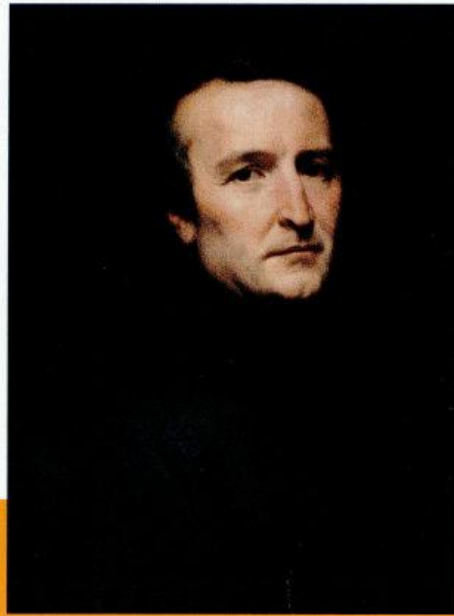


JEAN-PAUL PÉRIER-MUZET



**FATHER EMMANUEL D'ALZON:
IN HIS OWN WORDS**

Dalzonian Anthology

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HIS OWN WORDS**

DALZONIAN ANTHOLOGY

**BACKGROUND, THEMES AND TEXTS, BIOGRAPHICAL
INFORMATION, BIBLIOGRAPHICAL INDICATIONS,
AND STUDY QUESTIONS**

**TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH BY
FR. EUGENE V. LAPLANTE, A.A.**

**GENERAL HOUSE OF THE
AUGUSTINIANS OF THE ASSUMPTION,
ROME, 2003**

Cum permissu Superiorum

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CONTENTS

Preface	i
Dedication.....	iii
Foreword	iv
Prologue.....	vi

Part I

1. A Student's Life in Paris.....	1
2. The Dreams of A Young Romantic Living in the Country	5
3. The Genesis of A Vocation	9
4. The Passion of Friendship	13
5. A Caged Seminarian: d'Alzon at Montpellier.....	17
6. Roman Intoxication	21
7. The Joy of Being a Priest	26
8. First Steps in Pastoral Ministry	30
9. D'Alzon, Young Vicar General in Protestant Country	34
10. The Star of Religious Life.....	38

Part II

11. Fr. d'Alzon's Social Streak	43
12. A Seasoned Spiritual Counselor	48
13. Father d'Alzon, Schoolmaster	52
14. An Original Preacher	56
15. The Formation of One of His First Disciples: E. Pernet	60
16. A Destiny in Giant Steps: Victor Cardenne	64
17. The Official Birth of the Assumption.....	68
18. The First Foundation in Paris	73
19. The Call of Distant Lands: The Universal Vision and Mission ...	77
20. Riding the Ultramontane Wave	81

Part III

21. D'Alzon at Lamalou, Trials of Health	86
22. Honor Your Father and Mother	90
23. An Heir-Founder of Father d'Alzon: Fr. Victorin Galabert	94
24. Advice to a Young Superior	98
25. A Father's Attention for His Daughters.....	102
26. Father d'Alzon, Gentleman-Farmer	106
27. Life's Wounds	110

28. The Missionary Adventure in Australia.....	114
29. A Ramshackle House in Paris	118
30. A Favorite Son, Vincent de Paul Bailly	122

Part IV

31. A Parable of Community Life	127
32. The Orient: Mystery and Mirage.....	131
33. Rochebelle, 1865.....	136
34. A Vicar General's Doll	141
35. The Bible and Exegesis of Fr. d'Alzon's Time	145
36. Fr. d'Alzon in the Fields of Le Vigan	149
37. A Lesson in Political Morality	153
38. Fr. d'Alzon, a Pilgrim at Lourdes	158
39. Castles in the Clouds: Jean, the Millionaire	162
40. Fr. d'Alzon at Vatican I	166

Part V

41. Fr. d'Alzon, in the Eye of the Storm	171
42. Notre-Dame des Châteaux.....	175
43. The Wedding of Jean de Puységur.....	179
44. Fr. d'Alzon and the Little Miners.....	183
45. An Apocalyptic Atmosphere	187
46. Candidates for Bishop, Nîmes 1875.....	191
47. Relations among the Families of the Assumption	195
48. Fr. d'Alzon at Clairmarais	199
49. A Life Centered in God	203
50. Ah! If Only We Had a Newspaper	207

Epilogue	211
Prayer for the Beatification of Fr. d'Alzon	213
Index of the Principal Themes	217

PREFACE

Following the centennial of the foundation of the Assumptionists celebrated in 1950, a number of publications appeared that allowed a serious study of the life of the founder, of his spiritual path, and of his work in the service of the Church and the society of his time. I am thinking in particular of a collection of unpublished letters (*Souvenirs intimes - Extraits de lettres inédites 1850-1880*, Paris, 1950), and also to the study of Fr. Athanase Sage on the spiritual thought of Fr. Emmanuel d'Alzon (*Un maître spirituel du XIXe siècle*, Rome, 1958). The recent celebration of the sesquicentennial in the year 2000 also gave birth to the publication of new works that bring us closer to this important personality of the 19th century and to the congregations he founded.

Since the publication in 1956 of the *Écrits spirituels*, a great effort has been made to give access, to a larger audience, to the correspondence through which Fr. d'Alzon communicated the inspiration underlying his numerous initiatives and his most intimate reflections. This effort consisted in the publication of the letters collated in fifteen volumes, at first by Fr. Pierre Touveneraud, later by Fr. Désiré Deraedt (from 1978 to 1996), which comprise some 5000 letters, and finally two tomes of unpublished letters, assembled and published by Fr. Jean-Paul Périer-Muzet (Rome 2003). A truly scholarly work has resulted and is impressive. To this must be added the three volumes edited by Fr. Siméon Vailhé between 1923 and 1926, containing the letters from 1822 to 1850. The result is so impressive in fact that one might fear to read such a work and believe that only a few people, familiar with this kind of documents, could do it. There is also the fact that none or so few of the letters have been translated that this work remains completely unknown to non-francophones. The result is an incomplete picture of the man, and in certain cases a complete lack of understanding of this personality and of his objectives. Thus, the importance of this publication.

I consider that the present work is an essential complement to the *Écrits spirituels* published in 1950. Together they give us a faithful portrait of Emmanuel d'Alzon. The *Écrits spirituels* bring together in one volume the official work of the Founder: the Directory (the spiritual doctrine of his religious faith), some elements of the first Constitutions, and other foundational documents (Addresses to the Chapters, letters to formators, circular letters to the religious meditations and retreat conferences, various speeches, other official and doctrinal letters). The "official" and public nature of these documents gives us an excellent idea of their author and

yet, once again, it remains limited. For example, we learn very little about the evolution of the thought of the founder and of his spiritual path, about the persons he came close to and their reactions to his ideas and initiatives; in the end, we obtain only a vague perception of his true personality. A quick reading of these documents, and particularly of the *Écrits spirituels*, may give us the impression that the thought of Fr. d'Alzon was rather classical and not very original, whose sermons and spiritual considerations lacked imagination and humanity, and whose personality was quite austere and inhibited.

Those who had already discovered the correspondence of Fr. d'Alzon felt the need to go further. That brought about the publication of the mass of his letters. Yet for most people the personality of Fr. d'Alzon revealed by this important collection remained unknown. That is, until now.

Just as the *Écrits spirituels* brought about a rediscovery of Fr. d'Alzon seventy years after his death, this volume finally brings about the discovery of a “new” Fr. d'Alzon nearly 120 years after his death. From now on, I believe that whoever wants to know the Founder, know who he was, and find his true thoughts, will have to refer to these two volumes.

If this book was nothing more than an anthology of the main letters of Fr. d'Alzon and of their translations into the official languages of the Congregation, it would already have found its place in the libraries of the Assumption. But the author has re-situated each letter in its precise historical context, with references that will satisfy the most erudite and permit any reader to know more about whatever he is seeking. For a long time already we had desired a modern biography of Fr. d'Alzon that would complement the two important volumes of Siméon Vailhé on Fr. d'Alzon in 1926-34. That work will require much research, but I believe that Fr. Périer-Muzet has already built the foundations for it by writing an historical preface for each letter chosen for this anthology.

Fr. Périer-Muzet, the archivist of the Congregation, has once again rendered a great service to his brothers and to the Church in general, and he has accomplished it with his great competence as an historian. I pray that his work, translated in the four official languages of the Congregation, become a source of renewal as was that of Fr. Sage fifty years ago, in fidelity to the spirit given to the Church, through Fr. d'Alzon, for the greater service to the people of God.

Fr. Richard Lamoureux,
A.A. Superior General
Rome, February 2, 2003

DEDICATION

The memory of the Founder of a
Congregation does not belong only to history.
It also comes in the form of a spirituality that expresses itself in prayer.

Before the altar, the Assumption invokes Fr. d'Alzon in the hope that
the Church, in the near future, will officially recognize his holiness.

FOREWORD

In 1999, the General Council asked the archivist to prepare a book that would be a sort of anthology of Fr. d'Alzon and a kind of compendium of his voluminous correspondence. An almost integral edition, begun by Fr. Siméon Vailhé in 1923, had just been completed through the tenacious work of Fr. Désiré Deraedt in 1996. The reasons for a new publication, practical to use, appeared to be both simple and imperative: on the one hand, few religious would undertake, on their own, a systematic reading of that imposing corpus unless there was a proposed selection, a good reason for those responsible for the Congregation to encourage a stream-lined version; and, on the other hand, those in charge of formation in all the provinces, unable to count on a translation of this mass of texts in their own language, in the short term, were always obliged to use the usual texts, such as the *Écrits spirituels* or the foundational texts (Constitutions), writings that require continually renewed presentations and modernizations in order to keep their value.

Since 1992, there has been constituted a bank of computerized information that has reviewed, scanned, and classified all the writings of Fr. d'Alzon, published or unpublished, known, less known, or unknown. We can begin to hope that this instrument, rendered accessible thanks to the costly investment that went into the indexation, highlighted by the creation of a thesaurus, will mobilize the energies of younger generations attracted by this type of computerized tool. A CD makes the research work operational, but it is still too early to determine if the flowers that always precede the promise of fruit will in the future produce in their spring germination, when the first harvest draws near. The long-term investment requires the maturation of patience; a change or an in-depth innovation cannot be judged only according to the feverish itches of technology. Let us hope that the more than 2000 possible research themes on the thought and activity of Fr. d'Alzon, thanks to the different indices of the thesaurus, will inspire Assumptionist students to do serious research, the documentation for which has been gathered, set in order, and is now directly usable.

In this work, we offer a selection of 50 texts of Fr. d'Alzon taken mostly from his correspondence from 1829 to 1880, thus covering his entire life and presenting to us multiple points of interest, but especially in a way to bring them to life again. Each theme selected is developed in a four-tiered format, and the method is uniform

- The first tier offers a broad study of the context and of the theme selected;

- The second tier contains the text or the extract¹ from a text of Fr. d'Alzon according to its importance and the space at hand, in the manner of a fruit whose external envelope forms a protective and perishable peel. In order to be fully savored, must not the fruit be properly wrapped before its consumption?
- The third-tier is divided into two parts: the former, subtitled 'FOR FURTHER REFLECTION AND RESEARCH,' presents a brief but precise bibliography that the author of these lines used for each theme developed. The latter, entitled 'for a personal use of the text,' presents a series of questions without pretending to be exhaustive or exclusive, their completeness, pertinence, or interest will have to undergo the test of international formation in the congregation, on the part of those in charge of formation and on the part of young people. That is why this text, given to various translators, is open to corrections, adaptations, especially bibliographical, or other changes according to one's own objectives. As it is, in its present form, however, this manual, which was conceived and foreseen as a help for basic formation in the Assumption, hopes to accomplish a wider mission to all, with the risks and limits inevitably imposed by the original language, the culture in question and the roots of the historic milieu. Here is the ever-present challenge of a religious foundation, which arises in a particular time and place not to calcify but to spread where the Spirit leads despite the contingencies of time and place.

It is up to present-day Assumptionists, at the dawn of a new millennium, to become aware of this founding spirit and to guarantee that it remains ever new. Inculturation and charism are two forces at play opening new paths to the heart. For over 150 years, the way of Emmanuel d'Alzon, begun with a handful of men in the cradle of Nîmes, has continued to cross borders to further the passion for the Kingdom and has brought into existence the fraternal network which, inspired by Augustine and so many others, participates in the broad Gospel way where the Love of God is wed to the cause of humanity.

J.P. P.-M

¹ The inconvenience of using extracts is not insuperable. The reader can go back to the complete original text, printed and published, for almost all the selections in this book.

PROLOGUE

A man, whatever his qualities, cannot be defined only by words, let alone by the words of others. Is not someone's best to be found in his own writings? That is what we are trying to achieve in these pages, through the reading and study of the correspondence of Fr. d'Alzon, chapter after chapter, following the chronology of his life, and in choosing a few major strengths of his thought and action. Before we present these extracts, we present a summary of this person.

D'Alzon, a strong personality

Emmanuel d'Alzon was a son of the Cévennes, who spent his entire life (1810-1880) in the Rome of southern France in the 19th century, Nîmes: a Southerner in origin, in demeanor, and in spirit, that is how this man of the Church can be defined geographically and psychologically, vicar general of his diocese for forty years, who gave birth to two religious families, the Augustinians (1845) and the Oblates of the Assumption (1865) and contributed greatly to the formation of the Religious of the Assumption.

From his family roots in the Cévennes (Le Vigan), Emmanuel retained more than one characteristic: quick and even impetuous in his choices as in his dislikes, faithful to ideas and to people as to the causes he took up, he willingly defined himself, with a whole-hearted temperament, "Catholic above all," that is to say in his era, Ultramontane, anti-liberal ("liberal" in the sense of 19th century French politics), quick to act and generous in his commitments.

Also in his writings, expressions of the most polished romanticism, filled with finesse and sensitivity, can be found side by side with fiery attacks highlighted by the purest irony or marked, like Veuillot, by the talent of the polemicist.

D'Alzon's vocabulary, particularly rich in his voluminous correspondence, reveals no fear in juxtaposing the most familiar and the warmest epithets or diminutives with the most direct invectives or calls to order. Is not his favorite adverb the frequently used word "frankly," repeated with all its nuances and sometimes dumped on someone with the most brutal honesty?

Significant Evolutions

And yet, this “thoroughbred” Southerner, who would visit Rome more often than Paris, escapes easy classification and stereotyping. On the political level for example, if it is true that he shows himself to be, from his birth to his death, almost viscerally and without a chink, anti-liberal, we see that he did not refuse the evolutions that appeared inevitable for him and for his era: 1848 transformed him into “*a republican in the making*”; his monarchist convictions did not stop him, at the end of the 1860’s, from envisaging a nascent democracy.

An aristocrat of note, in command of a powerful fortune which he would inherit from his family in 1860, he neither attached himself to the dominant class, the bourgeoisie, nor to its interests. This aristocrat knew how to speak to the people and aimed to draw the congregations he would found to the service of the needs of the people. For a time the education for the elite that he developed in Nîmes by taking on Assumption College in 1844 consumed all the strength of his religious; but very quickly, Emmanuel gave free rein to other initiatives that sought to reach the masses: Fr. Halluins orphanage at Arras in 1868, the alumnales (“minor seminaries”) in 1871 for the popular classes that had been called *the priesthood of the poor*, massive pilgrimages beginning in 1872, and the creation with Fr. Vincent de Paul Bailly in 1873 of a popular press that would become a powerful mold of opinion, the Bonne Presse.

The child or the young man accustomed in the years 1816-1832 to the princely home of Lavagnac (Hérault), in the lordly style and the mores of the provincial aristocracy, would nevertheless die poor and stripped of everything, wearing the humble religious habit of the *monk-apostle* on November 21, 1880. That is the true path of an authentic gospel-like life, a striking paraphrase of the *rich young man* (Matthew 19:16-22), who knew how to break away from the kind of destiny that his state in life might impose to one marked by *boldness, generosity, and unselfishness*, one set on more universal shores and stakes.

The Gift of a “Full” Life in the Church

We would cut ourselves off from any possible understanding of the life of Emmanuel d’Alzon if we did not relate it to the free choice that he made of progressive ecclesiastical duties, matured in the light of a living, personal, committed faith open to the universal.

Emmanuel liked to recall his triple attachment to the Church or his three *spiritual births*: his baptism in the church of St. Peter of Le Vigan (September 2, 1810) which he never forgot to celebrate annually as his *true* birthday; his ordination to the priesthood in Rome (December 26, 1834) at the end of great suffering because of his friendship with Lamennais; and his choice of religious life in the chapel of the college of Nîmes (December 24, 1845 and 1850) after five years of personal and community trials. Baptism, ordination and religious life do not represent three successive aspects of an anxious or inconstant life; they are three markers of a spiritual path lived in the Church and for the Church, as much on the level of a strong interior life—to love Christ, the Virgin and the Church: to live all of Jesus Christ—as on the level of a vigorous apostolic action: to promote the coming of the Kingdom of God in me and around me, the motto that would become his banner.

Emmanuel was a man of total commitment, discovered in the course of his experience in a church alive. His faith was the *gift of a conquest* unremittingly begun anew, unremittingly expanded, and unremittingly pursued.

The trials of ill health that, in May 1854, obliged Fr. d'Alzon to reduce his activities and to care seriously for himself by enjoying the waters at Lamalou-les-Bains (Hérault), marked a kind of taking in hand and re-centering of his life and his work in which the apostolic dimension was recovered in the fire of that devouring love of Christ and the Church which consumed his entire existence. Emmanuel, who welcomed the changes of the times and who was a natural leader, who loved the studies that inspired the apostolic options he would undertake for society and for the Church, did not have the temperament of a hermit. Immersed in the life of his college with its many students, surrounding himself with laity, priests, and religious as collaborators, he did not think of his personal, priestly, and religious life except in terms of team, community, and communion. The spirit that enlivened him, and that he developed, was inspired by a faith that flowed naturally beyond the borders of a diocese, a country, or a continent, for himself, for the struggles he faced, and for the apostolic fields that he assigned to his two congregations. That spirit was as vast as the faith, as universal as the Church, and as unified as his life.

Now it is time to let his own words bring his life to light May these 50 chapters whet the appetite to know him better and especially to enflame the hearts of all who will seek to live in his spirit in the service of the Gospel for today's world.

Part I

1. A Student's Life in Paris	1
2. The Dreams of A Young Romantic Living in the Country.....	5
3. The Genesis of A Vocation.....	9
4. The Passion of Friendship.....	13
5. A Caged Seminarian: d'Alzon at Montpellier	17
6. Roman Intoxication	21
7. The Joy of Being a Priest.....	26
8. First Steps in Pastoral Ministry	30
9. D'Alzon, Young Vicar General in Protestant Country.....	34
10. The Star of Religious Life.....	38

Lavagnac

Places Where He Studied



Château of Lavagnac

This site is described by Emmanuel d'Alzon: Letters, Volume I (Siméon Vailhé), p. 184 (letter 23 January to Eugène de la Gournerie)



Chapel at Lavagnac

"The chapel is being repaired and I am saying Mass in a makeshift chapel (one that I have been wishing for a long time that you might experience). It's a greenhouse where I am perfectly fine, in the middle of orange and camellia trees, although most of the cameillias have died." Letter to Marie Correnson, 8 November 1877, cf. Volume XII (edition Deraedt), p. 231.

1

A STUDENT'S LIFE IN PARIS

The young Emmanuel d'Alzon (1810-1880) benefited from a first-rate formation, in four periods, according to the model for the elite of his day, those who had the advantage of belonging to the privileged classes of high society:

At first, during his childhood years, he was polished at home, in the great Lavagnac mansion, by a tutor, Abbé Bonnet—a hot-house experience. Later d'Alzon would state that he preferred the more stimulating regimen of “collective emulation” which he discovered when he had the chance to continue his secondary studies in two highly esteemed Parisian schools, St. Louis, of aristocratic reputation, for one year (1823-1824), and St. Stanislas, which had won the esteem of the Catholic youth of the Capital (1824-1828). He lived according to varied formulae, as an extern and as a semi-boarder. These were years rich in the full development of his personality, intellectual, emotional, and relational, in an atmosphere that was, at the same time, both supple and controlled in the educational institutions of the time. It was basically a classical literary and philosophical formation, marked by the Greco-Latin humanities and by the dominant traditionalist and romantic current of the heralds of the Restoration, de Bonald, de Maistre, Châteaubriand, or even Lamartine. Thus we find in his adolescent writings enthusiastic exclamations celebrating the exploits of Lord Byron as well as enjoying novels in the style of Sir Walter Scott. Having obtained a diploma in liberal arts, Emmanuel, without great enthusiasm, decided to study law in Paris (1828-1830), but greatly preferred the more open conferences in the “salons” or literary and philosophical societies of good repute. There he found the company of young people who were both studious and engaged in the debates of society relevant to the times and situation. He also enjoyed the more relaxed style of his own preoccupations, and always appreciated the space given for an autodidactic formation, which remained a permanent aspect of his life.

When the political events of 1830 ended his seven-year stay in Paris,

Emmanuel, seeking to find himself, returned to the province. In a quasi-retreat of two years at Lavagnac, he directed his studies and his readings towards a kind of preparation for the clerical life he felt called to.

We want to evoke, with two extracts from his correspondence, the parameters of the formation and of the personality of a young man in Paris during the last years of the Restoration: the time dedicated to study did not consist simply in time spent with books, and even less an exercise fixed on the observations of his inner emotions.

"... Tonight I am going to a new conference concerning public law: it is composed of sensible and reasonable people, a few judges, where all political subjects are discussed. It will be at Mr. Baillys place.¹ It is strictly private. Normally only third-year law students are admitted. Thus I would have been excluded for another two years, but I was accorded the favor of not having my study year considered and I am all the more at ease in this that I had not asked for the favor and it was suggested to me that I attend. Last Thursday, I visited the Hotel-Dieu (hospital) for the third time; the previous Monday I had gone for the second time. I have not yet given a class. My turn will come next Thursday. While my colleague attended to his, I visited the bed-ridden patients. All gave me good grades except one who is very distressing. I tried to talk to him every which way; he ended by telling me that it did not touch him at all. I will ask the young man who accompanies me and who has more experience to speak with him. Here is my usual method. When I see them for the first time, I speak with them about their health, their work, etc.; then I exhort them a bit to be patient and it is only during the second visit that I speak more seriously with them. I am giving you all these details, but you understand that I speak to no one else about this work. Here, only mother knows that I take part in it. I was obliged to write about it to Aunt Rodier because I expect to get some books from her to give to the sick. Even though I have written to her, my letter has not yet been sent and will leave only tomorrow..."

—E. d'Alzon to his father, Paris, December 13, 1828, from the edition of Siméon Vailhé, B.P, 1923, vol. 1, p. 22-23.

"...So you attended the wedding of the delightful Bridieu and you took the role that befits you best, that of a joyful and pleasant

minstrel. I dont know why, but I cannot convince myself that the groom was very happy that you offered your respects to his future better half when it was almost done. I might add, as you are often won't to say, he would have been quite gullible. So you had some happy times. Good for you! One doesnt always have them. For me (it is) something (else). Last week, I had decided to study my law. My God! Law is so boring! I wanted to take my exam before leaving, but then I changed my mind because it did not please Ducaurroy to allow me to take a special exam. So, as soon as I found out that he did not want to be reasonable, I quickly let everything drop and I was not displeased about it. Good riddance to one less exam on my back..."

—E. d'Alzon to Eugene de la Gournerie, Paris, July 13, 1829,
ibidem, p. 25

¹ Emmanuel Bailly (1793-1861), Parisian layman, initiator of many Catholic organizations and charitable works in the French capital. Emmanuel's parents: Henri Viscount d'Alzon (1774-1864), Emmanuel's father, and Jeanne-Clemence nee de Faventine (1788-1860), Emmanuel's mother. Eugene de la Gournerie (1807-1887), from Nantes, a classmate of Emmanuel in Paris, became a journalist and man of letters. Mrs. Jean-Antoine Rodier, nee Louise-Josephine d'Alzon (1768-1847). Adolphe-Marie Du Caurroy (1788-1850), law professor. Françoise-Henri Antoine, Marquis de Bridieu (1804-1872), lawyer.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION AND RESEARCH

On the formation of Emmanuel d'Alzon:

Dossier sur la Vie et les Vertus, volume II, vol. I, Rome, 1986, chapters II and III, pages 11-39.

On Emmanuel d'Alzon's professors:

La scolarité d'E. d'Alzon, Jean-Paul Périer-Muzet in A.T.L.P. (*A travers la Province* - newsletter of the Province of France), 1997, n. 130, p. 24-31.

On Stanislaus College (high-school),

- Georges Sauvé, *Le Collège Stanislas*, edit. Patrimoines et médias, 1993, 445 pages. Château - Millet, *Le College Stanislas (1804-1979)*, historical account, 1979, 32 pages.

- Paul Gerbod, *La vie quotidienne dans les lycées et collèges du XIX siècle*, Hachette, 1968, 272 pages.
- Antoine Prost, *Histoire de l'enseignement en France (1800-1967)*, Armand Colin, 1968, 524 pages.
- Victor Chauvin, *Histoire des lycées et collèges de Paris*, Hachette. 1866.

FOR A PERSONALIZED READING

- How do the life events presented by E. d'Alzon open the student that he is to a wider form of reflection?
- What noteworthy events can you find in your life that can relate by analogy to those of Emmanuel d'Alzon? What equilibrium does the *Ratio* want you to be attentive to?
- If you were to summarize the thoughts expressed by Emmanuel d'Alzon, what in them appears to you to be familiar and foreign at the same time?
- Isn't there a kind of necessary tension between one's free time and one's obligations? Between studies and the apostolate?

2

THE DREAMS OF A YOUNG ROMANTIC LIVING IN THE COUNTRY

Emmanuel d'Alzon was born at Le Vigan on Thursday, August 30, 1810 and was baptized in the parish church of St. Peter on the following Sunday, September 2. He spent the majority of his childhood in the country, at the château of Lavagnac (Hérault), near Montagnac and Pézenas. This beautiful aristocratic residence, repaired by the Viscount Henri d'Alzon, became the habitual family residence in 1816. It was the place where, throughout his life, Emmanuel liked to bathe in an intimate and familial atmosphere with his parents, his sisters, and later his nephew, Jean de Puységur, and his family. From May 1830 to March 1832, he followed the troubling echos of the Revolution of July 1830, the matter of the taking down of crucifixes that upset the Midi (South of France), and it was here that he prepared himself in a studious retreat before entering the major seminary of Montpellier. He left his family and his home with the emotions that we are aware of, the evening of March 14, 1832 (cf. his letter of March 16), but Lavagnac always remained at the center of his thoughts and his affections. Even from afar, he liked to evoke this sometimes idealized cradle of his youth and of his vocation. He wrote pages to describe and praise the charms of the place, in the country, far from the feverish agitation of cities, where his thoughts, his heart and his body all had their share. The nearby Hérault river was handy for swimming or, even when preferred, for an excursion in a boat; the hills and plains were a special place for hunting and riding. It is from Lavagnac that many letters were sent to his friends in the capital or, later, to the men and women religious of the Assumption when, exhausted, he returned there to draw healing rest from this harbor of peace. The beautiful residence was always open to his friends and acquaintances, such as Abbé Combalot, passing guests, and numerous others. A stone's throw away the Abbey of Valmagne, this cathedral of vines, recalled the Cistercians, the city of Pézenas, Molière and the Conti princes; the Carthusians arrived in Mougeres (Caux), in 1825. The château of Lavagnac, bought from the Prince

de Conti at the time of the French Revolution by Jean-Louis-Maurice de Faventine, the uncle of Fr. d'Alzon's mother, became the property of Mrs. d'Alzon in 1812. It was successively inherited in the d'Alzon line, later of the de Puységurs, and of the Suarez d'Aulan until February 9, 1987, when it was sold by Henri d'Aulan to a Japanese company, presently in litigation. It is an obligatory stop on any pilgrimage in Fr. d'Alzon's footsteps. Today Lavagnac presents a sorry, upsetting spectacle that touches the heart as we remember how it once was and what it represented in the story of Fr. d'Alzon and his family.

"I am writing to you, my dear Eugène,¹ in a charming place. It is 10 o'clock at night. After the prayer that we hold every evening for the domestics, I took a sentimental walk. For a half hour, I went into deep contemplation, lying as I was on fresh straw, sheltered from the rays of the moon by the luxuriant branches of a green thousand-year old oak, whose immense shade covers the reapers' table during the threshing season. This table is nothing other than an old millstone that, no longer able to grind wheat, still serves to hold the food of those who prepare the wheat. That is quite charming, I hope. After my mind had been lost in sweet reveries for a while, I directed it to my work room, and in my spirit, my body approached the place where I could find paper, pen, ink, and other objects useful to those who would write a letter. Now that I am writing to you, I am facing the glass door; I see from my place the hesitant light of the moon grow bright and grow dim as uncertain clouds fly about in the air shading its disc with a veil now thicker, now thinner. If you want to know what sounds strike my ear, they are firstly the disharmonious cries of a flock of ducks that, placed under the protection of my youngest sister, scurry about; for you should know that for her there is no joy greater than feeding the ducks, unless it is galloping about the garden on a she-ass that she has just been given. I also hear many owls, many crickets and grasshoppers, some quails, and that's it. Do you know what I am thinking about? About you, first of all and about the pleasure I would have, if instead of taking my walk alone and going in to write to you, I had been able to do it with you and prolong it far into the night. That is what I am thinking about, and I am quite uncertain when this beautiful plan to take evening walks with you will be realized elsewhere than in Paris. You are so alone in that populous desert, as alone as a drop of

water in the ocean, alone as a grain of sand, and finally as alone as that poor quail in my game-bag, the quail that had not been hit by a killer bullet until after four hours of hunting. My dear friend, if I were in your place, it seems to me that I would have plenty of time to work, to do something well, to prepare legal briefs, to write articles for Le Correspondant, to prepare numerous works for our conferences; I won't talk about writing verse, for a poet like you, who writes only when inspired, is sometimes obliged to wait, and there is no more capricious master under our orders than inspiration."

—E. d'Alzon, Lavagnac, August 14, 1829,
edit. S.V., vol. I p. 28-30.

¹ Eugène de la Gournerie is a 22-year old law student in 1829. Marie-Françoise d'Alzon, nicknamed Fanny, is the youngest sister of Emmanuel, future Countess Anatole de Puységur (1819-1869). At the time of the letter in 1829, she was 10 years old.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION AND RESEARCH

On the residence of Lavagnac:

Merveilles et châteaux de Provence, Hachette, 1970, 316 pages, (text by Claude Fregnac and documents of Pierre Fauchaux), in the collection Realites, pages 209 and following.

On the newspaper, *Le Correspondant*, for which Emmanuel d'Alzon wrote his first article titled 'Fête-Dieu' [n. 17, June 30, 1829, refer to the account in the dictionary *Catholicisms* vol. III (1952), col. 218-219. See also *Histoire de la Presse française*, vol. II (from 1815 to 1871), P.U.F., 1969, p.104, note 3.]

On the Abbey of Valmagne:

Historia November 1995, n. 587, p. 10.

On Alzonian geography:

Cévennes Languedoc, in the *Guides Bleus* collection, Librairie Hachette, 1970. For Le Vigan, Pierre Gorlier, *Le Vigan à travers les siècles*, Anduze, edit. 1981 (1956). Patrick Chabanel, *Histoire des Cévennes*, Que sais-je?, P.U.F. 1998. Brochure *Sur les pas du Père d'Alzon*, by Claude Colombo and

Pascal Gindre, Paris, 2001, 52 pages. Robert Sauzet, *Les Cévennes catholiques*, Perrin, 2001, 416 pages.

FOR A PERSONALIZED READING

- This page deserves to be studied as a romantic text built on a contrasting theme of dreams of a young man in the country and a soul-mate alone in the city. Do not these feelings of nature that make many other feelings arise evoke the *Reveries d'un promeneur solitaire* in the style of Rousseau or yet again of the most brilliant passages of the Martyrs of Châteaubriand?
- La Gournerie had his literary moment of glory with his works on *Rome chrétienne* (1843), *Histoire de François Ier et de la Renaissance* (1847) and *Histoire de Paris et de ses monuments* (1852).
- What places touch your heart the most? Why?

3

THE GENESIS OF A VOCATION

The theology of the vocation to the priesthood did not begin with the 19th century! Emmanuel d'Alzon's concept of the priesthood changed dramatically through the years. From a question of ideas, he was led to a path of commitment. It evolved from a status of influence in a society where clergy had a specific weight, clearly recognized at the time, to an interior, and even mystical, concept of the priest whose action was an in-depth participation in the incarnation of Christ in souls. This theology of the priesthood was patterned on the *Imitation of Christ*

The choice of a priestly vocation made its way into the heart of Emmanuel d'Alzon, according to his own testimony, in his adolescence. One might believe that he heard the slogan of vocational promotional material: *too young to undertake the project, but not too young to think about it*. The idea of such a vocation confronted other desires, those of a social establishment that the birthright, the formation, the social rank of Emmanuel would have given him almost automatically. When the young man revealed it to his parents, their reaction, without being negative, was far from enthusiastic. Also, his friends, patently, did not all accept the idea. In the wide variety of their answers, we would find many of the ideas or stereotypes that fill readers' opinion columns of magazines or in the rare television programs that are given to this unusual subject. The media generally do not give much space to the mysteries and channels of grace...

And yet, Emmanuel was not discouraged. He established study plans and organized his way of life toward the goal; he took care to surround himself with the wise counsel of a few priests in whom he had confidence so that his interior adventure might not be lost in the sands of youthful illusions. Prayer, meditation, and receiving the sacraments had already become for him, after the apprenticeship of the child and adolescent, a freely accepted life-style, a second nature. He was still a youth in age and spirit, but already an adult in his faith. At Lavagnac, he spent two years of retreat to ripen his choice, while at the same time leading the life of the youth of his time and

milieu, according to his refined, but exacting taste. It was in this well-balanced context that he was led to express interiorly the YES to the gift of his life for the Church, a YES without looking back, a YES open to a world to love, to evangelize, and to save. Let take the time to hear him express his discovery:

"...You do not want to be at all reasonable. I scare you in a priest's robe. Should I have expressed all my reflections before I settled on an idea so repugnant to you? Firstly until the age often to twelve, the idea pleased me in singular fashion. I abandoned it for a while and the career that attracted me the most was the military. I gave it up because of a few remarks from my parents. But, from about that time, I decided to consecrate myself to the defense of religion, and that thought has grown in me in a surprising way. From that moment, I felt an extreme repugnance for public service. I would have accepted to have a career, but it would have been for a short time only It would have been in order to see how administration works. So I saw only one battlefield worthy of me, the rostrum, and I believed I had to prepare myself for it by serious studies. Yet, by the same principle that made me despise careers and because I believed that I lived in a lawless State, and consequently lacking in legitimate power, I believed that where God did not command, I felt that I was made to aspire to sovereignty. And so, this sovereignty, in my opinion, was in the elected Chamber, and only in the elected Chamber... I soon noticed that sovereignty did not exist any more in the Palais Bourbon than at the Tuileries, and that in a society that was so sick, one could have influence only in separating oneself completely from it and pressing on it with all the weight of the rights that it had no authority to give. From then on, my enthusiasm to become a deputy disappeared completely, and I saw in the French government only a decrepit machine that was useless and was even dangerous to try to repair it. With other considerations, I was led to conclude, as I formed a life-plan, that if I ever got settled in a career, I would resolve to do so by the age of 35 at the earliest, while I contemplated with pleasure, in the distant future of my career, the possibility of consecrating myself to God. 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 then? It was my lack of enthusiasm; it was the coldness with which I

considered the sacrifices I had to make and the possibility of profiting from it. The ease with which I believed I could make a break with my attachments frightened me; but what frightened me even more, was the absolute absence of enthusiasm. But that enthusiasm has finally appeared; there is nothing more to be afraid of except the weight of the burden that must be carried..."

—E.d'Alzon to Luglien,¹ Paris, January 24, 1830,
S.V., vol. I, p. 39-40. 13

¹ Luglien de Jouenne d'Esgrigny (1806-1888), E. d'Alzon's best friend and whom he would have liked to see marry his sister Augustine (1813-1860), a law student in Paris who became editor of *Le Correspondant*, the *Memorial catholique* and at the *Univers* as well as *La Croix*. Married to Louise-Arthemise Milleret d'Omiécourt, he lived at Pouliguen (Loire-Atlantique). Fr. d'Alzon wanted to be considered as an uncle of their second child, Rene, born in 1849 and who died in September 1859. He joyfully accepted to be the godfather of their first child, Jeanne-Louise, born in 1845, who, in 1867, became the Viscountess de la Bourdonnaye. Mrs. d'Esgrigny died in June 1879 and, according to *La Croix*, Luglien died on November 7, 1888.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION AND RESEARCH

The direct testimony of Emmanuel d'Alzon on the origins and the development of his vocation to the priesthood is abundant. In particular, one can read with interest his correspondence at the time of his ordination to the priesthood in Rome: 1.1, edit. S.V., p. 759 and following and in its entirety, chapter V of the *Dossier sur la Vie et les Vertus*, Vol. II, T. I, p. 58-124. The 19th century inspired many models of priests, formed according to the post-Tridentine blueprint of the man separated from the world, set apart, living their pastoral ministry in often exemplary and even heroic fashion, such as the Cure d'Ars, besieged in his confessional, Don Bosco, overflowing with generous activity for the youth of the popular milieus of Turin, or even of zealous preachers such as Abbé Combalot, Bishop de Ségur, Fr. Lacordaire...

FOR A PERSONALIZED READING

- Who are the models of the priesthood in the world or in your country who speak to you today? Formulate your own life-plan.
- With what words does E. d'Alzon express his desire for the priesthood? Is this choice, in your opinion, motivated in a positive or negative way?
- Do you find in this text the various aspects of gradual discovery of the vocational path: attraction, aptitude, and call?
- What resistances did E. d'Alzon have to overcome in himself and in others in order to follow his path to the priesthood?
- What is Fr. d'Alzon's vision of the priest according to this text? What would be yours? Did this vision evolve in him? In you?
- How can we balance a life-plan and the will of God?

4

THE PASSION OF FRIENDSHIP

Friendship played a great role in the life of Emmanuel d'Alzon; his correspondence shows this, not only for the first stages of his student life, but also during the various phases of responsibilities and commitments that followed: at the seminary, in the exercise of his duties as Vicar General, in the art of spiritual direction, or even at the head of his religious congregations.

We are more accustomed to speak about his youthful friendships. The names are well-known: Bailly, d'Esgrigny, Dreux-Breze, Gouraud, de la Gournerie, Du Lac, Veuillot, Popiel, Thiebault... Generally, in the biographies of Fr. d'Alzon, the exceptional character of his relationship with Mère Marie-Eugénie de Jésus (1817-1898) is not forgotten. It was a life-long friendship, impressive for its quality, its intensity, and its fruitfulness. When they allude to the company of women which he kept, they are not simply engaging in some hollow literary euphemism. Involved in the foundation of quite a few communities, Fr. d'Alzon was impressive and attracted others in spite of himself, and knew how to steer this desire for strong relationships in the direction of his apostolic plans and to place it in the breath of divine love that inspires people to give the best of themselves. For Emmanuel d'Alzon, friendship is never far from or foreign to his passion for the Kingdom. At an advanced age, Fr. d'Alzon even expressed a true paternal tenderness for Marie Correnson on whom he was counting to establish the Oblates. It is possible that she did not become really conscious of it until he died and there arose difficulties and differences with his successor. Less examined, his relationships with the first religious of the Assumption deserve renewed attention; they have been left in the shadows because of other family or relational ties. It is certain that Fr. d'Alzon enjoyed the company of Abbé Charles Laurent, spontaneous, full of humor and vivacity. He always appreciated, despite its rough edges, the straight, truthful, and devoted character of François Picard, whom he chose as spiritual director and whom, in his last days, he named vicar general. He clearly fell under the

charm of Vincent de Paul Bailly who knew how to set afire everything he touched or wrote. He was able to foresee and sense the great apostolic qualities of the future Fr. Pernet, when Marie Eugénie sent this hesitant and puny young man to Nîmes. Although strict, Fr. d'Alzon was not tyrannical. His personal correspondence witnesses to a great tenderness of feeling that allows us to perceive qualities of the heart that are neither repressed nor suffocating.

"I am angry my dear friend, that my thoughtlessness prevented me from writing to you at Juilly.¹ I wanted to speak with you about things that are now perhaps out of place, but it is clear that I am thoughtless. So let's not talk about it. You hurt my feelings by telling me that you believed that Lord Byron² was too proud to have a friend; for I am very proud. Pride is the foundation of my character, and yet it seems to me that I love you. You know what it is to love, in friendship, I mean. Speak to me about it a little. I am sometimes sad because it seems that my love for those to whom I am attached is quite a bit less warm than that which they show me. It was proven to me today that I was completely in error about attachment and still I haven't learned from this.³ I must love, and to love someone. I am not sure if I will ever experience again, as I have already, the passion of friendship. A fire that cools burns in vain. What it needs perhaps is someone who desires it. I hope that your retreat has done for you the most good possible. This morning, and last Thursday, the feast of the Annunciation, I thought about you and Thiébault⁴ in a special way. I have sometimes been terrified to place before God my love for my friends, and I have found since then that I had only to purify it: omnia munda mundis⁵. So then we can present them to him, offer him his love for them, and that does some good. My dear friend, I am more and more convinced every day, and tonight more than ever, that there is no happiness except in religion, and especially in the practice of religion. How faith makes intelligence grow! How charity enlarges the heart! But one must take up one's cross, and one must know how to carry it and not drag it behind oneself, for if we do not use it as a support, as a brace, it will necessarily crush us as a tiresome weight that we cannot get rid of. I shall not say more for tonight. It is nearly one in the morning. I sacrificed my Mémoires for you.⁶ Now tell me if you love me as I love you.

Emmanuel.

What a lovely thing beautiful handwriting is!"

—E. d'Alzon to Luglien de Jouenne d'Esgrigny,
end of March 1830,
from *Lettres d'Alzon*, edit. S.V., 1.1, p. 47-48.

¹ The college of Juilly is situated in the Brie of the Champagne region, 33 kilometers from Paris. (Cf. Jacques de Grivy, *Juilly 1177-1977, L'Abbaye, L'Académie, Le Collège*, edit. 1978, 382 pages.)

² Lord Byron, alias George Gordon (1788-1824), English poet and writer, who became a type for the rebel hero and for the romantic writer, killed in the Greek war for independence. One might call to mind his principal personages: Manfred and Don Juan.

³ Emmanuel d'Alzon alludes a few times to this wound from a non-reciprocal friendship with a classmate at Stanislas, Pierre-Simon-Louis-Marie Dreux-Brèze (1811-1893), future bishop of Moulins in 1850.

⁴ Louis Thiebault, another friend from his youth, native of the Artois (Beaurains near Arras).

⁵ Biblical reference taken from St. Paul's Letter to Titus 1:15, usually translated: *Everything is pure for those who are pure.*

⁶ During his youthful years at Lavagnac, E. d'Alzon undertook to write his *Mémoires*. Volume I of the *Lettres* (edit. S.V.) reproduces fragments of it. The original does not seem to have survived, contrary to the *Mémoires d'un ancien*, a series of articles published in *L'Assomption de Nîmes* beginning in 1875.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION AND RESEARCH

Young Emmanuel d'Alzon wrote a meditation on friendship, dated June 1829, and published in *Écrits spirituels*, p. 728-732. Fr. Charles Monsch made an analysis of this text on various levels.

The friendship between Fr. d'Alzon and Mother Marie-Eugénie de Jésus was exquisitely presented by Sr. Thérèse-Maylis Toujouze, R.A. in *Études d'Archives* no. 4, *Marie-Eugénie et le P. d'Alzon, intuitions communes, influence réciproque?*, November 1988, 90 pages.

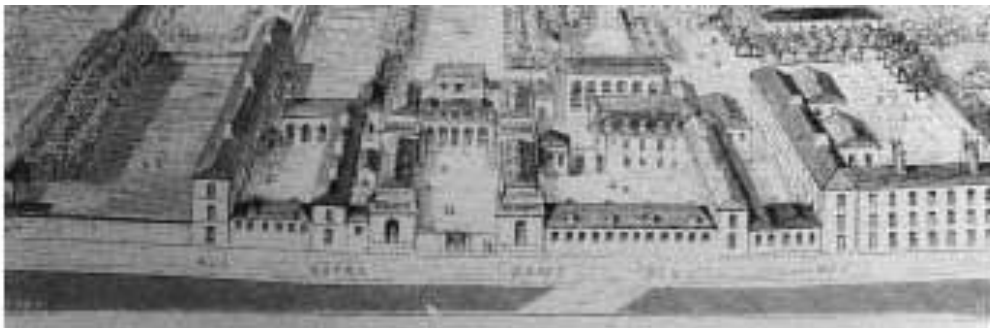
Their friendship is also evoked in chapter 13 of a short biography, *Marie-*

Eugénie Milleret, Fondatrice des Religieuses de l'Assomption, by Sr. Helene-Marie Bories, R.A., Mame, 1991, 141 pages.

Dossier de la Vie et les Vertus du P. d'Alzon, Rome, 1986; chapter IV, pp. 40-57. Could you comment on this assertion of Fr. d'Alzon on September 19, 1838: "*Friendship of the soul is stronger even than blood ties?*"

FOR A PERSONALIZED READING

- What criteria do you require for a friendship that is open, shared, lasting, and of good quality?
- Have you developed true friendships in your human and spiritual lives? What are they founded on?
- What, in your opinion, seems to foster the desire and the passion of friendship in the character of Emmanuel d'Alzon? How was it a force in his life? Does the expression '*spiritual friendship*' capture it?
- In what way does Emmanuel d'Alzon know how to relate his human friendships to the fire of his love for God?



The terrain and the buildings of the Collège Stanislas before 1848, as Fr. d'Alzon would have known them in the old Terray Hotel, before the school was transferred to the former Santerre brewery on Vaugirard Street.

5

A CAGED SEMINARIAN: D'ALZON AT MONTPELLIER

At the age of 22 Emmanuel d'Alzon decided to enter the major seminary of Montpellier. He would stay about 13 months, that is an academic year and a half, from Thursday the 15th of March 1832 to the end of June 1833. He received the tonsure on the feast of the Trinity 1832, Saturday the 16th of June, then the four minor orders at the ordination ceremony on the feast of the Trinity 1833, Saturday June 1st.

At the time the major seminary of Montpellier was the former 18th century convent of the Recollects and had been taken over by the administration of Most Rev. Jean-Louis Simon Rollet, first bishop of Montpellier after the Concordat. This convent-seminary, on Castelnau Road, of which today only the chapel remains and is used for the Departmental Archives, consisted of no less than 120 cells on two levels around a cloister. On the day of his arrival, Emmanuel d'Alzon was given number 937 on the official register. There he would take three or four examinations on the subject matter taught there: in June 1832, the sacraments; in February 1833, the treatise of the Incarnation and Canon Law; in June 1833, the sacraments of marriage and the Eucharist. After the honeymoon period, the first impressions of Emmanuel darkened quickly as he experienced the rough realities of life in a boarding school: a regimen of studies interrupted by the daily schedule, a form of cloistered life where reading, correspondence and visits were monitored, companionship with the seminarians of the time which he judged a bit superficial. Acerbic or funny remarks rain from his pen: he calls the seminary an «intellectual Trappist monastery», the teaching caricatured as an exercise in 'pure psittacism' (empty parroting), the odor of the place impregnated with the smell of codfish, a fish that must not have been part of the Lavagnac diet! The seminary was especially beset by the anti-Lamennais controversy. The bishop was a fierce opponent of Lamennais and banned the reading of *L'Avenir*.

Yet, all the expressions of bitterness, boredom, or disgust of Emmanuel

must be attenuated: the Southern Frenchman that he was, and would remain, would do just that with time and experience. Later he would be able to express all the advantages he received during those months spent at the seminary: regularity, the liveliness of group life, the fervor of the spiritual association that he did not fail to create, the excellence of certain courses, and the first steps of his contemplated priestly life. Of the 36 seminarians that began the year 1831-1832, 18 would be ordained to the priesthood. Emmanuel remained attached to the diocese of Nîmes. Twenty-four received the minor orders on June 1, 1833. Let us listen to Emmanuel's first impressions on his arrival at the seminary:

"My dear friend, here I am at the seminary! And I am happy, very happy, and I believe that the person who is happy can know something about it. True, I did have a very sad moment when I left Lavagnac.¹ I left without making a sound. My poor mother, as courageous as she showed herself to be in her sacrifice, had asked me not to tell her when I would leave. I kept it quiet, of course, but, even if I remained master of myself, I was deeply distressed. Now all has calmed down, and I am happy, more than I should be; for a day and a half here has shown me what there is to be gained. Tomorrow or the day after tomorrow, I will receive the cassock,² and I surely hope to make you retract what you once wrote about cassocks chilling hearts.

Here is the description of my cell. In a long cloister that goes from North to South, coming from the South, you enter from the left. The door opens to the right wall along which are a trunk, two little tables and shelves, which, leaning on an uneven partition, threaten to crush my nose with the books they hold. Facing the door is the window. You turn: there you have a board, a trunk, my bed, and you are still at the door.

