

**“Be strengthened in the inner self”**

*(Ephesians 3:16)*



***Letter on interiority***



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Letter # 4 of the Superior General



## INTRODUCTION

### *The urgency of a reform*

This letter follows from my preceding ones. With the letter on poverty, I addressed the question of solidarity with the least among us. With that on brotherhood, I developed another aspect of our Assumptionist vocation: our involvement in communion. Finally, with interiority, I would like to address what we seek when we speak of ourselves as men of faith. Faith is a tremendously vast topic to study and almost inexhaustible. Coming at it by way of interiority, I would like to underline the urgency of the question of prayer in the life of an Assumptionist religious and in that much larger dimension of our lives, i.e. what gives unity to our very existence as human beings.

As I visit communities throughout the world, I have noticed that we are hardly mystics. That is one way of saying that, in general, we show little inclination to the contemplative life or, to put it more simply, that prayer tends to take a back seat in our lives. Yet, as we are aware, prayer is at the heart of our commitment as religious. There can be no lasting religious consecration if there is no sustained and continually nourished relationship with the Lord.

This letter is in no way an invitation to flee the world. Quite the opposite! In my eyes, it is a question of stirring up the deepest sources of our love and of helping us to return to the One who is at the origin of all that is good. Without a solid inner life, any apostolic activity is built on sand.

Why speak of interiority rather than of prayer? The world we live in, I am convinced, produces great dispersion, the flight of the human being outward. We have never had so

many 'distractions' or 'amusements,' in the sense that Blaise Pascal understood these words, that is to say, things which draw us away from what is essential.

Interiority is that capacity of man which allows him to live in the truth without escaping the present. It is that source of life which springs up within him because it puts him in touch with eternity. Interiority is one of those values that allows him to become aware of his personality, to learn how to see, to observe, to admire, to "realize and relish things interiorly" (St. Ignatius, *Spiritual Exercises*, #2), to give thanks, to forgive, to go beyond what meets the eye at first glance. It allows one to "shut off", to remove oneself from, the hustle-bustle of the world around him in order to be alone with himself, to create time and space to rest, to dream, to imagine, to reflect, to pray.

As Rev. Mauro-Giuseppe Lepori, the abbot general of the Cistercians of the Common Observance, writes, "The real crisis in Christian life, and in the monastic and religious life, is not a crisis of form, but of substance. We live dissipated not because we lack virtue, discipline, consistency, but because we lack the mystical experience in our relationship with Christ."<sup>1</sup>

To speak of the spiritual life also means exposing oneself personally. For one cannot ask a blind man to speak of painting and a deaf man to give a conference on music. I will be modest in my approach, because I recognize that I do not know how to pray. All too often my prayer consists in asking the Lord, as did the apostles, to come to my assistance in order to teach me how to pray as I ought. To speak of prayer and interiority also means opening yourself to others. A life

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<sup>1</sup> Lepori, Rev. Mauro-Giuseppe. 2014 Lenten Letter "And If God Would Give Us His Heart?" <http://win.ocist.org/pdf/EN2014.pdf>.

of prayer is necessarily fed by certain preferences, authors, and physical postures. I will simply speak of how I live this intimate experience of encounter with God, even if it is imperfect and full of its ups and downs. I certainly do not wish to present myself as a model, but I hope my candor and my passion might awaken in others the taste for intimacy with the God of Jesus Christ.

I believe that there is within man a desire to enter into a deep relationship with his inner self, with others, with the universe, and with God. This desire may be called interiority, or the spiritual life. It is the conviction that man cannot be reduced to a collection of atoms and molecules, but is rather a being gifted with thought and capable of going beyond himself.

The mystical dimension is often forgotten because the world around us encourages competition and profitability. You can't obtain a diploma in the inner life and professional compensation is based on efficiency and production. The inner life is the poor cousin of our modern world. Our contemporary world encourages exteriority and this gives rise to a certain malaise in our civilization. Consumerism, individualism, and hedonism have profoundly upset the traditional vision of the human being.

The one who believes in Jesus Christ is aware of what is happening around him and wishes, nonetheless, to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom.....this Kingdom which is in us and around us, in the words of Fr. Emmanuel d'Alzon.

In another article, Rev. Mauro-Giuseppe Lepori recently wrote about the situation in his own order. It wouldn't be hard at all to apply it to other congregations. I subscribe to his vision of the urgency for a reform of religious life by refocusing it on the inner life.

“It is essential that we rediscover the mystical dimension at the heart of, or rather at the very origin of, our vocation. This does not mean detaching it from reality but to be aware of all of reality and, as a result, to place it at the center of our life and at the heart of our relationship with God, the experience of God.

“For when I look at our communities, I often ask myself a question, ‘Are these people Cistercian religious out of love for Christ or for some other reason? Are they really encountering Jesus? Do they have a living relationship with him? Do they live through him, with him, and in him?’

“And let us get this straight, this question of the mystical is not reserved to those men or women or monasteries we call ‘contemplative’. It is an urgent question for everyone; I would dare to say that it is even more urgent for those communities that have pastoral commitments or are involved in teaching or in other activities. For, without this center, I can see that people get lost, lose their way; they aren’t happy and they begin to live like pagans”.<sup>2</sup>

This observation on pagans recalls a remark Fr. Hervé Stéphan made during a canonical visit of a province. He had noticed that religious gathered to pray on work-days but forsook common prayer on Sundays. Hervé made this rather harsh, but true, reflection, “You have become practical atheists. By forgetting the Lord’s day, you are living like pagans”.

The thesis that I defend in this letter is taken from the position of a contemporary philosopher, Jean-Louis Chrétien<sup>3</sup>, who considers that the reality which characterizes

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<sup>2</sup> Lepori, Rev. Mauro-Giuseppe. “Sur la situation de l’ordre cistercien”, in *Vies Consacrées*, #1, 2015, p.7.

<sup>3</sup> Chrétien, Jean Louis. *L’espace intérieur*, Editions de Minuit, p.60 and p.252.



secularization is not so much the disappearance of God than it is the crisis of interiority. Secularization today has enshrined an identity which excludes God. Contemporary man lives alone with his self, in his conscience. Interiority, has, in some way, been desecrated. Man is alone with himself.

## **I. INTERIORITY IN THE ASSUMPTIONIST TRADITION**

Only the major Orders have a long spiritual tradition. Thanks to the teaching of Emmanuel d'Alzon and that of St. Augustine, our Congregation possesses a solid framework for building a spiritual life. Fr. d'Alzon insisted that we be "simply Catholic" and he was right. We don't have particular devotions, but we feed ourselves on the Church's tradition itself. It would be a mistake to believe that we are heirs to spiritual mediocrity when, in fact, we have a rich legacy.

