

Word from the Postulator

A total gift of self to God! What justifies the presence of this theme when treating the cause of Fr. d'Alzon's beatification? During the meeting of the International Secretariat for the Postulation, held in Rome from May 17-19, 2016, the first of the proposed objectives was to **know and make known** the Servant of God. And one of the concrete means identified to achieve this goal consisted in spreading the thought and teachings found in his writings. This brings us back to the conviction that Venerable Fr. Emmanuel d'Alzon is a sign of holiness for us, and that he continues to speak to us still today as a man of faith, and to teach us by his personal witness and by his multifaceted apostolic action.

So we are speaking here of an important aspect of the Christian life and the consecrated life since it touches upon the quality and depth of our commitment to follow Christ. Fr. d'Alzon is raising the question, therefore, of the meaning of our total gift to Christ in our consecration to the religious life, a question that is also shared by all Christians by virtue of their baptism. We thought it would make sense in this issue to recall what he says to us about the profound meaning of **the total gift of self to God**, understood as an **ongoing process** of the experience of the Christian life and of the consecrated life.

Fr. Julio Navarro Román, A.A.

Total gift of self to God

The dynamic of self-giving is fundamental for every person who professes faith in God. This is the case of those who have chosen to follow Christ by consecrating their lives to him, such as the founders of religious congregations. God entrusted to each of them a specific mission to be carried out in a well defined context. The initiative, therefore, comes from God. They have died to self in their fidelity to Christ.

Fr. d'Alzon was also called by God, and he acknowledged this call. His experience of religious life, as it is connected to the question of the total gift of self to God, reveals to us the major preoccupation of a *Spiritual Master of the 19th Century* (translator's note: this title refers to a famous book on Fr. d'Alzon by Fr. Athanase sage, A.A., entitled *Un Maître spirituel du 19ème siècle*). A close reading of d'Alzon *Spiritual Writings* allows us to grasp his

preoccupation with leading an exemplary consecrated life, that is to say, with the ideal of a gift of self to God as an ongoing experience or process of the religious life.

We see here a twofold conviction. On the one hand, as a religious, Fr. d'Alzon lived a life of total gift of self to God and translated that commitment into concrete acts: throughout his life he was faithful to what he promised God. On the other hand, he explicitly spoke of this experience in terms of gift of self in connection with the religious life.

It is clear that Fr. d'Alzon's spiritual adventure was characterized by three dimensions to which he keeps coming back: that of a Christian, of a priest, and of a religious. In his life these three dimensions were invariably intertwined.

(Fr. Jean-Marie Vianney Katabu Kavunga, A.A.)

In the words of Fr.d'Alzon

« *The gift of self.*

This is what religious life consists in, but there are many ways of self-giving. A religious gives himself to the point of perfection ».

(Spiritual Writings/ES, p. 1107)

What does Fr. d'Alzon teach us

The experience of Fr. Emmanuel d'Alzon

The gift of self as a reality of the experience of the consecrated life remained a major preoccupation of Fr. d'Alzon. An analysis of an instruction on religious life, from the year 1874 (ES 1107-1109), shows how, by inference, he clearly relates the experience of religious life with that of the total gift of self.

Fr. d'Alzon begins this instruction with a problematic that's quite clear, expressed in the first two sentences of his treatment. On the gift of self, he writes, «*This is what religious life consists in, but there are many ways of self-giving. A religious gives himself to the point of perfection* » (ES 1107).

Three questions might be posed based on this problematic. 1) For Fr. d'Alzon in what does the total gift of self to God consist in religious life? 2) As one responsible for a religious family, what did he think the day-to-day life of a religious would look like in the light of the gift of self? 3) What is the *goal* of this gesture of self-giving made by a religious? This problematic brings to light the train of thought of Fr. d'Alzon on the idea and meaning of the gift of self in connection with religious life.

A religious' everyday experience, an expression of the gift of self

For Venerable Fr. d'Alzon, what is essential consists in the conscious and responsible giving at the level of religious practice and fidelity to the mission received from God. Therefore, from the very beginning, Fr. d'Alzon presents a *specific definition* of the gift of self, «*Religious life consists in this* ». As a result, there clearly appears this conviction of Fr. d'Alzon: religious life constitutes a fundamental

experience of self-giving.

In fact, the gift is not only a founding and fundamental gesture of religious life, but it is also to be perceived as an existential dynamic of this experience. We find here, if only briefly, but significantly, the *definition* of religious life as «*the gift of self*». The day-to-day lived experience of a religious is the expression of this gift. And in doing so, Fr. d'Alzon expresses an entire lifetime of experience.