Nothing disturbs me. Only, I find the studies too chopped up. We don't have three hours in a row. It feels too much like high school. The meals are not too bad. The students, as much as I can judge by the theology classes I have attended, are not very bright but contentious enough to warp minds; this leads us to lose much time discussing stupidities, while overlooking the essential questions. The beginning of this letter was written yesterday at bedtime and was interrupted by the bell that indicated lights out. We must rise at 5 o'clock. I find, though, that we stay in bed too long. At 9 o'clock when I am going to bed, you are just starting to

dance. That is a funny reflection, in fact. There s very little time even to get bored; but perhaps things will eventually straighten out. It seems to me that I don't have a moment to myself Goodbye, little friend, goodbye, my heart, as our great bishop said to me yesterday.³ Keep well, be happy, and if the whim to come to visit us strikes you, take the month of July. I intend to go to the Carthusian monastery during the vacation.⁴ We could go to meet each other, then on to Du Lac and from there to here. That's not a bad idea. Finally, be convinced of one thing, that is, if ever dancing bores you, you would find no better relaxation than the Seminary"

—Emmanuel. From the Montpellier seminary, March 12, 1832, edit. S.V., 1.1, p. 289-292.
Letter to Luglien de Jouenne d'Esgrigny (1806-1888).

¹ The scene of the departure of Emmanuel from Lavagnac, on March 14, 1832, was later the object of many inexact commentaries, for example those of Bishop Besson in the funeral oration for Fr. d'Alzon in 1880 and the *Vie de Mgr. Paulinier*. It is better to rely on the impressions of Emmanuel himself and those of his cousin Charlotte (September 2, 1881).

² The wearing of the cassock, ankle-length robe of the cleric, marks the entry into the clergy. There are many later representations of the young Abbé d'Alzon wearing the Gallican rabat, the buttoned black cassock with a cincture, buckled shoes, and wide-brimmed hat. Some modifications would be occasioned by religious life (hood, leather cincture or a cord).

³ Bishop Marie-Nicolas Fournier de la Contamine (1750-1834), bishop of Montpellier since 1806.

⁴ The monastery of the Grande Chartreuse, founded in 1084, reopened by the monks in 1816 after the revolutionary period, is a popular place to visit, that is celebrated by Châteaubriand, Lamartine, Victor Hugo and Balzac. We are sure that d'Alzon visited there a first time in June 1835, on his return from Rome.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION AND RESEARCH

On the priestly religious habit:

L. Trichet, *Le costume du clergé; ses origines et son évolution en France d'après les règlements de l'Église*, Cerf, 1986.

On the Seminary of Montpellier in the 19th century:

- *La chapelle du grand séminaire de Montpellier*, brochure, 1889.
- Gérard Cholvy, *Le diocèse de Montpellier*, Paris, Beauchesne, 197fr, in the collection Histoire des diocèses.
- Ferdinand Saurel, *L'ancien clergé du diocèse de Montpellier*, 1901, four volumes.
- J.P. Périer-Muzet, *Sur les traces d'E. d'Alzon à Montpellier*, pro manuscripto, 10 pages.

On the teaching of theology in the 19th century:

Hocedez, *Histoire de la théologie au XIXème siècle*, 3 volumes, Paris-Bruxelles, 1947-1952. The so-called Catechism of Montpellier or *Instructions générales en forme de catéchisme donné à Montpellier en 1747* by Mgr. G.-L. Berger de Charancy.

Testimony of a contemporary figure on the vocation of E. d'Alzon:

P. Lovenbruck, C.S.S.P., *Souvenirs* édit. by Fr. Rene Charrier, C.S.S.R, brochure 5.

FOR A PERSONALIZED READING

- What was young Emmanuel d'Alzon's experience of seminary life at Montpellier? In his opinion, did the positive outweigh the negative?
- Did not Emmanuel establish strong ties there such as the one with the future Abbé Soulas? Cf. Cholvy, *André Soulas et les Soeurs garde-malades de N.-D. Auxiliatrice*, 1845-1995, Montpellier, 1995.
- Have you read his pact of mutual spiritual help through the Act of Consecration to Jesus Christ of May 3, 1833 *Écrits spirituels*, p. 750-752?
- What are the salient memories that you have of your formation time?

6

ROMAN INTOXICATION

On November 20, 1833, Emmanuel d'Alzon boarded the *Henri V7*, a ship that shuttled between Marseille and Civitavecchia. His family placed him in the care of Abbé Gabriel, then pastor of Sainte-Ursule of Pézenas, a well-educated, enthusiastic priest, and admirer of Lamennais. A young seminarian, Eleuthère Reboul, completed the trio. Stops in Genoa and Pisa enhanced the trip; on November 26, Emmanuel wrote his first letter from Rome to his sister Augustine, having had to wait an hour in the mud at the passport control and «cool his heels» at customs. Thus began his first stay in the Eternal City (November 1833-May 1835), to which he would return eight times: May-June 1855, May-June 1861, May-June 1862, April-May 1863, from November 1869 to June 1870, twice in 1877 (January-February, April-June), February-April 1878. In 1833, he quickly found lodgings in the convent of the Minims attached to the church of Sant'Andrea delle Fratte, near Piazza di Spagna. After having attended theology courses at the Roman College, he preferred, on the advice of Fr. Ventura, former general of the Theatines, to remain in his cell and study on his own, as he did in Lavagnac. He visited eminent members of the clergy, such as the Capuchin Cardinal Micara, Fr. Olivieri, Dominican, Fr. Mazetti, Caked Carmelite, all experienced theologians and favorable to the ideas of Lamennais. Before meeting with them, he prepared his reading notes, and made summaries of thorny problems of philosophy, theology, and religious politics. He also frequented the Rector of the English College, the future Archbishop and Cardinal Wiseman and his cousin Charles Mac-Carthy who gave Emmanuel English lessons, before the latter entered the diplomatic ranks.

Emmanuel's circle of relationships included Frenchmen and other foreigners living in Rome, M. d'Auriol, banker, Paul Delaroche, the son-in-law of the famous painter, Horace Vermet who would succeed him at the Villa Medici, M. de Fournas, Xavier Sigalon, the artist, Rubichon, an economist from Grenoble, the German painter Peter von Cornelius, the future Abbé de Dreux-Breze, the de Bernis; but Emmanuel also knew how to

restrain himself, for, as he says, *if you want to work, you can not visit too much*. There he experienced, at the heart of the Church in Rome, the condemnation of Lamennais (1834); Emnunuel suffered from the climate of politico-religious intrigues of which pontifical diplomacy is not exempt, even under the guise of theological thought. He formed a life-long maxim: *"always act on behalf of Rome, never against, sometimes without."* With him and through his eyes let us discover as pilgrims and admiring observers the beauties of the city:

"This morning [November 26, 1833], I went back to St. Peter's. The facade still bothers me, but I was able to admire at leisure the interior of the church. It is incredible. The space seems to grow as you walk. It is impossible to get an idea of the magnificence of all these things. The statues, the paintings, the papal tombs, everything is beautiful. And then, you get lost in it. We went back this evening. The more one sees it, the more one admires it; but I must say frankly that I don't like the facade, no more than the baldechino over the confession of St. Peter... Rome is an intoxicating city. I assure you, I do not exaggerate. I am on the run all day long. Truly it is miraculous. The monuments are almost as common as the houses. We went through some very ordinary streets; all of a sudden you stop to admire the very beautiful Trevi fountain, that could feed a river. You can believe me because I only began to admire it once I saw it. Mr. Gabriel claimed that I had fish blood in my veins. I let him talk... I will finish my speech at St. Mary Major. This morning I got started at St. Peter's...

—Extract of the letter to Augustine d'Alzon, November 26, 1833, edit. S.V., t. 1 p. 450-451

I have begun to roam through Rome at leisure. It is incredible. In all it would take more than a year to visit Rome superficially. St. Mary Major, St. John Lateran, St. Paul outside the Walls, the Coliseum and a great number of other monuments that I visited rapidly and that I will be obliged to revisit, if I want to appreciate all the details, contain all the beauty that you can imagine. We usually do our visiting on Thursdays because then we have the whole day to roam. Those monuments which are closest we do little by little.

—Extract of a letter to Augustine d'Alzon, December 14, 1833,

o.c, p. 461

This evening [February 24, 1834], I went to the Coliseum to see the moon rise. I sat on the steps of the cross that protect it from destruction...

—Extract of a letter to d'Esgrigny, o.c, p. 511

This evening [March 31, 1834], I went to see the famous fireworks. Perhaps I have seen more beautiful fireworks in Paris, if you consider the details, but [I have never seen] such a complete show. Yesterday, I saw the illumination of the dome of St Peter's. You have never seen anything like it...

—Extract of a letter to d'Esgrigny, o.c, p. 539

Yesterday [June 4, 1834], I enjoyed one of the most beautiful spectacles that I have ever seen... we went to visit the oak of Tasso, high on the Janiculum. The sun was setting behind us and was throwing its golden rays on the dome of St. Peter's that seemed completely separated from the rest of the city. Facing us, Rome, aglow in the last light of day; farther away, the Sabine mountains and those of Albano as mists began to cover them. It was a ravishing sight. It is after seeing such spectacles that you can understand Rome. You can see it in all the majesty of its ruins and of its new monuments; you understand everything that separates the debris of the palace of Nero from the arches of the Vatican... I spare you everything that I could add on the cupolas and orange groves, on the fountains and palaces, on the old Tiber whose waters are always yellow, on the pines that show their marvelous parasols on the horizon. I pray you, plant pines on the wastelands...

—Extract from a letter to Henri d'Alzon, o.c, p. 580

I bother about the world only when I look out of my window and see Tivoli, the ancient habitat of Horace, Monte Porzio where Cato lived, Tusculum the city of Cicero, Albano, the cradle of the Roman Empire, the debris of some temples and, very near to me, Holy Cross of Jerusalem where there is preserved the largest part of the cross that overturned the Epicurianism of Horace, the Stoicism of Cato, the Platonism of Cicero, and expanded the limits of the

Roman Empire by giving it new laws and a new god..."

—Extract from a letter to Henri d'Alzon, o.c, p. 758

Volume I of Fr. d'Alzon's letters, edited by Fr. Siméon Vailhé, contains 118 letters from Italy during this first Roman sojourn; they give us a view of what the city was like in that era, the atmosphere, the facts, the unusual mores easily perceived by a foreigner, the pleasant visits, the relationships of Emmanuel d'Alzon. Rome buzzed with rumors from the four corners of the Catholic world and from this colorful ecclesiastical world in the midst of a unique atmosphere, that of the Pontifical States.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION AND RESEARCH

On the theological formation of d'Alzon in Rome:

Dossier Vie et Vertus, vol. I, volume II, chap. V and VI. *A.A. Informations*, 2000, no. 6, p. 7-8.

On d'Alzon and the Lamennais crisis:

Colloque d'histoire 1980, (under the direction of Rene Remond and Emile Poulat), *Emmanuel d'Alzon dans la société et l'Église du XIXe siècle*, Paris, Le Centurion 1982, and article by Gaston Bordet, "Emmanuel d'Alzon et la crise menaisienne, 1828-1835", pages. 37-106.

Le P. d'Alzon et le drame final de Lamennais by Aubain Colette in *Pages d'Archives*, August 1958, no. 9, p. 321-344.

Jean-Paul Périer-Muzet, *Chronologie et topographie des séjours de d'Alzon à Rome*, pro manuscripto, 43 pages.

On Rome as seen by foreigners in the 19th century, you can consult abundant recollections and impressions: e.g. The Viscount de Châteaubriand (1827), Alexandre Dumas (1832), Abbé J.J. Gaume (1867), Lamennais (1839), J. Michelet, Abbé Moyne (1855), Polonceau (1835), Potocka (1826-1827), Quinet (1846), Renan (1849), L. de Sivry (1843), Stendhal (1817, 1826). L. Veuillot (1841, 1861-1862), Vigée-Lebrun (1835-1837)...

Yves Hersant, *Italies, Anthologie des voyageurs français au XVIIIe et XIXe siècles*, edit. R. Laffont Bouquins, 1988, 1093 pages.

FOR A PERSONALIZED READING

- What are your images of Rome? Ancient Rome? Christian Rome? Pontifical Rome? Italian Rome?
- How can one reconcile in the Alzonian/Assumptionist heritage of the “triple love” the sense of the Universal Church, the commitment of faith in an institution, and the interior freedom which the Spirit brings?
- What would be your priorities if you took a pilgrimage to Rome?
- For you, what should be some of the Church’s priorities today?

7

THE JOY OF BEING A PRIEST

At different times we have referred to the various stages of Emmanuel d'Alzon's progress to the priesthood, from Montpellier to Rome. His letters express his preparation, his apprehension, his fervor and his joy at being called to the priesthood in an interior mixture of impressions, of feelings and of convictions, all the while his ideal being purified in the fire of events. Is he not, on the eve of his ordination to major orders, on Friday, December 12, 1834, obliged to sign a document of acceptance of the encyclical *Singulari Vos* that condemned the ideas of Lamennais? We know his first reaction: "Cardinal Odescalchi assured me that the Pope was very pleased by the promptitude of my submission. It is rather vexing to attract the Pope's satisfaction in such a way."¹

The quick pace of his ordinations to the major orders (sub-diaconate on December 14, diaconate on December 20, and the priesthood on December 26 of the same year 1834) may surprise the present-day seminarian who is called to respect intervals! The practice of the diaconal stage, or diaconal year, can vary from one continent to the other, but it does imply an effective exercise of the function before ordination to the priesthood. The review of life exercised in an apostolic team is also a healthy aspect of the initiation to ordained ministries. We find no trace of it in the progression of Abbé d'Alzon. It is true that his later functions will largely compensate for this lack in his formation!

More essential, no doubt, is the determination of Emmanuel d'Alzon to advance to the priesthood in the context of having to find his way in ecclesial life. We see clearly that he does not seek to enter into a fixed state or to have a career. He doesn't know what his service to the Church will be when he expresses to his mother his intentions in the midst of a lot of self-questioning: "*I believe that the hand of God will do his work despite the efforts of man... For that I place myself under Providence. ..I am convinced above all that it is not in doing my will that I will do the will of God. There are many things I would not have done if I had done only what I wanted.*"²

These dispositions of openness and spirit of service will allow him, little by little, to discover his way and his ministry in the local Church. Among the anniversary dates that he liked to celebrate, that of his *'yes to the Church'* would always be present.

"It is eight days today since I said my first Mass.³ If I haven't written to you yet, it is because with each mail delivery, I expected a letter from you. What can I tell you about all that I have felt during these eight days? You have to say Mass to understand what it is. I had no idea. During these eight days, God has treated me like a real spoiled child. I am happy more than I thought that I could be in this world, and also, if it is true that here below men may aspire only to a certain degree of joy, I would no longer have the right to ask for anything from Providence for the rest of my life; it has been given in advance. For a few days, I have been saying Mass at the altar of St. Peter, in the crypt where his remains are and those of St. Paul.⁴ I am alone with my server. I am not obliged to hurry. You would not believe how delightful all that is. However, it is only today that I am very certain of having pronounced all the words that precede the consecration. Even if I know them completely, a cloud passes before my eyes, and I no longer know where I am up to. I hope that all that I am telling you will not trouble you too much, but I want to speak of something else with you. In your last letter, you spoke of your fears for me; you told me that you very much feared a free priest. What do you mean by a free priest? That is what I do not understand. Is one a free priest from the moment that with the permission of one's bishop, one is neither pastor nor assistant? In that case, Fr. Vernière⁵ will tell you that the best subjects he formed all had distaste for pastorates and assistant-ships.

Fr. Verniere would like me to be a missionary. The Jesuits that I consulted during my stay at St. Eusebius told me that I should be a preacher. Cardinal Micara,⁶ whom I consulted, answered that I should not act with French haste, but that I should continue my studies, because he believes that I would make a good Seminary professor. None suggested that I commit myself to be a pastor or an assistant. However, my intention is to be an assistant for a year in order to learn something about ministry. One thing that, in my view, prevents you from seeing clearly the position of priests, is that the system of the Church is composed of two parts, the

secular clergy and the regular clergy: the secular clergy, that in the Church is like the judicial system in the State, and the regular clergy that is like the ecclesiastical army But in France this army no longer exists; the debris that remains is almost nothing Those then who sense they are called to the priesthood, but to the military priesthood, if I can express it that way, find themselves in an exceptional situation....”

—Extract from the letter to Mrs. d’Alzon, Rome, January 3, 1835, according to the S.V. edit., 1.1, p. 767-768.

¹ Letter of December 26, 1834 to Henri d’Alzon, edit. S.V. t. 1, p. 762.

² Letter of January 3, 1835 to Mrs. d’Alzon, o.c, p. 768-769.

³ Emmanuel was ordained a priest on Friday December 26, 1835 in the private chapel of Cardinal Odescalchi.

⁴ According to the opinion of the time. The excavations to find the tomb of Peter were undertaken on the orders of Pius XII, between 1940 and 1949.

⁵ Priest of the diocese of Montpellier, professor at the Major Seminary: Jean Verniere (1797-1863), died pastor of Capestang.

⁶ Luigi (Lodovico) Micara, 1775-1847, Capuchin.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION AND RESEARCH

Remembrances of Abbé d’Alzon in Rome:

Pages d’Archives, December 1967, no. 8, p. 573-586

On the ritual, the prayers, the degrees of ordination (minor and major orders) before Vatican II:

Catholicisme, vol. X, col. 190-193.

On the person of Cardinal Carlo Odescalchi (1786-1841):

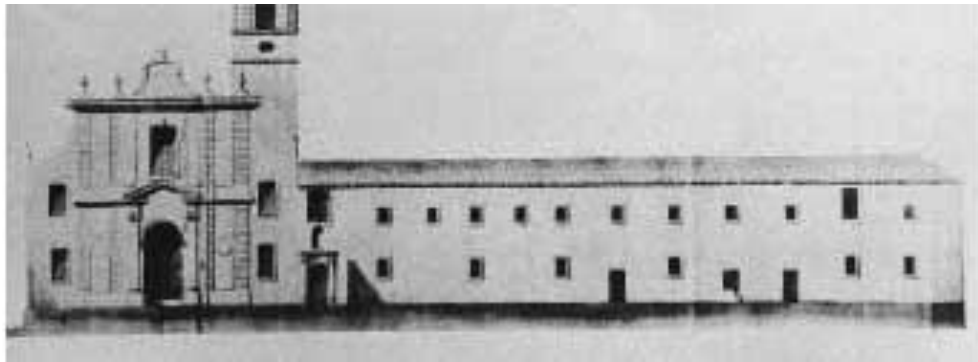
Pirri, *Vita del servo di Dio Carlo Odescalchi*, Isola del Liri, 1935.

On the Basilica of St. Peter in Rome, the archeological digs of St. Peter, the liturgy, Pope Gregory XVI (1831-1846): one can consult the well-documented articles in *Dictionnaire historique de la papauté*, published under the direction of Philippe Levillain, Fayard, 1994.

On the ecclesiastical personnel in Rome from 1833-1835, consult the *Notizie* (which correspond to today’s *Annuario Pontificio*).

FOR A PERSONALIZED READING

- Can you retrace the complete stages of the theological formation and the ordinations of Emmanuel d'Alzon? Is not pastoral formation as such missing?
- What does the *Ratio* and its practical applications foresee in your province concerning pastoral and apostolic formation for the future religious priest?
- How would you define the spiritual joy felt by Emmanuel d'Alzon at the time of his ordination? Can you make it yours?
- What take do you have on the distinction between the secular/regular priesthoods?



The former Major Seminary of Montpellier, where d'Alzon stayed, used to be a Capuchin monastery, on Castenau Avenue. It has now been destroyed, with only the chapel remaining today. Some of the former facilities have been rebuilt and currently house the archives of the Hérault Department.

8

FIRST STEPS IN PASTORAL MINISTRY

The years from 1835 to 1842 are those for which we have the least information concerning the concrete daily life of Abbé d'Alzon because of a lack of documentation. Overflowing with energy and enthusiasm, the young priest allowed himself to be taken up by the multiple calls of his apostolic involvement in Nîmes: religious teaching, youth work, preaching, administration of a school, spiritual direction, revitalizing existing social and charitable works and founding others, the foundation of religious communities,¹ evening round-tables, and public lectures on substantial matters. It would even be dangerous to make a list of his all-embracing commitments and the succinct listing we have made does not allow us to place them in order of importance. From all of this come without doubt the adjectives used to speak of him, some admiring him, others critical of him, none of which posterity has been able to erase. Abbé d'Alzon? A zealous, enterprising priest no doubt, but also careless and inconstant. The old bishop, Bishop De Chaffoy, said right at the beginning in 1835 to whoever wanted to hear that he did not know what to do with this somewhat burdensome recruit; his successor, Bishop Cart, would also have episcopal apprehensions when he would try to brake the devouring zeal of his Vicar General: *"He pushes me and I hold him back."*

We would be wrong, however, to retain of the young Father Emmanuel d'Alzon only this superficial image of an 'activist' priest whose regular apostolate was more of a general practice than that of a specialist. He arrived in Nîmes on Sunday, November 14, 1835, careful to adopt a modest way of life, not to say lowly, relative to his family's station. He had only one objective: to serve the Church of Nîmes that was being rebuilt after the tornado of the French Revolution which had left nothing but material ruins. Quite quickly, however, his pastoral energy would be channeled; from honorary canon and vicar general in the time of Bishop De Chaffoy (1835), he would officially become one of the titular Vicars General of Bishop Cart (1839). His schedule was completely organized with the highs and lows of

the administrative and pastoral functions of the diocese. He benefited from some undeniable trumps: his social relations and the personal fortune that he owed to his family milieu; his independence in regard to the clergy of Nîmes that he wanted to lead toward ultramontane convictions; the natural position of leadership that his demeanor commanded; his formation; his leadership qualities; and especially his initiatives that tended to overturn established traditions.

Let us allow this man of fire speak for himself as he writes to a friend in August 1836: *"Since I am here, I don't have a moment to myself."*

"...Let me simply tell you that I haven't changed, that is, grumbling sometimes but always going forward at my own rhythm; one might desire to be in a German university and be Vicar General in Nîmes, or one might desire taking care of young people² and having on one's hands a hundred Dames de la Misericorde,³ but you will again admonish me and encourage me to think of another desire: Ah! Dear Sir! Do not be so severe. Man proposes but God disposes. That is all Sometimes I would like to ask that they just allow me to undertake various missions at my leisure for, to be frank, my taste is for action. But it seems that they have discovered that I have a vocation to be an administrator, that is to give, every eight days, my opinion on cases of conscience presented to the Bishop's Council⁴ to which I have the honor of belonging. Hey, do not laugh too much in your beard at the thought of a greenhorn of 25 seated solemnly among five or six old men, listening and responding, questioning and objecting and finally acting as if he knew as much as the others. Something tells me that it is very funny to be Vicar General so young, but what can you do? If I told you that I would prefer studying and preaching, you would preach obedience to me, and though I want to hear your sermons, I would like others than those that you wrote at St-Cyr. After all you know me well enough to understand that I could live anywhere. I was extremely well received at Nîmes and I would be guilty if I did not express great gratitude to the good folk of Nîmes. I don't know if I told you that I preached almost every day during the last Lenten season. You would not believe all that this hard toil brought me. All the porters tip their hats, the pious ladies sigh when I cough; I have received tons of candy and the fruit vendor who had me eating awful oranges, touched by my sermons, now takes care to select them

for me and sends me the best. You see that I can get along with all types. I assure you, though, that I have happily sacrificed all my travel plans in the hope of being where God wants me: priest means being "old" and Jesus Christ said to St. Peter that when he became old he would be led where he would not want to go.⁵ You see I also know how to preach to myself I hope that my own sermons, enhanced with the eloquence of yours, will finally convert me. But I want you to preach them to me and not write them to me. I retain you then for the month of July or August. I will remind you of your promises; take this letter as the first summons..."

—Letter to Adolphe de Fournas,⁶ Nîmes, May 10, 1836.
The original text is in the *Diocesan Archives of Montpellier*.

¹ The foundation in Nîmes of a community of the Refuge in 1836, the Sisters of Charity (1836), of the Carmelites in 1843, of the A.A/s (1845), of the R.A.'s (1855); of the O.A. (1865).

² Cf. Catechisms of perseverance, youth clubs.

³ Charitable association that d'Alzon inherited from his great uncle: Canon Daniel-Xavier Liron d'Airolles (1762-1838) and that he would leave to a relative, Abbé Jean-Charles Dortet de Tessen (1799-1884).

⁴ At the time, Bishop Claude-François-Marie Petit-Benoit de Chaffoy (1752-1737), named bishop of Nîmes in 1817.

⁵ John 21:8.

⁶ Adolphe de Fournas is one of Abbé d'Alzon's correspondents, undoubtedly a professional military man, that he met on his return trip from Rome (June 1835).

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION AND RESEARCH

On the situation in Nîmes:

Boissier, *Nîmes et les Nimois*, Roumieux, 1878, 48 pages.

Mémoires de l'Académie du Gard.

Mazel, *Statistiques démographiques comparées de la ville de Nîmes de 1876 à 1888*, Nîmes, 1888, 58 pages.

Adolphe Pieyre, *Histoire de la ville de Nîmes depuis 1830 à nos jours*, Nîmes,

3 volumes, 1886-1887.

On Bishop De Chaffoy:

biography by Canon A. Couderc, de Latour-Lissade, Nîmes, 2 vol., 1856-1857.

On Bishop Jean-François Cart:

biography by the Abbé Azais, 1857.

Guy Dupré, *Formation et rayonnement du P. E. d'Alzon*, 1975.

FOR A PERSONALIZED READING

- Can you make a list of the bishops of Nîmes from 1817 to today?
- The history of the Gard Department is strongly marked by the opposition between Catholics/Protestants. In your view, did Abbé d'Alzon's attitude bring important changes in this matter?
- How was Abbé d'Alzon a player in the ultramontane faction in the diocese of Nîmes? Through what initiatives?
- Have you found in Fr. d'Alzon's correspondence notable figures of the Nîmes clergy of the 19th century?

9

D'ALZON, YOUNG VICAR GENERAL IN PROTESTANT COUNTRY

Abbé d'Alzon, ordained a priest in Rome on December 26, 1834, gave himself to the service of the diocese of Nîmes. Bishop de Chaffoy named him honorary canon and honorary Vicar General of Nîmes on November 8, 1835. On March 4, 1839, Abbé d'Alzon was approved as titular Vicar General by the cabinet of King Louis-Philippe and was installed in his post by Bishop Cart who had been named bishop of Nîmes in November 1837. Emmanuel d'Alzon would remain in this post until September 30, 1878, and as Vicar General would be called to accompany a series of bishops on their pastoral visitations, Bishops François Cart (1838-1855), Henri Plantier (1855-1875), and François Besson. Unfortunately we have only a few echos of these trips; so the unpublished letter to Bishop Sibour, at the time the young bishop of Digne before being promoted to the archdiocese of Paris in 1848 (1848-1857), fosters all the more interest.

Marie-Dominique-Auguste Sibour was not unknown to the young Abbé d'Alzon. A native of Saint-Paul-Trois Châteaux (Drome), as was his cousin, Leon-François (1807-1864), Abbé Sibour, ordained in Rome in 1818, after a period of ministry in Paris, had accepted the position of canon for the Diocese of Nîmes (1822-1839). He quickly came to like the spirited Abbé d'Alzon, attracted like him to preaching, youth work and the conversion of Protestants. Immediately on his arrival in Digne after having been named its bishop in 1839, he worked on the reorganization of his diocese and promoted the reconstitution of provincial councils. Like Abbé d'Alzon, he took to heart the visitation of all the parishes of his mountainous diocese, that had many points of similarity with that of the Gard Department.

Protestantism, a confession widespread in the Cévennes since the Reformation and which had attained equality with Catholicism through the Concordat of 1801, clearly stirred Catholics to try to convert them. D'Alzon's life gave a broad witness to that effort: sermons and debates, apologetical writings, educational and social works to shield youth from Protestant

influence, agricultural camps for orphans, the Saint-Francis de Sales Association, and the promotion of those Catholic pious practices that could appear repulsive to the adherents of the Reformed Church (adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, Mariology, processions); all the means that voice, pen, liturgy, and public activities made available seemed good at that time when ecumenism had not yet been born, to check the 'Protestant danger/ And if we are to believe d'Alzon, the Reformed Churches were no different in this religious antagonism: in November 1857, he wrote that *"every Catholic who becomes a Huguenot is promised a pig..."*

*To Most Rev. Sibour,¹ Bishop of Digne,
Nîmes, March 24, 1840*

"When we returned from the rounds that we had just made in the Cévennes, I found the pastoral letter announcing your pastoral visitation, and I read it with great pleasure. I thank you for having sent it to us, and in my thanks there is a humble prayer to treat me, in the distribution of your pastoral letters, as one of your priests. I understand, alas, that a bishop no longer has time for his friends; but his friends can always meet him again in what flows from his pen, and when they can no longer enjoy his intimacy, they can get a sense of him and understand him when he appears to them in the midst of his flock, instructing it and feeding it with the bread of the word.

I hope, my most venerable and dear Lord Bishop, that the days of your visitation will be less cold and rainy than those whose unpleasantness we had to bear. The bishop of Nîmes was kind enough to lend me his carriage sometimes; but I must admit that the fatigue brought on by these horrible roads, not to mention the torrents falling from heaven and beating down on one's shoulders, could have injured people more robust than he. As for him, he brought back only some passing stomach aches that he got rid of long ago.

The effect produced by his visit was remarkable on all counts. We discovered an unbelievable disorganization in Protestantism, undermined by Methodism,² and a lack of support; it endures only on the basis of an ancient hatred of the Church. However, this hatred, in many villages, is visibly erased by the sentiment of love and veneration that the bishop of Nîmes inspires. En masse, Protestants, and even ministers, send their children for his

blessing; they themselves make the sign of the cross before the bishop, so awkwardly however that it is easy to recognize them. These are little things, but it is significant. The contrast between Catholic majesty and the cold starkness of Protestantism speaks volumes. The consideration given to the bishop compared to little given to pastors is even more striking; I should add that it would be difficult to accord them anything but respect for their morality. Someone cited the family of one of these pastors, where, of four people, there are three different religions, all living, in harmony, at the expense of the one who is paid to teach one doctrine that was not quite his own. But if it was not his, it was at least that of his wife or of his son, and no one examined it too closely...”

—Origin: manuscript, Archives of the Archdiocese of Paris.

Transcribed by Fr. Adrien Pépin, ACR
(Archives of the Congregation in Rome).

¹ Bishop Marie-Dominique Sibour (1792-1857) was ordained bishop on February 25, 1840 at Aix-en-Provence. In July 1848, he was named Archbishop of Paris to replace Bishop Affre who died at the barricades. He would meet a similarly tragic end, stabbed in the church of Saint-Étienne-du-Mont on January 3, 1857, by Abbé Jean-Louis Verger, a suspended priest.

² The Methodist currents (John Wesley) known in Southern France as the ‘Awakening’, pietists, and liberals infiltrated the Calvinism of the Cévennes and Nîmes in the 19th century. Nîmes, an old Protestant stronghold in the 16th century, had experienced the Reformation before 1530. The wars of religion, the Michelade, the war of the Camisards left their marks still alive in 19th century souls.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION AND RESEARCH

On Bishop Sibour:

The work of J. Manceau, *Mgr D-A Sibour, archevêque de Paris (1848-1857)*, 1987.

The cousin of Mère Marie-Eugénie de Jésus, the publicist Jean-Joseph-François Poujoulat (1800-1880), published a *Vie de Mgr Sibour, archevêque de Paris, ses œuvres, sa mort*, in 1857.

On Protestantism as seen by Fr. d'Alzon:

Fr. Daniel Olivier has published *Le P. d'Alzon et l'œcuménisme*, Rome, 79 pages in the Série centenaire 1880, no. 7 and an article, *Le P. d'Alzon et la crise du protestantisme au XIXe siècle* in the Actes du Colloque d'histoire 1980.

Although the names of famous Protestants of Nîmes, Guizot, Crémieux are found in the writings of Fr. d'Alzon, although he debates with Pastor Puaux, although he enters a debate over the burial of Pastor Cazaux, we do not find mention of the works of Pastor Samuel Vincent: cf. Roger Grossi, *Samuel Vincent, témoin de l'Évangile*, Nîmes, 1994.

FOR A PERSONALIZED READING

- How would you define the function of a Vicar General today?
- Have you had a concrete experience of a pastoral visitation or of a diocesan synod?
- How does an Assumptionist approach ecumenical dialogue and involvement today?
- How can a religious conviction strengthen or, on the contrary, impede a form of tolerance? Was Fr. d'Alzon, intransigent ultramontane, a victim of the prejudices of his times?

10

THE STAR OF RELIGIOUS LIFE

It is sometimes asked what the influences were that led Abbé d'Alzon to religious life. We know that there were three foundations that played a role for him: that of the Religious of the Assumption in 1839 with whom, through Mère Marie-Eugénie de Jésus, he maintained a sustained relationship, that of the Carmel in Nîmes that he 'extracted' from his bishop by obtaining a few Carmelites from Avignon (1843) and finally that of Assumption College, acquired from Abbé Alexandre Vermot in 1843, in partnership with the Abbé Goubier, for which he would create, as a first step, a Third-Order.

We would like to know more about the interior motivations that led Abbé d'Alzon not only to overcome the resistance of his bishop, Bishop Cart, who had reservations at the thought of losing' his Vicar General, but especially that allowed the seed of becoming a religious to grow in him. On this question we are like a person at the portal of a cathedral, the portal of an interior spirituality that would give access to the key of an entire life. We see only the material edifice of a construction that spanned an entire life without its being able to reveal the mysterious passages of grace at work in his soul that gave birth to this new body.

Yet, we are not completely at a loss. If we read meticulously line by line the correspondence of Abbé d'Alzon, there is no lack of signs, admissions, and allusions, albeit veiled, in his writings that tell of his thirst for a 'regular' life in the Church, of his desire to see the rebirth of forms of religious life, new, yet anchored in tradition, or yet again, to sound the call for a foundation where the dynamism of common life coupled with an apostolic passion for the Kingdom can resonate fully.

Abbé d'Alzon did not underestimate the values of priestly life, but he believed that the values of religious life were more dynamic and free, which the iron collar of the Concordat could not tie down, or which episcopal bureaucracy could not muzzle. What pleased him above all else were attitudes of frankness, freedom, and simplicity which, in his mind, formed

the heart of a religious' spiritual armor and which the leaven of common life could use to spearhead apostolic initiatives. From Turin where he had travelled to the bedside of his brother-in-law, the Count Anatole de Puységur, he wrote to Mère Marie-Eugénie de Jésus what had become for him evident: *"An idea that I had had in the past and that was only a memory came back to me stronger than ever, that is, to consecrate myself to the formation of a religious community"*¹ Letter of June 24, 1844, edit. S. V. t. II, p. 162. Cf. also, o.c.p. 183, 185, 227, 259.

"...I now take up another question, that you can put aside until after your vows, if you wish, but that you can also address immediately if you think it right. It concerns only me. For a while now I have been very preoccupied about what is quite personal to me concerning the way in which Providence may want me to go. When I received holy orders ten years ago, it was like I was blinded, in the sense that I could not see clearly into my future. Today, it appears to me, that the star has reappeared and I seek to discover that toward which I must go. Intense aversions sometimes rise up deep in my heart, and yet it seems that it is not a question of my will or at least very little of my will. I am ready for anything. On the other hand, there are certain external circumstances that seem to be setting everything up in such a way as to facilitate how I might accomplish what it is that I think God wants. We must let God act. For my part, I am, it seems to me, ready for everything, whatever the cost."

—Letter to Mère Marie-Eugénie de Jésus, December 20, 1844,
edit. S.V., t. II, p. 213.

"... You speak to me about all the vocations that I would find for an Order such as you dream of it. But, I ask again, do I have what it takes? My way of doing, acting, proves to me that, on the one hand, I do not have the good fortune of pleasing everyone; on the other hand, I can see quite well that in the order of sanctity, there is not the slightest comparison between what I am and what founders were. Before undertaking the formation of others, what a demanding education did they not impose on themselves! Also, be careful, my child, that what you saw more attractive in me than in others might come from something undetermined that is less offensive to you than to others with fixed ideas"

—Letter to Mère Marie-Eugénie de Jésus, January 23, 1845,
o.c, p. 221.

“It is quite probable, indeed, my dear child, that I am heartless. And here is the proof During my travels, having written to my servant to hand over my apartment to the owner of the house, for the feast of St. Michael, it became known in the city; thence the tears that flowed most abundantly from so many eyes, that I am surprised that a river, or at least a torrent, did not result. Well! Would you believe that I had let them believe that I was leaving Nîmes and that I had the cruelty to abandon my penitents, those I guide, forever? Well, despite that, I believe that I have a little heart, more even than certain people. But I do not want to justify myself on that If you have not noticed that, I have nothing further to say Just the same, I thank you for those observations...”

—Letter to Mère Marie-Eugénie de Jésus, April 10, 1845, o.c,
p. 245-246.

¹ Here are the stages of Abbé d’Alzon’s path towards religious life according to his writings:

- June 1944, vow of priestly humility at the Consolata of Turin (Letter 340, edit. S.V.,t.II,p. 152).
- April 1845, the decision to leave his apartment in Nîmes at the Hotel Grandgent, on rue des Lombards (cf. above).
- May 31,1845, communication of his decision to Germer-Durand (Letter 383, edit. S.V.,t. II, p. 253-255).
- June or July 1845, private vows at the Church of Notre-Dame de Victoires in Paris (*Écrits spirituels*, p. 788-790).
- October 20, 1845: vow of perfection at Lavagnac (Letter of 21 October, t. II, p. 334).
- December 24, 1845: start of a novitiate period at the College of Nîmes (Letter 442, o.c, p. 416-420).

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION AND RESEARCH

On the three foundations of Abbé d’Alzon at Nîmes:

Dossier Vie et Vertus, t.1, vol. II, chap. X

On the heritage of Saint Augustine and the Augustinian influence on Emmanuel d'Alzon:

Letter of Fr. Hervé Stéphan to the religious, n. 25 in *Documents Assomption* 1981, n. 6, p. 427-430.

Itinéraires Augustiniens, 1992, n.7, p. 25-32 (E. d'Alzon, un familier d'Augustin); 2001, n. 25, p. 31-42 (E. d'Alzon, lecteur assidu de saint Augustin).

At the school of St. Augustin in *L'Esprit de L'Assomption d'après E. d'Alzon*, Rome, 1993, p. 83-88.

Identité religieuse et Vie assomptionniste, session at Nîmes, 1995, 151 pages.

FOR A PERSONALIZED READING

- What appears to you to be the determining factor(s) in Abbé d'Alzon's decision to embrace religious life?
- What were the obstacles he met on his way? What must he renounce?
- Do you know where the apostolic motto of the Assumption, taken from the Our Father: *Adveniat Regnum Tuum*, comes from?
- How does Abbé d'Alzon allow the Holy Spirit to guide his life? How is he, in your estimation, a master of spiritual life, rather than a spiritual master?

Part II

11. Fr. d'Alzon's Social Streak (1840).....	43
12. A Seasoned Spiritual Counselor (1840).....	48
13. Father d'Alzon, The Schoolmaster (1848).....	52
14. An Original Preacher (between 1846 and 1849).....	56
15. The Formation of One of The First Disciples: E. Pernet (1849).....	60
16. A Destiny in Giant Steps: Victor Cardenne(1849)	64
17. The Official Birth of the Assumption (1850-1851)	68
18. The First Foundation in Paris (1851).....	73
19. The Call of Distant Lands (1851)	77
20. Riding the Ultramontane Wave (1855)	81

La Vigan

The Cévennes

Saint Baudile Church, Nîmes

The Founder of the Little Sisters of the Assumption



An old medieval bridge in Le Vignan on the Arre River. The photo is taken from a collection of Fr. d'Alzon's Circular Letters written in Le Vignan.

11

FATHER D'ALZON'S SOCIAL STREAK

From his birth, Fr. d'Alzon belonged to the old social elite of his country: old, because it had been politically unseated after the French Revolution by the triumphant domination of the financial and industrial bourgeoisie, among whom the liberal Protestant François Guizot, one of his compatriots of Nîmes, was the preeminent prototype. Everything or almost everything contrasted, on the level of ideas, these two figures of the 19th century. And yet, one would be insulting the memory of the Founder of the Assumption to classify him without nuance as a social conservative because of his political anti-liberalism; at the time of the Second Empire, d'Alzon was demonstrably sensitive to the desires and expectations of the popular classes in their democratic and economic aspirations. Ozanam, a prestigious figure of a liberal and social Catholicism, had opened a new direction at the time of the July Monarchy with his famous motto *'Let us turn our attention to the Barbarians'*. The events that followed the Revolution of 1848 had quickly swept away the idyllic vision of the alliance of freedom and the Gospel, such as to drown it in the bloodied rubbish of the barricades. The Bonaparte dictatorship later took care of dissolving, with all the ambiguities of the Party of Order, any seeds of hope that had been scattered in 1848. In this difficult birth of a new society yearning so much for freedom, Abbé d'Alzon was certainly not a prime actor nor a privileged witness. As a man of the provinces, he was suspicious of the disputatious Parisian groups that held the top echelons and created public opinion. His efforts with the journal *La Liberté pour tous* in 1848 miscarried. Nonetheless, he followed, from Nîmes, the disquieting and paradoxical evolution of this 'unattainable society.' In his school, he fought against any outbreak of what he called 'bourgeois spirit' and loved the contact with the good' people of Nîmes to whom, he believed, it was necessary to give direction and moral perspective. There is no lack of examples of his attachment to the people that could be suspected of being paternalistic if there had been at the same time signs of personal ambition or interest. As a man of the Church, Abbé

d'Alzon used his influence and his means, but within the limits of his state, his status, and his convictions. A sworn enemy of intrigue, he allowed himself to be tempted only once in 1861 by a possible electoral candidacy, without any illusions as to the result, in order to block the anti-Roman political agenda of the government. It was more a question of honor than a question of taste. A text from 1840, borrowed from the St. Vincent de Paul Conferences that he had established in Nîmes, the second city in France to have them, thanks to him, allows us to understand the complex aspects of what we call the social streak of Fr. d'Alzon. It is written by Mr. Jules Monnier, secretary:

"Our organization until now is prosperous, but we need to be extremely prudent and reserved: whenever we meet Protestants, we must avoid clashes. That is why we put off many projects of spiritual alms which we have planned: thus it is for the catechism to the taffeta makers, to the porters, books for prisoners. Since God prepares the way and since charity shows how to overcome obstacles ingeniously, we hope to begin these good works without too much delay. Abbé d'Alzon, Vicar General, after having said Mass for us, addressed us with some edifying reflections. I thought that you would find pleasure in having the summary:

We recall the sentiments of humility that the example of our holy patron must inspire in us as we begin our work. Humility, in detaching us from all human pride, stirs us to work for God alone and, through it, we come to have confidence, not in ourselves, poor and weak sinners, but in the work that the divine Master has inspired in us. We render homage to God's omnipotence by never despairing of the good undertaken in His name. Charity always works that way. Almost all the foundations of Saint Vincent de Paul began with nothing, and had almost nothing to sustain them.

The work of the Dames de Misericorde began with a meeting of 24 devout ladies: today it covers all of Europe. At first a rented house at the Saint-Victor Gate held 12 foundlings; soon there was a hospital, Bicetre, Saint-Lazare, all of France. In the beginning Miss Legras gathered just a few Sisters of Charity; today there are more than 10,000... Our work will progress in the same manner if we know how to be detached, renounce ourselves, bring everything to God. Five loaves of bread in the hands of Our Lord fed five thousand men. The 1 franc 25 that we began with will be multiplied just as mysteriously as long as the spirit of charity, the

spirit of Saint Vincent de Paul, will be in us.

God has never abandoned good works. They are truly Christian, they are devout, they are blessed when they are humble and devoted servants of God. They are different from philanthropic works where all is human, where nothing is done for God, for they refer everything to God and humble themselves in self denial where they find marvelous strength. Also, what rights charity acquires! It pushes God, if we can express it so, it forces him to give back to the one who gives in his name as much as he gave to others. It exacts and engages his mercy. And heaven opens up for charitable sinners, at the request of the poor who have been helped and to whom heaven has given his alms.

Luxembourg, who said as he lay dying that he would give all his victories for a glass of water presented in the name of Jesus Christy spoke true: what indeed are all the glories, all the riches, all the honors of time compared with eternal happiness that the charitable soul conquers? Let us refer everything to God, let us give alms in a spirit of prayer, always in the sight of the Lord. It will bless us, will sanctify our visits to the poor. Our Guardian Angels will guide us, will give us consoling words to soothe the poor, words of hope to support them in their misery, gentle and zealous words to give new life to the afflicted soul and strengthen it in goodness. We will have glorified God, we will have lightened the sufferings of a few brothers, we will have sanctified ourselves: that is the most brilliant crown. Let us earn it, love it, and seek to obtain it.

Abbé d'Alzon ended the meeting with more words of encouragement to the Organization. He seeks to make known to us the mission of the layman in our time..."

—Letter of Jules Monnier to the President of the Conferences
in Paris, August 5, 1840.

Original manuscript: archives of the Society,
7, rue du Pré-aux-Clercs, Paris.

List of the founders of the Saint Vincent de Paul Society: Frederic Ozanam (1813-1853), Emmanuel Bailly (1794-1861), Paul Lamache (1810-1892), Felix Clave (1811-1853), August Le Taillandier (1811-1886), Jules Devaux (1811-1880), François Lallier (1814-1886).

List of the Presidents General: Emmanuel Bailly (1836-1844), Jules Gossin (1844-1847), Adolphe Baudon (1848-1886), Antonin Pages (1886-1903), Paul Calon (1904-1913), Louis d'Hendecourt (1913-1924), Henri de Berges (1924-1943), Jacques Zeiller (1943-1954), Pierre Chouard (1954-1969), Henri Jacob (1969-1975), Joseph Rouast (1975-1981), Amin A. de Tarrazi (1981-1993), Cesar A. Nunes-Viana (1993-1999), Jose Ramon Diaz Torremocha y Diaz (1999).

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION AND RESEARCH

On the Conferences of Saint Vincent de Paul at Assumption College in Nîmes: published texts 1850-1879, Nîmes.

On the history of the Society:

Ozanam. Livre du Centenaire, Beauchesne, 1913.

Société de Saint Vincent de Paul. *Livre du Centenaire*, Beauchesne, 2 volumes, 1933.

Thèse de l'Abbé Jarry sur *Emmanuel Bailly*, 1971

Acts of the Lyons Symposium of 2001, on Ozanam.

On the social apostolate of Fr. d'Alzon:

An article by Fr. Vincent de Paul Bailly: *Le P d'Alzon et les œuvres sociales* pro manuscripto, ACR (Archives of the Congregation in Rome).

Articles by Fr. Picot, in *L'Assomption et ses Œuvres*, 1950-1952.

On the newspaper *La Liberté pour tous*:

André Pezziardi, *Un journal catholique et démocrate en 1848, La Liberté pour tous*, Montpellier, 1977, 101 pages.

On the political commitment of Fr. d'Alzon between 1859 and 1863:

Pierre Touveneraud, *Pages d'Archives*, October 1960, n. 12. Croquis Galeran, p. 28-33,55-59.

On the political and social commitment of the clergy in the 19th century:

Paul Christophe, *Les choix du clergé dans les Révolutions de 1789, 1830 et 1848*, t. I and II, Lille, 1975 and 1976.

Pierre Pierrard, 1848, *Les pauvres, l'évangile et la révolution*, Desclée, 1977; *L'Eglise et la Révolution, 1789-1889*, Nouvelle Cité, 1988 and *VEglise et les ouvriers en France (1840-1940)*, Hachette, 1984.

José Cabanis, *Lacordaire et quelques autres, Politique et religion*, Gallimard.

FOR A PERSONALIZED READING

- What are the forms of social apostolate that the Assumption has developed in its history until today?
- Can a social commitment lead a religious to intervene on the political scene? What are the limits and the risks in your opinion?
- What are, in your opinion, the differences between social action and charitable works? What would your criteria be?
- Does the 20th century have notable examples of social commitment by clergy, religious and lay people?



Site in the Cévennes Mountains – “We’ll go there to watch the sun rise; it’ll usually be cold or brisk. We will set in place the first stone of the church the 5th in the morning and then we’ll say Mass on a kind of cart. We’ll have breakfast later and, if we have time, will see Bramabia” – Letter to Marie-Correnson 8 June 1865, cf. Volume V (edition Deraedt), p. 340

12

A SEASONED SPIRITUAL COUNSELOR

In the various self-portraits that Fr. d'Alzon has left us, we can only marvel at a certain number of permanent traits of character or personality. A man of disarming honesty, he was imbued with such a demanding uprightness that it led him to make sometimes rapid and severe judgments, even of himself. Fr. d'Alzon also knew how to use invective, scolding, and remarks sometimes with a point of irony or mockery, though he also knew how to ask forgiveness when he felt he had hurt someone. His actions or his judgments could appear to be too categorical or too quick; we know that he didn't like to wait or have to repeat and that patience was not his strong suit. As to the advice he gave, it was filled with more than a tint of will, energy and going beyond himself: in other words, it is more virile than feminine...

