

AA News of the Assumption



**MEETINGS IN EAST AFRICA
JUSTICE, PEACE AND THE INTEGRITY OF CREATION
A VIETNAMESE IN MOSCOW**

Agenda

Plenary General Council

- n° 4 : **June 2-11** (Buenos Aires).

Ordinary General Council

- n° 14 : **April 22-30.**
- n° 15 : **June 12-13.**
- n° 16 : **September 8-23.**

Session for Novice Masters :

- **June 18-27** (Rome).

Reunion of the General Councils of the Assumption family.

- **June 25-27** (Paris).

Fr. Ngoa

- **May 5-June 16** : Andean Province (canonical visit).

Fr. Benoît

- **May 21-23** : Union of General Superiors.
- **July 6-11** : St-Lambert des Bois (Novitiate Retreat).

Fr. João

- **May 6-June 1** : Andean Province (Canonical Visit).
- **July 7-11** : Paris (Session of the JPIC-Assumption).

Fr. Thierry

- Rome.

Fr. Étienne

- **July and August** : Madagascar

On the cover

The discovery of the community of the parish "Jesus-Christ Good Shepherd" of Loliondo in Tanzania, was a significant step of the canonical visit in East Africa during February by Fr. Ngoa Ya Tshihemba, Superior General (in the center of the photo) and Fr. Benoît Bigard, Vicar General (to the right), charged with accompanying this Vice-Province.

Rome celebrates the Jubilee... and worries about the Pope



There is a strange atmosphere that permeates Rome during this spring of 2025, somewhat like the weather of the "Eternal City" which constantly vacillates between radiant sunshine and depressing greyness...The sun is that of the Holy Year, decided upon by Pope Francis to mark, as is the tradition every 25 years, the anniversary of the Incarnation. And this jubilee, as is the custom, is flooded with pilgrims and tourists: an official estimate puts their numbers at 32 million for the year!

The General House is not in the background during such an occurrence. Like many other communities of our Provinces, we have placed this year under the sign of Hope, the theme decided upon by Francis for the Jubilee. Like all the pilgrims of the Holy Year, each of us will have the opportunity to enter the holy doors of the four major basilicas, accomplishing the path of conversion to which we are all called.

The first of the 40 themed jubilees organized for the year (journalists, deacons, benefactors. . .) have enabled some of us to meet up with friends from all over the world. Our house at Due Pini is stretched to the limit, welcoming many more religious and friends than in a "normal" year. It welcomes brothers who animate pilgrimages, members of our families, friends—and also complete Provincial Councils, who arrive in small numbers or sometimes (exceptionally!) in groups of greater importance. We are committed to helping them experience the spiritual aspects that have brought them to us. We are happy that this often allows us to have exchanges with them and a sharing in our prayers. There is also the darkness—since mid-February, of the health of Pope Francis which worries the entire Church—starting with the diocese of Rome, where he is Bishop.

At the time of this writing, the Holy Father has already been hospitalized for a month at the Gemelli Clinic (not far from our house!), but his state of health has incurred less worry among his doctors, and to the countless people who are praying for him. No one knows what the future holds for the Pope—nor through him, to the whole Church. At the Vatican and elsewhere, speculation is rife about a hypothetical vacancy in the Apostolic See and the succession that will follow... when the time comes. Meanwhile, the fervor of pilgrims is not lessening, and neither is the mobilization of our community!

Michel KUBLER (Rome)

Fidelity, Between Gift and Duty

I really like the formula used by those who celebrate jubilees, particularly in religious life. Very often, I hear them say: *"It is God's faithfulness that we celebrate. Yes, God has remained faithful."* Indeed, when God makes a covenant with his people, he remains faithful: *"I will walk among you; I will be your God, and you shall be my people"* (Leviticus 26:12). But this covenant is not one-sided: God invites his people to commit themselves to him and to live in accordance with this commitment. Yet, the Scriptures testify to many failings on the part of God's people. The title of this editorial echoes this daily struggle: that of persevering in the covenant, despite challenges and trials. It calls us to a renewed commitment and a fidelity to be built every day.



Fr. Ngoa Ya Tshihemba
Superior General of
the Augustinians of the
Assumption

A document from the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life reminded us that *"the difficulty of fidelity and the decline of perseverance are experiences that have been part of the history of religious and consecrated life since its beginnings."* This reality should not

discourage us. For, for centuries, men and women committed to religious and consecrated life have shown unwavering courage to remain faithful to their commitments by the grace of God. They had to make sacrifices and knew how to choose appropriate means to preserve their promises and achieve their goals.

Some withdrew to the desert (to be far from the "noise of the world"). Others, while remaining "in the world," made private vows. One of these is our founder, Fr. Emmanuel d'Alzon. I am very impressed by the content of his private vows and the frequency with which he made them:

- In June 1844, at the Sanctuary of the Consolata in Turin, he took a private vow not to accept ecclesiastical offices except on the orders of the Pope.
- In 1845, at Notre-Dame des Victoires in Paris, he made a private vow before the Virgin to work for the Kingdom of God.
- On September 8, 1846, he made another vow: to devote himself entirely to the perfection of Mother Marie-Eugénie de Jésus, foundress of the Religious of the Assumption.
- In January 1861, he took a vow to strive for perfection. His motto would be *"Mihi vivere*

Christus est."

Here was a man who wanted to dedicate his life to what seemed right and good to him.

There are situations and realities that can undermine our fidelity: poor management of difficulties encountered along the way, selfish ambitions, fear, etc. Making private vows can be an effective way to redouble our vigilance and courage. It was with this in mind that Father Emmanuel Bailly, along with other brothers from Nîmes, formulated the vow of fidelity in 1871. Here is an excerpt: *"In the face of the social unrest of our time, we, the undersigned, religious of the Assumption, commit ourselves to remaining faithful to the practice of our rules and to the common life, whatever the circumstances in which we may find ourselves and whatever the situation imposed on our works or our Congregation by events."* (E.S. p. 1090). This excerpt from the formula of the vow indicates its objective: to remain faithful in all circumstances.

Fidelity is not a kind of personal accomplishment based on any kind of personal effort. Who can boast of such a miracle? Our fidelity is sustained by the very One who said: *"I will be with you."* It is therefore thanks to a certain duty of memory, which revives in us the promises of the One who is always faithful, that the internal forces are awakened in us and help us to persevere. It is in this sense that our Founder, paraphrasing Saint Thomas, says that man owes his fidelity to God, because of the divine domain over every creature, and in particular over every intelligent creature; because of his benefits of all time; because of the promises made by man². The man who remembers the benefits that the Lord has accomplished in his life will say from the bottom of his heart: *"How shall I repay the Lord for all the good he has done me? I will lift up the cup of salvation, I will call on the name of the Lord. I will keep my promises to the Lord, yes, before all his people!"* (Ps 115:12-14). This "responsive fidelity" is not experienced through extraordinary gestures, but through fidelity to small things. This is true. We should start there: the need to pay attention to small things and be faithful to them. Let us do our part, and God will do the rest. ■

(1) CIVCSVA, *The Joy of Perseverance*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2020, n.1

(2) The Spiritual writings of Emmanuel d'Alzon, p. 426-427.

Calls, nominations, agreements...

Father Ngoa Ya Tshihemba, Superior General, with the approval of his Council, has called:

■ TO PERPETUAL PROFESSION

Willian NUNES DA SILVA

(Brazil) (02/20/2025)

Leonardo DE ALMEIDA CASTRO

(Brazil) (02/20/2025)

■ TO THE DIACONATE

Romel BAUTISTA

(Europe) (02/20/2025)

Paul THAI VAN Thành

(Europe) (02/20/2025)

■ TO PRIESTLY ORDINATION

Joseph PANAGUITON

(Europe) (02/21/2025)

Jovie KOUÉPOU KOUÉPOU

(Europe) (02/21/2025)

Pavel TINYAKOV

(Europe) (02/21/2025)

■ DIRECTORY OF RELIGIOUS

An update on the Directory of Religious 2025 will be placed online in the future on the Congregation's website assumptio.org, particularly to integrate the changes of those heading the Andean Province and the Vice-Province of West Africa: please refer to the Intranet section of the site (if you have lost the password for access, please ask your Provincial Secretary).

Please also note the new e-mail addresses for two of our Sisters' General Secretariats (page 92 of the Directory):

- for the Orantes of the Assumption:

orantesec.23@gmail.com

- for the Religious of the Assumption:

sec.gen.assumption2025@gmail.com

OUR DEANS, OUR YOUNGEST...

At the end of last year, our Congregation lost its two oldest members in quick succession: first, at the Albertville community (Province of Europe), Fr. Roland Imhoff who, at 106, was undoubtedly the oldest Assumptionist of all time! Roland Guilmain died two days later in Worcester (North America), aged 96.