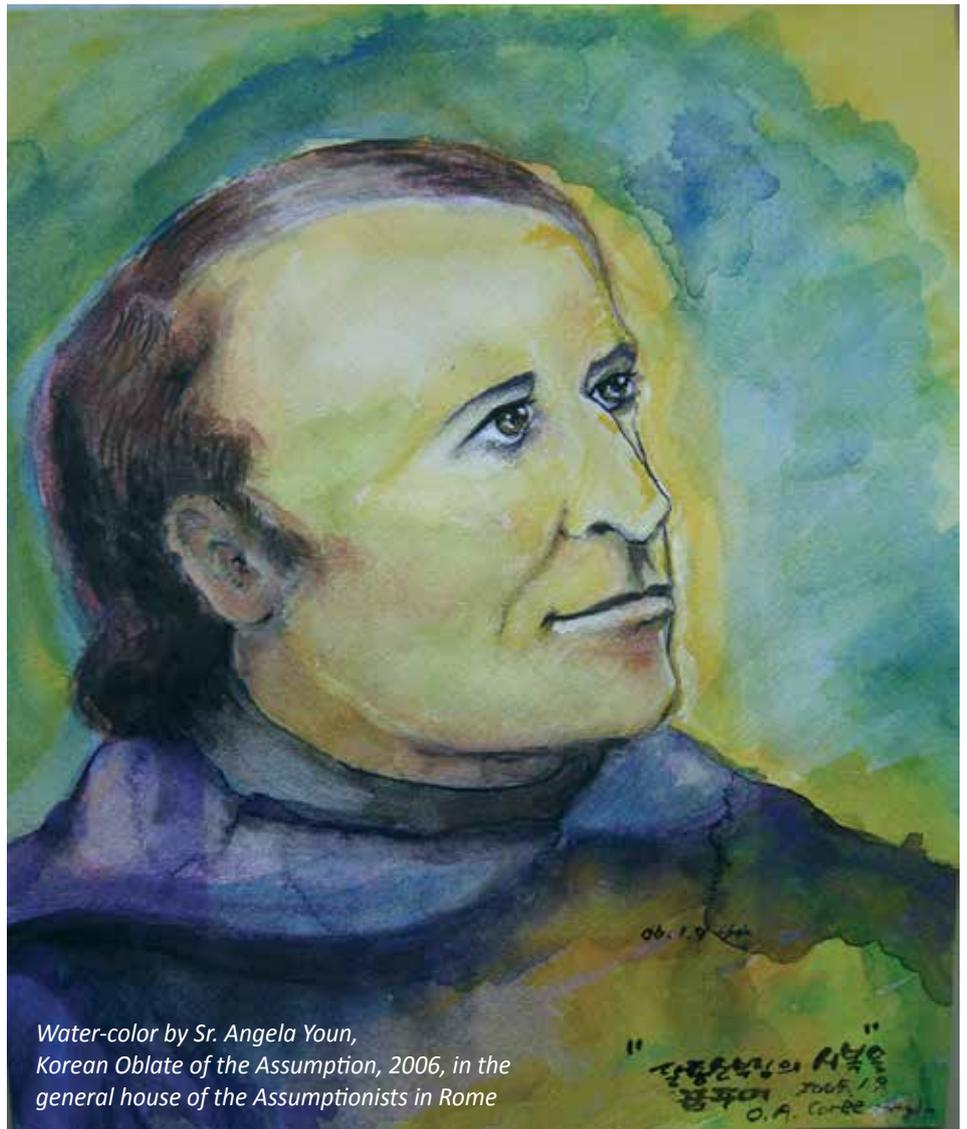
Religious profession, the founding moment of self-giving

In general, religious life is an experience of perpetual giving. But this experience always has

a concrete starting-point, and therefore one must recall that at a given moment in one's life, a candidate to religious life makes a commitment by first profession by which he begins a new phase of his relationship with God.

Based on this event, one can affirm that the *best gift of self* occurs in the total gift to God. In integrating this dynamic of gift into his life, a religious demonstrates fidelity to the promise made to the Lord and to the mission received. Therefore, profession, the founding moment of a life dedicated to following Christ, is in and of itself a gift of self.

Before this concrete moment



Water-color by Sr. Angela Youn,
Korean Oblate of the Assumption, 2006, in the
general house of the Assumptionists in Rome

in one's spiritual journey, one must discern God's will in one's life. If the foundation of the Congregation represents an act of obedience to God's will, and if, by actually founding it, Fr. d'Alzon is cooperating with this divine will, the gift of self is the fruit of God's will and the work of the Holy Spirit.

Going to the heart of the problematic of the gift of self to God

In the wake of his quite explicit thesis (*this is what religious life consists in*), Fr. d'Alzon immediately proceeds to go to *the heart of the problematic* when he affirms, «[...] but there are many ways of self-giving » (ES 1107). Religious life is only one of these ways of giving oneself to God, since, in addition to religious life, there is the life of every baptized Christian and the life of the priest. But, we believe that, when Fr. d'Alzon speaks of these *different ways*, he is focusing rather on the ways that religious themselves bear witness to their commitment.