And yet, the man of relationships that he showed himself to be in spiritual direction was remarkably filled with extraordinary prudence and finesse, both psychological and spiritual. He exercised a kind of natural superiority over others, a kind of weighty authority or firmness which his name and origins, his status and cultivation, conferred on him; but there was, likewise, a kind of self-mastery that had been tried by the gospel. That did not prevent him from speaking or directing people 'roundly', an adverb that is often used in his writings and that his contemporary listeners heard more than once on his lips. Meekness often seemed to be out of season for him, he did not use soft terms and we find in his vocabulary picturesque language that without having a military harshness did have quite a popular character and strength: *good God, what a mind; I gave him the cold shoulder; I have just given a good tongue-lashing; I have a good mind to send him about his business; my opinion is that if such a sister does not want to be handled a bit roundly you must get rid of her. With regard to Fr. Cusse, did he not one day compare him to a rotten apple that spoils the whole basket!* These remarks or expressions, that are a bit cavalier, take nothing away from the qualities of heart and tenderness of Fr. d'Alzon that abound

in his correspondence with those he guided and his friends. In good times and in bad, d'Alzon knew how to be a faithful friend, finding heartfelt words that are touching, that give the needed counsel, and the encouragement that allowed one to begin anew. Tenderness in him is a characteristic trait both natural and cultivated, a subtle and refined mix of simplicity and true intimacy that knows how to maintain balance and distance. An acute observer, he is a leader in the sense that as a priest, he pinpoints the sense of freedom and responsibility, values that make souls grow in the sight of God.

"Madame,¹ I have just read with most scrupulous attention the letter that you honored me with and, after having invoked the light of the Holy Spirit, here is the answer I believe that I must give you. Your situation is terrible, but you must stick with it until Providence itself gives you the means to get out of it. I gladly accept your request to write to me from time to time. I feel obliged to give you the reasons for that:

- 1. I believe that there are few priests who love Fr. Combalot² as much as I do, though I have no illusions about his faults.*
- 2. The measures you could take might end in harm for this poor Father, and after that to the community.*
- 3. Finally, my confessor³ whom I have just seen, believes that I could in all safety of conscience take on the correspondence that you request of me. He himself is the superior of a community and very experienced; he is the exact opposite of Fr. Combalot. Allow me, in turn, to set out some conditions to our relationship:*

- 1. Complete freedom to suspend it when either you or I would judge it proper. I never accept to take up the direction of someone without that condition.*
- 2. As long as (the relationship) lasts, complete honesty. As I understand it, it means that when you would not want to speak to me about something, you would tell me that you do not want to talk about that point. That would suffice for me and I promise never to push it.*
- 3. The resolution to never fear hurting me, as also on your part, the conviction that I will never speak to you except before the crucifix. I might often be in error, but if you read my letter at*

the feet of Our Lord, you will understand the intention that dictated it.

4. *And as you have already understood to be necessary, all the necessary precautions so that my letters not fall into the hands of anyone else.*

If these conditions are agreeable to you, I am as disposed to speak now with you just as I was not so disposed a little more than a year ago when you wrote to me for the first time.⁴ This change of attitude towards you comes from the disappearance of certain prejudices that your letter erased. I had been a bit shocked, I must admit, by your too great simplicity at Châtenay.⁵ I notice that you were not free and that you acted against your better judgment. I was a bit astounded also that a young person would write to me as you did concerning the nomination of a Vicar General I saw, with joy, that that letter, which in itself was perfect, was only an act of obedience...."

—Letter to M. Marie-Eugénie de Jésus, December 10, 1840,
edit. S.V., t. II, p. 57-59.

¹ A salutation that is a bit too solemn and that will later take on a more affectionate tone, but always with deference.

² Combalot, Abbé Theodore (1797-1873), preacher.

³ Tessan, Canon Jean-Charles Dortet de (1799-1884).

⁴ September 18, 1839 at Châtenay (Isère), home town of Abbé Combalot, in the plain of the Bievre.

⁵ This village is near Côte-Saint-André (Isère) where Marie-Eugénie de Jésus had gone in 1838 to be initiated into religious life in a convent of the Visitation after a first try with the Benedictines of Paris.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION AND RESEARCH

Claude Savart, *Le P d'Alzon et la direction spirituelle des laïques, d'après sa correspondance*, in *Colloque d'histoire* 1980. Le Centurion, 1982, p. 259-278.

Assomption, Province de France, *l'accompagnement spirituel Éléments pour*

une pratique, Paris, 1996, 19 pages.

Sœur Thérèse-Maylis Toujouse, *Marie-Eugénie et le Père d'Alzon, intuitions communes, influence réciproque?*, in *Études d'Archives*, no. 4, 1988. From Marie-Eugénie, one can read her *Notes intimes*, recently reedited, Auteuil, 423 pages.

L'Accompagnement spirituel, Christus 1992, n. 153, special issue, 270 pages. André Louf, *Être formé à l'accompagnement spirituel* in *Seminarium*, 1999, n. 4, p. 553-568.

There are very numerous articles on companioning or on spiritual direction, especially in the *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité* published in Paris by Beauchesne (index: "*Discernement des esprits*") and also in the recent *Dictionnaire de la vie spirituelle*, Cerf, 2001 (*Discernement*, pages 271-279).

FOR A PERSONALIZED READING

- How does Fr. d'Alzon show himself to be attentive both to the request for spiritual direction of Marie-Eugénie and the prudence to proceed in faith, respectful of the previous director?
- What essential qualities does he require on the level of the relationship between a director and a person he guides spiritually?
- How can we say that he is, in this circumstance, more attentive to a vision of the future than to a mulling over of the past?
- How does he manifest both his responsibility and his spirit of service with regard to Marie-Eugénie de Jésus?

13

FATHER D'ALZON, SCHOOLMASTER

One gets a good idea of Fr. d'Alzon by considering that the question of education was, in his own terms, 'the concern of his life.' Passionately concerned, as were Catholics of his day, with the question of education as it presented itself in his century, Fr. d'Alzon discerned very early on, by conviction and experience, the human, ecclesial and spiritual stakes in freedom of education: the formation of minds and opinion, the formation of enlightened Christians, and source of vocations. From the beginning, he led the battle, with Montalembert and Lacordaire, who refused to leave to an absolutist State alone the direction of education as it was understood by the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Empire. High schools (*lycées*), be they royal, imperial or national, imbued with liberal philosophy, could not satisfy the aspirations of Catholic families who were confident that the Church and its institutions would develop its own network of educational institutions. We know the three chronological landmarks of this long battle for freedom of education in France: 1833, the Guizot Law on primary education; 1850, the Falloux Law on secondary education; 1875, the Laboulay Law on higher education, before the transformations brought about by the education legislation of the Third Republic. Fr. d'Alzon developed both a pedagogical system and a practice: he dedicated his time, his fortune and his fame, and his Congregations, to it. Were not the Augustinians of the Assumption born at Assumption College in Nîmes in 1845? He recommended to his sons, in the Constitutions, *teaching in all its forms*, as a first and broad priority. In the educational domain, d'Alzon is innovative: methods of proximity, stimulation, confidence, strong spiritual life, constant attention to the youth who, all through his life, make up his surroundings and the natural framework of his activities. In this cradle, he fostered the collaboration of laymen and religious. The figures of Germer-Durand and Monnier were living examples of it.

The adventure began a bit in spite of himself in July 1843 when Abbé Goubier bought in his name, as co-owner, the Vermot boarding school, then

in decline. From Nîmes in 1844, d'Alzon launched, following Montalembert, a Committee for Freedom of Education. He lobbied cabinet ministers in Paris to obtain full freedom of education and created the *Revue de l'enseignement chrétien*. He settled himself in the school and made it his residence in September 1845; he laid the cornerstone of the chapel in May 1849. It was there that on Christmas Day 1850 he pronounced his public religious vows with four companions. There in 1859 he received and encouraged the *Félibres* (a group of writers using an ancient French dialect, "langue d'oc"). Indeed his fortune was buried there, but there he also discovered his life, its unity and his sense of direction.

"My dear Friend,

Although I am well taken care of at M. de Salinis',¹ I am somewhat ill which makes me get up late and go to bed early. At that rhythm and with the errands I do during the day, little time remains to fill you in on what I have been doing. I want to prove to you, though, that I know how to keep busy; here is the corrected copy of the religion composition of December 26. Since most of the students had withdrawn, I thought of doing only one section. Numa Baragnon² did not do his composition; one student did not sign his paper and I did not recognize his handwriting... I have had to stay here a little longer than I had planned because it was impossible to find seats (in the train) when I wanted to leave. I will be in Paris until Saturday night, and you will probably have received my letter by then. I did not expect to receive many details here about the house, but I really do expect to find some details on how things are going when I get to Paris. As for me, I have nothing to tell you except that if needed I found a good study master in Toulouse, and if you need one, you could address yourself to Abbé Pradel, chaplain at the Toulouse cathedral.³ I maintain, however, that, if you can, it would be better to await my arrival in Paris. I pray you to recommend to the professors and monitors to avoid excessive measures. You have no idea of the vexation I endure listening to the parents complaining that such measures had been used too often. I will write as soon as possible to the Third-Order. Today I have absolutely no time and I can only ask you to be my spokesman to all of my deepest affection. You know, dear friend, the special affection I have had for you for a long time already.

Be good enough to go and give my news to Fr. Goubier⁴ to

whom I shall write from Paris as soon as I know something. Were you able to speak with M. Nicot?⁵

—Letter to Eugene Germer-Durand,⁶ Bordeaux, January 12, 1848, from edit. S.V. t. III, p. 314-315.

¹ Salinis, Antoine de (1798-1861), bishop of Amiens in 1849, Archbishop of Audi from 1856-1861.

² Baragnon, Numa, (1835-1892), at the time a student at Assumption College, Legitimist lawyer, Under-Secretary of State from 1873-1875 and later senator in 1878.

³ It is in reality Abbé Pierre-Paul Pradet (1792-1854, according to the archives of the Archdiocese of Toulouse. Fr. d'Alzon erroneously writes "Pradel" instead of "Pradet."

⁴ Goubier, Abbé Vital-Gustave (1802-1855), Pastor of Sainte-Perpetua parish of Nîmes as of March 1839.

⁵ Nicot, Jean-Baptiste Pierre (+1864), Rector of the Académie du Gard and Secretary of the Académie de Nîmes. Cf. *L'enseignement et l'éducation dans le Gard*, Archives du Gard, 1991, 110 pages.

⁶ Louis-Eugène Germer-Durand (1812-1880) was a professor, director of studies at Assumption, intimate friend of Fr. d'Alzon. One of his sons, Joseph (1845- 1917), would become an Assumptionist, and his wife, Cécile nee Vignaud (+1886), after becoming widowed, would become an Oblate sister.

When he wrote this letter, Fr. d'Alzon was in Bordeaux where he would stay from the 7th to the 13th of January, having left Nîmes on the 1st or 2nd. He was getting ready to go to Paris to obtain full freedom of education for his school from the government. Assumption had enjoyed a half-freedom, that is for the elementary classes only, since August 21, 1845. On February 17, 1848, he had an opportunity to meet with the Prime Minister, his compatriot, Guizot, who promised him to obtain full freedom quickly, a measure that would become effective the following December 20, from the Minister of Public Instruction, Mr. Freslon. D'Alzon was present for the Revolution of 22-25 February 1848 that toppled the monarchy of Louis-Philippe and proclaimed the Republic (cf. letter n. 557, of March 6, 1848).

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION AND RESEARCH

Mémoires sur l'établissement de L'Assomption (1845?): Letters, edit. S.V., t. 11, appendix pages 487-493.

Histoire de L'Assomption depuis sa foundation jusqu'à nos jours, ibidem, pages 494-503

Mémoires d'un ancien de la vieille Assomption in L'Assomption de Nîmes, 1875, n. 1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 9, 14, and 15.

Louis Secondy, *L'enseignement secondaire libre dans l'Académie de Montpellier (1854-1924)*, 1974.

Louis Secondy, *Aux origines de la maison de l'Assomption a Nîmes (1844-1853)* in: *Colloque d'histoire* 1980, op. cit., pages 233-258.

Camille Ferry, *Maison de l'Assomption. Son histoire par un ancien (1843-1893)*, Nîmes, 1893. *Maison de l'Assomption, Discours et rapports de distribution des prix*, from 1845 to 1912.

Dictionnaire historique de l'éducation chrétienne d'expression française, edit. Don Bosco, 2001, 745 pages.

Many studies have focused on Fr. d'Alzon's concept of education: E. Bailly, H. Bisson, G. Bissonnette, J.-C. Ehrart, J. Franck, D. Gallagher, D. Gallo, R. Lamoureux, E. Rospide, M. Serge, F.-J. Thonnard. In 1932, there were published *Les Instructions du Samedi*, a compilation of Fr. d'Alzon's talks to students.

FOR A PERSONALIZED READING

- Have you made a pilgrimage 'in the footsteps of Fr. d'Alzon to Nîmes that led you to the various successive locations of the Collège de l'Assomption in that city? Do you know the educational institutions imbued with the spirit of the Assumption in the world today?
- How can we transpose to the 21st century the values and ideals put in place by Fr. d'Alzon in the educational and teaching domains? What qualities seem essential?
- Does education seem to you to be an essential aspect of Assumption's life? Why?

14

AN ORIGINAL PREACHER

If there was a religious exercise that characterized Fr. d'Alzon's practice, it was his assiduousness in preaching. Was he not nicknamed '*prédicomane*' ("preacher-maniac")? Yet even if one day he confided '*Preaching has always been more demanding than writing*', he did not exempt himself from either obligation. You might even say that before becoming a name in the diocese of Nîmes, he was a voice; all the churches of Nîmes, all the shrines, all the chapels rang with the echo of his word in all its forms: sermons on Sunday or on special occasions, Advent and Lenten preaching, month of Mary, liturgical services, installation of priests, pilgrimage exhortations, retreats, religious instructions to children or high school students, fervorinos to the Third-Order or to an Association... there is hardly a genre that he did not undertake.

We know that the Curé d'Ars believed that he had preached little if he did not go longer than 45 minutes! Undoubtedly the audience of his time, less solicited by the mass media, had a capacity to listen far superior to ours which hardly supports much more than the 7-8 usual minutes. By the way, all you have to do is to go to Africa to see that notorious exceptions to this rule still remain today. Surely it is useless to regret that we do not have a record in sound of the preaching of Fr. d'Alzon. There was no way to record voices in the 19th century. The telephone, the first form of long distance sound transmission, was invented by Alexander Graham Bell around 1876, and yet it was lost immediately after transmission. The phonograph of our ancestors was invented in the 20th century. Yet the echo of Fr. d'Alzon's sermons has reached us; it was lively, down-to-earth, picturesque, nourishing, and also varied. The best source, anecdotal it is true, is Canon Galeran, alumnus of Assumption College to whom we owe, thanks to the famous *Sketches*, a testimony to the founder's eloquence. The ministry of preaching corresponds to the spiritual definition of the priesthood: to present the faith, if need be to defend it, to argue, to enlighten current events with the light of Scripture. It entails always following the cry of Saint

Paul: *"Woe to me if I do not announce the Gospel."*

To illustrate these words, here is a recollection from the young Galeran that can be traced back to the years 1846-1849: *"One Saturday evening, after the singing of the litanies, in the old small chapel on Servie Street, Father began his instruction, all of a sudden, in the following manner:*

*Sirs, have you ever seen Fr. Matton,¹ who died as the retired pastor of Saint-Baudile?² Fr. Matton was very ugly; a nose, or better, a big blob on a small round face with the form and color of a tomato, with two small black eyes pierced as if with a drill; and all of that covered with a crown of white, badly combed hair, half covered with an old leather skull-cap. The image is exact. What do you think of it? Well! I am telling you frankly that I saw this priest in prayer a few times, especially during his thanksgiving prayer; I knelt as near to him as possible and on a slant so as to be able to contemplate the beauty of this face and the holiness of his expression. There I was witness to a real transfiguration. Then I remembered certain flawless human faces from the point of view of art, the fine lines, the exact proportions. These faces told me nothing; I did not find them beautiful. Why? Where does beauty come from? What does it consist of? Once and for all let us have a precise notion of it. Scripture has an expression that answers these questions: *Is qui intus est renovatur de die in diem*, II Cor 4:16.³ True beauty is the reflection of the soul. The more perfect the soul, the more beautiful is the exterior expression. At the resurrection, our bodies will be transformed in direct proportion to the transfiguration of our souls.*

From that beginning. Father went on to make a series of remarkable reflections. It was one of the most original and most interesting instructions that I have ever heard."

—According to Henri-Dieudonne Galeran,⁴ *Sketches of P. d'Alzon*, edit. Bonne Presse, 1924, p. 16-17.

¹ This is Abbé Benoit Mathon, born in Saint-Victor-la-Coste (Gard), on July 11, 1765, ordained a priest on December 19, 1789, Canon of the Cathedral of Nîmes, died on February 23, 1846. Information from the Régister of the clergy of Nîmes, pages 3 and 4.

² The church of Saint-Baudile of Nîmes was until 1877 the former church of the

Carmelites of the city whose convent dating from 1270 faced the Porte-Auguste. The church was ransacked in 1561, and the monastery destroyed. When the Carmelites were able to return to Nîmes at the end of the 16th century, they lived in a house abutting the Palais whose chapel served as a church. They remained there until 1685 when they took possession of a new convent that they had built in its former location. The church, then under the patronage of Saint Charles Borromeo, took the name of Saint-Baudile after its secularization in the years that followed the Revolution and became the parish church. In 1877, the parish took possession of the new church built in the gothic style, still facing Porte-Auguste. It was consecrated on October 28, 1877, in the absence of Fr. d'Alzon who was detained at Lavagnac (cf. letter no. 6062, t. XII, edit, D.D., p. 224, and note 1).

³ "Inwardly we are being renewed day by day." Translation from the New International Bible.

⁴ Canon Henri-Dieudonné Galeran was a priest of the diocese of Montpellier and had been a student at Assumption College of Nîmes. Very attached to Fr. d'Alzon, he was not able to decide to enter the Congregation, but he had fiery quarrels, because of his Ultramontane opinions, with the bishop of Montpellier, Bishop Lecourtier (1799-1885), appointed in 1861. Here are a few elements of his biography: born in Montpellier on February 5, 1831, son of Antoine Galeran and of Marie, nee Moulinier, ordained a priest on June 29, 1857, Assistant Pastor at Saint-Louis of Sète on February 1, 1858, Chaplain at la Providence on May 1, 1859, Pastor at Ceyras on December 18, 1861, placed under interdict on August 8, 1862. Thanks to Fr. d'Alzon, he was then able to go to England where he ministered for thirty years. Abbé Galeran died on January 5, 1915 in Damascus, Syria, after having lived out his old age, from 1892, in the Assumptionist community of Saint Peter in Gallicantu (Jerusalem) where he wrote his recollections of Fr. d'Alzon at the request of Fr. Picard. This information is from the archives of the diocese of Montpellier.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION AND RESEARCH

H.D. Galeran, *Croquis du P. d'Alzon*, Paris. B.P., 1924, 362 pages. On the theme of Fr. d'Alzon's preaching, read especially: p. 14, 16-17, 69-70, 77-78, 114-116, 142-143, 158-159, 160-162, 174-181, 187-189, 281-284. The English translation of the *Croquis* by Fr. Richard Richards: *Sketches*, Milton, 1982, 394 pages. There is a Spanish translation by Fr. Tomás González, *Anecdotes del Padre d'Alzon*, Rome, 2002, 546 pages.

Abbé Goiffon, *Dictionnaire du diocèse de Nîmes*, edit. Lacour, 1989 (reprint of the 1981 edition,) 414 pages.

Jean Thomas, *De la Révolution à la Séparation de l'Église et de l'État 1789-1905*, Nîmes, edit. Lacour, 1987, 267 pages. (The author who also wrote *Pierres précieuses de l'Église de Nîmes*, dedicates pages 165-176 to Fr. d'Alzon).

A copy of the sermon of Fr. d'Alzon for the wedding of Amédée de Mérignargues and of Paule Démians, the only document of its kind, was discovered in 1993.

FOR A PERSONALIZED READING

- From the published notes of the sermons of Fr. d'Alzon, can you analyze his type of preaching from the following elements: Scriptural quotations, *captatio benevolentiae* (a rhetorical device used to secure the goodwill of one's audience), images and figures of speech, and moral exhortation?
- In your opinion, what role does formal preparation and free improvisation play in a homily? On this subject, what is your impression of Fr. d'Alzon?
- In your opinion what would be the pedagogical means to be used in preaching so as to avoid intense boredom and yet maintain the integrity of doctrinal content?

15

THE FORMATION OF ONE OF HIS FIRST DISCIPLES: ÉTIENNE PERNET

The formation of the first Assumptionists took place in the cradle of the College of Nîmes. We know the names of the first companions of Fr. d'Alzon who, with him, at Christmas 1845 began a novitiate that had not been authorized by Bishop Cart: they were René-Eugène Cusse, from Nîmes (1822-1866) who would follow a winding road, Abbé Eugène Henri (1815-1874) from Nîmes, a diocesan priest who would leave and become pastor of Remoulins, Abbé Charles Laurent (1821-1895) from Uzès, priest novice who would eventually reenter Assumption definitively in 1852, Abbé François Surrel (1806-1857), diocesan priest of Nîmes, the prototype of those ephemeral vocations that would only pass through, died pastor of Saint-Ambroix, and finally another veteran, Abbé Paul-Elphège Tissot (1801-1895), from Lyons, who would commit himself only in 1852.

You can legitimately ask questions about the content of the religious formation given during the novitiate of that time, but we have only a few letters of the founder himself and, beyond that, a few recollections that some of the candidates of the time have left us. The founder had no other master of novices than the Holy Spirit, but he knew how to share his life ideal with his companions, his faith and his numerous apostolic activities. It is clear that the first candidates, all engaged in the many functions of a college, besides the usual religious exercises, had little time to perfect their formation. Fr. d'Alzon based everything on their interior dispositions and their capacity to teach, seeking to establish with each one a personal relationship built on confidence, openness and, sometimes, fraternal correction. For this, testimony abounds. He also liked to kindle their fervor by bringing them to the pilgrimage of Rochefort-du-Gard or by inviting them to a few days of retreat at the Carthusian monastery of Valbonne.

With them he would compose, beginning in 1850, the chapters of the first *Constitutions of the Assumption*, almost line by line since, as he said, he did not want to impose anything that had not been tested by experience. That

is how we have this text, completed in 1855, thanks to the copy that the future Fr. Galabert kept. This experimental path for the common life or companionship, in the crucible of the occupations of a college, was the test tube of the first Assumption. Despite its limits and even its failures, don't we owe to this "on-the-job-training" the solidity of the first pillars, and in particular that of É. Pernet?

"I can assure you, my dear friend, that you are completely wrong to think of yourself as a stranger among us. All the teachers of the house love you, the religious consider you as a brother, and I, I assure you, see you as a son that I love with all my heart. Be quite sure that your extreme modesty prevents you from seeing the feelings of affection that we have for you, and which, I hope very much, will always grow; for if God, as I am convinced, is the principle, the bond, and the end of our union, he will only increase among us whatever there is good of friendship and sympathy. Also, my dear child, I had no thought of addresssing reproaches to you, unless they were the most tender reproaches, reproaches of the heart, because you did not seem to love us as much as we love you. But all that will come, I am sure, when we will know each other better and when the timidity that prevents you from blossoming will be cast out the door. You know what Saint John says: Caritas perfecta foras mittit timorem.¹ Hasten to have for us a perfect love; I assure you we will return it well. Like you, I am suffering from not being able to return to Nîmes as I wanted to; my health is far from being restored.² I recently had a relapse and I was obliged to take many precautions. Finally, one must hope, God will reunite us. For now, everything must be an occasion of trial and exercise. Alas! We should be saints in all things, imitators of God, as beloved sons: Imitatores Dei ut filii carissimi.³ So, absence, reunion, separation, return would be for us means of sanctification. Please, as soon as you receive my letter, tell the post office to send my letters to Le Vigan, to be held for me there.⁴ I leave to M. Cardenne⁵ the necessary space to reply to your insults and I am most affectionately yours in Our Lord."

—Letter of September 11, 1849, Lavagnac, according to edit.
S.V., t. III, p. 486-487.

¹ 1 Jn 4:18. ("Perfect charity casts out all fear").

² Fr. d'Alzon's health is a permanent theme in his correspondence.

³ Ephesians 5:1 ("Be imitators of God as his dearest children").

⁴ From September 12 to 21, Fr. d'Alzon, who was at Lavagnac nursing a form of cholera, would go to Le Vigan.

⁵ During Fr. d'Alzon's lifetime, Lavagnac would always be a welcoming place of rest for the religious who would thus benefit from a kind of family hospitality in the countryside. Let's remember that until 1860 Augustine and Mrs. d'Alzon lived there; until 1864, Mr. Henri d'Alzon; and, until 1869, Mrs. Marie de Puységur with her children. Count Anatole de Puységur, born in 1813, died in July 1851, leaving three children from his marriage, celebrated on Marcy 20, 1837, with the youngest sister of Emmanuel: Alix (1838-1895), Marthe (1838- 1845), and Jean (1849-1910). We know what happened to these children: Alix became a Carmelite in Paris, Messine Avenue, in 1858 with the name of Sister Marie-Thérèse de l'Enfant-Jesus. The turmoil of the war and of the Commune in 1870-1871 destroyed her fragile equilibrium. Fr. d'Alzon found a refuge for her at the Carmelite convent of Saint-Chamond (Loire), then in a rest home where his niece would remain for about twenty years before she was taken in by the Carmelite convent of Narbonne where she died in July 1895. We know the cruel expression of Cardinal Caverot about sick nuns: Unfortunately, Our Lord takes care of the heart, but not of the head! Marthe died in childhood at Lavagnac, undoubtedly from an aneurism. Jean married Clotilde de Quinsonas in Paris in 1872. They had three daughters: Alix (1873-1952) who became Mrs. de Tocquelle, Marie-Clotilde (+1920), who became Mrs. Suarez d'Aulan, and Isabelle (+1964), who became Mrs. de Rodez-Benavent. A son named Emmanuel did not survive. Cf. chapter 43, "The Wedding of Jean de Puységur."

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION AND RESEARCH

The human and spiritual personality of Fr. Pernet is well described in various works about him:

Matthieu Lombard, *Le P. Pernet*, Paris, Bonne Presse, 1911, 84 pages.

Abbé Emidio Federici, *Le P. Pernet*, Roma, 1940, 470 pages.

Gaetan Bernoville, *Le P. Pernet*, Grasset, 1944, 272 pages.

Madeleine Legoët, *Un précurseur du service social Etienne Pernet*, Paris, edit., Spes, 1948, 148 pages.

Sœur Humbert, *Le P. Pernet*, Paris, rue Violet, 1854, 30 pages. *Telle fut son âme.* *ibid.*, 1962, 116 pages. *Telle fut sa mission*, *ibid.*, 1960, 48 pages. *Approches d'une spiritualité* *ibid.*, 1958-1961, three small books of 94, 102

and 96 pages.

Rémi Kokel, A.A., *Etienne Pernet: 1824-1899*, Maison Mère des Petites Sœurs de l'Assomption, Paris, 1962, 42 pages.

About the vocational journey of Pernet, one can read pages 34-36 of *Notre Dame de Grâce, Rochefort du Gard*, 1981.

FOR A PERSONALIZED READING

- According to this letter what is the relationship between Fr. d'Alzon and his disciple? How does the founder see his relationship with his religious? What would you place under the heading "perfect charity"?
- What portrait does Fr. d'Alzon paint, at this point, of the future Fr. Pernet? Does what you know about Fr. Pernet allow you to give a more complete picture of the future founder of the Little Sisters of the Assumption?
- Mutual understanding, esteem, empathy, friendship, the "reproaches of the heart" and the love of God undoubtedly build up a relationship of trust. What would you add to this foundation of the Father-disciple relationship to make formation as complete as possible?

16

A DESTINY IN GIANT STEPS: VICTOR CARDENNE

One of the first to enter the Third-Order of the Assumption as a lay member was the young Jean-François Cardenne, better known in the Assumption by his religious name, Victor. It is a mystery for no one that his bohemian life-style as a student in Paris had estranged him from all religious practices or preoccupations. He did, however, make a saving acquaintance with the pastor of the church of Saint-Etienne du Mont, near the Pantheon, Abbé Joseph Perdrau (1820-?) who became the brother-in-law of doctor Henri Gouraud (1807-1874) in 1836 as a result of the marriage of his sister Fanny and who put him in contact with the Assumption in Auteuil. He met Mère Marie-Eugénie de Jésus, who quickly discerned in this young man an excellent recruit for Fr. d'Alzon's college.

Fr. d'Alzon met him in Paris in August 1845 and wrote to Germer-Durand about him: *'I spent a part of the morning with a young man that I have definitely hired. He is filled with dedication. He wanted to devote himself to the teaching of law; he has changed his mind after having very satisfactorily passed his thesis. He is committed to a regular life that I discussed with him.'*¹ From then on, the life of Cardenne is intimately linked to the destiny of the college where he took the post of professor of history in 1845 and his liveliness accomplished wonders: *Mr. Cardenne is a "keeper"; all I see in him edifies me; each day he makes new progress in holiness*, Fr. d'Alzon wrote of him at various times. Member of the Third Order, Victor Cardenne was received with joy as a religious brother in 1846. The only concern for Father d'Alzon was the bad health of this professor; not even the fresh air of the Midi could cure his bouts of tuberculosis. On December 24, 1850, Brother Victor would commit himself to the Assumption by the profession of annual public vows. It was clear that his earthly journey would be short. He died at Fontainebleau, in his mother's arms, in December 1851.

We will never know the face of this religious of the early days: no photograph, no sketch brightens the 300 pages that Jules Monnier dedicated to his memory. We'll have to settle with this eloquent moral

picture of him: *'Converted like Saint Augustine, endowed with a lively intelligence, Cardenne had something of the ardor of our patriarch for the conversion of sinners, for whom he used all the resources of his zeal and of his spirit. He was the first of Assumption's ranks on earth to open the door to Assumption's ranks in heaven.'*²

"...The house is a bit upset by the illness of a stranger—a wagon driver— who stopped ten minutes from here at a grist-mill belonging to my father³... They claim that he has cholera.⁴ They do not want me to go on the pretext that there are two other priests in the house to hear his confession. Their remarks seasoned with the intimate and penetrating charm of Latin verse are something that Cardenne uses at times. It frightens me, not for us but for the students. The other day I took him to Valmagne;⁵ he found the arches too low, and it took a quarter hour of discussion to prove that they were not. Another time, having just read Bourdalou, in his admiration he declared to me that this orator was too spare. I must admit that a spare Bourdalou⁶ is a bit much for me; but we must overlook that and not point out to him his erroneous expressions too much. He cannot express himself better.

It has been several days that we have no news from Monnier.⁷ I do not know to whom Tissot⁸ wrote, but it was neither to Cardenne nor to me. His last letter was reassuring; only, as I had suspected, it was the reception afforded to his wife that put him in such a state.

You well know, my dear friend, that in my prayers the word 'Assumption' includes all those that I love; but you can be sure that, if I single out a few persons for special affection, you are not one that I would forget.

Adieu and until we meet again. I will be in Nîmes on the 10th in the evening or the 11th at nine in the morning. And you?"

—Letter to Louis-Eugène Germer-Durand,⁹ Lavagnac, October 5, 1849, edit, S.V., t. III, p. 501.

¹ Letter no. 339, S.V. edition, t. II, p. 294; t. III, pages 44, 168, 173, 182...

² Quotation from *Croquis Galeran*, p. 226.

³ The agricultural property of Lavagnac included some 300 hectares, that for the

most part were farmed. The d'Alzon's owned a grist mill at Belarga, a few kilometers from the château and another at Roquemengarde on the Hérault River.

⁴ Cholera, a very contagious disease, was still quite widespread in 19th century France. You can catch a good picture of it in the description given of the small town of Manosque, with its cortege of terrifying emotions, in the book by Jean Giono, *Le hussard sur le toit* (1951), recently made into a movie.

⁵ This 12th century Cistercian abbey, founded in 1138, incorporated into the Citeaux congregation in 1145, nicknamed the "Cathedral in the Vineyards" because of its location, is a few kilometers from Lavagnac. The primitive Romanesque church was replaced by an abbatial church begun in 1252 with construction continuing into the 14th century. At the time of the Revolution, it suffered the fate of ecclesiastical properties. Secularized, it was bought by private owners and was transformed in the 19th century into a château residence and agricultural property. The 14th century cloister, the church and the claustral buildings, transformed in the 17th century, remain. For a few years now a part of the property has been open to visitors.

⁶ Louis Bourdalou (1632-1704), famous Jesuit preacher, author of sermons given between 1670 and 1693.

⁷ Louis-Jules Monnier (1815-1856) and his wife (+1868 or 1869), both members of the Third Order, were very devoted to the Assumption, living at 23 Roussy Street, and later on du Pont de la Servie Street. We know the given names of some of their five children: Emmanuel (1841-), Marguerite (-), Thomas (1854-1910). Thomas entered the Assumption but it would seem that he became a member of the secular clergy in Marseille. At the death of Jules Monnier, great efforts were made to help the family out both at Nîmes and at Auteuil.

⁸ At that time, there were two Tissots at Assumption, the future Fr. Paul-Elphège and the married layman mentioned here, also a native of Lyons, Joseph, born in 1829, perhaps a relative of the Abbé.

⁹ The Germer-Durand family, who lived in Nîmes since 1844, Roussy Street, next to the synagogue, included at least five children: Jean, Brigadier General (1839, deceased before 1919), Daniel (1840-1841), Michel (1842-1843), François, architect (1843-1906), Joseph (1845-1917), Assumptionist, and Elizabeth (1848-1851).

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION AND RESEARCH

Jules Monnier, *Un maître chrétien, notice sur F.-V. Cardenne (Souvenirs, Meditations, Prières, Entretiens)*. Paris-Nîmes, 1854, 298 pages.

Jean-Paul Périer-Muzet, *Notices biographiques des Religieux de*

L'Assomption, Rome, 2000, vol. I, p. 495-496.

Siméon Vailhé, *Vie du P. d'Alzon*, Paris, B.P., 1926,1.1, p. 405-408, 587-592.

Galeran, *Croquis d'Alzon*, Paris, B.P., 1924, p. 258-266.

On Valmagne, you may consult Brun's article in *Bulletin du Comité de l'art chrétien*, Nîmes, t. IX (1909), p. 129-250 and that of Renouvier, *L'Abbaye de Valmagne* in *Mémoires de la société de l'Aveyron*, t. V., 1845, p. 424-427.

FOR A PERSONALIZED READING

- Fr. d'Alzon's correspondence and the book by Jules Monnier give many other aspects of Brother Victor Cardenne's personality which had its share of qualities and virtues. Can you give a portrait of this first religious of the Assumption in heaven?
- In your estimation, what were the criteria used to recruit the teaching staff at Nîmes?
- Fr. d'Alzon, on a visit to Lavagnac, had invited Brother Cardenne who accompanied him on some of his excursions. Another letter of Fr. d'Alzon evokes Valmagne. Are you familiar with it (Cf. letter no. 530, June 17, 1847 ed. Siméon Vailhé, t. III, p. 260)?

17

THE OFFICIAL BIRTH OF THE ASSUMPTION

The historical origins of the Assumptionists, without dispute, go back to Christmas night 1845, to the time of the July Monarchy and the struggle of d'Alzon for freedom of secondary education, a date that perfectly regroups the unity of a foundation with a three-tiered structure: the College, the Congregation, and the Third Order. That is indeed the date retained, not only by those who like chronological precision, even if they appear to be a minority, but also the one explicitly given by the foundational text and by later references which the Assumption itself makes in presenting its origins. The beginning of a religious life organized in the form of a novitiate is cited in the correspondence of Fr. d'Alzon to Mère Marie-Eugénie de Jésus, dated the morning of December 26, 1845.¹ In his numerous requests for official recognition for the Congregation in Rome, as in the indispensable episcopal testimonial letters joined to the requests, the Founder of the Assumption always referred to Christmas 1845. Finally, if a curious observer takes the trouble to consult the very official *Annuario Pontificio*, he will clearly see how perfectly accurate these calendar references are.

Whence comes then this apparent 'chronological cacophony' in the commemorative celebrations of the Assumption, 1850 instead of 1845, for the centenary (1950) and sesquicentennial (2000)? The answer is as simple as it is simplistic: the five years that it took for Bishop Cart to accept the initiative of his Vicar General; the bishop *allowed it to happen without officially authorizing it*. Let us only admire the patient faith of a man who has been accused sometimes of impatience, inconsistency, and fickleness. Men who like round numbers skip over the obstacle of "obstinate" numbers and the bottom line. This tendency, together with the distance that memory produces, easily led to certain "adjustments" of time. In 1945, the world was just emerging from the cataclysm of five years of war. Men needed time to forget these troubled years in order to build better days. 1850 as 1950 holds an aura of roundness, contrary to 1845 and 1945, when on the one hand Assumption had experienced semi-rejections, and a

century later on the other hand, was counting its dead and its prisoners. Like good sports, let us rejoice with Fr. d'Alzon as he announces victory, without forgetting the years of struggle.

"My dear daughter.

Even if I have only a minute, I want to say two words to you. All of a sudden tonight, the bishop has allowed MM. Hippolyte, Cardenne, Pernet, Brun and myself² to take vows for a year.³ Praise God! I regret not having been able to let you know in time. You could have united your prayers to ours. I believe that I have found the 10,000 francs for Miss Gaude;⁴ I will take care of the rest. I will have someone write to Miss Stafford⁵ for her English lady. Mr. de Chartrouse⁶ wants to take Miss Dubois⁷ only in the month of April or May. Adieu, my daughter. As soon as I get out of the mess Vm in, I will write to you. May the Child Jesus be everything for you! I will offer you to him while I offer him my self."

—Letter of Christmas Eve 1850 to M. Marie-Eugénie de Jésus, Nîmes, edit. S.V., vol. III, p. 640.

"... On the night of Christmas, we⁸ have renewed our vows forever.⁹ This morning we put on the cowls,¹⁰ because they had not arrived on time. All of this has gladdened teachers and students alike.¹¹ God grant that this impression last and be fruitful! I hope so, for everything was very simple, very serious, and very natural. At the same time, one could see such a joy in those who were giving themselves to God that there is no way to doubt their good dispositions nor the certitude of a true joy in imitating them. Adieu, my dear daughter. I hope to write to you before the New Year. However, I want to wish you a happy New Year as also to all your daughters. May Our Lord make them true religious, filled with zeal for their perfection and that of the souls to whose salvation they must devote themselves. All yours in Our Lord."

—Letter no. 110, Nîmes, December 26, 1851, to Mère Marie-Eugénie de Jésus, in edit. P.T., vol. I, p. 123.

¹ Letter no. 442, edit. S.V., t. II, p. 416-420, which was widely distributed by Fr. Richard Lamoureux at Christmas 2000.

² We have here a very precise list of the first five professed Assumptionist religious, in alphabetical order: E. d'Alzon, Henri Brun, Victor Cardenne, Étienne Pernet, Hippolyte Saugrain. Compare this list to that of the 6 postulants of 1845!

³ The formula of profession in Latin: cf. *Merits spirituels*, p. 807.

⁴ Miss Cesarine Gaude, an R.A. postulant, from Nîmes, born in 1815, became Sister Marie-Rodriguez de la Misericorde in 1849, professed in 1851, died in 1877.

⁵ Miss Stafford is an English woman converted to Catholicism by Fr. d'Alzon during the Advent series he preached at Saint-Baudile in 1838. She gave English lessons in a family of Nîmes and sought to find a position for another woman, a certain Mrs. Gorham.

⁶ It is difficult to identify this person; could he be related to the Baron Laugier de Chartrouse (1804-1877), whose son studied at Assumption?

⁷ Miss Dubois was probably a candidate for a position of tutor or governess. We have not found her name in the correspondence of the time of Mère Marie-Eugénie.

⁸ The "we" represents Fr. d'Alzon, Fr. Henri Brun, and Brothers Étienne Pernet and Hippolyte Saugrain. Brother Cardenne died on December 14, 1851. Brother François Picard took his annual vows on December 24, 1850.

⁹ That will be the rule for profession in the Congregation until 1923: two years of novitiate for the choir brothers, three for the lay brothers. At the end of the first year, which takes place in a canonically erected novitiate, unless there is a dispensation, the annual profession is made, if this year is deemed valid; the following year, perpetual profession takes place. Lay brothers pronounce their first vows after three years only.

¹⁰ The cowl, a feature of the habit borrowed from the Augustinian Order or the Dominicans, is a short hooded cape that covers the shoulders. It is related to the ecclesiastical mozetta and the hood worn by priests. Cf. the study of P. Tournèraud, *Formes monastiques*.

¹¹ What other echoes are there of these ceremonies? Cf. Galeran, *Croquis*, p. 69 (1850).

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION AND RESEARCH

On religious Life in The Assumption:

Premières Constitutions des Augustins de l'Assomption 1855-1865, Rome Edition, 1966, 243 pages.

Cérémonial de vêture et de profession, (without date or place), 128 pages.

Rituale congregationis Augustinianorum ab Assumptione, Paris, 1935, 193 pages.

Notes on the aim and the spirit of the Order (1845-1850), in *Écrits spirituels*, p. 644-648.

Directoire (1859) in *Écrits spirituels*, p. 15-124.

Instructions de Clôture des Chapitres généraux de 1868 and four Letters to the master of novices (1868-1869) in *Écrits spirituels*, p. 687-691.

Retraite sur les vœux avec le P. d'Alzon, J.P.P.-M., pro manuscript, 1994.

To study the thought of Fr. d'Alzon:

Athanase Sage, *Un maître spiritual au XIXème siècle*, Rome, 1958, 184 pages.

André Sève, *Ma vie c'est le Christ*, Le Centurion, Paris, 1980, 184 pages.

For a contemporary theology of religious life:

J.-M.-R Tillard, *Devant Dieu et pour le monde*, Paris, Cerf, 1974, Coll. Cogitatio Fidei n. 75, 460 pages.

History of the Congregation of the Augustinians of the Assumption:

In addition to the articles in the specialized dictionaries or collections.

Jean Monval, *Les Assomptionnistes*, Grasset, 1939;

Adrien Pépin, *Les Religieux de l'Assomption*, Bonne Presse, 1963;

Lucien Guissard, *Les Assomptionnistes, d'hier à aujourd'hui*, Bayard, Editions *From Past to Present*, Bayard, U.S.A. 2002; in Dutch *De Assumptionisten toen en nu*, in Brazilian Portuguese, *Os Assuncionistas de ontem e hoje*, *Imprentas Salesianos*, Santiago de Chile, 2003)

Jean-Paul Périer-Muzet, *Petit Manuel Histoire de l'Assomption*, Rome, 2003.

In Spanish one can refer to the work of Fernando Aliaga Rojas, *Religiosos Asuncionistas, 100 años al servicio de la Iglesia en Chile: 1890-1990*, Santiago de Chile, 1990, 247 pages.

FOR A PERSONALIZED READING

- How do you understand the importance that Fr. d'Alzon gave to

monastic forms in the Assumption?

- What do you know about the practice of a fourth vow in the Assumption? What are its various elements?
- In your opinion, do simplicity in form and spiritual joy appear to be sufficient for a profession of public vows?
- What are the various forms which the Assumptionist religious habit took over time? What are your ideas on this matter and what does our present Rule of Life say about it?

18

THE FIRST FOUNDATION IN PARIS

The idea of an Assumptionist foundation in the French capital originated much earlier than its realization (1851). To make this dream a reality, d'Alzon had a few aces up his sleeve that he could count on, not to mention quite a few friends. He understood what advantages it would offer for the growth of his religious family. Moreover, Mère Marie-Eugénie de Jésus, who would be happy to attract him to Paris, urged him to move in that direction. Bishop Affre had already expressed his hope that Fr. d'Alzon would take on the administration of Stanislas College that the Vicar General of Nîmes had refused, preferring to take care of the growing needs of the Nîmes school. The nomination of Bishop Sibour, a former acquaintance of Fr. d'Alzon, to replace Bishop Affre of Gallican tendencies, slain at the barricades in 1848, made his decision somewhat easier. Laurent, Tissot and Cardenne formed the first Assumptionist trio of this new teaching community in Paris at the beginning of the 1851 academic year. Very quickly the choice of neighborhood, along with the extremely modest resources and the lack of students, proved to be very poor. In 1853, the boarding school was transferred to the northwest gates of the capital, to Clichy-la Garenne, a neighborhood of rather ill repute, but which still enjoyed the magic of that day when its holy pastor, Vincent de Paul, passed by.

From 1853 to 1860, Fr. d'Alzon became the 'clockmaker of a community' that had to face many internal storms under the direction of its superior and director, Fr. Charles Laurent; as soon as the clock was installed and the mechanism set up, it would break down, to cite his own expression. Fr. d'Alzon himself who faced a financial crisis at the Nîmes school in the years 1856-1857, preferred to have the novitiate harbored peacefully in a small annex to the convent of Auteuil, on Eymes Street. Picard, as a young priest, would have the experience of being superior there after his first experience in Rome.

In 1860, another solution was found: Brother Vincent de Paul Bailly, then

a novice, had to visit his dying father. He discovered in the François Ier neighborhood an *oddshaped piece of land* for building. An offer was made to Fr. d'Alzon in November 1860; Cardinal Morlot approved the choice in December of the same year. A very modest *ramshackle house* was built in 1861 and on February 23, 1862, once the chapel had been blessed, the religious celebrated the first Mass. Such were the humble beginnings of the chapel of Our Lady of Salvation, destined for robust growth. Preaching, ministry of reconciliation and spiritual direction would make of the modest Pernet the founder of a new congregation of the Assumption in 1865. Picard and Vincent de Paul Bailly would seize other challenges after 1870: pilgrimages, the press, and congresses or assemblies.

Mr. Hippolyte¹ wrote to me yesterday about a building that, according to what he tells me, appears to be quite suitable.² But since it concerns a final and solemn decision, I wanted to wait at least one night. I had our brothers pray; I, myself, have just celebrated mass; I gathered the council of seven³; and after a final vote, it was unanimously decided to go forward. We will go, therefore, in the name of Our Lord and of the Blessed Virgin. There remain only questions of details, but, for that, you know with how much confidence I entrust everything to you.

Here is just one observation. I would like the house to be leased in the name of Abbé Charles Laurent,⁴ priest of the diocese of Nîmes, Licencié in Letters. Could you, while waiting for him to arrive, negotiate the contract for him? It would be a guarantee for the owner, but can you do it? As for me, it would be very important that my name not appear because of my family, who would complain loudly.⁵ I want to place the house under the patronage of St. Charles and open it on November 4.⁶ I don't think that it would be good at the start if we had the same name as you in Paris. The idea of calling the house St. Charles came to me a little while ago at the elevation. Don't you think that it would be good to advise Fr. Caire of Saint-Philippe du Roule?⁷ I believe that we are in his parish. Could you mention it to Abbé Sibour?⁸ Should I write to the archbishop right away? It seems to me that seven teachers would be sufficient.⁹ Do you want the names? Messers Laurent, director; Cardenne, bursar; Legier, monitor; Tissot, sixth form, Blanchet, seventh form.¹⁰ Teachers for the eight and ninth forms remain to be found, but that will not be difficult. Do you think we should begin before November 4. That

might prove to be difficult. I would really like to keep Messers Laurent and Cardenne until October 1; one month would suffice to make the arrangements, especially if you could render us the extreme kindness of having a few repairs taken care of.

I would not like classrooms at street level; I would prefer to place some of them on the second floor. Hippolyte is talking about a room that faces the street. Could we not make it into a parlor? Perhaps we could fix it up a little more suitably. Everything must be very simple; I see no reason to act otherwise. It seems to me that the bedding could be bought later, but you have more expertise in the matter than I. People are waiting for my letter. In sum, lease and take care of it as you wish. I am speaking only about us. You will forgive me for that, won't you?

Here is a list of conditions; see if they suit you. We can change the cost of boarding, etc"

—Letter to Mère Marie-Eugénie de Jésus, Nîmes, July 4, 1851,
edit. P.T., 1.1, p. 53-54.

¹ Saugrain, Hippolyte, a Norman from Ecquetot (1822-1905). As a young man he had worked as a clerk in a business. His profile was composed by Fr. Polyeucte Guissard, *Portraits assumptionnistes*, p. 3-13.

² We have every reason to believe that it concerns the future Assumptionist boarding school situated at 234 Faubourg Saint-Honore, a leased building, that tradition places on the site of the present Parisian Dominican convent of the Annunciation, no. 222.

³ The Council of Seven in 1851 included besides Fr. d'Alzon, Fr. Henri Brun, Brothers Victor Cardenne, Hippolyte Saugrain, Abbé Elphège Tissot and two laymen, Germer-Durand and Monnier.

⁴ That is what is explicitly mentioned in the entry about this private boarding school in the official *Almanach imperial* of 1853. It is also mentioned how much the neighborhood mattered.

⁵ The d'Alzon family was already quite alarmed by Fr. d'Alzon's debts at the school in Nîmes.

⁶ On the Roman calendar, it is the feast day of St. Charles Borromeo (1538-1584).

⁷ Abbé André-Antoine Caire, born in Marseille in 1797, Canon of Paris in 1849, was indeed pastor of Saint-Philippe de Roule parish, before becoming Vicar General of Amiens. He died in 1856. However, according to the archives of the Archdiocese of Paris, Canon Jean-Hippolyte Ausoure (1793-1875) was the pastor in

1851.

