming caught up in earthly attachments, you must set your sights higher? Do you not sense

the joy of a higher world? Do you not feel that the chapel is your starting-point on your journey to the skies? Are you so egotistical that you have no time to love anyone? Where better than in the chapel can you pray for others, for your mother? Do you not mourn alive and to help enter into the rest of God? Do you experience no temptations? Here we can find an arsenal of spiritual arms to combat them combat them.

Finally, we must die. Come here and so young that you are, come and think about death. Others as young as you have come and are no longer on earth; their body has disappeared in the tomb. Come and think about your own death, about your judgment, about your eternal life. And the best answers to the questions which trouble you your conscience will be given here—in a spirit of recollection within the chapel.

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## 4. Work

1877

*Opening of Classes*

*“Ego autem in laboribus a juventute mea; I have been poor and hard-working since my youth”*  
(Ps. 87:16 Vulgate)

These words of the psalmist apply to Jesus Christ working at Nazareth.

I come to propose them to you. They are hard but this is the human condition.

Now, your work must be obedient, persevering, and sanctifying.

### I. Obedient Work

Work is a penalty, to which we must all submit, whether we like it or not. So choose. And to show you how important it is to be obedient in whatever work you perform from the very start, let me begin by pointing out its goal (ridiculous though it may seem), that you are here to pass your ‘baccalaureate’, preparation for university studies. Ah! If from the time of your entrance you had obeyed, I am not afraid to say that you would never have experienced failure. But one has his own ideas; one wants to work in his own way or, what is worse, wrongheadedly. And in the end one is surprised that he has failed.

### II. Persevering Work

The following obstacles run counter to perseverance: laziness,

inattention, caprice.

*Laziness.* One agrees to let this horrible rust erode the most brilliant intellects. However, in life you'll have to work hard. If you don't, you will soon turn into a 'mediocrity' and there are very few exceptions to this rule. From where do individuals amounting to nothing come? From laziness!

*Inattention.* Are we inattentive? Some of us seem incapable of focusing our minds on anything. Focusing is painful; it demands perseverance and effort. Without these, what remains? A nature that is fruitless.

*Caprice.* Every educational establishment has its 'quota' of weird spirits. They cannot be 'brought into line.' If they work, it's by 'fits and starts'. Their fundamental characteristic is obstinacy. They are charmed for the wrong reason. If they can counteract a well-deserved rebuke by a 'smart' retort, they are happy. Such a response is absurd. It doesn't matter....they are happy. But these caprices compromise their future. They think they're preparing their future, provided that their caprices have triumphed! At what result will they arrive? At the result of being poor, insupportable beings to everything that will be condemned to live around them. As to their career, don't speak about it. What career is possible without perseverance? And their caprice has not led them to persevere in anything.

### III. Intelligent Work

Let me explain what I mean. The young man who has pursued his studies by obeying the direction of his teachers, who has worked with relentless perseverance, even though he may be less gifted, will undoubtedly achieve much greater success than those little geniuses in their breeches or those brilliant youngsters in knickers. By the time their moustaches have grown, they have become well below average. By the time they graduate they have become nincompoops, who, in order to console themselves for having achieved nothing, have but one compensation, to make of themselves worthless cynics, and in the end radicals. I have known more than one Assumption student who has gone down this sad path.

On the contrary, I have known some, who, without being geniuses, have by obedience and perseverance met with remarkable success. Certainly, when natural intelligence is present, you can desire nothing better. But take two students of equal intelligence: if one obeys and perseveres and the other is lazy and pays no attention except to what he wants to do, you will quickly see how contrasting results occur.

### IV. Sanctifying Work

Work is hard, I know: it is for that reason that it atones for our sins and sanctifies us. What good is work unless you work for something

worthwhile?

A particular young man may have worked very hard and may have been extremely successful financially as well as obtaining the means to enjoy the praise and glory of others. What good will all this serve him on his death bed? Let us give him something worthwhile to live for, a higher goal. You are sons of France and sons of the Church. Well, you have to work both for France and for the Church. For France, that you lead her back to her former destiny; and for the Church, which holds eternal promises, even if Jesus Christ has not promised to preserve them always in the same countries.

Work with faith for the resurrection of Christian France. Work with love for the Church. It is in doing this that eternal reward is found.

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## 5. Thoughts for the Summer Vacation

*To the students of Nîmes*

### **To remake Europe...**

A famous diplomat supposedly said: "Since 1870, Europe no longer exists." I would hope that his words were true so that we might respond to him, "Well! Catholics will remake it." In effect, Europe is not brave. The Revolution has created havoc in Europe and will make it pay dearly for being taken up with modern ideas. Nevertheless, if the Revolution had a beginning, it can have an end as well. If its ideas are of recent origin, they may be short-lived. Is it possible to wring the Revolution's neck in order to restore life to Europe?

How would you like to think about that question during the vacation period as I will do.

### **...by a spirit of sacrifice**

First, why does Europe no longer exist? It is because solidarity no longer exists. Everyone is looking out for his own interests; everyone is staying at home. This is the universal motto which is nothing other than the motto of egoism elevated to its highest power. Do you want to combat this evil? Begin by destroying egoism in yourself. Combat it by making little of your individual fancies, likes and dislikes, comforts and pleasures. Ah! There are so many ways to combat egoism while staying at home!

While fighting tooth and nail egoism and egoists, show your generosity, be selfless men, steep yourselves in a spirit of sacrifice. Get involved in those endeavors that will forge your soul in zeal for charity and in the pursuit of noble ideas based on lofty ideals! Whatever seems evil to you, you must oppose. Have the courage your faith inspires. Make war above all on what people think of you, in all the forms it may take. When you've done that, I sincerely believe that it will be easy for you to stretch

out a helping hand to your brothers, to unite yourselves with them. You will form an alliance of good will. At first you will get knocked down and then knocked down again. That's how you'll learn how to do battle.

**...by the spirit of faith**

Europe is disintegrating—perhaps has already disintegrated. Why? Because it is sad to say, Europe has lost its faith. At this very moment two nations are fighting over religion<sup>360</sup>. But although the common people are believers, can the same be asserted, with any stretch of imagination, about their respective leaders? Ah, if only these leaders were men of Faith—what great hopes would this hold! But where are the leaders who have faith? And in the rest of Europe, where are the peoples who have faith?

Since the loss of faith is ruining society, it follows that society will be restored only by the restoration of faith. Ah! My friends, think about this, if one of you had faith the size of a mustard seed, he could move mountains; and if a hundred of you had faith the size of a mountain, you could lift up the world. What is impossible for a hundred young people who have great faith?

Listen to something that actually happened but in which I did not play a brilliant role. Last year I thought it was time for our Fathers in Paris would do well to stop leading their pilgrimages. Fr. Picard, obstinate as usual, insisted so much until I said, Yes, to one more pilgrimage. So they organized a pilgrimage toward our dear Lady of Lourdes. Do you know how many miracles the caravan obtained? Twelve, they counted twelve, of which several led to the conversion of entire families, among others that of a Freemason who, when he saw his dying daughter come back to life and completely healed, went to confession. What are we to conclude? That Fr. Picard had more faith than I had, or that he knew better how to put it to better use?

Therefore, it is necessary to have great faith and if the Blessed Virgin does not always reward it by twelve miracles, one can be certain that she will reward us in one way or another; miracles are not always proof of holiness. But it is no less sure that the way to triumph over the world is faith, as St. John said.

You will be men of sacrifice and you will be men of faith, two conditions to bring Europe back to life.

**...in order to fight for the Church**

You cannot fight for a non-existent cause. In Europe there are indeed opposing forces facing one another in mutual antagonism. But since the Reformation it can no longer be said that Europe itself is fighting. In order to restore this spirit of glorious combat of former times to Europe, unity in Europe must be restored; and, it is an astonishing thing which you will not understand after a first reading, that Europe has lost life when it lost

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<sup>360</sup> Russo-Turkish War (1877-1878)



unity, and that its unity disappeared the day one no longer wished in various degrees Catholic unity. And it is a remarkable historical truth—which may escape the superficial reader—that Europe lost its essence when it lost its unity, and that it lost its unity when it parted company to a greater or lesser degree, with the Catholic Church. The Protestants may be the first to blame—but then the Jansenists, the Gallicans, the philosophers in the genre of Louis XV<sup>361</sup>, and the free-thinking Catholics<sup>362</sup> of our own day. But this is a lot for you to digest. I'll stop here and allow you to spend your vacation time thinking about the problem and trying to understand it.

What else? Be good. Obey your Dad and Mom. Give good example to your younger brother; and don't pull your little sister's hair. Don't be rude to the domestic staff and don't receive visitors by sticking out your tongue out at them. This is important advice even for those who may have understood nothing of the dense subjects mentioned above.

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<sup>361</sup> the 18th century philosophers of the so-called 'Enlightenment'. In 1768 Voltaire published a book entitled, *Précis du siècle de Louis XV* (*Short history of the Age of Louis XV*), a historical work celebrating the progress of Enlightenment ideas made in France during the reign of Louis XV.

<sup>362</sup> What d'Alzon calls 'catholiques libéraux'

## III. STRUGGLES

*I. Struggle against the Revolution*

*II. Struggle against the Secret Societies*

*III. Work against the Schism*

*Let no one be surprised at the modest place, in this collection, to the writings on struggles. They would require numerous historical explanations in order to be suitably interpreted and, because of circumstances, take on a less important spiritual character. Nevertheless, several texts have been chosen to reveal the extent of Fr. d'Alzon's zeal in defending the Church.*

## **I.** ***The Fight against the Revolution***

*The fight against the Revolution was energetically undertaken through “preaching, teaching, and the press.” In general, we only have rough notes on his preaching on controversial issues, but they bear witness to the thorough preparation given to this apostolate. Twice the Revue de l’Enseignement Chrétien took up the fight for the freedom of authentically Christian education and formation of youth entrusted to religious institutions. With regard to the press, Fr. d’Alzon always understood its importance for a more effective dissemination of Church teaching. In this section one will find documents treating teaching and the press that date from different periods.*

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### **The Splendor of Christian Art<sup>363</sup>**

While modern scientific advances tend to preoccupy us with material welfare—while a certain literary school seems to rummage the lower levels of the human heart, there to unearth the secret of our most shameful sentiments—I find it appropriate to explore the treasure-house of Christian Art. We are here at a gathering, the purpose of which is to crown the success of our intellectual achievements. It is, nonetheless, a religious gathering. We must learn how to utilize whatever this world has to offer—to turn everything into the rungs of a ladder leading straight up to heaven (Gn 28:12)—to endow matter with the spiritual significance it can never entirely lose.

What indeed is art? Is it not the manifestation of beauty? And what is beauty? Did I not tell you once at a similar gathering that beauty consists in the glorious expression of truth? So, truth is the foundation of beauty—and beauty is the foundation of art.

But, there are two levels of truth: the truth about things which were created and will pass away, and that about transcendental truth which is the very shape of God’s infinite self—as infinite as he is—because it is one and the same infinite substance and subsistence. So to God be glory, because he is the source and creator of everything beautiful.

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<sup>363</sup> Speech on Prize-giving Day 1859

## 1. God, Source and Creator of Beauty

If we look on things from this light—from God’s point of view, then truth becomes synonymous with God himself, and so does beauty...and it is in the contemplation of his own infinite beauty that the infinite happiness of God subsists.

Nothing created will ever completely manifest the radiance of God’s perfections—the entirety of God’s loveliness. Only God knows how wonderful he is—because only God knows how beautiful he is. And yet, he who possesses and contains all beauty, because he is all beauty, holds within his all-embracing grasp all relative and secondary truth, and all relative and secondary beauty. It is, at the moment of his creating other beings, the moment when they begin to exist, that they too become beautiful, with a beauty relative to and derived from his own.

And man—who is the masterpiece of material creation, and, therefore, the most beautiful of all things material—can justly claim that God has stamped his own image and likeness upon him. (Gn 1:27). “*Signatum est super nos lumen vultus tui, Domine; You have stamped the likeness of your face upon us, O Lord*” (Ps 4:8).

Now, since God is the source of all beauty, it is to God we must go to learn what beauty really is. And, if art had no other purpose than to manifest beauty in the things we can see, hear and feel, then how would it make sense, since it derives its true meaning from God and God alone? And man, who was created in God’s image and likeness—man who is the imitation of him who fashioned man with his own hands can relate to God as a work of art relates to the artist.

So, an artist is the most faithful imitator of our Creator. But, if he is to live up to this sublime honor, he must place himself between earth and heaven. From the earth he must demand his materials and his tools—but, from heaven he must seek his inspiration and enthusiasm. Would it be lacking in due reverence to describe God as the supreme artist? He began by creating something out of nothing. He then proceeded to give his works, order, shape and beauty. He hung his stars in the firmament, each having its own particular luminosity. All was created to manifest his timeless glory throughout the ages.

The children of men sing his praises forever on high. The stars in the sky glitter with his splendor. The roaring of the waves as they dash against the rocky coast—the desolation of the desert lands—the fury of the gales—the perfume of the flowers—the noises of the day and the silence of the night...they all add up to a tremendous work of art: a panorama upon which we gaze—a symphony which delights our ears. The Creator reveals his presence through the medium of his mighty works—and man, although he cannot perceive God himself in the marvels of creation, concludes, nevertheless, that God alone could have produced such wonders and coordinated such beauty.

No one can tell what human art would have developed into, had we retained the innocence of the Garden of Eden. But it is evident that art was never meant to express the still and frosty beauty of death. It was meant to express life in all its fullness. It was meant to enable us to understand living beauty—to fill us with enthusiasm for all that lives. It implies a creative faculty whereby we reproduce beyond ourselves what we experience in the depth of our being.