After this double death, **here are the oldest religious in the congregation**, with their nationality and province:

- P. Aidan FURLONG (USA, North America) : 96 years old
- P. Lambert MAURISSEN (Belgium, Europe): 96 years old
- P. Leo van der KLAUW (Netherlands, Europe) : 94 years old
- P. Michel ZABÉ (France, Europe): 94 years old
- P. Maurice MÉTRAL (France, Europe) : 94 years old



As for **our youngest members**, the youngest

Assumptionists, at the time this text is published, are :

- Fr. MADEMBO Rochelvy Darsy Joseph (RDC, Africa): 21 years old
- Fr. PELE TABALA Exaucé Roger (DRC, Africa): 21 years old
- Fr. MOTARI Innocent Nyabiba (Kenya, East Africa): 22 years old
- Fr. RAHERINIAINA Jean Frédéric (Madagascar): 22 years old
- Fr. MUMBERE MUGHALITSA Adélar (RDC, Africa): 22 years old

The cries of our brothers and sisters in the service of the people of God in Kivu

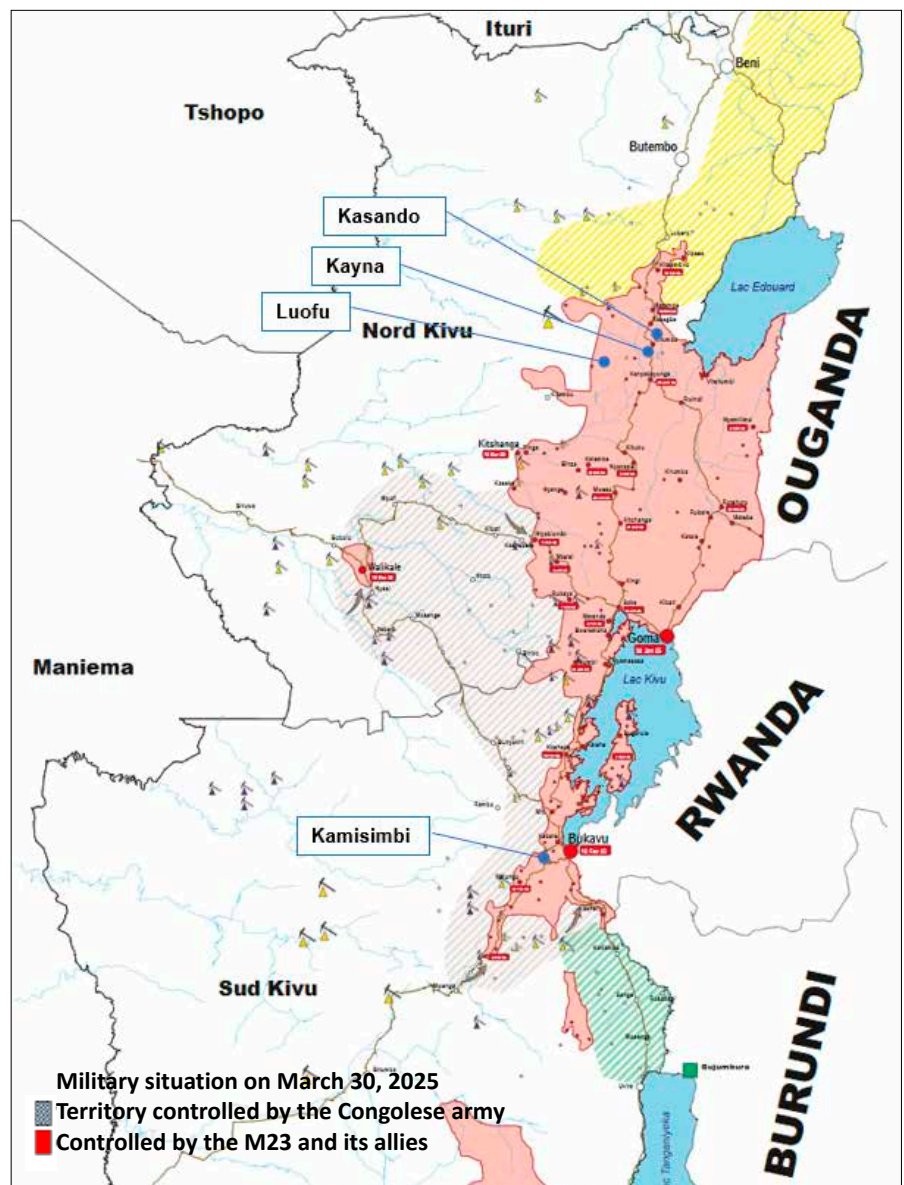
We are publishing the testimony of Fr. Thierry, Assistant General , back from the region where nearly 200 religious live, many religious of the Family and the Lay Assumptionists who are close to us in their lives, their spirituality, and their mission.

Since the capture of the border crossing of Bunagana in June 2022 by the rebels of M23, the great Kivu, situated in the Northeast of the Democratic Republic of Congo (D-RC), finds itself in a very difficult situation in terms of security.

This “Movement of March 23 » was outraged by the Congolese government’s failure to comply with the March 23, 2009 agreement between the Kinshasa government and the Congrès National pour la Défense du Peuple (CNDP): the latter, originally composed of Kinyarwanda-speaking Congolese soldiers, took as their mission to defend the interests of the two ethnic groups that spoke this language.

In December 2023 the M23 had been joined by a new rebellion, the Alliance du Fleuve Congo (AFC), led by Corneille Nangaa. This former chairman of the National Electoral Commission, despite having fraudulently brought to power President Félix Antoine Tshisekedi, to rebel against his bad governance, probably because of their well-known links with ex-president Kabila.

The coalition is clearly acting with the military support of Rwanda, behind the security mask of efforts to neutralize the



Rwandan rebels (known as the FDLR), pursuing with their economic endeavors, specifically the pillage of the natural resources of Congo.

Social and security situation

The successive takeovers of strategic locations in the zones of Rushuru, Masisi, Nyiragongo and in one part of Lubero con- ➤



M23 rebels enter the center of Bukavu, the second-largest city in eastern DRC, and take control of the administrative office of South Kivu province, Sunday February 16, 2025. © Janvier Barhahiga/AP/SIPA

cluded with the occupation of regional capitals: Goma (North-Kivu) last January, directly followed by that of Bukavu and other territories of South-Kivu. The humanitarian, economic, and security consequences of these military activities are legion: massive displacement of rural populations toward urban areas, a concentration of these people in camps for the displaced, progressive impoverishment in these occupied areas, violations of human rights, recurrent killings and numerous cases of mob justice, etc.

The pace of this military harassment is decreasing, but the living conditions are harsh. In the villages of Goma and Bukavu, the banking system is paralyzed such that the local agencies must depend on Kinshasa. The result is that the officials of the State are not getting their salaries, and other transactions

have become almost impossible for the retailers and social players. I heard of the risk taken by a religious from Bukavu who needed to take the route from Goma to Butembo in order to make a bank withdrawal for the survival of the young people at their social center.

The territories that are still under the control of the regular Congolese forces are in the same situation. The people who live there have a pit in their stomachs, worrying about eventual attacks which could result in looting, the flight of the regular army and all the hardships associated with rebel occupation. Added to that is the presence of numerous armed groups called Wazalendo (“patriots” in Kiswahili) who, do not reassure the local population, liable to fall victim to clashes between rival groups at any moment. These youth, who claim to be

defending their country, are faced with the obvious incapacity of the government army. They have set up camps and barriers everywhere to collect money from passers-by. Since they can’t count on government protection, the civilian population finds itself victim to harassment, looting, and other human rights violations.

That is how it is in Grand North-Kivu, which corresponds with the territories of Lubero and Beni (which also ties in with the diocese of Butembo-Beni). They are living a double Calvary. The people of the North have known for decades the torments of the Ugandan rebels (called ADF), who have massacred thousands of people, and the South finds itself under the occupation of the AFC-M23.

What is the Church doing?

The Church is in solidarity with the people. The bishops of the ecclesiastical Province of Bukavu (South-Kivu) regularly address in their dioceses, words of encouragement and peace toward the faithful, as well as to the belligerents. The humanitarian interventions of the Church toward the Caritas and the generosity of the faithful in their ecclesial communities are a huge relief for the displaced of the war.

The brothers and sisters living in the occupied zones show an exemplary resilience. They have chosen to live this Calvary with their people despite the appeals from their superiors to leave. Some of them, having known the displacement of the local population, have upon their return,

found the communities pillaged from top to bottom. Since the villages were already empty, it is difficult to determine with surety who caused the looting of the religious communities and the houses of the townspeople. Was it civil bandits, loyalist soldiers in flight, or rebels upon their arrival? No one knows. Additionally, our communities, at a time when they need it, can no longer receive visits from their brothers and from superiors, because of multiple barriers and harassment on the routes.

It remains difficult, in this situation, to live one's faith with dignity, and to witness to the Gospel. In these zones where it is forbidden to talk about the atrocities committed by elements of the Congolese armed forces with their Wazalendo associates and

rebel forces, the pastors must mix prophecy and prudence to avoid reprisals. To this must be added the material difficulties of survival which are the daily bread of the entire population. The basic services (schools and sanitary conditions) suffer from it equally.

In the meantime, the government of Kinshasa does not seem to be making this a priority. Some ONGs with access to these regions are trying in vain to provide their support, which remains insufficient. The people, like their pastors, need our support and our prayers to remain strong in faith and to hold on to hope in this specific place in the world and in the Church.

Fr. KAMBALE KAHONGYA Thierry
(Rome)

Tens of thousands of people flee conflict in eastern DRC. © AFP - AUBIN MUKONI / AFP



Meeting the Assumption in Tanzania

Fr. Benoît Bigard, Vicar General, recently accompanied Father General on his canonical visit to East Africa. Here, he shares his impressions of the trip.



