

A News of the Assumption



EDITORIAL

On the way to the General Chapter

"It is a matter of giving time to better understand our world, the stakes of a Christian presence, the relevance of an apostolic congregation such as ours to announce the coming Kingdom."

Agenda

Plenary General Council

n° 10 : **June 1-11, 2022.**

Ordinary General Councils

n° 34 : **February 14-18, 2022.**

n° 35 : **April 11-15, 2022.**

n° 36 : **May 2-6, 2022.**

n° 37 : **June 14-14, 2022.**

Fr. Benoît

- **December 26-January 3:** Family.
- **January 4-February 8:** France (canonical visit).
- **March:** Andean Province (canonical visit).

Fr. Marcelo

- **Dec. 29-Jan. 13:** Angola.
- **January 15-February 8:** France (canonical visit).
- **March:** Andean Province (canonical visit).

Br. Didier

- **December 21-January 1:** Family.
- **January 2-14:** Tanzania.
- **February:** Paris.

Fr. Thierry

- **January 24-28 :** Athens.
- **February 5-7:** Council of the Orantes of the Assumption (Creteil).

Fr. Miguel

- **December 25-January 8:** Kenya.
- **January 9-24 :** Tanzania.
- **January 24-31 :** meetings of the JPIC Assumption (Paris).

On the cover

A classroom in one of the “bush schools” organized by the Assumptionists in Madagascar: a place to implement the “global education pact” (read p. 6-7)

In Saigon, apostles in a time of pandemic



“Brothers, aren’t you afraid of getting infected?”, questioned many people in seeing us with our nutrition packs. “We are definitely afraid! However, love is bigger than fear.” Therefore, we leave our zone of security and go to those who are desperate for help in the quarantined sections of Saigon. It has been three months since the city has been plagued with sickness. Not able to maintain long periods of isolation, some have returned to their hometowns, while others remain confined in zones of quarantine facing hunger and fear, since the risk of infection is very high.

All the population is under strict confinement; we risk becoming strangers one from another, especially for those who panic. As a response, certain brothers have gone to help caregivers and the sick with medical services; the others at the house prepared food stuffs each day, to dispense like gifts of love to families in difficult situations.

We have encountered many people in dire poverty. Young children were lacking milk, the sick were lacking medicine, and many people began to lack simple nourishment. We listened to their requests for help; we would make phone calls to inquire and try to bring them love on our vehicle tours. Our arms, with the help of our benefactors, were not big enough to embrace all the desperate situations, but we hope that our simple attempts comforted a portion of their sufferings and difficulties.

Therefore, in connection with the Church, we share in “the pain and the anguish of the people of our time”. Confident in the love of God, we offer them sincere prayers for a rapid end to this pandemic. We ask that the generosity of our numerous benefactors is not exhausted, so that we can continue to relieve the struggles of our most vulnerable brothers and sisters.

Fr. HOANG Duong Pierre
(Scholasticate Community, Saigon)

On the way to the General Chapter



Fr. Benoît Grière
Superior General
of the
Augustinians of
the Assumption

Soon you will receive the “Letter of Indictment”, that is, the official letter by which the Superior General informs all religious of the upcoming 34th General Chapter of the Congregation: date, theme, place, objectives. It is a formal letter, but it should introduce everyone to the preparatory process in order to foster a renewal of hope. It is a time offered to us for a greater availability to what “the Spirit is saying to the Churches” (Rev 2, 7). We are benefiting from a particular conjuncture for this event in the Assumptionist family: the holding of the Synod on synodality. Pope Francis has asked that we each participate at our own level in the implementation of this synod. The General Chapter of the Assumption is therefore to be situated in this privileged context of a broad reflection on the way we do Church.

To help us move forward on this path, the preparatory commission for the Chapter has begun its meetings. A working document will be sent to you in the next few days which will give you the spirit in which we want to prepare the Chapter. It is a matter of involving every religious and every community. It is a matter of giving time to better understand our world, the stakes of a Christian presence, the relevance of an apostolic congregation such as ours to announce the coming Kingdom and finally to contribute to the reform in the Church so that it may be ever more “holy and blameless” (Eph 5:27).

On the other hand, I have asked several religious and lay people for a fresh look at the apostolate for the Reign today. Thus, we begin this issue of AA-Info with a presentation written by Fr. Benoît Bigard on the examination for the

Reign of God. Fr. d’Alzon inaugurated this practice at the Assumption. It is still honored by our Oblate Sisters of the Assumption. Some Assumptionist religious review their day or their week through this examination. Edgard Bourque, a religious from the United States, renewed it in his method. Today, it is proposed to us in this form to allow us to make it our own. To be workers of the Kingdom, such is our ambition, but we can still make progress in our lives so that they may be more coherent and more relevant according to the Gospel.

Other articles will be published later, either in AA-Info or in other media: “The Kingdom and the mission in Africa”; “Bruno Chenu: prophet of the Kingdom?” These texts will make us reflect on our capacity to work for the extension of the Kingdom around us in the world that is ours. If any good ideas come from anyone, I would be interested in receiving their written contribution which we could then publish.

The year 2022 is starting. A year that we all wish to be marked by joy, peace, health, concord and reconciliation. Our passion for the Kingdom of God impels us to make a concrete commitment to transform our world without delay. I ask God to give us abundant energy so that our faith can lift the mountains of inertia and indifference that can sometimes threaten us. The Assumption knows that it can count on God. The Congregation also counts on the work of each one of us. Happy New Year 2022!

Fr. Benoît Grière a.a.
General Superior

Callings, nominations, agreements...

Fr. Benoît Grière, Superior General, with the approval of his Council, has called:

■ TO PERPETUAL PROFESSION

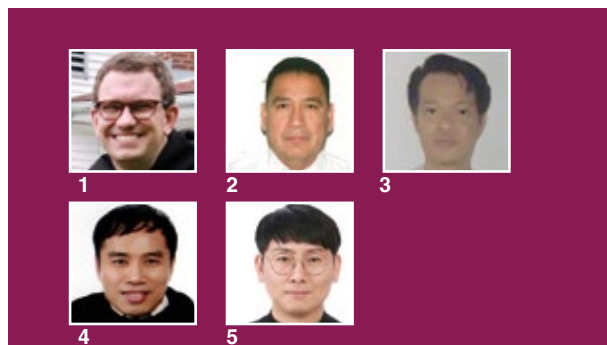
- 1) **CAGLIONI Daniele**
(North America) (11/09/2021)
- 2) **RODRÍGUEZ GUTTIÉREZ Dagoberto**
(Andean Province) (11/12/2021)

■ TO THE DEACONATE

- 3) **LE TUAN PHUOC Thien Joseph**
(Europe) (11/09/2021)

■ TO THE PRIESTHOOD

- 4) **NGUYEN VAN Truyen Paul**
(Europe) (11/10/2021)
- 5) **KIM Tae-Hô Simon**
(Europe) (11/12/2021)



NOMINATION OF A VICE-PROVINCIAL

Fr. Benoît Grière, Superior General, with the approval of his Council, has named **Fr. Henri KIZITO VYAMBWERA, Superior Vice-Provincial of East Africa**, for a 2nd triennium, beginning on January 1, 2022.



DEPARTURES FROM THE INSTITUTE

Fr. Benoît Grière, Superior General, with the approval of his Ordinary General Council, has granted an indult for departure :

- to **Br. Ricky Rajaonarison Bertrand RAVOSON** (Madagascar), temporary profession;
- to **Br. Roderic Andres REYES** (Europe), temporary profession.

THE 2022 SOLIDARITY CAMPAIGN

Good news: the 2021 campaign for a vehicle for the Katendere Postulancy (DR-Congo) was a real success, leaving a balance of more than 14,000 USD. This, along with a donation from the Albertville community, will be used to provide a second-hand vehicle for the other Congolese Postulancy, located in Bibwa (Kinshasa region).

The 2022 campaign will be used to purchase a vehicle for a third Postulancy, that of Mbaga Tuzinde, in the Vice-Province of East Africa. Fr. Kizito, Vice-Provincial, assures us that this would be a great need, which could be partially covered by a provision in the budget of the formation houses. .

On the sidelines of the CGP, the Generalate had the joy of **WELCOMING FRENCH CARDINAL PAUL POUPARD**, President Emeritus of the Pontifical Council for Culture, for the Eucharist and lunch on Saturday, December 4. Despite his advanced age (91 years), this man, who is still strong and quick-witted, shared his rich experience of the Church and of the six popes with whom he has collaborated.



The 34th General Chapter is getting ready!

The December session of the CGP, held in Rome with a few participants from afar, allowed us to get the ball rolling for the big event in June 2023

The 34th General Chapter is now underway! The extraordinary session of the CGP held at the end of September had already made it possible to launch it by setting its calendar, its theme and its composition (read AA Info n° 18, p. 10). The ordinary session held in Rome in December continued the work in various ways.

It was not really an “ordinary” session, since it was organized according to the format of normal CGP meetings with the effective presence of all, but various reasons - visa or health - prevented five members from coming to Rome. In addition to the CGO, the Provincials of Brazil, the Andean Province and Europe, as well as the Vice-Provincial of East Africa were present, but those of North America, Africa, Madagascar, as well as the Vicars of West Africa and Asia-Oceania participated from afar. It was therefore a mixed meeting, whose sessions occupied the entire Roman day, but with variable participation from a distance, depending on the time difference: there are 12 hours difference between Boston and Saigon! But the technique followed, as best it could, and the agenda was honored.