How would sinless man have reacted to God's presence and God's gifts? What would he have perceived in a world where no evil had intervened to disturb the original harmony? We cannot tell—neither can we describe the works of art which human heart, human intellect and human hand would then have produced. Would we have built houses? Would we have had to paint and decorate our domestic interiors? And what would have been the nature of our public worship? How would we have seen God's glory, and thanked him for all his benefits? How perfect and faultless would our language have become? How deep would our thoughts have been, and how eloquent our utterances? In other words, what would have been our artistic development? We do not know. We cannot tell.

This state of sinlessness did not last. Man's willfulness revolted against God—and, thereby, brought turmoil and disorder into the harmony of God's creation. What was God's reaction? Let me tell you. He, the Supreme Artist, counteracted the destruction of sin, the disturbance of rebellion and (let us not forget) the ugliness of evil by producing a brightness and a beauty such as creation had never attained—and never could or would. Its constituent elements would be derived from the very ranks of the rebellion. Guilty man and guilty matter would combine to manifest God's presence among men. A man would appear upon earth—and this man was God!

## **2. The Loveliness of Christ**

There is no need to describe the material beauty of this human body in which God's own Son came to us as one of us. Let us just repeat what St. John tells us: that "the Word was made Flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw his glory." (Jn 1:14). And let us say to the Christian artist: "Reproduce that! Take your chisel—take your paintbrush—take your words and music...and reproduce that! Reproduce it if you can, and as best you may. He is human, and, therefore, he comes within your competence—but he is also divine, and you must never lose sight of it.

He is power—he is wisdom—he is love, justice, independence...he is every conceivable quality to an infinite degree. Depict him! Depict God! He who is pure spirit and every-consuming fire, cannot be contained within the limits of human art—because it has its limits. But, the God who hides himself can, nevertheless, be suggested and hinted at. We can, at least, begin to guess the divine reality beneath our very helplessness to give it

adequate expression.

God becomes portrayed as a human being—as “a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief,” (Is 53:3) bearing the marks of original sin. This is how we see him. Beneath this he veils the glorious reality of who he really is. Godhead and humanity are both personified in him—and yet God is distinct from humanity, and humanity from God. The Christian artist must do his best to combine what is seemingly incompatible. Yet humanity can supply him with information—can lead him closer and closer to the divinity he aspires to depict. He will never depict him perfectly. But he can depict him better and better—and must endeavor to do so, even though the artist is limited and the model limitless.

Who better than St. Paul for putting sublime truths “into a nutshell?” He defines Christ as the object of human art, by telling us that “*in quo inhabitat plenitudo divinitatis corporaliter*; in him the fullness of the Godhead is embodied,” (Col 2:9) contained in a body. And so, Christian artists, do not despair of God being utterly beyond your scope. Here is God, dwelling in a human body. Paint and sculpt this human body, but paint and sculpt it in such a way that those who admire your handiwork may be lifted up, mind and heart, to the recognition and adoration of God.

### 3. The Two Focuses of a large Ellipse

Art can depict, not only pure, unadulterated beauty—not only the beauty of truth and goodness. There is a certain beauty in evil. Satan, the prince of darkness, the president of hell, exists—and by his very existence provides us with a warning model. Whoever wrote the “Essay on Indifference” points out that Satan is still, and always will be, beautiful—yet the sight of him is terrifying and repulsive. He is the ideal, the personification of evil. His face gleams like polished metal. Spite glistens in his green eyes. Relentless pride is enthroned on his brow. Cut off from God—the implacable enemy of all God has created—he hovers in the void like some deadly meteor to strike and destroy—like some vulture to consume the corpse.

Bossuet has this to say to Satan and his colleagues: “O, you fallen and repudiated angels, you, who have revolted against God, you have surrendered your superb qualities to evil use. These very qualities have stoked your pride. Your very superiority has puffed you up with self-esteem. Dazzled and led astray by your own luminosity, what would have led you to eternal bliss has led you to everlasting torment. Your very perfections have become your executioners. Hell exists, and it is you who have created it!”

Monsieur de Maistre said of the Middle Ages what can still be said about the world and all its beauty: it is a vast ellipse, and its two focuses are Jesus Christ and Satan—the beauty of absolute goodness and the beauty of ugliness, or absolute nothingness. But, the evil which takes possession of

something erstwhile good, remains, albeit distorted, one of God's masterpieces. This self-distorted masterpiece, this wonderful product of God's creative hand, is none other than Satan: still the most beautiful of all the angels, despite his having turned himself into the wickedest.

See how the forces of good and evil muster around these two opposing leaders. On the one side you get the forces of evil, with their raging passions and unbridled vice—slaves and addicts to sin—driven on by the devils of hell and the hatred of the damned, as opposed to the army of Christ: those who practice austerity and self-denial—the martyrs, the dedicated virgins—the Apostles of the Lord—the angels and the saints. Scattered throughout the world, men are nevertheless, split into two warring camps.

See how they clash! Study the phases of this unceasing combat between God and evil which has lasted since the time of Cain and Abel, and will continue till the close of human history. Think of the battles which go on within the minds and hearts of men. Think of how charming sin can be, the temptation to abandon belief when it is so much more profitable not to believe. Think of the moments of remorse when God is pleading with us to return to him. Sometimes we listen to him, but at other times we shroud ourselves in a cloud of indifference, until night takes possession of our soul. Think of how wicked people can achieve brilliant success in defiance of their Creator. Yet how long does their success last? How many years are there between the cradle and the grave?

Yes, it is intriguing to study this warfare between good and evil. Such a study was not unknown among the pagans—nor was it unexpressed by their art. But evil was not yet, nor could it have been, confronted with the goodness Christ came to impart...and it was with the advent of Christ, and the manifestation of Christian goodness, that art reached its highest and noblest expression. Christianity, by teaching us so much more about God, provided art with the necessary conditions for its true fulfillment. It taught us who the Supreme Being is. It showed us how he, being infinite in all perfection, could communicate part of his perfection to the work of his hands. And it warned us that, because of the very perfection with which he has endowed us, his creatures, we can plummet to the very depths of degradation by violating the basic laws of our nature. So, Christianity has extended the frontiers of art, and expanded its domain. And this leads us to a further consideration, so essential to the understanding of human life and human behavior.

We, God's rational creatures, revolted against him, our Creator. We fell. We were punished. And to make up for it, to repair the damage, God intervened by making the supreme sacrifice, by offering himself up on our behalf. Let art express this! Let art enter into the sphere of God's dealings with man. And then art will attain its full dimensions, and realize its true purpose.

A few questions are to be asked and answered. Is there no artistic

beauty outside Christianity? God forbid that we should say so! Nature itself has its beauty—a beauty expressive of, though how often disassociated from, the author of nature. Whatever exists has its purpose, its place in the universe, and, therefore, its own kind of beauty. Whatever exists can be captured and expressed by art. But, the object of art is, surely, to take hold of what is visible, and, thereby, appeal to our noblest and most fundamental aspirations. To depict household goods, historical or everyday events, the likeness of birds or animals...can, indeed, afford us a relative satisfaction—but will it raise our minds and hearts to higher things?

I do not wish to revive age-old quarrels—to stir up caked and crusty mud. I readily admit that pre-Christian art acquired a lineal perfection which we have yet to equal, and have certainly not surpassed. So let us not argue about this. Let me tell you what I do mean, by taking as examples two of the masterpieces of pagan art: the statue of Apollo and that of Laocoön at the Belvedere<sup>364</sup>. Let me begin by admiring their superb workmanship. But what moral lessons do either of them convey? Apollo has just slain the monster sent by Juno's fury to attack Latone, Diana and himself. He has overcome this monster. See how he revels in his triumph—how he rejoices in his prowess! His face and his stance combine to express the gladness of this youthful God. What is he telling us? That he, the son of the adulteress, has defeated the legitimate wife. She is bitter at having been abandoned by the greatest god of all. Righteousness has lost its power—beauty and strength have got the better of it. The god looks on—the priest expires. Juno has been unable to overcome Apollo by sending a sea monster to attack him. So, she takes her revenge by sending two sea monsters against this other priest—against him who was cunning enough to detect the trickery of the Trojan horse. It makes us shudder to watch these two repulsive reptiles converging on Laocoön. Look at them! They have swum ashore. Laocoön and his two sons are now entangled in their deadly coils. Father and sons struggle in vain! We can almost hear the marble screaming in terror.

But, I ask you, what morality does all this convey? Here you get a pagan priest—a perfectly decent man—who has warned his fellow citizens against a stratagem which will bring about the ruin of their city. So the furious goddess—furious at her beauty being disregarded—dispatches two sea monsters to devour this loyal citizen. And, meanwhile, the highest of the gods—he who for the sake of another of his priests killed thousands of Greeks—looks helplessly on, unable to protect this one. Don't ask me if there is anything noble, inspiring, uplifting, about either of these sculpted episodes. If there is, I cannot tell you. But there is one statue of pagan art which has won my unqualified admiration. Walk through the Capitoline Art Gallery in Rome. There you will come across a room furnished with

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<sup>364</sup> Both are now in the *Cortile del Belvedere* of the Pio-Clementine Museum of the Vatican Museums complex.



sculptures, none of which are worth a second glance—all except one, and it depicts a scene from the Coliseum. It's a lovely little piece of marble, and it's called the Dying Gladiator<sup>365</sup>. They have not yet carried his body away. There he lies in the arena, resting on one arm—watching his life-blood flow out of his wounds. In those eyes which can still see, there is sorrow, there is pain—but there is also a gleam of hope such as no words could describe.

I do not know the name of the sculptor, nor the period when this masterpiece was hewn out of the marble. But I am convinced that whoever carved this Dying Gladiator had watched Christians dying in the arena, and understood something of the mystery of martyrdom.

#### 4. The Beauty of God's Word

Ah! You can say what you please about the perfection of Grecian Art—you can praise it to the skies. I admit it is as perfect as human form can be. I admit it expresses natural sentiment as exquisitely as it can be expressed. But, when it comes to making us larger than life—to setting us face to face with our ultimate destiny—to bringing us closer and closer to God...when it comes to providing us with the noblest of all models to imitate—to lifting us up far beyond earthly beauty and earthly goodness...when it draws us to the foot of the Cross upon which God was offered to God...will anything do except Christian Art? What but Christian Art can venture into the realm of Divine Revelation?

Let us however, leave the domain of beautiful shapes and colors. This isn't an art-school or a sculptor's studio. Our task here is to teach your sons to speak good French—and here, in the domain of speech and letters, Christian Art provides a minefield of inexhaustible treasure.

Just as Our Lord Jesus Christ is the model of every virtue—just as he is the fount of all truth—so is he the source of all beauty. As God made Man, he is the ideal and prototype of all art. He inspires those artists who endeavor to reproduce him in painting or in sculpture. But he inspires still more those who dedicate their efforts to the perfection of human speech. How can we utter nobler sentiments than by speaking about him? So let our words express the very beauty and sublimity of God. How could they be better employed? “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (Jn 1:1).

This is the very origin of Catholic theology and Christian eloquence. What else are we to begin to speak about than “the brightness of God's glory and the wonders of his being?” (Heb 1:3). Is there anything so glorious to us and showing us how wonderful he is? It is this word, this divine message, which “in days of old, in many ways and by many means, God spoke to our fathers through the prophets—but now, in these latter days, he has spoken to us through his own Son” (Heb 1:1-2). “No one has

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<sup>365</sup> Also known as the Dying Gaul or the Dying Galatian

ever spoken like this man speaks,” said the guards to the Pharisees who had sent them to arrest Our Blessed Lord (Jn 7:4-6). Such is the Word announced by the prophets, and proclaimed by the Apostles. Such is the Word whereby people are saved (Acts 4:12). It has nothing to do with the “persuasive accents of human wisdom” (1 Cor 2:4). In the beginning it even took on a “roughness and readiness” which shocked the refined subtlety of the educated Greeks. They regarded it as foolish talk (1 Cor 1:23). But the time came when it was no longer necessary to prove to the world that God’s truth owed its origin to no human erudition. Then Christians were permitted to demonstrate that no one can express truth so eloquently as those who derive it from God himself.

And I ask you: How can human words be put to better use than to utter those sublime truths which God himself has confided to our minds and hearts, to be expressed with our tongues? And the Christian artist—that is to say the Christian speaker and writer—yields to a kind of despair—though I don’t like using this word because nowadays it has acquired a pejorative connotation—yields, I say, to a kind of despair, because he knows he will never be able to speak highly enough of his ideals—since these ideals emanate directly from God. And thence, the effort to surpass the eloquence of our predecessors—because there will always remain an unbridgeable chasm between what has been said and what ought to be said.

Who indeed, can do justice to God’s word? It is powerful—it is dignified—it is supple—it is sweet. It is full of sorrow and compassion for our misery. It is full of hope and encouragement in the rewards it promises us. It is full of hatred for sin, yet pity for the sinner—full of sympathy for those who fall, yet indignation towards those who cause them to fall.

Is there anything worthy in human thoughts and feelings which transmits no echo of the voice of God: instructing, warning, persuading us in the path of righteousness, and teaching us to raise our voices in praise? And, under the impulse of God’s words, our own words acquire a dignity which assures their being listened to. We worship the word of God—and our worship consists in the care we take never to allow it to be misused by the slightest insinuation of falsehood.

What else can we add? We are not all capable of proclaiming God’s word with the same eloquence and lucidity. We do require a certain level of human intelligence to penetrate and exploit the treasures contained therein. We do require a certain enthusiasm to make it attractive and acceptable to the philosophers of our day. We were not all meant to become poets, orators or writers. But, unless humanity has sunk into complete decadence, and reached the point at which evil passions have taken complete control, nothing will ever be more admired than words which issue from the mouth of God—upholding his prerogatives, and defending his cause.