Our Congregation is an apostolic institute, but we are religious. And religious life is organized around a foundational charism that must penetrate every Assumptionist community and religious.

### ***The inner life according to Fr.d'Alzon***

*"As Assumptionist religious we give ourselves to the pursuit of a life of prayer, in a habitual awareness of the presence of God"(Directory, II, 2).*

To get a real appreciation of Fr. d'Alzon, you have to read what he says and not be satisfied with pat ideas that circulate about his spirituality. Much work that has been done in recent years provides us with a clearer picture of the spiritual personality of our founder and to grasp his originality better. The publication of his *Écrits spirituels*

*(Spiritual Writings)* was an important moment in the appropriation of his thought, but this effort continued with the publication of his correspondence. A number of Assumptionists have also written about Fr. d'Alzon and helped us understand the rich heritage he left the Church. Books, already some that are quite old, such as those of Fr. Athanase Sage<sup>4</sup>, deserve to be read. It would be desirable that the upcoming generation of religious address this question and edit a new manual of spirituality in the school of the Assumption.

In the *Directory* that Fr. d'Alzon left as our guide in matters spiritual, he ends with a chapter (#23 of Part Three) entirely dedicated to the "inner life". Admittedly, this chapter is colored by a particular vision where the key word is "renunciation." However, limiting our understanding of our founder's spirituality to this aspect alone would be to eviscerate it. Emmanuel d'Alzon had a spirituality based on a meditation of the Kingdom "in us and around us." His understanding of interiority is quite classic and he constantly makes allusion to prominent spiritual theologians. We are well aware of the importance that he gave to the great spiritual writers. He was able to drink from the ever fresh waters of Catholic spirituality without exclusivity or bias: the Carmelite school, the French school, etc.

What is important in dalzonian interiority is the desire to conform oneself to Jesus Christ. To do so, there is a three-staged process: you begin by studying Jesus Christ, then loving him, and finally imitating him.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> See in particular: Sage, Athanase, A.A. *Un maître spirituel du XIXème siècle. Les étapes de la pensée du Père Emmanuel d'Alzon.*

<sup>5</sup> D'Alzon, Emmanuel. *Écrits spirituels*, p.856-859.

## ***Silence in the thought of Emmanuel d'Alzon***

Interiority requires silence and Emmanuel d'Alzon insists a lot on this aspect of a religious' life.

“Silence is one of the greatest resources of the religious. According to the Prophet, ‘Your strength will be in silence and hope,’ (Is 30:15) that is, in prayer. These two great means to holiness are complementary: without silence, there can be no recollection; without recollection, there can be no interior life. If I am always talking, how can I expect to hear the voice of the Lord my God within me? ... How can I hope to be united with Him? ... How can I prepare for this union, either by looking back over the past, which will result in my disavowing my sins and purifying my soul, or by making acts of loving adoration, which require a great peace and quietness of soul?...”<sup>6</sup>

All of this contributes to favoring prayer. In d'Alzon's way of thinking, prayer is the privilege of simple hearts, entirely and gratuitously turned toward God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It is the time and the space where a human being realizes who he is in God's eyes, the well-beloved of the Father, and who God is for him, Father, source of love and of life. It is the place and the moment when God exists as God and man as creature.....one in the presence of the other: “Therefore, the goal of prayer is that we speak to God and he speak to us.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> D'Alzon, Emmanuel. *Directory* II, 3.

(<http://www.assumption.us/media/virtual-library/47-virtual-library/374-directory-of-the-augustinians-of-the-assumption>).

<sup>7</sup> D'Alzon, Emmanuel. *Écrits spirituels*, p.1155.

### ***Fr. Emmanuel d'Alzon's legacy: the Rule of Life***

This too brief presentation on interiority in the eyes of Emmanuel d'Alzon would be wanting were we not to complete it with a rapid look at prayer in the *Rule of Life*. As I have already suggested, the Year of the Consecrated Life which we are celebrating in 2015 must be a privileged moment for us to reread in depth this fundamental text of our Assumptionist vocation. This means going back over the pages that treat "our prayer life"(numbers 44 to 54) and meditating on them.

Reading these numbers of the *Rule* confirms that we have a spirituality that is simply Catholic. There are no particular devotions at the Assumption, as we love to repeat; however, that should not lead us to conclude that at the Assumption there are in fact no regular practices to be observed. How often have I found myself sad to observe that private prayer has been "written off" in our daily activities? One thing that is striking in our *Rule* is how it calls each religious to take responsibility for organizing his life of prayer. There you find, "It is incumbent upon each religious to organize, according to his own spiritual inclinations, a program of personal prayer" (*Rule of Life* #54). As to community exercises, it is also stated that "everyone bears responsibility" (*Rule of Life* #53).

What is key to note as well is that the life of prayer is meant to be a time of meeting God. The *Rule* makes quite a few references to the importance of this encounter of an Assumptionist with the Lord (#23, 24, 45, 143).

Therefore, it is my duty as superior general, responsible for safeguarding the spiritual legacy of Fr. Emmanuel d'Alzon, to invite each religious to examine honestly how he applies the demands of the *Rule of Life* concerning the spiritual life and prayer to his own existence.

## ***The Augustinian spirituality of interiority***

A short while ago an Assumptionist, Fr. Jean-François Petit, published a book entitled *Devenir plus humain avec saint Augustin (Becoming More Human with St. Augustine)*. The author reminds his readers that for St. Augustine the interiority of a Christian is to be understood and clarified in the light of the Word of God. In fact, there is no true interiority unless the human heart is enlightened by the Bible and that is why “Augustinian interiority is in no way comparable to the self of some crude or reductionist depth psychology. Entering into oneself does not have as its goal the pondering of one’s own riches, bordering on a kind of self-satisfied narcissism. Quite the contrary! Entering into oneself is a matter of escaping the illusions and untruth one has about oneself and of the world so as to rediscover the Absolute, who, precisely, is not of this world. The goal of this spiritual effort is, in fact, to communicate with what is transcendent by passing through the interior of the person and not getting lost in the process. That is why true interiority is induced by the divine word of the only master that counts, namely, the Teacher within”.<sup>8</sup>

Another Assumptionist writer, Fr. Marcel Neusch, clarifies things, “The truth of existence dwells in each person’s heart. Interiority refers to more than those sentiments which consume us; it refers to that secret place where truth resides, more intimate than one is to oneself. This is why Augustine insists on returning to one’s heart: *Redite ad cor*. Involved in this search, particularly under the influence of the Neo-Platonists, he discovered that the truth does not have its proper place outside (*foris*), but in the innermost part of the

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<sup>8</sup> Petit, Jean-François. *Devenir plus humain avec saint Augustin*, Salvator 2015, p.20.

soul (*intus*). (...). Here is how he expresses it himself, in a now famous formula:

‘I sought you according to the sense of the flesh. But you were more inward than my innermost self and higher than my highest. *Tu autem eras interior intimo meo et superior summo meo!*’(*Confessions*, III, 6, 11)”<sup>9</sup>

Thus there is a path of Augustinian interiority that I shall now describe briefly.