In addition to various specific themes, such as education or the Lay-Religious Alliance (see below), or recurring themes, and of course the important exchange of news and experiences that the CGP allows, part of the work was dedi-



cated to the next General Chapter. This was first considered from the point of view of pre-chapter work, according to two aspects:

1) **The preparatory commissions** for the General Chapter: thus, the Preparatory Commission, under the leadership of Fr. Thierry Kambale Kahongya, will send a letter to religious and laity to solicit their active participation in the preparation of the Chapter.

As for the thematic pre-Chapter commissions, at least two of them have already begun their work: the one on the structures of the congregation, led by Fr. José Miguel Diaz Ayllon, and the one on communication and social networks, led by Fr. Michel Kubler.

2) **The Provincial Chapters:** the CGP reviewed their organization (electoral law) and their calendar.

Finally, the CGP has voted the principle of having an outsider as an animator in order to facilitate a smooth progress in the discussions and has accepted the proposal of Fr. Alberto Toutain, Superior General of the Picpucians, a 55 year old multilingual Chilean: in close collaboration with the Chapter Coordination, he will intervene in the debates in order to stimulate reflection from his outside perspective and to broaden our horizons!

In the immediate future, the next solemn step in our march towards the 34th General Chapter is the letter of indictment of the Chapter, which the Superior General plans to publish at the beginning of the year 2022.

P. Michel KUBLER,
(with the help of the summary
written each day by Fr. Benoît
Bigard)

The Assumption commits itself to the Global Compact on Education

The major educational project launched by Pope Francis shall mobilize all the high schools and universities of the Congregation

Pope Francis has sent out an invitation calling upon all humanity and its social organizations, in particular Catholic and non-Catholic educational institutions, to adhere to the Global Compact on Education. He extended it to other groups as well, to men and women of culture, the sciences, and sport, to artists, and the agents of the means of communication. With this compact he is looking for the greatest personal and collective commitment to seven goals placed at the heart of every educational process of the person, including rejecting the throwaway culture, listening to the voice of children, teenagers and youth, in general, and building a future of justice, of peace, and of a life of dignity.

The compact aims to promote the full participation of girls in education and the family as a center for education, to educate through a sense of welcome opening ourselves to the most vulnerable and marginalized, to find through study other ways to understand economy, politics, growth and progress with a view to an integral ecology; to safeguard and cultivate our common home following the principles of subsidiarity and solidarity and the circular economy.

So that this Global Compact on Education might lead to concrete actions, the Congregation for Catholic Education set up five areas and assigned specific responsibilities to the coordinating universities:

Human dignity and rights with the University of Notre Dame in the USA.

Peace and citizenship with the Pontifical Lateran University of Rome assisted by the Catholic University of Australia.

Integral ecology and technology with the Pontifical Xaverian University of Bogotá.

Fraternity and development with the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart in Milan.

Culture and religions with the Pontifical and Royal University of St. Thomas in the Philippines.

All of these will be under the coordination of the Congregation for Catholic Education¹.

¿What is happening at the Assumption with regard to the Global Compact on Education?

The Global Compact on Education is a call for us to display a certain boldness as Pope Francis has invited us, the same passion that Fr. Emmanuel d'Alzon had for the Kingdom of God.

Fr. d'Alzon asked that his religious be bold, disinterested and zealous. Boldness is needed. Why? Because we are living in a society which prepares individuals in a very personal, individualistic way. Nevertheless, the goal of education in our society is to foster fraternity. We cannot



welcome young people without teaching them how to live in full fraternity that breaks down borders, that breaks down cultural, ethnic, and religious differences. We are Christians, we are Catholics, but we are open to diversity. In this regard, creating fraternity means creating a climate of an integral and participative culture in education. It is the capacity to foster harmony.²

The Global Compact on Education is a privileged moment in the history of education and, in particular, in Catholic education, and I believe that we really shouldn't leave ourselves on the sidelines. The Pope has already explained his dream to us on various occasions: we are really in a dynamic of change, of transformation. We aren't simply involved in a proposition that can wait to be implemented. No, there is a real sense of urgency. The Pope speaks of an educational emergency. Much has been said about the personal and profound experience of the Pope at the origin of the compact, when he was rector of the Catholic University of Buenos Aires: in the morning he would go to work at the University and in the afternoon he would go to work in high schools on the outskirts of the city.

For the Pope the compact begins in an experience that he firmly believes is possible.... going to the outskirts, the peripheries where the poor live, where the excluded live, where those who most need attention and education live and, thanks to this experience, enabling people to come together and simply providing an education focused on things other than what he calls the dictatorship of results or of excellence... He wants to establish a dynamic of encounter, culture, dialogue,

assistance to the neediest, and a search for solutions that will allow us to move ahead.

Assumptionist education is invited to find the means to place in common an educational experience which has been present since the days of our founding. We have so much to share but what we lack is that touch of boldness and creativity that Fr. d'Alzon asks of us in getting out of the classroom and getting involved in what is called today "networking." Such networking facilitates the creation of bridges among present-day children and youth living in a society that nourishes the hope for an **urgent** change, where the love for this world and for the men and women who inhabit it are placed at the center of our concerns.

We have to be careful not to

think that the Global Compact on Education is an initiative that will disappear quickly without leaving behind major consequences or to fall into the temptation of making a list of good things within our institutions that make more or less room for the request of Pope Francis. This would be regrettable. The Assumption was founded to open up horizons, to undertake great causes. Each of us, wherever he may be, whether in an international enterprise like Bayard or the bush schools of Madagascar and the children of Rio de Janeiro's favelas, is an agent of change in a world that God loves profoundly and that we cannot do otherwise.

Rev. Marcelo MARCIEL, A.A.
Assistant general



- 1) Pope Francis made the invitation to adhere to the Global Compact on Education on October 15, 2020 (the presentation of the compact was carried out by the Xaverian University of Bogotá)
- 2) In the invitation to sign the Global Compact on Education, Very Rev. Benoît Grière, October 4, 2021.

“Called to discern the seeds of the Kingdom that comes”

Excerpts from the Superior General's closing address at the end of the 9th Plenary General Council in December 2021

“In spite of certain obstacles, the essence of our work has been respected. The debates have been animated and we have taken the measure of the life of our provinces and our communities. We have entered into a synodal process as requested by Pope Francis, that is, into a time when listening to the Holy Spirit is essential. Listening to one another and to the Spirit of God is necessary to discern the right path to take. We walked together, each at his own pace, being careful not to leave those who are slower or who limp along the road.

As usual, the discussion on the situation of our provinces allowed us to be in solidarity with the joys and sorrows in our religious family. (...) The young people are there and Father Vincent Leclercq drew our attention to the departures of young religious. These departures are numerous, perhaps too numerous, and show the difficulties we have both in discernment and in accompaniment during formation. We must be ever more vigilant in finding formators for the integral formation of the Assumptionist. (...)

The lay-religious alliance is a living and contrasting reality. The recent international meeting by videoconference allowed us to weave relationships between the various lay entities of the Congregation in Africa, Europe, and America. A commitment formula was proposed and we accepted it. A cross was drawn for the laity. What would our mobilizing works be without the involvement of the laity at Bayard, Accompagner, Assumption University and UAC? (...)

So we are on our way to the Chapters, Provincial and General. (...) We are called to discern the seeds of the coming Kingdom. It will be up to each province to see that the preparatory process is well lived by all the religious and all the communities. “The Kingdom of God is very near. To live and announce the hope of the Gospel”. (...)

The points of fragility of the congregation are numerous, but they also correspond to a historical evolution of Christianity and of the societies in which we are inserted. We can accept to leave the traditional places of our apostolate, as long as we continue to be passionate about the Kingdom of God by working for unity, truth and charity. If we close communities we must open others elsewhere. The Assumption is a missionary congregation. It is mobilized to announce the Gospel throughout the world. To do this, it must leave its comfort zone and accept the risk of adventure and prophetic audacity. (...) “

Fr. Benoît GRIÈRE
Superior General



Rekindle the flame of the Lay-Religious Alliance

The International Commission of the Lay-Religious Alliance of the Assumptionists had hoped to have a Forum in Nîmes, France, in July of 2020. However, due to the onslaught of the pandemic, the Commission decided to plan a three-day virtual Forum to be held in October 2021.

With the theme of “The Alliance in the Service of Unity” plans were developed for October 1, 2, and 3, 2021. Invitations were sent out to those originally invited to the Nîmes event, as well as to tandem members, Lay Assumptionists, and religious throughout the provinces. Much thought was given to the agenda for the virtual meetings—including speakers, presentations, and format.

Each of the Commission members contributed to the organization of the meeting and to its execution. The Commission, under the facilitation of Fr. Thierry Kahongya and with the assistance of Fr. Marcelo Mar-

ciel, includes the following members: Victoria Prada, Andean Province; Benedicte Fauvel, Province of Europe; Stella Kahambu, Province of Africa; Cristina Sanchez, Province of Europe; and Patricia Haggerty, North American Province.

The Commission wanted to provide Lay Assumptionists world-wide the opportunity for fraternity, reflection, and discussion around the theme of unity. Our Superior General, Fr. Benoît Grière, graciously accepted the invitation to open the meetings.