What then is art? It is the expression of beauty. And what is beauty, but the expression of goodness and truth? Between goodness, truth, art and beauty, there exists an intimate and unbreakable alliance. And if we attempt

to use art for any other purpose, save for the propagation of truth, we are grossly misusing it—and thereby spreading chaos in the elevated regions of human understanding. And this has been the crime of those who profane art by employing it in the service of the devil. Ah! they are deserving of all condemnation: those who thus exploit the greatest natural gift God has given us.

But let it be added that they would not descend to such a depth of depravity—they would not sell their tongues and their pens to Satan, unless modern society provided them with customers who are as depraved as they are.

### Conclusion

My dear boys, one of the principal aims of your being educated in this establishment is to teach you to appreciate the beauty of Christian art. Many of you, most of you in fact, will leave school with little more than the facility of being able to distinguish between what is beautiful and what is hideous. A few of you, being naturally more gifted and having striven with greater perseverance, will be able to pursue, each in your chosen career, the development of human art and human eloquence. Remember it is a heinous crime to turn your talents against truth. Many are committing this crime today. It is no less a crime because everybody seems to be committing it. Human justice may be lenient where there are too many criminals to punish them all. But this is no reason to suppose that God's justice had abandoned any of its inalienable rights.

Remember boys, you will have to fight. You will find yourselves up against human intellects which seem to revel in misusing their God given gifts—who turn what was meant for good into evil, and what was meant for truth into falsehood. Fight them with all your might: with the nobility of your ideals—the rectitude of your ways—the clarity of your judgment—the total Christianity of your commitment. Fight whatever degrades man by leading him along the path of shameful self-indulgence. Treasure the Christian arts. They are holy because they relate to God and his service. And let it never be said of you that, under pretext of loving what was beautiful and attractive, you have turned your backs on what was genuine and good. AMEN.

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## The Church and Education<sup>366</sup>

The Pope is about to be declared infallible. It's a solemn confirmation of his role as universal teacher, and it will highlight his

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<sup>366</sup> A note from 1870

responsibilities. He must not only condemn what is false—he must proclaim whatever is true, and make sure it is taught throughout the Church.

From which point of view I am going to examine the question of ecclesiastical studies. For the sake of order and precision, let me put forward the following six considerations:

1° That the Church is entitled to supervise all forms of instruction. Indeed, it is profitable for everybody that the Church should do so.

2° That under the present circumstances it is particularly necessary for the Holy See to maintain control over whatever is taught in our schools.

3° That there is all the more reason for the sovereign pontiff to supervise, reform and direct all religious teaching, especially the theological teaching imparted today in our seminaries.

4° How must this supervision, reform and guidance be put into practice throughout the Catholic world?

5° And in what must the reform of Catholic studies consist?

6° Finally, what about a Catholic university?

1° *The Church's rights.* There is no need for me to insist on these rights. They are accepted by every loyal and enlightened Catholic.

The Church bases its rights on Our Lord's words: "*Euntes....docete*; Go and teach all nations" (Mt 28:19). Teaching the truth implies jurisdiction over whatever contributes to the truth. It applies to everybody. This principle is, however, denied by the State monopoly over education. It is denied by the new development of education in Germany. It is denied by what we call "Free Thought," a by-product of the Revolution. And it is denied by the so-called "tolerance" of Gallicanism. But do they understand where they are leading us?

2° *The rationale for the Holy See's position.* Why is it so necessary for the Holy See to take charge of education nowadays?

The State is presuming, and assuming, its right to teach whatever is "non-religious" or has become "non-religious." Specifically, religious instruction is, indeed, left to the Church—but this is reducing the Church's role, restricting the Church's mission. It amounts to nothing less than a Godless education—and the results of this revolutionary teaching are only too obvious. But if this separation of what pertains to the State and what pertains to the Church is to be carried to its logical conclusion, it must be admitted that the Church has every right to instruct its own children, to give them a complete education. This Catholic education ought to be imparted in our own independent Universities. It ought to be established, organized and supervised in our own independent schools. We ought to be permitted to demonstrate the superiority of our educational system. We ought to be allowed to show that Catholics, educated under God's guidance, are better educated than those who study everything except religion.

Various popes have, at various times, constituted various Roman "Congregations"—among which the "Holy Office" whose task is to protect

Catholics from heresy and falsehood—among which the “Propaganda” to carry the torch of the faith into Protestant and pagan lands. And after this Vatican Council, the work of these two “Congregations” will be supplemented by that of a third, the “Congregation for Sacred Studies.” It will not only defend the truth, as does the “Holy Office.” Its task will be to spread the truth—and not beyond the visible Church, as does the “Propaganda,” but within the visible Church—to face up to the secularization of knowledge which is taking place today. Let me return to this theme in a moment.

3° *Special reasons.* Why should the Sovereign Pontiff have to supervise, reform and guide all religious teaching—everywhere, but especially in the seminaries? Is this not the task of our bishops?

We must take account of the views expressed by certain bishops at the Council. Some of them were deplorably ignorant—others deplorably servile. The outlook of those we call “the Minority” was altogether deplorable. We must take account, likewise, of the evil influence exercised by certain religious orders in the seminaries under their control. We must take account of the destructive effect of our State institutions—the decadence, the rebellion, the sheer heresy fostered in many universities.

Is it not evident that our Sovereign Pontiff, our universal and infallible teacher—he who is charged with “confirming his brethren,” his fellow-bishops as Our Lord told Saint Peter at the Last Supper (Lk 22:32) and to instructing all peoples...is it not evident that he himself must be well informed of the various intellectual tendencies throughout the Catholic world, so as to be able to reform them when they are leading souls astray? Is it not clearly his task, not only to draw up a “Penny Catechism” for Catholic children and the Catholic working-classes—but to supervise the religious training of better educated Catholics? Must he not make sure that, in the aftermath of the Vatican Council, all bishops everywhere provide their junior clergy with an adequate Catholic theological syllabus—with a substance of Christian knowledge to transmit throughout the whole Church?

We must formulate our plans in view of the approaching struggle. We will be up against governments which mistrust us—up against bishops who claim to be “God Almighty”—up against hidebound institutions which refuse to “budge an inch.” Does it mean we ought to give way to discouragement? Not if we are truly determined to put things right.

4° *Means to be used.* How is our Holy Father the Pope to set about establishing this supervision, this reform, this guidance, and above all this leadership in the realm of Catholic Studies?

A.—As I said, by the assembling of a “Congregation of Sacred Studies.” This assembly will have to consist of men from all over the world—from wherever there are errors to refute and abuses to correct. It will have to comprise both priests and lay organizations. It will have to direct and reform institutions which already exist, and found new ones.

B.—Inspectors will have to be appointed to supervise the seminaries. They must have the power of conferring theological diplomas on all those lecturers appointed by their bishops. It isn't difficult to understand why.

C.—Their findings must be reported regularly to the “Congregation for Sacred Studies.” Regions differ. Reports must be sent about theological teaching in France—in England, Italy, Germany, Spain—in North and South America—in India and China—in those parts of the Near East bordering on Africa, and those parts of it bordering on Russia. These reports, drawn up as soon as possible, would often contradict the official reports made by diocesan bishops. Many abuses would be unearthed and drastic remedies decided upon.

5° *Reform.* In what must the reform of Catholic studies consist? I would have to write pages and pages to give this question a satisfactory answer. Let me just say this: The trouble nowadays is that lots of people are Catholics, but don't behave as if they were—in fact, lots of people are not Catholics, but continue to call themselves Catholics. It is of such merely nominal Catholics that Saint John writes in the Book of Revelation: “You pass for a living body, but all the while you are a corpse” (Rv 3:1). What can we do to remedy this? We must instill a genuinely Roman Catholic outlook into the minds of our contemporaries. We must give them a proper Catholic education, sound Catholic instruction, to stop them from thinking like revolutionaries and “free-thinkers.” We must amputate the “separatism” with which so many of our most fertile intellects are sadly infected. They can well be described as “unconscious heretics.”

It is none of my business to tell our bishops what to do. There is very much they could do—but if I started telling them, I'd never get to the end of it!

6° *Details for a Catholic university.* What then about opening a Catholic university? I haven't yet made my mind up about this important question. I can speak only for France. To open a Catholic university would entail much difficulty and many a heartache. Would the bishops send young men to study at an establishment over which they themselves exercised no control? If they sent students to places like the “Maison des Hautes Etudes” in Lyons (which they very nearly did) it would prove a disaster for the Catholic Church. And if anybody dared to open an independent university in a diocese where the bishop was opposed to such a scheme—just think of the obstacles which would have to be overcome!

Is there no way? I don't see a way. But it's worth thinking about—and I just haven't had the time to give it adequate consideration.

#### **Conclusion**

To sum up: For me this is one of the most important questions to be dealt with after the Council—preferably during the Council—the question

of theological studies. It is an immediate corollary of papal infallibility, such as it is about to be defined. There is no more vital or effective means than the pursuit of Catholic studies, if papal influence is to penetrate every aspect of Catholic thought. At a time when independence and freedom of conscience are in conflict with authority—at a time of Revolution, if ever there was one—is anything more essential than complete submission to, and close communion with, the Holy See? Catholic learning must be restored to the docility which obtained during the Middle Ages, and once again influence the deliberations and decisions of political government in the ways of justice and peace. And for this it is supremely important that Rome should adopt not merely a defensive attitude, but a positive role. The Pope (about to be declared infallible), must insist—and never cease to insist: “This is the true Catholic faith. Go forth and teach it.” Amen.

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## Carthage to Be Destroyed<sup>367</sup>

The *Revue de l'Enseignement Chrétien* (*Review of Christian Teaching*) has kept silent for fifteen years. Now we resume our task. Let me tell you why.

France's military defeat—the damage thereby caused to our political and social fabric—the “pieces to be picked up”—the reconstruction to effect...all this has obliged French Christians to “put their heads together,” coordinate their efforts, and form an Association to protect their rights.

We intend this Association to “take shape.” Meanwhile, let us consider what we are up against. Which enemies stand in the way of our most legitimate aspirations?

The most formidable enemy of ancient Rome was the City of Carthage. So the Senate decided there could be no peace and security until Carthage had been “wiped off the map!” Our greatest enemy nowadays—the bitterest opponent of Christian Rome, of God's Church—is the State University. So let us raise the battle cry “Carthage is to be destroyed!”

We must fight the University—we must get rid of it if we can. But we must keep within the law.

We must aim at establishing Catholic universities. We must open a study center—with public lectures and private correspondence courses, for whoever is keen on pursuing this great aim. We must begin by teaching Catholic doctrine. We must place ourselves under the guidance of the Holy See, and of those bishops who give us their support.

Then how are we to proceed? By whatever means available: by letters to the Press—by raising objections to current procedure—by

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<sup>367</sup> Fr. d'Alzon contributed this article to the *Revue de l'Enseignement chrétien* in 1871, after France's defeat in the Franco-Prussian War.

amicable controversy.

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## Against State Monopoly of Education<sup>368</sup>

...Under what pretext are they excluding religious subjects from the syllabus of our State baccalaureate? They tell us: “The State must make secondary education available to all its citizens. But all its citizens do not share the same religious allegiance. We cannot cater to every religion—therefore, let us cater to none.” This may appear reasonable at first sight—but is it? They are forgetting that in education we must begin by teaching the essential—and what is the essential, but God? They are doing all they can to exclude God. In doing so they are excluding the most fundamental of all truths—the truth upon which all other truth depends.

So they are committed to a system of education unfounded on principle, since they repudiate the most basic of all principles! The idea of God being the First Principle is no mere abstraction. It is the truth, and all other truth derives from it. When it comes to teaching, surely this basic principle must be taken into account. For Christians, this fundamental truth, upon which all other truths depend, is also the basis of all moral obligations—no one can have any moral obligations unless he is convinced of it. So, by leaving God out of our educational system we are suppressing moral obligation—and what is there to replace it? For us Catholics, to leave God out of education is a crime. “You shall love the Lord your God—this is the first and the greatest commandment” (Mt 22:38). Moses told us so. (Dt 6:5). “The Lord your God shall you adore, and him only shall you serve”—this is what Our Lord himself told the devil, and thereby put him to flight. (Mt 4:10). Remember these words—they made Satan run away. But nowadays Satan feels at home in our schools, because they never talk about God. Satan is being perfectly logical—except that his logic is the logic of hell.

Well, we don’t care for this kind of “logic.” We are not particularly enthusiastic about the devil—we have no particular longing for his company! We wish to enthrone God, and enthrone him everywhere. Saint Paul tells us: “Whether you eat or drink, or whatever else you do, do it in the Lord’s name.” (1 Cor 10:31). We prefer God’s company to that of the Prince of Darkness. All the more so because it’s not a mere question of preference, convenience or “logic”; it’s a question of obligation! If we really believe in God, we must give him priority—we must regard him as the beginning of everything—he must accompany us every step of the way—and we must look to him as our journey’s end. So-called “modern

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<sup>368</sup> Open letter to Louis Veuillot in *Revue de l’Enseignement Chrétien (Review of Christian Teaching)*, in 1873. Louis Veuillot was a famous Catholic journalist who covered the First Vatican Council and championed the declaration of papal infallibility.



science” treats him as if he didn’t matter—as if he were supremely irrelevant. Surely it’s one of the worst crimes ever to have been committed in human history! And we don’t have to be very intelligent to foresee that such a crime will entail terrible chastisement in due course—to those who have committed it, and to those who have participated in it. After nineteen centuries, we can still hear the voice of the Jewish mob while Christ stands before Pontius Pilate. They are howling: “We have no King but Caesar” (Jn 19:15).