### ***The chamber of the heart***

With Augustine everything gets started in the heart. The heart, the focal point of the life of man, is the place of the encounter with God. The place where He resides so as to guide us and protect us.

“Return to your heart: why run far from yourself and cause your own demise? Why follow the paths of loneliness? You who have gotten lost in your aimless wanderings, come back. Where? To the Lord. It can be done quickly: return first to your heart. You wander about, exiled far from your very self. You hardly know yourself and you are seeking to know the one who made you? Return, return to your heart; lift yourself above your body. Your body is your dwelling place; your heart perceives through your body, but your body is not what your heart is. Leave even your body and return to your heart (...).

Return to your heart; see there what it is there that you must perceive of God, for in it is the image of God. In the inner

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<sup>9</sup> Neusch, Marcel. *Saint Augustin. Splendeur et misère de l’homme*. Cerf, 2011, p.33-34.

man dwells Christ, in the inner man are you renewed after the image of God, in His own image recognize its Author.”<sup>10</sup>

Returning to the heart takes effort. Augustinian spiritual life, even if it is marked by the primacy of God’s grace, comes about with the cooperation of man’s will. Augustine speaks of the chamber of the heart twice in the *Confessions*; elsewhere he speaks of “the house of the soul”. This house which is the innermost recesses of the heart is often subject to terrible conflicts. For it to find rest, it must first be pacified.

“The Lord tells us, *‘Go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you’* (Mt 6:6). Going to your inner room means returning to your heart. Blessed are those who rejoice when they return to their heart and find nothing evil there.

It’s quite clear that those who have wives who are mean hate to go back home, and how happy they are to get out of the house! And when it’s time to go back home? They have a hard time because of all the grief they’ll face --- the worries, the grumbling, the bitterness, the mutinies. A house enjoys no order unless there is peace between a wife and a husband. If not, it would be better for him to wander the streets.

Therefore, if those returning home have every reason to be distressed for fear that the walls of their home may crumble under the weight of their residents’ brawls, how much more miserable are those who do not wish to return to their conscience for fear that they, too, may crumble, indicted by their own sins.

If you would like to return joyfully to your heart, purify it. *‘Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God’* (Mt

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<sup>10</sup> St. Augustine, *Homilies on the Gospel of St. John, Treatise XVIII, 10.*

5:8). Remove from this heart the scars of lust, the stain of greed, the ulcer of superstition; remove every sacrilege, every evil thought, all hatred, not only do I say toward your friends but even toward your enemies. Get rid of all this: return, then, to your heart and you will find happiness there.”<sup>11</sup>

So it is that in his homilies Augustine shows that he has a sense of humor and knows well the families of his congregation in Hippo and what goes on between married couples. Our hearts are often upset and have trouble finding peace. We know this well, “our hearts are restless until they rest” in God. To return to the chamber of one’s heart, it must be purified, made pleasant and holy.

### ***Recollection***

After purification comes the time for one to prepare to enter his heart; that time is the time of recollection. Here is how a contemporary philosopher speaks of this moment,

“One senses the need to be recollected when one is scattered, disconnected, dispersed. Recollection is an act of unifying, a conversion of one’s attention, when we take hold of ourselves and we find ourselves once again.”<sup>12</sup>

“The entire work (the *Confessions*) is the story of its author’s recollection, the arduous passage from being scattered in a thousand directions to an existence unified in faith in the one God. However, the first and last agent of this recollection is not Augustine, but God himself. God alone leads and can lead one to God. He alone can give me strength, light and direction to lead me to Him, and transform me along

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<sup>11</sup> St. Augustine, *Commentary on Psalm 33 (2)*, 8.

<sup>12</sup> Chrétien, Jean-Louis *Pour reprendre et perdre haleine. Dix brèves méditations*. Bayard, 2009, p.91.



the way. For if I could do it on my own and if by myself alone find God and prepare myself to encounter Him, then he would not be the Lord, but an idol of my imagination and a phantom of my pride.”<sup>13</sup>

We cannot put exclusive trust in methods of meditation because, in the end, everything depends on what Goes does. It is always possible that one have the arrogant illusion of believing that recollection techniques allowed him to have access to a higher state of consciousness.

“If man has become deaf to the voice that comes from within, then, St. Augustine shows, he will need the exteriority of the word of another, the Revelation of God in history, and the visible voices of natural beauty, even if in varying degrees, so that he might become attentive again. The recollection that brings us to find ourselves again may at first come from encounters, and from encounters that are unforeseen and unintended, over which we had no say. Who can say what a book might produce, any particular book or one recommended to us? The book that I hold in my hands, something that exists in the world, may contain the key that opens the door to my self, heretofore closed, even unknown to my self.”<sup>14</sup>

### ***The discovery of the Teacher within***

Once he returns to his heart, man will not find himself alone there. The heart is inhabited by the inner host ---- Christ. God inhabits the heart of man and it is probably this

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<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*, p.95.

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*, p.99.

that modernity has the hardest time to accept. We are not alone in the chamber of our heart.

“So come back with me to the face of the heart; get that ready for seeing God with. The one to whom God speaks is inside. Ears, eyes, other parts of the body that can be seen, they are all the organs or the residence of someone or other inside. **It’s the inner person in whom Christ resides for the time being through faith**; that’s where he is going to reside in the full majesty of his divine presence, when at last we have come to know *what is the breadth, the length, the height, the depth*; to know also *the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge that we may be filled with all the fullness of God* (Eph 3:17-19).<sup>15</sup>

The heart is the ‘chair’ from which we can allow ourselves to be taught. I like this beautiful passage from the *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John*. I meditate on it often because it consoles me in my search for the inner host.

*“The two disciples heard him speak in this way and followed Jesus. Then he turned and saw them following, and said to them, What do you seek? And they said, Rabbi (that is to say, Teacher), where are you staying?(...)”*

It was from that moment that they attached themselves to him so as never to leave (...) He would show them where he lived; they went and stayed with him. What an enjoyable time they had that day and what a wonderful evening! What could they not share with us of what they heard spoken from the Lord’s own lips? Let us also build within our hearts a house where he may come and teach us and spend time in conversation with us.”<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> St. Augustine. *Sermon 53, 15, Sermons: The Works of St. Augustine*, Edmund Hill (translator), New City Press, 1991

<sup>16</sup> St. Augustine. *Homilies on the Gospel of St. John, Treatise VII, 9*.