The parish of Christ the King in Msongola, Dar es Salaam, newly entrusted to the Vice-Province of East Africa.

My first contact with our East African communities dates back to the RIAD (Inter-Assumption Meeting for Dialogue) in Nairobi in 2006. Then there were a few brief visits with the CGP to Arusha (Tanzania) in 2018 and Kampala (Uganda) in 2022. But it was as Assistant General responsible for accompanying this Vice-Province that I was able to better discover our communities and our works in East Africa, through two one-month visits in 2024 and 2025.

The Vice-Province of East Africa was established in January 2019, but the missionary

adventure there dates back to September 1987 with the arrival of Fr. Edward Pepka (American) and the establishment of the first community in Nairobi the following year. Today, it boasts 14 communities and one mission *ad experimentum* (in Namanga, Kenya), which are divided into six locations in Kenya, eight communities in Tanzania, and one in Uganda.

In keeping with the Assumptionist tradition, we can identify six main apostolates: formation, parish ministry, shrines, education, youth ministry, and media.

1) Cf. *L'Aventure missionnaire assumptionniste*, p.561-568.

Formation

Until now located within a parish in Kenya, the postulancy is in a transitional format, with the 11 postulants being divided between Nairobi and our parish of Kyabakadde while awaiting a new postulancy in Uganda within two years. In addition, three houses are dedicated to formation: the Arusha Novitiate (4 novices this year), the Arusha Philosophate with 15 students attending the Spiritan Institute, and the Nairobi Theologate (CIFA) with 19 students, primarily training with the Jesuits of Hekima College.

Parish Pastoral Care

In East Africa, as in many developing countries, parish life is marked by pastoral care, but also construction work and the running of schools, clinics, and other social projects. Thus, the nine parishes entrusted to our care have expanded to 47 secondary stations, with several primary schools and clinics. The smallest has 730 Christians and the largest 7,500. The most recent is located in Dar es Salaam (former capital of Tanzania), where the Christ the King Parish of Msongola was entrusted to us in July 2024.

Two Shrines

This pastoral sector is more recent, having been in existence for two or three years, with a diocesan pilgrimage site currently developing in Namanga: Our Lady Source of Hope is identifiable by its large cross in the mountain on the border between Kenya and Tanzania. The plan is to open an Assumptionist spiritual center near the shrine. The second, located in Bura in the Diocese of Mombasa (Kenya), is



dedicated to Our Lady of Good Hope.

Education

In addition to the parish schools, Assumption High School, not far from the parish of Njiru (Nairobi), has been slowly expanding over the past eight years, serving around a hundred students from working-class backgrounds. Dormitories are under construction to better accommodate boarding students (boys and girls).

Youth Ministry and Media

Youth ministry is omnipresent in our parishes in Africa, but it is worth noting the Rejefir/Younib network initiated by Fr. Serge-Patrick, the "Youth Network in the Service of Interreligious Fraternity," which is expanding

from Nairobi. Among its many activities, the Younib TV channel broadcasts 24/7, also offering event media coverage and studio recordings. This channel can also be viewed on YouTube. Also on the media front, it is worth noting the presence of Bayard in Nairobi, currently in the research and development phase.

Special Discoveries in Tanzania...

Among the Sonjo and the Maasai...

Some of our parish missions in Tanzania are quite atypical. For example, the communities of Loliondo and Digodigo work in the "Safari region," near the country's most beautiful natural parks, which attract many tourists: the ►

Serengeti, the Ngorongoro Crater, and more. The Maasai people, traditionally nomadic and pastoralists, are very present in this region, steeped in their traditions but quite open to Christianity.

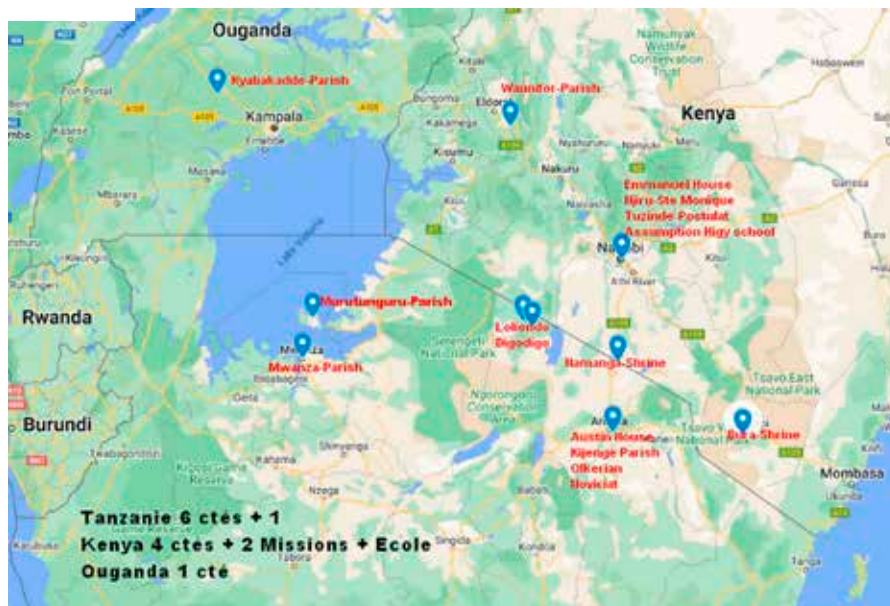
Another, much smaller people, the Sonjo (or Temi), traditionally farmers, are the ancestral rivals of the Maasai and remain resistant to any evangelization. However, our community of Digodigo is located right in the heart of the Sonjo. It goes without saying that its mission in primary evangelization is not easy. As adolescents, after their initiation, young Sonjos can no longer attend church under penalty of banishment from their community. Certainly, the elders allowed the Church to establish itself, counting on the schools or clinics it would establish, but despite this small opening, daily worries abound: sabotage of our small school's equipment; sacred trees on parish land that must not be touched; the threatening climate of the young warriors of the tribe; paying for stream water for the few hours of use by the community; the theft of animals from our livestock, etc. Our brothers are courageous and do not lack perseverance!

Twinning between parishes...

Fortunately, these two communities benefit from a wonderful initiative from their diocese of Arusha, which consists of twinning large urban parishes with these small rural parishes. Support, even modest, is welcome on both financial and spiritual levels. Thus, our parish of Kijenge in Arusha sponsors the small parish of Digodigo, and that of Loliondo is twinned with the Arusha Cathedral.

On the shores of Lake Victoria...

At 68,100 km², Lake Victoria (or Nyanza) is the largest in



Africa and the third largest in the world. It is located in the heart of our Vice-Province, straddling Tanzania, Uganda, and Kenya. Two of our communities lead parishes around this lake, in relatively different environments. For example, Saints Peter and Paul of Mwananchi in Mwanza, Tanzania's second largest city, is a relatively new parish, with modest but committed members. The rural parish of the Mother of God of Murutunguru, which is celebrating its 75th anniversary, is located on Ukerewe Island, hours from Mwanza by boat. Fortunately, our communities are organized into sectors to break their isolation and allow the brothers to support each other in the mission.

Through this brief overview, I hope to have conveyed the dynamism of this Vice-Province, within a Catholic Church in East Africa that is itself very dynamic. The major challenges seem to me to be the deepening of the Assumptionist charism by the younger generation, the rooting of the fundamentals of religious life that are not those of the diocesan model, and unity for the mission: among brothers from the three

countries as well as with the missionaries who come especially from the DRC. Finally, the great challenge of pooling goods and developing our own resources to support the many apostolic projects underway! We entrust to the Lord the bright future promised to our future "Province" of East Africa: Assante sana! («Thank you very much» in Swahili).

Fr. Benoît BIGARD
(Rome)

East Africa in Figures

On site:

88 religious + 15 (novices and postulants)
47 religious are from East Africa (29 Kenyans; 13 Ugandans; 5 Tanzanians); 41 come from other countries (34 Congolese, 3 Togolese, 2 Malagasy, 1 Cameroonian, 1 Burkinabe). Among them, 43 young religious are in formation.

Outside the Vice-Province:

8 religious in formation or on mission

A formation session within the Assumption family

Augustinians, Oblates, and Orantes of the Assumption from the diocese of Arusha (Tanzania), met last August for a day of fraternity and sharing

« To have a fruitful consecrated life amid the challenges of the modern world¹: that was the theme of this day within the Assumption, facilitated by Fr. James Kulwa Shimbala, SMA. The gathering revolved around two points:

- The questions that religious face in the context of the post-modern world¹:

- Suggestions to better live out our religious commitments amid so many changes.

Numerous cultural changes are connected to the concept of postmodernity. There is a cultural revolution going on due to Marxism, capitalism, and liberal philosophies: relativism in the face of truth, disbelief and questioning of social values, search for personal fulfillment, multiplication of choices, questioning of absolutes, rejection of authority, trivialization of violence. These are present along with new forms of addiction, particularly considering this age of social networking.

Faced with such changes, religious life is not spared. The fragmentation of knowledge and the perception of a changed society due to the reign of individualism has shaken religious life at its very foundations: fraternal life in community, a sense of belonging, the notion of the common good, the relationship with authority, the spiritual life, etc.

Religious relativism is another temptation that tends to level out practices and beliefs.