Very well—they have no King but Caesar. Jesus Christ is both God and man. Caesar is the State—and the ambition of the State is to replace God! One day we will be able to trace the sinuosity of this serpent. Yes, the State University has been a serpent—gliding its tortuous path through the undergrowth, seeking for ways and means of suppressing God—by expelling him from the Primary School, the College and the Lecture Hall. Note how it always begins from the top, and works its way downwards. All the more reason for manning our defenses “on the hill-top,” and preventing the serpent from sliding down into the “valley.” We have reached a crisis in the battle between good and evil, God will remain in possession—perhaps not of all French souls, but at least of those who are genuinely Catholic. God will be driven from the world of science and philosophy. He will be driven from refined society. He will be attacked but it will be indirectly—by means of an education which leaves him “out in the cold.” Oh, yes, his enemies will be very polite, but let us be aware of their hypocrisy! Their tactics are to cut God off from his own creation and all it comprises.

Such is the sacrilege of our State University! It has taken possession of higher studies—then will come secondary schools and finally the village schools. It is all the work of a Godless university seeking intellectual dominion.

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## Planning a Catholic Daily Newspaper

*to Fr. Emmanuel Bailly*<sup>369</sup>

Before you leave Le Vigan I want you to plan the first edition of a Catholic daily newspaper. Its publication is due to commence on January 1. I want you to stress that we are, first and foremost, Catholics. Secondly, that we are not a political party. That, despite not being a political party, we are Catholic, that is to say universal in our approach—and are, therefore, entitled to our place in the sun. We offer our help and sympathy to all men of good will, no matter which political party they belong to. We intend to respect their opinions—we ask them, in return, to respect our principles.

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<sup>369</sup> His elder brother, Fr. Vincent de Paul Bailly, became the famous Assumptionist journalist.

As far as political structures go: we expect a radical transformation of the European scene, which will lead, sooner or later, to the triumph of democracy. Aristocracy, as we knew it, is now a thing of the past. The professional and business classes in our big cities must be prepared to play their part, and we must, above all, appeal to the “man in the street.”

I have just been interrupted.

Think of this powerful means of “putting the Catholic Church across,” and of instilling Catholic ideas throughout contemporary society. You will not have to venture into the “highways and byways” (Mt 22:9). You will be appealing to a congregation who seldom, if ever, come to church, but they will read your editorials, and gradually come to accept a lot of wholesome Christian doctrine. Don’t you think it’s worthwhile?

#### **Creating a Popular Press**

Nowadays, “anti-clericalism” is on the rampage—the clergy are “fair game” for any journalistic sniper. We’ve got to stick up for our clergy. The brothers and nuns are being driven out of their schools. We must find them other schools to teach in—and we must see that they get paid. Whatever is Catholic is under the threat of extinction—it calls for our wholehearted support.

Do we wish there to be establishments which are not State controlled? The State wants to get rid of the Church. Do we wish to strengthen the Church and to restore its authority and influence? Well, we must make sure the Church has the wherewithal to carry on its good work. We must look after our Catholic institutions. We must treasure them and come to their assistance.

How are we to set about it? By getting into the daily press. And how can we get into the daily press?

Well, look at one of our publications, *Le Pèlerin*. It already has a circulation of 60,000. Doesn’t this call for addition and improvement?

We must seek ways and means of making this enterprise succeed. And I don’t think it’s impossible to find any.

#### **Is There a Catholic Press?**

We have tried one thing and another, and have met with varying success. *La Liberté pour tous*<sup>370</sup> allowed certain unconscious errors to creep into its columns. As for the *Revue de l’Enseignement chrétien*, a learned theologian from Salamanca has, it appears, detected heresy therein. There is *Le Pèlerin* and the *Bulletin des Œuvres populaires*<sup>371</sup>—into which some of us have poured gallons of ink and bucketsful of eloquence. All of which has helped the good cause, but we feel it’s not enough. We need better and more, a thousand times better and more. But are we capable of providing

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<sup>370</sup> In English: *Freedom for All*. It was a short-lived newspaper launched by Fr. d’Alzon and Mr. Germer-Durand at the time of the political revolution of 1848

<sup>371</sup> In English: *Bulletin of Popular Activities*.

better and more? Our desires are greater than our effectiveness: they remain unfulfilled. It's a terrible pity!

So is there nothing more we can do, because we must do something to counteract the evil influence of these secret societies?

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## **II.** ***The Fight against Secret Societies***

*We are living in the year 1870-1871. France has just lost the Franco-Prussian war. Meanwhile, Fr. d'Alzon is contemplating a vast network of priests and laity to stand up to those "Secret Societies" which militate on behalf of what he calls "The Revolution." This "Catholic Action" under the presidency of the local bishops, will be directed by priests and religious chosen for the task. Its "militants" must be firmly convinced Catholics; and as far as possible they must be attached to one or other of the Third Orders (they must be "Tertiaries") in order to nourish their spiritual life and sustain their apostolic zeal. United in purpose, collaborating in effort, they must devote their energies to helping individuals, and groups of individuals to live a full Christian life in the world. They must associate themselves with every good work of charity and Christian propaganda. There was no form of spiritual distress in the diocese of Nîmes which Fr. d'Alzon had not sought to alleviate. What he could not attend to himself, he had entrusted to his collaborators: to his religious and religious sisterhoods, and to their tertiaries. According to the statistics in 1874, there were 63 Assumptionists. They lived in 14 different communities, and looked after 92 different establishments or organizations; 54 of these establishments pursuing different aims.*

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### **A Third Order of Laymen<sup>372</sup>**

*Its Aim.*—To live a more perfect life, something between that of Christian laypeople and that of religious. Its members are to give one another mutual support in the practice of Christian virtue. They must provide the Church with an organization to defend it—just as the Secret Societies are organized to attack it. In other words, they must assist the Forces of Good in their struggle against the Forces of Evil.

Such have been my intentions in founding our Third Order. We are simply fighting for the extension of Christ's Kingdom here below. So our motto must be these words of the Lord's Prayer: "Thy Kingdom Come."

Until a special handbook can be published for the Tertiaries, let us

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<sup>372</sup> This document is one of two that were attached to the Circular Letter of 1874 on the Assumptionist Third Order.

use that of the Assumptionist religious. Having more battles to fight, the Church needs more fighters, apart from its regular battalions—as many more fighters as possible. The characteristics of our little Association must be the energetic performance of good works, readiness to accept pain and disappointment, straightforwardness, initiative, and a spiritual outlook.

*Admission to Membership.*—Each candidate must be presented by a member of the Assumptionist Order: a religious or simply a Tertiary.

Only the Director can admit him or her to the postulate. For admission to the novitiate and the taking of vows, the Director needs the approval of his Councilors.

The candidate must be a sufficiently educated person. He must be of a sociable disposition. He must sincerely desire to seek perfection, according to his state of life—and must be capable of performing the tasks membership will entail.

Once the applicant's good character has been established after careful investigation, he may be admitted to the novitiate. The same applies when it comes to permitting him to pronounce his vows. The Director himself (or some reliable person delegated by the Director) is responsible for assembling the necessary information—which must be put before the Council, enabling them to reach a prudent decision.

During his novitiate the candidate must be “put to the test”—the kind of tests to be applied are fixed by our rules.

The novitiate lasts at least a year. Vows are to be renewed annually.

The tertiary will be given a crucifix, to be permanently worn by his person.

By making his profession, a tertiary vows to live a better life. He is perfectly free to pronounce the formal vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, but he is under no obligation to do so. Poverty, chastity and obedience can be practiced without having to enter a monastery. Poverty will consist in avoiding too much comfort and luxury. Chastity has its rules, even for married people. As for obedience: we must all learn how to abandon our own personal inclinations in the pursuit of good works: Nobody can oblige a Tertiary to undertake any particular work—but he needs permission to undertake any more.

*Pious Practices.*; Every day: half an hour, or at least fifteen minutes' meditation; half an hour's spiritual reading, which must include one chapter of the New Testament; a nightly examination of conscience; a monthly day of recollection. Four special communions every year: at Christmas; on the feast of the Holy Name (which was then the Sunday after New Year's Day); on the feast of Corpus Christi; and on that of Our Lady's Assumption.

They will shun worldly amusements: dances, the theatre; they will devote themselves to visiting and comforting the sick.

They will pray lovingly for the souls of the faithful departed.

They will procure a Book of Hours (a shorter form of the priest's

breviary) so as to join in the official prayer of the Church. They will endeavor to recite the “Little Hours” (Terce, Sext and None) or at least Prime, Vespers and Compline.

*Organization.*—Their organization will be very simple. They will need a Director (who must be a religious) and six Councilors who must divide the administration between them.

Meetings must take place, once a fortnight if possible, and preferably once a week. These meetings must comprise a religious instruction. There must be a friendly discussion among themselves about the present condition of the Third Order. Where have they succeeded, and where have they failed? What means are being taken to maintain their fervor?

*Activities.*—Their primary preoccupation must be with their personal sanctification. But in addition, the Tertiaries must devote themselves to the pursuit of the Spiritual and Corporal Works of Mercy: teaching, spreading the Gospel, alleviating all forms of human misery. There are so many “lost souls” for them to bring back to Our Blessed Lord. Do not forget what he said: “*Messis quidem multa, operarii autem pauci*; The harvest is, indeed, great, but the laborers are few” (Lk 10:2). These words of our Divine Master have never been more appropriate, and we must bear in mind that he went on to say: “Pray, therefore, to the Lord of the harvest that he send laborers into his field.”

Yes, we must all pray hard for many more laborers to come forward and offer their services—for there is a very great deal of work to be done, to “gather all the wheat into his barn” (Mt 13:30).

Nota

This Rule of Life for the Third Order has been simplified as far as possible. It is worth further examination and development and it must be submitted to the careful consideration of our General Chapter.

Would it not, for example, be better to call them “The Association of Saint Augustine,” rather than “The Third Order”?

So, please let me know what you all think. In what ways could this project be improved and rendered more effective?

Perhaps, when he has time and leisure, Father Picard could compose a suitable handbook for the Tertiaries. Send him all your “bright ideas.”

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## A Third Order of Priests<sup>373</sup>

*Our Priest Tertiaries.*; Although these priests are not members of our brotherhood—not Augustinians of the Assumption—they, nevertheless,

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<sup>373</sup> This document is one of two that were attached to the Circular Letter of 1874 on the Assumptionist Third Order.

wish to be associated with us as Tertiaries, in order to live a more perfect and priestly life.

*Their Aim.*—To acquire priestly perfection in the exercise of their ministry—to practice all those virtues a priest ought to have and to seek the extension of Christ's Kingdom here below as they perform the various tasks a priest has to do.

*Their Spirit.*—Let them love Our Blessed Lord Jesus Christ with all their heart—let them love Our Blessed Lady his mother—let them love the Church his spouse. This threefold love is manifested by their utter dedication to God's cause. Jesus Christ is being expelled from everywhere. May he reign over us once more. They must be true sons of Mary, the model of our life of prayer. They must strive, assiduously and unselfishly, for the triumph of God's Church—for its right to teach and legislate—for the success of all its good works.

Their three outstanding virtues must be their faith, their readiness to sacrifice personal convenience, and their initiative. Their faith repudiates worldly values—their sacrificial spirit disposes them to defy opposition and accept suffering—their initiative makes them bold and courageous in God's service: no laziness, laxity or love of ease.

*Admission.*—A priest is admitted to our Third Order on the recommendation of an Assumptionist or of another Tertiary. But only the Director may approve his admission and allow him to become a postulant. For him to become a novice, two thirds of the Council must approve.

Postulants and novices must place themselves under the spiritual guidance of the Director or the Master of Novices.

Before accepting a postulant, we must find out whether he is a suitable candidate for our Third Order.

The postulants and novices attend all community functions except the Chapter of Faults.

After his novitiate the professed tertiary takes no formal vows—but he does undertake to observe the rules of the Third Order for one year.

After five years he may become perpetually professed.

At his profession he is given a Crucifix to signify his membership.

The Director may admit any individual priest to adopt the Third Order's way of life. But a formal admission to the Confraternity implies his having completed his novitiate and been accepted by the Council.

If in any locality there were several Tertiaries unassociated with one another, then the Superior General could assemble them into a Confraternity.

*Their Obligations.*—By their Profession, the Associated Members undertake to perfect themselves as regards poverty, chastity and obedience.

1° Obedience: As priests they must practice absolute obedience to their bishop. They must go where he sends them and do what he tells them.

As Tertiaries they must obey the Director: in whatever pertains to their spiritual life, their personal behavior, and the good works they do over and above their pastoral duties. They cannot be obliged to undertake any work contrary to their inclinations, but they may undertake nothing more without his permission.

2° Poverty: This must be practiced by the simplicity of their lifestyle and accommodation, the modesty of their attire, and the frugality of their meals. They need permission to dine out and to travel abroad. They must work hard for their living, as befits the poor. They are recommended to submit their annual budget to the Director's approval.

3° Chastity: As priests they must cherish and safeguard their celibacy. The Director may be obliged to warn them if they are being imprudent in this respect, or to get some other suitable person to warn them.

Over and above their obligations as Tertiaries, they may be permitted to increase their dedication by pronouncing religious vows, but these vows are of their personal option, and must be taken privately.

*Their Spiritual Exercises.*—Meditation—the rosary—spiritual reading—daily examination of conscience—visits to the Blessed Sacrament—these and other pious practices will be inserted into the Tertiary's daily life according to the nature of his duties and his personal needs.

As far as is possible, they will fast once a week.

If he leaves a given locality, the Tertiary does not cease thereby to be a member of the Third Order in this locality. We must visit any of our associates who are sick, and be very kind to them. If they are in danger of death, we must warn them of it; this is of the utmost importance.

When any of our Tertiaries dies, each of us must recite the Office for the Dead, and offer a Requiem Mass for the repose of his soul.

All Tertiaries are invited to work in close cooperation with the Augustinians of the Assumption. Our Assumptionist Handbook and Book of Rules are theirs to read and meditate upon.