For three days, and approximately eleven hours, the lay and religious gathered in a spirit of communion, of diversity, and of internationality to celebrate the rich charism of Emmanuel d’Alzon. That was perhaps the best reason for having such meetings. We discovered that amidst our diversity was a true commonality. It was gratifying, at the beginning of each day, to see a myriad of faces on the screen and to hear greetings of welcome in French, Spanish, and English. Old friends were able to see one another, and new friends were made as the meetings progressed.

The first day begun with the welcome address by our Superior General, Fr. Benoît Grière. The essence of his welcome consisted of an overview of the Lay Assumptionist movement. He encouraged all to “rekindle the flame” of our engagements and to become “missionary disciples”. He reminded the participants of our call to unity and our call to holiness. We should be men and women of prayer finding Christ in the gospels, in prayer, and in our practice of fraternity. Father General also invited us to be participants in the capitulary preparation of the General Chapter of 2023, in a

The new commitment formula for lay Assumptionists

The Plenary General Council, during its December 2021 session, approved the insignia of the laity, as well as a new formula of commitment, by which all the laity of our Alliance will henceforth commit themselves. Here is the official text:



In the presence of my brothers and sisters, and before you Father ..., Superior General (or Father ..., representing the Superior General), for love of Christ and to extend his Kingdom, I ..., promise to God to commit my life to the spiritual path of love for Christ, the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Church, according to the Way of Life of the Lay Assumptionists; And this for (one year, three years, all my life).

synodal way: “The Chapter will be a time to listen to one another and to the Holy Spirit.”

The keynote presentation of the day was the workshop by Fr. Dominique Greiner---“Unity in the Charism of the Assumption”. He emphasized that our search for God is not a solitary quest. “The mutual support of the lay and the religious, in their mutual search for God, is a powerful remedy against clericalism. . . The charism of unity that has been given to us as Assumptionists is for the good of the entire Church!”

The second day of the Forum featured Provincial presentations. Each Province spoke of distinctive features of their Province, composition of groups, and how they have overcome the challenges of the pandemic. Provinces making presentations included North America, Madagascar, Andean Province, East Africa, Africa, and Brazil. Victoria Prada conducted a workshop, “The Fraternal Communion.” She noted that the lives of the lay and religious should reflect what God does within us. We should be “sparks of service for the Church and for the world.” We need to be artisans of unity strengthened by our fraternal life. This can only be nurtured through time and dialogue.

The workshop of day three was “The Mission that Binds Us” by Patricia Haggerty. She spoke of the Assumptionist mission as reflected in *The Rule of Life* and *The Way of Life*. Patricia pointed out that we are called to be brothers and sisters through “a spirit of evangelization---living out the gospel message in our everyday lives and sharing it to the best of our ability.”

The third day also saw the conclusion of Provincial presentations with the European presentation. Additionally, there was a discussion of the Ceremony of Engagement and the use of a distinctive sign/symbol for all Lay Assumptionists. We were blessed to, once again, listen to the words of our Superior Gen-

eral. We were sent on our way knowing that we are on “a journey that is synodal.” We were affirmed that we are all Assumptionists working to make the reign of God closer.

Patricia MORIN HAGGERTY
Commission internationale de
l'Alliance





Kamisimbi, an Assumptionist monastery in South-Kivu

The Province of Africa has founded a new community in the vicinity of Bukavu

We are in South Kivu, where the Assumptionists, after several years of establishing a community in the city of Bukavu, were given an additional parish in the area of the capital of this province of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The parish is a community in service of the people of God, as well as a spiritual center welcoming those with spiritual concerns. It was begun by Fr. René Mihigo, a native of the region. The parish is located nearly 27 kilometers from the city. Kamisimbi is a village where the inhabitants, as well as the Christians, are far from the parish. The first missionaries, the White Fathers, began evangelizing the popula-

tion around 1906. Sent to Kalugoba in 1918, they left this region in 1922 because of the climate in the Kamisimbi region. The parish is at a high altitude, which makes it extremely cold. Moreover, the mountainous terrain makes travel exhausting. The village is situated 9 kilometers from national route n° 2, which deprives it of any economic activity other than farming and cattle raising. It is a remote area with a scattered population. Such conditions do not attract a pastoral staff!

The Christians have an inner drive to come to Mass; they were thirsting for ministers to be closer to them. Despite their poverty, they are motivated for activities

within the parish, and they devote themselves to its progress. The church was eventually built and furnished by this group of inhabitants.

From a pastoral standpoint, the parish is quiet during the day; it is like a cemetery. After morning Mass, the Christians automatically go to the fields where they grow sorghum, sweet potatoes, and even corn. The silence of this environment permits for personal meditation and contemplation! Another aspect of daily life is the heavy consumption of liquor and amazing fertility among the women---such that one family can have as many as ten to twelve children with one mother, and ►



The founding community of Kamisimbi, with (right) a postulant.

sometimes some elderly in the family. Even among Christians, a man can have four wives. There is not enough consistent work to provide food for all these people, and even less to educate the children. Fetishism, sorcery, and magic are still present.

Our foundation in Kamisimbi, opened in May 2021, includes three religious: Fr. Augustin Mbusa Sirimirwa, superior; Fr. Marc Chibalonza Lubanja, pastor; and Fr. Jean-Marie Vianney Kambale Sabwira. We have already welcomed a postulant. Since his arrival, he has been ministering in the parish of Saint-Jacques, particularly working among families and children (primarily in the parish rather than the schools). He works in catechesis and sacrament preparation. Considering the terrain of the region, he will need an all-terrain vehicle for his shopping and daily activities.

It is the social context that proves to be a Calvary for our brothers. In addition to the scourge of alcoholism is added numerous economic and sanitary problems. A sick person can leave a care facility because he doesn't have enough money to pay for his treatment. Thieves in search of food or money do not hesitate to attack people with machetes. Large families cannot provide for their needs in the face of malnutrition and sickness, especially tuberculosis. The parish has a great challenge at the pastoral level to accompany the people of God: guidance from the Holy Spirit is needed for good judgment.

Another challenge lies in the pastoral particularity of the archdiocese of Bukavu compared to the other dioceses. Other than in the city, in the outskirts, masses are always said in the native language, the Shi dialect. The archbishop insists on this tradition so

that the people can preserve their proper language. Another novelty for our community is that the Eucharistic celebrations last much longer than those in North Kivu. Additionally, the parishes are connected by routes made of dry clay and gravel, which enables one to travel in any environment.

There is a remarkable pastoral atmosphere at the heart of the diocese of Bukavu, with many gatherings to share in the daily experiences of pastoral life. The diocese contains 47 parishes, most of which are run by diocesan clergy. As for the religious, the White Fathers were followed by other congregations: Jesuits, Xaverians, Salesians, Franciscans, etc., not to mention the orders of women religious. Lastly, a Trappist monastery was established in Murhesa.

Fr. Jean-Bosco SAWE MBIONGO

Examining the Reign: actively contemplating the unfolding Kingdom of God

To help religious and communities prepare for the next Chapter, we are publishing a series of reflections on its theme: “The Kingdom of God is at hand” (Mk 1:15). Living and proclaiming the hope of the Gospel”. Here is the contribution of Fr. Benoît Bigard, Provincial of Europe.

I don’t know about the formation of other Assumptionists, but for my part I have hardly heard of this “Examination of the Kingdom”, whereas Fr. Jean-Paul Péri-er-Muzet mentions in his biography of Fr. Edgar Bourque: “Fr. Bourque likes to give, transcribed, the famous (sic) *Examen du Règne* or *Chemin pour le Règne* which Fr. d’Alzon used to talk about with his first religious and of which the founder of the Assumption left the text in the form of an evening prayer in his *Spiritual Writings*, page 918.

In fact, this evening prayer, “*Come and live in me, become incarnate in me...*”, evokes above all the theme of the mystical incarnation of Christ in us, until we can say with the Apostle Paul: “*I live, but it is no longer I, but Christ who lives in me.* (Gal 2:20). By the way, I did not find any mention of “Examination of the Kingdom” or “The Way of the Kingdom” in the online writings of Fr. d’Alzon. It must be said that our founder was not fond of ready-made recipes or pre-made exercises. I think that this “*Examen du Royaume*” is like the Meditation when Fr. d’Alzon explains:

“You asked me at the General Chapter to lay down some principles on prayer. The more I think about fulfilling your intention, the more I find myself in a certain obscurity. So many masters have written on this subject that I do not know what to add to what has been said. It is not the subject matter that bothers me, it is the embarrassment of choice. I will try, however, to give you some indications which will help you to form the spirit of our prayer, rather than to throw it into such

a uniform mold that it would end up becoming a mechanical operation”... And to add: as to “an indispensable method of prayer. There are several, and I do not insist much on the choice.” (E.S. pp. 215-216)

Certainly, Fr. d’Alzon was very much given to interior examinations, since it suffices to reread the end of each chapter of the *Directory* to find a series of questions that allow one to make one’s own interior examination concerning the subject exposed. But can we summarize all these questions in a structured “*Examen du Règne*”? Certainly not! However, I do not think I am mistaken in pointing out that the first question found in the *Directory* is the most important one for Fr. d’Alzon, and tells us something about this Reign Examination: “*Is Jesus Christ my all?* (ES p. 20). He develops it further in its apostolic dimension: “*Do I have a burning heart for Jesus Christ and for what he loves? Do I want to pray? Do I want to suffer?... Do I want to fight? ... Do I want, according to my infirmity, to be an apostle for him?* (ES p. 81)

In short, since Fr. d’Alzon takes a broad view of the multiple interior examinations that we could make, and since he did not leave us with a condensed formulation ready for use, about fifteen years ago I let myself go with my own formulation of an “Examination of the Kingdom” in the line of Fr. Bourque. This was born in the context of the structuring of a group of the Lay-Religious Alliance in Quebec City and was used during our monthly meetings to reread the past weeks from the point of view of our con- ▶

>> 34th General Chapter

tribution, or not, to the unfolding of the Kingdom in us, among us and around us.