Deviations, like sorcery and satanism, are treated like alternatives against Christian spirituality leading to double membership and reciprocal mistrust. Religious are confronted with a delicate equilibrium between the traditions that established our congregations and a desire for renewal and adaptations to the challenge of today. Our digital culture, that is today unavoidable, changes the way we relate to others. Evangelical values are in danger by the excessive use of communication. Smartphones and social networks tend to replace moments of participation in community.

Attitudes to consider: discipline with the use of media, leave the telephone during meals, meeting, retreats. . favor direct contact in community, resist attempts to self-isolate.

Our day also developed propositions for a renewal of religious life:

- **work together** through a renewal of prayer, through an effort of work, of an understanding of self and of forgiveness;

- **build communities that are more fraternal** through personal discipline and a spirit of belonging, by participating in the

community like members in our own right;

- **live the 3 « C's » : Community-Communication-Community:** "We should learn to live together like brothers (and sisters), if not we will perish together like fools." (Martin Luther King)

- **Encourage formation** in non-violent communication and interculturality.

John-Paul II recalled : *"It's in the name of Christian faith that the Second Vatican Council engaged the entire Church to listen to modern man so as to understand him and to invent new types of dialogue, bringing the originality of the Gospel message to the heart of today's mentalities"* (Address to the Pontifical Council for Culture, 1983).

The Assumption Family has created more opportunities for **fraternal encounters and sharing** in our countries, has reinforced links, and has advanced hope for all in the face of changes that we are confronted with in society.

Sr Marlyn NGANZALI, O.A.
(Nairobi)

This article appeared in « *Nouvelles internationales* » of the Oblates of the Assumption (no5, Oct.-Dec. 2024)

1) Postmodernity means the structural upheavals in the way of life and social organization in the 20th century.

Emmanuel House, serving the mission in East Africa



Members of the CIFA at Emmanuel House in Nairobi (Kenya)

The CIFA of Nairobi (Kenya) is the heir to the first Assumptionist foundation of the current Vic-Province.

In the introduction to our Rule of Life, we read: *“When God sees his people in need, he calls men. He gives them the grace to feel, to love like him. And the strength to undertake. He calls them and he sends them.”* It was in response to this call that the Assumption established itself in Kenya, with the priority mission of establishing houses of formation in East Africa. This is why, in 1988, an international community was founded in Nairobi by four religious: Frs. Edward Pepka and Richard Brunelle (United States), Brs. Jean-Marie Paluku Meso (D.R. Congo), and James Conlon (England).

Fr. Brunelle recounted in an article¹ the difficulties the mission in Nairobi began with, particularly in recruiting missionar-

ies for this foundation. The only one ready to leave, Fr. Pepka arrived in Nairobi on September 1, 1987. Bro. Meso and Fr. Brunelle followed in August 1988 and were introduced by the former to the wonders of East African nature, the hassles of immigration and customs services, and the myriad attractions of the city of Nairobi. The three of them prepared together for the arrival in September of the Provincial and then of Bro. Conlon. The Nairobi community subsequently welcomed two or three new members each year, sent by the North American Province to help consolidate the mission. These include Frs. Luc Martel, Alexis Babineau, Oliver Blanchette, Aidan Furlong, and Gilles Blouin.

From the very beginning, the communi-

ty developed its apostolic plan: to create a fraternal and welcoming community, to design a missionary project, and to develop a formation program for aspirants and theologians. However, due to the small size of the house, they decided to build a four-story building with about thirty rooms and large multipurpose halls: enough space for the entire community, as well as the many visitors who passed through. Opened in October 1993, the construction site as completed in March 1995. This house became the current CIFA Emmanuel House in Nairobi.

Initially, Emmanuel House was both a philosophy and theology center. In 2000, with the transfer of the philosophy center to Arusha (Tanzania), it became solely a theology center, already welcoming religious from various countries. By decision of the CGP, it received the status of International Assumptionist Formation Community (CIFA) in 2014, with successive superiors Frs. Jean-Marie Paluku Meso (2014-2015), Charles Kasereka Muvunga (2015-2023), and Louis Martin Rakotoarilala.

During the current academic year, the CIFA in Nairobi welcomes 19 young religious in formation (16 theology students and three specialized studies students) from seven different countries: Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Madagascar, DR Congo, Burkina Faso, and Togo. Four formators accompany them, including two Congolese, one Kenyan, and one Malagasy. In total, the community is composed of 29 religious: students and formators, as well as a deacon and four priests who are students or serve the Congregation. According to the testimony given at the 34th General Chapter by Fr. Joachim Mpozembizi Ssentongo, Ugandan, parish priest of our parish of Saint Monica in Nairobi, *"CIFA is today a necessity for the Assumption. It is a school adapted to learn our missionary character as Assumptionists of our time. CIFA allows religious to know each other as members of the same family and to learn not only to live together but also to work together for the mission of the Church and the Congregation."* During this same Chapter, Fr. Dominic KAMAU MUTURI, Formator at Emmanuel House and



The CIFA building at Emmanuel House in Nairobi (Kenya)

First Vice-Provincial Councilor, stated that CIFA teaches brothers in formation *"by adapting to another environment, by gradually detaching themselves from their own, (...) to overcome nationalism and tribalism. They open up to other realities, become more flexible, learn to live together. Little by little, they enter into a new culture, that of the Kingdom where there is "neither Jew nor Greek" but brothers who seek Christ together"*.

My personal conviction is that, as an international community, our diversity is truly our strength. This is why CIFA must always foster creativity, awareness, and the sharing of the different qualities that the brothers possess through their own cultures. However, the major challenges facing CIFA Nairobi for Assumption formation today are based on raising awareness and supporting religious to emphasize their sense of belonging to a single Congregation. We have only one culture and one goal, which is to extend the Kingdom of God within and around us.

Fr. Louis Martin RAKOTOARILALA
Superior of CIFA Emmanuel House in Nairobi
(Kenya)

¹ "Meaning and Challenges of Assumptionist Establishment in East Africa," in the Proceedings of the History Conference for the 150th Anniversary of the Congregation, November 2000 (pp. 563-568).

A Vietnamese brother in Moscow



Fr. Pierre Tran Duc Long has lived for twelve years in the capital of Russia, in the service of a large community of his compatriots spread across the European part of this immense country.

Can you introduce yourself ? And can you say some things about your community?

Fr. Long : I am Pierre Tran Duc Long, a Vietnamese Assumptionist priest. I entered the novitiate in France in 2005. After making my first vows, I completed my studies in philosophy and theology. In 2012, I was ordained as a deacon in Montpellier, and I was also named to the community in Moscow in 2013. That same year, I was ordained to the priesthood in the church of Saint-Louis des Français in Moscow.

Our community in Moscow has two brothers: Fr. Slava, a Russian, the diocesan economist and pastor of Saint-Louis Parish, and me, a vicar of the parish and chaplain for the Vietnamese Catholics. Fr. Celeste Pianezze, an Italian, who has not joined us yet, is in rehabilitation for his leg and is in the process of learning to walk with his prosthesis.

What are some of the traits of Fr. d'Alzon that you also share?

To answer this question, one must look at some of the characteristic traits of Fr.

d'Alzon. He was a man of faith, of prayer, of communion, of passion, of devotion, and of initiative in work and in his animation of the Congregation. He had a spirit of frankness and straightforwardness, of generosity, and of disinterest for the coming of the Kingdom. These are the traits our founder has left us and which he wanted to pass on to future generations of religious.

As an Assumptionist, like the other brothers, I imitate the model of our founder to be passionate about the Kingdom of God, to be in solidarity with the poor, and in unity with other Christians. The triple dimension is doctrinal, social, and ecumenical and is put into practice by the Assumptionists' missions of teaching, pilgrimages, works of charity, and ecumenical dialogue. . . Fr. d'Alzon had a big ecumenical dream for Russia, but it was difficult for it to materialize. What is important today at this level, in a country that is mostly Orthodox, is prayer, the Catholic presence, charity, and respect for the differences of others. We could not ap-

proach, or break down divisions, without charity and dialogue, listening and mutual respect. That is what I am most conscious of in this mission country.

When did you arrive in Moscow? How have you integrated yourself in this mission country?

I have been here since 2013. To integrate in this mainly orthodox country two things are needed:

- to love the mission in Russia which Fr. d'Alzon encouraged and to to which he sent his brothers; *"Turn your attention toward Russia"* (letter to Fr. Galabert);
- to love the culture, the language, the country where you live, be open to the people you meet and to whom we speak, respecting their differences.

These factors allowed me to be well-integrated and to adapt to the community and missionary life in Russia.

What are your main activities ?

I celebrate Masses for the community at the Church of Saint-Louis, administer the sacraments, teach catechism to the catechumens, prepare couples for marriage, and bring Communion to the sick. For the last three years there have been no scouting activities because of the departure of many French families. I wait for their return. . .

Can you describe the Vietnamese diaspora ?