⁸ For the two Sibours, see p. 55.

⁹ The Paris boarding school was never more than an expanded tutorial institution with a maximum of twenty students.

¹⁰ Identities to be clarified: Abbé Elzéar Blanchet was only a Nîmes cleric in minor orders and Ernest-Gustave Légier was already listed in the Nîmes school register as a Monitor.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION AND RESEARCH

On the boarding school located on Faubourg-Saint-Honoré Street:

Siméon Vailhé, *Vie du P. d'Alzon*, Paris, B.R, 1834, t. II, p. 68-70.

Sur les pas du P. d'Alzon à Paris, Jean-Paul Périet-Muzet, pro manuscripto, 4 pages.

On the city of Paris:

In the collection *Guides bleus*, Paris, 1984.

Alfred Fierro, *Histoire et dictionnaire de Paris*, Paris, Robert:Laffont, 1996, col. Bouquins, 1580 pages.

J. Hillairet, *Dictionnaire historique des rues de Paris*, 1963, 2 volumes and supplement (1991).

Dictionnaire des monuments de Paris, Hervas, 1992.

On the foundations of the R.A.s in Paris, from 1839 to 1900:

cf. the book *Origines de L'Assomption*, Paris, 4 vol. (1898-1902).

On the residence located on François Ier Street-

consult *Pages d'Archives*, October 1956, no. 4.

FOR A PERSONALIZED READING

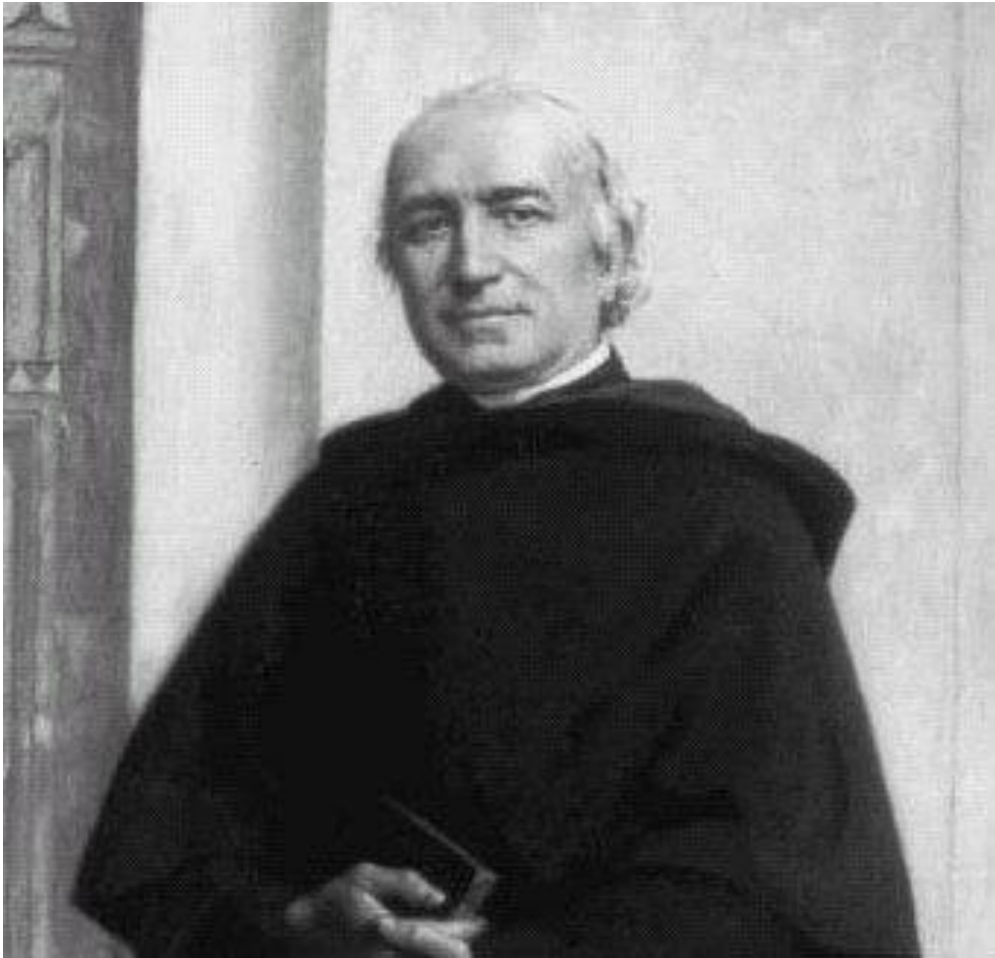
- What is Fr. d'Alzon's state of mind as he announces the decision to found a community?
- Mère Marie-Eugénie de Jésus is greatly solicited by Fr. d'Alzon in internal questions concerning the Assumptionists. How do you understand that? Does the involvement of persons outside a

religious community seem to be a desirable form of community government? In your opinion what are the advantages and the risks?

- In your opinion what were the advantages for the Assumption to venture into the capital at that time?



One can read d'Alzon's commentary on St. Baudille in the series entitled *Assomption en Nîmes*, #70 (pp. 357-358).



THE FOUNDER OF THE LITTLE SISTERS OF THE ASSUMPTION
Fr. Pernet after 1870

19

THE CALL OF DISTANT LANDS: THE UNIVERSAL VISION AND MISSION OF THE ASSUMPTION

Nîmes, the French Rome, did not restrict the missionary vision nor the intellectual preoccupations of the founder of the Assumption. A remarkable letter of 1851 to a Religious of the Assumption in England set the visionary objectives of Fr. d'Alzon in two directions; partially formed in Rome, Fr. d'Alzon did not forget the call of distant lands to which the sense of a universal Church called him on the level of ideas and on the practical level. Even if he lived through the Lamennais drama from the inside, even if he suffered from the fact that in the geographical capital of the Catholic world the men who establish the moral laws and the rules of perfection conform, with difficulty, their own behavior to what they preach, he did not lose sight of the lesson of universalism that he learned there.

The first objective on the agenda was establishing in Nîmes the foundations of an independent university, even if it could not be Catholic, the idea of which had been suggested to him by Bishop Baines, Apostolic Vicar in England, and which came back to him during the Provincial Council of Avignon in 1849. He knew that something of the sort had already been tried in Paris at the Ecole des Carmes; but he wanted in his mind to avoid any form of take-over or control of a Gallican kind in this enterprise, that inevitably, he thought, would tend toward Caesarism in order to extricate itself from any ultramontane influence. Fr. d'Alzon knew full well of the efforts of the imperial power to obtain from Rome a bull of canonical approval for the theology faculties of the State Universities which would favor the Gallican traditions of episcopal autonomy and customary law. Thus he elaborated his plans for a university to be placed one day under the patronage of Saint Augustine. He recruited a professor of dogma, Abbé Bensa. For the theological formation of his religious, he would choose to send them to the Roman theological faculties so that they might adopt ultramontane habits of thought, feelings, and faith. In 1855, he sent F. Picard, V. Galabert, R. Jourdan and M-J. Lévy there. The second objective

was without doubt kindled in Fr. d'Alzon by the missionary experience of the Religious of the Assumption; since 1849, they had spread to the other side of the world, to South Africa, in Capetown, and in 1850 they went to England, in Richmond. These two departures from the French cradle were tough missionary experiences and yet what better universal horizon could there be in the eyes of the one who wanted to place his Congregation in the universal orbit of Roman authority and not under the yoke of episcopal authority! The male Assumption was still too small and bade its time, but it was already being defined.

"If I have waited so long to answer your letter, it is because I have been quite ill for a long time and not wanting to write only a few lines, I wanted to wait till my strength had come back a little in order to converse with you at length. Firstly allow me to thank you for the interest you have taken in our house in Paris. It is beginning very small, but that does not worry me for we began here in Nîmes in exactly the same manner. For the English brochure, if you judge it opportune to make one, prepare it however you wish. Each people has its own way in which things have to be presented to them, and I understand very well all those differences and nuances. So on this subject you have full power, and there is no one else whom I could trust more to send me subjects from England, if God wills.¹

The more I think about it, the more I am convinced of the need to have for each people indigenous workers for the Gospel. I was speaking about that a few days ago with a Carthusian Prior,² a remarkable man who was making absolutely the same remarks about the religious of his Order. If then you want to make use of Assumptionist religious, you must choose them and send them to us until we have a novitiate in England;³ and that may not be for a long time yet. I must admit, however, that, for me, you must desire to have the help and support of men formed in the same way as you, who would move you forward in the spirit of your rules, because they would know them better, and who would also benefit from the good influence of the sisters. It would remain to fix certain limits to avoid certain disadvantages, encroachments and even abuses; but that, I believe, would be taken care of beforehand, and I must admit that that is one of the questions that concern me most in our future relations.⁴

The small crosses that result for you from the thousand little

discussions among your Fathers do not surprise me at all. It is the sad side of human nature; its weight keeps growing. After all, that proves that it is not men who have made moral laws or the rules of perfection and that they come from a higher authority, since they find it so difficult to conform their own behavior to what they preach. That is very sad; God permits it so that we learn to rely on him alone.

I find you very happy to be able to do something good for your poor Protestants. Here, there is no way to approach them, but God seems to have some merciful intentions for them. The rich are afraid and revert willingly to ideas of authority. People go to what is the deepest shade of red. But perhaps it is a means, undoubtedly terrible, to separate them from the influence of their ministers and of a sectarian spirit. Later, saints will be able to act more easily on these poor masses. Oh! If it would only please God to send us some apostles soon!...

Pray hard for the Assumption of Nîmes. I want to establish here a Superior Normal School, and even this will start very soon. We will have at first four professors, later a greater number, if necessary. I am starting, as I told you, a theology course in the house. I would like to establish that as the seed of a Catholic University, but a University that would depend only on Rome. Little by little, hopefully, we will reach our goal. Among our children, there is evidence of a great number of vocations for the foreign missions, and perhaps that is one of the causes that will attract the most blessings of God on us..."

—Letter to Sister Thérèse-Emmanuel O'Neil,⁵ Nîmes, September 13, 1851, in the P.T. edit, 1.1, p. 80-83.

¹ The first Anglophone A.A. was Fr. Edmund O'Donnell (1796-1869).

² This was Dom Augustine Dussap (1803-1864), Prior of the Carthusian Monastery of Valbonne, re-established in 1836.

³ An A.A. novitiate was opened in Nottingham, on June 20, 1941 and transferred to Capenor in 1948, after the establishment of the Province of England (1946-2000).

⁴ Fr. d'Alzon always held a preference for the free relations of friendship rather than the lines of authority (cf. Chap 47 Relations inter-Assomption).

⁵ This Irish R.A. (1817-1888) was the founding superior in Richmond, England.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION AND RESEARCH

Claude Maréchal, *Mission sans frontières*, Letter no. 10, June 1995, 23 pages. General Chapter of 1999, *Passion for God in a New Century*.

Actes du colloque de l'aventure missionnaire de L'Assomption Lyon 2000, Rome, 2001.

Mémoire Assomptionniste, Écrits au fil des ans 1859-2000, du Bugey, 2000, 181 pages.

Lucien Guissard, *The Assumptionists From Past to Present*, Bayard/Le Centurion, 1999, 172 pages, op.cit. on page 96, and translated into four other languages

Pierre Touveneraud, *l'apostolat à L'Assomption 1945-1973*, pro manuscripto, 22 pages.

Assumptionist Session, Rome, 1997 (Intellectual formation and specialized studies).

See also: the Report to the members of the General Chapter of 1999 prepared by a preconiliar commission: *'Pour une politique intellectuelle à l'Assomption'*, St. Gérard, May 1998, 24 pages.

FOR A PERSONALIZED READING

- Do the Assumptionists have a policy with regard to the intellectual life? How would you define it?
- By what initiatives did Fr. d'Alzon show his choices for a marked doctrinal formation in the Assumption?
- Did the emergence of a desire to form an international congregation have its beginnings in Fr. d'Alzon's day? Elaborate.
- Was the missionary adventure of the Assumption inspired by those strong convictions of Fr. d'Alzon? At what moment(s)? Why, in your opinion?

20

RIDING THE ULTRAMONTANE WAVE

We cannot understand the insertion of Fr. d'Alzon into the ecclesial context of his time without his ultramontane commitment, a trend correctly defined as *a part of the Church that has its eyes turned beyond the Alps, that is, towards Rome*. But if ultramontanism was united in the commitment to the Pope and in the image of the three white symbols (host, papal cassock, and the Virgin), there is nonetheless a variety of nuances between the uncompromising ultramontanes, such as Fr. d'Alzon, and the moderate ultramontanes. Historians trace the rise of this trend, from Pius VII, figure of the martyr-pope, to Pius IX, the prisoner-pope; they see its crux in the imbroglio of the Roman Question that little by little transformed the Papal States into a woeful pocket of land as a result of the Italian Unification; they describe its zenith at Vatican I that proclaimed the primacy and the infallibility of the Pope, which signaled the end of Gallicanism. They underlined its various tones and the scope of its expressions: the schools controversy, the liturgy, the teaching given in seminaries, the forms of devotions and spiritual accents. Finally, they point out its truly important aspects: the paroxysm of a Catholicism of authority, the branding of so-called enemies from within (liberals, Gallicans, heretics, schismatics) and of outside enemies (anti-clericals, Free-Masons, and rationalists). The anti-liberal and uncompromising aspects of this ultramontane Catholicism developed passionate mentalities and behaviors that gave to the Church the image of a besieged fortress. We know the thinkers that fed it: from the counter-revolutionary current of de Bonald and de Maistre, to the evolutionary current of Lamennais, bard of the temporal power of the popes, to the spirited style of the journalist, Louis Veuillot, whose newspaper, *L'Univers*, enflamed rectories. All of this came together to make any small desire of autonomy or affirmation of national traditions degenerate into schools of controversy. Its extreme marching orders were: centralization, latinization, romanization, absolute papal power. But the price to pay for the Church, held tightly or soldered doctrinally in the

Syllabus, was heavy for it required going against the flow of the times. Fr. d'Alzon's impregnation with that spirit was profound. The signs are numerous and striking: not less than nine sojourns in Rome, numerous audiences, both public and even private, with the Pope, the constant requests for opinions and indults from Rome. But it would be wrong to think that it was something superficial since it touched the three essential poles of his spirituality: *to love Christ, Mary, and the Church*, from which his typical devotional accents flowed: eucharistic, ecclesiological, and Marian.

"Bishop,

Last night, I had a long audience with the Pope.¹ I think it will please you to have an account of it. However, I would be grateful if you returned this letter to me in Nîmes; I don't feel very strong and I prefer not to write the account of what happened, twice.

I was received at 9 P.M. The Pope had on his desk a request that I had sent to him the preceding evening via Bishop Ségur² concerning the Religious of the Assumption. I substituted another request for the first, and the Pope, on reading it, saw your name among the bishops who had written in favor of these Ladies: 'Ah! The bishop of Montauban', he said; 'he is a very good bishop! I allowed myself to tell him immediately that you were the bishop I esteemed the most in France: 'Yes' said the Pope, 'when he came here, I admired his gravity, his prudence; I was very pleased with him.' Afterwards, I had to speak to him for a brief moment of a matter concerning relics in which the archbishop of Toulouse is involved³: 'Ah! That one' he said, 'I do not like him as much as the bishop of Montauban.' The bishop of Nîmes wanted the Pope to write to Bishop Mioland. (A thousand pardons for this ink blot, I won't begin again.) The Pope did not want to. Besides Fioramonti,⁴ to whom I had spoken, had indeed told me that they did not get along. These preliminaries having been taken care of, I asked his permission to open my heart to him about the state of France. I'd be happy to,' he replied, 'and take your time.' I began by telling him what you and I both know:

- 1. That the Gallicans are beginning to raise their heads;*
- 2. The government is encouraging them;⁵*
- 3. That the fine situation that Fornari⁶ had created for the nuncio in France⁷ is being eroded every day.*

He agreed with me entirely...."

–Letter to Bishop Doney,⁸ bishop of Montauban, Rome, May 31,
1855 in the P.T. edition, 1.1, p. 550-554.

¹ Pius IX (1792-1878) elected pope in 1846, proclaimed Blessed, along John XXIII, by Rome in October 2000. He was undoubtedly the most anti-liberal pope in history. There are numerous biographies, of unequal value, of this pope. The last volume, well documented, by Roger Aubert, in the Fliche and Martin collection, *Histoire de l'Eglise*, is given over to him (re-edited in 1971). Also there are studies about him in Italian by Martina, Crocella, and Croce.

² Bishop Louis-Gaston-Adrien de Ségur (1820-1881), son of the famous countess, blind prelate (1854), author of numerous pamphlets, purveyor of seminaries and president of the Association of Saint Francis de Sales.

³ Bishop Jean-Marie Mioland (1788-1859), named coadjutor of Toulouse in 1849, with full succession in 1851.

⁴ Bishop Domenico Fioramonti, at the time, private secretary of Pope Pius IX.

⁵ Fr. d'Alzon here is taking aim at the minister for religious affairs of Napoleon III, Hippolyte Fortoul (1811-1856) that he had known at the Law Faculty in Paris in 1829. Journalist and later university professor, he began a career in politics in 1849. He was chosen as Minister for Public Education and for Religious Affairs after the coup d'état of December 1851, at the same time indeed as Fr. d'Alzon was not named to another term as member of the High Commission on Public Education (1852). Fortoul sought to minimize the influence of the Church by controlling the nominations of bishops and a restrictive application of the Falloux Law.

⁶ Cardinal Raffaele Fornari (1788-1854), Nuncio in Brussels from 1838 to 1842, later in Paris from 1842 to 1850, curial cardinal in Rome from 1850 until his death. [Cf. the article in D.H.G.E., (*Dictionnaire d'Histoire et de Géographie Ecclésiastiques*), vol. 17, col. 1095-1107.]

⁷ Cardinal Carlo Sacconi (1808-1889), succeeded Fornari as Nuncio in Paris until his elevation to the cardinalate in 1861.

⁸ Bishop Jean-Marie Doney (1794-1871) is a former disciple of Lamennais, made a bishop in 1844.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION AND RESEARCH

On the personalities of the Second Empire mentioned above,
Jean Tulard, *Dictionnaire du Second Empire*, Fayard, 1995, 1347 pages.

Jacques-Olivier Boudon, *L'épiscopat français à l'époque concordataire 1802-1905*, Cerf, 1996, 589 pages, in the collection Histoire religieuse de la France.

Histoire du Christianisme, t. XII (1830-1914), Desclee, 1995, 1172 pages.
Austin Gough, *Paris and Rome, The Gallican Church and the Ultramontane Campaign 1848-1853*, 1986 (French Translation, edit, de l'Atelier, Paris, 1996, 319 pages.)

On a hotly debated question of the controversies between the Gallicans and the Ultramontanes: Daniel Moulinet, *Les classiques païens dans les collèges catholiques?*, Cerf, 1995, 485 pages, in the Collection *Histoire religieuse de la France*.

FOR A PERSONALIZED READING

- What does the ultramontane trend inspire in you in the context of the Alzonian spirituality (love of the Church)? How can we promote the better aspects and put aside the forms that are historically obsolete?
- What criticisms or reservations would you have regarding the passionate debates, movements, and sensitivities that exist in the Catholicism of your country?
- Do you think that ultramontanism contributed positively to the liberation of the Church in the 19th century? In what aspects and how?
- Conversely, to what dead ends and limits did this spiritual and doctrinal movement lead?

Part III

21. D'Alzon at Lamalou, Trials of Health.....	86
22. Honor Your Father and Mother	90
23. An Heir-Founder of Fr. d'Alzon: Fr. Victorin Galabert	94
24. Advice to a Young Superior	98
25. A Father's Attention for His Daughters	102
26. Father d'Alzon, Gentleman-Farmer	106
27. Life's Wounds.....	110
28. The Missionary Adventure in Australia	114
29. A Ramshackle House in Paris	118
30. A Favorite Son: Vincent de P. Bailly	122

Beaufort, Notre Dame des Châteaux
Marian Sites



"We'll place a statue of the Blessed Virgin in the round tower and that's how we'll make the place Notre Dame des Châteaux. We'll place a small chapel inside the tower and it'll be beautiful. You shall see that when we inaugurate this statue, there'll be a splendid party throughout the region," boasted Fr. d'Alzon to the minor seminarians of Notre Dame des Châteaux, 17 July 1872, cf. Letters, Volume IX (editions Deraedt), p. 400.



See an enthusiastic description of this site by Fr. d'Alzon in the same volume, pp. 166-167.

21

D'ALZON AT LAMALOU, TRIALS OF HEALTH

The spa (hot springs) of Lamalou-les-Bains, built along the right bank of the Bitoulet River, in a lovely vale of the southern Cévennes mountains (Hérault), calls to mind the thirteen visits of Fr. d'Alzon who was stricken with a paralysis of one side due to a cerebral hemorrhage on May 19, 1854. It has been rightly said, as Fr. Athanase Sage claimed, that this date marked a complete spiritual turnaround in the life of Emmanuel d'Alzon, who, until then, had almost been drowning in the thousand agonies of a hyperactive apostolate.

Certainly Lamalou was neither the first nor the only spa that Fr. d'Alzon knew; he frequented and would continue to visit Eaux-Bonnes (Pyrénées-Atlantiques, 1847), Vichy (Allier, 1854), Bagnères-de-Bigorre (Hautes-Pyrénées, 1868, 1874), but Lamalou remained the point of reference of Alzonian spirituality where some of his major writings were composed: the *Reasoned Examination of the Adoratrices*, the *Meditation on the Crucifix* or *A Friend for Everyday*, and finally the *Directory*, first written for the Religious of the Assumption, and later revised for the Assumptionists. Many letters that recount the spiritual profit that the Founder, obliged to take care of himself, drew from this trial of poor health, were sent from Lamalou. Did he not write, for example, that 'God does not take away our strength except the better to force us to pray?' In the baggage that he unpacked at the Hôtel des Bains where he would stay could be found the *Imitation of Christ* and the New Testament, each of them read and meditated continually. In 1858, he confided to his friend, Doctor Jean-Léon Privat (1810-1897), medical inspector of the spa from 1849 to 1881, his intention to build next to the care facility a chapel that would replace a prayer center that was too cramped (the construction of the parish church took place only in 1893). Twenty years later in 1878, the project was realized with the start of the construction of Dr. Privat's medical center, the first building being the Chapel of Our Lady of Mercy, utilizing stone from Beaucaire. At that time Fr. d'Alzon wanted to furnish the altar in the chapel dedicated to Saint Joseph.

Dr. Privat wrote: 'When he returned to Lamalou in 1879 after an absence of a few years, my dear friend d'Alzon found a chapel built on the grounds. He raised his eyes to heaven, a big tear ran down his cheek and he shook my hand affectionately and slid me an offering.'

This little village of the Hérault, which had become a spa, had only 750 inhabitants in 1880, but its reputation in the medical world was well established. It was from there that on June 21, 1857 he addressed to the Adoratrices du Saint-Sacrement ("Adorers of the Blessed Sacrament") the meditation on the Crucifix, reprinted later with the title of 'L'Ami de tous les jours' ("An Everyday Friend") that has moved and comforted so many who were unhappy and ill and strengthened innumerable hearts.

For Clémentine,¹ Lamalou , about May 23, 1856.

"My dear child,

If only you knew how much your promptitude in writing to me has touched me! Also, I want you to know how much I welcome your letters. Yesterday, I received^ yours at lunch time. I quickly looked at what you said about Juliette,² and when I had been reassured, I put your letter in my pocket, I had lunch (a most important thing at the spa) and I left for a walk by myself I had been walking for some three hours; I wanted to arrive at the top of a mountain and I was only at its base. I asked some lumberjacks for the shortest route. They showed me a kind of path cut through the woods on a steep mountain. I began a real climb. I could take no more than twenty-five steps at a time before stopping to catch my breath; I started to wear a hole in my socks and my cassock was torn. When I arrived halfway up, I looked back down: it was harder to go back down than to keep climbing. My tongue was hanging out and the strength to go on disappeared. I sat down, as well I could, behind a small green oak and I read your letter.

This path, on which I stopped so often, where I grimaced so hard to go forward, made me think, and I cannot tell you all the immense compassion I had for your past hesitations. I began to offer the stones that rolled under my feet, the sun that beat down upon me, for your perseverance. If you only knew all the good resolutions I made for your intentions, and the patience that I promised myself to exercise in order to inspire you, when you are not feeling up to it! I offered much of my tiredness for the

intentions of Juliette and for our two saint Helens,³ and, also in this good company, I finished my excursion, with the help of God and of Saint Michael, visiting a hermitage dedicated to him.⁴

I say all of this to encourage you to write to me. I want this letter to give you as much moral strength as yours gives me physical strength. Good-bye, my child. All yours in Our Lord.

E. d'Alzon"

—E. d'Alzon to Miss Clémentine Chassanis, May 1856, from
Lettres d'Alzon, edit. P.T., t. II, p. 84.

¹ In 1856, Clémentine Chassanis was a young girl of the elite of Nîmes, former student of the Institute of the Dames de Saint-Maur, who became president of the Association of the same name, Place de la Calade, also member of the Association of the Children of Mary. Fr. d'Alzon thought of her to form the group of the Adorers of the Blessed Sacrament.

² Juliette Combie, another well-known person among the former students of Saint-Maur; already a member of the female branch of the Third-Order of the Assumption in Nîmes; had Fr. d'Alzon as spiritual director. He knew and esteemed her family: the parents, Jean-Emile Combie and Mrs. Amélie nee Lavendet de Lafigère, and their four children: Juliette, Delphine, who became Mrs. Emile Doumet, and later a Little Sister of the Assumption, Louise and Maurice. Louise (1828-1870), younger sister of Juliette, became in 1855 a Religious of the Assumption under the name of Sister Marie-Catherine du Précieux Sang. Emile Doumet, Junior, would become Fr. Paul-François, Assumptionist (1857-1905) and his sister Amélie (1852-1921) became a Religious of the Assumption, the future Marie-Catherine de l'Enfant-Jesus, for a short time third superior general of the R.A.s. As for Blanche Doumet, sister-in-law of Delphine, she tried religious life briefly with the Oblates in 1866 with the name of Sister Emmanuel-Madeleine.

³ Hélène Rouvier, future Adoratrice, and Sister Sainte-Hélène, Sister of Saint-Maur or of the Enfant-Jesus, congregation founded by Blessed Nicolas Barre, nee Marguerite Chalvet (1809-1874).

⁴ St. Michael's Hermitage, 448 meters high, with a Romanesque chapel and vestiges of the ramparts of a medieval fortress that Simon of Montfort is said to have destroyed. Other points of visits in the area: Saint-Pierre de Rêdes, Capimont.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION AND RESEARCH

The Christian meaning of suffering gives food for thought in the light of the mystery of Calvary. We recall the words of Paul Claudel: 'Christ did not give a sermon on suffering, but took up his cross and allowed himself to be nailed to it.' Many pages written by spiritual authors, often based on their own experience, evoke with infinite variety and sensitivity, this obscure or scandalous aspect of the human condition which is also a test for the faith of believers.

George Tavard, *Le Père d'Alzon et la Croix de Jésus , les lettres aux Adoratrices* , Rome, January 1992, 114 pages. André Favard, *Le P. d'Alzon à Lamalou*, A.T.L.P. 1987, no. 52, p. 8-9. From the same author, *Évocation sonore 'Emmanuel d'Alzon à Lamalou,'* 1991.

Read the testimonies of believers and religious who work in the health field: François Varillon, Denis Lédogar...

FOR A PERSONALIZED READING

- Have you suffered from illness? Did the experience close you in on yourself or did it allow you to open yourself to new realities, situations, and persons?
- Did illness test your faith, did it strengthen or renew it? Did it change something in your life? Did the prayers of others support you in the trial of your illness?
- What feelings do the memories of or the encounters with the sick, the handicapped, and the suffering awaken in you?
- In your opinion how might medical facilities become places to proclaim and bear witness to the Christian faith?

22

HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER

When it came to his parents and his siblings, Emmanuel d'Alzon took profoundly to heart this commandment of the Gospel (Mt 19:19), which repeats what was already found in the Decalogue of Moses (Ex 20:12). Fr. d'Alzon was always close to his family in the difficult periods of their existence; did he not go to Turin in 1844, to the bedside of his brother-in-law, Anatole de Puységur? Does he not reproach himself for not having yet gone to pray at the tomb of his second niece, Marthe de Puységur, deceased accidentally at Lavagnac in 1845? The deaths of his two sisters, Augustine in July 1860 and Marie-Françoise in April 1869, moved him deeply: "I have come requesting silence in these places that are filled with the recollection of my sister Augustine. In vain, I return to her room searching this silence but it refuses to give it to me; in the chapel I go to sit in the places she usually took" or again: "I accompanied my dear Marie to her final resting place, and now, at each instant, I think I will see her in the salon, in the chapel, in the corridors, on the paths. I know where her body lies, I hope that her soul is in heaven." Emmanuel d'Alzon was, for his aging parents, a model of filial devotion, visiting them at Lavagnac and caring for them in their old age. He attended to Mrs. d'Alzon until her last moments as she was severely handicapped after her fall on the stairs of her residence in Montpellier. A nurse, the famous Pauline "of Lavagnac," took care of the nonagenarian Mr. d'Alzon to the very end (1864).

Although it is true that the obligations of religious and priestly life require detachment of the religious, as well as mobility and distance from their families, nonetheless there remains for them a filial duty to participate, according to their means, in accompanying them. The structures of religious life allow one to reconcile, after consultation, both the obligations of the apostolic life and the obligations that result from the various circumstances of family. We find the proof of this in the very human answer that Fr. d'Alzon gave to Br. Etienne Pernet in 1856, to the request for help on behalf of his mother, an aged widow without great resources. The future co-

founder of the Little Sisters of the Assumption in 1865, born into a modest working class family, felt the painful push and pull of the situation that could have jeopardized his religious vocation. How can one satisfy an obligation of conscience and not escape one's duty as head of the family, while preserving one's choice of a way of life? Here's the simple answer Fr. d'Alzon gives to this question!

"My dear child,¹

I begin by asking your forgiveness for not having answered you sooner. It is my trip to the waters (spa) that is somewhat to blame. I can give you no other counsel than this: agree with your brother² to create together a pension for your mother,³ and let her go back to Franche-Comte. I admit that I do not think she could live a long time away from her region. It is impossible for you to sacrifice your vocation, and I am convinced that God will always bless the community for what we will do for your mother. Your brother can, with his 1500 francs, do something; you will do your part by taking it out of our funds. Besides, you will be consulting with the superior.⁴

Since I am writing to you, I will not write to Fr. Laurent.⁵ Here is what you must tell him. I was hoping to be in Paris in the spring and I offered the bishop of Nîmes⁶ to come to Auteuil for the imperial baptism; I hoped to lodge him there. I pray Fr. Laurent to come to an understanding with the Superior to lodge him somewhere. I absolutely want the bishop to stay with us this time at Auteuil or at Clichy. Let's do what we can, but if you knew what effect that would produce in Nîmes, you would understand why I hold to that so much.

I am assured that the waters are doing me an infinite amount of good and that would not surprise me. Good-bye, dear friend. All yours and to ours.

E. d'Alzon"

I want an answer as soon as possible regarding the question of the bishop. Fr. Laurent would do a masterful job if he would receive the bishop at Clichy and would write to him immediately, after having come to an understanding with the Superior, who would write to him if he instead had to go to Auteuil. If the bishop goes to Auteuil, I would like M. Gourju⁷ to do him the honors. I

count on his friendship for me and I request this favor.

¹ Claude-Étienne Pernet, born at Vellexon (Haute-Saone) on July 23, 1823, was 33 years old at the time. The salutation 'My dear child' is both a sign of very paternal affection on the part of Fr. d'Alzon and of a relationship of complete confidence on the part of the young man.

² Étienne Pernet is the eldest of a family of four children. He preceded Jean-François, born in 1826 (at the time of this letter in 1856: he was married in 1854 to Jeanne-Pierre Charles, a police officer in Paris). Their child, Étienne-Eugène, born out of wedlock at Vellexon in November 1848 had died in October 1854 in Paris. This first wife died in February 1863, and Jean-François was married a second time with Miss Marie-Elizabeth Petit in 1868. As for his other siblings, Marguerite, born in 1829 and Simon in 1838; the latter was handicapped for life as a result of coxitis.

³ Mrs. Claude-Louis Pernet, nee Madeleine Cordelet, was a widow since July 1, 1838. Her husband, a simple laborer, did not leave a sufficient inheritance to provide for the family. Besides, Mrs. Pernet had suffered from diabetes since 1853 and had come to Paris to implore help. She died in 1857.

⁴ The 'Superior' generally designated, in Fr. d'Alzon's correspondence, Mère Marie-Eugénie de Jésus who knew Brother Étienne Pernet personally. Indeed she is the one who sent him to Fr. d'Alzon in May-June 1849.

⁵ Fr. Charles Laurent (1821-1895) was, in 1856, the superior of the community and of the school at Clichy-La-Garenne, in the northwest section of Paris.

⁶ Fr. d'Alzon, at the time recuperating at the spa at Lamalou, was taking care of finding lodgings in Paris for the Bishop of Nîmes, since 1855, Bishop Henri Plantier, either in a facility at Auteuil foreseen as the future novitiate for the Assumptionists or at Clichy. He attached great importance to rendering him this service because Bishop Plantier considered himself, for Fr. d'Alzon and the Assumption, a true friend.

⁷ Clement Gourju, father of Antonin, professor of philosophy at the school in Clichy, later principal at Roanne.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION AND RESEARCH

Do the Code of Canon Law (1983) and the Rule of Life of the Congregation of the Augustinians of the Assumption (1981) provide certain criteria for discernment in the question of the rights and duties of a religious regarding his family? Is a religious left to rely solely on the voice of his personal conscience without any other support?

The spiritual and human path of Fr. Pernet is presented in numerous

publications, notably:

Pierre Touveneraud, A.A, *Le P. Pernet hier et aujourd'hui*, in Pages d'Archives, Rome, April 1966, 160 pages.

Gaetan Bernoville, *Le P. Pernet, fondateur des Petites Sœurs de l'Assomption*, Grasset, Paris, 1944.

Raymond Courcy, *La passion du Règne de Dieu, l'adaptation permanente du charisme des Petites Sœurs de l'Assomption*, Cerf, 1997, 167 pages. The Little Sisters of the Assumption have begun a computerized bank of information on their foundational writings (Pernet, Mère Fage).

FOR A PERSONALIZED READING

- Do you have personal knowledge of such a difficult situation that seems to jeopardize someone's personal choice of life because of family obligations?
- What concrete solutions would you counsel that would be just for each party in this conflict of duties?
- In the advice given by Fr. d'Alzon to Brother Pernet, what seems to you to respond both to the human and spiritual points of view? Would not the search for immediate solutions, which are always more or less obsessive, complicate the future?

23

AN HEIR-FOUNDER OF FR. D'ALZON: FR. VICTORIN GALABERT

There are few pages about the fledgling Assumption where the figure of one of Fr. d'Alzon's first sons, Fr. Victorin Galabert (1830-1885), does not play a prominent role. Born at Montbazin (Hérault), this medical student obtained his doctorate in 1854 with a thesis entitled *Essai historique sur la variole* (An historical essay on smallpox). A sermon by Fr. d'Alzon at the Assumption of Nîmes, where the young student taught, converted him in the manner of Augustine and led him to rediscover the path to religious fervor that had been lost in his family. It was despite his family that he entered religious life, taking the Assumptionist habit on December 8, 1854. Fr. d'Alzon sent him to receive his formation in theology in Rome (1855-1858). After teaching for a time in Nîmes, Fr. Galabert was the man chosen by Fr. d'Alzon to establish his religious family in the Orient, in response to the vague indications or desires expressed in Rome by Pius IX.

In the mind of Bishop Brunoni, it was at Philippopoli in Thrace that the Assumption would find a concrete place according to a pontifical strategy elaborated in its ideal at the Vatican and to be carried out by religious congregations (Resurrectionists, Capuchins, Vincentians). There was much hope in the possibility of a Bulgarian Uniate community. In the spring of 1863, Fr. d'Alzon met with Fr. Galabert to examine closely the realities and to determine projects. As a matter of fact, the Founder was being counted on to erase the debts of the Apostolic Delegation! Fr. d'Alzon very quickly realized that there could be no question of founding a seminary for the Bulgarian Slavic Rite clergy. Fr. Galabert, who had two doctorates, was sitting at a desk with his school children, poor children attending Saint-André Elementary School of Philippopoli, opened on January 3, 1864. A modest and fervent religious, intellectually gifted and patient, he learned Bulgarian, discerned the first native vocations and, beginning in 1865, became the counselor of Bishop Raphael Popov (1830-1876). Daily companion of his bishop, he traveled the country with him, scribbling notes

in a journal which described day by day all the particularities of rural Bulgaria, living under Turkish rule and permitting, a century later, to retain the memory and the images of bygone days. He urged the Founder to furnish him with women assistants; that is the origin of the Congregation of the Oblates (1865). Leaving the care of Saint-André School to Fr. Alexandre Chilier, who would found the future Saint-Augustine College (1884), Fr. Galabert established the center of the Assumptionist mission in Andrinopolis (1867). As a stone buried in the foundations, ecumenist before his time, he embraced the Oriental soul of a people that he learned to love and that he served until exhaustion. This heir-son of Fr. d'Alzon fully merits the title of founder.

"So you are a priest, my child.¹ Yesterday, at the moment you received the priestly anointing, I was saying mass for you. I thank you for the one you will say for me tomorrow. May Our Lord grant you zeal for his house!² You know that this love is the foundation, the basis, the spirit of the Assumption.³ I do not know what I will do with you.⁴ It is possible that I will ask you to stay in Rome for another year,⁵ and in that case, you would, in your turn, have to fulfill the function of superior, assuming that I would entrust a few students to your care. You must cultivate much regularity, a spirit of prayer, strength, and generosity, so as to be a model for young religious.⁶ You must also practice much humility, kindness and patience. Add to that a little less distraction, a little more cleanliness, and all will go marvelously well.⁷

I would not want you to come back from Rome without the cap of a doctor of Canon Law. I am sorry that Fr. Picard was not able to take his theology exams, but he must take care of his health. Tell Fr. Barre that I thank him for remembering me.⁸ I pray for him with all my heart. At Montpellier, some people assured me that he is awaited to replace Fr. Soulas in his good works. I cannot believe that news. The good Abbé Soulas left his Congregation to influences that Fr. Barre would probably not accept.

I am at Lamalou for a short month. I would like to give you news, but that is impossible. God permits our poor Assumption of Nîmes to be tossed about. After having believed for a moment that it could be revived, all seems finished; but, on the other hand, there is good reason for hope coming from other quarters.

I continue to refuse colleges and minor seminaries. One must believe that, if we have absolute confidence in God, he'll know how to bring good out of bad.

When does the Pope return to Rome? Goodbye, my dear child. A thousand wishes to Fr. Picard. Be assured that I am attached to you with all my heart.

E. d'Alzon.

Don't let Fr. Picard forget the indulgences for us and the members of T(hird)-O(rder). If his health were to require his return, let him go. We will need him to work next year. Send me the news from Rome. The newspapers don't say everything or are very late."

—Letter of Fr. d'Alzon to Fr. Victorin Galabert, Lamalou, June 7, 1857, from the P.T. edi., t. II, p. 246-247.

¹ Ordained a priest in Rome on June 7, 1857.

² Is not the expression directly from the Gospel (John 2:17), originally found in Psalm 69:10?

³ We recognize in this lapidary formulation one of the cornerstones of Alzonian spirituality that we find almost everywhere: Assumptionist Rule of Life, Directory...

⁴ Fr. Galabert's apostolic life is known: from 1858 to 1862 he was professor of natural science at the school in Nîmes, and at the end of 1862 he was sent to the mission in the Orient, his life's work. He died in Nîmes on February 7, 1885 from a cerebral hemorrhage at the age of 55.

⁵ From 1857 to 1858, in Rome, Fr. Galabert was a collaborator of Abbé Chaillot for the *Analecta juris pontificii*.

⁶ This passage expresses the content of a religious' example according to Fr. d'Alzon.

⁷ It is certain that Fr. Galabert was quite absent-minded and forgetful. The recommendation of cleanliness was a constant in Fr. d'Alzon's comments to this religious who was a medical doctor!

⁸ Abbé Charles-François-Louis Barre (1814-1872).

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION AND RESEARCH

A certain number of articles have been dedicated to the memory of Fr. Victorin Galabert; they are listed in the *Notices Biographiques*, vol. II, 2000, p. 1190.

The preserved writings of Fr. Galabert were typed in the 1950 s and form a collection of 13 volumes totaling 3795 pages (ACR). They can be consulted on CD. In 1998, thanks to the work of Fr. Charles Monsch, there was published in Sofia, in a bilingual Franco-Bulgarian edition, vol. I of the *Journal du P. Galabert* in the Orient, corresponding to the years 1862-1866; in 2000, vol. II (for the years 1867-1869) appeared. A third vol. of selected letters is in preparation.

The Centre d'Alzon has just brought out a CD entitled *Les écrits version beta 1.0*, containing, in particular, the correspondence of Fr. Galabert.

FOR A PERSONALIZED READING

- The course of formation in the Assumption, understood in the intellectual sense, is often disconnected from any apostolic perspective for the future. What do you think of this situation on the part of the young religious and the lack of solicitation on the part of the Institute? How can this be remedied?
- Priestly religious life cannot be compared or equated with a career. How can as yet undefined apostolic motivations nourish and give meaning to a young religious' formation?
- What picture does Fr. d'Alzon give of Fr. Victorin Galabert? What does he wish for him? Did Fr. Galabert fulfill the hopes of the Founder?

24

ADVICE TO A YOUNG SUPERIOR

The service of the superiorship or 'superiority,' to use the expression of Fr. d'Alzon, is certainly an essential aspect of the life and animation of religious communities. Religious life, with its hierarchical structure from the base to its center or summit, usually functions locally as so many democratic cells, if by that we understand free interplay, in an organized and voluntary society of persons who are at the same time responsible and dependent, whose common point of reference is the Rule. Fr. d'Alzon, before codifying the principal points of superiorship in the Constitutions, experienced it himself in his dual capacity as ecclesiastical superior in the diocese of Nîmes and as founder of religious congregations

Assumptionists remained only one community in the cradle of the school in Nîmes until 1851, when a Parisian satellite was created in the Faubourg de la rue Saint-Honore in Paris (1851-1853), quickly transferred to Clichy-La-Garenne (Hauts-de-Seine). If you count the attempt to found an agricultural colony and novitiate for brothers at Mireman, just outside of Nîmes (1853-1857), then that of the novitiate of Auteuil in a building on the property of the Religious of the Assumption in Paris (1857-1858), and finally that of a sporadic community of students in Rome, Rethel would be the fifth formed at the beginnings of the Assumption. Each time, Fr. d'Alzon tried to find in the ranks of his 'small work' the man of faith and good disposition who could assume the leadership of a group attached to that of an apostolic activity, such as Henri Brun at Mireman, Hippolyte Saugrain as his assistant at the school of Nîmes, François Picard in Rome or yet again Charles Laurent in Paris.

It is interesting to note that through the years the service of superiorship has known many evolutions in its form, if one consults the various legislative texts of the Assumption (Constitutions, Circulars, Chapters). As proof, all one needs to do is compare the articles that refer to the superior of a local community from the beginnings to the present Rule of Life (Index, p. 122) or in the last booklet presented by the General Curia as well: *Le*

supérieur local, suggestions pratiques pour l'animation, Rome, 1990.

The most beautiful texts are born of life experience and take their inspiration from mature experience and changing problems. Let us listen to Fr. d'Alzon as he entrusts this service of superiorship to the young Fr. Picard in 1858:

"Dear Friend,¹ Lamalou, September 10, 1858

So now you are definitely superior of Rethel.² You are free to take with you Fr. Pernet³ or Fr. Brun.⁴ I would urge you, though, to take Fr. Brun because his health will spare you a lot of fatigue. It is understood that, if he goes, he will teach a class and will help you with the discipline. I order you to take particular care of the health of Fr. Cusse.⁵ If you do not receive any Masses, let me know. I will see to it that you will have some to say. Send me word.

Take things easy. The Champenois character is, I believe, a bit heavy and cold. Frankness seems to me to be the best method. Stop Fr. Brun from being too much of a perfectionist. Just do things and have him do the same. Do not show joy at appearing to be or thinking of yourself as more qualified than others. Remember that an administration that isn't perfect, but which safeguards affection, is a thousand times preferable to an administration that is excellent but which is detested.

Then, remember that the spirit of the Assumption consists in the love of Our Lord, of the Blessed Virgin, his mother, and the Church, his spouse⁶. Here is what you must always keep in mind: Our Lord, the Blessed Virgin, the Church. If you act singleheartedly in this fashion, it will soon be felt and you will be loved as it should be. If you have problems, the purity of your intentions will be a supreme consolation for you. If you are designated as extraordinary confessor of our Sisters at Sedan,⁷ you should accept. Go along in all confidence to the cardinal.⁸ Become friends with Abbé Hanesse,⁹ but I believe that there are internal intrigues that you must avoid. Get to know only Abbé Hanesse and the cardinal. You should be polite and respectful with the others; don't let yourself get sucked in by anyone.

Goodbye, dear child. May Our Lord and the Blessed Virgin protect you! I bless you with all my heart. E. d'Alzon"

—E. d'Alzon to Fr. François Picard, September 1858, from *Lettres d'Alzon*, edit. P.T., t. II, p. 512.

¹ François Picard, born on October 1, 1831 at Saint-Gervasy (Gard), was almost 28 years old. Novice at Christmas 1850, he was ordained a priest in Rome on May 25, 1856 in the private chapel of the Cardinal Vicar, as was Fr. d'Alzon in 1834. He was then Master of Novices at Clichy-La-Garenne and chaplain at the boarding school of the Religious of the Assumption at Auteuil, beginning in 1857.

² Rethel is the name of a small city in the Ardennes, in the diocese of Rheims, population about 7000, where the Assumptionists took charge of the Notre-Dame school, founded by Bishop Gousset in 1854, at the beginning of the school year of 1858; this experiment would last only three months.

³ Fr. Étienne Pernet would be the one to accompany Fr. Picard at Rethel, as treasurer of the community. Born in 1824, he had just been ordained priest with Fr. Hippolyte Saugrain, at Le Mans, by Bishop Nanquette on April 3, 1858.

⁴ Fr. Henri Brun (1821-1895) would in fact remain at the school at Clichy-La-Garenne which was kept until 1860.

⁵ Fr. Eugène Cusse (1822-1866), priest on September 18, 1858, was professor of science.

⁶ One of the first references of what would be called the 'triple love' of the Assumption.

⁷ The foundation of the Religious of the Assumption at Sedan was made in 1854.

⁸ That is Cardinal Thomas-Marie-Joseph Gousset (1792-1866), bishop of Périgueux in 1835, archbishop of Rheims in May 1840, created cardinal in September 1850.

⁹ Pierre-Napoléon Hanesse (1808-1889), secretary to the archbishop since 1843, Vicar General in 1862.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION AND RESEARCH

For Fr. François Picard, consult his biography written by E. Lacoste (Ernest Baudouy), Bonne Presse, 1932, 550 pages, also *Pages d'Archives*, 2nd series, p. 17-44; 3rd series, p. 177-243 and 249-414.

Fr. Adrien Pépin, under the pseudonym of Paul Castel, did an excellent study, *Le P Picard et le P Vincent de Paul Bailly dans les luttes de presse*, Rome, 602 pages, and also a very detailed *Chronologie de la vie du P Picard*, 124 pages.

For the brief community experience of Rethel, read Siméon Vailhé, *Vie du P d'Alzon*, vol. II, p. 76-78.

On superiors by Fr. d'Alzon, Directory, third part, chapter II (*Écrits spirituels*, p. 86-87); Ninth Circular (E.S., p. 272-273); Twenty-eighth and Thirty-fourth Meditation (E.S. P. 545-552; p. 593-600); Advice to superiors, 1858 (E.S. 1065-1066).

On the diocese of Rheims, an article by P. Demouy-J. Goy, *Catholicisme*, t. XII, col. 744-759.

On the person of Bishop Gousset, the more recent information can be found in the *Dictionnaire d'Histoire et de géographie ecclésiastiques*, t. XXI, col. 956-957 and in the *Dictionnaire de Biographie française*, t. XVI, col. 824-825.

FOR A PERSONALIZED READING

- What is your judgment on the finesse and the spiritual quality of Fr. d'Alzon's recommendations to Fr. Picard concerning his duties as superior? Concerning the religious of the community, the school, and the personnel of the diocese?
- In certain details, do not these directives show that Fr. d'Alzon knew the personalities of his religious very well, and that of Fr. Picard in particular to whom he writes in August 1858: '*You must be flexible in the forms, you will never lack firmness*'?
- What are the essential qualities that you expect in the superior of a community?

25

A FATHER'S ATTENTION FOR HIS DAUGHTERS

The abundant correspondence between Fr. d'Alzon and Mère Marie-Eugénie de Jésus, from the time of their first meeting at Chatenay (Isere) where Abbé Combalot came from, expresses their common desire to establish a community of Religious of the Assumption in Nîmes for adoration and education. The project could not be realized during the lifetime of Bishop Cart, who was quite hostile to the multiplication of convents in his episcopal see, but it would be fulfilled after his death (August 13, 1855).