Here is an updated presentation.

A) Examination or active contemplation?

“Contemplation and action are united for us in the same goal: to serve the extension of the reign of Jesus Christ...” (ES p. 79)

In Fr. d’Alzon’s time, we used to speak of a particular examination, an examination of conscience. During the time of Catholic Action, the “Revision of Life” was developed. In the Ignatian tradition we like the “Prayer of the Covenant”. For my part, I propose an “Active Contemplation of the Kingdom”.

In fact, the examination of conscience has the double disadvantage of being too self-centered and certainly also too self-righteous. The rereading of life, or revision of life, has its own logic (seeing, judging, acting) reformulated in many ways (for example: extracting, purifying, accomplishing); it still has all its value today, but it is not specifically linked to our spirituality of the Kingdom. The prayer of the Covenant comes much closer to what I would like to share, but it does not directly evoke the Kingdom unfolding in us, among us, around us.

Why then speak of “Active Contemplation of the Kingdom”? Basically because the Kingdom of God has been unfolding since the foundation of the world, and more particularly since Jesus of Nazareth came to break the glass ceiling that prevented Creation from fully corresponding to God’s plan. Since the event of Jesus Christ, the Kingdom of God is already here, on the march, even if it is not yet fully realized!



The Round of the Elect, by Fra Angelico (Convent of San Marco, Florence)

We therefore firmly believe, beyond all the upheavals of history, that God’s plan will succeed, that his Creation is moving towards a beautiful end: the Kingdom! The aim of this “Active Contemplation of the Kingdom”, of this “Examination of the Kingdom” consists therefore in discerning and contemplating the action of the Spirit who is bringing about the Kingdom of God - whether I contribute to it or not - in order to give thanks for it, and then, **in the same movement, to exercise my desire for the Kingdom of God in the face of that which prevents it from being there in fullness.**

I love to contemplate Nature, a forest, a beautiful oak tree, a deer... all this life that unfolds and that does not need us, some even going so far as to say that Mother Nature would be better off without humans (which I do not believe it is because the project of Creation is global and the human being holds a proper and singular place in it...). What a satisfaction, in any case, following this time of contemplation, to be able to realize that Creation is unfolding, whether I contribute to it or not, and to be thus put back in my very modest place, where everything does not depend on me, where I do not have

to carry everything on my shoulders but simply to do my small part to contribute to this unfolding of God's project.

It is not a question, therefore, of examining my conscience, of dwelling on the past, or of burdening myself, but on the contrary, of decentering myself **in order to make the coming of the Kingdom the horizon of the world's life.** Moreover, what is lacking for the coming of the Kingdom is not only of the order of "sin", but also of the **time offered by God for Creation to unfold and move towards its fullness...**

This active contemplation can therefore be lived in three stages:

- **Contemplate:** What signs have I been able to perceive of the unfolding of the Kingdom of God?

- **Examine:** What has contributed to, or opposed, the coming of the Kingdom of God?

- **Commitment:** What new desire to commit oneself concretely does this arouse?

B) Towards a concise formulation of this active contemplation

"We propose above all to work, for love of Christ, for the coming of the Kingdom of God in us and around us." (Rule of Life n. 1)

*"Our motto, *Adveniat regnum tuum*, gives us this general thought. We wish to contribute, as much as it depends on us, to the advent of the reign of the three persons of the Holy Trinity, and in so doing, we will combat the three great errors of modern times. [...] **The reign of God the Father in the universe, the reign of God the Son in the Church, the reign of God the Holy Spirit in souls, such, it seems to me, must be the mother thought of***

the Assumption family. (3rd letter to the novice master, 1868. ES p. 161)

How can we make a binary expression - "in us and around us" - fit into a Trinitarian logic: the reign of God the Father in the universe, the reign of God the Son in the Church, the reign of God the Holy Spirit in souls? Like others, I resolved the question by reformulating the expression usually used by Fr. d'Alzon with a Trinitarian version: to make the reign of God happen in me, among us and around us! This allows us to reformulate in a concise way an "Examination of the Kingdom", an "Active Contemplation of the Kingdom of God in the process of unfolding":

Looking back on the day, the week, the month...

And by cultivating the desire to bring about the reign of God: in me (reign of the Holy Spirit), among us (reign of God the Son) and around us (reign of God the Father):

I contemplate: what signs have I been able to perceive of the unfolding of this reign in me, among us, around us?

I examine: what has contributed to, or opposed, the coming of the reign in me, among us, around us?

I commit myself: on a particular point, resulting from my rereading, what do I wish to live to better contribute to the coming of the reign of God in me, among us, around us?

C) The coming of the reign of the three persons of the Trinity

1 - Bringing about the reign of God in me, personal dimension, reign of the Holy Spirit in souls

Faced with a world neglecting the Christian virtues...

If the community dimension, which we will see later, is - from a certain point of view - almost absent in Fr. d'Alzon's life, and if the goal of his foundation is clearly apostolic, this in no way diminishes the importance he gives to the personal dimension of this reign of God over the soul of the religious. I would even say that the vast majority of his spiritual writings deal with this subject: how can we "strive to make the reign of God triumph within us"? How do we allow God to reign in our souls? How can I make Jesus Christ my all and be configured to him?

Fr. d'Alzon speaks well on several occasions of the importance of allowing the Holy Spirit to reign in our souls: *"What an insult it is to have a God in one's heart and not to glorify him, as is fitting! Yet this is how we treat the Holy Spirit with incredible lightness"* (ES p. 904), but let us recognize that he speaks much more abundantly of making Jesus Christ reign in us. So the apparently clear division of the reigns of the three persons found in the third letter to the master of novices (see above) is not to be made an absolute; it is, however, practical for the exercise of active Contemplation of the reign that we propose!

Here then, among an infinite **number of possible questions**, in addition to all those already present in the *Spiritual Writings*, is a small personal selection for this examination of God's reign in me...

- Have I taken the time to give thanks for all the blessings and gifts of God that I have received?

- Have I taken steps to grow in the Gospel virtues, using the

Virgin Mary and the saints as examples?

- Have I taken time to nourish my relationship with Christ? Regular prayer? Meditation on the Word of God? Reading to deepen my faith?

- Does the framework of life that I have given myself (rhythm, schedule, personal commitments...) allow the Kingdom to unfold in me? Am I not wasting too much time in the use of the means of social communication to the detriment of my interiority?

- Have I allowed the Spirit of God to irrigate all the dimensions of my life? "This is what the Spirit produces: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith, humility and self-control" (Gal 5:22). (Gal 5:22) *"A branch will come out of the stock of Jesse, the father of David, a shoot will spring up from its roots. On it will rest the spirit of the Lord: the spirit of wisdom and discernment, the spirit of counsel and strength, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord."* (Isaiah 11:2)

- Have I been open to the signs of the Spirit or have I turned inward? Thanksgiving for the encounters, the services rendered, the attention to those who crossed my path... Ask for forgiveness for my refusals, my retreats, my lack of hope...

- What has been the driving force of my days? My work? My state duty? This activity to be carried out? A service to be rendered? An unforeseen event for which I made myself available? In short, have I been an actor in God's reign on the move... Or have I only allowed myself to go in search of my own pleasure, comfort... or some nonchalance?

2 - Bringing about the reign of God among us, the community dimension, the reign of God the Son in the Church

Faced with a divided and individualistic world

I mentioned earlier how the community dimension was, in a certain sense, absent in Fr. d'Alzon's writings: this is not entirely true, but I will explain. You will not find in the writings of our founder the words "community" or "fraternal life", but rather that of house or of edifying, charitable, respectful relationships among the brothers. In these meditations concerning superiors, our founder essentially evokes the bonds between the superior and each of his religious...

Nor do I believe that one can find the notion of "apostolic community" in his writings: it was another era, another state of mind. Rather, it seems to me that Fr. d'Alzon sees religious life as a gathering of brothers or sisters who support each other on the road to holiness: *"Why did you come to seek a common life in a cloister, if not to be supported by the daily relationships you would have with men who would strive for perfection like you? Otherwise you had only to remain in your solitude and keep the kind of life that would have suited you best."* (ES p. 569).

One could summarize, in a caricatured way, by saying that for Fr. d'Alzon, the religious house is simply a place where individuals come together to support each other in their personal journey of perfection and in their apostolic zeal. This would explain the binary nature of the purpose that is attributed to us: to work for the coming of God's reign in and around us, without any particular apostolic mission

of the fraternal community.