In Russia, the Vietnamese are mainly employed in commerce, in growing vegetables (in the summer), and in sewing. The traders work in the commercial districts of the town, while the fashion designers work in factories on the outskirts or in the province. These workers are

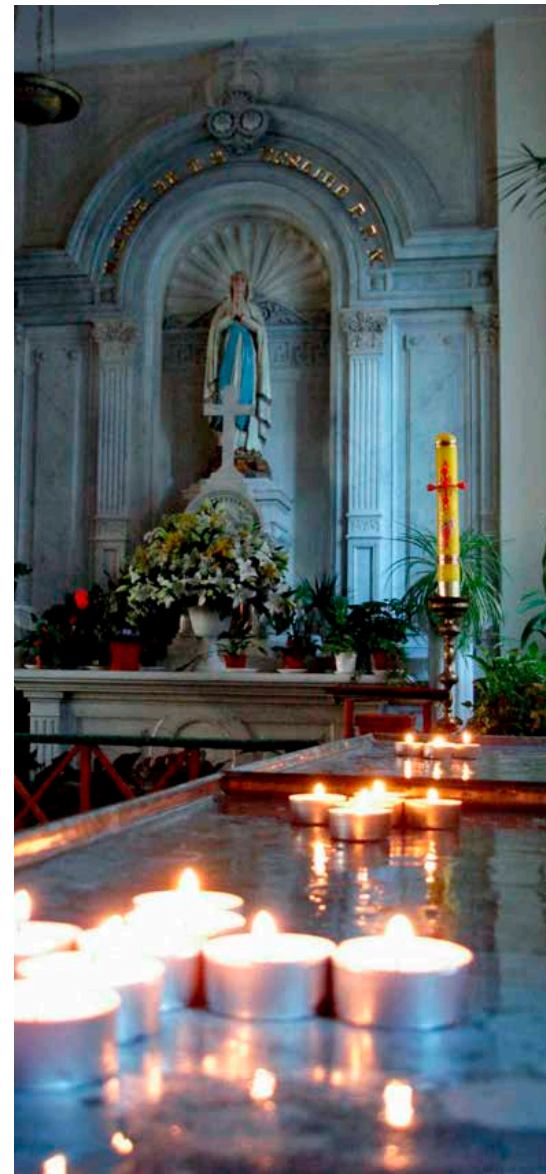
divided into different groups in Oufa (1 200km from Moscow), Ekaterinbourg (at 1 500 km) and Toulou (at 200 km). Occasionally, I go to the factories to say Mass. Often, the young Vietnamese work in Russia for two or three years, or even less, to earn a living, then they might return home or try to find work elsewhere. . .

Under what conditions is your mission unfolding? Can you fulfill your ministry freely?

Up to this point, I have had no problems with my ministry. In spite of the conflict in the Ukraine, political crises in the Middle East and with one country the majority orthodox, I practice openly in total freedom and ease. In recent years, I have seen the Catholic bishop of Moscow, accompanied by a crowd, say the Stations of the Cross in the streets around the cathedral on Holy Saturday without any problem. The real difficulty is to get a Visa to enter Russia, especially since the April 2024 terrorist attack on the outskirts of Moscow.

Now that the 2025 Jubilee is here, what words of hope would you like to share?

I think that the Jubilee Year can bring hope to the world : the end of the war in Syria, in Lebanon, in Gaza, and in the Ukraine, the reopening of meeting places, of dialogue among the leaders of countries, and of improvement of their relations. All of this, so that the life and work of countries, and of each person in the world could be more stable and more peaceful, and so that travel can be simpler. The Jubilee of hope calls us to look toward the future with hope, and to always hope in the



Lord with patience and confidence, especially during difficult times and during the discouragements of life, or of the mission, *"because it is in hope that we are saved"* (Rm 8, 24). Consequently, St. Paul tells us: *"Hope against all hope"* (Rm 4, 18), *"Have the joy of hope, hold on during tribulation, and be diligent in prayer"* (Rm 12, 12). With hope, we draw energy to move forward in our lives.

*This article appeared in the bulletin
ATLPE, n° 45 (Jan.-March 2025)*

Sisters and brothers committed to our Earth

The International Inter-Assumption Secretariat for Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation has written a letter to the religious sisters and brothers of our four congregations. Here is the full text.

The team of the International Secretariat for Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) is pleased to send you its greetings and also to update you on the highlights of the final meeting from January 17 to 19, 2025, at the General House of the Religious of the Assumption, 17 rue de l'Assomption in Paris. The themes that occupied us during the three days revolved around formation, our work plan, and communication.

1) Formation

The first formation theme was developed by Maria Cristina, a

lay member of the Assumption Sisters living in Colombia (Bogotá). She spoke to us about COP 29, which took place in Baku, Azerbaijan, a country that unfortunately is not responding to the decisions taken against climate change. 200 countries responded to the UN's call, but no effective economic decision was made to help poor countries suffering from the consequences of climate change. Similarly, there was no final agreement, no signature, and no declaration regarding commitments to regulate the coal market, the main contaminant. Meanwhile,

we were all outraged by the heavy economic cost allocated to resolving this ecological issue while results are slow in coming. The next session, COP 30, will take place in the Philippines in November 2025.

The second formation theme concerned the Synod's final conclusions. Fr. João, Assistant General of the Augustinians of the Assumption, was the speaker. Since 2021, Pope Francis has been inviting us to enter into a synodal process. After three stages: diocesan, continental, and universal, the concluding synod finally took place in Rome in October 2024.





What process should we follow to move forward in a synodal Church? The Pope invites us to allow ourselves to be captivated by the Holy Spirit, who is the protagonist of liberating action within the Church. The Lord is on our path; he passes through our journeys, not through our ideas. He is not static, but dynamic; he enters into a movement with his people and transforms their whole life into a dance. Hence the reality: «Life as a dance.»

To better listen to Him, we must abandon our old ways of listening to the Lord in each of our brothers and sisters. From now on, it is no longer necessary to seek the Lord in a document; thus, the conclusions of the last synod cannot be considered as guidelines for a synodal assembly.

2) Plan of our JPIC activities

Saturday was set aside for the JPIC plan. We are gradually moving forward on our path of commitment to the objectives of our Assumption Family regarding JPIC. We recall that the calendar year, viewed from this ecological perspective, provides us with material: January 1st of each year is the World Day of Prayer for Peace; from September 1st to October 4th, the Season of Creation. Reviewing our *Laudato Si'* platform and its Assumption Action Plan in light of the theme of integral ecology, we reaffirm our choice of three priorities: the cry of the earth,

the cry of the poor, and a sober lifestyle.

We inform you that an online session is being organized from July 7 to 11, 2025, on the theme: *“A world of living beings sharing a common home: new ways of inhabiting the earth and acting in favor of migrants around the world.”* We thank Fr. Milad Yacoub, A.A., for his willingness to help us connect all participants around the world. We also thank the various translators who responded favorably to our request, and we continue to expect the same willingness from all of you for the remaining tasks. The session organizing team will be in person at the General House of the PSA in Paris, with the assistance of Fr. Milad. Thank you to the Little Sisters of the Assumption for always opening the doors of their house to us, as well as all the translation equipment they provide.

Interested parties are asked to register using the following form to allow for proper preparation of the technical platform for the connection: <https://forms.office.com/e/AKycafd58P>

3) Communication

Ultimately, we discussed the fundamentals of communication, questioning the use of current means of communication, their impact on daily life, and their benefits for users and for our world. Between Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and

so on, we must consider how to orient our communication not only to reach as many people as possible, but above all to nurture the image of humanity as the center of ecology.

The next meeting of the JPIC Secretariat team will take place at the Provincial House of the Augustinians of the Assumption of Paris at Denfert-Rochereau (January 23, 24, and 25, 2026). We give thanks to God for the JPIC initiatives in our congregations. In Spain, a meeting will take place on February 22, 2025, at the Dulce Nombre de María parish in Madrid. Many have already received the link to connect via video. We also encourage the initiative of the major superiors of Rome, who organized a JPIC session from February 10 to 14. We conclude this report by thanking you for your support and assistance at various times along our journey as an Assumption Family.

Fr. Philippe MUHINDO NDUNGO
(Madrid),

for the JPIC International Secretariat team, which also includes:

Sr. Marcia Ferreira, General Delegate, P.S.A.

Sr. Théodosie Kitwana, O.A.

Sr. Matilde Mbakaniaki, O.A.

Sr. Elizabeta Balint, O.A.

Sr. Odile Ratiana Arimanana, P.S.A.

Sr. Ngoc Nhung, P.S.A.

Sr. Bernie O'Donovan, P.S.A.

Sr. Myriam Collon, P.S.A.

Sr. Marcelline Mubata, P.S.A.

Sr. Sandra Durán, R.A.

Sr. Lerma Pangantihon, R.A.

María Cristina Umbarila, lay P.S.A.

P. João Gomes, A.A.

A Sign of Hope for Youth in the Philippines

The Assumption of Asia has initiated two promising programs, in partnership with local civil and ecclesial bodies. An example that could inspire others to emulate them!

On January 10, 2025, during the Assumptionists' meeting in the Philippines, a memorandum of understanding was signed by the Augustinians of the Assumption, Our Lady of Pentecost Parish (OLPP), the neighborhood council and youth council of Barangay Loyola Heights, and a development NGO network leader. The Assumptionists' JPIC Commission spearheaded the establishment of this partnership for a very simple reason: JPIC initiatives should go beyond the formation of religious leaders, bringing this urgent need for social and ecological justice to the people we serve. Working for JPIC in our apostolate areas will bear much fruit in the present and especially in the future if we invest our care in young people.

This partnership offers two JPIC programs for youth: Social Conversations and a Good Governance Initiative.