Sister Marie-Eugénie de Jésus arrived in Nîmes on October 24, accompanied by the three sisters chosen for the foundation: Sister Marie-Walburge Howly, superior of the group, Sister Marie-Elisabeth de Balincourt, a native of Nîmes, and Marie-Gérard Ernalstein, a lay sister.

The first residence was improvised; the Religious would stay at the residence of the Baroness de Lisleroy, maternal grandmother of Sister Marie-Elisabeth, at 29, rue des Lombards, near St. Charles Church, before finding a place to stay in November in a modest little house on Roussay Street, not far from the Assumption school and near the Carmelite Convent. Four other Religious joined them: Sister Marie de la Croix Aubert, Sister Marie-Aloysia Lawson, Sister Marie-Laurence Finn, novice, and Sister Marie-Pelagie Desperroix, lay sister. The first Mass was celebrated there by Fr. d'Alzon on November 9.

This still temporary installation would not last. The correspondence of the following years (1856-1858) allows us to follow all the stages of the construction and the preparation of a convent, known as the Priory of Nîmes, established according to the rules: purchase of the land on Bouillargues Street, the plans of the architect, Revoil, that foresee the cells for the nuns, the cloister, the boarding school, a pleasant garden and a fence. All this material work to which Fr. d'Alzon gave his wholehearted attention should not mask everything else he did. As at the Assumption school, and using the same model, there were born spiritual branches

grafted to the foundation of the Religious: Association of the Adorers of the Blessed Sacrament, a feminine Third-Order of the Assumption. The beginnings of the boarding school were modest: 12 students in October 1858; but this educational work would have great success until after the law of 1901, the republican legislation on the authorization of religious communities. The Congregation of the Religious of the Assumption was dissolved in December 1906. The local community resisted until August 23, 1911, the date of their expulsion under police escort. It became a medical center for senior citizens (Centre Villemin). It would regain its first vocation in 1991 with the creation of the Lycée d'Alzon, an extension of the Institut d'Alzon under the direction of the Oblates.

"My dear daughters,

If you believe that I would let the feast of the Assumption pass by without wishing you a happy feast, you would be making a big mistake. Firstly, it means too much to me. Our religious begin their retreat tonight and have the greatest need that you obtain copious graces for them. So lift your hands to heaven until the 22nd.¹ On the 22nd I will go to Sedan, and I will give a kind of retreat to your Sisters,² and as for that, it is somewhat in your interest that I sanctify these members of your family. Finally, it might be possible that, instead of going through Toulouse, I would have to go by Nîmes on my way to Lamalou. Since there are important questions to be discussed, please let me know, if you have any insights, through which place I should pass,³ if you have any thoughts.

Allow me to ask you to do for one another the favors that I will ask of you. Please tell your Mother⁴ that I wish her much patience to decipher my letter, because I can barely reread it myself. To our Reverend Sister Dean⁵: that I think about her a lot and that I see that she did well to come and pitch her tent on the banks of the Vistre; all, at Auteuil, regret her absence and my visit made me appreciate all the more the treasure that we have acquired. To S. M.-Julienne⁶: that her charming nephew, whom I questioned twice about what he wanted to say to her, promised to reflect on it. To Sister Marie de la Croix⁷: that Sister M.-Cécile⁸ envies her the joy of training the nightingales of Nîmes. To Sister Aréthuse⁹: that her watering would be much needed for the lawns of Paris. To Sister M.-Théodore¹⁰: that one cannot find in Paris

chocolate like the one she makes for me. To Sister M.-Claver¹¹: that I suspect that she is the most saintly of the community. As for Sister M-Angélique,¹² truly I am embarrassed; but we will surely find something by the time I return. And now, good night. I am leaving, not to begin my retreat, but to have my gang begin theirs, and I have to find out what it takes to convert, sanctify, chide, encourage our little community. I am all yours, my dear daughters, in Our Lord."

—Letter to the community of the Assumption at Nîmes, Clichy, August 15, 1859, from the edition of D.D., vol. 13, 1991, p. 131-132.

¹ Implicit allusion to Exodus 17:11.

² The R.A. community of Sedan was founded in 1854 by Sister Marie-Thérèse (Josephine) de Commarque (1811-1882), a native of La Bourlie.

³ Fr. d'Alzon was in discussions for a fusion with Fr. Causette, superior of the Missionary Priests of Calvary (Toulouse).

⁴ "Notre Mère" designates here the superior at that time of the Priory of Nîmes, Sister Françoise-Eugénie de Malbosc (1822-1878), a native of the Ardèche.

⁵ Sister Marie-Augustine, Anastasie Bévier 1816-1895) who pronounced her vows in the same year as Mère Marie-Eugénie. "Dean" means she was the oldest by profession, since there were others older than her in age. A native of Avranches.

⁶ Sister Marie-Julienne de Bure (1819-1884), from Paris.

⁷ Sister Marie de la Croix Aubert (1833-1906), from Argentan.

⁸ Sister Marie-Cécile de Momigny (1822-1886), from Blois.

⁹ After much research, it seems quite certain that this is not the given name of the religious, but an allusion to the one who is in charge of watering the garden. We do not know who is hidden under this charming and mythological allusion.

¹⁰ Sister Marie-Théodore (Virginie) Grefeuil (1831-1881), from the Aveyron.

¹¹ Sister Marie-Claver Monteil (1835-1915), from the Ardèche.

¹² Sister Marie-Angélique (Angelina) Poupard (1833-1874), from the Oise.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION AND RESEARCH

On the community of Nîmes, *Les origines de l'Assomption*, t. III (1900), p.

417-440. *Marie-Eugénie de Milleret*, Mame, 1991, p. 79-84.

On the superior of the R.A. community of Nîmes at that time: *Mère François Eugénie de Malbosc*, by Bishop. De Cabrières, 1900, 382 pages.

On the spirituality and the charism of the Religious of the Assumption: Foundational texts: *Textes fondateurs*, Auteuil, 1991, 563 pages. Collection *Études d'archives*.

On the apostolic life of the Religious of the Assumption: *Un projet éducatif au XIXe siècle*, *Études d'archives*, 1988, no. 5. M.-Antoinette du Cœur de Jésus, *L'éducation du caractère*, Paris, 1946, 229 pages.

Besides the extant correspondence of the sisters of Nîmes, nothing much is left of the written testimony of the life of this community of Nîmes; the registers of the boarding school, the archives or day to day records did not survive the great ordeal of 1901-1910 (trials, expulsion). The priory chapel, built by Revoil, has now been restored.

FOR A PERSONALIZED READING

- How does Fr. d'Alzon express his attention both to the community as a whole and to each individual religious?
- What are the major activities of the Religious of the Assumption, yesterday and today? How do they express their charism?
- The relations of Fr. d'Alzon with the R.A. community of Nîmes seem very intimate. What is his responsibility in their regard?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages that can occur when a male community finds itself in close proximity and collaboration with a female community of the Assumption? Do you have any examples?

26

FATHER D'ALZON, GENTLEMAN-FARMER

It is more customary to present the spiritual thoughts of Fr. d'Alzon than to present him as a property owner. And yet he portrayed himself so in this letter of August 1860, addressed to his mother, the Viscountess d'Alzon, who would die barely two months later.

The d'Alzon's were rich property owners at Le Vigan and at Lavagnac; for the old noble classes of society, land ownership remained the symbol of wealth and influence, however precarious; they were at that time being dethroned by new values, commercial, banking, and industrial, often mixed together. We know that the fortune of the d'Alzon's came from his mother, nee de Faventine, who had in fact inherited the fortune of her adoptive parents, descendants of a "farmer general of revenues" (a kind of tenant-farmer in the rich Ancien-Régime). At the death of his mother in October 1860, soon after the death of his sister Augustine (July 1860), the two living descendants, Emmanuel and his sister Marie-Françoise, took possession of their share of the inheritance; Fr. d'Alzon who since 1835 received large sums of money for his endeavors in Nîmes, all carefully accounted for as an advance on his inheritance, gave preference to Marie de Puységur for the estate at Lavagnac, and for his part received the family residence of Le Vigan and the attached farms. The estate of Montmau, situated in the township of Saint-Pons de Mauchiens, that he also inherited, would later be sold by Fr. d'Alzon to his nephew, Jean de Puységur.

His correspondence was peppered with financial considerations and calculations in which his general optimism was never absent, even if all his life he suffered from the *martyrdom of money*.

An economic study should be made using all the information we possess scattered through his correspondence, notably in his exchanges with Mère Marie-Eugénie de Jésus, who, it must be said in passing, was head and shoulders above him concerning financial practices of the day: bank and industry shares, stock market quotations, interest on loans. "*Your knowledge surpasses mine in financial affairs*", he writes to her on January

29, 1861. This nobleman, even if he was from a recent aristocratic line, was lagging in his knowledge of the new economic forms, in which the Milleret family bathed, for they were from a financial world bourgeoisie. Both, however, had only those contacts with money important for the needs or control of their apostolic projects, since their personal tastes and choices were shaped by the law of the Gospel and the true values of the Kingdom alone. And yet, there is no lack of agricultural realism in this account of Fr. d'Alzon to his mother during a stay in the Lavagnac countryside.

"Dear little mother,

I have arrived safe and sound, and since I don't have much more to do here, I'll leave tomorrow morning for Lamalou. When I entered the chapel this morning, I found a very beautiful bouquet of white flowers; I asked what it was, and I was told it had been placed there by the gardener, on the eve of the feast of Saint Augustine.

The wheat, rye, and oat crop will bring in 9,434 francs net; the cost of the cultivation¹ cost 10,334 francs, the threshing alone will have cost 2,234 francs without counting what the plow horses cost during the year and what they spoil in the woods and the luzerne grass, not to mention the man to care for them. We were able to use from the principal property owners of Mèze a machine that would cut the cost in half If you want to have an idea of what that means: the threshing with the horses cost 2.25 francs per hectoliter; with the machine that would not cost more than 15 cents per hectoliter. The difference seems quite attractive to me; it is 45 to 15, or 3 to 1, in other words, one third.

Poujol and the 'ramonet' (see footnotes) insist that we should not buy Roussillon seed; they find that what we harvested here is quite good. They showed it to me. From what I know, I find it superb and without seeds. We will have to buy barbless wheat. I need to come back to one observation. The 44 "units" (the French term "sèterie" is an ancient measure equal to 150-300 liters) of La Conseillère will produce in wine more than the 160 "units" that we planted in wheat, oats and rye. The wine will sell for 100 francs. (The) 120 hogsheads (1 hogshead equals 114 liters in liquid measurement) that this vineyard will give you will bring in 12,000 francs. The cultivation and the vintage will cost 1,800 francs at most. The 160 "units" of wheat, oats, etc. give you a revenue of

9,434 francs. I give these details so that you might convince my father:

- 1. that he consent to get rid of the plow horses, that cost him at least 2,000 for nothing;*
- 2. that he acquire an agricultural machine with the money from the sale of the stud-horse. The first year he will have worthwhile savings; the following years the profit will be superb. Vidal² of Mèze, accepts to make this machine and guarantee it.*
- 3. that he allow the planting of a vineyard since with the present laws and attitudes it has been decided (by the government) to maintain a low price for wheat.*

I need not say that sheep can eat what the plow horses eat and also give good manure. I don't know why I am giving you these reflections that are really more for my father. It is evident that I am writing for both of you.

I was not able to see Rodier; he left me a note to tell me that he had to go to Clermont.³ I am leaving tomorrow. Alexander will be in Montpellier on Friday evening or Saturday morning.

Goodbye, little mother. I embrace you very tenderly as also my good father. Your fifty-year old son. Emmanuel!

—Letter of Fr. d'Alzon to Mrs. Jeanne-Clémence d'Alzon, Lavagnac, August 29, 1860, D.D. edit., t. III, p. 282-283.

¹ The agricultural and technical vocabulary of Fr. d'Alzon is astonishing. If we easily recognize the cereals (wheat, oats, rye) and the animal food grass (luzerne), we have to consult a specialized dictionary for many terms: the 'dépi-quaison' is a threshing method by treading, the 'ègue' is a plow horse, the 'rous sillon' is a local variety of seed-wheat, the 'touselle' is a barbleless ear of an early type of wheat, the 'muid' is a unit of measure (the Languedoc muid is equivalent to 114 liters) as is the 'setier' (agricultural unit of measure also called 'sétéree'). La Conseillère is the name of an agricultural estate near Lavagnac. We can see, with Emmanuel d'Alzon, that the era of mechanical agriculture has arrived and also that of the replacement of cereal planting by that of the vine. This last transformation would be done by Jean de Puységur; the barns and granaries of Lavagnac would be transformed into wine cellars.

² The persons cited in this letter are not all identified: the bouquet of flowers placed in the chapel recalls the memory of Augustine d'Alzon (1813-1860); Poujol must be an overseer of the Lavagnac estate; Vidal, a builder-seller of agricultural

machinery from Mèze that an almanac of that era would allow us to identify more precisely; Rodier, a relative of the d'Alzon's, possibly Louis-Antoine Rodier, a native of Montpellier, son of Louis-Antoine Rodier and of Louise-Josephine d'Alzon. As to Alexandre, without any other indication, he is completely unknown. As to the 'ramonet' the term refers to an agricultural worker whose function was to clean the grain with a cylindrical machine called the 'ramonerie.'

³ The geographical names evoke the neighborhood of Lavagnac: Mèze is a locality of 5800 inhabitants at the time, near Montagnac; tuns were manufactured there; Clermont must be Clermont-l'Hérault, with 5400 inhabitants, a city of tunneries. La Conseillère is the name of an estate at Lavagnac, on which today there is a house of the same name.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION AND RESEARCH

Georges Duby and Armand Wilson, *Histoire de la France rurale*, Le Seuil, 1976, vol. III, 568 pages.

The financial archives of Lavagnac were burned in part after the sale of the château by Henri d'Auland in 1987, according to the testimony of the present day farmer of the property, M. Baillol. There is a shed that still stores higgledy-piggledy several registers of accounts.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION AND RESEARCH

- What do you think about money and what are your worries?
- What did your family background teach you on the subject?
- Has religious life modified your relationship with money and financial means?
- What does the Rule of Life recommend concerning the economic life of the community?
- Do the canonical distinctions between possessing and using goods appear to you still to be practical and effective?

27

LIFE'S WOUNDS

1860 was a year filled with trials for Fr. d'Alzon. Death arrived to decimate his family: in July, Augustine was taken suddenly, and then in October, his sorely afflicted mother, Mrs. d'Alzon. These two sorrows were added to the loss of his niece, Marthe, in 1845 and that of his brother-in-law, Anatole de Puységur in 1851. The family ranks had thinned out. Mrs. d'Alzon, grown blind, no longer had the help of Augustine who kept her company in her apartment of Montpellier, Maison Roche, on Trésoriers de la Bourse Street. A bad fall on the staircase of this grand town house, undoubtedly resulting in the fracture of the neck of the femur, caused great pain that the medical treatment of the times could only reduce with a few drop of opium. For a month Emmanuel suffered greatly in attending to his mother in agony; he felt quite alone because of the helplessness of his father, retired at Lavagnac, an octogenarian almost completely deprived of speech. Alix de Puységur, at the Carmelite convent of Paris, was likewise absent because of the cloister. Fr. d'Alzon's suffering was sharpened by the interdiction to preach and hear confessions in the diocese of Montpellier, because of his opinions and excessive ultramontane zeal, which Bishop Thibault (1835-1861) held against him.

Since 1859, the Catholic world had its eyes fixed on Rome and the Papal States. The politico-military alliance of Napoleon III with Piedmont had dragged the whole of the Italian peninsula into the whirlwind of the Risorgimento. Cavour hoped that a war against Austria-Hungary would cause its definitive expulsion from the transalpine map; underhandedly, troubles were stirred up in the central states to withdraw these populations from obedience to the Pope who could oppose a regular army only with a few more or less trained bands of volunteers, the Pontifical Zouaves. Farther to the south, in the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, Garibaldi, the republican, was biding his time to rally the cause of unity in his own fashion. Fr. d'Alzon was not a man to remain inactive, arms folded. Using pen, word, and deed, by committing his whole person, he entered into the public fray.

His nephew, Jean, who had been taken prisoner at Castelfidardo, had just been freed. Fr. d'Alzon's battle was inspired by his ecclesiological convictions and his ideas, shared by many Catholics of the time. It was in this troubled context that he negotiated with Bishop Quinn to send a few religious to Australia and that he submitted in faith to the repeated losses within his family, and even wrote: *"I consider it a great consolation to be able to suffer a little in my family at the same time that the Church is suffering so much."*

"My dear daughter.

Thank you for your kind letter. Let me tell you very simply how I'm feeling. Seeing my mother's sufferings made me wish that they would come to an end. For some time I have been speaking with her. I know she understands what I am saying. Since I had been deprived so much of being with her, death¹ seems to have brought me near, although, to be sure, it's a diminished presence. Perhaps I like solitude more, something which had happened to me at the death of my sister and which increases a little day by day. It is egoism, but I say it as it is. I feel so good in the presence of souls that faith tells me are in a better world or ready to enter. I have never understood better the joy of being a priest and religious through the prayers that we can offer for these poor and dear souls; and then there is the honor of suffering in my family at the time when the great Christian family is suffering so much. It is something when the love of the Church is not an empty word. It is with the Church that I console myself the most for the death of my mother. If you knew what I felt when, after having written to you and to a few others, I went into her room again to beg her forgiveness for all the pain I had caused her and went to kiss the hand that had cared for me so much! There was undoubtedly bitterness, but then we are not like those who lack hope.

Her last words to me were: 'One must know how to make every sacrifice.' Why would you wish that this legacy be less precious to me than all the others? After her, no one will console me better than you, my daughter,² but in this frame of mind that I am showing you, do I really need to be consoled? I am obliged to go to Lavagnac for a few days to take care of a few family matters, then I have two retreats to preach,³ the first of which will begin about November 14. Fr. Hippolyte preached two sermons to

me yesterday on my need to be in Nîmes. I believe that it will be best if I stay with my plan to go to Paris about January 15.⁴

Sister Marie-Catherine⁵ wrote me a rather discouraged letter a few days ago, but since then, on the occasion of my mother's death, she has written me again and seems to have recovered.

Good-bye, very dear daughter. You see how I am showing you the depths of my heart.

E. d'Alzon."

—Letter of Fr. d'Alzon to M. Marie-Eugénie de Jésus, Nîmes, October 18, 1860, according to D.D. edit., t. III, p. 325-326.

¹ Mrs. Jeanne-Clémence d'Alzon died at Montpellier on October 12, 1860, at 11 p.m. Her body was interred in the family vault in the cemetery of Montagnac, next to her daughter, Augustine.

² Marie-Eugénie de Jésus lost her mother, nee de Brou, in 1832, during the cholera epidemic in Paris; her mother's friend whom she considered her *aunt*, Mrs. Doulcet in 1854; her cousin whom she called her *uncle*, Ernest de Franchessin, in 1851. Jacques Milleret would die in 1864. Family losses did not spare the Foundress of the Religious of the Assumption.

³ One in Nîmes in November, the other in Agen, which was in fact cancelled. On the other hand he preached a retreat to the students of the Religious of the Assumption in Paris at the end of November.

⁴ In fact, Fr. d'Alzon traveled to Paris already on the 22nd of November 1860 and stayed until the 30th.

⁵ Sister Marie-Catherine Combié (1828-1870), sister of Juliette, of Maurice and of Mrs. Doumet, was a Religious of the Assumption, superior of the Bordeaux convent from its foundation in 1860.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION AND RESEARCH

Are not Fr. d'Alzon's faith and prayer during his trials those of the Psalmist, of the anawim? On this subject, one can read two issues of the Cahiers d'Évangile: no. 13, 1975, by Mannati, *Pour prier avec les Psaumes* and no. 92, 1995, by Collin *Le livre des Psaumes*. Suffering that inspires a purified prayer is a great spiritual reality of all times and in all religions. Fr. d'Alzon pens expressions on his experience and the spirituality of his time that are disconcerting to us as they present and justify a 'love of suffering.' One can

legitimately prefer other non-dolorist expressions, where the terms are inverted: suffering in love, suffering from love, or yet again suffering to love, offering one's suffering and participating in the sufferings of Christ. The magazine *Présences* (1955-1974) gives a balanced presentation of Catholic doctrine on this subject.

The sensitivity of Fr. d'Alzon's feeling as a result of family losses is magnificently expressed in a later letter of January 16, 1875, addressed to Mrs. Varin d'Ainvelle who had probably just lost her mother, Mme de Lafigère (Letters, edit. D.D., t. XI, pages 25-26): *"One would say that, when by virtue of a long illness she had already done her purgatory, God left her a certain time to think more about heaven and gave a few more days to those she was about to leave, to console them by this last return to a life that was losing itself more and more in the thought of eternity. You will feel an immense emptiness, but Our Lord, who is very kind, will fill some of it by the return of Amédée... May God help you use in holy fashion the freedom that you will find anew in a cruel solitude! All that shows us the path. Let us inflame ourselves with the example of those who go before us and walk in their footsteps. There is a great sweetness in recalling beloved memories when we find in them beautiful examples to follow."*

FOR A PERSONALIZED READING

- Whatever one's age, losing one after the other a mother and a sister is a great trial. What feelings does Fr. d'Alzon experience at the time of this double loss?
- The work of grieving must also be done in the heart of the believer. How does faith allow one to take on both the sorrow of an absence and the search for another form of intimacy, without suppressing the former and without overstating the latter?
- Does the commitment to a very busy apostolic life seem to you to be a form of flight or a help? Within what limits?

28

THE MISSIONARY ADVENTURE IN AUSTRALIA

In signing a mission agreement or contract with Bishop Quinn on October 19, 1860, Fr. d'Alzon authorized a first foreign mission experience for the Assumption. Until then, the Congregation had known only the life of high schools or boarding schools, even if the foreign missions were included as an apostolic possibility listed in the Constitutions of 1855. We also know that Fr. d'Alzon had not failed to reflect on the unsuccessful effort of the Religious of the Assumption in Capetown (1850-1852); he was well-placed to be aware that episcopal authority, which guarded its rights meticulously, was hardly favorable, in general, to the exemptions of religious life.

Without taking exactly the same route, the Assumptionist foundation in Australia (1860-1875) was to have no future; Bishop James Quinn, the young Irish bishop of Brisbane, did not fulfill his part of the contract to favor the implantation of a religious community with its own house as soon as possible. His only ambition or interest for his apostolic administration was to use the religious as so many men delivered to his authority with their hands and feet tied. Hence there arose his quarrel with Fr. René-Eugène Cusse, who, declared a fugitive religious for having left the diocese of Brisbane, would later be expelled from the Congregation in 1862, before dying in Newcastle in 1866. The misunderstanding was aggravated by the slowness of the communications of the times and a certain hasty judgment on the part of Fr. d'Alzon.

Yet it would be wrong to believe that this experience was entirely negative: Frs. Brun and Tissot, and Bro. Polycarpe Hudry showed themselves to be true missionary collaborators, tenacious and enterprising, even if they had hoped to get involved more with a direct apostolate among the aboriginal populations than with spiritual aid to the descendants of the Irish colonists. In 1875, Fr. Tissot was the last to leave the island continent in conformity with the decisions of the chapter of 1873. The least we can

say is that the Assumption upheld its bargain and that Fr. d'Alzon showed faithful loyalty to a bishop whose attitude was not reciprocal.

From 1862 on, the vision of the founder turned to the Orient and that apostolic commitment with entirely different stakes would mobilize the Congregation for at least a half century. Without a doubt the difficulties would not be lesser, but over time, according to circumstances and appeals, certain forms of investment and involvement would be clarified and would anchor a foundation, shaky at first, in more promising structures: mission posts, schools, social works, and intellectual endeavors. Let us enter into the missionary history of the Assumption through the initial door of the Australian adventure:

"Nîmes, September 29, 1860

Bishop,

Allow me, first of all, to thank you for your letter which I was greatly looking forward to. I must admit that after having been alerted by you, through Fr. Laurent, that you did not have the money necessary for the journey of our religious, the two propositions with which you began your letter and the repeated declaration of your lack of financial resources seemed to me to be the essential point of your correspondence; and the two little words, that you copied in the letter I received from you yesterday, seemed to me to be only a preparation for what you added about wanting for the means to pay for the journey of a single missionary.¹ But from the time Fr. Picard assured me that there was a misunderstanding,² before even having received something from you, I authorized Fr. Cusse to leave and come to an understanding with your Grace.³ So you see, Your Excellency, that there was no ill will on my part.

It is therefore understood that, since you do not have the resources, Fr. Cusse and Fr. Brun alone will be at your disposal; that if you can take only one, you will take only one. I would wish that it be Fr. Brun; however, I leave you free to choose. And when these two religious arrive in Brisbane⁴ and see how things are, if they think that we can be useful to you, and if Your Grace judges it à propos to give an episcopal decree authorizing us in your diocese as the Congregation of the Augustinians of the Assumption,⁵ we will gladly send you other religious.⁶ I will go

even further. If, over the course of time, Fr. Cusse and Fr. Brun appear to you to be ill-suited for the missions and for your works, and you still want our religious, you can send the two fathers back and we will offer you other apostolic workers. It seems to me, Your Excellency, that in the conditions that I propose, Your Grace will see all our desire to be agreeable to you, and that I prove to you how I have acted sincerely in the misunderstanding that has occurred between you and me.

I am with respect to Your Grace the very humble and obedient servant. E. d'Alzon."

—E. d'Alzon to Bishop Quinn, bishop of Brisbane, Letters of Fr. d'Alzon, vol. III, edit. D.D., 1991, p. 313-314.

¹ The question of money and of financial resources was certainly not in the practical aspects of a foreign missionary foundation an insurmountable obstacle, but certainly a key question, not only for the beginning, but also for the development of a mission. In due time the Assumption would learn how to take advantage of its relationships and benefactors to establish offices to procure funds (collections, magazines, exhibits, and conferences...).

² The misunderstanding dealt with the integration of the religious into the body of the diocesan clergy in the form of the Oblates of Saint Charles.

³ 'Votre Grandeur': the official title of courtesy given to a bishop until about 1930.

⁴ Three religious left for the diocese of Brisbane from Liverpool, on December 7, 1860: Eugène Cusse (1822-1866), Gavète Elphège, Tissot (1801-1895). The latter two took up the post of Maryborough. Fr. Cusse would make known his disagreement with the bishop. Bishop Quinn who, despite his commitment to do so, did not authorize the establishment of the Congregation under its own name in the diocese.

⁵ Such was the official name always desired by Fr. d'Alzon for his male Congregation.

⁶ Fr. Henri Brun (1821-1895) and Brother Polycarpe Hudry (1838-1912) would leave in December 1862.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION AND RESEARCH

On the history of the mission in Australia: Austin Treamer, *The Mission of*

the Augustinians of the Assumption in Australia 1860-1875, typed text, Nottingham, 175 pages (November 1986).

On the Assumptionist missionary adventure: Actes du Colloque de Valpré in November 2000, Rome, 2001. *For an historical approach: Bishop Delacroix, *Histoire universale des missions catholiques*, 4 vol., Paris, 1957-1959.

For a theology of the mission: Decree of the Council of the Vatican II *Ad Gentes*, the Encyclical of Pope Paul VI, *Ecclesiam Suam* (1964); A.-M. Henry, *Esquisse d'une théologie de la mission*, Cerf, 1959, *La force de l'Évangile*, Mame, 1967; Girault and Vernet, *Croire en dialogue. Chrétien devant les religions, les Églises, les sectes*, Droguet and Ardent, 1979. The Encyclical of Pope John Paul II: *Redemptoris Missio*, December 7, 1990.

FOR A PERSONALIZED READING

- The failure of the mission in Australia repeated in its own way that of Cape Town by the Religious of the Assumption in 1852. In your opinion, why did both fail? What was missing?
- What are the conditions for such a project to be viable (communication, contract, preparation, definition of the goal, native recruiting)?
- Has the missionary history of the Assumption known more positive results? Why and at what cost?
- Does the hierarchy show itself to be more respectful of the specific character of priestly religious life today? Can you point to examples?

29

A RAMSHACKLE HOUSE IN PARIS

The history of the purchase of the plot of land on François Ier Street in Paris, some 1050 square meters, in December 1860, can be traced perfectly, thanks to the extant correspondence between Fr. d'Alzon and Brother Vincent de Paul Bailly; it was through the intervention of M. Adolphe Baudon, owner of #2 on the same street, that the purchase was concluded positively on December 12, after an auction that had no other bidders. The president of the Saint Vincent de Paul Society was not on this occasion, as was long believed or we were led to believe, simply a front, but a real buyer with his own money, in order to be of service to Fr. d'Alzon, who always seemed to be without funds. Fr. d'Alzon counted on the sale of Clichy to cover the cost without increasing his debts. Leases would be regularly signed to allow the Congregation to divide the lot, very modestly at first, in the autumn of 1861, on which a chapel would be built along with a few cells. On February 25, 1862 a first Mass was able to be celebrated there by Fr. Picard and in May of the same year the place was inhabited. There were a few enlargements made in 1866, a cloister with five small rooms above it. In 1874 the building, christened Picard, a big four-story convent in the back, would be erected, while waiting for the beginning of the construction of the big chapel of Notre-Dame de Salut, which would be completed in the years 1896-1899.

But this architectural work was merely the material envelope of a dynamic apostolic fermentation; in 1865 Fr. Pernet committed himself to the foundation of the Little Sisters of the Assumption. The war in 1870 and the Commune in 1871 only appear to mark a halt; ambitious initiatives would explode with the creation of the Association of Our Lady of Salvation (1872), pilgrimages (1872-1873), Congresses and the Press (1873), a work-place where we would find shoulder to shoulder a religious leader full of spiritual energy, Fr. Picard, and an assistant characterized by an insatiable drive, Fr. Vincent de Paul Bailly. The first alarm of November 1880, the assault on and takeover of the little chapel, was quickly forgotten; the following years

marked the high point of an astonishingly lively and multifaceted spirit. House of formation, novitiate (1874), the press, preparation of Eucharistic Congresses, cradle of the Orantes (1896), François Ier Street became the heart and center of the Congregation, firmly directed by Fr. Picard, supported by a star-studded field of young religious formed in his image. Then came the sad days of 1900: the Trial of the Twelve, the decree of dissolution, the exodus. It was only in 1945 that 8 François Ier Street would become once again a center of community life. Let us follow the humble beginnings of the famous 'bicoque' (ramshackle house).

"Nîmes, Monday evening, December 17, 1860

My very dear friend,

First of all let me tell you that you are definitely one of the most original characters that I know; but, then again, I don't accept any of the blame for you! I would rather give you a holy picture for all the details you go into and that interest me so much. But you will ask for it from Madame the Superior, for whom you spare the trouble of writing and reading my hieroglyphics. Your youthful eyes must be good for something.

In order to build, one must have money. On the one hand, I do not have a cent, and on the other hand I do not want to borrow, with the exception of the land credit. So we must wait until some part of Clichy is sold. No way in the world do I want a rich construction; I want something poor and very poor, as long as it is clean. In that regard, I am fifty-six times of the opinion of Mr. Baudon, and even I do not see why we shouldn't go to the sixtieth.

It is absolutely impossible for me to go to Paris at this time. When Fr. Laurent leaves for Bordeaux, I will remind you. Fr. O'Donnell will go with Fr. Picard. If they say stupidities to each other, they will patch it up. There will not be a community for some time, and the two Fathers will be able to live in the little house neighboring that of Mr. Démion, if the house of Mr. de Brou offends the archdiocese too much. In the spring we will have sold a little of the Clichy property, it is to be hoped, and as a result, we will not be too much in debt. If the builders of our future 'bicoque' would want to take a part of the land at Clichy as payment, as they did for the convent of Auteuil, we could perhaps hasten the construction of the buildings.

I can say nothing about the location of the chapel. I had believed that if Mr. Jackson had ceded a part of the lot, we would have been able to build along the property of Mr. Ouvré and we would have had the prescribed ecclesiastical orientation; in addition to supposing that we had the Leroux lot, we could have built for the religious on the south side. As to the passageway, I yield it gladly. If we had lay clothing, we could escape by d'Antin Avenue and in all these public gardens we would be invisible to the naked eye, isn't it true? On that matter, I leave it up to Providence, especially as we have only d'Antin Avenue as an exit and that from the entrance on François Ier Street we would be seen taking it. If by ceding these passages, and adding 20 to 30,000 francs, we can buy the Leroux and the Jackson strip, I think that it would be very good.

I believe that I have answered all your questions, and as I have a raging headache caused by a head cold, I say goodbye. E. d'Alzon"

—Letter to Vincent de Paul Bailly,¹ December 17, 1860, Edit., D.D., vol. III, 1991, p. 363-364.

¹ Brother Vincent de Paul Bailly (1832-1912) was, at the time, a young novice who having been called to his dying father's bedside, took the occasion to search for a piece of land to buy in Paris. The names cited, Ouvré, Jackson, Leroux, were those of property owners contiguous to the desired *odd-shaped piece of land* on François Ier Street. The religious of Paris and Auteuil, after the closing of the school at Clichy, were promised to other communities in Paris, Nîmes, Rome and Australia. Mr. Adolphe Baudon would be the real buyer of the place. Fr. O'Donnell would die there in 1869. Louis Milleret de Brou, brother of Mère Marie-Eugénie de Jésus, owned a small residence at Auteuil, near the R.A. convent.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION AND RESEARCH

On the Parisian residence of François Ier Street: *Pages d'Archives*, October 1956, new series, n. 4. p. 53-76.

For the contemporary history of the Assumptionist residence of François Ier Street, one can refer to the information published in the bulletin of the Province of France:

A.T.L.P. (Paris) 1979, n. 1, p. 17; 1979, n. 4, p. 6 decision to demolish the building; 1980, n. 7, p. 8; 1980, n. 9, p. 4; 1982, n. 20, p. 15; 1982, n. 23, p. 14; 1982, n. 25, p. 10-11; 1984, n. 32, p. 19; 1985, n. 39, p. 9; 1986, n. 46, p. 27. In 1969, the community of Bayard-Pressé was integrated into the François Ier house. The demolition of the 19th century buildings took place in 1980. In May 1986, the community returned to the entirely rebuilt facility on a smaller lot, limited to #10 alone.

FOR A PERSONALIZED READING

- What architectural and religious notes does Fr. d'Alzon intend to bring to the furnishings and real estate of the Assumption in the Capital?
- The Paris debt, incurred by the purchase of François Ier Street, financed by the sale of Clichy, would become a leitmotiv in the correspondence of Fr. d'Alzon and Fr. Picard. How do you see financial solidarity between communities today?
- The Assumption, a congregation that had not received official recognition, and later dissolved by the French government, had to organize so as to have a juridical front for its properties. How? Has that changed?



Chapel of Our Lady of Salvation, François Ier Street, Paris, rebuilt in 1889 and subsequently decorated by Miss Chaplin.

30

A FAVORITE SON, VINCENT DE PAUL BAILLY

The first of the Bailly sons to enter the Assumption, Fr. Vincent de Paul, was, without doubt, the favorite son of the Founder, who was not afraid to write to him one day: *'I was a bit hungry and thirsty for you, and though we must not be attached to the creatures of God, God does not prohibit loving one's children:* That expresses the deep mutual attachment that these two men had for each other from the first moment they met on March 25, 1853; Fr. d'Alzon was seduced by the youthful enthusiasm of this lively employee of the Telegraph service, whose almost unequalled verve was matched by a spirited pen. As to the young man who was a boarder at the school of Nîmes, he knows how to cram into a few lines a colorful, very life-like, portrait of an overburdened school director/founder. From this relationship a vocation was born; in June 1860, after a few days' retreat, Vincent de Paul decided to become a religious. We cannot really say that his formation in the Assumption was fine-tuned: a shortened novitiate, theological studies accomplished quickly in the midst of a thousand other occupations, a directorship of the school of Nîmes (1863-1867) that did not prove to be good for anyone. It might be said that this man, with his lively intelligence and enterprising imagination, was more at ease with action than with studies. 1869 was a turning point in his life; he was in Paris at the side of Fr. Picard, ready, as was his young superior, to live, for all to see, the adventures and the realities of the faith in contact with the masses and public opinion. Volunteer chaplain with the army of Metz in 1870, prisoner of war at Mayence (1871), he needed the smell of gunpowder and public action to give full measure to his capacities. By getting involved in the organization of Congresses and of pilgrimages, he would find his path and sharpen his pen. *Le Pèlerin*, a modest bulletin of pious literature, was transformed into an illustrated current events magazine (1877). From Nîmes, Fr. d'Alzon more than once would raise his eyebrows on reading his articles and deem the genre superficial and even silly! Well, there was a solution for this! The subordinate invited his superior to furnish written

homilies; in that way, he could reserve to himself the role of capturing instantly the attention of the reader. In 1883, the born-journalist that he always was found his best platform, the columns of *La Croix*, a daily newspaper, under his favorite pseudonym, Le Moine ("The Monk"). He became one with his readers, inoculated them with the virus of current events and of an in-your-face and high-volume faith, aroused readers in a polemic fashion by biting remarks, well-chosen words, outrageous epithets, and stinging caricatures. Extremely hard-working, he participated in all the battles and all the activities of the times: pilgrimages, various constructions, prayer associations. In 1900, he was condemned to silence and to solitude, other forms of a martyrdom already foreseen in 1861.

"Nîmes, December 29 1861

My very dear child,

I come to thank you for your kind letters, for your good wishes on my feast-day, and in exchange, I send to you my wishes for a happy New Year. What will this year be that begins in such strange circumstances?¹ Only God knows. But what I would want of you is that you go and prepare yourself for the battles² that probably await you, by frequent visits, especially to the tombs of the martyrs. What are we before these giants? Real pygmies.³ But by the grace of God we can grow and nothing is more conducive to develop Christian courage in our hearts than their trials the sight of which is present at each step to the faithful who have the joy of living in Rome.⁴ I ask you, please, to profit from the lessons of your various theology professors;⁵ but besides these living masters, you have these doctors whose blood says more than any speech and whose eloquence lies entirely in their actions. From them you will learn to fight, and when you compare what you do with what they did, you will feel enlivened with a great desire to suffer in turn as they suffered to prove their love of J.C. Then you will see that the regularity of life, the work of studying, the victory over character faults and temptations, the contemplation of religious life are nothing compared to everything the martyrs suffered, and that, since you must work to be prepared for everything, not only a religious novitiate, but also a novitiate for martyrdom, nothing is too difficult and obedience must consist more in holding yourself back than in pressing

forward.

Forgive me, my very dear child, if I use this language with you, but the circumstances seem to be quite serious and the horizon very dark. What I foresee may be exaggerated, but alas! There are more and more clouds gathering each day and there are such signs in the heavens, that we might believe that we are speaking of the present and not simply of the future.

I ask that the two novices⁶ pay great obedience to Bro. Vincent de Paul, who must save his strength for study. Pray to the martyrs to obtain for you patience in the boredom of work. Work hard. It seems to me that you have reached the moment when the first difficulties of your stay in Rome have been overcome, when you will begin to savor each day a little more joy at being closer to Saint Peter and the Pope, and when you will feel more what those men must be to whom God has given the grace to be able to pray every day on the tomb of some apostle.

Goodbye, beloved sons. Persevere! Persevere! Who among you will be the first martyr?

E. d'Alzon."

—Letter of Fr. d'Alzon to Bro. Vincent de Paul Bailly, ed.
Désiré Deraedt, vol. III, 1991, p. 549-550.

¹ Fr. d'Alzon was very preoccupied by the political and military situation created in Italy, the virtual suppression of the Papal States.

² Those of the future Fr. Vincent de Paul Bailly would take the path of the pen.

³ The first Assumptionist contact with actual pygmies dates from the 1930's in the Congo.

⁴ Fr. d'Alzon could draw on his own recollections and experiences from 1833 to 1835.

⁵ The student days of Bro. Vincent de Paul Bailly would be short.

⁶ Augustin Gallois (1826-?) and Emmanuel Bailly (1842-1917) were the two companions.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION AND RESEARCH

To depict the figure of Fr. Vincent de Paul Bailly, there is no lack of biographies; one can refer to the documentation in the *Notices*

Biographiques, vol. I, 2000, p. 116.

In 1962, Fr. Adrien Pépin also produced a *Chronologie de la vie du P. François Picard (1831-1903) et du P. Vincent de Paul Bailly (1832-1912)*, Rome, Curie Généralice, 276 pages. It is a valuable tool for anyone wishing to follow the busv life of these two religious. The inventoried writings of Fr. Vincent de Paul Bailly, more than thirty volumes, are typewritten and have recently been integrated in the d'Alzon computer bank. A CD is now in preparation.

On Bro. Vincent de Paul Bailly's life in Rome, see *Pages d'Archives*, December 1967, no. 8, pages 598-606.

On Fr. d'Alzon's forms of prayer: Ngwese Kombi Floribert, *Prières recueillies et présentées du Vénérable P. d'Alzon*, Kinshasa, 1997, 25 pages. Jean-Paul Périer-Muzet, *Prier quinze jours avec Emmanuel d'Alzon*, Nouvelle Cité, Montrouge, 2003, 122 pages.

FOR A PERSONALIZED READING

- What recommendations does Fr. d'Alzon give to the young theology student? What is the place given to prayer and the practice of virtues?
- What do the feelings expressed by Fr. d'Alzon concerning the Church, its history and the Papacy, suggest to you?
- How are you called to account for the hope in you as you experience present world events?
- Is there not an astonishing paradox that is more and more marked with the years in Fr. d'Alzon and his disciples between the pessimism of their thoughts and the optimism of their actions? What do you think?



Since 1873 the Assumption family has been faithful in keeping its Lourdes rendez-vous for the feast of the Assumption.

Part IV

31. A Parable of Community Life	127
32. The Orient: Mystery and Mirage.....	131
33. Rochebelle (1865).....	136
34. A Vicar General's Doll (1865)	141
35. The Bible and Exegesis in Fr. d'Alzon's Time (1866)	145
36. Fr. d'Alzon in the Fields at Le Vigan (1867)	149
37. A Lesson in Political Morality (1867)	153
38. Fr. d'Alzon, A Pilgrim at Lourdes (1868).....	158
39. Castles in the Clouds: Jean, the Millionaire (1869).....	162
40. Fr. d'Alzon at Vatican I (1869)	166

The Birth of *La Croix*
Marian Pilgrimages
The College of Clichy



31

A PARABLE OF COMMUNITY LIFE

Religious life in the Assumption has two aspects: on the garden side, it borrows habits and customs of the fraternal common life from monasticism; on the yard or street side, it corresponds to modern forms of apostolate that opens it up to everything that is social and public. This is what Fr. d'Alzon wanted for the Assumption, double or "mixed" to use the old terminology, but especially modern in his mind, without rejecting the centuries old and even millennial tradition of the common life.

More than anyone else, Fr. d'Alzon, as vicar general, could not ignore the tension he sensed of being pulled apart caused by his double obedience, and questioned his ability to lead a Congregation while taking seriously the duties of a high profile post in the church. Only in 1878 would he resign from his post as vicar general, after 40 years of good and loyal service to the Church of Nîmes. Religious life requires presence and communion within a human group whose members do not choose each other, where affinities and divisions based on character, temperament, origins, and other contrasting factors can only be balanced by individuals truly transcending their differences and undergoing evangelical conversion. Fr. d'Alzon, a man of character and decisiveness, loved those who had a strong and wilful nature, and was more at ease with the manly virtues than with the 'vapors' or the shifting, bending humors of confreres whom he did not hesitate to accuse of being 'cotton balls.' And yet, no one could deny that he had a genuine community streak composed of frankness, affection, and communication. He liked to give his disciples nicknames that were humorous and tender at the same time. He pinned on them some really unusual names, for example: for Galabert, *Galabertinet*, (a diminutive expressing innocence), for Pernet, *Pernichon of my heart*, (a diminutive expressing endearment), for Emmanuel Bailly, *Culot* ("pushy"), for Eulalie de Régis, *Sister Absolute Saint*, for Picard, *your Majesty or your high reason*. Does he not invite Fr. Hippolyte to earn money by inventing a liquor to be called *Essence of the Assumption*?¹ This shows that in the eyes of the Founder,

humor in interpersonal relationships cannot be minimized in the common life, as long as all forms of vulgarity or of guile are excluded.

Fr. d'Alzon, who was on the road so often, liked to recommend the virtues of a regular life to his disciples; but we also find him preoccupied with the health of Fr. Hippolyte or of Fr. Pernet. The death of eight religious between 1851 and 1880 touched his sense of spiritual fatherhood and religious brotherhood. Let us listen to Fr. d'Alzon as he tells a bittersweet parable.

"Nîmes, July 12, 1862

To my dear sons, Brothers Augustine and Emmanuel-Joseph.² May they have long life with their noses, ears and skin.

My dear little tomcats,

A little bird tells me that you are sometimes tempted to pull each other's hair and sink your young claws into each other's tender skins. This is a figure of speech, for you are cats neither by nature nor by grace, but your superior would be tempted to say so, judging by your character,³ not something that deserves praise. So much so that he does not dare leave you for too long a time for fear that on his return he would find only a small piece of the tail of one of you. I would be driven to despair to hear that you had devoured each other, be it on account of the Jesuits or of the Dominicans (religious orders that ran the schools they attended in Rome). Neither of you, friends, is easily digestible. Brother Augustine is a bit thickskinned and Brother Emmanuel Joseph being only skin and bones whets the appetite little. Thus you will have to be content with the portions that the Poles⁴ give you and not consider each other as boiled beef or salad.

Goodbye, my dear sons. Courage and holiness. I wish for you the perfection that consists in allowing his neighbor to live without fear of being devoured.⁵

E. d'Alzon."

—Letter of Fr. d'Alzon to Brothers Augustine Gallois and Emmanuel Bailly, from the Letters, edit., vol. IV, D.D., 1992, p. 92.

¹ Letter to Bro. Alexis Dumazer, ed. Désire Deraedt, t. V. p. 95.

² Since the beginning of November 1861, a small community of Assumptionist had been installed in Rome. It was composed of three religious:

- Brother Vincent de Paul Bailly (1832-1912) who had made his vows on October 31st just before leaving Nîmes; Fr. d'Alzon had named him superior of the little group.
- Brother Augustine Gallois (1826-?), a lesser known figure in the Assumption as he did not stay. A native of Ste-Marie of Py (Marne), he was recruited at the College of Reithel (Ardennes). After his theological studies in Rome (1861-1863), and his perpetual profession in Nîmes (October 15, 1863), he would be sent to help Fr. Galabert in the Orient at Philippopoli, from 1863-1865, where he was ordained a priest on March 25, 1864. After a series of trials, he would then be transferred to Paris, François Ier (1865-1869), and then to the orphanage in Arras (Pas de Calais). He would leave the Assumption in 1873 and was undoubtedly incardinated in his diocese of origin.
- Brother Emmanuel-Joseph Bailly (1842-1917), brother of Vincent de Paul, was born in Paris, student at Clichy-la-Garenne from 1854-1860, student in Rome from 1861 to 1863, then teacher at the college at Nîmes (1863-1867) where we would replace his brother as director from 1867 to 1880.

³ "Judicative" (translated as judgement), in the sense of that which allows one to make a judgement or evaluate, is normally an adjective but can be used as a noun.

⁴ The allusion to the Poles is easily explained: the small Roman community was lodged in the house of the Polish Resurrectionists, at St. Claude des Bourguignons in Rome. At that time, Fr. d'Alzon was negotiating a fusion with that Congregation, composed mostly of Poles, and it seemed to him that it was a wise move, before any decision, to have the spirit of the Assumption coexist with that of the Resurrectionists by the concrete experience of the two communities living together.

⁵ The understatement does not lack flavor. As for the allegorical use of the figure of the cat to depict personal or community attitudes, it was already used by Aesop and La Fontaine; the feline species has given numerous expressions that evoke trickery, cunning, cruelty and even voracity.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION AND RESEARCH

In the writings of Fr. d'Alzon, the term 'community' is used 575 times and that of 'communities' 116 times. But, are not the contexts very different

from today's? The Rule of Life, in Augustinian style, is very attentive to the quality of a fraternal climate and animation: Athanase Sage, *La Règle de Saint Augustin commentée par ses écrits*, Paris, 1961, 280 pages. On the other hand, one can discover echoes of community life in the Assumption in every age, in the pages of *L'Assomption et ses œuvres* magazine. Readers who want a more doctrinal presentation of this theme can go to the pages of three Augustinian inspired reviews, founded or controlled by the Assumption: *Revue Augustinienne* (Louvain, 1902-1910), *Revue des Études Augustiniennes* (R.E. Aug.), and *Itinéraires Augustiniens*.

On the Augustinian influence in Fr. d'Alzon

Itinéraires Augustiniens, 1992, no. 7

A Travers la Province, 2000, No. 157, p. 17

L'Esprit de l'Assomption d'après le P. d'Alzon, Rome, 1993, pp. 87-88

On the Augustinian heritage at the Assumption: cf. *A.T.L.R.*, Nov. And Dec. Issues, 2000

FOR A PERSONALIZED READING

- How does Fr. d'Alzon try to give a humorous lesson in fraternal harmony?
- Community life can have various facets. What are those that you find in your personal experience?
- The present Rule of Life indicates that fraternal life is to be built up every day (Chap. II, no. 7). What are the joys and the difficulties that you find in building fraternal life?
- Are not laughter, humor, and welcoming unforeseen events and differences, powerful natural aids in such a form of life?