However, where Fr. d'Alzon situates in a very explicit and sustained way the community dimension of the unfolding of the Reign is through the mission of the Church and our unwavering commitment to that mission, in good understanding with all the artisans of the Church. This is obviously explicit in the love of the Church that is asked of us in the triple love. It is undeniable that the function of Vicar General, which Fr. d'Alzon exercised for almost all of his priestly life, strongly marked both his apostolic conception of our religious life (which rests on the zeal of each member, rather than on apostolic communities in themselves) and his conception of a commitment to the Church, frank, generous, and in good understanding with the diocesan clergy, other congregations, and all the pastoral agents of the Church.

It is therefore a question of approaching this question of the deployment of the Reign among us, the Reign of God the Son in the Church, starting from the different cells of the Church to which we belong: our family and our loved ones, our Christian community, our religious family, our Church in the broadest sense.

Here, then, among many other possible questions, is **a small series of questions** for this examination of the coming of the reign of God among us:

- My family and loved ones: Am I grateful for my personal and family journey? Have I been attentive to those who are close to me, especially those who are going through a trial? Thanksgiving for the beautiful gestures made... and desire to go further for my difficulties in loving.

- My Christian community: Do I enjoy being with my broth-



Christ Pantocrator (Saint Sophia Basilica, Istanbul)

ers and sisters in faith? Do I care about building relationships? How does the communion celebrated at the Eucharist translate into greater communion with the members of my Christian community? What support have I given to members of my community who are experiencing difficulties? Faces to remember in prayer...

- My religious community: Is my view of my brothers and sisters benevolent? Do I know how to rejoice in what they do well in the service of the Kingdom? Am I concerned about the growth of each one, beyond the difficulties and characters, by helping him to give the best of himself? Does the quality of our community

life (fraternal life, positive interculturality, welcoming guests, prayer life, mutual support, apostolic collaboration...) bear witness to the Kingdom in progress?

- The Assumption family: Do I feel solidarity with the joys and difficulties of the brothers, sisters and lay Assumptionists? Do I have the will and desire to work and collaborate with each other? Thanksgiving for what our spiritual family is doing in the service of the Kingdom and the desire to go further, to live better the charism entrusted to us in the service of the Church and the world...

- The Church: Do I love the Church? Do I have the desire to be Church, even with those who

are not of the same sensibility as me? Am I capable of being both benevolent and demanding towards the Church? When I think of "Church", what place do I give to members of other Christian denominations? Do I care about encounter, discovery, dialogue?

3 - Bringing about the reign of God around us, missionary dimension, reign of God the Father in the universe

Faced with a world without God...

This aspect is much more evident in Fr. d'Alzon. If he wanted to found a congregation, it was above all to constitute a body of zealous men at the service of the coming of the reign of God in the world. In his very first notes concerning the purpose of his foundation, he wrote:

"Purpose of the work: the reign of Jesus Christ in the world, preparation for his eternal reign. [...] External means: teaching, education, example, severe protest against the world, gentleness, search for the union between truth and the new results of science, popular action." (ES p. 645)

In his formulations, Fr. d'Alzon always remains very Christ centered. He speaks more readily of the reign of Jesus Christ than of the reign of God the Father, but for him it is all one, and this is rooted in his spirituality of mystical incarnation: to allow Jesus Christ to continue his incarnation in each of us and in the world.

So **here is a new little series of questions**, among many others possible, this time concerning the coming of God's reign around us:

- Have I been concerned to inform myself about the life of



The Sermon on the Mount (13th century illumination)

the world? To rejoice in what is good, in what is beautiful and good, in what speaks to me of the Kingdom on the move... and to become aware of the suffering experienced, of the injustices, of the road still to be travelled?

- Has my way of living, but also the way of living of my environment, contributed to promoting inequality or injustice? When I buy something, is it only the price that counts? What about the whole chain that made it possible to acquire this good: is the way it was produced and put on sale respectful of nature, of people, of justice? I can give thanks for the habits of life that seem to me to be going in the right direction and rekindle my desire to change again what is disrespectful of nature, what wastes the common good, what increases the gulf between poor and rich....

- Am I a man of action? Do I have the desire to bring about the Kingdom of God? Kingdom of justice and peace? Am I committed to those who organize themselves to make things happen and to fight against injustice, inequality and misery, here and elsewhere?

- Do I care to be an educator, to serve the truth, to denounce rumors and false news? To accompany people in their discernment in the face of all the new questions that may arise?

- Am I a man of unity or of division? Am I able to dialogue with members of other religions? Am I capable of bearing witness to my faith while gathering and welcoming what is true, beautiful and good in others? Do I have the desire to act in favor of the common good with all people of good will, beyond all divisions of religious, philosophical or hu-

man wisdom?

- Do I have the concern to approach the digital space as a place conducive to meeting, to fraternity, to evangelization, without letting myself be manipulated by the commercial logic of digital technologies?

- Am I listening to the existential questions, the search for meaning and the sufferings of those I encounter? Do I have the desire to announce the Good News of Jesus Christ? Have I taken this or that opportunity to speak about it?

By way of conclusion

I am well aware of the multiplicity of the questions asked and of the questions that are still possible: it is certainly not a question of taking them all up again each time. The only purpose of this small enumeration was to evoke the field of possibilities when it comes to examining the advent of the reign of God in me, among us and around us, in the context of this beginning of the 21st century.

I prefer, therefore, by way of a final word, to refer to the formulation proposed in the box above of this "Active Contemplation of the Kingdom of God in the process of unfolding", hoping that from time to time, or even regularly, this reformulated "Examination of the Kingdom" may support our Assumptionist walk.

And may the horizon of this Kingdom of God, in the process of unfolding and advancing towards its success, be the driving force of our thoughts, our actions, our prayer and... our rest!

P. Benoît BIGARD

Fr. d'Alzon: a model of holiness for today

Vincent Leclercq, the new Postulator General of the Congregation, is taking over from Fr. Bernard Le Léannec, including maintaining a concern for the cause of our founder in the columns of "AA Info". We thank him for his contributions.

Religious or lay people, communities... everyone is inspired by the figure of Fr. Emmanuel d'Alzon and his model of holiness. We are his heirs. His spirituality, his life witness, and his works are all riches to be cultivated and transmitted.

What is holiness?

Holiness is communion with God. Fr. d'Alzon expressed it this way: *"The end of the Christian life is union with God. The end of the religious life is the most absolute union with God."* (1) This intimacy with God can be read in D'Alzon's writings: the official texts written for our two congregations, his retreats, his homilies, his personal correspondence. But it is most evident in his life. His life is very solid rooted in the cardinal virtues (based on faith, hope and charity) and very faithful to the graces he received from God in his youth.

Christ - and only Christ - in the first place

Fr. d'Alzon was a brilliant man. He received his baccalaureate in literature on 8 August 1828. Fewer than 1,000 candidates were admitted in all of France! He then enrolled in the first year of law at the Faculty of Paris. But he was not a man to be satisfied with courses at the university, however prestigious it was.

During these student years, he joined the Société des Bonnes Etudes, a literary circle founded by M. Emmanuel Bailly (1794-1861). He also enrolled in a series of conferences on history and religion led by the Abbé de Salinis and published his first article at the age of 19! D'Alzon aimed for excellence in everything he did. His wealth - his mother

was immensely rich - and his membership in an old aristocratic family in the south of France placed him among the elite of his time.

He could have joined the army and entered the great school of Saint-Cyr. He could also have pursued a political career and become a deputy like his father... But in the end, he chose Christ, because he alone could give his life its true nobility. Rather than coveting it for himself, he wanted to give Christ the first place in his life.

Persevering in his initial choice of Christ Jesus

The vocation came to him during a Eucharistic adoration. (2) He tells his friend Lucien d'Esgrigny about it in a letter dated January 21, 1830. He was not even 20 years old! The year 1830 was particularly troubled in France. And he was forced to "confine himself" to the family castle of Lavagnac and could not complete his second year of law school. In Lavagnac, for almost two years, what did he do? He practiced sports and studied according to a precise and demanding program that he had established himself. He prayed a lot and with fervor... before finally deciding to enter the Major Seminary of Montpellier, on March 15, 1832.

In Montpellier, in a letter dated November 28, 1832 to his friend d'Esgrigny, he wrote: *"Today, I begin to say: God alone."* And on May 3, 1833, with two other seminarians, he concluded a Holy Covenant. We find the complete text in *Ecrits Spirituels* (p.750-754). His goal was already to "consecrate" himself to Jesus Christ.

"Like St. Paul, we want to know only one thing: Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ cruci-

fied (...) And as Jesus Christ offered himself voluntarily to his father, so we will always offer ourselves to God. (...). We ask him to transform our breasts [our hearts] into a burning furnace, from which, with our words, the flames will incessantly spring up to warm so many lukewarm and cold hearts, which are only waiting for a spark from heaven to ignite.” (3)

Loving everyone in Christ Jesus

After the summer vacations, he did not return to the seminary. Following the advice of his parents, he decided to continue his formation in Rome in November 1833. On January 11, 1834, he wrote to d’Esgrigny: *“I ask God to expand my heart for him and for his friends, for I believe I love him with all the love I have for them.” (4)*

This prayer reveals a very sure conception of holiness, open to others whom he loves in God. To love God and one’s neighbor in Jesus Christ... It also gives us to understand the link that united his love of Christ and his love for the Church.