*Their Organization.*—Our Third Order is governed by a Director, a Master of Novices and a number of Councilors. The number of these Councilors will depend on the number of Tertiaries.

All necessary dispensations are accorded by the Director.

*Meetings.*—As far as possible, we must meet together once a week. We will recite Vespers together, or one of the Minor Hours. We will be given a spiritual lecture. We will accuse ourselves of having broken our rules. If we wish to chat, the meeting must take place elsewhere than in Chapel.

*Good Works.*—Since the motto of our Third Order is "*Adveniat Regnum Tuum; Thy Kingdom Come,*" let them busy themselves with the apostolic works that are most effective in "bringing about the Kingdom."



Yet no particular good work is specified; we are prepared to undertake the lot. What does matter is that we must not be selfish. We must be ready to hand over to others work which we ourselves began, allowing others to take the credit. This applies, for example to the work of the Catholic Media—such an important work nowadays.

But Tertiaries must never forget that their primary work consists in their “duties of state.” So, before undertaking anything extra, they must make sure they have accomplished whatever was ordered by their principal Superior—and if they are diocesan priests, their principal Superior is the Bishop.

First things first. We must respect and maintain the “established order” by first fulfilling our obligations, then do what we can over and above our obligations.

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## An Association for the Defense of the Catholic Church

Fierce fighting has broken out on earth between the Catholic Church and the Revolution. The Revolution is seeking to overthrow the Church, to overthrow Christ’s Kingdom on earth. What a pretension! Satan has declared war on God!<sup>374</sup>

The Church has its armed forces: its clergy, its religious orders, and its pious associations? The Revolution too is organized for battle under the auspices of Freemasonry, which comprises various secret societies.

The Church’s principal weapons are prayer and the Word of God; *oratio et ministerium verbi* (Acts 6:4). The Freemasons too have their weapons. They do not pray, but they do worship. They worship those ugly passions which drag us down into the mud, thereby cutting us off from the “River of Life” (Rv 22:1) and the “Green Pastures” (Ps 24), and cutting us off from where God can be found. The Church stands for all that is ennobling and uplifting; the Revolution for all that is repulsive and degrading. The Church glories in what is spiritual; the Revolution in what is material and sensual. Behind it lurks the devil, enticing us to forbidden pleasures, as he enticed our first parents in the Garden of Eden.

Both the Church and the Revolution speak to us in human language. They speak to us in books and newspapers; in what we learn in school; in whatever we hear and listen to; in the laws and customs which regulate our daily lives. And sometimes the voices of the Revolution are so loud that we can hear nothing else. But the Church too has its voice. And sometimes we wonder whether the voice of the Church is uttering its true message, or

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<sup>374</sup> In the Book of Revelation we read that “fierce fighting broke out in heaven between Michael and the Dragon” (Rv 12:7).

whether the ministers of the Church are not, as St. Paul says, “adulterating the word of God” (2 Cor 2:7).

The mass of the people are being systematically perverted more and more. Is there one truly Christian state or nation left on the face of the earth? Everywhere we see society riddled with skepticism. So is it not time for the Church to start exercising its rights and raising the populace out of the slime into which “the powers that be” are dragging them down? Is it not time to organize ourselves, and synchronize our efforts against the Revolution and its doctrines and against Freemasonry and its machinations? Is it not time to get together, under the leadership of our Holy Father the Pope, and our bishops—and form a vast and powerful Association, the purpose of which will be to counterbalance hell?

1° Freemasonry uses the daily press. Against this evil press, why should we not create a good press<sup>375</sup>?

2° The Freemasons know how to manipulate what goes on in schools, especially in our state schools. Then why should we not concentrate our minds and our efforts on teaching? We need Catholic schools, independent of state-control. We must establish these Catholic schools—all sorts of Catholic schools.

3° The Freemasons encourage “the works of the flesh” and the impulses of corrupt nature (Gal 5:16). These are, in fact, the gods they worship! We, on the contrary, must teach people to “walk in the spirit!” We must show them the value—and the magnificence and the splendor of a Catholic culture. We must teach them to pray and to be happy in this world because they are looking forward to a better one.

4° Freemasonry has its gatherings of so-called “learned” men who discuss all branches of science in order to pervert its applications. We must hold spiritual gatherings: missions and retreats, pious and charitable reunions.

5° The Freemasons are concerned with the needs of ordinary people—their material needs. Our concern is with their spiritual needs, with the re-Christianization of their outlook, and consequently of their behavior.

6° Freemasonry undermines the influence of the Church by stripping the Church of its lawful possessions. We, on the contrary, must do all we can to increase the Church’s power and influence, both at home and abroad. We must erect Catholic establishments, found Catholic associations, and print Catholic publications. We must provide the Holy See with whatever it needs to fulfill its role as spiritual center of the world, and spiritual guide of the nations.

All this, you may say, is being done already. Yes, but is it being done with sufficient energy and unity of purpose?

Let us form a Christian League. Its members must dedicate their

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<sup>375</sup>The Assumptionist Publishing House in Paris was, indeed, called: “La Bonne Presse,” – the “clean”, “the good”, and “honest” press.

lives, and “pool” their efforts, in bringing about the Church’s triumph. We must use all these means, and we must persevere. There is every reason to hope that, within a few years, we will be meeting with considerable success.

Our overall aim will comprise several projects, each of which will have to be separately studied. We will require all our specialist skills, but we must work in close cooperation.

We will place ourselves under the patronage: 1° Of our Blessed Lady, Queen of Heaven. By proclaiming her Glorious Assumption, we are affirming the superiority of spiritual over merely material values and we are challenging Satan. 2° Of St. Michael the Archangel. He is the head of the heavenly host. 3° Of St. Peter. He is that immovable rock upon which the Church is built, the Church which is to overthrow the Revolution.

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### The League for God’s Rights<sup>376</sup>

Art. 1.—A Catholic Association is hereby formed—it will be called the League for God’s rights.

Art. 2.—Its aim is to defend contemporary society against so-called “Free Thought,” against morality divorced from doctrine, and against all those secret societies opposed to revealed truth, God’s law, God’s Church, God’s supreme dominion over all creation.

Art. 3.—Its motto is Saint Michael’s war-cry as he drove the devils out of heaven: “*Quis ut Deus*; Who is like to God?” (Rv 12:7)

Art. 4.—Its feast days are: the Immaculate Conception on which we honor Our Blessed Lady as the most admirable result of humanity’s restoration by Jesus Christ, and the magnificent blossoming of the supernatural order. St. Michael (September 29) on which we honor the leader of the heavenly host, Satan’s conqueror. St. Peter (June 29) on which we honor Our Lord’s first deputy on earth, the foundation stone of his Church.

Art. 5.—Its weapons are prayer and the sacraments and all the means of Catholic propaganda that can counteract the vicious propaganda aimed at ruining our faith.

Art. 6.—Its spirit is that of zeal for whatever upholds God’s cause and that of his Church.

Art. 7.—Its organization consists in that of committees formed wherever possible. These committees must be established in conformity with civil law. Wherever there is such a committee, its rules must be adapted to local circumstances.

Art. 8.—Whereas the secret societies pursue their aims “under cover of darkness” (Jn 3:19), our League of God’s Rights must always “walk in

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<sup>376</sup> This and similar plans resulted in the Association of Our Lady of Salvation (*Notre Dame de Salut*) which took shape only after Fr. d’Alzon’s death.

the light as befits children of the light” (Eph 5:8).

Before receiving Holy Communion on their admittance to the League, the new members declare as follows:

“In presence of the Holy Trinity and of Our Lord Jesus Christ whom I adore in this host, I swear to defend the rights of God and of the Holy Catholic Church, to the utmost of my ability, whenever these rights are attacked.”

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## A Catholic Congress

*(Church of the Carmelite Fathers, April 7, 1872)*

*Pax vobis; Peace be with you.*

Gentlemen,

What more appropriate text could I take for our farewell? We have closely collaborated, and produced excellent results. So let us take the words from today’s Gospel. The Apostles assembled in the Upper Room, in what could be called the first Congress, must have felt very downhearted at Jesus not being there. Then to comfort them he appears miraculously among them, and wishes them peace.

So let this peace be among you—the fruit of your past labors—the aim of your future endeavors. *Pax vobis*—Peace be with you—for, unless you yourselves are at peace, you will never transmit peace to others. We are now going our separate ways, each on a mission of peace. And the secret of this peace—between yourselves and among those to whom you are returning—lies in faith, hope and charity.

Peace in yourselves—peace among yourselves—peace with others and among all men (Lk 2:14). Let your peace be founded on faith. Walk in that light whereby we see events and situations from God’s point of view. Be sons of truth. Be men of principle, and not men of expediency. Let your whole life be regulated by the example and teaching of Our Blessed Savior. Be bold in the profession of truth. May your success be that of truth over error. May you be at peace because you breathe truth.

Let your peace be founded on hope. What troubles men most of the time? Is it not anxiety for the things of this earth? Hope lifts our sights higher. You will no longer look for happiness in what passes; your ambition will be for what endures. Worldly cares and preoccupations, the petty disputes of petty-minded men, will no longer trouble your minds. Your treasure will be in heaven (Mt 6:21). Never mind about temporary advantages. You will find the peace of Our Blessed Lord risen from the dead. “If you are risen with Christ, seek the things that are above...be

heavenly-minded, not earthly minded; *Quae sursum sunt, quaerite...quae sursum sunt, sapite, non quae super terram.*” (Col 3:1-2).

Let your peace be founded on charity. Love God. Let him alone possess your heart. Let him be your motive, the meaning and mainstream of your whole life. Learn to appreciate the privilege of being with God. He descends to our level, and thereby raises us up to his. And thus we find the peace which cannot be disturbed, that “peace of God which surpasses all understanding; *pax Dei quae exsuperat omnem sensum*” (Phil 4:7).

Peace in yourselves—peace among all men. Whatever comes from God can be shared without being diminished. Your faith, your hope, your charity, will be increased the more you communicate it to your fellow men. So, go and bring them faith. The world is lost in the darkness of error—led astray by lying propaganda. Save the world by bringing the light back—the clear light of truth, from your lips, but above all from the way you yourselves live. Your life must be an unceasing sermon on faith. You are apostles, and to you Our Blessed Lord comes with his message of peace. *Pax vobis*. And we know that Our Blessed Lord’s wishes come true for those who really love him.

Give peace to others. Hope teaches us to despise earthly possessions. Be especially generous to the poor. Your disdain for riches will express itself in abundant almsgiving. Your generosity will appease the poor man’s pent up anger and resentment. He will come to accept his poverty when he sees you going short in order to help him. The more you give, the better he will understand that happiness does not consist in having a lot of money—and you will teach him to value the things of heaven by showing him how little you value the things of earth. Rich people can do so much by their generosity to reconcile the “haves” and the “have nots.”

Bring peace to all men by your charity. Many of you gentlemen are renowned for your good works, but there are so many ways of performing good works. You haven’t told us much about the good you have done, but you have told us much about the good which remains to be done. That’s the right spirit!—That’s humility and goodwill.

Yes, the field is vast. Carry on with your holy traditions of doing good for the love of God. See the storms of hatred rising up on every side like the waves of an angry sea. But no furious storm has ever been able to extinguish the fire of divine charity. “*Aquae multae non potuerunt extinguere caritatem*; Many waters cannot drown love” (Sg 8:7). Multiply your charitable works—let there be more and more of them. Invent new forms of charity. Carry the flames of divine love all over France, to its utmost extremities. Wherever Revolutionary hatred lifts its ugly head, let Catholic charity rise up and defeat it. Let the armies of heaven overcome the hosts of hell. So just as I wish you peace, as Our Blessed Lord wished his Apostles—you must not only wish it, but bring it to all men.

And before we say goodbye, remember that after Our Lord’s Resurrection and Ascension, the Apostles who had seen him rise and

watched him go up into heaven, invited Our Blessed Lady, his Mother, to come and live with them (Acts 1:14). Do like the Apostles. Invite her to come and live with you, and preside over all your holy endeavors. Place yourselves under her very special protection. Recent prodigies have shown beyond doubt how powerful she is. Call upon her name—and watch your good works assume miraculous proportions. Amen.

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## To the Saint Vincent de Paul Societies<sup>377</sup>

*“Beatus qui intelligit super egenum et pauperem in dia mala liberat eum Dominus; Blessed is he who has regard for the lowly and the poor; in the day of misfortune the Lord will deliver him” (Ps 40:1 Vulgate).*

Gentlemen,

It is an unmistakable sign of your intelligent concern for the needy that you should come here to rekindle your zeal. This holy place is dedicated to Our Blessed Lady. She was of royal ancestry. By giving human birth to God the Son, she became Queen of earth and heaven. And yet her life—the holiest of all lives—was spent in poverty and obscurity.

So let me begin by greeting you with these words of the Psalmist: *“Beatus qui intelligit super egenum et pauperem; Blessed is he who has regard for the lowly and the poor.”* Yes, blessed are those who appreciate the positive value of being humble and ignored.

### **The true meaning of Charity**

Your understanding of Christian charity is manifest by your coming here, as members of the Societies of St. Vincent de Paul, to a shrine restored by the spiritual daughters of your Patron Saint—to a shrine confided to the care of his spiritual sons—to those who have inherited his virtues—to those on whom the mantle of his humility has fallen from heaven (2 Kgs 2:13). Come gentlemen—come filled with these sentiments of pious veneration for God’s Blessed Mother and for St. Vincent de Paul. Come and seek the graces you need, zealously to accomplish the noble tasks it is your duty to perform. Because the practice of charity demands more than a concern for human welfare—it demands an insight into the mind of God. “Our warfare is not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers” (Eph 6:12), against that diabolical hatred, instilled and exploited by hell, in the hearts of the “have nots” for the “haves.”

