

~ ASSUMPTIONIST RESEARCH COLLECTION ~
N° 3



ORIGINS

OF THE ASSUMPTION FAMILY

FOUNDERS AND FOUNDESSES, FOUNDATIONS,
INTUITIONS, RELATIONS AND DISAGREEMENTS

ACTS OF THE INTER-ASSUMPTION COLLOQUIUM
PARIS, JANUARY 6-10, 2004



FRENCH EDITION EDITED BY BERNARD HOLZER, A.A.
ENGLISH EDITION EDITED BY ROBERT J. FORTIN, A.A.

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Contents

Introduction	7
English Editor's Note	7
Significance of the Colloquium	9
Word of Welcome	15
Overview of French and European Society at the Time of the Foundations	19
The Founders of the Assumption Family, Their times and challenges (1830–1900)	19
Discussion	47
The Church in the 19 th Century, Its Geopolitics and Strategies . . .	55
Foundation of the Congregations belonging to the Assumption Family and their Respective Founders and Foundresses	73
Foundation of the Religious of the Assumption	73
Relations between the Assumptionists and the Women's Congregations of the Assumption Family	105
Foundation of the Oblates of the Assumption	119
Foundation of the Little Sisters of the Assumption	147
Foundation of the Orants of the Assumption	171
Discussion	201
Original Intuitions: Spirit and Spirituality of the Assumption Family	215
The Religious of the Assumption	215
The Augustinians of the Assumption	225
The Oblates of the Assumption	227
The Little Sisters of the Assumption	239

Origins of the Assumption Family

The Orants of the Assumption	259
Discussion	281
Disagreements and Difficulties at the Beginning	291
Problems of Government and of Relations between the Religious of the Assumption and the other Congregations of the Assumption	291
The Priory of Nîmes Affair	335
Relations between the Oblates and the other Congregations of the Assumption	343
Disagreement between the Religious [Sisters] of the Assumption and the Oblates of the Assumption about the name “Oblate” . . .	355
Disagreement between the Religious [Sisters] of the Assumption and the Oblates of the Assumption about a boarding school in Nîmes (1873)	363
Discussion	371
When Mother Marie of Christ (Religious of the Assumption) be- came an Oblate of the Assumption	373
The Near Eastern Mission and the Foundation of the Oblates of the Assumption	381
Relations between the Little Sisters of the Assumption and the Assumptionists	399
The Orants of the Assumption	421
New insight into Father Picard’s categorical temperament	441
Synthesis	447
Conclusion and Dismissal	453
Bibliography	461
Initials and Abbreviations	480

Introduction

English Editor's Note and Acknowledgments

The present work is part of a 3-volume French collection entitled *Recherches Assumption (Assumptionist Research)*:

- Vol. 1.** *Assumptionist Missionary Adventure (L'aventure missionnaire assumptionniste)*—Acts of the Colloquium on History held on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the Congregation of the Augustinians of the Assumption, Lyon-Valpré, November 22–26, 2000, published in 2005.
- Vol. 2.** *The Assumptionists and Russia (Les Assumptionnistes et la Russie) 1903–2003*—Acts of the Colloquium on History, Rome, November 20–22, 2003, French edition, Bayard Presse, Paris 2005, Russian Edition, Moscow 2005.
- Vol. 3** *Origins of the Assumption Family, Founders and Foundresses, Foundations and Intuitions, Relations and Disagreements (Les origines de la Famille de l'Assumption, Fondateurs et Fondatrices, Fondations, Intuitions et Différends)*—Acts of the Inter-Assumption Colloquium, Paris, January 6–10, 2004. French edition, Bayard Presse, Paris, 2005. English edition 2007.

All of the talks contained herein were delivered in French. Those given by members of the religious communities of women were first translated by members of their respective communities, except those given by the Orants of the Assumption which were translated by Father Leo Brassard, A.A. The talks given by Assumptionists and by the guest lecturers were translated by the undersigned who also revised and edited all the other translations. He wishes to thank all who contributed to this edition.

Origins of the Assumption Family

Robert J. Fortin, A.A.
Editor of this English edition

June 29, 2007
Assunzionisti
55, Via San Pio V
00165 Rome
Italy

Significance of the Colloquium

BERNARD HOLZER

The preparation of this Colloquium was not simple. The determination of the Superiors General and their Councils as well as the extensive research and collaboration on the part of the Archivists and their collaborators finally made this venture possible, albeit daringly. As stated in the program of the Colloquium:

This Colloquium was wanted by the five General Councils of the Assumption Family in order to re-read the history of our religious families and to clarify the problems that arose in the relations among our congregations in their early days.

This work of remembering and clarifying the past is meant to promote greater communion among the five Assumption families. It does not intend to pass judgment on people but to objectify the important issues involved and the reasons underlying the disagreements that took place, in an historical presentation that takes into account the mentalities of the time. This work will be based on the archives of each congregation.

The major themes around which this Colloquium is organized are those contained in the program that was planned.

A survey of French and European society at the time of the foundations in the 19th century

Several points-of-view were requested in order to help us discover this century which influenced the Founders and Foundresses as well as the foundations of the Assumption Family.

Origins of the Assumption Family

These points-of-view are reflected in the lectures of Louis Secondy, enriched by the contributions of the participants, and of Claude Prudhomme, on the *Church's Geopolitics and Strategics in the 19th Century*, everything further enriched by our visit to the d'Orsay Museum.

The lectures demonstrated a desire to understand a century that is recent, often misunderstood, and sometimes caricatured.

We discovered a fascinating century, dominated in France by the event of the Revolution, a century that was extraordinarily innovative.

It was a Voltairian, rationalistic century that fought against the Church.

It was a century that witnessed society and the Church constantly evolving, often with no models or rules to go by; a century of debates, of repositioning, and of experimentation, but also of problems not yet resolved, “a century of confusion,” as it was characterized.

It was a century of conflict in which the laity got strongly involved, and women exerted their influence and demanded their rights. It was also a century in which the role of the priest and the pope as well as of the theology of the sacrament of Holy Orders was not to be underestimated.

We have understood a little better the Catholic mindset of the time, the answers—including the intransigent ones—the Catholic Church invented in order to respond to the challenges of this century and to redefine its position: “to be part of History in order to make history.”

It was in this century that the Assumption Family was born. It lived in it with a spirit of initiative, creating daring apostolates which it reproduced in other parts of the world.

The Founders of the Congregations of the Assumption Family and the Role of the Founders and Foundresses at the Time of the Foundation

The Founders and Foundresses of the five congregations came across as men and women completely of their time who thought daringly. They were fascinating and often passionate people with fiery temperaments that bound them together in strong and sometimes tumultuous friendships. But, as time went on, these Founders and Foundresses had increasingly closer ties not only among themselves but also with a network of intellectuals, activists, and religious of other congregations. They were completely up-to-date. They

Significance of the Colloquium

communicated among themselves, stimulating and challenging each other as they thought out their respective projects.

The participants in the Colloquium were struck not only by their humility but also by their ambition and their daring in wanting to “regenerate” society and families, “evangelize intelligences” and the poor, and “remake a people of God” . . . to the farthest limits of the world.

The archivists underlined adventures that were, at one and the same time, fully human, spiritual, and mystical, along with their accompanying crises, surely, but also with their daring and their faith.

In the discussions, in addition to the question of the fourth vow, questions arose about how to determine who is a Founder or a Foundress and about the criteria to be used in defining a religious family.

Original intuitions: Spirituality and Spirit of the Assumption Family

Clearly, the spirit of the Assumption Family is rich and multifaceted, and sometimes difficult to formulate. It is characterized by prayer, a search for the will of God, abandonment to God, a desire to leave a stamp on history and on institutions, and formation. It is also characterized by a family spirit and mutual help. The foundations appear to have been the work of God.

Disagreements and Difficulties in the Early Days

After several clarifications were made about Father Pernet’s relations with his congregation, the “Nativity Affair” in Cannes, the “Marie-Gertrude Affair,” and the Cape Town schism, various problems—which were sometimes compounded by rumors, simplistic explanations, or hasty generalizations and which marked the mentalities of our congregations—were presented in all of their complexity, based on archival material, some of which is still unpublished:

- Problems of government and of relations between the Religious Sisters of the Assumption and the other congregations of the Assumption Family.

Origins of the Assumption Family

- The Priory of Nîmes Affair.
- Relations between the Oblates and the other congregations of the Assumption Family.
- The disagreement between the Religious [Sisters] of the Assumption and the Oblates of the Assumption over the boarding school in Nîmes.
- The disagreement between the Religious [Sisters] of the Assumption and the Oblates over the name “Oblate.”
- The Near Eastern Mission and the foundation of the Oblates of the Assumption.
- The relations between the Little Sisters of the Assumption and the Assumptionists over the government and direction of the Congregation.