The **Social Conversations** program is a monthly gathering of young people to discuss various JPIC issues—one topic per month. The program is so named because it aims to enable young people to raise their voices,

share and validate their own experiences, and come together to take action. The monthly activity always invites an experienced young speaker for each topic, but the speaker's role is to challenge young people on the importance of the issues, to shape and broaden their perspectives on current issues. After the conference, group and plenary sharing aims to help young people assimilate, reflect, and share ideas with each other. Furthermore, to encompass the diverse voices of stakeholders working toward a common goal, the parish offers an opening briefing, providing an overview of Catholic social teachings related to the topic, while the barangay or SK concludes the event with comments and promotes similar programs. Most importantly, each activity is primarily organized by youth leaders from the Parish Youth Ministry (PYM), Kabataang may Dedikasyon para sa Loyola Heights (KDLH), and SK, organized into committees for effective implementation.

The **Good Governance Initiative** is a specialized program for selected young leaders (approximately 15 to 20 participants). The training workshop

consists of two full weekends to train young leaders to propose projects in the spirit of JPIC. This training begins with self-understanding, leadership development, and understanding current societal realities, before moving on to the technical aspects of developing and writing project proposals. The training also includes relevant topics such as critical thinking, effective use of social media, and collaborative work between the Church, government, and civil society. Afterward, half a day will be dedicated to mentoring and finalizing their proposals, and another half day to presenting them to the barangay captain and other relevant leaders.

This simple yet promising JPIC partnership for youth is a testament to hope in working for the Kingdom of God.

Bro. Jundelle Romulo JALIQUE

¹ If you would like to support this initiative, you can make a donation by following this link: <https://kaloob.ph/donate/>

Notre-Dame de Salut, oldest and youngest !

Pilgrimages, born in France in the 19th century, have recently been integrated by the CGP in the list of realities that will mobilize the entire Congregation.



The statue of Our Lady of Salvation.

The Association of Notre-Dame de Salut is one of the oldest works of the congregation with 152 years of service to the Church announcing faith and service to the Kingdom. It has recently been recognized as one of its mobilizing works.¹

This recognition, although late, underlines the strength and continuity of its actions. Founded to propel unifying projects, the Association gave birth to the National Pilgrimage, its first and main realization. Anchored in Lourdes, a place of faith on a global scale, this pilgrimage embodies the mission of the Association. It is the only event in France that unites, each year, the five branches of the Assumption family, as well as the laity, priests and religious friends in one purpose of fraternity and service.

The Hospitality Notre Dame de Salut, another work founded by the Association, illustrates this engagement through a specific service to the most fragile. Thousands of volunteers of all ages are

committed to helping the sick, the isolated, those in precarious situations or the handicapped.

The National Pilgrimage reinforces this unifying cause and constitutes a true school of synodality, of subsidiarity and of service. It illustrates concretely the strong orientations of the congregation: the welcome of the poorest, the proclamation of faith, and a living spirituality for our time.

Together, these actions make the Association Notre-Dame de Salut and its flagship work, the National Pilgrimage, an essential pillar of Assumptionist life. Whether it is for a long period of time or for a short time, your arms and your hearts are reaching out with joy to enliven our spirituality and our engagement to the service of the Church, of the world, and of the Kingdom. Let us get mobilized!

Fr. Sébastien ANTONI (Paris)
Director of the National Pilgrimage

*Article first appeared in the bulletin
ATLPE, no45, (Jan.-March, 2025)*



The National Pilgrimage to Lourdes.

¹From a decision of the Plenary General Council, made in December 2024 (cf. AA Info no 7, p. 9). The updated list of the mobilizing works of the Congregation, and those for which it must be mobilized, now number six: Assumption University (North America), Université de l'Assomption in Congo (Africa), Bayard (Europe-North America-Africa), Centre St. Pierre- St. André de Bucarest (Europe), the Network of Bush Schools and College of Monsignor Canonne (Madagascar), and the work of the Pilgrimages Notre-Dame de Salut (Europe).

Fr. d'Alzon and Studies

A third of the religious in our congregation are currently studying. What are our founder's studies like, and what did he think of the Assumptionist formation? (1)



Fr. d'Alzon's Studies

This is a delicate topic to address, given our founder's atypical academic background and his unique student profile: a model student, intelligent, orderly, and disciplined in his research, yet rather unstable, having changed his major four times in less than four years.

As a child, Emmanuel seems to have had little appreciation for the services of his tutor, Father Bonnet, to the point of placing an owl's nest in his bed. (2) At the age of 12, while improvising a homily in front of his friends, he saw him approaching. Seizing the opportunity, he declared: "My dear friends, if the good Lord sends you children, never give them a tutor, but raise them yourselves." (3)

At Stanislas, the famous Parisian high school, the teenager showed diligence, without shining. He was nevertheless part of the elite, obtaining his Baccalaureate in Arts on August 8, 1828: fewer than 1,000 candidates were accepted that year in all of France. He enrolled at the Faculty of Law in Paris. But not being a man to be satisfied with university courses, however prestigious, he frequented several student societies where he forged strong intellectual friendships.

The following year, Emmanuel did not return to university. He preferred to continue his studies on his own at the family château in Lavagnac. In October 1831, he entered the Montpellier seminary where he spent a year and a half and received

minor orders (porter, acolyte, lector, and exorcist) on June 1, 1833. During the summer, he decided not to return to the seminary and considered several locations, including Paris and Solesmes. His parents convinced him to complete his training in Rome. (4)

Stay in Rome

Rome was a university city for the young priest D'Alzon. Later, the Eternal City would also become the place to obtain official recognition of the Congregation, report on the life of the diocese on behalf of the Bishop of Nîmes, honor the Japanese martyrs (1862), participate in the First Vatican Council (November 1, 1869 - July 18, 1870), accompany the pilgrims of Nîmes (1861 and twice in 1877), honor the memory of Pius IX, and acclaim the election of Leo XIII (February 20, 1878). In November 1833, Rome was the city he chose to deepen his theology and prepare for the ministry.

He enrolled at the Roman College (5) - today's Gregorian University - for a few courses, and very briefly, from December 1833 to Easter 1834. Faster than his Italian colleagues, he preferred to study at his own pace and especially with renowned and highly learned private tutors. Two advantages enabled him to do so. The first was his name, which opened all doors for him: his aristocratic background and family connections facilitated contacts. The second was his personal discipline: D'Alzon cultivated a true taste for intellectual work. He could read from morning to night and in several languages, and ardently pursue a particularly demanding personal program.

Brief Time at the Roman College

Abbé d'Alzon initially attended courses at the Roman College,



Father d'Alzon with Paulin Garnier, photographed by Disdéri, around 1852-1853.

the first study center of the Society of Jesus, founded by Saint Ignatius (1491-1556) on the model of the University of Paris (6). He was attracted to the moral theology of Stefano Gabaria. But he put aside Giuseppe Bruniati's Sacred Scripture and enrolled in two courses in dogmatic theology. The lessons were attended by about 80 students, mostly Italian. The registers for the year 1833-1834 mention the name D'Alzon Emmanuel, opposite which we read: *abbiit sub initium jaunarii*, "withdrew at the beginning of January (1834)"! (7) The file specifies that he is "gallus" (French) but it is empty: no notes, no mention of attendance or discipline. Indeed, from Easter 1834,

he definitively abandoned the courses and became a perfectly independent student, free from any academic obligations.

D'Alzon was undoubtedly disappointed with the teaching provided at the Collège Romain, which was too similar to that of Montpellier. He even missed the class of his former professor, Mr. Ginoulhiac. "*As for the form, it's always the same,*" he wrote. At the time, teachers dictated their lessons to students, and this way of studying theology was not enough for him. Quite critical of teachers, he was sensitive to their pedagogy: "*I will take two courses in dogma and one in morality; we usually take a course in sacred scripture, but I find that* ►



Faculty of Law attended by Emmanuel d'Alzon, located on Place du Panthéon in Paris

the one who does it is too obscure and too diffuse. In short, I am not at all happy with it."

A "custom-made course"

He was guided by renowned theologians, all supporters of Lamennais, who gave him a letter of introduction for each of them. His private teachers were Cardinal Ludovico Micara (1775-1847), a Capuchin; Father Benedetto-Maurizio Olivieri (1769-1845), Master of the Dominican Order and Commissioner to the Holy Office; Father Antonio-Francesco Orioli (1778-1852), Superior General of the Cordeliers; Father Gioacchino Ventura (1792-1861), former Superior General of the Theatines, and Father Giuseppe-Maria Maz-

zetti (1778-1850), Carmelite. Their affiliation with Lamennais's ideas would pose a real problem for his ordination. Abbé d'Alzon had to deny a letter of denunciation - he suspected the Bishop of Le Puy - and remove all suspicion by reaffirming his allegiance to the Pope. Evoking the state of mind that had inhabited him since the condemnation of Lamennais, (8) he wrote on August 23 to Abbé Fabre, his former professor in Montpellier:

"I study every day and I confirm myself in a few maxims, the importance of which my journey has made me understand. The first is that one must always work for Rome, sometimes without Rome, never against Rome."