## II. THE DIFFICULTIES OF THE INNER LIFE IN TODAY'S WORLD

### *Interiority and the new means of communication*

The modern world confronts us with the new challenges of communication. Never in the history of the world has man been offered so many means to be connected to his contemporaries. We find ourselves in a period of lightning transformation, to use the title of a book recently published by Bayard Editions<sup>17</sup>, one in which, in the field of communication, man seems to be connected in real time. Still, we know that our *Rule of Life* calls us to “wisdom in the use we make of the media” (#37).

The emergence of social networks (Facebook, Twitter, and others), the Internet Revolution, as it has been called, has profoundly altered the relation to time. We have entered into a civilization of immediacy where information arrives almost in real time. Even if he is thousands of kilometers from an event, contemporary man receives information very shortly after it appears.

Monks have reflected on this matter. At their last general chapter, the Trappists invited specialists in social media to help them in their reflections. There is a ‘new man’ being fashioned by the new technologies. This new man is being altered with regard to his relation to time and to space and we have to be aware of it.

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<sup>17</sup> Giorgini, Pierre. *La transition fulgurante. Vers un bouleversement systémique du monde ?* Bayard 2014.

## ***The noise of the world***

Our world is filled with noise and our heart is tormented. It is difficult to find quiet spots and times of real rest allowing us to meditate and to reflect on our life and on God. Augustine wished to withdraw; it was called *otium*, the opposite of that time known as *negotium*, (hectic activity). It was to be the time to ask oneself the basic questions; *otium* was healthy time off.

In order to live this time apart, silence is necessary. We need to find places of stillness. To do so, it probably means cutting oneself off from the world of instant communication, which has come into existence in recent years. We live in a 'connected' world, connections which leave little place for interiority. Even monks are subjected to the excesses of technology. Who doesn't have a Facebook or Twitter account? The Internet is everywhere; more than 2.5 billion people are on line; there are 6.5 billion cell phone accounts in the world and 1.8 billion use social media. I do not want to engage in a wholesale critique of those aspects of modernity linked to the new means of communication, but to invite us to a responsible use of them. There are undeniably negative repercussions on the human person. We need to be conscious communicators. Here is the essential question in my eyes: does communication give birth to personal and authentic relations?

At their chapter, the Trappists reflected on the topic, "Media, Internet, communication...and the silence of the Trappist"<sup>18</sup>. These monks asked themselves some interesting questions, such as: "in dealing with persons coming from a digital world, how does one provide formation to the

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<sup>18</sup> <http://o-c-s-o-gc-2014-assisi7.webnode.es/news/media-internet-communication-and-the-silence-of-the-trappist/>

monastic life?" or "the Internet and silence". Here are a few of their reflections which struck me:

"In the network, there is no silence. It is a continuous flow of everything and more. There is never an interruption, except when the signal disappears from the collapse of the system. Education to silence today is a real challenge because of the fact that there are no places of silence at the social level. Cities, neighborhoods, homes are constantly inundated with noise pollution. Silence is something foreign to the lives of young people, they do not know its meaning, do not practice it. Often they create a personal space (to isolate themselves from others) wearing their headsets or pumping up the sound to full volume; they love music at deafening levels to plunge into sound vibrations and to forget by surrendering to the rhythm ..." For them, silence is uncanny (*translator's note*: in his spiritual satire, *The Screwtape Letters*, C.S. Lewis has a senior demon named Screwtape explain to his nephew, Wormwood, an effective way to win over modern man to their cause, "We will make the whole universe a noise in the end"). Those who led this conference recognized that the effects of digital media on the human spirit are varied. Nevertheless, they point out that a person who is spiritually poor is more likely to be captivated by digital technology and lose his autonomy more easily in the face of it. On the other hand, digital media offers a person with a solid inner life room for freedom and creativity. They conclude that "the network provides content for all perversions as also for all the virtues. *For this reason, formation, education and self-control are essential.*" They cite the example of the brother in the next room who sends me e-mails asking me to borrow a book - it makes no sense, you get up, go and knock at his door.

Inner wealth is the result of a personal journey. There is always a danger of succumbing to the sirens of the Internet and falling into a life of spiritual mediocrity.

Silence is the sworn enemy of *homo communicans*; yet silence is indispensable if one wants to enter into any real communication, as Pope Benedict XVI reminds us,

“Silence and word are two aspects of communication which need to be kept in balance, to alternate and to be integrated with one another if authentic dialogue and deep closeness between people are to be achieved. When word and silence become mutually exclusive, communication breaks down, either because it gives rise to confusion or because, on the contrary, it creates an atmosphere of coldness; when they complement one another, however, communication acquires value and meaning.”<sup>19</sup>

Silence is useful in enabling one to hear God.

“In our silence something sounds softly to us from above, reaching not our ears but our minds. Any who hear that music are so disenchanted with material noise that the whole of human life seems to them a confused uproar, which stops them from hearing another sound that is delightful, a sound like no other and beyond description.”<sup>20</sup>

### **III. THE MEANS AT OUR DISPOSAL**

“Because our life must be a life of prayer, because we leave souls free in their journey toward God, and because mental prayer is the means we have for the most perfect union with God, our only end, should not our efforts bear on going to God

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<sup>19</sup> Benedict XVI, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/communications/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_mes\\_20120124\\_46th-world-communications-day.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/communications/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20120124_46th-world-communications-day.html).

<sup>20</sup> St. Augustine, *Commentary on Psalm 42:7, Exposition of the Psalms*, trans. Maria Boulding, O.S.B., New City Press, 2000.

through the knowledge of his Son, in the love of the Holy Spirit?" (Emmanuel d'Alzon, *Fifth Circular Letter*, II).

Let us not imagine that there are formulas available that would allow us, if applied to the letter, to achieve union with God. God alone takes the initiative in visiting us. He provided us with the sacraments to foster a life of intimacy with him, but no particular technique can pretend to constrain God. God is infinitely free to meet us when he wants, how he wants, and where he wants.