A lack of clarity about the objectives and ways of directing and governing a congregation, incomprehension, clashes of temperament, delicate relationships between men and women, emergency situations, impatience, associates who were excessive on occasion, gossip . . . all of this must be taken into account in order to disentangle the threads of these crises, which time has allowed us to relativize and which the archives are bringing to light little by little.

A spirit to be Lived, Spheres of Activity to be Pursued

These talks and the exchanges that followed at table, in the evening, and during the breaks were followed with great interest and attention. In the evaluations of the Colloquium, the participants unanimously underlined the climate of listening and of trust, the search for truth in the presentations, and the desire to identify and explain the difficulties encountered by replacing them in their context and their complexity.

Some of the conditions needed in order to re-read the crises were underlined. It was felt and, in fact, experienced during the Colloquium that the following were needed:

- A willingness to listen to each other as well as the type of humility that our Founders and Foundresses had.

Significance of the Colloquium

- Seriousness in our research in order to be as precise and clear as possible.
- A sense of the Church.
- A desire for communion and dialogue in order to rise above the misunderstandings.
- Mutual support.
- Encouragement and friendship despite the crises.
- A spirit of freedom.

This re-reading was also done in Faith.

During the exchanges, several participants noted that God was leading our history, mingling the human and the spiritual as well as frailty and daring. They discerned the Holy Spirit at work in the hearts of human beings. *“Christ is present in the Assumption. He continues to work among us.”*

“What undertaking is not a tissue of misery? God takes all of it and creates a body like Adam’s out of mud. And when his spirit breathes on it, it becomes something beautiful,” wrote Father d’Alzon to Marie-Eugénie of Jesus from Nîmes on March 22, 1853 (B 20231).

Before God, Brothers and Sisters were able to purify the memory of their congregation and to live and celebrate, in a brotherly and sisterly fashion, the reconciliation that comes from Him.

May the readers of these Acts relive this experience in the same fraternal spirit.

Father Bernard Holzer, A.A.
Member of the Colloquium
Coordinating Committee and
of the Editorial staff of these Acts

55, Via San Pio V
00165 Rome, Italy

Origins of the Assumption Family

Word of Welcome

MERCEDES MARTÍNEZ

I wish to welcome each and every participant in this Colloquium on the five Families of the Assumption. The Motherhouse of the Little Sisters of the Assumption is pleased to host the Brothers and Sisters who share with us the same spirituality, who form a spiritual family within the Church, but who nevertheless have different charisms.

This Colloquium is going to allow us to reread the history of our congregations, to deepen our knowledge of each other, to strengthen our relations, and, in so doing, to clear up the difficulties that took place, especially in the early stages of our foundations. Remembering the past always requires an effort, but it is a salvific experience. It is demanding, but it is also liberating.

By this rereading, we wish to clarify and objectivize our history, taking into account the mentality of the period, and to strengthen our fraternal bonds and communion. Without the shadow of a doubt, our Founders and Foundresses will accompany us throughout these days.

You will note in the program that, in addition to the contributions of each congregation, there will be contributions on more general topics which will help us grasp events in their social, political, economic, and religious context, as well as the status of women and of women religious in the society and Church of the 19th century.

The history and reality of each congregation is like sacred ground before which we must take off our shoes as did Moses before the burning bush. It is from this perspective of respect that I dare to invite you to dialogue, to clarify the issues, to listen to the questions, etc.

The prayer, the liturgical celebrations, the group or interpersonal encounters, the conviviality, the meals, and, at the end, the celebration of the Centennial of the death of Father Picard will allow us to strengthen, as I said earlier, the fraternity and communion that exist among us.

Origins of the Assumption Family

Blundine Fougerat, Religious of the Assumption, will be the Secretary.

Bernard Holzer, Augustinian of the Assumption, and Eliane de Montebello, Little Sister of the Assumption, will be the Moderators.

Christine Foulon, Religious of the Assumption, Luisa Drago, Oblate of the Assumption, and Mr. Louis Secondy, historian, will constitute the Animation Committee.

I believe I have nothing else to add, except to express the hope that these days, which we are about to experience and which are taking place at the beginning of the year 2004, following the celebration of the Nativity of Our Lord, will reinforce our passion for the Kingdom and the communion that exists among us, and thus allow us to put into action our common motto, *Thy Kingdom Come*.

Sister Mercedes Martínez
Superior General of the
Little Sisters of the Assumption

57, rue Violet
75015
France

**Overview of French and
European Society at the Time
of the Foundations (19th
Century)**

The Founders of the Assumption Family, Their times and challenges (1830–1900)

Making good use of history to understand your Founders in their
time, in society, and in the Church

LOUIS SECONDY

Introduction

In opening this colloquium, I will not try to rewrite or summarize the acts of the well-known colloquium of 1980 on *Emmanuel d'Alzon in the society and Church of the 19th century*. Rather, as an historian, I have been asked to help you discover or rediscover the overall context of the period. *What would I have lived had I been a religious or a layman during that period?* Many things were happening at all levels at that time, including extraordinary inventions of major importance. I will therefore describe many facts in order to provide you with an overview of what happened, recalling the main issues, but without going into detail. The various speakers who will follow me, all of them very qualified in their field, will in turn do the same thing, just as all of you will do individually throughout these meetings.

In my introduction, I will make three points in order to put in perspective both the subject-matter and the period.

Understanding the context

This topic would be irrelevant if the life and actions of the founders and of the congregations, either those that were just coming into existence or those that were already in full development, had not been in some way deeply influenced by these events, regardless of whether they took place in France, Europe, or elsewhere in the world.

For example, in 1832, young Father d'Alzon became interested in a group of exiles who arrived in Lunel, in the Department of Le Hérault in southern France, not far from Nîmes. Approximately 600 Polish citizens were directed to this city after the repression that had taken place in Warsaw in the aftermath of the insurrection of November 29, 1830 and the subsequent uprising in Poland.¹ The city was re-occupied by the Russians and the Czar entered the capital, which provoked the exile of 10,000 Polish patriots toward Western Europe: Switzerland, Belgium, and especially France. Among them, were those who landed in Lunel. Young d'Alzon wrote that they showed themselves to be excellent practicing Catholics and models of recollection. The Polish priests, he thought, got along very well with the local clergy. Their faith and piety managed to overcome the prejudices of the Carlists² (legitimists) who were numerous in Lunel. These new arrivals edified the parish by their assiduous Church attendance. *“God grant that this good leaven will be able to energize our masses, which could be excellent if only we knew how to lead them.”* This encounter with the refugees in Lunel, as well as his reaction to Gregory XVI's letter to the Polish bishops,³ reflected his interest in Poland and foreshadowed the one he would always have for this country.⁴

His desire to merge with the Resurrectionist Fathers⁵ is another example

¹Poland was partitioned in 1815. Part of its territory went to Prussia and Austria, but the largest part went to Russia. A first insurrection against Czarist oppression began on November 29, 1830 but was violently put down.

²Charles X abdicated on August 2, 1830 in favor of his grandson, the Duke of Bordeaux. Louis-Philip ascended the throne. The supporters of Charles X, called Carlists or Legitimists, could not tolerate the revolutionaries during the Revolution of July 28–29, 1830.

³Gregory XVI, in the name of established law, condemned the Polish insurrection and told the Polish people that they should submit to the Russians. Emmanuel d'Alzon did not hesitate to write: “Saint Peter, after all, did not ask the prefect of the praetorium to countersign his epistles,” *Le Père d'Alzon et la Pologne*, Acts of the Franco-Polish Colloquium of Montpellier, June 22–24, 1992, Paris, Champion, 1994, p. 139.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Resurrectionist Fathers: a Polish religious congregation with whom the Assumption-

*The Founders of the Assumption Family, Their times and challenges
(1830–1900)*

of this interest. In reflecting later about the failure of his Polish policies, which would have served as the base from which he had hoped to re-conquer Russia for the Catholic Church, he came to believe that Poland, before all else, had made the Church “*the defender of its nationality*” and a weapon against Russification. This example helps us understand the reason why, in preparing this Colloquium, we decided to begin these days with a broad historical overview in order to recall the period in which the various events took place and to replace them in their overall context according to the importance they had in the lives of the founders.