32

THE ORIENT: MYSTERY AND MIRAGE

From February to April 1863, Fr. d'Alzon made an exploratory trip to Constantinople, accompanied by a former student of Assumption College in Nîmes, Louis Guizard. Besides Switzerland and Rome, it would be Fr. d'Alzon's only long trip outside of France. He wanted to see for himself the concrete situation of this Orient, at once both mysterious and attractive, to which Pope Pius IX had seemed to direct him and the apostolate of his small Congregation, in his blessing of June 3, 1862, which has remained famous. Slyly circumvented by three curial prelates, Bishops Talbot, Howard, and Lavigerie who conspired to send him to Bulgaria, at that time an Ottoman province, to the detriment of Jerusalem where he had hoped to acquire the Cenacle and the Tomb of the Virgin, Fr. d'Alzon sent Fr. Victorin Galabert, who arrived in Constantinople on December 20, 1862. Galabert had no specific directives for his mission.

After his arrival, Fr. d'Alzon observed, consulted, preached and became aware of the difficulties which a great number of politico-religious imbroglios had engendered and rendered quite complex; the Orient, since the Treaty of Paris of 1856, had been an object of the lust of all of Europe. The Ottoman Empire, a former great power in decline, whose remains were dispersed all over the Mediterranean Basin, offered a rare mixture of populations, ethnic groups, religions, rites, religious rivalries, sources of possible changes that each power or authority was longing to profit from. Greece was the first to pay a heavy price for its political freedom between 1820-1830; the provinces of Serbia, of Wallachia (a historical region of southeast Romania), and of Moldavia followed on Greece's heels; Egypt entered into dissidence with its Viceroy, Ibrahim Pacha. All the Balkans were feverishly awaiting their liberation both political (protectorship of the Ottomans) and religious (protectorship of the Phanar, the Orthodox Patriarch of Constantinople). It was in that context that Pope Pius IX re-established a Latin Patriarchate in Jerusalem (1847) and ordained Bishop Joseph Sokolski as the head of the Uniate Bulgarians (1861). But Russia was

also watching out for its interests; the archbishop was kidnapped, and the union of the Bulgarians with Rome was delayed. Orthodoxy, which had never abandoned its Caesarism, was the object of national pressures, torn between the Phanar (Constantinople) and the Patriarchate of Moscow. Rome found it difficult to let go of its dreams of a Latinizing union; it is that complexity that Emmanuel d'Alzon would face in 1863 with a three-pronged mentality: French, Catholic, and Roman. At least he would hear the urgent call of Fr. Galabert to send him the women auxiliaries he absolutely needed. That would bring about the birth of the Oblates of the Assumption in 1865. Let us listen to the first on-the-spot report of the trip addressed to Fr. Vincent de Paul Bailly in March 1863.

"Constantinople, March 16, 1863

Dear Friend,

Fr. Galabert has left,¹ the sultan² has taken a new wife tonight. I was supposed to go to see the feast of the candles, but I was not able. We are looking for an honest man among the Bulgarians: up till now one hasn't been found. Will we be successful? This matter creates more than one problem. Constantinople is much dirtier than its suburbs. Turkish women rush to the exposition, where, they say, there is nothing. But an exposition in Constantinople is more than a revolution, it is more like a half dozen revolutions. I wanted to see it today. Only women were allowed in. Ergo... Brother Emmanuel, finish the syllogism. Speaking of revolution, one is being predicted for Russia, much more impressive than that of Greece, much more beautiful than that of Italy, than that of 1849, than that of 1830, than that of 1793. All the Boyars (name of the former nobility in Russia from the 10th to the 17th century) will be roasted, all the children eaten, all the women will be divorced so as to have all the husbands they could think of. Herzen³ is a moderate, a rear guard, a reactionary compared to what you will see. Turkey has a black-and-blue dread of Russia that has a red dread of revolution, which has very black hopes; and in the end, none of this is white.

The Emperor of the French has a famous ambassador here.⁴ No one has ever been a better comedian. It is said that he will be replaced by a veteran of the First French Empire, Baraguay d'Hilliers.⁵

Pray God that I will know what to do. Evidently a patriarchal seminary is needed here, an apostolic and scholarly center.⁶ Well! That is, it seems to me, one of the aims of our Congregation. Do you know what scares me? It is the cost of land. Two and a half miles from here,⁷ land costs 12,000 francs and more per hectare. As for the Bulgarians, they are the most awful scum that one could imagine. Bishop Brunoni,⁸ after many inquiries, thought he had found an honest man; then he discovered that this man had left his wife and given his daughter to I don't remember whom. It is worse than mud, it is dung. Oh well, we have to love them, they are our neighbors.

Will I arrive in Rome on the 17th or the 23rd?⁹ I still don't know. I am anxious to get to Rome; I still want to be here; I would also want to be in France. How I would like to do many impossible things at the same time! Another detail It is already three weeks that I have been asking for the most remarkable work that the Greeks have written on a religious subject. The Greeks have written nothing in the past twenty years and to find something remarkable one has to go back eighty (years). It is 10 o'clock in Constantinople, 9:30 in Rome. I send you my blessing. Goodnight. Go to bed, and I will as well.

E. d'Alzon

If Bernard¹⁰ is still in Rome, give him a thousand greetings from me."

—Lettres d'Alzon, edit, D.D., vol. IV, 1992, P. 223-224.

¹ Since March 10, 1863, Fr. Galabert had been accompanying Louis Guizard and Bishop François Malczynski on a tour of Bulgaria.

² Abdul-Aziz (1830-1876), sultan since 1861, renowned for his famous harem and the luxury of his court.

³ Alexander Ivanovitch Heraen (1812-1870) was a revolutionary Russian writer, who published a politico-literary magazine, *La Cloche*, in exile.

⁴ The Marquis Lionel de Moustier (1817-1869), Ambassador to Constantinople from 1861 to 1866, later Foreign Minister (1866-1868) and Senator. His successor to the Turkish Court was Prospère Bourée (1866-1870).

⁵ Marshall Achille, Count Baraguey d'Hilliers (1795-1878), brilliantly took part in the Crimean War. He was ambassador to Constantinople in 1853. His sister,

Clémentine (well known to M. Marie-Eugénie de Jésus), married a military man, Charles-Henri Denys de Damrémont.

⁶ These projects would see the light of day beginning in 1895 at Kadi-Koy. Under the direction of Louis Petit, a seminary, a scholasticate and the review *Echos d'Orient* (1897) would give these lines a tinge of prophecy or of some foundational premonition.

⁷ The *lieue* is an ancient measure of distance which corresponds to about 4 kilometers. On March 2, Fr. d'Alzon made an excursion to Kadi-Koy on the other side of the Marmara Sea, on the Asian side. He walked in the *field of the widow* mentioned by John Chrysostom. On April 15, he visited the Church of the Assumption where Abbé Negri ministered.

⁸ Bishop Paolo Brunoni (1807-1870) was the Patriarchal Apostolic Vicar of Constantinople, president of the Committee for the Bulgarian Uniates.

⁹ Fr. d'Alzon left Constantinople on April 16 and arrived in Rome on the 22nd.

¹⁰ Bernard Bailly, brother of the Assumptionist Bailly brothers.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION AND RESEARCH

Besides these texts of Fr. d'Alzon on the Orient, there is much first-hand information to be had from Fr. Galabert, especially in his *Journal*, which has been partially published (Volumes I and II, Sofia 1998 and 2000, correspond respectively to 1862-1866 and 1867-1869).

For later years there is much information on the apostolic activities of the Assumptionists and the Oblates of the Assumption in the collection *Missions des Augustins de l'Assomption, 1886-1965*.

For the Mission in the Orient: cf. *Pages d'Archives*, March 1865 and the booklets *Oblates Centenary 1980*, in Turkey, Russia, Bulgaria, Rumania, Belgrade and Jerusalem. Julian Walter, *Les Assomptionnistes au Proche Orient* (1863-1980) *Centennial Series no. 6*. Georges Castellan, *Histoire de Balkans*, Fayard, 1991 and Robert Mantran, *Histoire des l'empire ottoman*, Fayard, 1989.

FOR A PERSONALIZED READING

- What vision of the Orient do these observations or impressions of Fr. D'Alzon convey? Do they appear to be objective?

- In your opinion, why does this geo-political region remain even to this day in constant turmoil?
- Are you aware of the epic accomplishments of the Assumptionists during 150 years, from Belgrade to Jerusalem? Why does the Orient continue to find a soft spot in the heart of Assumptionists?
- What are the current challenges that have been identified and what are the resources that the Assumption of the third millennium is consecrating to it? In view of what?



Statue of Our Lady of Salvation: a history and a description of this devotion can be found in issue #675 of *Assomption et ses œuvres*, 1998, pp. 15-17.



Rochefort-du Gard, a pilgrimage in the Department of Gard, where Etienne Pernet affirmed his vocation and where students and professors of Collège de l'Assomption would come on pilgrimage at the time of Fr. d'Alzon.

33

ROCHEBELLE, 1865

1865 marked the year of the foundation of the Oblates of the Assumption, those women religious auxiliaries that Fr. d'Alzon wanted for the Mission of the Orient where Fr. Galabert was screaming for them. The Founder had been thinking of something like this since 1863, but circumstances would give an unexpected twist to his first plan. Since January 1863, when he wrote: *'I would be disposed to found a small Congregation for Bulgaria,'* until April 1865, when he confessed: *'I am also a bit annoyed by the Religious of the Assumption, who have recently founded two new houses and then tell me they have no subjects,'* there had been negotiations, plans and attempts! And yet, if we look at the day to day unfolding of the events, it would not be exact to present the birth of the Oblates of the Assumption as the simple result of a refusal by the Religious of Auteuil. In December 1864, Mother Marie-Eugénie de Jésus traveled to Nîmes expressly to discuss the founding of a group of Oblates who would be an intermediate category between the Choir professed and the lay sisters. It is also true that her council demanded that a foreign foundation with all its uncertainties be put off: Where to go? Andrinopolis where the Assumptionists had not yet founded and where the help of the Resurrectionists seemed to them to be a sort of last resort? And for what precise mission, since two foundations recently made or about to be made, Malaga in Spain and Poitiers, still needed personnel? In the end, on whom could he count? The famous 'Pauline' of Lavagnac, that is Miss Sagnier, on whom Fr. d'Alzon was counting on, calling her the cornerstone, finally removed herself from the race. Despite the understandable hesitations, d'Alzon's sense of urgency moved him to act. In February 1865, he rented a house in Nîmes, but there was no one to live there! Finally it was Fr. Hippolyte Saugrain, the Master of Novices at Le Vigan, who saved the day in April 1865, and found in the Cévennes a pool of solid vocations, whom Fr. d'Alzon could not praise highly enough. They were the 'Bulgarettes; his 'Bulgarotes', his 'Bulgarines', those tough little mountain girls, active,

intelligent, full of faith and generosity. He found them a house to rent in the suburbs of Le Vigan, Rochebelle, blessed it on May 23, 1865, and celebrated the first Mass there the next day; and the same evening, Bishop Plantier blessed a statue of the Virgin, called Our Lady of Bulgaria, who presided over the small improvised convent. Mother Marie-Eugénie accepted to furnish this first nucleus a temporary superior, M. Marie-Madeleine de Peter. Let us visit the place with Fr. d'Alzon.

"To my dear daughters, Sister Marie-Eulalie, Sister Marie des Anges and Marie Correnson, Le Vigan, April 22, 1865

My dear children,

Man proposed to begin the work of the Oblates in Nîmes and God seems to want it launched at Le Vigan. The house is just about to be rented. That probably will be a done deal on Monday or Tuesday. It is on the side facing the one where we live. It is a house rented by the English for a long time, when the English came to Le Vigan, on a rise; a charming hill, a beautiful vista, water, fruit, vegetables, a prairie, and mulberry trees. It will cost 12,000 to 15,000 francs, probably 12,000. But a thousand francs-worth of leaves have already been sold. There is some 300 francs worth of fodder, four tuns of wine, so that the rent would end up at some 400 or 500 francs at most.

The person who is obtaining this great deal for us is trying to find out why we are being given such a great and advantageous deal, and fears that something is going on under the table and is trying to discover what it is. The building has four stories. On the first floor, there is a vestibule, an enormous kitchen with pantries, a huge dining room, cellars, and sheds. On the second floor which opens on a terrace, two very nice rooms, on one side an antechamber that can be the parlor, a large room that can be the chapel, with a small room as the sacristy and a small office for the superior and the chaplain. On the third floor, very large rooms which could become dormitories. On the fourth floor, bedrooms and attics.

We can move in immediately. We would begin paying only on July first, and for the first six months we would deduct the price of the leaves and the fodder sold. We would keep the wine, the vegetables and the fruit. Fr. Hippolyte claims that in one or two months he would have at least twenty young women. In that case

the house would be too small, but we would have the option of sending a few to Nîmes.

Note that we have two teachers, who would sell their school benches, collect their debts and bring in a few hundred francs, as well as their furniture and kitchen utensils. We believe that this endeavor won't cost us a cent, except to set up the chapel and that will be a small expense. Besides, I can surely count on the good will of some ladies of Le Vigan.

Dont you want to visit our little establishment? I will be here all next week. If you leave at six in the morning, by mail-coach or the business coach, you will be here at about one or two o'clock—seven or eight hours of coach—and then you will go back, having seen for yourselves. A trip for three in the coach what a delight! And you would come to give your blessing in the foundation of the work.

As for what we do, here is what I think: work, penance, prayer. Work to live, penance to expiate for the sins of heretics and obtain their conversion, prayer to adore the Blessed Sacrament. From there, retreats where the girls of our mountains would come to see if they should become lay sisters or go to Bulgaria. The mission that Fr. Raphael or Fr. Jean-Baptiste just gave at Alzon converted all the men, except for fifteen, gave new life to the Penitents, turned up one vocation for us and seven or eight female vocations, without mentioning those from Le Vigan and surroundings. If were successful, we would lease a big silk worm factory and put in two hundred beds, with an economical oven, to take care of the female weavers, as we have done at Saint-Ambroix. In the meantime, Fr. Hippolyte will preach to them (the weavers) three times a week for the Month of Mary, at the hospital So you see the urgency of your coming to Le Vigan to supervise all of this, give your opinion, and your blessing..."

—Letter to Miss de Régis,¹ vol. V, edit. DD.,
1992, p. 288-289.

¹ Sister Marie-Eulalie is none other that Eulalie de Régis (1826-1867) and Sister Marie-des-Anges, Isabelle de Merignargues (1826-1884). Marie Correnson (1842-1900) was 23 years old and would not go to Rochebelle until 1867. The other persons named are Assumptionist religious: Fr. Hippolyte Saugrain (1821-1905), Fr.

Raphaël Jourdan (1836-?), Fr. Jean-Baptiste Grousset (1818-?), the two latter later left the congregation. Le Vigan, Alzon, and St-Ambroix are three towns of the Gard. The first Oblates were: Thérèse Salze, the Durand sisters, Augustine Bernassau, the Dalmier sisters, Louise Damenne, Marie des Anges Clavier, Félicité Brun Villaret, Veronique Villaret, Augustine Brun, Colombe Balmelle, Marie Bourrier...

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION AND RESEARCH

On the Oblates:

d'Alzon, *Écrits spirituels*, pp. 1182-1184.

S.Vailhé, *Vie du P. d'Alzon*, Paris, B.P., 1934, chap. XVI.

Mother Thérèse-Marie Foy, *Vénérable Emmanuel d'Alzon*, Gosselies-S. Gérard, March 2000, p. 163-174.

Dossier sur la vie et les vertus du P. d'Alzon, t. II, vol. II, p 693-729 and 847-871.

Pierre Touveneraud, A.A. and Sr. Marie-Léonie (Marichal), O.A. *La fondation des Sœurs Oblates de l'Assomption*, Série Centenaire no. 4, Rome, 1980, 36 pages.

Pages d'Oblation Mémorial et Souvenirs, Paris, 1.1 to XVI (1957-1999).

Les Oblates de l'Assomption, Cahier du Centenaire d'Alzon (by country, province and apostolates).

Lettres du P. d'Alzon à Marie Correnson et aux Oblates de l'Assomption, Brussels, 1933, 490 pages. *Actes du Colloque Marie Correnson*, Paris—Nîmes, 2000.

Julian Walter, A.A., *L'Apostolat Assomptionniste auprès des Bulgares de 1862 à 1880*, and Étienne Fouilloux, *L'œuvre orientale du Père d'Alzon vue par ses fils (1880-1980)* in the *Colloque d'histoire 1980*, op. cit., Le Centurion, Paris, 1892, pp 180-198 and 199-220. Victorin Galabert, *Journal*. Tomes I-II, Sophia, 1998-2000.

FOR A PERSONALIZED READING

- Doesn't every foundation require a burst of enthusiasm? Nevertheless, at the same time, Fr. d'Alzon lacked neither realism

nor a spirit of faith when he wrote about Bulgaria: *"My God, what a wasps' nest I've jumped into! But one must be somewhat of a fool for the Lord!"* Cf. Letters of Fr. d'Alzon, t. IV, p. 188. What do you think?

- In what way does the foundation of the Oblates appear to be a real act of faith?
- What religious formation did Fr. d'Alzon foresee for women religious missionaries?
- Do you know any other women's religious foundations established for the foreign missions in the 19th century? What traits do they share in common with the Oblates?

34

A VICAR GENERAL'S DOLL

Rarely do we hear of Fr. d'Alzon's interaction with youth, even though he was thoroughly involved with them throughout his life. In 1835, upon his arrival in Nîmes as a young priest, he threw himself in the work of youth clubs and popular education. Did he not, besides, as early as 1845, want to live in a "collège" (prep school) in direct contact with the world of youth? When he moved temporarily to the hills surrounding Nîmes, on Mount Duplan, was it not to find himself once again absorbed in the work of the Argaud youth club whose renewal he wanted to assure? This aspect of Fr. d'Alzon's life, which has not inspired his biographers, deserves, however, greater attention: undertaking the refoundation of a college in Nîmes and the student boarding house Vermot were inspired by pedagogical and pastoral concepts rooted in a fundamental apostolic vision. In each generation youth represent the spearhead of the future, be it that of the family cell, society or the Church. The importance that 19th century Catholics gave to educational questions, especially the status of academic institutions, originates in an observation that was obvious: the influence of a holistic formation of the person in the first years of life cannot be underestimated. The State cannot claim for itself alone that part of responsibility that is first of all a family priority, which, in all of its social and spiritual elements, must be strengthened by all of a country's resources.

In founding religious congregations, Fr. d'Alzon long placed, too long undoubtedly, great hopes on the natural vocational pool that the college of Nîmes represented in his vision. The development of the Oblates, starting up in the Cévennes, and the experience of a few of his disciples whose origins and personal affinities oriented them rather to the poor classes led Fr. d'Alzon and the Assumption, even before 1870, if not to other preoccupations, at least towards broader horizons and other means: those of rural areas, working class neighborhoods or the masses.

As early as the end of the years that mark the Second Empire, Fr. d'Alzon turned to other needs that the evolution of a society towards greater

democracy and justice made clear. He did not disavow his priorities; he sought to adapt them to changing circumstances. Even if he remained in contact and in affinity with high society because of his family's status, he never let go of the qualities or values that transcend social status: simplicity, generosity, heartfelt contact, a childlike spirit in the Gospel sense, as with his little cousins of Berrias to whom he sent a doll that he had won in a lottery.

"Le Vigan, August 10, 1865

My dear little cousins¹

Can you imagine that a long, long time ago, I won a doll in a lottery? Now that is something extraordinary: that an old² Vicar General wins dolls! I really don't have the time to dress her, undress her, give her breakfast, and teach her to read; and what's more, it would not be proper for me to take her out for walks. What would they say in Nîmes if they saw me taking her out for some fresh air on Feuchères Avenue?³ So I'm going to ask you to do something for me, a big service, and I hope you will not refuse.

Would you be willing to take responsibility for being her little servants, her little mothers? I hope that your mother⁴ will not consider her entrance into the house as adding to the family. Also, I must tell you: my protegee has a little clothes kit, that will arrive with her little person. You will see, it is quite well furnished. The only problem is that her things seem to me to have yellowed a bit, but at the first washing, at Berrias, it will all be brand new.

Goodbye, my dear little cousins. Believe me, I have great confidence in you, since I am putting you in charge of the education of my doll.⁵ You will teach her good manners, you will not look for too much affection from her, you won't make me too jealous, and when I go to see her and we speak together, you will not repeat to others what my poor little doll and I have said confidentially, even though it was in your presence.

Goodbye, again, my dear little cousins. Believe me, I love you a lot as do your father and mother. My doll's box and her clothes kit will arrive on the Assumption, at the same time as this letter. If they don't arrive, make sure you ask for them.

E d'Alzon"

—D'Alzon Letters, vol. V. edit. D.D., Rome, 1992, p. 385-386.

¹ These were the daughters of Paulin de Malbosc and his wife, nee Mix de Roussy, whom he married in 1855. Paulin had been a widower since 1848 of a first union contracted in 1847. The family of Fr. d'Alzon was related to the Roussy de Sales. The couple, P. and A. de Malbosc, had several children whose given names were mentioned in Fr. d'Alzon's correspondence: Françoise, Marie, Joseph, Jeanne and Thérèse. From other sources we know the Malbosc family quite well. They divided their time between their two residences of St. Victor of Malcap (Gard) and Berrias (Ardèche): Paulin was the son of Jules Bastide de Malbosc (+1867) and of Anne-Julie, nee de Lafigère (1783-1853), married in 1810, and who had five children: Amélie (1819-1845), Louise (+1825), Eugénie, who became Sister Françoise-Eugénie, R.A., (1822-1878), Eugene (+ 1858) who married Louise, nee Carayon-Talpayrac and Paulin.

² On August 30, 1865, Fr. d'Alzon will end his 55th year. To a child, that birth day seems to be that of an old person. Fr. d'Alzon gladly calls himself old before his time.

³ This beautiful avenue of Nîmes, situated between the railroad station and Esplanade Square, bordered Assumption College, whose official entrance is still on de la Servie Street.

⁴ Alix de Malbosc, nee Roussy de Sales, was a direct cousin of Fr. d'Alzon. She is the daughter of Felix-Léonard, Marquis of Roussy (1875-1857) and of Pauline de Sales (1876-1852). Alix's brothers were Félix-F.-Louis-Philippe (1824-1862), husband of Marie de Fayet (+1868), Eugene (1822-1915), husband of Renée de Brosses, and Paul-François-Jean (1817?) and her sisters were Marie-Françoise (1819-1842), wife of Edouard Muffat de Saint-Amour, and Alexandrine (who died young). The de Roussy family was originally from Nîmes and established itself in Savoy with the last descendant of the family of Saint Francis de Sales (Thorens).

⁵ One can recognize in this list certain aspects of education that were dear to Fr. d'Alzon: distinction (in the sense of nobility, excellence, virtue), study, controlled affectivity, good behaviour...

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION AND RESEARCH

F. d'Yvoire, *Armorial et nobiliaire de l'ancien duché de Savoie*, Grenoble, 1863-1938. F. Miquet, *Répertoire biographique des Savoyards contemporains 1800-1892*, Annecy, 1893-1898.

On the subject of education at the college of Nîmes:

Fr. d'Alzon, *Instructions du Samedi; Circulaire sur l'éducation et l'enseignement; Seventh General Letter, Écrits spirituels*, Paris, B.P., 1932. pp

235-253.

Bauer, *Le P. d'Alzon, éducateur, Systèmes d'éducation chrétienne*.

Sister Marie Serge, O.A., *Le P. d'Alzon et l'éducation*, 1987.

On 19th Century Education:

Dictionnaire historique de l'éducation chrétienne d'expression française, under the direction of Guy Avanzini, edit. Don Bosco, Angers, 2001.

Gérard Cholvy et Nadine-Josette Chaline, *L'enseignement catholique en France au XIXe et XX siècle*, Cerf, 1995, 294. p. in the collection *Histoire religieuse de la France*.

FOR A PERSONALIZED READING

- How is Fr. d'Alzon able to place himself on the level of his young audience? How does his simplicity remain natural?
- In your opinion, what are the major thrusts or principles of education that Fr. d'Alzon wanted to impart to his students at Assumption College? Is education still a priority at Assumption?
- What do you know about the company Fr. d'Alzon usually kept at Assumption College of Nîmes? In your life, are you in contact with youth?
- What games, sports, forms of relaxation, hobbies were part of the culture of Fr. d'Alzon and the youth of his time? What are yours?

35

THE BIBLE AND EXEGESIS OF FR. D'ALZON'S TIME

This page from Fr. d'Alzon, written in 1866, and published in the newspaper *Le Monde* of the time is worth reading for various reasons: for itself, for the mentality it reflects and for the evolution of thought that it can not but call to mind. A man of the Church of his time, Fr. d'Alzon had a sacred respect and an ecclesial reflex for the reading of the Holy Scriptures, according to the traditional teaching of the Popes and the Councils. Already in 1837, he warned the editor of the *Gazette du Languedoc* about a new edition of the Bible that had not been approved by the religious authorities.¹ Like all other 19th century clergy, Fr. d'Alzon was accustomed to reading the Bible in Latin in its official version, the Vulgate, the only liturgical text in use in the Western tradition since the Council of Trent. At Montpellier, in 1832, Emmanuel asked his father to send him his Greek New Testament,² an interesting indication of the intellectual requirements of the seminary and of the seminarians. It is, of course, the Vulgate that he usually quoted, literally or from memory, in the manner of the Ancients, not to mention all the implicit allusions to the sacred text. One day, we hope, a study of the instances of scriptural allusions and passages in all his writings will demonstrate how much the Bible was the first and unsurpassable source of inspiration for Fr. d'Alzon beyond any other literary, theological, patristic, or spiritual influence! Still, he was aware of the numerous, more or less accurate, French versions, that had taken their place in the world of letters; he was no stranger to the translation of the Maistre de Sacy (1672-1696), or that of Genoude (1820-1824), nor that of Abbé J.-B. Glaire (1834), translators whom he quoted by name, but whose textual and critical weaknesses are known today. As far as Hebrew is concerned and its eventual utilization in the seminary, we do not have any convincing proof of its use. We do know, however, that his bishop, Bishop Plantier, a former professor at Lyons, was able to address the Jewish citizens of Nîmes in that language on the occasion of his introduction to them as bishop. It is the same Bishop Plantier who in a bishop's statement

of the time would be able to respond to the allegations of Renan's well-known *Vie de Jésus* (1863). Let us not make of Fr. d'Alzon what he never claimed to be anyway, someone who had a taste for or a passion for exegesis, but rather what he was, a fervent reader of the Bible.³ As a science, this discipline was in limbo, especially in the Catholic tradition in which the interpretation of the literal meaning did not authorize any speculation other than spiritual and homiletic, since everything had been doctrinally controlled and determined since the time of the Reformation.

"Nîmes, Good Friday, [March 30] 1866
My dear Friend,

While celebrating the Good Friday Office this morning, I had to sing the prayers for heretics and for Jews. For the Jews, I asked that God remove from the heart of this perfidious people the veil that covers them "et pro perfidis Judaeis, ut Deus et Dominus noster auferat velamen de cordibus eorum... Exaudi preces nostras, quas pro illius populi obcaecatione deferimus" As for the heretics, I asked God to deliver them from all errors, ut Deus et Dominus noster seruat eos ab erroribus universis ... Respice ad animas diabolica fraude deceptas.⁴ And it is side by side with men for whom the Church prays, but that she declares perfidious, blind, plunged in all kinds of errors, deceived by the knavery of the devil, that priests join together to translate the book of truth par excellence! Either the Church knows what it says in its prayers, or it does not. If it does not know, let that be proclaimed loud and clear. If it does know it, if the same prayers with the same condemnations, have been today, the very day of the death of J.C., repeated from one end of the earth to the other, what hope is there to find the true meaning of the Bible with the help of assistants such as those depicted for us in the liturgical prayers?

It has been alleged that the translation of the Bible is a purely philological question. So then, why did a newspaper state that, at the first meeting, one of the venerable pastors requested the prayers of good souls for the success of their work?⁵ If we want to do only philology, why these prayers? It might be just as well to request such prayer for the Academie des sciences morales.⁶ If there is here something more than a philological birth, I understand prayer; but I remember that the prayers requested toward a common end by English Protestants, inspired by pure

*intentions for their Catholic compatriots, were recently declared by the Holy Office, with the approval of the Pope, as the overthrow of the faith and the proclamation of indifference in religious matters.*⁷

One day, during a funeral, some Protestants reproached O'Connell⁸ his having distanced himself from them when their minister wanted to say prayers. "The Catholic Church" he answered, "prays for all, but prays with no one I wait for the Church to declare its consent to translate the Bible with anyone."⁹ Please accept, my dear friend..."

—Letter to Melchior du Lac, according to edit. D.D., vol. VI,
Rome, 1993, p. 49-50.

¹ Letters, vol. II, S.V., p. 17.

² Letters, vol. I, S.V., p. 296

³ Cf. Letter 3106, t. VI, p. 252: "I was reading my New Testament in the shade of the house."

⁴ This is the text of the intercessions of the office called *Paracheve* of the *Missale Romanum*, in use at the time. Fr. d'Alzon never hesitated to say that he sang off-key: cf. Letter 143, Nov. 2, 1833, ed. S.V, p. 442.

⁵ Fr. Désiré Deraedt indicates in his note no. 1, that it referred to a *Société nationale pour la traduction des livres saints* (a National Society for the translation of the Holy Books), a meeting held at the Sorbonne on March 28, 1866.

⁶ The *Académie des sciences morales*, founded in 1895, had as ecclesiastical members in 1832 Abbé de Sieyès and the prince Charles-M. de Talleyrand-Perigord; in 1918, Cardinal Mercier and Fr. Sertillanges.

⁷ The text condemning Bible Societies is found in Denzinger or the Syllabus of Pius IX.

⁸ Daniel O'Connell, leader of the Irish Catholic emancipation (1775-1847).

⁹ The T.O.B. (Ecumenical translation of the Bible) dates to the years 1972-1975.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION AND RESEARCH

On the history of the French versions of the Bible

Dictionnaire de la Bible, vol. lib, col. 2346-2373, art. *Françaises (versions) de la Bible*;

Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique, vol. XV, col. 2700-2739 and Tables, col. 1098-1100 (Ecriture Sainte).

Dictionnaire Encyclopédique de la Bible, Brepols, 1987, p. 1331-1333. *Catholicisme* vol. II, col. 13-17.

How can we not mention here the contemporary initiative of Bayard-Presses to place *La Bible Nouvelle Traduction* (Bayard, 2000) in the framework of a literary and innovative translation of the Bible which avoids both exclusion and competition except in the interest of editorial and commercial freedom?

Pius IV, in 1564, forbade the reading of translations of the Bible in the vernacular that were not accompanied by explanatory notes faithful to the Church's teaching. The *Bible Society* was founded in London in 1780, imitated in 1792 on the other side of the Channel (*Société Biblique française*) and in 1816 by *The American Bible Society* (ABS) with a strong missionary objective. All of these institutions were condemned by Pius VII in 1816, by Leo XII in 1824, Gregory XVI in 1844 and Pius IX in 1846 and in 1864 (Syllabus).

Frédéric Delforge, *La Bible en France et dans la francophonie, Histoire , traduction, diffusion*, Publisud/Société biblique française, 1991, 384 pages. It is indicated on page 242 of this book that the *Société nationale pour la traduction des livres saints* included in 1866 Pastor Emmanuel Pétavel, the Catholic priest Étienne Blanc and the Hebrew scholar Lévy Bing.

FOR A PERSONALIZED READING

- What are the arguments used by Fr. d'Alzon to condemn such an enterprise? What do you think of them in regard to history and today's mentality?
- Should not the translation of the Bible be distinguished from the notes and commentaries that can be appended to it? What is the judgment of the Church on this matter today?
- Can the reading of the Bible be non-denominational?
- Reading, praying, and studying the Bible are commonplace today in numerous inter-confessional Bible groups. In your opinion, what are the advantages of such an enterprise?

36

FATHER D'ALZON IN THE FIELDS OF LE VIGAN

In July 1864, under the guidance of Fr. Hippolyte Saugrain, the Assumptionist novitiate settled at Le Vigan, after the more or less improvised forms of novitiate in the various communities of the Congregation: Nîmes, Clichy, Auteuil. Thanks to his family inheritance, Fr. d'Alzon had the opportunity of transferring the cradle of the Assumption to this modest village of the Cévennes where he himself was born in 1810. Thus he brought about a sort of new life for young religious, in a place of their own, undisturbed by the continual solicitation of a nearby apostolic work. The year 1864 marked a kind of return of Fr. d'Alzon to his familial and regional roots in the Cévennes. Already in the summer of 1831,¹ the young Emmanuel, who had grown up by then, had crossed the peaks of the Cévennes, walked along the banks of the Dourbie, and traversed the table land of Larzac in order to visit his old relative, the Viscount de Bonald, in his hermitage at Monna, near Millau (Aveyron). On his way, above Saint-Jean du-Bruel, he certainly would not have missed an opportunity to meditate at the romantic ruins of the old medieval castle of Algues, cradle, according to tradition, of his ancestors from Roquefeuil. Beginning in 1864, it would not be the memories of the past that would bring Fr. d'Alzon to Le Vigan, but the choices of the future with the formation of young generations of Assumptionists that he would house in his old family home, La Condamine. The rural setting would not lack charm; the isolated villages of the area offered both plenty of opportunities for religious to exercise ministry, and at Rochebelle, tried vocations for the young Oblates: Roques, Avèze, L'Espérou, Alzon, Mandagout, Le Cigal, Saint-André de Majencoules, all names that were part of the Assumptionist geography of the times. The waters of Cauvalat were a balm for those with health problems. The farms of the agricultural estate, l'Elze, La Valette or Bagatelle, furnished some economic resources before being sacrificed, one after the other, on the altar of financial necessity. The novitiate of Le Vigan would give way, in 1874, to a short-lived alumniat (minor seminary), baptized St. Clement in

honor of the liturgical calendar and of the Viscountess d'Alzon. In 1881, in order to save the house, Fr. Picard sold La Condamine to the Countess d'Ursel who had not yet become Mother Isabelle. For a moment, let us return again with Fr. d'Alzon to this rustic oasis of peace, at the mercy of Mother Nature's whims.

"Le Vigan, May 16, 1867

My dear daughter.

Thanks for all the details you have given me. Here, we also have had our storm, but a hailstorm, such that everything is ruined. We don't know where to pick up leaves.² The fields are hacked up, the gardens devastated as if a regiment of cavalry had galloped through them.³ Not to mention the grapevines and the fruit; all of that has disappeared—(there is) no more than on my hand. Also I have gotten down to manual labor like the monks;⁴ I picked up three bundles of mulberry branches. The Fathers⁵ are doing as much. Who knows, perhaps the hail has made us understand the usefulness of manual labor? My poor back, however, after three quarters of an hour, begged for mercy.⁶

The Oblates are doing well, and I am happy about that, but with this devastation, what are they going to live on? They will have to work a little harder. Still, we have had one consolation; our Breton cow, who has the Oblate colors, that is, white and black, has given us a calf the color of an Augustinian, that is all black. It is a pleasure for me to contemplate this young aspirant for the novitiate,⁷ at least by the color of his robe. Your husband⁸ is not doing badly. This afternoon he felt threatened by a migraine headache, but just as I was finishing picking up the bundles of wood, he came by, while going to take his milk,⁹ to reproach me for preferring my bundles to the visit of the Raynaud ladies, who were leaving my place.

As I picked up the last branch, I thought that Providence had come to encourage me to consider a life in the fields.

If you see Angéline¹⁰ ask her if she received the letter that I wrote to her on Monday and that she should have received by the time you returned to Nîmes from Caissargues. I encouraged her to show a bit more energy and not to retreat so much as an inch once she has taken a step forward. Goodbye my dear daughter. A

thousand times yours in Our Lord:'

—Letter to Cécile Germer-Durand, from the Letters, edit.
D.D., vol. VI (1992), p. 252-253.

¹ Letters, 1.1 S.V., p. 227-229.

² This refers to the mulberry leaves that are used to feed silkworms.

³ That would be the sad spectacle of Reichshoffen, on August 6, 1870, at the battle of Woerth-Froeschwiller (near Haguenau in Alsatia).

⁴ Fr. d'Alzon was still completely absorbed in the reading of the last two volumes of Montalembert on the *Moines de l'occident*, published in 1867.

⁵ The professed religious priests at Le Vigan were Fathers Hippolyte Saugrain and Jean-Maire-Joule.

⁶ Fr. d'Alzon was 57 years old and not accustomed to working in the fields despite an energetic and exemplary courage for the benefit of the novices. "They had me hoeing these last few days, and I can no longer hold a pen": letter of July 10, 1866, VI, p. 86.

⁷ If we take count, apart from the animals, the community of novices at Le Vigan had a dozen young people: Emile Gauthier, Ulysse Martin, Vital Martin, Pierre-Baptiste Morel, Claude Lhérisson, Paul Favatier, Barthélemy Lampre, Isidore Salenson, François Schiskov, Luigi Dimitrov, a brother Gabriel, François Chambourdon.

⁸ Professor Eugène Germer-Durand (1812-1880), husband of Fr. d'Alzon's correspondent, Mrs. Cécile G.-D., nee Vignaud (+1886), who would join the Oblates, when she was widowed. The couple had 6 children: Daniel and Michel, who died very young, Joseph who would become Father Germer-Durand in the Assumption, brilliant, epigraphist, (1845-1917), Jean, brigadier general, François, architect, and Elisabeth.

⁹ At Le Vigan they had the leisure to visit with the *magnans* (silkworm producers) and the cattle-breeders from Fr. d'Alzon's various properties. A group of Oblates, distinct from those of Rochebelle, lived at La Valette, but Arènes, L'Elze and Bagatelle were rented out

¹⁰ Angéline Chaudordy had taken Fr. d'Alzon as spiritual director.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION AND RESEARCH

On Le Vigan

Pierre Gorlier, *Le Vigan à travers les siècles*, Anduze, 1981.

The homestead of the d'Alzon's' "La Condamine" was already mentioned in a text at the beginning of the 17th century. About 1796, Emmanuel's father, Viscount Henri, and his family were there. There he met his future wife, Jeanne-Clémence de Faventine, whom he married in 1806. The young couple moved to Lavagnac around 1816. The house was rented out before being taken back by Fr. d'Alzon in 1864. It was a novitiate between 1864 and 1874, then an alumniat from 1874 to 1881. The Countess d'Ursul bought it only to protect it from plunderers. Fr. Quenard, around 1933, bought it back from her heirs, the de Virieu, and offered it to the Oblates. It was the Orantes, however, who lived there between 1937-1939, undertaking a few renovations. Property of the A.A. Congregation, it is still available to Assumptionists who are passing through, who enjoy finding there the atmosphere of their origins. A decision will soon be taken as to the future of this place after the foreseen departure of the Orantes. (editor's note: the property has been sold to the town of Le Vigan, but the Assumptionists have maintained the right to a room which will serve as a d'Alzon museum.)

FOR A PERSONALIZED READING

- What do you think of your manual labor and your technical aptitudes within the framework of your apostolic religious life? How can you develop them?
- Is not contact with the working world in all its forms also an opportunity to be seized on and promoted?
- Can manual labor be for you a form of prayer, of leisure, of a well-balanced, healthy lifestyle?
- Is not ecology a natural dimension of our lives, to be continually rediscovered, regardless of fashions or times? Farming was a reality of Assumption's life in the past. Without prejudging what the future may hold for it, have you known any wonderful examples of brothers who have been vinedressers, gardeners, carpenters, or artists, whose dedication to the mission sanctified the work of their hands?



A pavilion of the Grande-Aumônerie, a 17th-century building, Clichy-la Garenne (just north of Paris), site of a former Assumptionist high school from 1853 to 1860.

37

A LESSON IN POLITICAL MORALITY

All throughout his life, Fr. d'Alzon was involved in political matters. Son of a member of parliament, adhering to the Legitimist ideas of the royalist right, he showed himself to be a critical analyst of the events that shook the monarchy in 1830. In his hands, the various national or regional newspapers or magazines, *La Gazette*, *Le Moniteur*, *La Quotidienne*, *L'Ami de la Religion*, *Le Correspondant*, or *L'Avenir*, were examined critically with a basic unshakeable conviction: the rights of God and those of the Church trumped any other consideration of person, party, regime or opinion. Under the July Monarchy, liberal in inspiration, Fr. d'Alzon positioned himself in the opposition of the Center-Left, and at the time of the Revolution of 1848, he did not hesitate to embrace the ideals of the day expressed in the columns of a short-lived newspaper, *La liberté pour tous*, insofar as the new republican regime respected and protected the Church. This attitude placed him in a delicate situation with his own family. The Napoleonic Empire from 1852 on, in the style of Napoleon III, inspired in him nothing but reservations. And from 1859 on, there was even condemnation; Gallican monarchism, liberal capitalism, internal corruption reinforced his militant opposition while the foreign policy of the Second Empire favored Piedmontese nationalism. Fr. d'Alzon's ultramontanism, that led him to identify himself with the rights of the papacy, brought him to enter the political arena: candidacy for the departmental elections of the Hérault (1861), petition campaigns, preaching on the political hot-button issues of the day, and outspoken support for various candidates. It would be wrong, however, to think that Fr. d'Alzon *played politics* simply for political reasons. He was claiming the right for clergy to speak and act *outside the sacristy* when the stakes seemed to go beyond the private domain of partisan preferences and touch upon the convictions and values that formed the basis of collective, social, and church structures and projects. Of course, his choices may appear to us today to be marred by questionable preferences and prejudices, which were in part linked to his origins and relationships.

That is the lot of any person in a given situation however high the ideals and the sources of his actions might seem to him.

Fr. d'Alzon, a man of his times, did not hesitate to navigate his way through the barriers of political involvement and public opinion. He did not refuse the inevitable openings toward democracy and social justice, but he did so according to the conservative mind which remained his, that of the principles of honor, frankness and loyalty which the political life of his time, as in every era, was not in the habit of courting, even as it perverted itself by pretending to practice them.

"Concerning a defeat by Emmanuel d'Alzon.

The agitation that took place for a few days around the ballot box is beginning to calm down. The winners are gradually becoming accustomed to their triumph; the losers are learning the lessons of a defeat that was perfectly deserved. As a loser, I consider it an obligation in conscience to protest against those who are much too quick to return to their blessed torpor. I would like to force a few of my friends to understand that, because 'the Empire is peace'¹ going to sleep is, nevertheless, not the holiest of duties, and even, that when faced with what has recently happened, going to sleep could well be a crime.

I have often been heard to criticize Protestants. This time the Protestants stayed out of it, and, from their point of view, they acted very cleverly. They enjoyed seeing what masterpieces the Catholics are capable of when the ghost of the Reformation does not appear before them. Ah! How strong they would be if, folding their arms, they resolved only to watch us act...! We would not be able to accuse them of anything, and they would soon be our masters!

The last letter I addressed to M. Demians² brought me, they say, a certain unpopularity; I am quite comfortable to remain unpopular and profit from the rights that such a situation affords me to say quite clearly how I judge the sad spectacle we have just witnessed.

I put aside the question of persons. VII focus only on the public acts revealed in the daylight.

I may feel sadness, disappointments, but I am old enough not to have illusions; one may be distressed to find certain people smaller than we had dreamed, but, after all, one looks and then

goes his way.

That a general,³ a son of Nîmes, have the fantasy of being a member of the General Council, that he be presented by the government, what is simpler? And who can consider that bad? When he makes promises, who has the right to become angry except the people to whom he has made no promises? It would be good not to make promises, at a time when so many are made, and the Nimois would not be French, nor especially electors, if they did not take them seriously But, that he said, as I was assured he did, that priests would do well to remain in their sacristies at election time, this is an assertion that I want to contest. He is well aware of the three visits that he made to me two years ago, to urge me to get out of the sacristy and campaign for his election; he knows well that he approached other inhabitants of these dark sacristies, and even..., but let us not push it.

What I understand less is that, in the present circumstances. Catholics, authentic Catholics, voted for him. Not that in ordinary circumstances he could not have received their votes, but was it forbidden to remember what had just happened? They call themselves Catholics, they see their bishop, the object of behavior they know well; they have the opportunity to protest solemnly; but they do not protest and they nominate the official candidate. I assert that it is a sign of the times.⁴

I only ask forgiveness for having dared to write that those who, acting in this way, had a vigorous faith were modest in the matter of honor. If I had doubted that this appreciation of things should be applied to so many, I would have kept it to myself. Some pretend, it is true, that certain priests gave the example. I believe that that is not true, but even if it were true that their modesty matches that of the simple faithful, what should we conclude? It was priests who first cried out: we have no other king but Caesar!⁵ And they had, to calm their conscience, the sight of the 18,000 workers that Herod, according to Josephus, had hired to adorn the temple. Thank God, we have not yet reached the time when, according to Hilary, the Arian Emperor Constantius was building churches in order to destroy the Church more easily. Is there nothing left than to despair, and is abdication of one's duties a necessity without remedy for Catholics? I am far from thinking that. Catholics are capable of rising from the defeat,

whatever they might say, which they have inflicted on themselves, on three conditions: the first is a return to true Catholic principles. The second is the resolution to profit, boldly and without after-thought, from all the weapons that modern society places in their hands. The third is organization, strong, yet legal...⁶

—Letter to the Catholics of Nîmes,⁷ vol. VI,
edit. D.D., p. 319-325.

¹ Ironic quote of a Napoleon III slogan in his speech at Bordeaux before the restoration of the Empire.

² Auguste Demians, mayor of Nîmes. Cf. Letter 3061, vol. VI, and p. 304-66

³ General Jean-Louis Walsin-Esterhazy.

⁴ Expression borrowed from Mt. 16:3.

⁵ Gospel quotation: John 19:15.

⁶ A good example of Fr. d'Alzon's optimism in the land of political Utopias and Catholic masochism.

⁷ In 1867, Fr. d'Alzon had great dreams for political changes in the Gard, counting on a massive protest vote against the official candidates. His hopes were mostly disappointed.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION AND RESEARCH

The Gospel and politics form a dynamic and explosive couple, illustrated in the reality of every country where Christians live, in every era. What attitudes do the local Church and the Conference of Bishops in your country recommend to the clergy at election time? In its international history has the Assumption had good or bad experiences with regard to elections or political events?

On the political ideas and commitments of Fr. d'Alzon:

Jean-Marie Mayeur, *Les idées politique du P. d'Alzon*, in *Colloque d'histoire d'Alzon*, Le Centurion, 1982, p. 144-164. André Sève, *Ma vie c'est le Christ*. Emmanuel d'Alzon, Le Centurion, 1980, p. 19-28.

What do you think of Fr. d'Alzon's statement of 1868:

"We are not men of opposition, but of affirmation"?

FOR A PERSONALIZED READING

- Is there not a “fundamental divorce” between morals and politics? In your opinion, why? Can you give examples? Do you agree with Fr. d’Alzon’s analysis? Does a “confessional vote” have any meaning for you?
- Does a firm attitude based on principles make all political activity—which is always evolving—impossible, inoperative, old hat?
- What “combination of elements of behavior” always seems valid to you in considering and carrying out a morally just action?
- Are there options other than the extremes of silence, opportunism, martyrdom or disenchantment for the committed Christian?

38

FATHER D'ALZON, A PILGRIM AT LOURDES

As a great admirer of Louis Veuillot and fervent reader of the newspaper, *L'Univers*, Fr. d'Alzon could not have been unaware of the existence of Lourdes from its very inception, which the famous journalist supported well before Henri Lasserre did. Yet Fr. d'Alzon's correspondence does not contain any specific mention of Lourdes before 1868, when, making the most of a course of treatment at the hot springs of Bagnères de Bigorre, he would discover the site as a solitary pilgrim, on the 15th of August, at the age of 58. He was immediately seduced by the Gospel message transmitted by the little shepherdess of Bartrès who had become a famous seer and, at the time, removed from the curiosity of the crowds, at Nevers.

Fr. d'Alzon met Abbé Peyramale and sympathized with this peevish pastor who, at the end of his life (1877), was saddened by his jurisdictional quarrels with the Garaison Fathers of Fr. Sempe, installed as guardians of the site and promoters of the pilgrimages that were turning the crowds away from the parish church to benefit the construction and financing of shrines on the grotto grounds. The simplicity of the Gospel message Mary gave to Bernadette: prayer, conversion, penance, pleased Fr. d'Alzon who liked to read the story of Mary through the lens of the few Marian allusions or appearances in the Scriptures. It was under the protective mantle of the Virgin that he earnestly placed his religious foundations. The mysteries of life and faith of Mary appeared to him to be so fully evangelical that his motto remained succinctly Christological without Mariological exaggeration: *"If to the primary love of God, you add the love of our Lord, the love of the Blessed Virgin, his Mother, and the Church, his spouse, you will know, in its simplest expression, the spirit of the Assumption."* At Massabielle, Fr. d'Alzon entrusted his sons and daughters to the Mother of God, humble and confident in her apparitions to a poor girl who could barely read.