"Without doubt, a Christian needs certain periods of retreat into solitude to be recollected and, in God's presence, to rediscover his path. Nevertheless, given his character as a creature, and as a creature who knows that only in grace is he secure, his method of getting closer to God is not based on any *technique* in the strict sense of the word. That would contradict the spirit of childhood called for by the Gospel. Genuine Christian mysticism has nothing to do with technique: it is always a gift of God, and the one who benefits from it knows himself to be unworthy."<sup>21</sup>

### ***Lectio divina***

Meditative reading of the Word of God fosters the inner life. We know well that the Bible is the main staple of the man open to God's will. Pondering the Scriptures every day by using the daily Mass readings or by undertaking a continuous reading of a particular book of the Bible is an exercise that allows one to enter into a 'divine habit'. Returning again and again to the Word of God and meditating on it shapes one's

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<sup>21</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Letter to the bishops of the Catholic Church on some aspects of Christian meditation*, #23, October 15, 1989.

personality. The great patristic and medieval authors are also an inexhaustible source for the one who wishes to begin such a practice. Why not sign up for a workshop to get started with *lectio divina*? Quite often the sisters in our Assumption Family have a huge head-start on us Assumptionists. It would be a good idea to ask them for their support in this regard.

### ***Spiritual reading***

Anyone who reads Emmanuel d'Alzon notices the numerous spiritual writers he frequented: John of the Cross, Francis de Sales, Bérulle, Teresa of Avila, and, of course, the Fathers of the Church. Having had to cull lots of community libraries, I have seen that, although there may have been abundant spiritual reading, the quality was quite mediocre. Still I know that we shouldn't throw out the baby with the bath water. I think that we have a tendency today to relegate older spiritual writers to the dusty shelves of our libraries forgetting that there are treasures to be discovered among certain authors. During my meetings with religious, I have noticed, with a heavy heart, how rare and limited their spiritual reading is. Spiritual authors are legion, but I am convinced everyone can find an author that corresponds to the desire of his heart. Personally, the discovery of Etty Hillesum was a moment of grace and joy for me. But there are others as well that feed my inner life. I think of Henri Nouwen, of Thomas Merton, of Lev Gillet who wrote under the pseudonym, 'a Monk of the Eastern Church', and of Michel de Certeau. I believe that God does not leave us without provisions for our journey and there will always be men and women who know how to convey their personal experience. I sometimes think about what our brother, Fr. André Sève, said to me when I was a novice. He was talking about how his



book, *Thirty Minutes for God*, came about. André, who was a journalist at Bayard, had abandoned his life of prayer little by little after his ordination to the priesthood. Different professional activities completely ate up his time. One day he conducted an interview with a canon, Fr. Henri Caffarel à Troussures. This priest, founder of the 'Equipes Notre-Dame' (*translator's note*: the Equipes-Notre Dame are involved in marriage preparation and support) had an intense spiritual life that he spoke about during his retreats. André had come to write an article about him, but Caffarel invited him, before they did anything, to pray. He left him alone in the chapel. At that time André was 60 years old. This experience which would change his life led to the book that introduces readers to a life of prayer. After this book appeared, André wrote a book on meditation practically every year until he reached an advanced age. What I take from this anecdote is that every religious is called to rediscover the importance of the life of prayer no whatever his age or apostolic commitments. Novice that I was, I would retain this fine example and would enjoy seeing this elder statesman of our novitiate faithful to community meditation, always in a spirit of recollection. Moreover, his life of prayer was reflected in the simple and short homilies he would give at daily Mass.

Spiritual reading is important in order to understand how the gospel was perceived by our elders in the faith. There are so many schools of spirituality that there is always at least one that corresponds to our expectations and needs. Understanding Jesus Christ is above all the goal of the inner life and since we belong to the Body of Christ that is the Church, it is good for us to be in communion with those who came before us. Take the time to return again and again to these authors, to read and reread them. We who sponsor a publication house also need commentators on the Word in order to cultivate a taste for the gospel among our

contemporaries. I enjoy reading the short commentaries written by Assumptionists in the various editions of *Prions en Eglise* and *Living with Christ* throughout the world. Let us not be afraid to speak among ourselves of our spiritual lives and the things we have discovered. How rare it is for us in our conversations together to talk about what it is that we have been reading! Maybe we're just afraid to be seen talking in this way. But there's nothing to be ashamed of in loving to read a good book on spirituality or theology.

What is important to remember above all is that the Word of God, received in the Sacred Scriptures, should serve as the foundation of our spiritual lives.

### ***Spiritual direction***

Even if the *Ratio institutionis* makes abundant mention of spiritual directors, it would be a shame to think that only the young in formation need such support. Spiritual direction is essential if one wants to grow in the inner life. The re-reading of one's life that occurs in such a context allows a religious to discover coherence in his life and to discern the will of God better. Each stage of life merits a personal re-reading with the help of a spiritual director. I think that it takes a certain level of humility to allow oneself to be so directed. The Church has a wealth of experience that it places at our disposal and we need to know how to take advantage of it.

To be sure, in the initial years of religious life there are many sensitive issues that arise with regard to a permanent commitment. There are certain periods of greater fragility in one's life when one needs more intense spiritual direction. For example, the first years after ordination can be moments when there is great disappointment and disillusionment. I have often noticed that brothers who are having the greatest

trouble are often those without regular spiritual direction. Quite often and paradoxically, you will see religious accompanying others and neglecting to be accompanied themselves.

Let us recall what Cardinal Ratzinger wrote about spiritual direction, for the substance of his remarks remains ever valid:

“Among these one might mention first of all that of the humble acceptance of a master who is an expert in the life of prayer, and of the counsels he gives. Christian experience has known of this practice from earliest times, from the epoch of the desert Fathers. Such a master, being an expert in ‘*sentire cum Ecclesia*,’ must not only direct and warn of certain dangers; as a ‘spiritual father,’ he has to also lead his pupil in a dynamic way, heart to heart, into the life of prayer, which is the gift of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>22</sup>

### ***The annual retreat***

The *Rule of Life* reminds us that “it is incumbent on each religious to organize, according to his spiritual inclinations, a program of personal prayer” (#54). We are well aware that the spirit of the Assumption is a spirit of freedom. But this freedom also has certain benchmarks. There are, for example, participation at daily Mass, the celebration of the Divine Office, thirty minutes of private personal prayer, and visitation of the Blessed Sacrament....not to mention the annual retreat.

I invite each religious to be serious about setting up a program of daily and yearly prayer. A certain laxism with regard to the prescriptions of the *Rule of Life* is detrimental to one’s spiritual life and hence one’s religious life. We need a certain rigor and discipline of life. Our religious commitment

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<sup>22</sup> *ibid*, #16.

will withstand the vicissitudes of our lives insofar as it is seriously fed by a solid spirituality.

Retreats can take many forms.... a retreat in private in some quiet and isolated spot or a directed retreat with the benefit of a preacher. I leave it up to each one to judge what is best for him. However, we must not abandon this key practice. It offers us an opportunity to be more profoundly reconnected with God and to renew good habits of praying. It can also be an occasion to meet a priest who can help us to untangle certain complicated situations that have cropped up in our lives and perhaps to hear our confession as well.