The dates of the various foundations involved and the important choices that guided them are as follows:

1839—As Mother Marie-Eugénie began her foundation in 1839, she was struck especially by the de-Christianization of the ruling classes and the bourgeoisie, and by the inadequacy of secondary education for young girls. We will therefore need to take a closer look at the school question and the education of young girls in France at that time.⁶

1845—The Augustinians of the Assumption. Father d’Alzon was dreaming of a doctrinal religious order. Mother Marie-Eugénie told him of her interest in a congregation dedicated to education. Who more than he would get involved in the school questions of his time? Who would prove to be more innovative and more active in this field?

1865—The Oblates of the Assumption, founded by Father d’Alzon, were meant to be the servants and the elementary schoolteachers in Bulgaria⁷ as well as in France. Their specialty—the missions—was connected to one of the most important aspects of these foundations, viz. education.

1865—The Little Sisters of the Assumption were founded by Father Pernet and Miss Fage. These sisters, nurses to the poor, began to assist the suffering, to help them, and to provide them with health care, without taking any timeout for themselves, and without accepting anything from them in return. This raises the social question and its solutions.

1896—The Orants of the Assumption were founded by Father Picard and Countess Isabelle d’Ursel, born Clermont-Tonnerre. These sisters dedicate their lives to prayer and contemplation, another important area of religious

ists worked in Bulgaria.

⁶Cf. article by Françoise Mayeur and Sister Clare Teresa in *Mère Marie-Eugénie Milleret, fondatrice des Religieuses de l’Assomption*, Acts of the Centennial Colloquium, 1998, Paris, Don Bosco Publications, 1999.

⁷Bulgaria was still until Turkish rule. It became independent in 1878.

Origins of the Assumption Family

life in the 19th century.

To be noted: the considerable amount of time elapsed between each foundation (1839, 1845, 1865, and 1896), and the great differences in the age of the founders who were born in 1810, 1817, 1824, 1842, and 1849. We can already suspect that many changes occurred over the course of these decades.

Changes that took place

Here are a few simple examples of what happened during the lifetime of the founders. The map of France was reshaped: France gained Nice and Savoy, but lost Alsace-Moselle. The Mont-Blanc in the French Alps became the highest peak in the country (4,102 meters) instead of La barre des Ecrins. Trains began to circulate throughout the land (3,000 km of railroad in 1848, 18,000 km in 1870), photography became commonplace after 1830, the press did not cease to develop itself, iron structures appeared in train stations and covered markets, and aluminum was used more and more. Large department stores began to appear. Schools sprang up everywhere, and all children were learning to read and write. Telephones made their appearance. Fashions changed regularly. New literary, artistic and musical movements competed with and succeeded each other. The Church lost its position in French society. Processions were outlawed. Crucifixes were banned from public places. Nevertheless, as pointed out by G. Cholvy, there was a constant ebb and flow of Christian life in society.

And these changes took place in all areas of life: geopolitics, political regimes, industry, trade, ideas, and sciences. New names came to the fore: Pierre Proudhon, Auguste Comte, Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, Charles Darwin, David Strauss, Ernest Renan, but also Louis Pasteur and Claude Bernard. Workers gained rights. Children were no longer exploited as before. This simple but random list illustrates the importance of making a precise inventory of these changes in order to correctly situate our founders in their time.

A synthesis

But it is not feasible, in the little time we have, to describe all of the great changes that took place in society, the main events, and the major evolutions that characterized the period between 1830 and 1900. We must therefore content ourselves with highlighting the main features of these changes,

*The Founders of the Assumption Family, Their times and challenges
(1830–1900)*

stressing the aspects that influenced especially the lives of the founders and that prompted them to give their congregation a specific orientation and to choose their particular apostolates. Indeed, underlying these realities, there were often personal experiences through which they analyzed the situation from the point-of-view of evangelization. Hence, our various references to their lives and writings, hence also the title of this talk: *The Founders of the Assumption Family, their times and challenges (1830–1900)*.

I have organized this data under nine headings, highlighting in each a number of major events which, when placed in succession, will help us understand the entire period and provide the backdrop to which we will constantly refer and which will be completed by your personal contributions. This exposé is therefore not closed to other ideas but open to your own work upon which it is based. For instance, I noticed that, in the meetings of the Fraternity of Our Lady of Salvation (*Fraternité Notre-Dame de Salut*), the lectures and discussions dealt not only with the life of the Church but also with scientific discoveries, contemporary events, social advancements, and, indirectly, with current politics.⁸

Major event of the period

But before beginning this study, I want to insist on the omnipresence of an inescapable event for both society and the Church, viz. the French Revolution of 1789, an event that was praised to excess by some for its many benefits, but categorically condemned by others for its “innumerable wrongdoings.” It was blamed for everything, both good and bad. As a result of these divergent positions, there were two antagonistic camps in France. The persons we will be speaking about fell into the camp of those who were relentlessly opposed to 1789. The Revolution was therefore implicitly present in everything they said and did, and will be present in everything we will say.

The position of Emmanuel d’Alzon is well-known: “*All-out war against the Revolution until we get back everything it took from us,*”⁹ or again, “*There is a duel to death between the Church, which has eighteen centuries of promises behind it, and the Revolution, represented here by the University,*”¹⁰

⁸Cf. below the talk given by Gisèle Marchand on the Little Sisters of the Assumption.

⁹L. Secondy “Le Protestantisme, La Franc-maçonnerie, la Révolution et l’Université, selon le Père d’Alzon,” in *Révolution et contre-Révolution dans la France du Sud-ouest, Comité du Bicentenaire de la Révolution dans le Montalbanaïst*, pp. 119–123.

¹⁰The University: Napoleon began the system of lycées and restarted the University.

Origins of the Assumption Family

which is not yet seventy years old.”¹¹ If France no longer had any principles, only the Revolution was to blame.

Father Emmanuel Bailly went even further when he asked Father d’Alzon to obtain from the pope “*his approval of the 4th vow, . . . the vow to fight to the bitter end the Revolution, its ideas, its books, and its undertakings. What Saint Dominic did against the Albigenses, could we not ask God to be able to do the same thing against the Revolution and Freemasonry?*”¹²

In Nîmes, a certain Charles Bigot, who crossed swords with Father d’Alzon, represented the other tendency: “*We date from 1789.*” “*To authority,*” defended by religious people, he opposed “*liberty; to revelation, science; to the idea of a fallen human nature, the mind and heart of human beings capable of and desiring good and truth.*”¹³

I. French politics: a century of confusion

The founders lived in a politically unstable France, tossed about by changes of regimes and revolutions within the country, and by wars abroad. Very often, they found themselves involved and uncomfortable in the face of these events:

- a. France, between 1830 and 1900, underwent no less than five revolutions or serious crises:
 - The Revolution of July 1830
 - The Revolution of 1848
 - The Days of June 1848

Education at the beginning of the century was entirely in the hands of the State. The University was a hotbed of atheism and anticlericalism which were always insinuated and often directly taught to the students who drank it all in with the rest of what their professors were teaching. When Ozanam (now a Blessed) was a student in the 1830’s, he was always open about his Catholic faith and started the St. Vincent de Paul Conferences with fellow Catholic students whom he managed to bring out of their timidity. Later he returned as the first openly Catholic professor. As professor of literature, he often found ways of explaining the religious heritage of Europe. He supported Catholics, made converts, and tried to win his students away from atheism.

¹¹*La Gazette de Nîmes*, August 6, 1871.

¹²*Ecrits Spirituels*, p. 1090.

¹³Charles Bigot, *Le R.P. d’Alzon et l’Université*, published by Roger et Laporte, Nîmes, 32 pages.

*The Founders of the Assumption Family, Their times and challenges
(1830–1900)*

- The Coup d’Etat of December 2, 1851, with its numerous deportations, particularly in southern France (Languedoc)
 - The Paris Commune¹⁴ (1871) which became a time of anguish and trial for all the Assumption communities.
- b. There was also a series of conflicts abroad that directly affected France:
- The Crimean War (1854–56), with the siege of Sebastopol in 1856
 - Italy, with the victories of Magenta and Solferino (1859)
 - Mexico (1860–67)
 - The Franco-Prussian War of 1870.
- c. During this period, there were six regime changes:
- 1830 to 1848: the July Monarchy with Louis-Philippe. The Legitimists (or Carlists) placed their hopes in the grandson of Charles X, the Count of Chambord. The Founders felt quite strongly about this change of dynasty.
 - 1848 to 1851: the Second Republic,¹⁵ with two periods:
 - One marked by the February Revolution¹⁶ and the social measures that were enacted at that time.

¹⁴The Paris Commune: During the Franco-Prussian War, Napoleon III surrendered at Sedan. The Legislative Assembly met in Paris, deposed the emperor, and proclaimed the Third Republic. However, to make peace, the Germans demanded such humiliating terms, which the Republican government was accepting, that the country revolted against the Republic, and the Commune (city government) was set up in Paris. It lasted two months. The French army attacked and retook Paris, slaughtering thousands of Communards.