A sometimes painful love for the Church

The strength of his commitment to the Church and for the Church is remarkable. In *Ecrits Spirituels* (p. 862ff.), D’Alzon would later evoke our duties to the Church. The typically “Alzonian” style of this text, written for the novices of 1874, reflects the strength of his convictions and a great love for the Church. *“Our duties towards the Church are all the more important because the Church is a perfect society, because she is the body and spouse of Jesus Christ, because she is our mother and our country”* (ES

p. 862). He draws the following conclusions:

- We must love the Church with a “filial love”. D’Alzon criticizes priests who consider the Church *“as an institution”*. If they lack zeal, they are a contradiction and even a danger because *“priests and religious who are not zealous are the loss of the Church”* (ES 862). We must love the Church with a filial love and not with a venal love guided by personal interest. *“Let us therefore be devoted sons to the Church and remember that since God is the end of the Church, we cannot have too much love for her.”* (ES 862).

- For the Church, we have a duty to study. In D’Alzon’s mind, the Church is a gathering of intelligences that are nourished by the truth: there is therefore a serious obligation to study: *“We must study the natural truths and especially the supernatural ones that have been brought to the world by Jesus Christ.”* (ES 862).

- If we truly love the Church, we must become saints. It is not just a matter of cultivating the desire for holiness, but holiness itself: *“Let us not remain vulgar men,”* he says. *“Graces are treasures, for which we must give an account.”* Now, *“the purpose for which God gives us his graces is our sanctification. If we are not saints after that, we are monsters...”* (ES 863).

- We must develop a “spirit of propaganda”, that is, a true missionary spirit. Now, the essential characteristic of the apostle is the gift of self, as well as selflessness: *“Let us care less for ourselves and a little more for souls”* because *“If we love ourselves too much, we no longer have the time to care for others.”*

Finally, there is perseverance, for Father d’Alzon has al-

ways remained lucid with regard to the Church. He recognized that he was sometimes disappointed by it. In the text of his consecration to Jesus Christ in Montpellier in 1833, he wrote: *“The sight of the outrages that our Lord receives in the Eucharist, especially from the ecclesiastics, will be the object of our eternal sorrow.”* (ES 752) What had he seen of his ecclesiastical (or liturgical) outrages in Montpellier? Do they explain his departure from the seminary? Because of his discretion, no one will ever know. But what he witnessed seems to have shocked and pained him.

In Rome, he was distressed to attend religious services *“in the midst of people who considered them as spectacles.”* (5) Vis-à-vis the clerics, his words are not very complimentary. He deplores the presence of intriguers and ambitious people. And on 23 June 1844, D’Alzon took the initiative of making a vow of priestly humility before the miraculous image of the Virgin at the sanctuary of the Consolata in Turin. The letter to Mother Marie-Eugénie de Jésus, dated the next day, is worth quoting to understand Fr. d’Alzon’s holiness and his connection to the Church and our own foundation:

“I made a vow here, which I don’t know what to tell you about. I was extremely struck one evening by the deplorable state to which the ambition of some was leading the Church, and also by something else I have lost the memory of. I know that the result that remained with me was that I renounced any idea of ecclesiastical dignity, and the next day, at Mass, I vowed to refuse any office in the same sense that the Jesuits do. (...) Since then, an idea that I had had in the past, and which was only a memory, has

come back to me stronger than ever, and that is to dedicate myself to forming a religious community. (...) In the depths of my being there is an impulse towards something, which I do not know in detail, but which I nevertheless discover confusedly..." (ES, 639-640) (ES, 639- 640)

The young D'Alzon was especially affected by the "Lamennais affair". Recalling his conviction, he wrote to his father in August 1834: "I could say that I submitted, but with a roar." Following a denunciation, he would even be forced to sign a form of adhesion to the encyclical *Singulari nos* (June 25, 1834) which condemned the errors of Lamennais. The document was immediately brought to Pope Gregory XVI. Emmanuel's laconic comment: "It is rather annoying to attract the pope's contentment in such a way."



Formulating a Christian and religious life project

In Rome and even before his ordination, D'Alzon used a series of expressions that will go down in history. These formulas are known today to all Assumptionists, whether religious or lay. Some of them are even found in the *Rule of Life* (1984). These early writings already express the charism of the Assumption and our spiritual heritage.

On August 7, 1834 - he was only 23 years old - Emmanuel d'Alzon spoke for the first time of "the cause of God" (cf. RL 4). On 23 August, he wrote to Father Fabre that "one must always work for Rome, sometimes without Rome, but never against Rome." (6) To the same abbot, he declared himself "Catholic above all". This expression has often been attributed to Veuillot because he used it in his corre-

spondence in 1846... twelve years later! On March 18, 1835, we find the first occurrence concerning the "reign": "I am convinced that what remains to be done for the priest is to work according to his strength to establish the reign of Christ"...(7)

Fr. d'Alzon's desire for holiness dates from his youth and takes us back to his formative years. In the self-portrait he wrote at the age of 21, Emmanuel d'Alzon confided that he had a "life plan" to deepen:

"What am I? What do I want to be? How will I become what I want to be? It is true that I have had a life plan for quite some time. I know well or I think I know vaguely what I want to do, but I have never gone down deep inside myself, never realized exactly what means I wanted to use to reach my goal. Today, that is what I seriously want to search

for. I want to know clearly what I am, what I want to be, and by what means I will become what I want to be." (ES 73)

In Rome, he was able to cultivate his love for Christ, to deepen the meaning of his vocation and to widen it to the dimensions of the Church, in all lucidity and freedom. His desire for holiness was born and took shape during his years of formation. And for us, formation will always have this goal. Of course, holiness can come much later. And it is possible to be converted at any age... But it is better to begin as soon as possible. For D'Alzon, the desire for holiness is the foundation of his religious life, not its outcome. Formation was for him a "school of holiness": a time when he received extraordinary graces that he developed throughout his life. He took the gifts he received from ►

the Lord very seriously and never stopped making them bear fruit.

"God still wants saints and we must prepare them for him." (ES 470) For D'Alzon, the main responsibility of a superior is to accompany his brothers on the path of holiness. *"What an Assumptionist superior must propose to himself above all is to make his brothers love Our Lord and all that Our Lord has loved, in the order in which Our Lord has loved him. Everything is there: to love Jesus Christ and all that he loves."* (ES 1065)

Religious life is a path of holiness to be lived in coherence and fidelity to the graces received from God. This perseverance characterizes the life of Fr. d'Alzon as well as his desire for holiness.

Perseverance at the price of a true conversion.

D'Alzon had a strong and independent character that he knew how to humbly place in the hands of the Lord, so that he could transform and convert it:

- **A man of natural authority**, favored by his social background that placed him among the elites of his time, Fr. d'Alzon welcomed Assumptionist brothers from very diverse backgrounds and put himself at the service of each and every one.

- **Coming from a conservative family**, Fr. d'Alzon analyzed his time and learned to perceive its newness, its aspirations and its spiritual needs. His education was classical and austere. But he instilled a family spirit in the ranks of the college in Nîmes which became for him like a laboratory. He let new things emerge around him and sometimes far from Nîmes: in Paris with the *La Bonne Presse*, in Lourdes supporting the Association Notre-Dame de Salut



and the growth of pilgrimages, in Notre-Dame des Châteaux for the aluminate school of which he himself had the idea... D'Alzon looked kindly on new things, but also on everything that others undertook. Let us mention his unfailing support for the secular clergy of Nîmes of which he was the vicar general, for Fr. Pernet in the foundation of the Little Sisters of the Assumption, for Fr. Vincent de Paul Bailly in the adventure of *Le Pèlerin* and *La Croix*.

- **Initially destined for success**, Fr. d'Alzon never let any difficulty or failure get him down. He was not discouraged when his ideas were thwarted, his projects postponed and his intuitions fought. He discerns and tries to adjust his plans to the will of God. The Bible would say that he was "a just man". His justice is expressed above all in his passion for unity, as an anticipation of the Kingdom that God wants in a 19th century torn apart and a Church still divided.

- **A man of the Eucharist**, he was a man of the Eucharist for himself and ahead of the practices of his time. He encouraged Eucharistic adoration and com-

munion at a time when it was still too infrequent. He transmitted this Eucharistic sensitivity to other Assumptionists, some of whom would become founders themselves.

- **A man of mission**, his model was Saint Paul whom he called *"the Apostle"* in his *Spiritual Writings*. Indeed, Fr. d'Alzon recognized himself well in the personality of Paul: the elitist character of his education, a fiery temperament and especially his immense missionary zeal.

An integral and missionary faith

His love for Christ and the Church overflows with ideas and initiatives. His faith is integral: it embraces the world without leaving anything behind or in the shadow of the Gospel.

His intimacy with Christ, his love of the Church, his devotion to the Virgin Mary, his long friendship with Pope Pius IX, his fidelity to the diocese of Nîmes, and even his "ultramontanism" for fear of a Gallican schism... everything that Venerable Father Emmanuel d'Alzon said, wrote, or undertook had only one goal:

to allow Christ to gather together the heirs of his Kingdom.