### ***The particular examen***

In the *Directory*, Emmanuel d'Alzon examined the different means that might be useful in growing in one's religious life. Among them one finds the particular examen. I will quote him because what he says is in line with an invitation of Augustine who desired that one both "know himself and know God", *noverim me, noverim te*. To encounter God and to live from this encounter one must begin by knowing oneself. This is the principle of interiority.

"I shall know myself well only on condition that I study myself constantly. The particular examen is an exercise especially suited to giving me this self-knowledge which, revealing as it does my nothingness, my sins, and my shortcomings, will show me the remedy I should apply to the source of my sins. What efforts have I made to achieve a real knowledge of myself? ... With what sincerity and rigor have I made my examen? ... Do I detest the cowardice and the daily struggles which this examination makes known to me? ... Have I not often neglected it? ..." <sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> op. cit., III, 19.

The particular examen is also known as the examination of conscience. It entails an exercise of introspection that allows us to see, day in and day out, whether the way we live our lives is being carried out under the gaze of God and in fraternal love.

### ***Silent prayer***

There is another form of prayer that it would probably be useful to know, namely, 'Presence Prayer' (*translator's note*: such as the 'Jesus Prayer' of the desert fathers), also known as silent prayer. It is a question of being in God's presence and calling upon him by a name that we have chosen because it holds a special meaning in the intimate relationship we have with him. This prayer is time-honored in Christianity and has taken on different forms at different times in history and in different religious traditions.

"Throughout one's life, silent prayer will be based on this name, which always remains the same. Praying is made simpler in this way: as soon as we speak the Name within, we enter a state of prayer, without having to pose all sorts of questions about the manner in which we will go about it on a particular day. More mysteriously, this Name becomes the path of interiority; it allows us to enter into the depth of ourselves, to leave behind all the turmoil that affects us on the outside."<sup>24</sup>

St. Augustine has taught us how to use this path that goes from without to within, then from below to above (*translator's note*: what Fr. Edgar Bourque, A.A. called "The Augustinian Way of Meditation", reflected in his review *Augustinian*

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<sup>24</sup> Gueullette, Jean Marie. *Petit traité de la prière silencieuse*, Albin Michel, 2011, p.20.

*Journey*). Recollection is the first stage of the inner life. But Augustine reminds us that the exterior world is not to be banned from our prayer. For him, one cannot rise up except from where one has fallen. The world and all its circumstances contribute in one way or another to the inner life.

“We cannot find anything in a human being other than flesh and soul; the whole person is comprised of spirit and flesh. Can it be, then, that the soul is speaking to itself, somehow commanding itself, exhorting and arousing itself? Perhaps some disturbances were causing it to waver in some dimension of its being, but then another part realized what was happening? The part we call the rational mind, the faculty that thinks about wisdom, that even now cleaves to the Lord and longs for him --- this faculty has become aware that some of its lower powers are being seriously perturbed by worldly impulses, that they are being lured toward external things by earthly cravings and forsaking God, who dwells within the soul. The soul then recalls itself from exterior to interior, from lower things to higher things...”<sup>25</sup>

“Notice how that inwardness is recommended in a psalm: *But the sons of men shall hope in the protection of your wings*. Notice what it is to go within, notice what it is to take refuge under his protection, notice what it is even to run within the reach of the Father’s lash; for *he punishes every son that he takes in*. But *the sons of men shall hope under the cover of your wings*. But what is there within? *They will get drunk on the abundance of your house*. When you have brought them inside, on entering into the joy of their Lord, *they will get drunk on the abundance of your house, and you will give them to drink of the torrent of your delight, since with you is the*

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<sup>25</sup> op. cit., St. Augustine, *Commentary on the Psalms* 145,5.

*fountain of life; not outside, away from you, but inside, with you, that is where the fountain of life is found. And in your light we shall see light. Stretch out your mercy to those who know you and your justice to those who are upright of heart.*"<sup>26</sup>

Man is a pilgrim, *homo viator*, on his way to the Homeland or, to be more exact, returning to it. The *Confessions* of St. Augustine may be read as a meditation on the Parable of the Prodigal Son, a return of a lost son to the house of his Father, full of love and mercy. So it is in our spiritual life. We are invited to leave behind far-off lands, also known as the lands of dissimilarity/unlikeness, in order to return to the Kingdom, or the land of similarity/likeness. The dissimilarity/unlikeness of which Augustine speaks is that which keeps the soul far from God. Man was created in the image and likeness of God, but for the Fathers of the Church man resembles God insofar as he is a contemplative. "This means that man is not only pre-eminently a thinker, but a 'seer,' a prophet who gazes into the deep things of God and gives utterance to what he sees. He is a man of prayer, a man of the spirit. St. Augustine seeks God in the most intimate depths of his own spirit."<sup>27</sup>

#### **IV. THE PLACE OF THE BODY IN INTERIORITY**

Paying attention to the inner life does not mean that one ignores his creaturely nature. Quite the contrary! An authentic inner life allows one to recover an experience of

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<sup>26</sup> op. cit., St. Augustine, *Homilies on the Gospel of St. John*, Treatise XXV, 17.

<sup>27</sup> Merton, Thomas. *The New Man*, Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, New York, 1961, p. 60.

the body and to integrate it into the building of one's personality.

The body cannot be forgotten and should be able to participate in the life of prayer. Whoever wishes to forget his body will be brought back to earth in short order. Who hasn't experienced difficult moments in prayer because his posture was ill-suited?

The body participates in prayer. One must find a way not to ignore it but to include it in one's search for interiority. I repeat, I think there is great freedom for the children of God. Still, there are certain limits; one doesn't want to engage in things that are going to distract one's brothers and disturb a spirit of recollection. I remember once going into a scholasticate chapel and seeing brothers stretched out on the floor. It made me want to go off to my room and take a nap... Personally, I like to be in a chapel with subdued lighting and comfortably seated on my chair. I also really like it when there are other brothers already present and in a state of prayer. Their presence draws me to imitate them even more. We need each other's example to keep us motivated.

Augustine demonstrated wisdom by emphasizing that what is most important is to maintain a desire to pray. He reflects on the experience of King David as it is recounted in the Second Book of Samuel (II Sam 7:18). Authentic prayer always begins 'in the secret depths of the heart'. Therefore, bodily posture is secondary if, in fact, the heart is the place *par excellence* where meeting the Lord takes place.

"For we pray, standing, as scripture says, *But the tax-collector stood a long way off* (Lk 18:13); and kneeling, as we read in the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 7:59; 20:36); and sitting, as we have seen with David and Elijah. And unless we also prayed while lying down, it would not be written in the Psalms: *Every night I will wash my bed, I will water my pillow with tears* (Ps 6:6). For when someone seeks to pray, he



arranges his limbs just as it occurs to him at the time that his body is best disposed to arouse his mind....For the mind's attentiveness creates a solitude for itself, and it is often unaware, at the time when it occurs, of where it is facing or of the body's position."<sup>28</sup>

The body, then, plays a key role in prayer. It must be respected and included in an attitude that opens the heart to pay attention to the Master within.