¹⁵The Second Republic: Louis Napoleon Bonaparte was a nephew of Napoleon I and the organizer of the Bonapartist opposition to Louis Philippe. In December 1848, he was elected President of the Second Republic. In 1851, he assumed dictatorial powers and in 1852 became Emperor of the Second Empire, taking the name Napoleon III (there was no Napoleon II).

¹⁶The February Revolution: When the Republicans gained power in February, they arranged National Workshops to give work to the jobless. The workers voted themselves wages so high that money ran out and the workshops were closed. As a result, civil war broke out in Paris—the Paris mob v. the Army. Peace was finally made by Archbishop Affre who walked to the barricades alone to discuss with the insurgents. Sadly, a stray shot was fired. He was shot and died of the wound, but he had won the peace by his courage and determination. There were two tendencies among the liberals, those who simply wanted political power, and those who wanted a social transformation. In final analysis, the former were the more powerful.

Origins of the Assumption Family

- The other, conservative, during which Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte was President of the Republic.
- 1852 to 1870: the Second Empire, also with two periods: the authoritarian Empire and the liberal Empire. Catholics, at first, were pleased with the Emperor, but then rejected him when the Papal States were threatened. Father d’Alzon, we know, supported the Papal Zouaves.¹⁷
- Starting in 1871: the Third Republic, with two periods:
 - The first period, conservative, ended with the failure of the restoration over the question of the flag (1873).¹⁸

¹⁷Papal Zouaves: soldiers in the pope’s army, volunteers (mostly from France, Holland, and Belgium), organized in 1860 in France at the request of Pius IX. (There was also another corps, the Roman Legion, which was placed at the disposal of the Holy See by the French government.) In 1867, when Garibaldi attacked the Papal States, Father d’Alzon sent as many as he could from the diocese of Nîmes. He mentions at one moment that he had already sent one hundred and that there were still more to come. An Assumptionist went to Rome with them and remained as their chaplain. They were still there when Father d’Alzon went to Rome for Vatican I in 1870.

¹⁸Before the French Revolution, the Bourbon royal family ruled France. Louis XVI was guillotined during the French Revolution, and by 1800 Napoleon was in charge and governing France as a Republic, until he made himself Emperor. However, when Napoleon was exiled to St Helena in 1815, the monarchy was brought back with Louis XVIII (brother of Louis XVI) who reigned from 1814 to 1824 and carefully respected the gains made under the Revolution and Napoleon. He was followed by Charles X (another brother of Louis XVI) who reigned from 1824 to 1830 and who was far too royal. After the July Revolution of 1830, Charles X offered to abdicate in favor of his grandson, the Comte de Chambord (and Due de Bordeaux). In fact, the Orleanist candidate, Louis Philippe, succeeded him as a constitutional monarch. Though France had not yet rebecome a Republic, he brought back the flag of the Revolution, blue, white and red. The Comte de Chambord went into exile in 1830 with his grandfather.

Once the air had cleared after the Franco-Prussian War and the Commune, there was a genuine monarchist majority in France. Lavignerie started a campaign in favor of the Comte de Chambord, advocating that he should reign under the name of Henry V. He took part in conversations between the Legitimist and Orleanist factions, and undertook a visit to the Comte in exile to urge him to come to a quick decision. He told him there was a large majority in the Assembly who were in favor of the monarchy, and it was only a question of his return. The Comte declined this invitation and pleaded his determination never to abandon either his principles, or the white flag of the French monarchy, quite apart from the fact that he did not consider this opportunity propitious for the restoration.

In 1875, the French Provisional Assembly pronounced in favor of a republic, by only one vote. In 1876, a popular vote established a republic. (Adapted from *The Cardinal of*

*The Founders of the Assumption Family, Their times and challenges
(1830–1900)*

- Then, with the crisis of May 16, 1876, the Third Republic swung to the left with Gambetta, Jules Ferry, and Camille See. Crises and scandals of all kinds marked this period: the resignation of Jules Grevy (1887), the Boulanger Affair (1889), the anarchist killings and attempted killings with Ravachol and Vaillant (1893), the Panama Scandal (1893), the assassination of Sadi Carnot (1894), and the first trial in the Dreyfus Affair (1894), all of which stirred up the Assumption family and kept its *Bonne Presse* supplied with news.

Father d’Alzon was tempted to go into politics himself, even to the point of presenting himself for elections. He got personally involved at the local and national levels in political issues, particularly regarding education.¹⁹ It is surprising to see how much Mother Marie-Eugénie was also interested in politics. She hoped that the desires of Catholics would become a reality, and she wanted to understand what was going on, especially in 1848, as was pointed out by Françoise Mayeur.

II. Transformations in Europe

Father d’Alzon’s interest in Bulgaria, Poland, Russia, Prussia (“one of the three enemies of the Church”), and Italy, *inter alia*, is sufficient justification for our taking a moment to examine this question. Europe was undergoing just as many convulsions as France, convulsions which led to profound transformations. The map of Europe changed considerably as revolts, uprisings, and armed conflicts, whether successful or not, followed one another. There were revolutions in a number of places in 1830 and 1848: Vienna, Berlin, Milan and Venice with uprisings against Austria, and Rome where the pope had to flee to Gaeta in 1848 and where the Italian Republic was proclaimed in 1849. Rome was then captured by the French on July 1, 1849. One political assassination after another shook the world, for example, Lincoln (1865), Alexander II (1881), as well as the failed assassination of Orsini in France (1858).

In the midst of all this turmoil, new States appeared on the map:

Africa, Charles Lavigerie, by Josi de Arteche, trans. Mairin Mitchell, Sands, p. 91, and *The Catholic Church in the Modern World*, E.E.Y Hales p. 230).

¹⁹J.M. Mayeur, “Les idées politiques du P. d’Alzon,” in *Colloquium of 1980*, p. 144 et seq.

Origins of the Assumption Family

- Greece in 1830.
- Belgium, also in 1830, which later became a place of exile for a good number of your religious.
- Hungary, in 1848, sought to have its independence recognized. It later adopted the system of the double crown.
- The two Romanian provinces were united in 1859 (Couza, then Charles of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen).
- Italy, in 1871, completed its unity to the detriment of the Papal States and of Papal Rome. The Popes then considered themselves as prisoners in the Vatican and received the warm affection of conservative Catholics.
- The German Empire came into existence at Versailles, in the Gallery of Mirrors, on January 18, 1871.
- Bulgaria emerged in 1878 with the Treaties of San Stefano (Greater Bulgaria) and the Congress of Berlin which downsized its territory.
- Poland, which flared up on several occasions, particularly in 1831 and in 1863, though not a State at this time, posed a serious problem for liberal-minded states.
- Russia crushed several revolts and imposed an intense Russification program on the country.

For some time, Father d'Alzon counted on making the most of these new developments for his own purposes.

III. Changes brought about by progressive colonization and missionary expansion

While **South America** was decolonizing itself with the emergence of new States, colonization progressed in **Africa** (Algiers in 1830). Following various explorations, the European powers installed themselves all over the continent.

In **Asia** also, various treaties imposed on the Chinese the transfer of ports and legations (Treaty of Peking in 1860, with the right to propagate the Christian religion). In Indochina, after Emperor Tu-Duc manifested his

*The Founders of the Assumption Family, Their times and challenges
(1830–1900)*

hostility toward Christianity by massacring missionaries (1861), Saigon was occupied and, in 1862, Tu-Duc had to give up Cochin China to France. From there, the French moved up the Mekong River and made Cambodia their protectorate (1863). Riviere again occupied Hanoi, and his death led Courbet to impose a second protectorate treaty and to occupy the valley of the Red River in 1884. The Treaty of Tientsin gave official status to the French occupation of Indochina.

France became the most missionary country of the 19th century

Catholic concern for these nations, which were often being discovered for the first time, translated itself into intense missionary activity, first by Protestants (e.g. the Paris Mission), then by Catholics who gave money and other gifts for the missions and prayed intensely for them. The French were in the forefront of this activity. They furnished most of the missionaries around the world: two-thirds of all the missionary priests in 1900, i.e., 4,500 out of 6,000,²⁰ plus 2,600 teaching brothers and 10,000 religious sisters. The *Propagation of the Faith* started by Pauline Jaricot was the soul and symbol of all this. Between 1822 and 1922, half the money it raised came from France, as did nine-twentieth of the total *Holy Childhood* contributions from 1843 to 1923. These donations as well as those made by *l'Œuvre des Ecoles d'Orient* testify to the country's generosity. The *Annates* (1822), which had a circulation of 145,000 in 1845, spread the missionary spirit even to remote rural areas.