For us, the mission is like an actualization of his love for the Virgin Mary, who comes second in the statement of the “triple love”. If Marian piety is indeed at work in the life and writings of Fr. d’Alzon or even in the history of the Congregation, let us recognize that it is not central, unless we give it a much broader meaning. Indeed, there is nothing “Mariolatric” about the way Fr. d’Alzon and our communities live... With Fr. d’Alzon, we see in Mary the icon of a humanity already saved by divine grace. In prayer, we entrust to Mary our world that is still on its way to the Kingdom. Mary will always precede us in our hope for the Kingdom. With Mary, it is therefore easier for us to say “*Thy Kingdom come*” and to be apostles of her will. Fr. d’Alzon’s love for the Virgin Mary is inseparable from his love for Christ and the Church, which he never ceases to send on mission:

“No, I became a priest, it seems to me at least, for others as much as for myself. It was the desire to glorify God, by bringing to him as many lost people as I could: it was the desire to pour a little balm on the wounds of this poor humanity, which pushed me to the altar where I thought I would find a remedy. But I went up to the altar only on condition that I come down from it to mingle with society and have on it the little influence of which I am capable.” (8)

The poor, a source of fruitfulness

The revolution of 1848 made Fr. d’Alzon aware that faith was in retreat among the working masses (the workers). He was concerned about the growing in-

equality between the rich and the poor. During the distribution of prizes (1851, 1858, 1861) at the college in Nîmes, he warned of the catastrophic consequences of a conflict that would end up opposing “*those who lack the necessities*” and “*those who have more*”.

By mixing with society, Fr. d’Alzon understood that the working classes needed to be reconciled with the Gospel while the poorest were gradually moving away from the churches. His last years were to be particularly fruitful because of his concern to give back to the least of these the first place they have in the Kingdom of God.

For him, every work of charity is first and foremost a work of evangelization: “*Material alms must go hand in hand with the spiritual alms of the proclamation of the faith*”. Let’s give just one example of the integral faith of Fr. d’Alzon. Deploring the exclusion of the poor neighborhoods of Nîmes, he conceived the idea of “the work of newspapers”, which consisted of posting newspapers free of charge in places frequented by the workers. He also encouraged the creation of popular libraries in prisons, hospitals, barracks and factory workshops. Thus, long before the Good Press, there were what he called “good works”. But without these good works and Father d’Alzon’s concern for the little ones, La Bonne Presse or Bayard would probably not have come into being.

Conclusion

Father d’Alzon received and even formulated the project and charism of our congregations during his formative years, even before his ordination. He then manifested an integral faith and an unflinching fidelity to the graces he

received, which he was able to integrate progressively into his own spiritual, religious and apostolic life, into the social, political and ecclesial life of his time. Finally, he passed on to us his charism and his apostolic zeal through the founding of our two congregations and a certain way of living in the Assumption. Such was the desire of Fr. d’Alzon. Such was the holiness of a life that allowed itself to be inhabited by God in all the dimensions of existence, a life animated by an integral faith.

P. Vincent LECLERCQ
Postulator General

(1) Meditations on religious perfection for the Augustinians of the Assumption. Paris, 1927, II, p. 155. Bernard le Léannec in «L’attrait de la sainteté», AA info n° 15, January 2021.

(2) Letter to Marie-Eugénie de Jésus dated 1865 (Letters of Fr. d’Alzon, volume V, p. 231).

(3) ES, p. 751-752.

(4) Jean-Paul PERIER-MUZET AA, «Nouvelles chronologie du P. d’Alzon, de sa vie, de ses écrits et de ses principales biographies», Cahiers du Bicentenaire d’Alzon 2010 No. 10, p. 54.

(5) Letters from Fr. d’Alzon to Abbé Martin d’Agde (p. 533) and to Henri d’Alzon (p. 542), in Jean-Paul Périer-Muzet, Nouvelle chronologie du P. d’Alzon, de sa vie, de ses écrits et de ses principales biographies (New chronology of Fr. d’Alzon, his life, his writings and his principal biographies), Cahiers du Bicentenaire D’Alzon 2010, no. 10, page 55.

(6) Letter to Abbé Fabre, August 23, 1834.

(7) Letter to Alphonse de Vigniamont, March 18, 1835, in Jean-Paul Périer-Muzet, op. cit. p. 61

(8) Letter from Fr. d’Alzon to D’Esgrigny, 18 January 1835, in Jean-Paul Périer-Muzet, op. cit.

Father Vincent de Paul Bailly in the turmoil of persecution

More than other Assumptionists of his generation, “the Monk”, creator of *La Bonne Presse*, had to endure trials and exile. Here is the account given by a young historian

Vincent de Paul Bailly rarely leaves anyone indifferent. His name, like that of his newspaper, *La Croix*, remains associated with the virulent anti-Semitism raised in France by the Dreyfus Affair. We also know the role that he played in the creation and development of *La Bonne Presse*, he who was fond of modern techniques. Finally, at the Assumption, we remember his attachment to Father Picard, his role in the development of pilgrimages of penance, as well as his submission to the order of the pope who took away the direction of his press work.

Yet all this leaves in the shadows his last years, from 1900 to 1912; yet they allow us to better understand the destiny of this religious and his congregation at a difficult time for religious life. Like all Assumptionists, Bailly was to undergo several trials: the dissolution of the congregation, followed a year later by the generalization of anti-congregational measures, then exile outside of France, before a cautious and still clandestine return. Bailly's journey can be seen in a new, more personal light: that of an elderly religious, forced to leave his activities and his country while pretending to have abandoned his religious life.

The founders' cross

It all began on March 7, 1900. While the day before, the Assumptionists had been condemned to dissolve their congregation - considered an “illegal political association” - Pope Leo XIII, through the intermediary of the prefect of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, asked the Assumption to withdraw from *La Croix*. Father Picard obeyed. For the Congregation, the most important thing was to set up houses

of formation abroad; in France, the houses established in the provinces were left open, but the Assumptionists who remained in Paris were “dispersed” under the guise of secularization.

However, in July-August 1901, Father Picard and his advisors understood that the exile would last. This time, they entered into a sort of second exile. The Assumptionist communities that remained in France were closed one after the other, and a liquidator whose extensive prerogatives were provided for by law multiplied the number of lawsuits in order to recover the Assumptionist properties. But in Paris, just as people were convinced that the precautionary measures were effective, an anonymous letter in September 1902 triggered new lawsuits that threatened the freedom of Vincent de Paul Bailly and his principal companions.

New lawsuits and crisis

It was necessary to leave France. Picard died in Rome on April 16, 1903. The Assumption staff was busy preparing the election of a new Superior General. This took place in Louvain in June 1903: Emmanuel Bailly became head of the Congregation. This succession was logical, since the newly elected Superior General was already Fr. Picard's right-hand man; it met with the approval of all the former religious of the congregation, who had known the founder like Emmanuel Bailly.

The next three years seemed a bit chaotic. While the new Superior set out to visit all his houses, the French political situation became increasingly tense until the end of the Concordat system in December 1905. The General Chapter held in Louvain in

June 1906 marked a new stage for the Congregation, which was getting used to its situation of exile. However, the overall increase in numbers until 1912 was not enough to meet the needs of the communities which were growing on several continents, without any decision being taken to prioritize the development efforts.

Then the crisis broke out. It had been brewing since 1906, when the General Chapter itself had asked Emmanuel Bailly to submit the Constitution to Rome for approval. In 1909, it took the form of an appeal addressed by a certain number of religious to the Congregation for the Regulars, denouncing the Assumptionist government as too secret, too centralized, and too authoritarian. The dispute continued when Emmanuel Bailly took the decision to suppress *La Revue Augustinienne* which was edited by the house of studies under the leadership of Fr. Merklen. In 1912, the second General Chapter - which represented those close to the Superior General and not all the religious - confirmed the state of the congregation: it remained ruled with an iron fist by a Superior elected for life.

A torn personality

As a member of the Council of the Superior General, Vincent de Paul Bailly participated in the decisions taken throughout this period. As Assistant General, he also made a number of visits to Assumptionist communities, notably in England. Exiled, he lived for some time between Rome and Belgium. Secularized, he remained much closer to La



Bonne Presse than has been said. Finally, his activities as director of pilgrimages of penance took him to the Middle East every year until 1910. Bailly's many activities have been sufficiently emphasized, so we would like to propose a more intimate approach to his personality during this time of trial.

It is easy to imagine the suffering that the founder of *La Croix* felt when he had to lay down his arms in his crusade for the press in March 1900. He had been engaged in journalism in 1876, twenty-five years earlier; it was in this activity that he had become somewhat sedentary, to the point of hoping to die on the job; and, as he reached the age of 68, the pope's order represented for him an extremely painful uprooting. Bailly is an often incisive journalist, but he is a discreet man. He has always expressed himself through his pen, and in this case his feelings would have been revealed in broad daylight had it not been for

the almost certain intervention of his superior, Father Picard.

Before the publication of his farewell article in *La Croix* on April 5, 1900, "the Monk" prepared three drafts with dramatic accents. One can read his deep sadness at being separated from a work - he considered *La Croix* to be a real "pulpit" - for which he had made many sacrifices. One can also read his bitterness at seeing the triumph of the Waldeck-Rousseau government, which obtained the departure of the Assumptionists. Finally, one can detect in it a great lack of understanding of the decision of Leo XIII, to which he resigned himself rather than obeying it. He was, in a way, struck by lightning and thought of his retreat as a burial: only this last point is still apparent in the final article of April 5, modified at the behest of Picard, in all likelihood.