Let us listen to Cardinal Ratzinger once again: "In prayer it is the whole man who must enter into relation with God, and so his body should also take up the position most suited to recollection. Such a position can express in a symbolic way the prayer itself, depending on cultures and personal sensibilities. In some aspects, Christians are today becoming more conscious of how one's bodily posture can aid prayer."<sup>29</sup>

### ***Distractions in prayer***

Distractions exist and they interfere with our praying. The heart can be troubled with any number of thoughts. Long ago Augustine spoke about this.

"Let each one of us bring our own heart under scrutiny and examine ourselves without flattery or blandishment, for nothing is more foolish than to cajole and deceive oneself. Let each one closely observe what goes on in the human heart and see how our very prayers are for the most part so

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<sup>28</sup> St. Augustine, *Responses to Miscellaneous Questions : Miscellany of Eighty-Three Questions, Miscellany of Questions in Response to Simplician, and Eight Questions of Dulcitus*, Ramsey, Boniface (trans), New City Press, 2008, p. 228.

<sup>29</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Letter to the bishops of the Catholic Church on some aspects of Christian meditation*, October 15, 1989, #26.

hindered by idle thoughts that the heart can scarcely stand before God. It wants to take hold of itself so that it may stand, but somehow it runs away from itself, and can find no fence to shut itself in, nor barricades to constrain its flightiness and tendency to wander, so that it may stand still and be delighted with its God!"<sup>30</sup>

The difficulty is not in finding God ---- because he is within us. The difficulty is in paying full attention to his presence.

"Sometimes it happens that both states (coming close to God and being far off) are experienced by the same person. We are sometimes close, sometimes far away; we approach God by the light of truth, but seem to be distant from him owing to the cloud of the flesh. This does not mean, brothers and sisters, that we come to God by any change of place, or distance ourselves from him by any spatial movement, for God is everywhere and is confined to no place whatever. To approach him is to become like him; to move away from him is to become unlike him."<sup>31</sup>

We must return to the heart. The heart is the hidden place of our personal life. For us human beings it serves as an inner homeland, a sacred refuge, a place apart both mysterious and inviolable. The heart is our interiority. It is that place of our conscience that discerns right from wrong, good from bad. It is also the locus of the encounter between the soul and God. It is my true self.

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<sup>30</sup> *ibid.*, St. Augustine, *Commentary on Psalm, Boulding (trans)*, Ps. 85:7.

<sup>31</sup> *op. cit.*, St. Augustine, *Commentary on Psalm 34, Boulding (trans)*, II, 6.

## *Techniques of meditation*

Putting the traditions of prayer in East and West in contact has been one of the fruits of the current globalization. Today it's not unusual to observe the influence of Eastern meditation techniques on the ways people pray in the West.

Some of our brothers have benefitted from meditation techniques they discovered at workshops or retreats or from reading something about the topic. Among these are those versed in the Enneagram, a tool that allows one to get a better understanding of oneself.

I think that we must not forget that St. Augustine wanted to grow as much in his knowledge of God as that of himself. He says in the *Confessions* that he had become 'a great enigma' to himself (X, 33, 50). The discovery of his self was a key moment of interiority. We are sons and daughters of God and our vocation comes to light in our conscience only after a certain journey. One must practice a certain introspection in order to know oneself. This requires time and patience and at times recourse to time-tested means.

Whatever technique may be chosen, the common trait is the search for a better personal balance that allows one to understand more clearly the world around him.

However, in addition to 'self-understanding,' there are spiritual techniques aimed at promoting prayer. These are known as meditation techniques. The spectrum is broad: Zen, Hesychasm, etc. There is a certain exotic quality involved in the search for methods emanating from the East or Far East that are sometimes perceived as superior to the ancient ways of the Western tradition. Often the impression that emerges from the practice of these methods is that their adherents consider them to be in and of themselves ways of salvation. Each technique probably has its worth, but one must avoid considering any technique as the be-all and end-all. Salvation

is given in Jesus Christ and it is a gift freely given that has nothing to do with the efforts that man can furnish to gain it. In summary, the gift God gives us always surpasses whatever we may merit. In 1989, Cardinal Ratzinger wrote his "Letter to the bishops of the Catholic Church on some aspects of Christian meditation." It offers a particularly pertinent lesson for us today. The prefect for the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith reminded us that "Christian prayer is always determined by the structure of the Christian faith, in which the very truth of God and creature shines forth. For this reason, it is defined, properly speaking, as a personal, intimate and profound dialogue between man and God.....Thus Christian prayer is at the same time always authentically personal and communitarian. It flees from impersonal techniques or from concentrating on oneself, which can create a kind of rut, imprisoning the person praying in a spiritual privatism which is incapable of a free openness to the transcendental God. Within the Church, in the legitimate search for new methods of meditation it must always be borne in mind that the essential element of authentic Christian prayer is the meeting of two freedoms, the infinite freedom of God with the finite freedom of man."<sup>32</sup>

Cardinal Ratzinger cautions his readers about 'erroneous ways of praying'. He says, among other things, that "the false fourth century charismatics identified the grace of the Holy Spirit with the psychological experience of his presence in the soul (#9)". For it would be a serious mistake to consider such affects as a sign of the presence or absence of God in one's heart. The spiritual masters remind us that experiences

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<sup>32</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Letter to the bishops of the Catholic Church on some aspects of Christian meditation*, October 15, 1989, #3.

of affliction and desolation should not be taken purely and simply as signs that the Holy Spirit has abandoned a soul.

More and more, with the openness of the West to Eastern and Asian spiritual traditions, there is the risk of a syncretism with no little harm to Christian faith. That is why one must be careful and examine “with careful discernment” the contents and the methods so as to avoid the confusion that can come with religious sentiments.

The most important thing to remember is that “it is necessary in the first place to bear in mind that man is essentially a creature, and remains such for eternity, so that an absorbing of the human self into the divine self is never possible, not even in the highest states of grace (#14).” Nevertheless, he goes on, it is possible to speak of the divinization of man. We are incorporated into Christ and in receiving the Holy Spirit we participate in the very life of the Trinitarian God.

Another key point he makes is that “it is impossible to arrive at a perfect love of God if one ignores his giving of himself to us through his Incarnate Son, who was crucified and rose from the dead. In Him, under the action of the Holy Spirit, we participate, through pure grace, in the interior life of God.”<sup>33</sup>

Cardinal Ratzinger insists that “this gift can only be granted ‘in Christ through the Holy Spirit,’ and not through our own efforts, withdrawing ourselves from his revelation”. We must avoid every form of pelagianism.