Did this movement have anything to do with the Assumption Family? “Yes, foreign missions are our ambition,” wrote Father d’Alzon. In his third letter, he mentioned the missions in Australia: “By what providential design has it happened that, few as we are, we already have so many missionaries?”²¹ In his *Instructions* of 1873, he noted that, though he had to abandon Australia, “real good is being done in Bulgaria. Our Oblates are efficiently supporting us... What a precious outpost against the Greek and Russian schism!” He later wrote: “You were founded to be our lay-sisters in the missions.”²² But the Bulgarians were Christians. Was this really mission country? According to the thinking of that time, yes. It was a question of

²⁰G. Cholvy, *Histoire religieuse de la France contemporaine. 1889–1905*, Bibl. Historique Privat, 1986, p. 218 et seq.

²¹*Ecrits Spirituels*, pp. 141 and 160.

²²December 27, 1874.

Origins of the Assumption Family

having them enter the bosom of the Roman Catholic Church.²³

We must not forget that, except for Europe and Latin America, all the remainder of the world depended on the Congregation of Propaganda, even Holland, until 1853, on the same basis as the mission countries.²⁴ It was a question of converting the East, the Slavs and, through them, Russia, and of bringing these “schismatic” countries back to Roman Catholicism.

The attraction which the Religious of the Assumption had for the missions is well known: South Africa, New Caledonia, and their union of prayer with missionaries leaving for China—along with the temptation to go there themselves—or for Madagascar. The map of the missionary foundations of the Little Sisters of the Assumption is no less impressive.

In 1845, the Holy See encouraged the development of indigenous clergy and the evangelization of local cultures.²⁵ Father d’Alzon made it a priority for Bulgaria. The directives called upon missionaries to increase the number of territories and bishops, “*to train from among the indigenous Christians or the inhabitants of these countries well-trying clerics, to elevate them to the priesthood*,” “and to open seminaries and train their students with care and in such a way that they can eventually “*assume all the ecclesiastical functions, even the direction of the missions, and eventually be elevated to the dignity of bishop.*” “*We must completely reject and abolish the custom of employing the local clergy in the missions only as auxiliary priests, a situation which*

²³These facts explain why, when Father d’Alzon arrived in Rome with his Bishop and a group of pilgrims from Nîmes for the canonization of the Japanese Martyrs, Pius IX was thinking very especially about Bulgaria. At the public audience on June 5, 1862, a remarkable thing happened. The Pope turned to Father d’Alzon and blessed his works “in the East and in the West.” D’Alzon was quite bewildered, for he had no works in the East. The following day, the Pope received him in private audience. Father d’Alzon explained later: “I came away with the right—I might almost say the *mission*—to study the question of the return of those oriental peoples to the faith, and, with the help of some eminent persons, to find the means needed to achieve this goal that had been pointed out to me. . . .” With characteristic enthusiasm he set about the task. At the Fifth General Chapter of the Priests of the Assumption (Nîmes, September 1862), Father Victorin Galabert was appointed Founder of the Assumptionist Mission in the Near East.

In fact, d’Alzon had recently come into his father’s inheritance and had already shown some interest in using some of it to buy the Cenacle in Jerusalem. He had also been offered the place known as the Dormition of Mary and wanted to turn it over to the RAs, but the Roman Curia thought the money could be better spent for the needs of the Church, particularly on a seminary for the new Bulgarian Catholics.

²⁴Emile Poulat, *Colloquium of 1980*, p. 197.

²⁵*Neminem Profecto*, Sacred Congregation of the Faith, November 23, 1845

*The Founders of the Assumption Family, Their times and challenges
(1830–1900)*

they rightly consider humiliating.”

After 1880, colonization and evangelization went hand-in-hand. But as G. Cholvy concludes: “*In general, caution carried the day because the missionaries found themselves in conflict with the plan to completely Frenchify these countries, a policy which underpinned direct colonization but which ran counter to the desire of the missionaries to defend the indigenous languages.*”²⁶ It was one way of respecting the local people at a time when colonization was bringing them into subjection and when, at the same time and in other parts of the world, human rights were gaining momentum.

IV. Advances in the field of human rights

The 19th century saw the abolition of slavery, first by the English in their colonies in 1834, then by the French in 1848 with Victor Schoelcher, and finally by the Americans in the USA in 1860, which caused the terrible War of Secession (1861–65). Russia abolished serfdom in 1865.

The Assumption Family was in no way opposed to these evolutions. But when Father d’Alzon spoke about the rights of man, he did so from another perspective, that of the Church denouncing the abandonment of the rights of God. Was he not the founder of the *League of the rights of God*? He referred to the angel’s famous refusal, “*non serviam.*”²⁷

IV. Social problems and the first successes

The first Industrial Revolution proletarianized the working class which grew constantly at the detriment of the rural areas, or, to say the least, by absorbing their overflow. Women and children, more than men, were exploited, regardless of their age or their physical condition. Working hours were excessively long. Workers in the large industrial areas lived in precarious conditions: bad housing, long distances, difficult work, sickness and unemployment. However, there was also a progressive advancement of the working class during this period. Villerme’s book, *Tableau de l’état physique et moral des ouvriers dans les fabriques de coton, de laine et de soie,* (“*Description of the physical and moral condition of workers in the cotton, wool and silk factories*”) denounced in 1840 the hiring in workshops of seven and even six-year-old children and the fact that some textile workers had to spend

²⁶G. Cholvy, *La Religion en France*, op. cit. p. 29.

²⁷*Ecrits Spirituels*, pp. 1434–35.

Origins of the Assumption Family

up to seventeen hours a day in certain cotton mills, fifteen of them hard at work. He wrote, “*A convict’s workday is only twelve hours and is reduced to ten because of meal breaks.*” Demands were increasing everywhere but were stronger among the working people, labeled “the working class” at the time.

Victor Hugo wept over the fate of children in 1838:

Where are all of these children going.
Laughter banished from their faces,
Submissive, pensive, thin with fever?
The girls of eight you see walking;
They will work for fifteen hours in the mills. . .
Innocents in a penal colony, angels in a hell.
They work. . .²⁸

In reaction to these abuses and to these unacceptably low salaries, there was a series of revolts and uprisings, such as the revolt of the silk-weavers of Lyons in 1831, as well as serious incidents during various strikes.

Working conditions were appalling but improved little by little. First, those of children for whom new work standards were progressively drawn up: in 1834 in England, then in 1841, 1874, 1881, and 1893 in France.

Under Napoleon III, in 1864, workers won the right to strike and the right of association and assembly, and trade unions began to be formed.

In this context, the social question constantly arose, as did possible cures for this social sickness. Churches did their best to respond to these situations by encouraging charity. Lay people and religious tried to find solutions to the poor living conditions and the misery of the working class. Countless good works addressed the needs of the various categories of the disenfranchised: organizations to help infants (linen for the newborn, bedding and accessories); day-nurseries; youth clubs (Father Pernet cared for 200 boys from working-class families in Nîmes); apprenticeships; orphanages (remember Antoinette Fage in 1861); shelters for the homeless; and later on, summer camps for children with Pastor Lorriaux in 1881. For women: ministry to servants, sewing rooms, help with wedding trousseaus, places of refuge for prostitutes. . . and, more broadly, care of the sick, care of the indigent, and concern for prisoners and the mentally ill.

²⁸Quoted by P. Pierrard, *Enfants et jeunes ouvriers en France*, Les Editions ouvrières, 1987.

*The Founders of the Assumption Family, Their times and challenges
(1830–1900)*

Preachers reminded the faithful of their duty to come to the aid of the poor and to make good use of their wealth. Sisters became nurses and social workers. The Sisters Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul served Jesus Christ in the person of the poor. The Little Sisters of the Poor, founded by Jeanne Jugan in 1839, practiced “*joyful service of the elderly up to the moment of their death.*”

In 1865, the Little Sisters of the Assumption, founded by Father Pernet and Miss Fage whose thinking and work will be described in subsequent talks, assumed their share of the burden by serving “*the poor, the workers, and their families*” in order to show them God’s love. “*Apostles in the midst of the working class,*” said Father Pernet. These nursing sisters were to assist the suffering, help them, and provide them with health care, without taking any timeout for themselves and without accepting anything in return.