Studies Linked to the Vow of Poverty

The way Emmanuel organized and carried out his theological studies is important for understanding his vision of formation at the Assumption. For him, studies are primarily linked to the obligation to work, whether manually or intellectually. (9) With regard to intellectual work, the study of theology is rooted in our desire for God and to serve His Church. The desire for God, the taste for study, and apostolic zeal are consistent in the Instruction of 1873: *"We need saints, but saints enlightened by Catholic knowledge."* (10)

Studies prepare for the apostolate. Whether the mission is pastoral or educational in nature,



L'abbé d'Alzon vers 1838-1840, daguerréotype.

1) During the formators' meeting in Nîmes (November 2024), Father Nicolas Tarralle shared a work dedicated to this subject: "The Apostolate of Studies 150 Years after Father d'Alzon." The text evokes the 150th anniversary of the 8th Circular on the Novitiate (November 8, 1874).

2) Siméon Vailhé, Emmanuel d'Alzon Vol. 1, p. 24.

3) Ibid., p. 25.

4) Letter from D'Alzon to D'Esgrigny, September 19, 1833.

5) At that time, the Roman College was not located at No. 4 Piazza della Pilotta, where our Assumptionist brothers study today, but at No. 4 Piazza Del Collegio Romano, the current Ennio Quirino Visconti High School. 6) Cf. Letters of Father d'Alzon, vol. A, pp. 457, 460, 464, 547, 548.

7) AA Informations, December 2000, no. 6, pages 7-8: "Father Emmanuel d'Alzon studying in Rome, 1833-1835."

8) By Pope Gregory XVI, June 25, 1834: Encyclical Letter *Singulari nos* "Condemnation of the indifferentism and liberalism of Lamennais and of his book *Paroles d'un croyant*"

9) "I must study, because it is a debt," ES 633.

10) ES 188.

11) ES 1036. Excerpt from the 1870 conference on the Church.

12) ES 468. 18th meditation of 1878.

13) ES 212.

14) Nicolas Tarralle, op. cit. "What should one study? Father d'Alzon then re-specifies the main points of a training plan: 1° Jesus Christ (...) 2° Dogmatic theology (...) 3° Morality (...) 4° The Bible, and Jesus Christ in the Bible (...) 5° The Holy Fathers (...) 6° History (...) 7° Canon Law, which relates above all to the study of the Church considered from a social point of view. 8° Finally, literature and aesthetics, which must be imbued with the Christian spirit." (ES 635-636)"

intellectual work is a requirement imposed on all and not the privilege or leisure of a few: "If you want to accomplish the work of the Assumption, you must study. I make it an obligation of you as a soldier of the Church." (11)

Thus, any failure to study marks a poverty that is reflected in the mediocrity of the apostolate: "Unfortunately, we study little, very little, and the consequence is that we teach badly." (12)

Study not for oneself, but for others

The time has come to recall the famous phrase of Fr. d'Alzon, taken from the 4th circular of June 1874, frequently quoted but sometimes out of context: "When one no longer studies in

the Congregation, it is because it will have served its purpose and will have received God's curse." (13)

Our Founder has just reminded us that studies are part of an apostolic project centered on charity and personal sanctification. It is not just a matter of acquiring additional skills or a diploma, but of associating with good authors: reading the Bible, becoming truly familiar with Augustine and Thomas Aquinas; know the spiritual masters (John of the Cross, Francis de Sales, Bonaventure and Alphonsus Liguori) and discover the lives of the saints (14).

A curriculum adapted to each student's abilities

After the postulancy, all Assumptionists must study philosophy and theology. But not all follow the same curriculum. Three years of philosophy and four of theology for some, reduced to one year of philosophy and two years of theology for the "less capable young professed."

But above all, it is important to ensure that progress in the divine sciences goes hand in hand with the development of the virtues: faith, hope, and especially charity:

"The master, charged with directing during the scholasticate, will constantly remind them that they must above all cultivate within themselves the three theological virtues, the basis of their relationship with God [...]. The professors, or, if our students are attending a theology faculty, our tutors, will strive to ensure that progress in the divine sciences and the development of the virtues related to the subject of this science keep pace with each other." One of the essential characteristics of our studies will be the union of the practice of virtues and science." (15)

Consequently, a religious who neglected his personal sanctification would be sent back to the short cycle "whatever his intellectual means" and would therefore find himself "unable to participate in the General Chapter."

For D'Alzon, theology does not transmit abstract knowledge but rather God's thoughts and ways of acting. In the last ten years of his life, he became increasingly aware that it must also allow him to reach more popular circles, welcome new profiles from the alumnats, accompany pilgrims in their popular devotion, and animate social works (orphanages

and schools), not without tension with the more elitist aims of the beginning of his foundation and his desire to establish a doctrinal congregation.

Study and Have Others Study

The goal of studies is to introduce an ever more intimate knowledge of God. This objective seems very important to him for future priests, because no one can transmit what they have not received and patiently absorbed:

"The obligation to educate oneself when one can is much more serious than is generally thought. The priesthood perishes through a certain ignorance, the ignorance of knowing how to speak of God." (16)

Working for the coming of the Kingdom is inseparable from studies, which become very useful when it comes to guiding souls. If a religious does not work with his hands, he is obliged to study, otherwise he will not properly live his vow of poverty. Since work wards off all kinds of temptations, Father d'Alzon emphasizes that studies also foster chastity and obedience since they encourage humility "against all vain curiosity." (17)

Through study, the religious sanctifies himself and prepares for his future. Through his dedication to intellectual work, he develops his pastoral skills and prepares himself for preaching, teaching, or spiritual guidance. For D'Alzon, who never forgets that God has placed his talents in each of us, study constitutes a battle to be won over laziness, lack of apostolic zeal, mediocrity, and even ingratitude.

No Race for Diplomas

The Founder asked the brothers leaving the novitiate to

always return to the foundations of study: humility before the Mystery of God and charity towards others. Studies and diplomas were a means, not the end of the religious:

"Do not think that we have great esteem for the science established by university degrees; we endure them in the same spirit as the need to grant divorce to the Hebrews (...). It was a Pope who established the degrees, since then; the devil has turned them against the Church."

The most gifted religious began their studies upon hearing this warning from the founder. To the brothers destined for short courses, D'Alzon offered another piece of advice:

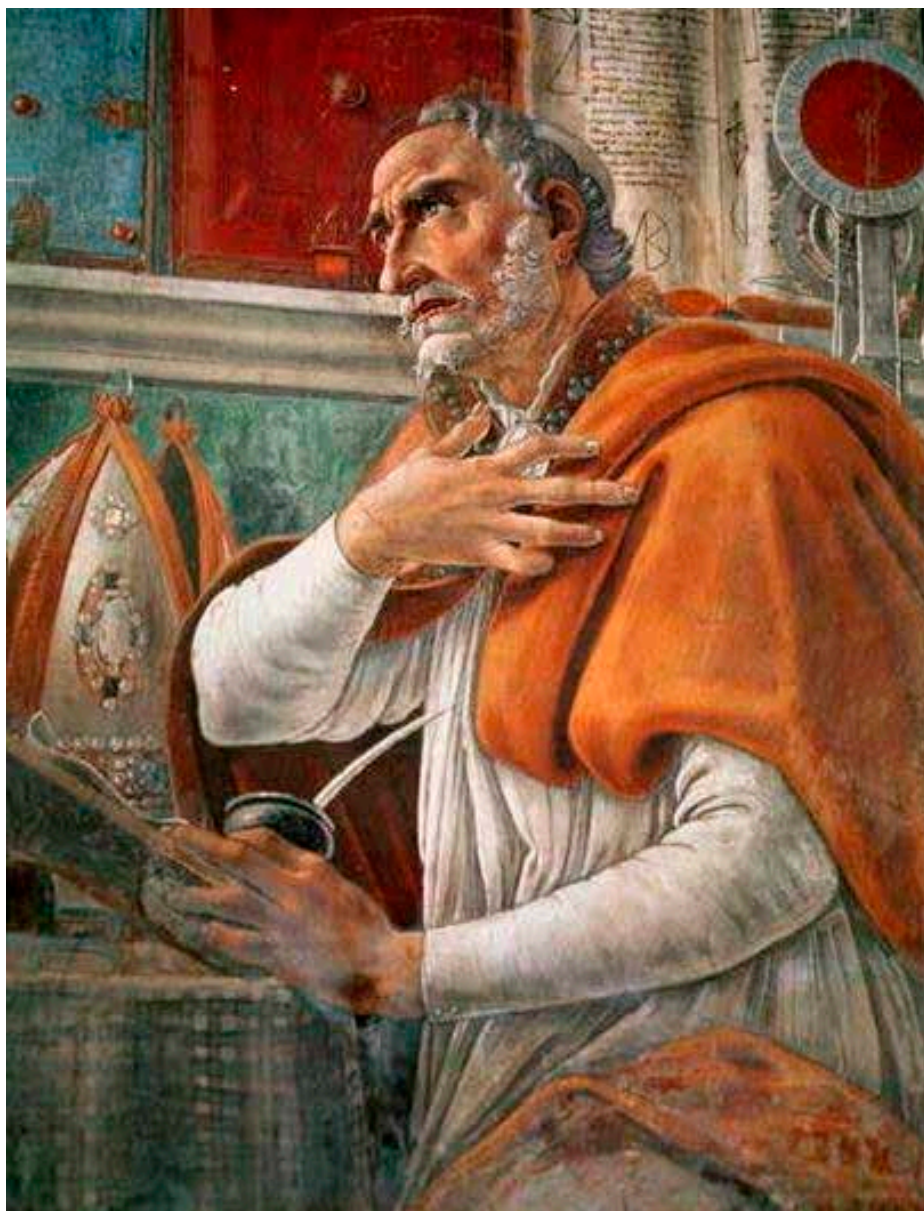
"You are not very capable, [so] don't waste a minute of your time, occupy your mind, keep it occupied every day." »

No contempt in these words from our Founder, but rather an encouragement to give the best of oneself, including in religious formation. And a prediction representing the finest compliment for a disciple of Saint Augustine: "You will worship the God of science less, you will worship the God of humility more." (18)

Conclusion

Father d'Alzon wanted a doctrinal congregation. He conceived of a "family," while foreseeing that one day it would undoubtedly become a "people." (19) Today, we are there: some 300 religious are in formation. And it would be difficult to offer everyone a "customized path."