In effect, religious life, from all appearances, is a total gift of self. However, there are different ways allowing one to live this experience out. Our hypothesis is that what is

essential in Fr. d'Alzon's analysis is based on his everyday experience (at the time he wrote this, he had thirty years of religious life under his belt and forty years as a priest). For him a religious gives of himself totally, «*to the point of perfection*» (ES 1107). From this we understand that in his eyes religious profession constituted the beginning of an orientation for the future. The gesture of total self-giving is made from the beginning of one's life to the end. For Fr. d'Alzon, first profession already constituted «*the moment of committing oneself forever* » (cf. ES 331).

A responsible gift

This perspective leads us to say that religious profession gives a certain orientation to one's life. If religious profession is lived well, it requires a radical renunciation. From this point of view, the major focus of Fr. d'Alzon's reflection is responsible giving and the carrying out of God's will.

Based on this problematic articulated by Fr. d'Alzon, we can see that the total gift of self and the call to perfection

characterizes well the commitment of religious. And the *synthesis* of all experience of religious life consists in the *dynamic* of the total gift of self that should end up in holiness. This is possible only if a religious remains faithful to the promise made to the Lord in giving himself entirely.

Brought about by profession (first and final), the gesture of self-gift implies availability, desire to give of self and to maintain one's commitment until the end. This gesture grows firmer with experience and characterizes the life of a religious.

(Fr. Jean-Marie Vianney Katabu Kavunga, A.A., *Don total de soi à Dieu*, Rome 2007, p. 37-42).

A young man has given himself to God. He understood the terms of this transaction. He knew much suffering lay ahead. He realised that, despite his weakness and frequent stumbles, vigorous efforts would have to be made. So he gave himself, deliberately and unconditionally. The Devil has, indeed, tempted him, but has not overcome him. This young man has transcended human motivation. His faith and his courage have enabled him to endure. With the eyes of faith he gazed upon God and Jesus Christ and he said: "Yes, I will go". He made this decision after many an inward struggle. But having said, "I give myself," he was true to his word because he is an honourable young man. Yes, religious must, indeed, be honourable in their dealings with God.... An honourable religious may be tempted to opt for an easier life, but he will repel this temptation. He has promised God not only the fruit but the tree. And this religious is like the wise man who built his house on the rock. He cannot be shaken – and it's because he has given himself the right way (E. d'Alzon, E.S., 1108-1109).

Portrait in the style of Eastern icons, Mexico, in the Assumptionist parish of Emperatriz de América.



News from the Secretariats

- The Secretariat of the United States remains very active in the promotion of the Cause of our Founder. The team meets regularly and follows a pre-established calendar with religious and lay-people representing every community and the works of the Assumption in this country. The last meeting took place on October 20. **They are preparing a pilgrimage, « In the footsteps of Fr. d'Alzon ».**

- This year the lay Assumptionists of Spain will celebrate the anniversary of Fr. d'Alzon's death on November 12, a full day's celebration, where time for prayer, reflection, and refreshment has been planned. They are also preparing the « **the Week of the Assumptionist and of Fr. d'Alzon** », from **November 21-27**, with an exposition of photos, books, and magazines on the Assumption in the world.

- The team of the Secretariat in Buenos Aires sent us an report, indicating the cases of the ill who had recently been commended to Fr. d'Alzon's intercession; they prayed the novena for them and visited their families. More than half of them are young children. They composed a **special prayer to commend children to Fr. d'Alzon**.

- The diocesan Secretariat in Nîmes met on November 9; Fr. Julio Navarro, Postulator, was present. The main activity of the Secretariat at this moment is to motivate pastors of the diocese so that they will make Fr. d'Alzon better known to their parishioners. **A new novena text** is being prepared in collaboration with Br. Jean-Michel Brochec.

Favors and graces received

I would like to send this short letter for the cause of Fr. Emmanuel d'Alzon's beatification. While I was visiting the basilica of Lourdes in Santos Lugares, I approached the tabernacle, in great distress; I joined a group of people who were praying.

On the pew there was small card with the prayer for Fr. d'Alzon's beatification. I asked what it was and I began to pray. I would now like to bear witness to the grace received from God through Fr. d'Alzon's intercession.

My only daughter was quite angry with me; I was feeling bad, really sad, because I hadn't seen her in a long time, as well as my grandchildren. I spend several weeks homebound, without leaving. Once I began praying to Fr. d'Alzon, the pain in my heart diminished and I once again began to leave the house and to feel happier. I prayed until the prayer worked on her and she came back to the house. I am very happy. I am thankful. May it please God that many people, like me, be able to witness Fr. d'Alzon's beatification soon.

I greet anyone who may read this note wishing them many blessings. I also wish that this saint may soon be known by all of humanity.

(Esther, Santa Fe, Argentina, April 7, 2016)



Large Christ in ivory, claimed to be from Charles V, offered to Fr. d'Alzon by Bishop de Chaffoy

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