Among the lay people, the members of the Conferences of Saint Vincent de Paul, one of whose early leaders was Ozanam, visited the poor. The conferences had 10,000 members in 1848 and 32,500 in 1861.²⁹

As for the Little Sisters of the Assumption, they settled directly on rue Saint-Dominique, “*an area chosen for its poverty.*” Father Pernet insisted: “*A Little Sister is a missionary, all the more so that she must live in the midst of the poor and devote herself charitably to the poor working-class.*” He listed the poor he had in mind: “*the little people, the illiterate, the sick, the abandoned, the infirm, the debilitated, the displaced, the underprivileged, and the dying.*”

In addition to this category of Christians who brought immediate help, there was another, that of Christians and philanthropists, often intellectuals, who were aware of the fact that charity, in the sense of direct aid to individuals, in and of itself, was not sufficient to solve social problems. Justice must step in. They collected data and assessed the phenomenon in lengthy surveys, describing the miserable life of the industrial workers in large cities (Lamennais, de Bonald, Villeneuve de Bargemont, Villerme, and the Christian Association of Mulhouse).

In 1832, in *L’Avenir*, de Coux criticized the social system at the root of the problem, viz., the type of liberalism that considers the worker as nothing more than a machine among an employer’s capital assets. De Coux placed social considerations above economic ones. Around 1839–40, his disciple Ozanam appealed to the moral conscience of people. Contributions like these

²⁹G. Cholvy, *Frédéric Ozanam, l’engagement d’un intellectuel catholique*, Bayard, 2003.

Origins of the Assumption Family

from thinkers reflecting on a Christian vision of social justice ultimately led to the extraordinary encyclical that appeared in 1891, *Rerum Novarum*, with all of its radical newness.

Where did Father d'Alzon fit into all of this? According to G. Cholvy, he was social in his own way. He admitted that there was a “*worker problem*.”³⁰ What did he think was the solution? He thought that “*individual reforms*” were highly desirable, but also “*more general reforms*.” He expected “*superabundant intelligence*” on the part of his disciples. He believed the wealthy should take the first steps. He denounced “*the haughty despotism of employers toward their workers and the deep hatred of workers toward their employers*.” He noted that “*wherever employers took the first steps toward their employees, not just with alms but also with measures inspired by intelligent charity, there was a threefold result: production rose, morals were strengthened, and profits increased, and, as a bonus, hatreds disappeared and reconciliation took place*.”

He seems to have done his homework: “*If I am speaking with assurance about factory proletarians, it is because I have studied the question a little more closely*.” And he concluded: “*We must think about, examine, and especially study these questions, first, because today more than ever, at a time when charity is facing great obligations, it needs to be enlightened, and secondly, because, despite the humility and silence befitting all charitable work, you must, by the nature of things, enlighten the poor classes, thereby offering them the most precious fruit of charity*.”

Another Assumption-Family example: during the meetings of the Fraternity of Our Lady of Salvation, the major problems of workers were discussed on a regular basis. Schools were also thought to be part of the solution of the social problems.

VI. Education

The subject of education concerns more or less all of the congregations of the Assumption, and this, at all levels.

Mother Eugénie was struck especially by the de-Christianization of the ruling classes and the bourgeoisie, and by the inadequate secondary education given to young girls, hence her boarding schools.

She said: “*In the social class I am speaking about, i.e. to say, among the*

³⁰*Ecrits Spirituels*, pp. 1442–43.

*The Founders of the Assumption Family, Their times and challenges
(1830–1900)*

families of bankers, notaries, lawyers, etc., there are a thousand prejudices against the education given in the convents. . . Included among these prejudices are their political orientation, their poor education, and their lack of good manners.”³¹ She sought to “Christianize intelligences” and to “expand the intelligence of young girls” (Combalot). Hence, this extraordinary sentence about the type of candidates to be recruited as Sisters: “With time, piety evaporates but stupidity remains.”

At this point, it would be interesting to develop the topic of the lack of faith among the bourgeoisie of the 1830’s, a problem that arose in the lycées and colleges³² and that Y.M. Hilaire calls “the prolonged predominance of the sons of Voltaire.”³³ The Constitutions of the Religious of the Assumption were clear on this subject: “It is through education, which is the very work of Christianity, that the Religious of the Assumption are called to carry out their mission of extending the frontiers of his Kingdom.” And she wrote elsewhere: “Education is our share, our service, our ministry in the Church.”

Father d’Alzon was actively involved in secondary³⁴ and higher education. For him, the aim of Christian secondary education was to form elites. But he also insisted on “the need to retake all levels of education from the lowest to the highest, consequently, from the universities at the top level to the elementary country schools at the bottom level.”³⁵ There were many similarities between Marie-Eugénie and d’Alzon on this point: “Christian education has only one aim: to form souls in the knowledge, love, and resemblance of Jesus Christ” (Marie-Eugénie)—“The Christian teacher must sculpture Christ into the souls of young people” (Father d’Alzon).

The Oblates of the Assumption founded by Father d’Alzon were, by and large, destined for the popular elementary schools of Bulgaria. They were to be at the service of Bulgaria, above all as teachers. It was therefore an important question for your founders, hence the need to be well-acquainted with these mechanisms, even beyond what is said in the studies already made regarding one or another aspect by F. Mayeur or Sister Clare Teresa for the

³¹Quoted by Sister Thérèse Maylis.

³²The lower level of a secondary school is called a *collège*, while the upper level leading to the *bac* is called a *lycée*. The *bac* (baccalaureate) is the final exam at the end of the secondary cycle. Good grades give automatic entrance to the university. Catholic secondary schools were always called *collèges* (never lycées).

³³G. Cholvy, *Histoire religieuse de la France contemporaine, 1800/1880*, p. 73.

³⁴L. Secondy, *Aux origines de l’Assomption*.

³⁵Écrits Spirituels, pp. 1070–1.

Origins of the Assumption Family

Religious of the Assumption.³⁶

Let us recall a few facts regarding education in France during the 19th century:

1. This century was characterized by a progressive expansion of primary education:

	Schools	Students
1815	20,000	860,000
1820	27,000	1,120,000
1831	49,092	1,939,000
1847	63,028	3,500,000
1863	68,761	4,336,000 (1/4 of the children did not attend school)

Three important facts characterized the period between 1830 and 1890:

- A rapid development in the education of boys.
- A significant development in the education of girls throughout the century.³⁷
- A decreasing number of illiterates as 1880 approached (28% of the adult population in 1864). In decreeing obligatory education, the secular nature of schools, and the fact that education was free-of-charge, the laws of Jules Ferry completed the structures that enabled everyone to receive an education. *Le Pèlerin* called the obligatory law “*the monstrous law against childhood.*”³⁸

2. This century was also the one in which freedom of education³⁹ was won

³⁶Op. cit., *Colloquium* of 1998.

³⁷The statistics reflect this growth. An example illustrates the point: in 1848, on a total of 63,000 schools, 19,000 were for girls, and on 3,500,000 students, there were 1,300,000 girls. The Parieu Law of 1850 foresaw a school for girls in every town of 800 inhabitants or more; the Victor Duruy Law of 1867 foresaw a school in every town of 500 inhabitants or more.

³⁸Le Pèlerin, March 25, 1882.

³⁹Freedom of education. This refers to the question whether the Church might own schools of its own. Laws against this, passed during the French Revolution, had been confirmed in 1825. The Guizot Law (1833) gave the Church the right to elementary schools and the Falloux Law (1850) the right to run secondary schools. Universities remained under government jurisdiction.

*The Founders of the Assumption Family, Their times and challenges
(1830–1900)*

on three levels: elementary, secondary, and higher education, after long battles in which Father d'Alzon was personally and fully involved:

- The Guizot Law of 1833
- The Falloux Law of 1850
- The Law on Higher Education of 1875

These various laws had important consequences regarding our topic:

- The creation of numerous Catholic secondary schools for boys run either by diocesan priests or more especially by religious. Recognition of Assumption College in Nîmes slightly preceded the law of 1850.⁴⁰
- The creation of private Catholic elementary schools which developed as a result of the secular laws but which opposed the secular schools where “*God no longer has his place.*”

3. This century also saw the *beginning and development of secondary education for girls*, which took place in stages:

- In 1867, the secondary program for young girls offered by Victor Duruy had little success.
- In 1880, the Camille Sée Law provided lycées, colleges, and secondary education for girls, but their programs did not lead to the baccalaureate, and therefore did not open the doors of the universities to women. In order to provide them with competent teachers, normal schools of higher education were founded in Fontenay and Saint-Cloud.

Catholics reacted to each new initiative and to each new law. They strongly opposed these new institutions which they thought would pervert young girls and compete with their own institutions. They therefore increased and developed the number of boarding schools for girls. Among them were those of the Religious of the Assumption and of the Oblates, particularly in Montpellier and Nîmes. We will speak more about them later.