But let us retain his concern for a formation that allows each person to integrate their vocation as a consecrated person and to cultivate their own talents within the congregation. Let us



15) Excerpt from the 1874 Note on the subject of “higher studies for religious.” » ES 1096.

16) ES 634.

17) ES 634-635.

18) ES 590. Saint Augustine: “Adde ergo scientiae caritatem, et utilis erit scientia; non per se, sed per caritem” *Associate science with charity, and science will be useful to you, not by itself, but through charity.*” (In Io. Ev. tr. 27, 5).

19) ES 187

20) ES 1097

Saint Augustin : « Adde ergo scientiae caritatem, et utilis erit scientia; non per se, sed per caritem » (Aug., Io. eu. tr 27,5)

‘Associate charity with science, and science will be useful to you, not by itself, but through charity’. (In Io. Ev. tr. 27, 5)

remember his demand for an integral formation, and more particularly, a theological formation oriented toward the practice of virtues, the apostolate, and the mission of the Church.

Finally, let us consider his apparent instability during the years of formation as an invitation to delve deeper into other realities and discover other Churches. His law studies in Paris, his studious retreat in Lavagnac, the time spent at the Montpellier seminary, his experience at the heart of the universal Church in Rome... all of this shaped the young D’Alzon and

enabled the founding of the Congregation.

His academic journey should give us a taste for inculturation, the need to base our discovery of theology on a human and personal experience. It opens the way for us to share our cultures, our languages, our missions, and above all, our passion for the Mystery of God, whose immutable science is as alive and fruitful as His love:

“If students did not immerse themselves ardently in sacred science, perhaps we should remove them from it, since they would

certainly become even more disgusted with it later.

Teachers will make it clear that sacred science is not a dead science, lost in abstractions floating in the winds, variable like human thought, but a science as immutable as God, luminous like His Word, alive and fruitful like His love.” (20)

**Fr. Vincent Leclercq Postulator
General**

André Scrima, Another Conception of Unity

Defended in 2021, Fr. Iulian Dancă's thesis on this important 20th-century Romanian Orthodox theologian has just been published. Here is a presentation.

Fr. Iulian Dancă's doctoral studies were immediately identified with a vocation: the search for unity, whether in the form of friendship, encounter in faith, or in the world of culture, through the dialogue of values and ideas. The Orthodox monk André Scrima, on whom he wrote his thesis, gave him a key to understanding unity at the tense intersection between the horizontal of history and the vertical of transcendence. The voluminous book that summarizes his research (1) shares this key.

First observation: the author engages in a genuine process of understanding and not a simple textual commentary. Even a philosopher like Heidegger becomes the starting point for the questions he formulates. Aristotle, Hegel, Celan, and even the Greek tragedians intersect when ideas or words become indecisive or vacillating. Iulian Dancă's bibliography thus indicates the steps taken to understand his endeavor: the possibility of an encounter within an indeterminate and ineffable horizon, yet profoundly present.

Apophatism designates this method by which man approaches and internally identifies with that which surpasses him, even to the point of supreme strangeness: an "acute" approach to ultimate estrangement. This was, moreover, the subject of Father Scrima's undergraduate thesis, and subsequently the idea that informed his entire reflection.

A connoisseur of theological tradi-



Fr. Iulian Dancă.

tion, Iulian Dancă returns, in a profound work of thought, to the things he speaks of. And in an exceptional form of friendship, he learns, page by page, to see the meaning of patristic texts through André Scrima's eyes, to dialogue with them, respond to them with his own reflections, and, through this encounter, give a face to the realities above. Father Scrima expresses apophaticism in a key word: itinerancy, an incessant movement, aroused and sustained by the irresistible call of a world beyond. Iulian Dancă articulates it in the context of monastic life (Eastern and Western) as the embodiment of the apophatic experience.

But, through apophaticism, the overall intention of the book is to find a model for encounter between religions. An ecumenism that is not "legal" or "political," but spiritual, which leads traditions to communicate symphonically about how they respond to the call of the transcendent. The apophatic unity of religions is, beyond all form, a mystical and inner reality.

The Second Vatican Council, where Fr. Scrima represented Ecumenical



Fr. André Scrima.

Patriarch Athenagoras, was one of those moments when the sense of rediscovered unity was made possible, not by skillful diplomats, but by providential figures who opened their ears to the call of the infinite. With talent and faith in the power of what he writes, Iulian Dancă bears witness to the truth of this event, with a guide at his side: Fr. Scrima, the newly found friend, embraced within the ultimate horizon of all friendship, namely the shared search for that which can never be grasped by the mind alone. The relationship between two seekers becomes fruitful when a third party, the Spirit itself, is established through their encounter. Iulian Dancă's book shows that this is truly possible.

Prof. Ioan Alexandru TOFAN
(University of Iași, Romania)

¹ Mihai-Iulian Dancă, *Experiența apofatică a unității în opera lui André Scrima*, Ed. Ratio et Revelatio, Oradea, 2024, 672 pages.

Bruno Chenu, an Assumptionist Vision of the Church

Father Nicolas Tarralle, on assignment in Ouagadougou, has just brilliantly defended a thesis in Lyon honoring an Assumptionist theologian who was also a great journalist.

As is often the case, the title is complex: “*Bruno Chenu, 1972-1987: A Conciliar Ecclesiology of the Kingdom for the Cultural Conversion of the Churches. A Theological and Biographical Approach to an Ecumenical Geography of the Church*”! Fortunately, the content of the thesis by Nicolas Tarralle, a French Assumptionist serving education in Burkina Faso, and the presentation he made on March 12 at the Catholic University of Lyon provide the necessary clarity to assess its scope.

The period studied should be noted from the outset: it is limited to Bruno Chenu’s “Lyon years” (1942-2003), marked by his doctorate in 1972 on the World Council of Churches and then teaching—especially in ecclesiology—at the Grand Séminaire and the Catholic University of that city. But Nicolas Tarralle takes care to integrate into his study the young academic’s many commitments: mixed marriages, the Dombes Group, the Justice & Peace Commission, Éditions du Centurion... In his lectures as in these various venues, he elaborates and implements his vision of a Church, summarized by N. Tarralle as being “of God” and “of men,” both “mission” and “community.”

Bruno Chenu’s life and work are thus marked by a great coherence: the unity of a person and a life in serving the Unity of the Church in its denominational



Fr. Nicolas Tarralle (3rd from right), surrounded by his thesis jury.

(ecumenism was the common thread of his intellectual and spiritual journey) and cultural diversity: his fervent passion for Black theology, from the United States and then from Africa, led him to engage in dialogue with all the Churches of the South. Our new doctor summarizes this by saying that Bruno Chenu thus developed “*a geography of the tension between the universal Church and the denominational and local Churches, which is both theological and contextualized.*”

Three perspectives thus emerge: a broad view extending to the salvation of humankind, an intermediate view of the tensions specific to the Churches, and a narrower view of the personal encounter with God. It was B. Chenu’s vision, structured in this way, that enabled the Dombes Group to consider “identity as conversion” in a document that has remained famous (*For the Conversion of Churches*, 1987).

It is an understatement to say that the jury (1) validated Father Nicolas’s research work, awar-

ding him the highest honors of this Faculty: “Very good, with the unanimous congratulations of the jury!” Before a large audience—some sixty people, including friends from Lyon and African colleagues, attended the defense, not to mention dozens of online viewers (2)—he requested the publication of all or part of the thesis, hoping that the study of Bruno Chenu’s work would be continued during his “Parisian” years, marked particularly by his responsibilities as a journalist. Attention all enthusiasts!

1) Chaired by Marie-Hélène Robert, it included the thesis director, Jean-François Chiron, as well as Michel Kubler, a.a., who was Bruno Chenu’s student and then assistant at the Faculty of Theology in Lyon before succeeding him as Religious Editor-in-Chief of *La Croix* in Paris.

2) The recording of the defense is available here: <https://www.youtube.com/live/EUE45JmLS1E>

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Our deceased brothers

† Fr. **Paul CALAS**, of the Layrac community (European Province), died on February 17, 2025, in Layrac, France. His funeral was celebrated on February 21, in the chapel of the Priory, followed by a burial in the cemetery of Layrac. He was 92.

† Fr. **Paul O'CONNOR**, of the community of Kenepuru (European Province), died on March 1, 2025, in Porirua (New Zealand). His funeral was celebrated on March 11, in the parish church of Porirua, followed by a burial in the cemetery of Whenua Tapu. He was 76.