The mystery of Mary that attracted him the most was that of her spiritual

fecundity; had she not, through the mystery of the Incarnation, given birth to the Savior of humanity, just as he did not cease to ask of the Lord for the grace of giving birth to generous and apostolic souls in the service of the Kingdom? Fr. d'Alzon felt the strength of Lourdes, this power from heaven that tends to renew on earth miracles of faith and to make popular public acts of Christian devotion. A real fever for pilgrimages and a great thirst for miracles took hold of him as it became manifestly urgent in his eyes to rechristianize those masses whose social elites were losing their way. Only an impulsion of faith, one that is not afraid to show itself in public, would be able to repair the fabric of a united people: Lourdes was a rest area for prayer, before once again setting out together on the journey.

"Bagnères de Bigorre,¹ August 16, 1868

My very dear daughter.

Just one word. I have just arrived from Lourdes,² where I prayed a long time for you. I asked for real holiness, humility, a spirit of faith, and zeal I also prayed for all your daughters and I gave myself the pleasure of being locked behind the grill that protects the grotto from the public,³ for almost four hours. So you see that I had time to pray for my friends. I am sending you the photograph of Bernadette, now Sr. Marie-Bernard at Nevers;⁴ I am also sending with it a small plant picked from just under the spot where the apparition took place.⁵ If I could, I would encourage this devotion.⁶ As much as La Salette⁷ left me, I don't know why, incredulous or at least dry and hard, Lourdes brought me a sort of sense of peace, confidence and hope that I would some day be converted. At the Mass I said in a chapel inside the grotto, I placed your name first after that of my Assumptionist brothers.

Goodbye, my daughter. Yours a thousand times in Our Lord. E. d'Alzon

Bagnères has done me a lot of good, but it is tiring my stomach a bit; I feel like throwing up from time to time."

—Letter of Fr. d'Alzon to Mother Marie-Eugénie de Jésus,
from Edit. D.D., vol. VII (1994), p. 134

¹ Bagnères de Bigorre was at the time a small city of 9,400 inhabitants in the Hautes-Pyrénées near Tarbes. At the foot of a mountain called Ardour, 550 meters high, it had been a reputed spa known since Roman times.

² Lourdes was not yet the Marian city known worldwide. The first of the 18 apparitions to Bernadette Soubirous took place on February 11, 1858 at the grotto of Massabielle on the banks of the Gave River where the young girl had gone to gather wood with her sister Toinette and a friend, Jeanne Abadie. These events took place 10 years before Fr. d'Alzon made his first visit. He had wanted to pray there on the feast of the Assumption. It was only in 1872-1873 that the Assumptionists would inaugurate the famous annual national pilgrimage that would draw enormous crowds to Lourdes.

³ Fixing up the site happened gradually. On June 8, 1858, the prefect, Baron Massy, instructed the mayor of Lourdes, Lacadé, to prohibit access to the grotto by building a wooden fence. On Monday, October 4 of the same year, the order was given to commissioner Jacomet to open the site for free access to the public. It was only in 1876 that a first chapel was built, in conformity with the request expressed on March 4, 1858, by the "Lady" of the apparition. For the topography of the site, one can refer profitably to the illustrations in the *Lourdes Magazine* of May 2000. In a famous declaration of 1862 recognizing the authenticity of the apparitions, the Bishop of Tarbes, Bishop Laurence ordered the preparation of the site around the Grotto for public worship. The cave was cleaned up, the ground was paved with marble and a local ironmonger installed a protective grill, two meters fifty high and eight meters fifty wide. On April 4, 1864, the statue of the Immaculate Conception by Joseph Fabisch was installed in a niche.

⁴ Since October 1858, Bernadette Soubirous had protected herself from public curiosity and malice by taking refuge with the Hospice Sisters. She left Lourdes on July 8, 1866 to enter the novitiate of the Sisters of Charity of Nevers where she suffered humiliations from the mistress of novices. At the age of 35, on April 16, 1879, after a cruel agony, she died in holiness, a victim of tuberculosis.

⁵ The first of the 18 apparitions was on February 11, 1858, and the last on July 16, 1858. Between 1868 and 1879, Fr. d'Alzon visited Lourdes five times.

⁶ It was Bisop Plantier, who, at Nîmes, would develop a real popular passion for Our Lady of Lourdes; chapel dedicated to Our Lady of Lourdes was built in his cathedral. He requested to be buried at the foot of the altar (1875). Diocesan pilgrimages were organized.

⁷ Fr. d'Alzon visited La Salette in July 1858. He had not hurried there either, since the events went back to September 19, 1846.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION AND RESEARCH

L'Assomption et ses Œuvres, 1958, no. 517, p. 8-11.

Claude Soetens, *Le P. d'Alzon, les Assomptionnistes, les pèlerinages* in *Colloque d'Alzon*, Le Centurion, 1981, p. 301-318.

Jean-Paul Périer-Muzet, *Le P. d'Alzon et les pèlerinages*, pro manuscripto, January 2000, 22 pages. Philippe Boutry, *Conférence sur le P. d'Alzon et les pèlerinages*, (December 1999), Lecture Series at François Ier.

Lourdes Magazine. The writings of Abbé Laurentin.

P. Drochon, *Histoire des pèlerinages français de la très sainte Vierge*, Paris, 1890.

Catholicisme, Lourdes article, vol. VII (1975), col. 1193-1200.

Ruth Harris, Lourdes. *Body and Spirit in the Secular Age*, 1999 (French translation: *La grande histoire des apparitions, des pèlerinages et des guérisons*, edit. J. D. Lattes, 2001. 593 pages).

FOR A PERSONALIZED READING

- What do you consider to be the authentic elements of a pilgrimage?
- How does Fr. d'Alzon's piety express itself at Lourdes?
- Was Fr. d'Alzon favorable to the establishment of the first national pilgrimages to Lourdes? What were the reasons for Fr. d'Alzon's wariness about this initiative of the Paris Assumptionists?
- How did the "phenomenon of Lourdes" become the symbol of Assumptionist apostolic activity in France and throughout the world?
- What activities are recommended, even mandatory, for a pilgrim visiting Lourdes? How do they conform to Gospel counsels?

39

CASTLES IN THE CLOUDS: JEAN, THE MILLIONAIRE

Among the curious or unusual events that pepper Fr. d'Alzon's life, there is one worth examining. It happened at the novitiate of Le Vigan at the end of 1868 and the first five months of the following year. The one who was called "Jean the Cook" or "Jean the millionaire brother" was in fact a young convert, baptized at Le Vigan, Jean Domingo, whose precise origins are unknown, probably American, who found himself responsible for the kitchen and the laundry of the novitiate. At the same time he took great interest in the Catholic activities of the parish and those put in place by Fr. Hippolyte Saugrain, especially nocturnal adoration. A fabulous inheritance, that kept mounting from month to month, expected from an American uncle, and of which the beneficiary promised a good slice to the Assumption, fed Fr. d'Alzon's correspondence with Frs. Hippolyte Saugrain, François Picard, Victorin Galabert, and the Bailly brothers. Indeed, the Assumption sorely lacked funds, but not projects! It is interesting to note the reactions of the various correspondents on the subject: Fr. d'Alzon, who was always short of money and continually dreamed about the American millions, built plan upon plan. Fr. Hippolyte, a sly Normand, would not allow himself to be fooled before first being able to weigh in his hands the cash, which remained, for him, an unrealized promise. Fr. Picard thought it wise to gather the various parties in Paris for a reality check; they would finally be able to begin addressing the debts of Nîmes and of Paris, the taking over of the Halluin Orphanage, the continual appeals of Fr. Galabert for the Oriental Mission, and the installation of the Oblates in Nîmes. Fr. Emmanuel Bailly, director of the College of Nîmes, who had just quarreled with the general treasurer, was also counting on a piece of cake. The dream ended in disillusion: Jean disappeared from Le Vigan without a trace, one beautiful May day, leaving a very disappointed Honorine Villaret behind. The incident was instructive; the financial situation of the Assumption had not improved since 1857. The apostolic projects of one and another, with daring improvisations that certainly counted on providence, could not ignore the

need for planned new sources of revenue. The judgments they made of each other were pointed, for example, Fr. d'Alzon on Fr. Saugrain "Peace will fill his heart at the same time as money fills his wallet" or, a premonitory one in 1867, from Fr. Vincent de Paul Bailly, very much tried by his year as director, on Fr. d'Alzon: "Father uses up men quickly at the college:" Does money, which *makes the blind sing*, serve as a trap or a revelation? The last word is worthy of Fr. d'Alzon: "*It would be better to enter into the spirit of poverty.*"

"Le Mans,"¹ January 23, 1869

You are, my daughter, a nasty little person if you think that you are disturbing me; that is simply absurd and I have to tell you that in order to unburden my heart.

I have a slight cold, and, instead of taking a walk, I am writing to you, which is much more agreeable to me, unless, of course, I disturb you. Doesnt this last observation give you a big laugh? What do you think?

Fr. Hippolyte writes that these last few days Sister Marie de la Croix² has lost her head a bit; perchance her dear uncle has come to bring it back to her. I will probably find two or three good Oblate vocations here. At the Visitation, there is an assistant³ who is entirely afire for the foreign missions. And this holy young woman is recommending that I accept a young woman they will not receive in their convent because she is illegitimate and Le Mans is too close by. Before suggesting that she go to a more distant convent, she has offered her to me and wrote to her in Angers where she lives. She has received a good education, lives for the moment with her father who is a doctor, but where she feels at risk. Then there is another, and a third one, and I really hope that it will end there!

I believe that I'll really get something from my retreat. Do you want me to send you some money for a sewing machine? They say that these machines do the work of four people. I could manage 300 to 400 francs; let me know. If we had two of them plus two good workers, that would be marvelous. Finally, I'll make sure that I find out everthing that I can, with regard to the young women that Mrs. de Chaponay⁴ is proposing. Don t you think that it's preferable that I see them at Lyon beforehand, because I will see them there in a month? I am amazed with the Sisters of the

Visitation in Le Mans and I think that Sister Marie-Colombe will find me some vocations, in addition to the ones that I just mentioned to you.

As for Jean, the cook at Le Vigan,⁵ it is no longer one million, no longer nine million, but fifteen million that his benefactor would have refused for all his properties. If he gives some to the Oblates, would he not be a really good man? You will receive two small packages of apostolic crowns that Mr. Marie-Colombe, whose dedication to the missions is unbelievable, is sending you. My child, I bless you with all my heart. E. d'Alzon"

—Letter to Mother Emmanuel-Marie Correnson, from D.D.
edition, vol. VII (1993), p. 229-230.

¹ Fr. d'Alzon preached a retreat at Le Mans at the Visitation convent, from the 21st to the 29th of January 1869.

² Sister Marie de la Croix Barnouin, niece of Abbé Henri Barnouin, pastor of the Nîmes parish of Saint François de Sales.

³ Sister Marie-Colombe, nee Clémentine-Marie Cox in 1804.

⁴ The Countess of Chaponay, of Lyon, was born Cécile de Lascours, a family from the Gard, friends of Fr. d'Alzon.

⁵ Another designation for the man that other religious transform into a postulant, a Brother... The fortune would come from properties scattered from Guadeloupe, Santo Domingo, Florida, to New Orleans. We can follow the adventure by going over the numerous references in the index of vol. VII, p. 462: Jean (cook at Le Vigan). Did Fr. d'Alzon remember another "uncle from America," the Chevalier Bruno d'Alzon, whose inheritance had also disappeared as the months passed?

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION AND RESEARCH

The stipend of a vicar general could support three or four religious according to Fr. d'Alzon's own testimony. In 1869 the Assumption had about forty members, a good third of them still in formation.

Apostolic activities such as running a college (even with fees), orphanages (Arras), foreign missions (Orient), agricultural schools cannot be financially viable. Personal fortunes, dowries, inheritances, volunteers, subsidies,

house repairs by those who live there, farm rentals, borrowing... are necessary.

Some religious lived on their ministry: parishes (Alès, Australia); preaching (Fr. Lauren); pastoral activities (François Ier Chapel). But buying land and buildings weighed down the general budget for a long time.

FOR A PERSONALIZED READING

- What were the sources of revenue for Fr. d'Alzon and the Congregation in 1869? Why were they insufficient?
- The economic history of a congregation is rarely written. Why, in your opinion?
- Does faith in Providence appear to you to be a sufficient source for the creation and development of a religious congregation?
- In the end, did not the knowledge of Fr. d'Alzon's personal fortune make it more difficult for the early Assumption to take responsibility for the apostolic activities of the Assumption?
- In your country, what are the sources and kinds of income today which Assumption enjoys in order to carry out its apostolic projects?

40

FR. D'ALZON AT VATICAN I

On November 1, 1869, Fr. d'Alzon left for Rome once again, to accompany his bishop as his theologian at Vatican Council I, a sojourn that would last until July 18, 1870. He stayed with his bishop, Bishop Plantier, at the French seminary in Rome on Santa Chiara Steet and had a joyful reunion with Fr. Galabert who was there as theologian for his bishop, Bishop Popov. His expectations for this exceptional Church gathering were great; on February 13, 1869, did he not write to Fr. Vincent de Paul Bailly, *"I am for the declaraiion of the infallibility of the Pope, for the suppression of the naming of bishops by the State... for a decrease in the number of certain exemptions, and I agree that those in simple vows... enjoy all the privileges of solemn vows. There you have summarized my opinion on the questions that are expected to be examined?"*¹ His hopes would be fulfilled in part, but at the expense of debates and a slowness which would be echoed in his ill-humored remarks. For Fr. d'Alzon's correspondence did not slack off; actually, it is at this time that we have some of his most beautiful texts on the love of the Church and on its missionary reality, a passionate love equal to his unconditional ultramontane faith. Fr. d'Alzon did not attend the sessions of the council, but defined himself as a "Gadfly" ("mouche du coche" from the Lafontaine fable "The Fly and the Coach") (t. VIII, p. 133), multiplying contacts and commitments in the service of the already attained majority for the proclamation of infallibility. The council sensitized him more acutely to the universal dimension of the Catholic Church and the powerful growth of recently evangelized countries; Rome had become the crossroads of nations, peoples and languages in communion with the Chair of Peter. In his eyes, an inversion had occurred between the old countries of Christian stock, stuck in their old historical quarrels, and young Christian nations, strong in their missionary dynamism. That taught him a great lesson in Church strategy: the future belonged to the young Churches, to the new religious congregations, to a redefinition of the alliances of the Church in the direction of the people, of democracy, of modern society, but

without conceding anything either to the principles of secularity (“laïcité”) that were part and parcel of the Revolution or of liberalism. Skipping over time, somehow as if to ignore the present, is symptomatic of a way of thinking that would like to build the future by way of re-inventing the past. The present is short-circuited, the past purified and idealized. As to the future, it would often evade the expectations of his projections; 1870 and 1871 would be “terrible” years with the fall of Rome, the Franco-Prussian War, and the Commune. And yet, the perceptions of Fr. d’Alzon, confided to Mother Correnson, lack neither enthusiasm nor perceptiveness:

“Rome, December 14, 1869

It has already been six long weeks since we took leave of one another, my very dear child. How long will the separation last? God only knows. It is said that we will be free at Easter, yet I have a hard time believing that. Rather, I believe that we will go into recess at Easter and will be called back later.²

Let me come back to what you told me about lay sisters. One of the reasons that make me refuse to have them is because, if I was to start over, I might exclude them from the Assumption. Have no illusions, the time of lay sisters is ending. My deepest conviction is that for the conversion of peoples, today one must above all else abandon aristocratic forms. We are moving toward a democracy whose demands will be tremendous, and, from that point of view, you can’t imagine everything that I am seeing here. First place does not belong to the Hungarian bishops, who are the last great lords of Europe; it belongs to the missionary bishops who go to the sessions on foot because they have no carriages. It does not even belong to the learned who will help to prepare the decrees and the canons. It is felt that they are working for others, and that those for whom the council is being held are the real friends of God, the little ones and the poor.³ Believe me, the strength of the future lies there. It is by poverty and humility that the world will be saved, if it can be.

If there is anything that could sadden me, it would be to see the Oblates deviate from their work. If I can find a reason for the weakness I have for them, it is really this spirit, at once more humble and fit, to touch a portion of the world that Our Lord loves more specially and that urgently requires attention.⁴ What you could do from now on is to be more selective in the choice of

candidates. Bring it up, but especially in a spirit of very great holiness that will be felt in your daughters, because it will exist in the mother.

I dined the day before yesterday at Veuillot's with missionary bishops.⁵ I can't begin to tell you how these men seem to be the best, because they are poor, because they are devoted, and because, having nothing to give, they give themselves. Believe me, very dear child, abound in the direction of the most complete gift of self; love our Lord whose entire life was so small, if nothing at all.

As for myself, I believe, seeing so many miseries at the council, that God blesses the poor and strikes those who delight in everything that does not tend to self-denial.

Give me some news about your health. You would not believe how important you have become for me as the days pass, but I don't want to write about that now. If you were able to read something about it, you would say: "Poor Fr. d'Alzon, one way or another, I must be content with him."

Tell me about your daughters; assure them that they are always present in my thoughts and that they must prepare themselves for great works. If we had ten thousand of them,⁶ they would be quickly put to work. The essential thing for me is not that they be numerous, but that, by their holiness, each one work like a hundred. Here is a little list of objects that I am asking Josephine Fabre to send me through Mr. Barnouin. Goodbye, once again. I have no time for rereading. In fact, I will send a list a little later. I send you a real blessing of an old father. I have just made an ink spot on my paper, please forgive me.

E. d'Alzon"

—Letter to Mother Emmanuel-Marie Correnson, in vol. VIII,
edit. D.S. (1994), p. 70-71.

¹ vol. VII, p. 257.

² The Vatican Council I would last until the annexation of Rome to the Italian State (October 9, 1870). The council then was adjourned *sine die*.

³ Inspired by the Bible: for the prophets, the people of God is made up, in the first place, by the anawim. Jesus took up anew the expression of Isaiah: "the good news is proclaimed to the poor" (Mt. 11:5).

⁴ In the years that followed Vatican II, we find similar appeals for a Church of the poor, a priority of the Church for the poor, a theme that would not be without influence on what is called liberation theology.

⁵ This expression needs to be understood: bishops in mission lands or countries.

⁶ Fr. d'Alzon had already evoked such a generous statistic on August 6, 1867: "*I pray to St. Ursula to give you eleven thousand daughters soon*" cf vol. VI, p. 314, letter 3072.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION AND RESEARCH

Fr. Antoine Wenger, *Le P d'Alzon et le pape*, in *Hier et Aujourd'hui coll. Série centenaire*, Paris, 1982.

Le P. d'Alzon et les deux conciles du Vatican, Rome, 1960, 48 pages.

G. Tavard, *Le P. d'Alzon au Ier Concile du Vatican*, Rome, 1996.

Vatican I, cf. the works of T. Grandérath and K. Kirsch, 3 vol. Fribourg, 1903-1906; G. Thils, Louvain, 1961 and 1989; H. Rondet, Paris, 1962; B. Bellone, Rome, 1966; R. Aubert, M. Guéret and P. Tombeur, Louvain, 1977; *Actes du colloque de l'École française de Rome*, Rome, 1989.

Vatican II: do you know of the chronicles of the various sessions, written by Fr. Antoine Wenger, published by Le Centurion in the 1960's? Who are the Assumptionists who, in one capacity or another, participated in the work of Vatican II in Rome?

FOR A PERSONALIZED READING

- In what ways can Vatican I, even as incomplete and unfinished as it was, be considered as the basis for the vision of Vatican II? Does not primacy (of Peter) call for collegiality?
- Is not living during the era of a council the occasion as well to seize the opportunity to make desired changes, to get a sense of the trials of unforeseen transformations, and to welcome the grace of a springtime for the Church? How do you see the Church of Vatican II?
- Each new council brings with it a time of contrasting acceptance. What was it like for Vatican I and Vatican II? From 1960 till 1980,

how did the Assumption benefit from Vatican II?

Part V

41. Fr. d'Alzon, in the Eye of the Storm	171
42. Notre-Dame des Châteaux.....	175
43. The Wedding of Jean de Puységur	179
44. Fr. d'Alzon and the Little Miners.....	183
45. An Apocalyptic Atmosphere	187
46. Candidates for Bishop, Nîmes 1875	191
47. Relations among the Families of the Assumption	195
48. Fr. d'Alzon at Clairmarais.....	199
49. A Life Centered in God.....	203
50. Ah! If Only We Had a Newspaper	207

41

FR. D'ALZON IN THE EYE OF THE STORM

If there was a year filled with emotion and painful experiences on Fr. d'Alzon's path, it was 1870-1871, designated in the politico-religious history of France as the "terrible" year. Fr. d'Alzon had hardly left Rome in the euphoria of the proclamation of papal infallibility (July 1870), when he was confronted in Nîmes by a series of military disasters of the Empire at the hands of the German armies (August 1870) and the immediate political repercussions: the proclamation of the Republic, the constitution of a provisional government, an unconditional foreign military occupation, not to mention, on the horizon, the siege of the capital, the civil war of the Commune, and the threats of a poorly grounded political regime, and finally with the soon-to-be-realized corollaries, the fall of Rome and the end of the Pontifical States.

Like all French citizens and Catholics of his time, Fr. d'Alzon was touched both as a patriot and a Churchman. Truly the world was crumbling. In Nîmes, he would also have to face the pressures of changes and of events, but the future remained as dark as it was uncertain.

And yet, as one reads the testimony of his life, one is struck by the serenity of his impressions, which, in this man of action, were never far from the sphere of concrete proposals. In the flames of war, he did not hesitate to encourage the initiative of his religious as volunteer chaplains in the armed forces. His reading of the events may appear to us to be, and rightly so, quite moralizing and moralistic. Yet the weakness of this reading did not blunt at all the dynamism of his apostolic undertakings. To the contrary, he demonstrated a spirit of faith that sought to give meaning to the events without letting itself be weakened, broken, or paralyzed by the continual flow of these tragically sad events, a spirit of hope that went beyond the unhappy present to expand already the fields of possible actions, and finally a spirit of inventive charity which would take shape with a few organized activities: the rebirth of *"Revue de L'enseignement chrétien"* the struggle for the freedom of higher education and the creation

of a Catholic University, and the foundation of apostolic schools with the creation of the “alumnates,” quite an original formula. As to the religious of Paris, their experience of war had sent them, so to speak, into the street; from 1871 on, their apostolic, public initiatives were incalculable in various areas: pilgrimages, congresses, the press. A single conquering spirit made them plunge into this society to rechristianize it. Let us listen to the master conductor in the midst of these turmoils.

“Bishop’s Residence of Nîmes, September 15, 1870

My dear daughter.

You will have seen Fr. Emmanuel Bailly, who made a special stop at Poitiers, to speak to you about the sisters of Sedan. At Saint-Dizier, you have had Prussian visits. I hope that at Reims your community will have been respected, but I understand your worries. In Nice,¹ you have as Prefect, Pierre Baragnon,² about whom his mother must have spoken when she was a postulant in your community. I did not want anyone to write to him, as Abbé de Cabrières suggested. It would have meant placing oneself in a very embarrassing position, with a man of shifty expediency like him.

*Here, the situation is, I think, as good as possible. The last place where we might be troubled is Nîmes, for we are well organized. What will we become after these profound humiliations? I believe that it is necessary to apply to France what I apply to myself every time I have a problem: How can this be of help? That is a loose translation of a phrase of St. Paul: *Diligentibus Deum omnia cooperantur in bonum.*³ What lessons must Catholics and French learn from this catastrophe, which is not yet over?⁴ I can find no other answer than this one: the resurrection of the Christian spirit in the sense that we, you and I, understood it when we gave Assumption its mark of originality and, even if we may have been caught up in the tide for a moment, the obligation always to go against the current with energetic perseverance until our last breath.*

If, as I hope, God wishes to bless the Assumption, we are living through one of the most solemn moments of its first development. That is my most profound conviction. I consider it an immense grace that some of my sons experienced these painful trials and

that some of your daughters were able to ponder the disaster of Sedan.⁵ A young engineer was telling me yesterday: "We have just witnessed the struggle of twenty years of laziness, pleasures and debauchery, after twenty years of study and work." That seems to be quite true. We must leave aside pleasure for work and preach this doctrine to our children, to everyone. If were willing to pay this price, I believe that France can rise again and maintain its mission in the Church of God through austerity, sacrifice, and relentless struggle against the ideas of the day. At last we see where they have led. I believe that two societies will be formed and we are working to create a Christian society

I hope to see you soon and we will talk. I would like to know when. I have not left Nîmes, despite my plans. If however, I would be obliged to absent myself for a few days, I would not want to make the blunder of missing you and miss being at your service all the while you were here. I dont know why, in the midst of all the calamities that submerge us, I cling to the immense hope that we have a lot to do and that the small tree of the Assumption must grow and produce its most attractive fruits, in the midst of the most terrible storms. A thousand times yours in Our Lord."

—Letter to Marie-Eugénie de Jésus, from the correspondence of Fr. d'Alzon, vol. VIII, edit. D.D., 1994, pp. 503-504.

¹ Poitiers, Dedan, Saint-Dizier, Reims and Nice, five foundations of the Religious of the Assumption, of which three were in regions under German military occupation since September 1870.

² Pierre Baragnon (1830-1904) is no longer *persona grata* for Fr. d'Alzon, undoubtedly because of his liberal ideas, tainted by republicanism. Mrs. Jean Amédée Baragnon, nee Marie-Jeanne Josephine Revoil de Servanes, after she was widowed, tried religious life.

³ Rm 8:28. "All things work together for those who love God."

⁴ There had already been the shaky Republic; later there would be, after the siege of Paris, the Commune. In a few days, Rome would be Piedmontese.

⁵ Sedan would twice be the symbol of a national humiliation, in 1870 and in 1940. The same lesson would be drawn, at least in certain social groups: the defeat was the consequence of the moral collapse of society, and finally, a divine punishment.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION AND RESEARCH

On the Republican Period and the political history of the 19th century:

René Rémond, *La République souveraine. La vie politique en France 1879-1939*, Fayard, 2002, 434 pages.

Pierre Milza et Serge Berstein, *Histoire du XIXe siècle*, Hatier, 1994, 503 pages.

D. Lejeune, *La France des débuts de la IIIe République*, Armand Colin, 1994, coll. Cursus.

Jean-Marie Mayeur, *Les débuts de la IIIe République, 1871-1898*, Le Seuil, 1973 Coll. Points.

J. Gadille, *La pensée et l'action politique des évêques français au début de la IIIe République*, 1967, 2 volumes.

B. Noël, *Dictionnaire de la Commune*, edit. 1978, 2 volumes.

G. Cholvy et H. M. Hilaire, *Histoire religieuse de la France contemporaine*, Provat, 1985-1989, 3 volumes.

FOR A PERSONALIZED READING

- What do you think of Fr. d'Alzon's socio-political analysis? Do his ideas of 'divine punishment' that go with his providentialist reading of history seem relevant to you?
- How does the Assumption foresee witnessing, in its own way, to a resurrection of the Christian spirit?
- What renewed apostolic initiatives would originate, after 1870, from the vision of a society to be rebuilt?
- Is not Christianity confronted throughout its history with a permanent questioning of its future?

42

NOTRE-DAME DES CHÂTEAUX

During the “terrible year” of 1871, there was one enjoyable pause in Fr. d’Alzon’s chronology, his well-known first stay at Notre-Dame des Châteaux in Savoy (August 1871), during which he would found the first ‘alumnate’, cradle of a pedagogical formula similar to the apostolic schools, which would be part of Assumptionist history for a hundred years.

This high-perched shrine, whose origin dated back to the era of medieval castles and whose history included for a time Dominican monastic life, belonged at the time to the administration of the diocese of Moutiers (Bishop Gros). Fr. Désaire negotiated to make of it an Assumptionist house of formation, after years as a hermitage for Abbé Martinet. Everything about it would seduce Fr. d’Alzon to found there this first special type of school to which was given a name formed by a neologism, “alumnate.” It was a mixture of a monastic dream in a famous historical and spiritual center, of preparation for religious life of very young Church vocations, and of intellectual, manual, and apostolic refining.

The formula might vary a little from one era to the next, but at the base of the foundations of alumnates are common ingredients: a rural setting, far from the centers of corruption that the cities are reputed to be; youths of quite modest origins, invited to participate in varied forms of basic labor; a family life cut off from their milieu of origin in order to have a continual contact with religious whose objective is to form their young natures through their ideal; and a network of benefactors who, under the aegis of Our Lady of Vocations, participate through their donations in this adventure of giving birth to priestly and religious vocations. At the end of his studies, the young person was free to choose the concrete path of his churchly commitment. Notre-Dame des Châteaux constituted the original matrix of an intuition that transcended the person of Fr. d’Alzon. For a long time, some religious had been insisting on a vocational contact with more blue-collar classes than those of the colleges; other analogous efforts, similar to the medieval monastic schools, had already been founded, such as that of Fr. de Foresta, S.J. And yet the Assumptionist formula of the alumnate was

innovative in many ways. It took up the new apostolic challenge which the working classes posed and which became particularly urgent after 1870. Fr. Pernet and Fr. Halluin, among others, identified a very promising avenue: to rechristianize people, ab origine, by offering to their young people a modified access to the forms of commitment and dedication in the Church.

"Notre-Dame des Châteaux, August 23, 1871

My dear daughter,

I want my first letter from Notre-Dame des Châteaux to be addressed to you. Imagine that from this knoll¹ compared to which the Coq is only a mole hill² we have a view of four beautiful valleys:³ to the South, a long line of firs, seven or eight kilometers away from N.-D.; behind, there is a sugar-loaf peak; behind that tonight, the moon seemed like a thief; to the right, the magnificent valley of Villars and Albertville, furrowed at the bottom by the Down River; a little to the right, the valley of Araiches, ending in those mountains with their eternal snows—yesterday I traveled with a good lady who keeps 170 heifers—some are still visible at this moment; more to the right, Beaufort and its firs and snow-covered peaks and incomparable mountain shapes; finally to the North, the valley of Hauteluce.⁴ Everything is beautiful. If we buy Les Vanches,⁵ you must come, absolutely I said Mass this morning for the Pope, on the day that he matches the days of Saint Peter.⁶ Tomorrow I will begin your novena, and then Fr. Pierre⁷ will finish it. But what vegetation! Pines, prairies, immense woods! Air! Milk! An appetite! I think that we will soon be able to receive children. This year, a dozen;⁸ then a few more; then we will build,⁹ if necessary Pray much that God bless our good will and also that he increase it.

Goodbye, my daughter. Greetings to your companion and to the Oblates. I think of you often and I remain very paternally yours in O. L.

E. d'Alzon

A horrible pen held in an unable hand"

—Letter from Fr. d'Alzon to Miss Louise Chabert,
edit. D.D., vol. IX, p. 165

¹ The site of Notre-Dame des Châteaux, above the village of La Pierre and today accessible by the Hauteluce road from one of the hairpin curves that leads to the pass of Des Saisies (1633 m.), is made up of a glacier loch reaching some 900 meters.

² A mole-hill is the little mound of earth around a mole hole; on the other hand, the site of Le Coq, undoubtedly familiar to the people of Le Gard, has yet to be found by any topographical search.

³ We can give precise names to all these indications full of admiring adjectives in the mouth of a person from the South of France: the sugar loaf peak is none other than that of Mirantin (1461m); Villard-sur-Doron (corrected spelling) is only a modest valley hamlet; Albertville, at the base of the medieval Conflans, a middle-sized Savoy town of 4,400 inhabitants at the time, without Olympic prestige in those days, at the junction of the Isère and Arly rivers. The Doron is a wild glacier river that had not yet been controlled by 20th century dams. Arêches is a valley village well known by today's tourists for its typical feature, storied houses, starting point for Alpine excursions: the pass of Pré near Boudin (1703 m), Cormet of Roselend (1968 m), the Grand Mont (1687 m), or the Aiguille de Grand-Fond (2889 m) as well, just some of the eternally snow-covered peaks that would be the joy and the endurance trial of the future alumnists! Beaufort-sur-Doron is the canton capital in the heart of Beaufortin, with a population of 2,490 at the time, renowned for its cattle market and its cheese, much appreciated by connoisseurs.

⁴ Village with a rather evocative name that leads to Mont Joly (1989 m) and to a superb panorama on the mass of Mount Blanc, home of Fr. Charles Désaire to whom the Assumption owes the acquisition of the Châteaux

⁵ Name of a plateau and of a chalet down below.

⁶ Some believed that the pontificate of Peter lasted 25 years, two months and seven days, equaled and surpassed by Pius IX. No doubt, John Paul II would like to, as well.

⁷ Pierre Descamps (1848-1915), first superior of the house

⁸ The story of the half dozen—the six jars, was well known.

⁹ The building, built in 1873, was razed in 2001.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION AND RESEARCH

There exists an abundant literature on the alumnates, their history, their concept and development: letters, reports, meetings of superiors, study programs, customaries, research articles, lists of students, journals. Here are the principal studies:

Fr. Polyeucte Guissard, *Histoire des alumnats*, B. P., 1955, 486 p. Fr. Henri Couillaux, *Histoire des alumnats de 1871 à 1900*. Fr. Noel Bugnard, Série centenaire 1980, n. 3, *Le P. E. d'Alzon et les vocations*.

Almost every aluminate, in France and elsewhere, published a bulletin or magazine to request donations. Fr. Couillaux was at the origin of the *Correspondant des alumnats*, the aluminate of Miribel published the *Trait-d'union des anciens alumnistes*. The Œuvre de Notre-Dame des Vocations published the *Echo des Alumnats*. Additionally, the magazine *L'Assomption et ses Œuvres* contains numerous articles on the alummates.

FOR A PERSONALIZED READING

- Can you list the strong points and the weak points of the aluminate system, copied or exported just about everywhere?
- What means can a Congregation use to promote a vocational policy? What are the means taken in this area by Provinces in the past twenty years?
- How can we protect a young vocation? What are the criteria for discernment and growth?
- What are, for you, the major and surest qualities for discerning a young vocation?

43

THE WEDDING OF JEAN DE PUYSÉGUR

In 1872, Fr. d'Alzon's nephew married Miss Clotilde de Quinsonas. Fr. Picard celebrated it in Paris on August 1st, since Fr. d'Alzon was not well at all. The priest-uncle, who rejoiced greatly on this occasion, had not spared his efforts in seeking everywhere an advantageous match for his nephew, even if he wrote to a nun: *"I congratulate you for staying out of these weddings; I foolishly made the error of meddling here in that stuff, and I bitterly regret it."*¹ Suffice it to say that in this, as in many other things, Fr. d'Alzon only sought the happiness of those he directed and it happened that he recommended attitudes for which he did not always give the example! How many matches did he not propose from time to time to his sister Augustine, all refused by her! Since the death of his sister, the Countess Marie de Poseur in 1869, Fr. d'Alzon was anxious to find a wife for his nephew who, on the contrary, showed no haste. So it was that the Vicar General of Nîmes would have envisaged a wedding with a relative of M. Marie-Eugénie de Jésus, a certain Valentine Milleret d'Omiécourt, the niece of Mrs. d'Esgrigny, a family that was also very close to the Founder.²

Fate decided otherwise. Another of Fr. d'Alzon's directees, Mrs. Antonin de Chaponay, introduced him to the Quinsonas family, and after multiple negotiations and parleys, worthy of Balzac's best novels, the affair had its happy end-ing in August 1872. Our times are quite different from that mentality or the ancestral custom of go-betweens and matchmakers who offered their good offices, at least in this part of the planet called Europe. The affairs of the heart were often absent from the intrigues and the network of family and friends. Today romantic intimacy is not always encumbered with considerations of for-tune or social status. Other times, other customs. It is certain, in any case, that the union of Jean and Clotilde sealed a path to happiness that Fr. d'Alzon corroborated in his own way in a letter of April 1877 to Mrs. De Chaponay: *"So you have two turtledoves as happy as on the first day and perhaps even happier. They owe it all to you, and as for me, I am very grateful to you."* It is true that Clotilde became

more than an adoptive niece to Fr. d'Alzon by continuing at Lavagnac the great tradition of hospitality of the d'Alzon's and the Puységurs. As a witness to marriage proposals, this letter exhumed from a century of oblivion, might be dated to April 1869.

"Your proposals are quite attractive, Madam, perhaps too attractive.

I will answer as a man who has confidence in you, and I will mention all the down sides on my nephew's part.

First of all, it is impossible for me to know with certainty my nephew's fortune as long as he has not come to an understanding with his sister, who is a Carmelite.³ I am working that matter out. I believe, however, that he will have between 60-70,000 francs of income, and rather more than less, all of it in land; the small amount of cash of his mother's fortune will probably go to his sister.

Jean had a fall as a child. His eye was poorly "repaired" (sic). When it is restless, its movement is less than pleasing. He had an eye infection when he was 18 months old. The mid-day sun tires him still. Besides that, his health is excellent. He is not pious. He does his Easter duty very seriously. Since his mother's death,⁴ he leads the prayers for the servants in the chapel of the château.⁵ Every day he is becoming more and more rooted in Christian and Catholic thought. A serious evolution has taken place in him in the last two years.

He adored his mother. He wants a wife who will resemble her and continue her pious works. He will need an intelligent wife. He has a really fine character and one should not have to consult his female relatives on the subject. They are all crazy about him. I am speaking of persons such as Mrs. de Malbosc⁶ whom you perhaps met at Alais.⁷

Day in and day out proposals are pouring in. I dare say that of all the proposals, the one that you had the kindness to forward to me is the most pleasing because you stand behind it.

Please, Madam, let me know the "buts," for I will find them out in another way and I prefer to owe everything to you. I have already heard the name of her guardian. I can't remember it at this moment. As you see, Madam, let us go forward, I'm with you. Be so kind as to speak to me about the health of this young person. Jean will not hear anything from me. I already gave his

mother whatever favors I had planned for him.⁸ Please, Madam, accept the homage of my deepest and respectful devotion.

E. d'Alzon

[PS.] Jean has certain financial hopes, but it's not worth talking about. It would be in the range of some hundred thousand francs.

I am leaving for Le Vigan. Would you answer me there? I am placing any other proposal in quarantine. Everything you have proposed pleases me. I have been given the hope to see Pierre⁹ at the end of July. Please tell him that he is taking his time.

As it is a period of mourning for my nephew, there would not be a big wedding"

—Unpublished letter of Fr. d'Alzon to Mrs. de Chaponay, April 26 [1869], quoted according to A. D. Rhone.

¹ Letters, vol. VIII, p. 411-412.

² Letters, vol. VII, p. 297, n.

³ Alix de Puységur, who had become Sister Marie-Thérèse.

⁴ Marie Françoise d'Alzon, Countess Anatole de Puységur, who died at Nîmes on April 4, 1869.

⁵ A family tradition that the young Emmanuel d'Alzon had himself continued.

⁶ Mrs. Paulin de Malbosc, nee Alix de Roussy.

⁷ The 19th century spelling for Alès.

⁸ In the division of property of 1861, Le Vigan went to Fr. d'Alzon and Lavagnac to Mrs. de Puységur.

⁹ A son of Mrs. de Chaponay who was causing her problems.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION AND RESEARCH

The theology and practice of marriage are in part conditioned by the era in which they are situated. For a good historical study, we can refer to the various articles on the subject published in the *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique* (General tables, vol. II, col. 3097-3118), *Catholicisme* (T. VIII, col. 461-521), *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité* (T. 10, col. 355-388), or in the recent encyclopedia of *Théo*.

One might still find it useful to consult a biblical presentation of human and Christian love in an old but stimulating book by Fr. Grelot, *le couple humain dans l'Écriture*, Lectio Divina 31, Cerf, 1964.

André Barral-Baron, *Choisir le mariage*, in the collection *Petite encyclopédie moderne du Christianisme*, D.D.B., 1989.

FOR A PERSONALIZED READING

- What is your concept of marriage, of the freedom of choice of the couple and family influences?
- In reading texts from Fr. d'Alzon, have you found his definition of marriage in relation to the other states of life?
- We have only one wedding homily by Fr. d'Alzon, given on April 23, 1873 at the wedding of Paul Démians and Amédée de Merignargues, cf. Letters, vol. VIII, p. 544, n. 5
- In the pastoral preparation for marriage, what are the main points to watch for as recommended by the Church today?

44

FR. D'ALZON AND THE LITTLE MINERS

In September 1868, Fr. d'Alzon received into the Congregation a priest from the Pas-de-Calais, Fr. Henri Halluin, founder of an orphanage, who wanted to assure its survival. It was Fr. Picard who presented the priest to Fr. d'Alzon in a very detailed letter on August 13, 1868.¹ A semblance of a novitiate at Le Vigan, begun on September 16, 1868, was quickly arranged in exchange for a decision of the Chapter of September 1868 to take charge of the orphanage, directed in the interim by Fr. Edouard Hermant. In mid-November it became evident that the orphanage needed the founder-novice, so Fr. d'Alzon hurried the foundation of an ad hoc community composed of, together with this priest newly turned religious, Fr. Pierre-Baptiste Morel, Brother Vital Martin and Brother Joseph Maubon: *"We have just taken charge of an orphanage of 300 boys, at Arras... That has earned us the acquisition of a saint, Fr. Halluin, who, for seven years, lived off the remains of soldiers' rations, so that he could found his work. I hope that we will be able to recruit a good number of Lay Brothers from among them."*² If there were temporary difficulties, there as elsewhere, in assuring an adequate and quality environment for the young apprentice orphans, the Assumption was able to dedicate itself for more than a century to this social work par excellence (from 1923 on, the Province of Paris provided personnel). Suffice it to mention the names of Frs. Jean-François Poutrat, Felix Ranc, François-Xavier Legrand, Wandrille Rocchiccioli, Eustache Pruvost, Vincent de Paul Grimonpont, and Brother Jean-Baptiste Senechal as well. It was heart-wrenching in 1978 for the Assumption to let go of this sphere of activity and apostolic involvement. The work was passed on to the D. D. A. S. (Direction Départementale d'Affaires Sociales - D.S.S., Department of Social Services) and left the city of Arras for the Rumeaucourt countryside. Some religious, such as Fr. Aloïs Steegen, assured, as far as they possibly could, a much appreciated spiritual presence.

Accepting responsibility for the Arras orphanage was symptomatic of

the Assumptions conscious desire and will, during the pivotal era of 1860-1870, to diversify its apostolic works. Beginning in the 1930's, each province in France assumed the direction of a social and popular work: Arras, Douvaine, and Toulouse Grande-Allée. It is interesting to read this page of Fr. d'Alzon who discovered in 1872 a social reality for which his choices or his origins did not pre-dispose him at all. In more than one way, these lines evoke the tragic descriptions of the naturalistic novels of Zola.

"Paris, August 10, 1872

My very dear daughters.

Your good little mother tells me that the recollections that I sent you in writing to her pleased you. I want to increase that pleasure by writing to you yourselves, all the more so because I want to tell you something from which we can draw a very practical conclusion. I visited Fr. Halluin's house in Arras. I won't speak more about that, though I could say many things about the six sisters who are there and work like 24. I won't speak either about our religious, considering that they could put you to shame and me all the more, because of all the tribulations, hardships, and suffering they must endure. But, listen. The day after my arrival, Fr. Halluin³ brought us to Brebis.⁴ Brebis is a coron. The word coron comes from corona, a crown.⁵ A coron is a housing unit for miners built by the administration. All the houses are the same. There is a well for every four families, and space for six or eight persons in each little tower, and gardens for each family. In the center stands the administration house occupied by Brother Boulet⁶ and 11 orphans. Soon there will be fifty. These orphans and all the children of the area are divided into two groups. One group goes down into the mines at 5:00 A.M. and comes up at about 3:00 P.M.; the others go down at 3:00 P.M. to come up I am not sure when. For work they don a kind of canvas garment, are bare-foot, and have a large leather strap around their head to fix the lamp with which they work. Boys and girls go underground that way. Fortunately they are, almost everywhere, kept separate. In the mine they are almost always on all fours, pulling the trolley cars and are subject to workers who do not go easy on them. They earn 15, 20, 30, 45 cents a day.⁷ But what a life! There are several mines. At night, in snow, in the cold; in the summer, in

the rain (it's always raining there), they go. On their return, they soak themselves in a bath and that is their life. I have seen them at table; some were bare-foot on a stone floor. I saw the son of a man who had been guillotined three days earlier and that Fr. Halluin had quickly adopted. On reflection, I found that my life as a religious was much less difficult, and even yours, my dear children. Going to or coming back from the train at Brebis, I saw these little ones running in the fields. Some, at 3:00 were going down into the mine for the whole night; the others coming back from the mine, in soaked clothes. Ah, good God, how we are spoiled! Sometimes they die. A while ago, nine died at once.⁸ Good-bye. I will not reread this, it is too disturbing"

—Quoted from Letters, vol. IX, ed. D.D., 1994, p. 413. To the Oblates of the Assumption at Nîmes.

¹ Letters, vol. VII, p. 132 n. 1.

² Letters, t. VII, p. 185.

³ Fr. Henri Halluin (1820-1895), founder of the Arras orphanage. Cf the biography by the Abbé Georges Lacroix, *Le P Halluin, le saint Vincent de Paul de l'Artois*, Cahiers d'Alzon, 1962.

⁴ Les Brebis, at Bully-Les-Mines or Grenay near Mazingade, in the coal mining area of Lens (Pas-de-Calais).

⁵ Undoubtedly a common etymology. This local term in Picardie could in fact derive from an Old French term "cor" or "quart" which means angle or corner.

⁶ Brother Jules Boulet (1818-1879). Cf. *Notices biographiques*, 1.1, p. 373-374.

⁷ Undoubtedly according to the number of coal-filled carts they pulled up.

⁸ This phrase could be interpreted as "at one time" or "from a coal-gas explosion."

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION AND RESEARCH

The relationship between workers and the Church is well studied in the classic work piece by Pierre Pierrard, *L'Église et les ouvriers en France (1840-1940)*, Hachette, 1984, nor should the essential work of Jean-Baptiste Duroselle be omitted, *Les débuts du Catholicisme social en France 1822-1870*, P.U.F., 1951. In Fr. d'Alzon's writings, we find a few vague allusions,

often negative or ironic, to socialist-leaning politicians of the first generation, Proudhon, Saint-Simon, but never to Marx, Cabet, Fourier, Barbès, or even Blanqui. His feelings about the “Reds,” the “Communeux,” or the “Savage beasts of Nouméa” only underscore his denunciation of the anti-religious or anti-clerical movements. On the other hand, Fr. d’Alzon is sensitive to the question of industrialization because of the coal mines of Alfès, Bessèges, and Grand-Combe. Cf. Pierre Léon, *Histoire économique et sociale de France*, t. III (1789-1880), 1976.

FOR A PERSONALIZED READING

- What do you know about the efforts and the realities of a social Catholicism in your country in the 19th century?
- Can Christianity, in its “charitable” outreach, make up for society’s failings with regard to those who are left out? What are the dangers of too much “moralizing” on the part of the Church?
- What do you know about the social commitments of the Assumption today?
- What deep concerns have you learned from your contacts with the disadvantaged or the marginalized?

45

AN APOCALYPTIC ATMOSPHERE

The 1870's bathed in an atmosphere of fear and uncertainty in the face of a doubtful future. Drawing on a background of biblical and theological references, the Catholic spirituality of the times expressed an "end-times" mentality ringing out loudly and clearly the themes of expiation, of an unavoidable collective penance, of a sin as much original as historical that had the recurrent face of the Reformation, the Enlightenment, and their avatar, the Revolution, and of an indispensable radical rebirth to be demonstrated in public penitential ceremonies. From all the apocalyptic discourse, in response to the "calamities of the times," there emerged the image of a vengeful God who punished Paris, the new Babylon. This religious cosmology found signs of hope in a proliferation of signs and wonders fed by accounts of apparitions, prophetic messages, secrets waiting to be divulged that attracted to many shrines, new or restored, enormous crowds thirsting for healings, conversion and devotions, made possible thanks to the development of the railroad. A sort of diffusive millenarianism, based on the predictions of the Virgin of LaSalette of 1846, *the Weeping Virgin*, filled the religious atmosphere with conjectures and interpretations that found whatever material they needed to subvert the social and political order born of the disaster. In the midst of the great battle waged between the divine forces and those of the Beast, for the Legitimists there appeared the face of a man of Providence, Henri V,¹ since the divine punishment would also bring salvation, of which Mary was the mediatrix par excellence. Fr. d'Alzon was no stranger to this movement toward spiritual rebirth, to this culture of prophecy and to these eschatological horizons. We have found many traces of this in his correspondence of 1873 in particular. His chosen prophet was named Chardon, called "wizard" by d'Alzon, before he chose a more serious candidate in 1880, Don Bosco.² The apparitions that he mentioned are many: Kruth in Alsatia, Les Batignolles in Paris, that of Marie-Julie Jahenny in the diocese of Nantes.³ His preferred pilgrimage site, besides that of

Rochefort, was the little village of l'Espérou where healings, conversions, and abjurations of heresy were manifold.⁴ In conclusion, shall we retain this mellower or wiser evaluation: *"I see all the prophecies of the past fulfilled but those of years to come are never fulfilled"* as the sign of a re-focused hope?

"Le Vigan, July 7, [18]73

I cannot express to you, dear friend, the joy that your letter of the 3rd gave me concerning the pilgrimages, the consternation of the archbishop, the establishment of a magazine for the pilgrimages, the naming of bishops, and the foundation of universities.⁵ We will find subscribers for you and we will send you articles. I shall write to Abbé Joinain, chaplain for the general hospital, director for the devotion of Notre-Dame de La Salette in Nîmes,⁶ so that he will organize the Nîmes pilgrimage. You can write to him in my name.