⁴⁰“Aux origines de la maison de l’Assomption a Nîmes (1844–1853),” in *Emmanuel d’Alzon dans la société et l’Eglise du XIXe siècle*, Colloquium on History (December 1980), Le Centurion, 1982, pp. 233–58.

Origins of the Assumption Family

4. This educational policy caused considerable problems for religious institutions:

In 1828, strong brakes were applied to the activities of minor seminaries. Rulings limited their number and that of their students. Measures were taken against the Jesuits, then against the other religious congregations regarding the enforcement of Article 7 and the decrees of March 1880. Non-authorized teaching congregations were told to align themselves with the new measures, but they resisted passively, which provoked the government to use force. Father d'Alzon died at the moment when the Assumptionists risked being expelled from Nîmes. A significant part of his work seemed threatened.

A good number of elementary teachers in the public sector were men and women religious. In 1863, 70% of the public school elementary teachers were religious women. In passing, let us underline the important role played by women in the church of the 19th century. "*Women have a very special mission to fulfill,*" wrote Father Pernet. The Goblet Law of 1886 barred them from teaching in the public schools, though the most senior among them were allowed to continue until they retired. The secularization of schools was supposed to be completed by 1897. But, there were still 7,000 sisters in the public schools in 1901. The law of 1904 struck another blow at religious teachers because all members of a religious congregation, even those authorized, were deprived of the right to teach. More than 2,600 schools were closed for lack of authorization. In 1914, there remained only 25 schools run by religious congregations, compared with 13,000 in 1880.

VII. A century of important inventions that changed people's lives

There were countless inventions. Let me mention just a few:

- The railroad (1831).
- Photography.
- The telephone (Graham Bell, 1876).
- Electricity went from the laboratory to the factory with Gramme's dynamo (1869). Hydro-electric power was used for the first time for

*The Founders of the Assumption Family, Their times and challenges
(1830–1900)*

industrial purposes, and the incandescent lamp was discovered by Edison in 1879. The alternator dates from 1877, and the transformer from 1886. In 1883, Deprez brought electricity to the factories.

- The phonograph made its appearance in 1877.
- The Bessemer converter in 1855 allowed industry and construction to make great progress.
- Iron structures began to appear, e.g., the covered markets (the *Halles*) of Baltard in 1853.
- The use of aluminum became common.
- Petroleum became a major source of energy (in the USA, Rockefeller in 1870).
- Many mechanical appliances were perfected, e.g., the Singer sewing machine (1863) and the Tellier refrigerator (1867). The Remington typewriter (1872) had a promising future.
- Important art museums were built, and works of art were created.

In the world of science:

- Pasteur developed the anti-rabies vaccine in 1885.
- Claude Bernard wrote *L'Introduction a l'etude de la medicine experimental* (*Introduction to the Study of Experimental Medicine*) in 1865. He believed that experience was the only way to attain truth.
- Bringing electricity, photography, and engineering together led to the invention of motion pictures in 1895.

VIII. The development of thought and art through basic research and publications

Here, I will mention only a few works in passing:

- Auguste Comte, *Le Catéchisme positiviste* (*The Catechism of Positivism*) (1852).

Origins of the Assumption Family

- Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species* (1859).
- David Friedrich Strauss (1835), followed by Ernest Renan, *The Life of Jesus* (1863).
- Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Das Kapital (Capital)* (1874).
- Art evolved profoundly, passing from Romanticism to Realism, to Symbolism, and to Impressionism.

IX. Religious phenomena: aspects of the Church in France at that time

Various currents of thought prevailed throughout Europe and particularly in France. The Church of the 19th century condemned liberalism and religious freedom, as set forth in the *Rights of Man*: no distinctions were made in the texts of Pius VI and Gregory XVI. After losing its States, the papacy saw Christendom as the model to be followed in organizing society. In 1864, the *Syllabus* and the Encyclical *Quanta cura* condemned modern errors. Vatican Council I, with its definition of infallibility, seemed to favor a monarchical structure.

In France, there were a few liberal Christians, but the Church in this country overwhelmingly spearheaded the conservative battle against the Republic. It provided society with less and less personnel to the extent that the State substituted itself for the Church. In the process, secularization took over in the schools, hospitals, prisons, and cemeteries. Internally, however, Gallicans and Ultramontanes were at loggerheads with each other.⁴¹ Father d'Alzon wrote to Father Picard: "*It is impossible to treat Gallicans and Romans in the same way. We have the truth; they are in error and will soon fall into heresy.*"⁴²

Certain influential people permanently marked this Church of France, despite the strong barriers that divided it. Suffice it to recall Lamennais' considerable influence on young d'Alzon and Marie-Eugénie, and Lacordaire's influence on the youth of that time. Also noteworthy is the role of very committed laypeople in the work of evangelization (cf. *Frédéric Ozanam* by G. Cholvy). Father Pernet, for example, was well aware of this when he founded three associations for laypeople.

⁴¹Claude Bressolette, *Colloquium of 1980*, p. 119 on "Maret and d'Alzon."

⁴²Ibid. p. 126, February 25, 1870.

*The Founders of the Assumption Family, Their times and challenges
(1830–1900)*

In this context, it is important to note that certain Catholics, even among those who were hostile to modern ideas, tried to adapt and respond to the world around them by updating and renewing existing works, or by starting dynamic new ones.

There was a renewal of religious life: old orders were reestablished (Benedictines and Dominicans), and new congregations like your own were founded with clear purposes: teaching, missions, nursing, and charitable works. There was a revival of confraternities, such as your own Confraternity of Penitents. There was a desire to re-conquer or more precisely re-evangelize the people by increasing the number of parish missions. There was also a renewal of the clergy with the development of seminaries and a substantial increase in the number of priests.

Moreover, the 19th century also witnessed the development in mystical spirituality (cf. the article by Sister Marie-Hélène: *Marie-Eugénie, a Spirituality for Today*⁴³), the re-focusing on Christ of a religion based not only on fear but also on love, and the rediscovery of prayer, contemplation, and basic devotions like that of the Blessed Sacrament and the Eucharist, the Sacred Heart, the Blessed Mother (this was the century of apparitions), and other devotions like those of the souls in purgatory and of the holy angels.

Devotions, pilgrimages, and Marian practices found the Assumptionists in the forefront. In Father d'Alzon's *Ecrits Spirituels*, Mary holds an important place (cf. the dossier on the spirituality of the Little Sisters of the Assumption). From Nîmes, he often made pilgrimages to Our Lady of Rochefort. Pilgrimages were for him acts of collective penance, "*huge processions, all the more effective the longer and harder they are.*" And he had a real love for the Church and the pope, and he was devoted to Pius IX. When it came to defending the pope, the Assumptionists were there without fail (the Papal Zouaves). One of the main purposes of their founder and of the Congregation itself was to defend the Church against the combined effects of the Reformation, the Revolution, the University, and Freemasonry.

The Assumptionists also played a leading role by creating a large popular publishing house which became one of their weapons (its common style displeased Father d'Alzon). Nevertheless, they did not neglect more intellectual and specialized publications like *L'Enseignement chrétien*. Parish youth clubs (*patronages*), the first form of Catholic Action, and youth movements outside the parish environment also marked the Church during this period.

⁴³Colloquium of 1998, pp. 113–256.

Origins of the Assumption Family

A considerable spiritual reawakening manifested itself during this century among intellectuals like Ozanam, and there was an important movement of conversion. Marie-Eugénie considered herself to have been part of that movement: “*In her faith as a convert,*” someone wrote about her. Your founders did their share by working with the lowliest, particularly through their social work.

Politically, the first to accept the Republic were Leo XIII and Lavigerie⁴⁴ in 1892. But, that was very late in terms of the timeframe we are working with. Nevertheless, we should remember Father d’Alzon saying that the Church does not fight any political regimes, except those that forget the rights of God. “*The Church is republican in Switzerland and in America. It is not against republicanism but above it. It cannot be repeated enough: the battle is not between the Church and this or that institution. It is between God and man who wants to make himself God. We are its enemies insofar as it is anti-religious and anti-social.*”⁴⁵ Christians could therefore accept whatever was not anti-Christian in the Republic.