So: “Blessed is he who is concerned with the poor and the lowly.

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<sup>377</sup> those of Nîmes and Montpellier on pilgrimage to the Shrine of Prime-Combe, May 7, 1876.

The Lord will deliver him on the day of misfortune.”

#### **Our troubled times**

Yes, we live surrounded by dangers, and these dangers are all the greater for being unnoticed. The so-called “wise men” of this world seem to take delight in making matters worse. They are like ignorant physicians who actually spread pestilence and hasten death, by prescribing and applying remedies which are poisonous.

Allow me gentlemen to express my opinion on how you ought to face up to these troubled times. You are giving generously to the poor. You are stretching out your hand to help them. You visit them; you comfort them. You have founded establishments where their children can be properly looked after, where their sick can be properly nursed, and where their old folk find comfort and security. Then how is it that all over France—north, south, east and west—resentment and jealousy are fomenting? The poor hate the rich, and this hatred is accumulating day by day. It has assumed such fury, such intensity, that our major industrialists, despite the prodigality of their abundant alms giving, are living in constant fear of civil war. Let us hope they are being over-pessimistic. But there must be some solid grounds for their being so apprehensive.

Yes, the poor, the proletariat, are discontented. Their hearts are full of hate. It is useless to inscribe: “Liberty, equality, fraternity” on our public buildings. It means nothing to the poor. Not only are they unimpressed, they repudiate it! Why? I’ll tell you why. It’s because the poor want not only more than they have; they want as much as they can possibly get.

And whence this “revolutionary” thirst for the maximum pleasure out of life? It comes primarily from the bad example given by so many rich people: those who are forever enjoying themselves, sparing themselves no luxury, giving free rein to all their sinful inclinations, and totally neglecting their religious obligations. No wonder the poor become cynical, with a loud-voiced cynicism based, most of the time, on abysmal ignorance.

“Look at you!” cry the poor. “Your life consists in nothing but having a good time—and in order to have a better time you jettison your religious beliefs. Very well, we don’t believe in religion either!” But no more religious beliefs, no more moral obligations. And with no more moral obligations, what is there left to curb our appetites? “Well, we have appetites too,” say the poor. “If you satisfy yours, why shouldn’t we satisfy ours? We have nothing; you have everything. Very well, we will deprive you of your surplus, and we will win because there are more of us. We’ll share everything out. We will all be equally rich; we will all do an equal amount of work; we will all have an equally good time.”

#### **The Situation of the Working Classes**

Gentlemen, am I exaggerating? Are my words nothing more than the mournful echo of those lugubrious sounds which rumble in the distance like an approaching storm—a storm which threatens to destroy our modern

society and sweep both rich and poor away?

Would it be indiscreet of me to repeat a conversation I held, only a few days ago, with one of your colleagues? He holds an important position. He is as calm and dispassionate as he is kind and caring, and he gauges the present industrial atmosphere with as much human perspicacity as he does with Christian charity. “We are always being told,” he said, “about the working class situation. Well, I don’t think there is such a thing as a working class situation. It’s an every-man-for-himself situation! The day so-called ‘good Catholic’ ladies spend a hundred francs on a new dress, instead of a thousand—the day when simple, solid furniture in Christian homes replaces all these ‘up-to-date’ luxury devices—the day we eat plain, wholesome food and banish the latest inventions of fancy cooks and elaborate pastry-makers...then the rich will begin being really kind to the poor, and the poor will begin to appreciate that much is being done to assist them in their poverty. The workers, now living in comparative comfort, will notice the frugality practiced by their so-called ‘social superiors,’ and cease to hate and envy them. They will start curbing their own unruly appetites. Other models will be set before their eyes, and this will induce a saner attitude towards the good things of this life.”

Perhaps I don’t agree with him all along the line, but I do grasp his point. I think there is such a thing as a working class situation, and a working class mentality. I do respect his conviction that when the rich have learned to practice voluntary austerity—when, in consequence, they have more to spare for their less fortunate neighbors—when, by their example, they show the poor that other things matter besides money—then there will be less social hatred and greed.

But, besides the efforts of individuals to moderate their life-style, could not certain structural reforms be introduced? Some outstanding Catholic industrialists<sup>378</sup> have done much to improve working conditions. Their factory hands—having had their self-respect restored—work harder, waste less, behave themselves better and go to Mass.

#### **Examples of Christian Behavior**

And this is why I urge you to ask Our Blessed Lady, the mother of Jesus, to obtain for you not only an “overdose” of zeal, but an “overdose” of intelligence. You have such an important part to play in the future of Christian civilization. You are responsible for what happens to the rich, as well as for what happens to the poor. You must remind the rich that if they wish there to be social reconciliation, it is they who must take the first step. In France today there are about 160,000 major factories. In most of them the despotic management despises the workers—and the workers entertain a deep-seated hatred for the despotic management. A clash is bound to occur, and its consequences are likely to be catastrophic.

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<sup>378</sup> like Léon Harmel at St. Etienne



But, let the facts speak for themselves. Wherever the “bosses” have taken a Christian initiative, not only by distributing alms, but by dispensing truly intelligent charity and by being tactful, sympathetic, imaginative, the following three results have been obtained: There has been increased output, less pilfering, and higher wages. No more mutual hatred and mistrust. On the contrary, friendship and loyal collaboration.

You may ask: how have these fortunate industrialists succeeded so well? I do not, for a moment, imagine there is one standard recipe for success. There are “umpteen” possible approaches. It depends on national and regional characteristics. It depends on the nature of the work itself. It depends on legitimate local customs. Are these people clannish?—are they patriarchal? The actual “Law of the Land” may be an impediment to decent relationships—but never mind. Right attitudes overcome the evil effects of wrong laws. The overriding principle is to observe the law of God. I cannot repeat this too often, especially not after my years of experience as headmaster of the most Christian of schools. The law of God: respect for paternal authority; respect for women and children; respect for young ladies and mothers; the habit of thrift and economy; and encouraging personal ownership. This last item is most important. A factory worker, who owns a bit of property and holds a modest bank account, is less likely to be found in the “pub” singing revolutionary songs, and this worker will be grateful to the “boss” thanks to whose Christian intelligence he is no longer an “industrial slave.” By this time he is fast becoming a good Christian man, if he isn’t one already. The bombastic demagogue who drove him into the army of anarchy, has lost at least one vote—one soldier of Satan now serves the Lord instead.

And what I say about the factory workers, I say with certitude because I have made a thorough study of their situation. The same applies to all working class agglomerations. Iniquitous conditions and evil laws are turning them into enemies of Christian society. Your enlightened charity must convert them. Thanks to you they must become valiant champions of Christ. To attain this goal you must reflect. You must study—you must get your facts and figures right. Charity nowadays more than ever, must face up to its obligations. It is confronted with very serious problems, and almost insurmountable difficulties. Danger lies ahead. Charity must be enlightened. Meekness and submission—silence and patience under persecution—all this has its place in spiritual warfare. But now the time has come to brandish the torch. “You are the light of the world.... Men do not light a lamp to hide it under a bushel basket. So let your light shine out for all to see it” (Mt 5:14-16). To enlighten the poor because “they sit in darkness and in the shadow of death” (Lk 1:79) is surely the kindest way a Christian can perform.

#### **The First Commandment**

Gentlemen, Our Blessed Lord Jesus Christ decided to atone for the guilt of the human race by shedding his own Precious Blood. How were we

to respond? How were we to collaborate? He outlined for his Apostles his final recommendations: “My children,” he said, “I give you a new commandment: love one another. Such as my love has been for you, so must your love be for each other.” (Jn 13:34). These precious words issued from the very heart of our Divine Savior. Sixteen hundred years later they issued from the very heart of Saint Vincent de Paul. In our present century they have issued from the very heart of a group of fervent young Christian men, and they have given a meaning to your life and your activities. Charity has always bloomed and flourished in God’s Church. It has bloomed and flourished under many forms. Your founders have made it bloom and flourish in our days. It is, indeed, a precious fruit and an admirable light. I am asking Our Lady of Prime-Combe to make this flower blossom, this fruit ripen, and this light shine, as never before, because of what you will have to do if you are to overcome the perils of our day and age.

Do not limit yourselves to loving the poor. Show the rich that they must love them too. And teach the poor to love. Inspire them to love those whom they now passionately hate—whom they now regard as their deadliest enemies. How to set about it? You must use your brains. The Psalmist says, “*Beatus qui intelligit.*” Thinking up ways and means of putting Our Lord’s spiritual testament into social effect, save our society from the fury of the Revolution, if it can still be saved. “*In die mala liberate eum Dominus*; Blessed is he who is concerned with the poor and the outcast. The Lord will deliver him on the day of misfortune.” Yes, this is how to be delivered by God on the day of misfortune. And this is what I wish you—on your days of misfortune in this life, and on the redoubtable day of judgment. Amen.

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## Spiritual Renewal of the Clergy

November 14, 1877

to Fr. Picard

I have two points to make—one concerns the spiritual renewal of the clergy, and the other that of the Christian teaching profession. Both are concerned with the spiritual resurrection of France, as the eldest daughter of the Church. If your rural clergy were doing their job properly, we wouldn’t have to worry about our village school teachers. The spiritual renewal of the clergy does not require a special Congress. But it is something which must be undertaken, and every legitimate spiritual means must be employed to bring it about.

This business of renewing the clergy is by no means the exclusive domain of the Augustinians of the Assumption, but we must nevertheless make it one of our principal preoccupations. How are we to face up to our task? We must begin by cultivating a very high ideal of the priesthood

itself. Our priesthood is that of Our Lord Jesus Christ. He transmits his priesthood to other men. So we must assist him in the work closest to his divine heart, in the work of forming good priests—because it is through the priesthood that he preaches to the poor, that he confers the sacraments of Penance and the Holy Eucharist.

Let our religious be utterly convinced of this. Each of them will then know what to do. They will not all labor with equal efficacy, but they will all achieve something. They themselves must become exemplary priests. They must pray very hard for their fellow priests. They must never be shy about speaking to their fellow priests about the priesthood. They must do their utmost to help those unfortunate priests who have “fallen by the wayside” (Lk 8:5). Their attitude towards all other priests must be benevolent.

Time and time again I have had to sit and listen to priests disparaging other priests. I find this most offensive. Fortunately, it has caused me to react. I protest most emphatically, at least by my stony silence. I do not like this continual criticism of our fellow priests. It amounts to disparaging the priesthood itself if we disparage those who are invested therewith.

Now, ought we to found a Third Order consisting exclusively of priests? I’m not sure whether we ought. You could perhaps found one in the Parisian region. Here in Nîmes I am the vicar general, which means that I could attempt nothing of the sort. All I can do is to exert influence on individual priests.

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## On the Spiritual Renewal of Christian Teachers

*November 14, 1877*

*to Fr. Picard*

This morning my dear friend, I wrote to you about how I envisage our work for the renewal of the clergy. Now what about the teachers?

Were I addressing a Teachers’ Congress, my task would be simple enough. I would state that, since the foundation of Catholic Universities was already on the episcopal agenda, all the Catholic laity had to do was supply the money and the students. But, education consists not only in opening universities. What about ordinary schools for ordinary people? It would be wrong for me to condemn school teachers as a whole—the sad fact remains that very many of them are most undesirable individuals who are forever waging war on their parish priests. What to do about it? We must, of course, find more suitable teachers, but how? We must do all we possible can to encourage the work of the de la Salle Brothers in our towns, and that of the other Brothers who work in the country villages. The parish priests can do a lot to help. If every parish priest took four or five little boys into his

rectory—boys destined for the minor seminary or for the de la Salle Brothers—what marvelous results could be obtained! And let them train good Christian teachers, whether or not these teachers ever become religious. They will already have done a vast amount of good.

*Practical Conclusions*

1° The adequate funding of those Teacher-Training Schools run by the de la Salle Brothers.

2° Vocations must be nurtured in the rectory.

3° We must open independent Christian schools everywhere, especially in places where the State schools are subversive.

4° Wherever the local school master is a worthy man, look after him, take an interest in his work. The Catholic Education committee must also keep an eye on our School Inspectors. A few of these are excellent fellows, but most of them are thoroughly detestable. Watch out for their propaganda which is usually obnoxious and revolutionary.

Here, then are a few ideas to start with. Take these few ideas and work on them, develop them, see what you can make of them. Suppose, for example, that the *Pèlerin*<sup>379</sup> launched its editorial campaign with a series of “Letters to Parish Priests?” Don’t send copies to every parish priest in the land. Some of them dislike us, and would only cause trouble. So concentrate on the friendly parish priests. The movement would, I am sure, catch on. We will have to persevere and “go slow.” We may not succeed in counter-revolutionizing the entire educational system—but we will go a long way towards making this happy dream come true.

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<sup>379</sup> The *Pèlerin* (Pilgrim) is a weekly magazine that began publication as a newsletter to those who had made a pilgrimage with the Assumptionists. It started in the 1870’s and continues to this day.