2,500 pilgrims will leave Nîmes on Monday for Lourdes.⁷ We had to refuse people. The crosses⁸ had great effect at l'Espérou. Protestants had come in rather great numbers. And, since they refused the crosses, we could tell who was Catholic and who was not. We presume that next year they will shine by their absence. Yet there are some who, no later than yesterday, dedicated their child to the Blessed Virgin with the promise of bringing them to l'Espérou three years in a row. I believe that l'Espérou is destined⁹ to obtain the grace of conversion for heretics. I will place myself in a quasi-retreat for three months. I am really tired, and especially need rest. Please tell Fr. Picard that I received his 300 francs. We have made two excellent acquisitions: Gustave Goubier and a professor, Mr. Golfin.¹⁰ This is for Fr. Picard alone. We are giving the habit to Golfin on August 14, Gustave will wait a little longer. We are giving the habit to Bachelier (Bro. Édouard) and to Romanet (Bro. Michel.)¹¹ Two from the Châteaux will be arriving.¹² Fr. Hippolyte is holding two in reserve for October.¹³

Good-bye, very dear one, and tenderly yours, E. d'Alzon

You, also, find us vocations. Tomorrow you will receive the account of the pilgrimage to Notre-Dame de l'Espérou."

—Excerpts from the Letters, vol. X, edit. D.D., 1994, p. 68-69.

¹ With one great exception, however: The legitimism of Fr. d'Alzon was never unconditional. He broke with the Gazette de Nîmes, had a falling out with the Baron de Champvans...

² Letters, vol. VIII, p. 488, p. 497; XIII, 420.

³ Letters, vol. X, pages 41, 42.

⁴ Utters, vol. IV, pages 335-336, 348, 377, 378, 389-390. 400, 401.

⁵ Through the Notre-Dame de Salut (N.D.S.) organization, there was a blossoming of pilgrimages, not only to the large apparition centers, but also a renewal of visits to ancient sacred shrines that had been abandoned since the Revolution. Bishop Guibert, who desired a careful diocesan pastoral supervision of pilgrimage centers, thought he could count on a rivalry between the Assumptionists and the Jesuits. The first issue of *Le Pèlerin* appeared on July 12, 1873, and Father François Chambourdon was the owner-editor. Among the French bishops named or transferred in 1873 were Bishop Fourcade to Aix-en-Provence, Bishop de la Boullerie, coadjutor for Bordeaux, Bishop Leuillieux to Carcassonne, Bishop Pichenot to Chambéry, Bishop Saivet to Mende, Bishop de Ladoue to Nevers, Bishop Langénieux to Tarbès, and Bishop Bataille to Amiens. At the time, Catholics were preparing to obtain a law granting them freedom to have schools of higher education (the Laboulaye Law of 1875).

⁶ Abbé Étienne-Pamphyle Joinain, written phonetically Joannin by Fr. d'Alzon.

⁷ Account of the diocesan pilgrimage of Nîmes, led by Bishop Plantier in *Le Pèlerin*, 1873, n. 3, p. 55-57. *Semaine religieuse de Nîmes*, 1873, n. 20, p. 229-230.

⁸ The well-known cross made of red wool bearing the inscription *Domino Christo servire* which became the emblem of the pilgrims led by N.D.S., that had previously been worn by the defenders of Rome. Pilgrimages and the defense of the Pontiff went together in the mentality of the time.

⁹ From the time that this high point of the Cévennes, through the initiative of Fr. d'Alzon, had again become a place of worship, many pilgrimages and healings took place. Notice the connotation of pilgrimage/anti-Protestant offensive.

¹⁰ Undoubtedly Gustave Goubier and Richard Golfin were two excellent recruits, but, as for many others, they did not persevere in the Assumption.

¹¹ Edouard Bachelier (1857-1929), first Assumptionist priest to come from the alummates. Fr. Michel Romanet, superior in Rome, another recruit from the alummates, would eventually enter the diocesan clergy of Paris.

¹² Marc Yvoz and Matthieu Lombard.

¹³ Undoubtedly the two recruits from the school at Le Vigan, Doulcier and Jourdan, would eventually join the diocesan clergy.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION AND RESEARCH

At the end of the 19th century many works, orthodox or esoteric, were published about supposed supernatural manifestations; there is a long list of apparitions, approved or unapproved, that can be found in Bernard Baillet, *Cahiers Marials*, April 1971. Dr. Antoine Imbert-Gourbeyre wrote two volumes in 1873, on the main cases of Stigmatisés (bearers of the stigmata) of the 19th century. In 1871, Abbé Jean-Jules Marie Curicque published his celebrated work, a bit uncritical but significant, *Voix prophétiques ou signes, apparitions, et prédictions*. Several priests specialized in doubtful prophetic literature, such as Abbé Emmanuel Chabauty and Henri Torne-Chavigny. It would be helpful to turn to the critical works of contemporary historians and theologians such as Philippe Boutry, Michel Cinquin (pilgrimages), Alphonse Dupont (the myth of the crusades), Hilaire Multon or Fr. Henri de Lubac (the spiritual posterity of Joachim of Fiore).

FOR A PERSONALIZED READING

- What do you think of this mishmash typical of the end of the 19th century that jumbles together apparitions, pilgrimages, miracles, and prophecies?
- How does the Gospel invite you to a way of purifying your faith with regard to “the signs of the times”?
- Is not the institutional Church, while attempting to give parameters to the forms of popular religion, obliged to make a continual effort of discernment in all cases of supernatural manifestations?
- For you, what are the signs of Christian hope that you seek to favor in your faith?

46

CANDIDATES FOR BISHOP, NÎMES 1875

The search for a successor to Bishop Henri Plantier, deceased at Nîmes on May 20, 1875, inaugurated a time of feverish activity for Fr. d'Alzon. He faced the disagreeable reality of not having been chosen by the Chapter as Vicar Capitular as he had been at the time of the death of Bishop Cart in 1855; he suffered what could well be called the phenomenon of erosion of influence, equivalent to a rejection by the influential members of the local clergy, among whom was the future Bishop Gilly.

Within the terms of the concordat of the time, the nomination of a bishop gave rise to many "negotiations" among the nunciature, the bishops, the embassy and the Ministry of Cults; each of these parties would in turn, return to local groups: the members of the Curia, the Roman Embassy, friends, the preferences of the bishops and clergy, the Prefecture and the Deputies... From these ever discordant consultations and inquiries were born rumors, further negotiations and "give and take" where the Holy Spirit had to compromise with diplomacy! Fr. d'Alzon was not the last person to make his voice heard, even if, after so many years, his reputation as an intransigent ultramontane that served him well in Rome did him a disservice in Paris. We know that as far as he himself was concerned, Fr. d'Alzon, who had been a candidate for bishop since 1848, had voluntarily removed himself from consideration for this ecclesial service and at the Consolata of Turin had made a private vow of priestly humility in 1844. But his relationship with the successive nuncios in Paris, Fornari, Garibaldi, Sacconi and Chigi, made of him an authoritative voice in the preliminary consultations and inquiries that began the process of nominations to vacancies and the transfers of bishops. The government did not always follow his advice, but it was often requested by the nunciature. Once the name of a candidate had been decided on, it was submitted to Rome before being published in the *Journal Officiel*. Then came the bishop's consecration and official installation...

In 1855, Fr. d'Alzon was caught by surprise in having to receive in Nîmes

in the person of Bishop Plantier, a bishop reputed to be a Gallican. After a moment of ill humor, he accepted to cooperate with the new bishop who proved himself to be a front-line ultramontane. In 1875, he made rather unflattering remarks about the choice of Bishop Besson, judged to be *intelligent* but *ambitious*. But especially this time, Fr. d'Alzon felt that he no longer enjoyed universal support in his post of Vicar General to which he had been named in 1839: the younger clergy desired change; the senior clergy were divided, ready to question the heavy measures put in place by the previous administration (permanence of certain positions, the practice of priests living in a rectory being required to eat together). Fr. d'Alzon made a decision: after a reasonable period of time, in order to assure continuity, he would submit his resignation, accepted in 1878.

"Bishop's residence, Nîmes, June 22, 1875

Mademoiselle,

For the past few days I have been wanting to write to you and I thank you for taking the initiative. Alas, how sad it is to see men so soon forgotten! No one thinks anymore about my poor bishop.¹ As to the new bishop, I had four excellent choices proposed by our deputies;² all were refused.³ I am not too afraid of Fr. Belville.⁴ They gave as a reason for not sending Fr. Gervais that he is from Bordeaux and they had just taken Fonteneau from there.⁵ As for Fr. Besson, I am not particularly for him, but how can one imagine that a Chapter that considers itself legitimist and ultramontane⁶ would ask for Fr. d'Hulst?⁷ Yes, the Canons want Abbé Hulst and are working hard to get him.

As for me, I declare I am no longer attached to anyone; I want to resign, as I wanted to 20 years ago; and if we get a Gallican bishop, the nuncio will have gotten what he wants.⁸ It will be his glory to have populated episcopal sees with pious mediocrities and nonentities, if not pious, at least scheming. Fava⁹ is as vulgar as possible. I have been informed about a Fr. Germain of Bayeux, a Fr. Limayrac of Montauban.¹⁰ Ah, I admit that it is sad to have so few capable men! I was saying to a Recollect¹¹ three days ago, that in writing to the nuncio, I had asked for a very intelligent man to prevail over the Protestants and the Revolution or a saint to convert the clergy. Ah, he answered, I would prefer an intelligent man, for the business of converting priests is a low

paying job.

But, above all, may they give us a bishop soon. The diocese is falling apart; the Chapter is turning the city's clergy against itself. The latter are writing to Rome against the chapter members; the pastors of the diocese who are transferred refuse to go. We are becoming a tower of Babel.

I am very happy that your brother is feeling better. They are sending me to Bigorre to calm my nerves. Would that not be an excellent place for him? I want to leave one of these days, but the rain and the cold have put me off.

Please accept, Mademoiselle, the homage of my most respectful affection.

E. d'Alzon."

—Letter to Miss Elise Veuillot,¹² quoted from t. XI, edit. D.D.,
1995, pp. 135-146.

¹ Bishop Henri Plantier, bishop of Nîmes from 1855 to 1875.

² Fr. d'Alzon cites the names of several politicians of the Gard: Numa Baragnon and de Larcy in the Tarteron government, Ferdinand Boyer and the Baron de Chabaud-Latour, deputies.

³ The four choices of Fr. d'Alzon: Abbé Louis-Hippolyte Guiol (Guyol) of Marseilles, Abbé Pierre-Marie Gervais of Bordeaux, Abbé Charles-Louis Gay of Poitiers as well as Bishop Théodore Legain of Montauban.

⁴ In fact, Abbé Louis Belleville (Bordeaux).

⁵ Abbé Jean-Emile Fonteneau who would become bishop of Agen.

⁶ This 'recalcitrant' Chapter was composed of Abbés Corieux, de Tessen, Reboul, Gareiso, Serres, Dalmières, Griolet, Veissière, Beaume and Gilly.

⁷ Maurice Le Sage d'Hauteroche d'Hulst, future founder of the Institut Catholique de Paris, considered a liberal.

⁸ Bishop Pier-Francesco Meglia, not well liked by Fr. d'Alzon.

⁹ Bishop Armand-Joseph Fava had been, since 1871, bishop of La Martinique, before being transferred to the see of Grenoble in August 1875. Great warrior against Free-Masonry, he would be a trusted ally for the Assumptionists of Miribelles-Echelles from 1887 on.

¹⁰ Abbés Jean-Augustin Germain and Pierre Philippe Limayrac.

¹¹ Fr. Odoric, alias Andre Jacobi, Franciscan Recollect.

¹² Elise Veuillot was a sister of Louis Veuillot of the *L'Univers* newspaper.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION AND RESEARCH

A very useful reference regarding bishops is the *Episcopologe français des temps modernes 1592-1973* by Chapeau and Combaluzier, Letouzey, 1977 and the beautiful study by Jacques-Olivier Boudon, *L'épiscopat français à l'époque concordataire*, Paris, Cerf, 1996 in the collection *Histoire religieuse de la France*. As to the involvement of Fr. d' Alzon in a few cases of nominations or resignations of bishops, we can refer to two studies concerning the neighboring dioceses of Montpellier and of Perpignan in which his role was not negligible: Gérard Cholvy, *Autorité épiscopale et ultramontanisme: la démission de l'évêque de Montpellier (1873)*, in *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique*, 1974, p. 735-759 and by the same author, *Gallicans et ultramontains. Bishop Ramadieu successeur de Mgr. Gerbet à Perpignan (1864)* in *Mélanges J. Gadille, Histoire religieuse*, Beauchesne, 1922, pp. 301-316. *Le P. d'Alzon évêquable?* In A. T. L. P., 1996, n. 128, pp. 15-20.

FOR A PERSONALIZED READING

- What do you know about the present processes and procedures for naming bishops in your country (inquiries, lists, recommendations)? What respective roles do the nunciature, the bishops' conference and the civil government play?
- Throughout its history, the Assumption has given several bishops to the Church. Could you draw a list of them to the present day?
- Throughout its history, religious life offers many excellent examples of bishops chosen from its ranks? Why did Fr. d'Alzon desire it so little for himself?

47

RELATIONS AMONG THE FAMILIES OF THE ASSUMPTION

1876 is a red-letter year in the history of the relations among the Families of the Assumption of the time. In order not to fall into simplistic anachronisms, it is good to remember that we are dealing with the 19th century, a time when there was a lacuna in canonical legislation with regard to religious life and that there existed a tendency to have recourse to Roman Congregations against local ecclesiastical or episcopal encroachments, by playing the card of religious exemption or the decentralized, international character of a congregation. Women's congregations with superiors general, born in the 19th century, generally took the lead from those religious orders in which the masculine element, corresponding most closely to the spirituality of the women's own institutes, allowed them to obtain help, support, or more, if desired, for the life of their communities. We must recognize the complexity of each particular situation, between the respective rights and obligations of the superior general, the local superior, the ecclesiastical superior, the confessor, or even the spiritual director, especially when it was possible for them to go in five different directions! History has hardly been miserly with anecdotes filled with comedy and parody. Books or treatises on the subject present contrasting opinions.

In 1876, there was talk of resolving this problem in so far as the four Families of the Assumption were concerned. The Little Sisters of the Assumption, founded in 1865, were asked to express their preference among three names of possible delegates. Very naturally Fr. Pernet's name was chosen and consented to by the A.A.'s, even if the process itself inspired some uneasiness among the sisters. For the Oblates the union between the two congregations seemed natural since they had the same Founder, a union inspired, in any case, by that of the Lazarists and the Daughters of Charity, especially given the need to work together in the foreign missions. But it is not insignificant that Marie Correnson, in 1873, in

order to obtain a school in Nîmes, bypassed Fr. d'Alzon, mediator in spite of himself between the Oblates and the Religious on this disputed property, and ran to the bishop to obtain an easily granted consent. And again, in 1876, on the document ratifying the union of direction and government of the congregation, which she signed, she did not forget to add a time-limit clause, '*for six years.*' For the Religious, for whom the union seemed a "foregone conclusion" between Fr. d'Alzon and Marie-Eugénie de Jésus, it took an unexpected turn because of the demands of Fr. Picard and the deliberations of the "*residents of Auteuil*"; nothing was decided and everything was put off till later.

"Bishop's Residence, Nîmes, Sept[ember] 18, 1876

My dear daughter,

I have just read the minutes of the Chapter,¹ and, if I had opened them earlier, the discussion about the minutes prepared by Fr. Picard and copied on your orders would have been useless. Because of the contents of the minutes in your registers, it is impossible to propose to you the work that the good Father had brought from Paris.² So, let us maintain the good friendship that we enjoy. In three years we will hold a Chapter; until then Fr. Picard will have had the time to come to an understanding with you and prepare something more serious than the report signed by me that says absolutely nothing.

Please note that I am not at all angry. You know that for more than twenty-five years I have not been favorable to a union. It is you who desired it. But under the terms stated in the minutes, it is quite evident that the Chapter did nothing. If it does not request more, there will be no need for deliberation, and I signed it only out of respect for what you had announced to M. d'Hulst, for you know that what was voted on is completely different.

I implore you not to see in my words any tinge of suffering whatsoever, since the decisions of the Chapter, except for what the delegate should do in Rome and with the bishops, [are] what I desired. Will we accept this situation of ambassadors? I think not, if it had to remain in those terms. To be your agents for spiritual affairs may be a service to be rendered, and we will do it with pleasure as long as there is no official acceptance of a much

too inferior position, since it is a matter for deliberation by a congregation of women. From this point of view, I am happy that I did not open your register during our Chapter. Fr. Picard had assured me that this register contained the transcription of his work. Since the corrections that he proposed to us stressed a meaning contrary to your discussion, he probably protested a little too strongly. Moreover, he implored me not to oblige him to accept the title of delegate. After reading what I just read, I absolutely cannot insist. There is a clear misunderstanding. Otherwise, were the question of union to be treated as a business transaction, I would wonder why I was invited to preside the Chapter.

Goodbye, my dear daughter. I tremble at the thought of hurting you when I only want to establish as clearly as possible your situation and ours. Let us maintain our good friendship. On this matter we will always agree; no further discussion.

Yours truly my dear daughter, in Our Lord.

E. d'Alzon."

—Letters, vol. XI, edit. D.D., 1995, pp. 469-470, to Mother Marie-Eugénie de Jésus.

¹ On the 24th and 25th of August, 1876, Fr. d'Alzon presided over the general chapter of the Religious of the Assumption at Auteuil and from the 11th to the 16th of September that same year, he directed the work of the 8th general chapter of the Assumptionists in Nîmes. Among the numerous questions studied, that of the relations with the three congregations of women of the Assumption particularly stands out. At the time Fr. d'Alzon was working hard in favor of a decentralized organization for his own family to be divided into three provinces, Nîmes, Paris and Andrinopolis.

² This text of Fr. Picard insisted, we can gather from the text, on a union of direction under the patronage of the A.A.'s.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION AND RESEARCH

Find in the various *Rules of Life* in use in the Assumption (R.A., A.A., O.A., L.S.A., Ora.) what is made clear concerning the relations and ties among the families of the Assumption. What is similar, common, different, present, or

absent?

The project of union proposed in 1876 between the Assumptionists and the congregations of women is presented in *Documentation biographique*, Rome, 1986, vol. II, t. II, pp. 758-777 and 925-970.

There are also themes for reflection on the traits common to the Assumption families: *L'Esprit de L'Assomption d'après le P. d'Alzon*, Rome, 1993, pp. 89-96. A more systematic study to trace the wounds and/or divisions among the families of the Congregation will be completed under the aegis of the General Councils of the Assumption, in 2004.

FOR A PERSONALIZED READING

- What are the signs of collaboration and fraternal sharing among the Assumption families today?
- In your mind, what might have given rise to the problems which surfaced among the families of the Assumption, not between persons but between congregations?
- How are we to consider, at the same time, autonomy, religious fraternity and interdependence? Are we reduced to doing good together only because we are "obliged to"?
- Can a clerical congregation risk fostering discussion without the possibility of wounds or divisions?

48

FATHER D'ALZON AT CLAIRMARAIS

The adventure of the alummates, inaugurated at Notre-Dame des Châteaux in 1871 and admirably supported by everything Assumption had to offer, took off in 1874. Fr. Polyeucte Guissard made himself their documentary historian, by taking inventory, three quarters of a century after their beginning, of their multiple foundations in France as well as in neighboring or far-off countries where the Assumption had decided to pitch its tent.

Father d'Alzon's correspondence from 1871 to 1880 is helpful in giving us a picture, through his own eyes, of the various sites and of some portraits of alumnists: Les Châteaux, twice (August 1871, August 1875), Nîmes at the college (April 1874), Nice (December 1874, January 1875, April 1877), Le Vigan (April 1875, September 1875, January 1876, July 1876, July 1877, August 1878) and Ales (December 1876, February 1877, December 1877). In August 1876 Fr. d'Alzon became more closely acquainted with Clairmarais, an alummate founded on November 6, 1874, which he had visited briefly in April 1876. These various brief stays were the occasion for conversations and impressions filled with freshness as he came into contact with young people who readily amazed and touched him.

Collectively or individually, some of the young people initiated a correspondence in which, through a sometimes conventional or even clumsy style, the glow of apostolic generosity shows forth, a generosity that the Founder knew how to underline and foster forcefully. Although there were many defections that thinned out the ranks of religious and novices, defections that inspired him at times to express bitter remarks deploring the deficiencies of spiritual formation in the Assumption, Fr. d'Alzon never ceased to find in this rich pool for vocations (which were the alummates) reinvigorating signs of hope. His natural optimism, rudely tried by life's realities, did not founder. In writing and in speech he continued to praise and to encourage, to criticize, if need be, and to point out the road to follow. The general chapter of 1876 drew up the broad lines that would

direct the alummates after the first tentative experiences. At the Châteaux, Fr. Pierre Descamps, at Nice and then Alès, Fr. Alexis Dumazer, at Le Vigan, Fr. Brun, at Clairmarais, Fr. Joseph Maubon: these would be the reliable men to organize and put into practice the intuition of a truly original formula that would assure the prosperity of a Congregation that had remained until then in an embryonic state. With Fr. d'Alzon, in 1876, we will visit the site of Clairmarais, destined for a long life. As we do so, let us remember this expressive summary of his idea on vocation work: *"It is certainly a work of utmost importance to which we can devote ourselves."* Letter of February 12, 1874.

"Clairmarais,"¹ August 4, 1876

If I told you, my dear daughter, that I am in an area crisscrossed by endless canals; that there are uninterrupted boat rides,—a slow and crooked means, it is true—; that the cows give forty liters of milk a day; that I am in an alummate of twenty children, in the fields and the forests; that the church is three kilometers from the rectory; that we receive donations each day of 50 to 100 francs; that, that, that, that this alummate is too rich even though on the day of the Portiuncula we might have asked for the poverty of St Francis of Assisi;² if I told you that and many other things besides, you would answer me: 'It is not like Nîmes.' Indeed, here it is more solidly Christian. It is not the enthusiasm of Nîmes, but it is something pleasantly solid. They drink beer and eat in a frightful way.³ Despite all the swamps, fevers are unknown. No flies, no high temperatures. Winter is quite bearable. What more could you want? We are building a lovely chapel that will be as big as the one at Assumption. The cost is 49,000 francs. Fr. Joseph⁴ has 20,000 assured, without counting the rest. They will be given a house worth 40,000 francs that we will sell to build the foundations. An old canon⁵ will give them land, etc. To be sure, I am giving you a very incomplete summary of what I have found here. That is what has happened to us so far.

Note that four communities had come here before us, that they had been offered the same thing, and that they had not wanted it.⁶ I should add that on the parish grounds, there is a house of the Sisters of St. Vincent de Paul who have been smitten by Fr. Joseph. They have taken over all the mending for the children, they sent us dinner yesterday, and today they will send

us one in my honor, and I accept it. So, I am making Fr. Vincent de Paul fume, and I count on making Fr. Picard fume also, for they complain about the wind of Nîmes. A short while ago, a hurricane uprooted thousands of trees, blew off I don't know how many roofs, broke windows and twisted, and that is the proper word, steeples strengthened with iron spikes. Just yesterday at Arras we had a storm.⁷

These details are not for you alone. When you find out where in the Pyrénées the Chaudordy ladies are perched, please send them this page on which I express, before ending, all my tenderness for them. Let us use another page for you"

—D'Alzon Letters⁸ vol. XI, edit. D.D., 1995, pp. 445-446.

¹ This is a village of the Pas-de-Calais, near St. Omer, where the Assumption, after Arras, set up an aluminate at junior-college level on the site of a former Cistercian monastery, hence the name St. Bernard given to the school.

² A Franciscan center par excellence, the chapel of Our Lady of the Angels. Francis obtained its use from the Benedictines of Mount Subiaco. He died there on October 3, 1226.

³ These observations of a pure French Southerner are interesting, be they topographical, meteorological, or gastronomical. Everything is seen according to the standards of Nîmes.

⁴ Fr. Joseph Maubon (1849-1932), founder of Clairmarais.

⁵ Canon André-Joseph Limoisin.

⁶ Our archives are silent on these precise details.

⁷ Storms and natural catastrophes are, in human memory, from all time!

⁸ This letter which the archives showed addressed to Mother Marie Correnson seems to have been destined for Louise Chabert.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION AND RESEARCH

For the account of the Assumption at Clairmarais, see the book by Fr. Polyeucte Guissard on the alumnates, pages 125-144.

The religious history of the site of the Cistercian monastery of Clairmarais is presented in the D.H.G.E., vol. XII, 1953, col. 1046-1048 and in the *Revue Mabillon*, 10, vol. 71, 1999. The buildings of the Clairmarais aluminate,

restored after each of the two World Wars, were used for the aluminate until 1960. The religious wrote the chronicles of the site in various bulletins or masazines: *Le Clairmarais* (1885-1891), *Souvenirs de Jésus-Naissant* (1892-...), *La cloche de Clairmarais*, *Restons Unis*. The house then became the center for raising funds for Madagascar and a pilgrimage center because of a Lourdes Grotto built there in 1939. The site was sold in March 1995 to the Jericho and Magdala Associations: Cf. the article by Fr. Jean-Daniel Gullung, the A.T.L.P., April 1995, n. 114, p. 8 (*Jéricho vient à bout des murs de l'alumnat de Clairmarais*.)

FOR A PERSONALIZED READING

- How do you understand the enthusiasm of Fr. d'Alzon for the alumnates?
- Is there not, in the life of a religious called to move about, a necessary tug of war between an ineradicable cultural identity linked to his origins and an inevitable inculturation?
- What is it that creates, from your point of view, the solidity of an act of faith in the heart of the believer, beyond his sociological roots (i.e. the accidents of time and place)?
- Does not this letter of Fr. d'Alzon seem to be for you a sort of hymn of thanksgiving for the collaboration among priests, religious and nuns?

49

A LIFE CENTERED IN GOD

As the years passed, Fr. d'Alzon felt the weight of old age. From 1875 on, he makes numerous allusions to his declining health: neuralgias, toothaches, and intestinal pains.... All about him his friends and those who supported him in his youth were disappearing, Melchior du Lac in 1872, Abbé Combalot in 1873, and the bishop of Nîmes, Bishop Plantier in 1875. In 1878 he rushed to Rome where Pope Pius IX had just died on February 7, after a pontificate exceptional at least for its length. The politico-religious disorders in France were of great concern to him. The so-called government of Moral Order, born in 1873 after the fall of Thiers and the call to the presidency of Macmahon, had not brought back the monarchy with the Count of Chambord; on the contrary, in election after election the Republicans became more offensive. Victorious in the Chamber of Deputies in 1877 before winning the Senate in January 1879, they awaited their hour: the resignation of Mac-Mahon and his replacement by Jules Grévy gave a glimpse, if not of an anticlerical policy, at the least that of a power struggle in which the positions of the Church were progressively eroded, and all of this despite the efforts of appeasement by the new pope, Leo XIII.

Since 1875, Fr. d'Alzon had been thinking of resigning as Vicar General. On September 30, 1878, it was a done deal, in writing. From then on he intended to consecrate his efforts to the service of his Congregation. He finished writing the *Méditations destinées aux Augustins de L'Assomption* (1878-1879), and submitted to the *Pèlerin* a series of articles to strengthen the doctrinal content of the publication. He recommended to his religious, in the midst of their apostolic endeavors which included education, preaching, pilgrimages, and the press, that they strengthen a *spirit of recollection* at the Assumption. He spent more of his time in retreats, all the while never ceasing to encourage a missionary thrust into Russia as soon as possible. He felt an interior need to re-center all his activity in the heart of the spiritual life, in the fervor of a prayer based on the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity under the impulse of the

Spirit of Truth, Unity, and Love. Prayer never left his heart; and his life, as absorbed by work as he was, never distracted him from it, as we can see from various remarks to those he oversaw in spiritual direction, in 1860: *"When you find yourself in the midst of your pots and pans, remember to boil up a little love of God"* or again *"There is a silence that comes from the dumb demon; I detest that one, because he inspires many useless phrases and words. But how I love the silence produced by the attentiveness to listen to God in the depths of ones heart and the desire to have him reign there!"* (Letters, vol. II, p. 327 and pages 297-298) Let us listen to this same voice in 1878:

"Nîmes, Nov[ember 18] 78

My dear daughter,

I had a message sent to you through Mother Thérèse¹ in which I thanked you for looking for alumnists for us in Madrid² but that I was now putting this matter in Fr. Picard's hands, to whom I have written.

Thank you for having sent my article³ to Bishop de la Bouillerie.⁴ The bishop of Montpellier⁵ is enchanted, the bishop of Nîmes, much less.⁶ As for me, I refer back to L'Univers. It is up to him to judge what he must do. I am not afraid of war, but I will not provoke it unless it is useful.⁷ I place myself in the hands of God,⁸ I seek to serve him as well as I can, and I am happy to see that from the point of view of morale, the Assumption has never been better than at this moment. Will it last? God knows.

*Goodbye my dear daughter. Yours in the Lord,
E. d'Alzon.*

I dont know what to say for your retreat. As for me, I try to do as much meditation as possible, and astonishingly, I have the proof that I am doing some good to souls, when I have resisted as much as possible the boredom of a dry, arid, meditation, filled with distaste and distractions. Learning to pray has become the science of my efforts, and I do not know how to give you other advice than what I do for myself. Remain before God, tell him we are nothing, and how much we need him; ask Our Lord to give us his spirit, the Holy Spirit to give us his love; it is as simple as saying hello, and in that I find all my strength and all my hope. I do not

know any greater goal than to seek God will all ones might. In a word, Vm trying to make myself as simple as I can and I can only hope that you become very simple in your prayer”

—Letter to Mother Marie-Eugénie de Jésus, taken from vol. XII, edit. D.D., 1995, p. 619-620.

¹ Thérèse-Emmanuel O'Neill, R.A. (1817-1888).

² The Religious of the Assumption opened a boarding school for girls in Madrid in October 1876, thanks to the support of the daughter of the Duke of Montpensier, the princess María de Las Mercedes, who had attended the boarding school in Auteuil. In January 1878, Mercedes married King Alfonso XII and became the Queen of Spain, for a few months only, since she died on June 24 of the same year. The first Spanish Assumptionists would come from the foundation at Osma, even if there were earlier ones such as the ex-Assumptionist François de Sales Gavète and Richard Golfin.

³ It refers to an article Fr. d'Alzon published in *L'Assomption de Nîmes*, November 15, 1878, in memory of Bishop Dupanloup, bishop of Orleans, who died October 11, 1878 at the château of Lacombe at Villard-Bonnot in the department of Isère.

⁴ Bishop François-Alexandre Roulle de la Bouillerie (1810-1882), coadjutor to the archbishop of Bordeaux since 1872. He was the uncle of a Religious of the Assumption, Sister Thérèse du Sacre-Coeur de Foucault.

⁵ Bishop Anatole-François-Marie de Rovérie de Cabrières (1830-1921), bishop of Montpellier since 1874, cardinal in 1911.

⁶ Bishop François-Nicolas-Xavier-Louis Besson (1821-1888), bishop of Nîmes since 1875.

⁷ Once again this is about skirmishes between the ultramontanes and that of the liberal Catholics, suspected of Gallicanism. The use of the word “war” shows the bitterness and the tone of this true war of opinions.

⁸ Biblical expression: Ps 31:6 and Lk 23:36, and used during the prayer of Compline: “Into your hands, Lord, I commend my spirit.”

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION AND RESEARCH

The forms of prayer used by Fr. d'Alzon have never been studied in any systematic manner. One can find, however, the elements of a presentation in the already mentioned works by Athanase Sage, *Un Maître Spirituel* 1958 (see Index under the word ‘Prayer’) and of Fr. André Sève, *Ma vie c’est le*

Christ. 1980 (chap. 8). The prayer tradition of the Assumption is presented in a booklet *L'Esprit de L'Assomption d'après Emmanuel d'Alzon*, 1993, and elsewhere in the article of Jean-Paul Périer Muzet, *La prière apostolique à l'école de la vie religieuse*, in *Vie consacrée*, 1997, n. 2. Father Floribert Ngwese Kombi gathered an anthology of prayers inspired by texts of Fr. d'Alzon (pro manuscripto, 1997). Fr. Frans (Herman) Andriessen, in 1980, published a booklet of prayers inspired by texts of Fr. d'Alzon, *Gods eigen manier*, for which there is a French version with the title *Sans Toi le chemin n'est que silence*, translation by Serge Taxis. See also: *Héritiers de l'Évangile. Prier trente jours avec les Religieux de L'Assomption*, Bayard Editions-Centurion, Paris, 1999.

Jean-Paul Périer-Muzet, *Prier 15 jours avec Emmanuel d'Alzon*, Nouvelle Cité, 2003.

FOR A PERSONALIZED READING

- How does the Assumption attempt to teach you to have a sense of an intense prayer life all through your religious life?
- What does the Rule of Life recommend for personal and community prayer?
- What are the specific qualities of a life of prayer in the Assumption?
- Is not the apostolic life itself a permanent invitation to an ongoing prayer life? What are the conditions and the specific means which foster it?
- What do you think about Fr. d'Alzon's way of expressing his prayer life, in his times, with his means and his spirit? Do you know of any other passages in his writings where he expresses himself as directly and as simply?

50

AH! IF ONLY WE HAD A NEWSPAPER¹

This exclamation of Fr. d'Alzon's desire would be realized only after his death, in the era of his successors. On June 16, 1883, Fathers Picard and Vincent de Paul Bailly, spurred on by the Count Henri de l'Épinois, would decide to transform the *Croix-Magazine* into *La Croix* newspaper, a daily, priced at one sou (penny). This realization of a desire of the Founder was already present in the mind of Fr. Bailly when he wrote to Fr. d'Alzon on June 16, 1880: "You ask me why *La Croix* doesn't have a circulation of 100,000 copies. The day you really want that, it will be possible; it must be a daily and cost a sou." Fr. Vincent de Paul sent up a trial balloon in the 133rd issue of *Le Pèlerin* in 1879.²

You may recall that in Nîmes in 1848 Fr. d'Alzon had already become a journalist by publishing a newspaper, *La liberté pour tous*. As a man of action and doctrine, was he not always attracted by what he considered to be a powerful means of formation and apostolate for the masses? The urgency was felt even more strongly at the end of the century as the law on universal suffrage transformed each citizen into a voter and the question was how to weigh in on political choices at the birth of a democracy, even if the stated goal was to struggle against a bad press, specifically the republican press, rather than to create in a positive way a journalism in the Catholic vein.

Already in 1872, the General Council of Pilgrimages had come up with the idea of a small popular publication, *Le Pèlerin*, born in 1873, that four years later, Fr. Bailly, a true journalist, transformed into a successful magazine. Despite the repeated criticism of the tone of certain articles and the waggish vein in Fr. Vincent de Paul, Fr. d'Alzon supported his efforts and gladly added his own collaboration. By inclination and taste, he militated in favor of a content that formed and fought rather than one that was simply informative and entertaining, a more serious content and less 'zozo' ("fluff") according to his expression. The *Revue de l'enseignement chrétien*, second series, ended in 1877, since its goal had been achieved with the application of the Laboulaye Law. For him, it was time to react against the invasion into

the public forum of an ill-intentioned press that left Catholic opinion divided and almost without a voice. The watchword did not vary for the Assumption: the question was in this area as in all others, to place oneself on the level of the only valid principle: '*Catholic above all*' translated in these tumultuous times by its equivalent '*defense of the Church*.' Let us follow the tentative steps of a birth that took form in 1879 with the search for a name for the future *Croix-revue*:

"Nîmes, December 10, [18]79

Dear friend.

You can see that we take seriously the idea of the Revue,³ but the farcical style that you seem to want to give it disgusts us a lot. Take up again the title of 'Revue de l'enseignement chrétien!' A little while ago, in response to 'Charlemagne,' Fr. Laurent proposed 'Le roi Dagobert'; Fr. Edmond, 'Dagobert' or 'Pourceaugnac;' for me, 'Le roi David.' Is not Charlemagne a big chamber pot? We want to be serious. Neither L'Apôtre nor Charlemagne is serious. Fr. Laurent is like me; he wants his article back if the title remains absurd. For the magazine, we want another genre than that in the Pèlerin. Not that we would exclude a few comic pages; on the contrary. But in the face of the very grave circumstances that are coming, we need more than the waggish genre. Believe me, the 'Lutteur' ('The Fighter') was a good title. We have other things to do besides cut capers. Capers amuse good people, irritate bad people, but produce little fruit.

Fr. V[incent] de P[aul] has not answered about the program. Does he have his own idea, as in Poitiers, when he gave me a traitorous blow that I haven't forgotten?⁴ I just don't understand anymore, but I am wary. I am astonished, I admit, to have received nothing but telegrams. Remember that you are cutting off our arms and legs. So, let us not talk about anything anymore. Make the Pèlerin a daily since that is your aptitude, but do not announce your intention to publish an organ of the Congregation. I cannot permit the publication to become a joke. Do you want us to cooperate? The cost will be a greater seriousness in the editing than there is in the Pèlerin, though I do not exclude some comedy.

The mail has arrived. No letter.⁵ Dear friends, you are treating us a bit cavalierly, while we are so well disposed for a common work. This is not the way to act when we want unity in a common goal and effort. In the end, we will wait. But if we do not come to your aid, it is because you will have wanted that. You will be doing the work of Paris but not the work of the Congregation!⁶ Come on; tell us about your projects!⁷ Today, Fr. Bailly might have been overburdened, but the preceding days? And Fr. Picard could have written a few lines himself.

*Take advantage of my appeal and write to us. Yours in Our Lord,
E. d'Alzon"*

—To Fr. François Picard, Letters, vol. XIII, edit. D.D., 1996,
pp. 230-231

¹ Letters, vol. XI, edit. D.D., p. 393.

² Letters, vol. XIII, edit. D.D., p. 163-164.

³ The problem was to find a name for the new magazine that would be published. Fr. d'Alzon expressed, along with the group of religious of Nîmes, his preference for a serious title that went with the content: Fr. Laurent is Charles Laurent (1821-1895), Fr. Edmond, Edmond-Marie Bouvy (1847-1940).

⁴ The contemporary reader cannot forget a fact that is entirely unknown to the editor of note 1, corresponding to letter number 4687, cf vol. IX, 1994, p. 428!

⁵ Fr. Désiré Deraedt found the letter of Fr. Vincent de Paul Bailly dated December 9 in which, for the first time, in the midst of a series of other possible titles, the one that would finally be chosen, *La Croix*. Cf vol. XIII, p. 231, n.2.

⁶ This should be understood in the sense of a possible and hoped for collaboration of religious who did not necessarily live in Paris.

⁷ It is to be noted that this remark that does not and will never lack a spicy flavor is addressed to communications specialists who can be quite uncommunicative among themselves.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION AND RESEARCH

On the origins of the magazine and later the newspaper *La Croix*:

Fr. Aubain Colette, *Les origines et les grandes étapes du journal La Croix*,

Pages d'Archives, III, pp. 475-570 (1965).

Fr. Charles Monsch, Acts of the symposium *Cent ans d'histoire de La Croix* pp. 288-293.

Paul Castel, *Le P. François Picard et le P. Vincent de Paul Bailly dans les luttes de presse*, Rome, 1962.

About the Belgian newspaper of the same name, by Victor Mousty:

D. Misonne, *Préhistoire du journal La Croix, A l'occasion d'un centenaire* in *Lettre de Maredsous*, 1983, pp. 18-33.

A. Simon, *L'hypothèse libérale en Belgique*, Wetteren, 1956, pp. 138-139.

On the Parisian daily:

Charles Monsch in *Presse-Actualité*, March 1965, n. 17, pp. 4-23.

Acts of the symposium *Cent ans d'histoire de La Croix 1883-1983*, Paris, 1988.

Under the direction of Fr. Lucien Guissard, *Le pari de la presse écrite*, Paris, 1998.

About a Catholic publication house:

Jacqueline and Philippe Godfrin, *La Maison de la B.P.*, P.U.F., 1965.

FOR A PERSONALIZED READING

- What are your ideas on today's press, on the role of the media in society? What changes would you make in the ideas of the first generation of Assumption on the subject?
- Do you know the names of Assumptionists who worked or are working in the press or even of Assumptionist journalists?
- How can a Christian perspective play a role in the presentation of the news?
- Is there a Christian press in your country? Does the Assumption have a role in it? Do you know other religious Congregations that work in the publishing business?

EPILOGUE

Father d'Alzon's life did not end on November 21, 1880 even if his pen fell from his fingers on that day. He bade farewell to his religious somewhat like his master, in the manner of the patriarch Augustine, who, on his deathbed in Hippo, foresaw a new age for the life of the Church in the face of the invasion of the Vandals in North Africa. Assumption College in Nîmes, in November 1880, awaited a police search and expulsion as the decrees of Jules Ferry concerning unauthorized teaching religious orders were applied. The intervention of Bishop Besson with the President of the Republic, Jules Grévy, obtained only a short reprieve.

The Founder himself died in uncertainty concerning the fate of his Congregations; as to that of his men, 70 religious strong, dispersed in 13 communities (France and Bulgaria), they had little promise of a future; as to the Oblates, he was not unaware of its fragility in the hands of an ill Superior. His hopes were on another level. In March 1879, did he not compare himself to *Abraham, who had only one son, who had only two and one was banished, and yet he became the father of the people of God?*¹ His serenity concerning his spiritual posterity was more an act of faith than a proof based on solid statistics. Placed in the hands of Fr. Picard, the Assumption, with the vigor of its spirit, would find its path of life both in Europe and on the roads of the new world.

Buried November 24, 1880, in the Saint Baudile Cemetery of Nîmes, the human remains of Fr. d'Alzon would be exhumed three times: transferred to the chapel of the College of Nîmes in 1892; then to that of Séguier Street in 1942; then they would be the object of a canonical recognition in November 1964. The Cause of the Servant of God, opened rather late (1930), and studied at length because of its more or less well inspired orientations (1958), followed a sinuous path. Pope John Paul II at last signed the decree recognizing the heroic virtues of Fr. d'Alzon in December 1991, eight years after that of Fr. Pernet (1983). All that remains for his beatification is an authenticated miracle. That condition was fulfilled on February 9, 1975 for Marie-Eugénie de Jésus, beatified by Pope Paul VI. At least Fr. d'Alzon can have the consolation of having fulfilled his promise to work for the perfection of one he directed spiritually. In part, he was responsible for her perfection. Above all, may his daughters and sons continue today to promote on every continent his call to a religious, apostolic and churchly life *faithful to the Gospel*.

¹ Letters, vol. XIII, p. 62.

PRAYER FOR THE BEATIFICATION OF FATHER D'ALZON

“Lord Jesus Christ, you called Emmanuel d’Alzon to be with you,
in the midst of men and women, in the service of the Father and of your
Kingdom.

You led him to share
that service and his love for you, the Virgin, and the Church
with brothers and sisters in the Assumption.

Today, in hope and in prayer,
we await the recognition of the holiness of Fr. d’Alzon
by the Church.

That is why, through his intercession,
with the poor and the sick of the Gospel¹
we make this supplication.

Lord, have mercy...²

[Share with us your passion for the Father and for man. Make of us the
laborers of your Kingdom].³

¹ A later variant: “with the poor and the disciples of the Gospel.”

² First formulation of the prayer to obtain the beatification of Fr. d’Alzon,
published in *ART Information*, February 1987, n. 115, p. 1.

³ This appendix does not appear in the first published form. Other additions or
complements have appeared since. After “*Make of us*” is added “*through your
Spirit*” And at the end is included the traditional liturgical doxology “*You who live
and reign for ever and ever. Amen*” For the previous forms of the prayer for the
beatification of Fr. d’Alzon: cf A.T.L.P., 1992, n. 85, p. 17-19.

The following prayer uses an open style, as can be seen in Augustinian-based version of Fr. Franz Andriessen.

SEEKING GOD FROM THE BOTTOM OF THE HEART

Lord, my Companion,
It is you I seek.

In the far corners of the garden of my soul
Where you are sometimes hidden,
I seek you. Without you
The path is only silence.

I keep coming back to seek where you live.

Your mystery,
A flame in the darkness,
Attracts and fascinates me.

All along my path
You sow signs, bits of cloth hanging in the trees,
And you anchor
My heart to your horizon.

But how can I find your Origin
In the depths of my being,
Living at the bottom of my death
And death but living deeply in me?
I turn and return towards you
My companion.

Sometimes, in my dreams
You enlighten me with a message;
You rise and brighten the skies
Like a sun;
And in my house,
Silently, at the window, make a sign;

In conversations,
You become a silent presence

And your embraces,
A spark for a new fire.
Fleeting, you are Lord
In your apparitions;
Everywhere at the same time, suddenly present,
And suddenly gone,
A true Easter morning,
A ghost in the garden.

When you leave me, each time my heart
Desires you ever more strongly.

I seek you everywhere
God of my heart
And of my soul,
Of my garden,
Of my path.

Extract from Frans Herman Andriessen, *Sans Toi le chemin n'est que silence*, p. 18. (English translation made from the French text).

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION AND RESEARCH

All the catalogued texts of Fr. d'Alzon are now available on computer. You can obtain them on CD from the Formation Community, rue des Braves 21, in Brussels 1081:

CD 150e, *Les Écrits 1810-1880 Emmanuel d'Alzon*.

CD *Thésaurus AA version bêta 1.1* (Texts of d'Alzon, Picard, Galabert, Laurent) as well as version bêta 1.0.

A *Diaporama Emmanuel d'Alzon* is also available, text and pictures are taken from the album prepared by Fr. Pierre Touveneraud, A.A. and Sister Suzanne (Marie-Léonie) Marichal, O.A. (April 1999).

A contemporary witness of prayer with the Assumptionists: *Héritiers de l'Évangile*, Bayard Editions/Centurion, 1999.

Books on the 150th anniversary: Lucian Guissard, *Les assomptionnistes d'hier à aujourd'hui* Bayard Editions/Centurion, 1999. [English, *The Assumptionists: From Past to Present*].

Mémoire assumptionniste, Écrits au fil des ans 1850-2000, Edit. Du Bugey, 2000.

Fr. Georges Tavard, *Emmanuel d'Alzon. Textes spirituels*, Cerf, 2002, 217 pages. Foi et Royauté (2003).

On the Assumptionists

Jean-Paul Périer-Muzet, *Notices biographiques*, 5 tomes, 1999-2000.

In 2003, publication of 2 complementary tomes of Fr. d'Alzon's letters, t. XIV (1832-1849) and t. XV (1850-1880), unpublished texts.

FOR A PERSONALIZED READING

- Do the writings of Fr. d'Alzon inspire your own prayer during a retreat, a liturgy, a meditation?
- Do you feel free to compose a prayer, a poem, a meditation based on a d'Alzonian text?
- By what practical means, within your reach, do you propose to deepen your knowledge of the thought of Fr. d'Alzon?
- What major texts of Fr. d'Alzon are part of the spiritual tradition of the Assumption?

INDEX OF PRINCIPAL THEMES

Alumnates: ch. 42, 48
Assumption, Charism/Spirit of: ch. 10, 20, 24, 25, 31, 38, 47, epilogue
Augustinian character: ch. 10, 19
Bible and exegesis: ch. 35
Catholicity/Universalism: ch. 19
Childhood/Youth: ch. 13,34
Christ, Mary, and the Church, Love of: ch 20, 24, 38
Church, Love of: ch. 6, 20, 40
Church, Service of the: ch. 6, 28, 46
Community: ch. 13, 15, 24, 25, 31, 33
Death/Mourning: ch. 27
Direction, spiritual/Discernment: ch. 12
Disciples, Formation of and Relationship with: ch. 4, 12, 15, 16, 23, 25, 30
Doctrinal apostolate: ch. 14, 19
Ecumenism: ch. 8, 9, 32
Education/Teaching: ch. 13, 18, 19
Episcopacy: ch. 46
Evangelization/ Kingdom, the: ch. 14, 41
Family: ch. 22, 27, 34, 43
Financial matters: ch. 26, 29, 39
Formation: ch. 1, 5, 7, 15, 23
Foundations: ch. 17, 18, 23, 28, 29, 33
Friendship/Charity: ch 4, 15
Interiority: ch. 7, 15
Marriage: ch. 43
Ministry: ch. 8
Missionary apostolate: ch. 19, 23, 28
Novitiate: ch. 15, 17,36
Obedience: ch. 24
Orthodoxy: ch. 32
Papacy/Rome: ch. 6, 7, 20, 27, 30
Pedagogy: ch. 13
Pilgrimage (practice and places): ch. 2, 13, 16, 18, 21, 25, 38, 45 Politics :ch. 11,37,46
Poverty: ch. 39

Prayer/Life of Faith: ch. 27, 30, 49, epilogue
Preaching (Ministry of the Word): ch. 14
Press/Journalism: ch. 30, 50
Priesthood: ch. 37
Protestantism: ch. 9
Religious Life: ch. 10, 17
Romanticism: ch. 2
Seminary: ch. 5
Sensitivities, Religious and Ecclesial: ch. 9, 20, 45
Sickness/Health: ch. 21
Social apostolate: ch. 11, 44
Society: ch. 11, 41
Studies: ch. 1
Suffering: ch. 21
Superiors: ch. 24
Ultramontaniam: ch. 9, 20
Vatican Council I: ch. 40
Vocation: ch. 3, 22, 42, 48
Women Religious: ch. 25, 33, 37
Work: ch. 36