Techniques are not the priority in the spiritual life because there is always a risk that we might confuse them with the goal to be attained, namely, progress in the Christian

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<sup>33</sup> *ibid.*,#20.

life and an ever stronger living out of Christian charity. “Nevertheless, given his character as a creature, and as a creature who knows that only in grace is he secure, his method of getting closer to God is not based on any *technique* in the strict sense of the word. That would contradict the spirit of childhood called for by the Gospel. Genuine Christian mysticism has nothing to do with technique: it is always a gift of God, and the one who benefits from it knows himself to be unworthy”.<sup>34</sup>

“The love of God, the sole object of Christian contemplation, is a reality which cannot be ‘mastered’ by any method or technique. On the contrary, we must always have our sights fixed on Jesus Christ....We therefore should allow God to decide the way he wishes to have us participate in his love.”<sup>35</sup>

## V. INTERIORITY AND CULTURE

In examining the life of the great spiritual masters, I have been struck by how important a role they considered beauty plays in contributing to the inner life. What would the spirituality of St. Bernard be without Cistercian art? What would Baroque piety be without the flowering of its artistic masterpieces?

It seems to be that we need to cultivate a taste for the beautiful and to learn how to appreciate works of art capable of feeding our inner life. I invite every religious to develop an artistic appreciation, whether it be for original works of painting, music, or other domains of artistic expression. I am convinced that the contemplation which art appreciation entails is also an essential element in the life of the spirit, and

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<sup>34</sup> *ibid.*, #23.

<sup>35</sup> *ibid.*, #31.

therefore of interiority. Some of our brothers have talents in music, photography, painting, iconography, poetry, and floral design. I would hope that we could learn how to appreciate these gifts. They contribute to shaping a soul in us that is both contemplative and oriented to Supreme Beauty, God himself.

## **VI. INTERIORITY AND COMMUNITY**

I maintain the strongest conviction that an intense spiritual life does not mean that one forgets the demands of community life. At the Assumption, we don't have two categories of religious: Marthas on the one hand and Marys on the other. Our vocation calls us to a fullness of life; both prayer and apostolic involvement in the world are integral parts of our religious being.

Still, it must be repeated forcefully that authentic Christian interiority is possible only to the extent that a person recognizes that he belongs to a community. Augustine, following St. Paul, says that we are members of the Body of Christ and that this reality in all its diversity is united in the Spirit. Quoting Cardinal Ratzinger again, "The Christian, even when he is alone and prays in secret, is conscious that he always prays for the good of the Church in union with Christ, in the Holy Spirit and together with all the Saints.." <sup>36</sup>

The search for the inner life is possible only in the measure that one recognizes the richness involved in uniting all members of the body to each one's individuality.

"Personal spiritual individuation can only take place in community, through it and in it, a community that is no larger than the one in which I currently live because it also includes

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<sup>36</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *ibid.*, #7.

that of the past and that of the future of the Church (...) In this perspective, therefore, there is a constant back and forth, but one made up of distinct moments, between solitude and community. It is a word that another speaks that brings me to solitude and this solitude brings me back to the center and the height of my being; it provides me with the resources to go back to this community, sending me over and over again to others".<sup>37</sup>

The life of prayer opens us to the other and to the Totally Other. What is key is that we can verify that we are growing in fraternal charity and in love of God. There is no evaluation possible of the quality of our prayer life other than the intensity of this love that is revealed in the life of one who prays.

### ***Some resolutions***

I would not want to conclude without urging you to go further. I wish to invite you to make some personal and community resolutions.

Why not take advantage of your local chapter to set a time for daily common meditation?

Why not set aside one day each month as a 'desert day' for silence and recollection?

Why not establish a yearly program of spiritual reading?

## **CONCLUSION**

I firmly believe that the more we cultivate an intimate and regular relationship with God, the more we will be witnesses of the Kingdom of God and signs of his presence in the world.

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<sup>37</sup> Chrétien, Jean-Louis. *L'espace intérieur*, éditions de Minuit, 2014, p.246-247.



I believe that we can draw generous vocations for the Assumption if we live our relationship with God with regularity and trust. The spirit of the Assumption, as Fr. Emmanuel d'Alzon developed it at the school of St. Augustine, is a spirit that sees big and far and wide. It allows one to scan the horizon and to move forward in the search for the God of love revealed in Jesus Christ. Interiority is possible and critical in our world. The inner life of religious is the condition *sine qua non* for drawing generous and abundant vocations. The lack of an inner life is detrimental and serves to render sterile all the efforts that we might make to attract religious and priestly vocations.

Our *Rule of Life* is a rich source in helping us cultivate interiority. Following the *Rule* means accepting regularity in our lives, but it is this regularity that builds up the inner man and makes him grow in freedom.

With our lay friends of the Alliance we have an extraordinary mission: open the door to God. Our hearts are thirsty and the world is waiting for true witnesses of the Gospel. The more our personal life is characterized by a desire for God, the more such a life will serve to dispel the kingdom of darkness.

With that I will close asking the Lord to give each of you his peace and his joy.

Fr. Benoît Grière, A.A.  
*Superior general*

Rome, October 1, 2015  
the feast of St. Theresa of the Child Jesus



# INDEX

<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<i>The urgency of a reform.....</i>	<i>5</i>
<b>I. Interiority in the Assumptionist tradition .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<i>The inner life according to Fr.d'Alzon .....</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>Silence in the thought of Emmanuel d'Alzon .....</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>Fr. Emmanuel d'Alzon's legacy: the Rule of Life.....</i>	<i>12</i>
<i>The Augustinian spirituality of interiority .....</i>	<i>13</i>
The chamber of the heart.....	14
Recollection.....	16
The discovery of the Teacher within.....	17
<b>II. The difficulties of the inner life in today's world .....</b>	<b>19</b>
<i>Interiority and the new means of communication .....</i>	<i>19</i>
<i>The noise of the world.....</i>	<i>20</i>
<b>III. The means at our disposal.....</b>	<b>22</b>
Lectio divina.....	23
Spiritual reading.....	24
Spiritual direction.....	26
The annual retreat.....	27
The particular examen .....	28
Silent prayer.....	29
<b>IV. The place of the body in interiority.....</b>	<b>31</b>
Distractions in prayer .....	33
Techniques of meditation .....	35
<b>V. Interiority and culture.....</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>VI. Interiority and community.....</b>	<b>39</b>
<i>Some resolutions.....</i>	<i>40</i>
<b>Conclusion.....</b>	<b>40</b>

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