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### **III.** ***The Fight against Schism***

#### **Father d'Alzon and Christian Unity**

*Fr. d'Alzon had always been interested in the reconciliation of what can loosely be termed "Protestants": in France, in England, Germany, and Switzerland. When his parents died, they left him quite a fortune, for they were landed gentry. He generously handed his fortune over to the Holy See. This drew the attention of Pope Pius IX, who encouraged him and his new Order to look eastwards: towards the schismatic Christians of the Balkan lands. For Fr. d'Alzon, the Pope's desire was equivalent to a command; and he set to it with a will, keeping his missionary eye on far distant Russia. The following extracts from his writings are not spiritual exhortations, but records of his proceedings. Needless to say, there was a lot of what we would now call "Vatican red-tape" to be cut through. Monsignors Howard and Talbot<sup>380</sup>, Monsignor Lavigerie<sup>381</sup>, Monsignor Simeoni and others: all of whom we would now describe as "Vatican top-civil servants"; were the men he had to deal with in these preliminary stages.*

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#### **The Near Eastern Question—June 1862<sup>382</sup>**

When I arrived in Rome, Msgr Howard encouraged me to look towards Bulgaria, and Msgr Talbot and Lavigerie did the same theme. I told them I had already begun to take an active interest in Syria at the instigation of Cardinal Barnabo<sup>383</sup>. I could not change direction without looking like a "weathercock"—unless the Holy Father, through the appropriate channels of the Ministry of Propaganda, expressed a wish for me to do so. Mgr Talbot promised to speak to the Holy Father about it. Msgr Lavigerie gave me an appointment, but failed to keep it himself! Then Msgr Howard

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<sup>380</sup> Both were Englishmen.

<sup>381</sup> A French priest who later became Cardinal Archbishop of Carthage and the founder of the Missionaries of Africa, also known as the White Fathers.

<sup>382</sup> An account drawn up by Fr. d'Alzon based on various conversations he had in Rome with regard to the Mission in Bulgaria.

<sup>383</sup> Alessandro Barnabo (1801-1874) was an Italian Churchman who became a cardinal in 1856 and was the prefect of the Propaganda and of the Eastern Rites.

promised to introduce me to Msgr Simeoni<sup>384</sup>, and this seemed the right step to take.

Msgr Howard suggested that we should drop the Rule of Saint Augustine, and adopt that of Saint Basil (a Balkan saint). He also suggested that we obtain permission to follow both the Roman and the Eastern Rites, according to whether we were operating in Western Europe or in the Balkans.

Msgr Simeoni welcomed me with open arms. He promised to do all he could to further the accomplishment of our plans. He, nevertheless, made it quite clear that under present circumstances Bulgaria ought to take priority. These poor people, he pointed out, were suffering from the most complete ignorance of ecclesial matters. The Holy Father himself would have to instruct Propaganda to change some of their rules—and permit a permanent choice between one Rite and the other.

I forgot to mention that I saw Howard and Talbot on March 27 in the morning. Talbot was the one officially on duty. He said he would speak to Simeoni that evening (Tuesday). Simeoni had had an audience with the Holy Father, and had probably already mentioned the matter to his Holiness. In any case, Simeoni and Talbot had Pope Pius IX's orders that I was to speak to Cardinal Barnabo. When Simeoni spoke to me about this, I told him it would surely be wiser not to call on Cardinal Barnabo until the latter had given me an appointment. Simeoni promised to keep in touch, and not to mention the matter to his Holiness again for the time being. This was on Monday June 2 at 10 a.m. when I spoke to him, and he gave me another appointment for Wednesday the 4th in the morning. So I went to see him again then. He described his conversation with the Holy Father. He had relayed some of Cardinal Barnabo's objections—although Cardinal Barnabo declared he was not altogether against the project. It appears that the Holy Father had told him repeatedly: "This is what I wish to happen"—from which Simeoni concluded that, since the Pope was so insistent, the project would have to be carried through.

So I asked Simeoni a few straight questions: must we tackle the Bulgarian situation?—when and how? I do not remember whether it was at our first, or at our second interview that I started being blunt. Our first interview had been terminated by his telling me what the Pope had replied. If I remember rightly, our second interview was spent in discussing ways and means. I told him that, for some time now, some Polish religious had envisaged a combination between their forces and ours. Among these Polish religious it would be easy to find men who would go to the Balkans with us. I wanted everything to be precise and methodical. We could choose somebody to go to Bulgaria, and examine the situation on the spot—somebody to make his mind up, and then come back and report to us.

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<sup>384</sup> Giovanni Simeoni (1810-1892) was an Italian Churchman was first secretary and then prefect of the Propaganda and of the Eastern Rites. He became a cardinal in 1875 and subsequently Secretary of State.

Simeoni approved. Then I told him it would take another two or three years before I could get hold of the money I intended using to finance the project.

Simeoni told me the Holy Father wished to see me. I was to present myself the following Friday with Cardinal Berardi<sup>385</sup>. So I went to see Cardinal Berardi. Simeoni had already told him to expect me. Finally, on Friday June 6 at 9:15 a.m. I went to the Vatican. I had to wait only five minutes before the Pope welcomed me into his private library.

The Holy Father opened the conversation. He told me he knew all about it—and fully approved the erection of a seminary in which Bulgarian students could be trained, in view of an eventual return of Bulgaria to the Catholic faith. This, he thought, was a necessary preliminary. The main difficulty would consist in getting priests to revitalize the country—because the priests there were more “stick-in-the-mud” than the laity. I mentioned the Polish priests who were ready to lend us a hand. The Holy Father approved, on condition that the priests I chose were carefully “screened” by the Propaganda. Polish priests, he said, were good fellows, but not always noted for their prudence.... I then told the Holy Father that Prince Czartoriski<sup>386</sup> had offered us a college somewhere in the Balkans, but we had turned his offer down for political reasons.

Now I come to think of it, my conscience reproaches me for not having been sufficiently precise in what I told the Holy Father. Be this as it may, the Holy Father insisted that we forget all about politics, and set our minds on apostolate.

I asked him for a House of Studies in Rome where both we and the Poles could undergo adequate training. He promised me such an establishment, as long as he could find one.

When I left the Holy Father I went to see Simeoni, and found him consulting with Barnabo. He (Simeoni) was delighted at the way things had turned out. He told me I must pursue the course prescribed by the Holy Father. I asked him for a further consultation with Barnabo—and he arranged for me to see the Cardinal that very evening.

I kept the appointment on time. I begged the Cardinal’s forgiveness for bothering him again, but Barnabo was most charming. I must confess to have been deeply edified by the earnestness with which he exhorted me always to follow the guidelines laid down by the Pope, because the Pope enjoyed the perpetual assistance of God the Holy Spirit...whereas the same did not apply to his humble self. He was going to dispatch two envoys: one to Constantinople (Istanbul) and the other to Bulgaria, who would report to him on the state of affairs. Meanwhile he offered me Letters of Recommendation.

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<sup>385</sup> Giuseppe Berardi (1810-1878) was an Italian Churchman was an apostolic pronotary and chamberlain of Pius IX, subsequently Substitute of Cardinal Antonelli, and created a cardinal in 1868.

<sup>386</sup> Prince Jerzy-Adam Czartoryski (1804-1880) was a Polish prince of Lithuanian ancestry exiled in Paris and involved in Catholic affairs in Paris.

*(Fr. d'Alzon did not complete this memorandum.)*

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## The Near-Eastern Mission<sup>387</sup>

### Call for missionaries

We cannot compare the clergy in communion with Rome to the clergy of the dissident Churches. Such a moral chasm exists between the two. The schismatic priests live under the yoke of civil government—and it is a cumbersome yoke, indeed. They are victims of the most disgraceful simony which makes them mere political tools. Whereas the Catholic clergy are free of the State. They are kept in constant touch with that center of divine influence in the world—with the permanent, divinely instituted See of Rome. This confers on them a dignity which, for hundreds of years, has been sadly lacking among the followers of Photius<sup>388</sup>. Now, a clergy placed in this unenviable situation becomes incapable of exercising its mission. The population knows this instinctively. They prove it by their lack of enthusiasm for a doctrine preached by servile, ignorant and incompetent lips. What, indeed, is preaching for them? And what can it be, since for most of the time, it is linked with little or no theological training on the part of the preacher? What they need, above all, is an educated clergy—and this education calls for zeal and initiative such as only the Catholic Church can supply. So let us have missionaries! We cannot repeat this too often to young souls who are impelled to dedicate themselves to that noblest of causes—the cause of extending Christ's Kingdom here below, the cause of extending the boundaries of his Church. “The harvest is, indeed, great, but the laborers are few—so you must ask the Lord of the harvest to send laborers into his harvest” (Lk 10:2). Let France supply the laborers. The French language is becoming more and more popular abroad nowadays is this not a providential sign that heaven is calling us?

### Missionary Nuns

We need women on the harvest besides men. For a long time it has been observed that the century which proclaimed Our Lady's Immaculate Conception is also the century in which women are being called to play a more active role in the work of God's Church. Look at the wonderful work being accomplished by the Sisters of Charity, the Daughters of Sion, and many other religious congregations of women, including the Armenian

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<sup>387</sup> An excerpt from Father d'Alzon's Prize Day speech at Assumption College, Nîmes, 1863.

<sup>388</sup> The Patriarch of Constantinople who broke off from the Roman Communion in the 9th century.



Sisters founded by Msgr. Hassoun<sup>389</sup>. The Greek Catholics have also started similar foundations—and in spite of many obstacles they have obtained tangible results. Is not all this a presage of the good which will be done the day when our new “swarms of bees” are let loose from the West to establish hives in the East—infertile regions, some may say, but regions, nevertheless, disposed to welcome the truth in whatever manner it is taught?

So let schools—boarding and day-schools—hospices, orphanages, refuges of every description...multiply in these lands where people are thirsting for the truth. Boys’ schools and agricultural colleges can, of course, be confided to male communities. And in a few years’ time we shall see the East blessing the West—blessing the Roman Church—for having given it back the truth. We shall see the Balkans blessing France for having sent them so many fine men and women to preach the Gospel.

#### **The Training of an Indigenous Clergy**

But this is only scraping the surface; much more is needed. Sending missionary priests and nuns is the way to begin, but it’s only a transition for what these people are entitled to is their own native clergy. And I am very proud—yes, very proud—that the Sovereign Pontiff has asked me to cooperate in establishing it by opening a seminary. My dream is to open a House of Ecclesiastical Studies near those illustrious places where St. John Chrysostom suffered so much persecution—near the ruins of that ancient temple where the Council of Chalcedon assembled (A.D.451). This Council of Chalcedon proclaimed the sovereign rights of the Roman Pontiff—it was an anticipated protestation on the part of the Christian East against the future schism of Photius. Then there is Constantinople (formerly Byzantium, now Istanbul) and its neighborhood, so rich in ancient Christian souvenirs. I dream of a patriarchal seminary where Greek and Bulgarian students can sit down together—where, with the blessing of our Holy Father the Pope, they can constitute an authorized theological center. They will be closely united to Rome, and yet they will be culturally independent. They will show these people, so firmly attached to their own rites and ceremonies, that the most effective means of preserving the previous symbols of their own nationality, and holding their heads up as Christians among Christians, is precisely to have a clergy of their own, second to none as regards sanctity and learning.

#### **What about a Catholic Patriarchate?**

May I mention one of my bright ideas, the realization of which will, of course, depend on higher powers than mine. I have often been asked why the Catholic Patriarch of Constantinople doesn’t live there. After all, doesn’t Jerusalem have a Catholic patriarchate? So why doesn’t the city of Chrysostom, of Gregory and of Ignatius have one also? Immediately the “clever men” click their tongues—it wouldn’t do. I know it “wouldn’t do,”

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<sup>389</sup> Cardinal Antoine Hassoun (1809-1884) was an Armenian Churchman who was named the Armenian patriarch of Constantinople and cardinal in 1880.

and I know why: it's for political reasons, and I don't want to get "bogged down" in politics. Allow me at least to state my case, which I have thought over very carefully. A Catholic patriarchate need not compromise French political interests. It could, on the contrary, if a wise choice were made to further these interests. And from the Christian point of view, it would facilitate the return of the Balkan peoples to the One True Fold. People have always appreciated dignity in their spiritual and temporal leaders. The Orientals, comparing their Catholic Patriarch to his schismatic counterpart, would see for themselves where true dignity lies—it would lie on the side of truth and righteousness.

**Where does the Laity come in?**

It is none of my business, gentlemen, to point out the material boon of the French language in these regions. French industry would certainly flourish. But this would be unworthy of me; it would be descending from spiritual heights to the inferior plane of trade and commerce. But I could, perhaps, turn the argument around. I could say to young Frenchmen: has not our French culture always born intellectual fruits? Here is a field worthy of your reflection, amenable to your initiative, open to your conquest. You need not set your sights very high—you could make humble beginnings. But even an un-ambitious career in these countries would entail nobility of enterprise. Are you interested in trade and commerce? Then you would meet with greater facilities in Eastern Europe. Take your hopes there, and take your dreams—take your skills and your efforts. But remember you are Christians. Be prudent businessmen—but don't leave your Catholic faith behind! It is traditional, in these lands where we have achieved such glory, to confuse Catholic influence with French influence. As far as you can, you must promote both. You will derive numerous benefits from such a policy. You will be conscious of having been faithful Catholics and patriotic Frenchmen—in generous response to the faith you were taught and the land where you learnt it.

I have been telling you, gentlemen, about some of the thoughts which ran through my mind as I stood on the beautiful but desolate shores of the Black Sea<sup>390</sup>. How I wish I had been able to confide in these people—to get them to share my hopes and ambitions!

But I have been confiding in you. I have told you that if we are to "resurrect" the Balkans, and restore them to the unity of Christendom, it must be with complete docility to the Holy See—and the sails of French ships will have to take us there. Has not the schism lasted too long? Have not these countries suffered too much? Must their hour of deliverance be further postponed? And what a privilege it will be for French Catholics to contribute to the triumph of truth—to contribute to the peaceful enfranchisement which Rome alone, that intellectual Queen, can bring to all the nations of the earth. Amen.

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<sup>390</sup> Fr. d'Alzon had recently returned from his visit to Turkey and Bulgaria.