The same Picard did not give his assistant time to sink into despair, sending him to the Holy Land and then to Belgium to accompany the installation of the novitiate. In the summer of 1900, the new retiree took a first look at himself, thanks to his distance from Parisian life. The confidences he gave to an Oblate of the Assumption, with whom he had a strong spiritual friendship, make it possible to follow his feelings from 1900 until his death. In July 1900, he said that he regretted "*the time given to men*" now that he was closer to God thanks to the setting of the novitiate, "*a closed paradise*". One can sense the excessiveness of this last expression; and it is ►

clear that the temporary resident of the novitiate is quickly tempted to take up the key to the apostolate. In September, he tried to obtain the authorization to take over the head of La Bonne Presse by addressing himself to the Cardinal Protector of the Assumption. This approach was unsuccessful, but it showed that the shock of his departure was still not digested by the exile.

At the service of a scattered family

Bailly's religious life began, not with a new life, but with a new part. While collaborating with some of the magazines of La Bonne Presse, he tried to preserve a link between the dispersed Assumptionist communities: this was the *Lettre à la Dispersion*, in which he showed the verve that we know him for, while making touching efforts to maintain the spirit of the religious family that is the Assumption. The fear of new legal proceedings caused the eclipse of this family news sheet in 1901, which reappeared however in 1908, with an even more community character, aggregating as much as possible the news of each of the houses.

In the meantime, Bailly experienced new trials with the death of his superior, Father Picard, and the threat of prison in France. The death of the founder's successor left a particular impression on him, not only because of the charisma of the deceased, but also because the two men had shared religious life almost from the time Bailly entered the Assumption. Thus, a year later, Bailly addressed a letter to his deceased superior, imploring his intercession. Of course, he obeyed completely his younger

brother who became his superior; but from then on he waited more and more ardently for death. He saw it as a deliverance, which he hoped for all the more because he believed that a wave of violent persecution was going to fall on the French religious. To Sister Augé, he confided his feeling of living a slow martyrdom over the years: the years, he said, were tearing away the pieces of his body one by one.

Back in France

In 1906, the end of the legal proceedings allowed him to return to France to fulfill various functions. Even though he was no longer the director of La Bonne Presse, nor the superior of the religious in Paris, he watched over the newspapers and the religious. He was also sent to England, Belgium, and Italy. There he visited the houses as a good assistant general. But as he complained to his spiritual daughter, his strength diminished with time. He saw himself struck down where he had sinned, in his own words, when he lost the use of his right hand. A secretary was then attached to him, but travel became more and more difficult for him and it was with great difficulty that he was able to attend the General Chapter of 1912. He died soon after, assisted by his brother Emmanuel.

To the end, Vincent de Paul Bailly tried to remain a faithful religious of the Assumption. As an elder religious of the congregation from 1905 on, he represented a father figure for the novices and for all the religious, through his visits abroad, but also thanks to the writing of the *Lettre à la Dispersion*. We are probably less familiar with his very affable character, so much so that

his writings have given him the reputation of a raging man, while his portrait gives him an austere appearance; nevertheless, his goodness comes out clearly from the testimony of the religious he was in contact with, among them Father Quénard, who said of him that he was a saint and a charmer.

Very close to his newspaper, Vincent de Paul Bailly remained in contact with La Bonne Presse - which he refrained from visiting again until 1910 - and participated in the creation and editing of several piety magazines, while keeping abreast of new techniques of which he remained the defender. As the Superior General's liaison in Paris, he frequently received his dispersed companions as well as his former editors. The pilgrimages to Jerusalem that he still led until 1910 were a consolation for him: far from France and the tumult of the anticlerical struggles, he was always happy to go to the Holy Land, bringing as many pilgrims as possible, whom he accompanied with solicitude. In the same way, the retreats he preached to young Assumptionists and the sermons he addressed to the Oblate Sisters and the Little Sisters allowed him to remain active, even though he was not always very comfortable with the student religious.

A spirituality and a journey well within his time

A reading of the instructions he gave to Sister Augé as well as to himself shows us, moreover, a spirituality very much in keeping with that of his time. Thus, Fr. Bailly strives to live intensely the great liturgical feasts, is enthusiastic about the frequent and daily communion recommended by Pope Pius X, and reads the

writings of Thérèse of the Child Jesus. But his epistolary exchanges confirm his difficulty in keeping hope for his time; for he only has hope for life after death. This is quite logical for a religious who was convinced, until 1906, that persecution would become violent.

His journey remains an example of the difficulty of living religious life at the time of the anti-Congregational Republic, probably all the more so for a religious formed in haste in a congregation that was not yet solidly based. These deficiencies, combined with an undoubtedly too strong attachment to the work of the press that he founded, allow us to understand the suffering that Fr. Bailly felt when faced with the ordeal of exile during his last years.

His religious fidelity and the affection that his contemporaries had for him explain the request for the opening of an informative process of beatification, formulated by Fr. Dufault to the Cardinal-Archbishop of Paris, Bishop Feltin, in 1956 - that is to say, 34 years after the death of the "Monk". The reform of the Congregation after the First World War and the two world wars themselves explain this delay. As we know, the trial was not successful, and another trial, this time for anti-Semitism, was opened shortly afterwards. Without returning to this question, the author of this contribution hopes to have shed new light on a complex figure, which it is preferable to try to understand rather than to judge.

Pierre LESCUYER

Assumptionists of the Orient and of the West

The collection « Assumptionist Memoir » has been enriched by two new titles

All self-respecting Assumptionists have heard of the "Mission of the Orient" of our congregation, founded in Bulgaria by Fr. Victorin Galabert: this country is the last which exercised the privilege, given by Pope Leo XIII, to take part in the Byzantine Rite. How many religious know of our somewhat mythical roots in the Orient?

It is to the credit of three religious, "pillars" of the Assumption in Bulgaria for almost 30 years, who retraced this, sometimes glorious and sometimes sad, story. It is the story of our illustrious community in Bulgaria, the only one: Plovdiv. It serves as the value of the collection, « Assumptionist Memoir », recently relaunched and made available by the European Province. (1)

Throughout the pages, the work retraces the activities of Fr. Galabert, and those of the Oblates of the Assumption (founded by this Mission). It also speaks to the influence of the College of St. Augustine, to the trial of our three

martyrs, and lastly to the "problematic refoundation" after the fall of communism. We find some very useful ideas on the "Eastern lung" of Christianity--its rites and its spirituality, including several Byzantine prayers. What a way to have an authentically Assumptionist faith, that is, breathing with both lungs!

Michel KUBLER



1) Breathing deeply. History of an Eastern Rite Catholic community in Bulgaria, by Petar Ljubas, Daniel Gillier and Claudio Molteni. Collection "Assumptionist Memoir", 150 pages.

Also in the same collection, *It was once the novitiate Saint-Antoine de la Chaume. . . A place and some men!*, by Benoît Combaud and Lydie Ruaud (129 pages) : a history of the novitiate of Pont l'Abbé d'Arnoult (Charente-Maritime, France), that had the greatest longevity of the European Assumption.

Editor

Michel KUBLER, General Secretary



Assunzione@mclink.it

Translator

Patricia Haggerty, Gilles Blouin, John Franck, English
José Antonio Echaniz, Anastasio Calle, Spanish
... and the help of DeepL

Model and laid out

Loredana Giannetti

Composed in December 30, 2021
This no 19 of AA- info is printed in 220 copies:
160 in French
30 in English
30 in Spanish
And 350 electronic shipments.

Agostiniani dell'Assunzione - Via San Pio V, 55 - I - 00165 Roma
Tel. : 06 66013727 - Fax : 06 6630814 - E-mail : assunzione@mclink.it

2 OFFICIAL

- ♦ Agenda
- ♦ In Saigon, apostles in a time of pandemic

3 EDITORIAL

- ♦ On the way of the General Chapter

4

- ♦ Callings, nominations, agreements...

5 PLENARY GENERAL CHAPTER

- ♦ The 34th General Chapter is getting ready!
- ♦ The Assumption commits itself to the Global Compact on Education
- ♦ «Called to discern the seeds of the Kingdom that comes»

9 ALLIANCE

- ♦ Rekindle the flame of the Lay-Religious Alliance

11 FOUNDATIONS

- ♦ Kamisimbi, an Assumptionist monastery in South-Kivu

13 34TH GENERAL CHAPTER

- ♦ Examining the Reign: actively contemplating the unfolding Kingdom of God

19 FROM THE POSTULATOR'S DESK

- ♦ Fr. d'Alzon: a model of holiness for today

24 PAGES OF HISTORY

- ♦ Fr. Vincent de Paul Bailly in the turmoil of persecution

27 BOOKS TO READ

28 OUR DECEASED BROTHERS

Our Deceased Brothers



† **Father François LENGLEZ**, of the community of Ciney (Province of Europe), died on November 3, 2021, in Ciney (Belgium). His funeral was celebrated on November 8 at the college of Ciney. He was 80 years of age.

† **Father Henk VOLMER**, of the European Province, died in Germany on November 7, 2021. His funeral was celebrated on November 17 in the Church of Remscheid-Lüttringhausen (Germany). He was 92 years of age.

† **Father Stefaan SAERENS**, of the Leuven community (European Province), died on November 10 in Leuven (Belgium). His funeral was celebrated on November 16 in the community chapel of Leuven. He was 91 years of age.

† **Father Frans DESMET**, of the Pavel House community (European Province), died on November 27, 2021, in Brussels (Belgium). His funeral was celebrated on December 4 in Notre-Dame of the Assumption Church of Woluwe-Saint-Lambert. His interment followed in the Cemetery of Saint-Gerard (Belgium). He was 74 years of age.