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## Plans for the Conversion of Russia

*March 30, 1878*

*Note to the Sacred Congregation of the Propaganda*

On Tuesday June 3, 1862, Pope Pius IX, of glorious memory, charged Msgr. Simeoni—who was then Secretary of the Propaganda for the Eastern Rites—to summon Fr. d’Alzon to a private audience, which the latter had not requested, on Friday June 6, at 9 o’clock in the morning. In the course of this audience, the Holy Father informed Fr. d’Alzon that he wished him to work for the conversion of Bulgaria by establishing Catholic schools there, by establishing a seminary, and by transferring some of his religious to the Slavonic Rite.

In order to study the situation on the spot, Fr. d’Alzon went to Constantinople to preach a series of Lenten sermons there. While he was there, he opened a boys’ school at Philippopolis, and sent some of his religious to Adrianople (now called Edirne) where boys’ schools and girls’ schools were eventually founded.

Without going into all the details of what happened over the next fifteen years, let us sum it up. There is a boys’ school at Philippopolis (now called Plovdiv) established under the Bishop’s patronage, housing 120,150 or 200 pupils (their number varies according to the season). The older pupils are given a thorough training in Christian doctrine—and assembled in a Catholic Sodality, some of the members of which show signs of a priestly vocation. Three of them have already become Pauline priests, that is to say priests of the Latin rite. There are four or five religious at Philippopolis. Fr. d’Alzon sent about twenty nuns to open a hospital at Adrianople. During the war (the Turko-Bulgarian war of 1878, noted for the bloody battle of Plevna<sup>391</sup>) the Sisters nursed about 50 Turkish soldiers and 50 Bulgarian civilians. They run a school for little girls of the working classes, and a boarding school for the daughters of the wealthy. After the war (in which the Bulgarians, thanks to their Russian allies, were victorious and obtained independence) the government asked these Assumptionist Sisters to look after the Turkish war-orphan. Some of these poor little mites died because of the privations they had endured—they were secretly baptized in their cradles.

The Assumptionists are chaplains to the Sisters. They visit the sick—they catechize the young ladies in school. Besides this, they run an agricultural college for orphan boys—some of whom were abandoned by their parents—and the more promising of these boys are sent to higher

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<sup>391</sup> The Siege of Plevna, or Siege of Pleven, was a major battle of the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878, fought by the joint army of RussiaEugénie and Romania against the Ottoman Empire.

studies. They run a boys' boarding school for the sons of those who can afford to pay moderate fees. They run a third establishment, a minor seminary, for those destined to pursue ecclesiastical studies.

This happy state of affairs, which obtained until recently, may have been modified by current political events. For over a month I have been waiting in vain for Fr. Galabert to send me his periodical report. He is Superior of our mission in Adrianople, and Visitor of our mission at Philippopolis. The report is overdue, owing to a suspension of the postal services. Nevertheless, accepting what seems to me to be the situation, this is what I propose to do: I intend to train the young religious destined for the priesthood in the Slavonic Rite. This was the desire of our late Holy Father Pius IX. He wished some of us to adopt this Rite—and thus establish an indigenous clergy, thoroughly instructed in a Slavonic seminary.

Those who imagine these people are enthusiastic about being dominated by Russia are themselves laboring under an illusion. What they want is autonomy, though I doubt whether they can attain it because there are too few of them. Ecclesiastically speaking, they could detach themselves from the Patriarchate of Constantinople—then, not willing to come under the Holy Russian Synod, they could easily be attracted to throw in their lot with the Catholic Church. The authority of the Pope would not be a burdensome yoke—because he's so far away.

Let me now pass on to a further consideration. Ever since Pius IX suggested that I take on the evangelization of Bulgaria, my horizons have extended many hundred miles to the north and east. I have been thinking very hard about Russia. About the month of May 1877, less than a year ago, when I was received in audience by the Holy Father, I asked him for his blessing and his encouragement, because I was contemplating the opening of another seminary to train missionaries to work in Russia. Well, Pius IX did encourage me. He encouraged me warmly, and he gave me a special blessing—and thus I departed from his presence. Since then a Russian lady, a Catholic, has offered to establish us on her estate, somewhere in the Caucasus—a handful of Fathers and a few young men. I am disposed to accept, provided they learn to speak pure Russian. Another alternative would be for me to send a French priest to the French colony at Odessa (on the Black Sea). We might be able to do something with that town which, I have been told, is a hotbed of corruption. So was Corinth—but this didn't prevent St. Paul from spending a long time there (Acts 18:11) and making it his headquarters in Greece. I have been assured that if we established a convent-school there for the education of young ladies, we would soon have many lady friends and be able to exert much social influence.

In fact, I can think of several reasons why the time has now come for us to invade Russia.

1° The prevalence of revolutionary ideas which are sapping the strength of this Colossus. The schismatic Church will no longer be able to control the situation.

2° A great shortage of clergy. The monasteries having been robbed, not to say ransacked, there are fewer and fewer monks. As for the “popes,” that is to say the secular clergy, their intellectual level is low. And since the sons of “popes” are no longer obliged to become “popes” themselves, they nearly all take up a business career—so hardly anybody is joining the parish clergy.

3° Would it be exaggerated to say that Russia is too vast a country to remain a political unity?

4° For a long time there has been talk of giving Russia a parliamentary regime. The day this happens—and it is liable to happen now that the serfs have been liberated—there will be freedom of worship for all religions.

5° When this present war is over, would it not be logical for Russia having fought to free Christians from Turkish domination—to grant religious freedom to Catholics in Russia itself?

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*July 19, 1875*

*to Fr. Galabert*

**A House in Odessa**

Do you know the first establishment I would like to see opened? That of a house in Odessa. It sounds a “tall order,” but I do think we ought to open one. Something must be done about Russia. In venturing East, Russia is our target. Let not the insuperable difficulties prevent us from getting there.

*August 29, 1876*

*to Fr. Galabert*

*(or to Fr. Alexis Dumazer, according to the d’Alzon data base)*

**Russia**

Sooner or later, Russia will open its doors to us, even if we have to lubricate the locks and hinges with our own blood.

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**Note on Russia, 1877**

In the Papal audience on May 2 of this year, Pius IX blessed me and encouraged me to go on thinking about the conversion of Russia. Cardinals

Pitra<sup>392</sup>, Howard, and Sacconi encouraged me also. Cardinal Aloisi Masella seemed thrilled with the idea—Cardinal Sacconi still more. Cardinal Rampolla seemed interested. Cardinal Segna, who is in the Ministry of Propaganda, was full of enthusiasm. The Propagation of the Faith at Lyon are all for the idea. The poor Polish Fathers at Adrianople are in a difficult position. If the Russian Army advances, they will be cut off. Our own situation seems less perilous. But what does anything matter, as long as we get into Russia?

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*June 12, 1878*

*to the Countess of Escures*

**Passion for Russia**

I have a passion for Russia—and I read whatever I can lay my hands on about this enigmatic People: with their discordant traditions—their unexpectedness—their young people already aged by contact with modern corruption—their servility—their religiosity—their business acumen—their aspirations towards novelty, as keen as that of any French socialist—their destructiveness, as cruel as that of any German philosopher—their national nihilism—their innumerable sects—their impecunious aristocracy—their despotism—their liberated serfs who do not deserve to be free, because all they do is get drunk, and thereby enrich the State. What an unhappy, wretched people they are! And yet they have noble qualities. And since they are baptized—and since Our Blessed Lord died for them—they are surely worth converting<sup>393</sup>.

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<sup>392</sup> Cardinal Jean-Bapiste Pitra (1812-188) was an erudite French Benedictine who became the Vatican librarian; Cardinal Carlo Sacconi (1808-1889) was an Italian Churchman who was appointed apostolic nuncio in France; Gaetano Aloisi Masella (1826 – 1902) was an Italian Churchman who was named a cardinal in 1887 and served as secretary, then prefect for the Propaganda and of the Affairs of Eastern Rites from 1899 till his death; Cardinal Mariano Rampolla del Tindaro (1843-1913) was an Italian Churchman who served in many positions before becoming Secretary of State under Leo XIII; Cardinal Francesco Segna (1836-1911) was an Italian Churchman was, among other things, papal delegate to Bulgaria, a friend of Cardinal Rampolla, and named a cardinal in 1894.

<sup>393</sup> There have, in fact, always been one or two Assumptionists in Russia since approximately 1903 – including Bishop Pie Neveu who died in 1946 – but only since the fall of Communism has there been a full Assumptionist community.

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## IV. ULTIMA VERBA

### Fr. d'Alzon's Last Words

*Fr. Picard had asked Fr. Emmanuel (Bailly) to write the following circular letter on the last moments of Fr. d'Alzon's life. We (Fr. Athanase Sage) place this letter at the end of this compendium of his spiritual writings, underlining the final recommendations of our beloved Founder. Fr. Picard included this text in a Circular Letter to all the religious.*

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*Nimes, November 16, 1880*

Yesterday evening our dearly beloved Father had weakened to such an extent that we judged the moment opportune to assemble round his bed and ask him to bless us for the last time.

He was, indeed "a shadow of his former self," but there were lucid intervals during which he manifested great serenity. He was patient, resigned, gentle and calm. He was prepared to meet the God to whom he had always belonged, heart and soul.

"Father, what do you wish?" "Nothing but God's will." "Is there nothing you desire?" "Nothing but Heaven."

Today, at half past one in the afternoon, all the religious were gathered in the room next to his bedroom. I approached his bed, and said: "Father, the religious would all like to see you for a moment. They are all here. May I ask them to come in?" "Yes, my friend, tell them to come in immediately."

So they came in and assembled round his bed. As they came in he gave each a kindly smile—and looked at them tenderly, although it was difficult for him to keep his eyes open. Fr. Hippolyte, Fr. Picard, Fr. Charles Laurent and myself took our places on each side of his bed. Then came the professed religious and the novices, in order of seniority, and his room was full. After a few moments' silence Father closed his eyes—stretched his arms over his bed—and in a quiet voice, full of emotion, which we could scarcely hear—very slowly and very calmly—began to speak.

“My dear brothers, you know that apart from God and Our Blessed Lady, I have never loved anybody as much as I love you.” Then another moment’s silence, after which he began to speak again very slowly, accentuating each word. “The time has come to say, goodbye. We must submit to God’s will. He is the Master.”

We were all filled with emotion such as we could not contain. He must have been aware of it. He reopened his eyes, looked at us for a while, then closed them again, and calmly continued: “There are many good religious who are not here. My heart goes out to them.”

Father relapsed into silence. Fr. Laurent thought the time had come to ask him for his blessing. So Fr. Picard, controlling his emotion as much as he could, said to him in a tearful voice: “Father, we humbly beg your forgiveness for the many times we have caused you pain.” To which Fr. d’Alzon replied: “On the contrary, I ought to kneel down and beg your forgiveness.” “O my dear Father,” exclaimed Fr. Picard, “please give us your blessing.”

And immediately we all fell to our knees, unable to retain our emotion. Father raised his arm, and held it raised as for a very solemn blessing. He pronounced the words slowly, as if he were blessing a large crowd of people, and this was his last blessing.

“Another blessing please, Father,” exclaimed Fr. Picard, bursting into tears, “for all our communities.” “Yes,” replied Fr. d’Alzon. “I am with them in spirit,” and his arm fell back on the bedclothes, as if he had lifted a heavy weight and endured great fatigue.

“You won’t forget us, will you, Father?” Fr. Picard continued. “You will remain with us in spirit?” “I am going away, but my heart will always be with you.” “You will look after us?”—“As much as I possibly can.”

While Fr. Picard was kissing one of his hands, Fr. d’Alzon’s other hand grasped mine tightly with unspeakable emotion. Every one of us came up to his bed, fell on our knees, and kissed his hand. He said with the deepest emotion: “Be good religious.”

Nothing could describe the combination of kindness and earnestness with which our Father spoke to us during these previous moments we will never forget. It was a heart-rending scene—during which he seemed to master the emotion which overcame the best of us. We had to leave the room in order to give free rein to our tears. And we didn’t wish to prolong his fatigue because by now the emotion we all felt had overcome him too, despite his efforts to control it. So Fr. Picard sent all the religious to pray in the chapel.

A few minutes later a telegram arrived from Rome. It was in reply to the telegram Fr. Picard had dispatched the previous day—and this is how it ran: Fr. Picard had wired: “To Monsignor Macchi<sup>394</sup>, Rome: Fr. d’Alzon,

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<sup>394</sup> Cardinal Luigi Macchi (1832-1907) was an Italian Churchman who served as Pius IX’s chief chamberlain.



our Founder and Superior General, is dying. I beg you to approach the Holy Father, and ask him for a special blessing.”

Picard

Monsignor Macchi replied: “His Holiness grants the requested blessing.”

Immediately Fr. Picard, Fr. Hippolyte, Fr. Laurent and I went up to Fr. d’Alzon’s bedroom. “Father,” exclaimed Fr. Picard, “The Pope has sent you his blessing.” (This was Pope Leo XIII.) Fr. d’Alzon opened his eyes, looked at the telegram Fr. Picard was holding in his hand, and asked: “are all the religious in chapel?” “Yes, Father,” and Fr. d’Alzon, thinking of others instead of himself, as was his custom, asked with some concern in his voice: “Have you read them the telegram?” “Not yet, Father. I wanted to tell you first, before telling anybody else.” “Thank you. Now go and read it to them.” “Yes, Father,” whereupon Fr. Picard blessed the dying Founder, and Fr. d’Alzon himself made a big sign of the cross.

I am writing these lines after this heart-rending yet comforting scene. The religious are still praying in the chapel. Submission to God’s holy will. He is the Master.

Our Father’s heart belongs to you all, and will always be with you<sup>395</sup>.

Fraternally, with all my heart, in Jesus Christ Our Lord.

E. Bailly

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<sup>395</sup> Fr. d’Alzon passed peacefully away on Sunday November 21, at midday, just as the “Angelus” was ringing, and his religious were beginning the 4<sup>th</sup> glorious mystery of the Rosary: Our Lady’s Assumption.

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