The rise of secularism and the creation of secular institutes of higher education, schools, and charitable agencies, as well as all of the laws on education, provoked many debates which, to say the least, had nothing academic about them. Their style was often violent; polemics raged. Adversaries hurled insults at each other. Later, *Le Pèlerin* accentuated and even systematized this tendency. Cartoons were used to illustrate a point, like the one on Gambetta⁴⁶ or the one on the lycées for young girls. This last one shows their

⁴⁴Cardinal Charles-Martial-Allemand Lavigerie, born in France, archbishop of Algiers, and founder in 1868 of the Missionaries of Africa, known until 1984 as the White Fathers. Many bishops, priests and other Catholics in France were beginning to say that the Church in France had to be realistic and accept the government. They could not go on hoping for a monarchy which would never return. Leo XIII had always held this opinion. In 1890, he sent for Lavigerie and gave him the task of announcing this new position to the world in general and to France in particular. Lavigerie was to choose his moment. On November 12, 1890, he proclaimed before a vast assembly of French officials the obligation for French Catholics to adhere to the republican form of government. The famous “toast of Algiers” was the object of harsh criticisms from the monarchist element. Lavigerie died in Algiers in 1892.

⁴⁵Le Protestantisme, la Franc-maçonnerie, la Révolution et l’Université selon le Père d’Alzon,” Acts of the Colloquium of Montauban. *Révolution et contre-Révolution dans la France du Sud-Ouest*, 1990, pp. 119–123.

⁴⁶Gambetta (1838–1882): French prime minister in 1881. In a famous speech of May 4, 1877, he said: “Clericalism, there’s our real enemy.” He later attacked the Church vigorously.

*The Founders of the Assumption Family, Their times and challenges
(1830–1900)*

students entering a place of choice, with Satan lurking as he waited for them at the door of hell.

Conclusion

Your founders, therefore, lived in a world that was constantly evolving and completely immersed in controversy, with strong resistances and significant advances. Faced with changes that were often hostile to them, they took a stand on many of these issues when they affected them directly, either in their personal existence, their apostolates, or their concerns as Christians involved in a society they had not chosen as it existed at that time. Along with many others, each in their own way, they participated in all of the battles, some on one front, others on another, but all together on all fronts: religious, political, social, educational, and charitable. Often on the front line.

The data we have gathered will help explain and perhaps clarify some of their behavior we will hear about during this colloquium. We must take note of this behavior, without judging it according to our modern criteria. When Father d'Alzon explained that increasing the number of chaplains in the lycées was an incentive to impiety for the students, we must make an effort to follow his logic in order to understand his reasoning, which does not necessarily mean agreeing with it. However, we must make this effort because history does not allow for anachronisms, especially on the subjects you will be covering. This way of thinking is essential to our reaching calm and healthy conclusions. And is that not, in final analysis, the purpose of your research?

Louis Secondy

9, rue de la Frégate
34080 Montpellier
France

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*The Founders of the Assumption Family, Their times and challenges
(1830–1900)*

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Origins of the Assumption Family

Discussion

The Role of history

Richard Lamoureux, A.A.: You gave us a very good suggestion: we must understand history without judging it in order to grasp the logic behind it. But must we not also understand it in order to learn from the lives of the founders about their intuitions and to learn from their 19th century experience? Do you have any suggestions about this?

Louis Secondy: *What can we take from the 19th century for our own time? History never dies (cf. the Balkans). History is like a spring gushing from a deep underground aquifer. In 1980, how did the Assumptionists rethink their founder? That colloquium gave d'Alzon his share of modernity. In addition to the character of each individual, intuitions also emerge enriched by a modern-day perspective. For example, justice will never destroy charity (cf. the Little Sisters of the Assumption). It's really a question of understanding what all these things mean today by discovering what they meant in their own time.*

The fourth vow

Lucas Chuffart, A.A.: I am pleased to have heard you speak about the “fourth vow” that strongly marked the charism and spirituality of the Congregation. It would be interesting to know why it was abandoned.

Louis Secondy: *Why did Rome refuse this fourth vow? I have the impression that such a commitment was too conditioned by its time. It was something that was too tied to the circumstances of the day. Would this vow have any meaning today?*

Origins of the Assumption Family

Lucas Chuffart, A.A.: The formulation of the vow was changed. The first one was counter-revolutionary and too dated.

Jean-Paul Périer-Muzet, A.A.: The first formulation was “the extension of the Reign of God and the education of youth.” It should be noted that the institutional Church opposed making religious vows too specific. It wanted no more than three vows. However, some congregations wanted to attain the status of an order.

Thérèse-Maylis Toujouse, R.A.: On Christmas 1844, the Religious [Sisters] of the Assumption, inspired by Father d’Alzon, added a fourth vow to the three they were already making. This vow continued to be made in the Congregation by a few sisters as they left for the missions. The Church asked that it be suppressed when the Constitutions were submitted in 1866. The reason for the suppression was not clear because “it was left to the sole judgment of the Superior General.” For its part, the Congregation noted at the time that the suppression of this vow would be regretted by many Sisters. The Constitutions of 1888 did not mention the fourth vow, though its spirit was stated in the purpose of the Congregation: “To extend by our whole life the Kingdom of Jesus Christ.” This aspect is still part of our formula of vows. Consequently, a fourth vow, expressing in general terms the specificity of the Congregation, became pointless.

Clare-Teresa Tjader, R.A.: The fourth vow did not have a clear content. I believe that is the reason why the Church suppressed it.

Claire Rabitz, O.A.: Father d’Alzon had us make a vow regarding the foreign missions. When the Oblates were united into a single Congregation in 1926, the fourth vow was suppressed.⁴⁷

Georgette-Marie Fayolle, O.A.: I agree with Claire Rabitz. It is the vow regarding missions that was retained by the Bordeaux branch.

Education

Richard Brunelle, A.A.: How can we explain Father d’Alzon’s opposition to public education?

⁴⁷This is not the same vow (cf. *Ecrits Spirituels*, p. 1090).

Discussion

Louis Secondy: *Father d'Alzon was interested in secondary and higher education. His major battle was first of all to obtain freedom for secondary education. When Father d'Alzon fought the University, it was because he deemed it to be the daughter of the Reformation, of the Revolution, and of Freemasonry. It transmitted a world hostile to God.*

In 1881, when elementary public education was secularized, Father d'Alzon was already dead. It was his disciples (Le Pèlerin) who fought to create a new situation in order to oppose this godless school. The fact that there were still religious teachers in the public schools did not prevent these teachers from being forbidden to talk about God. In the cities, the Brothers of the Christian Schools lost their schools. The secularization of the schools began long before the Law of 1881.

Jean-Paul Périer-Muzet, A.A.: What did our founders think of progress? Very often, weren't they simply critical of it?

Louis Secondy: *Regarding material progress as such, they did not reject the idea outright. However, they rejected ideas that explained the meaning of the world and of life in society without leaving room for religion, ideas that explained the world in ways that were contrary to the Bible and to the faith. This was also the reaction of intransigent Christians to these ideas of progress.*

Anne Huyghebaert, Or. A.: Father d'Alzon and other Catholics did not favor the presence of women in higher education. Did this prepare the crisis of Modernism? What was the basis for giving a different education to boys and to girls? Was *Le Pèlerin* the only publication at the time to adopt its particular style in treating these subjects?

Louis Secondy: *This perspective did not represent the Christian view of women. Jules Ferry believed that the role of women in society was different from that of men. The difference was one of nature, private life, family life, and education. Women were thought to be teachers par excellence (cf. Marie Rouanet who portrays a woman holding the keys, the accounts, the family memory, the education of children, and the tradition of God). Women exercise this role from the first moment a child begins to be educated in the home. In Christian milieus, women gained their independence once they were able to say no to men. Was*

Origins of the Assumption Family

the Superior General to obey a man? Marie Correnson and Marie-Eugénie of Jesus affirmed their femininity.

Educators, they began teaching the poor. They created day-schools. And in order to subsidize these schools, they created boarding schools. If we take into consideration only the hierarchical Church, we cannot understand the place of women in the Church in the 19th century.

Jean-Paul Périer-Muzet, A.A.: Father d'Alzon obtained full freedom for his college two years before the passage of the Falloux Law. He therefore took not only collective actions but also personal ones in favor of his Congregation.

Father d'Alzon did not like the style of *Le Pèlerin*. However, his disciples realized that it was the means by which they could reach people in the popular milieus and bring them a strong message, a combative message. Conquer and reconquer in order to crush the work of the Revolution and free themselves from it, and in order to re-give the Church its role in society by reestablishing a sort of Christendom.

The popular press launched offensives to bring these ideas to the common ordinary people because France was being turned into a godless country. The role of images in *Le Pèlerin* was to catch the attention of its readers by using very simple vignettes. *Le Pèlerin* became the Church's bombardiers, the Church's artillerymen.

The place of the laity

Monique Blondel, L.S.A.: In my work at the present time, I am rereading the minutes of the meetings of the Fraternity [Our Lady of Salvation] founded by Father Pernet. They shed light on the role played by the laity at these meetings, on the counter-Revolutionary trend, the school issue, the worker problem, and the invitations extended to various leaders to attend these meetings (Leon Harmel, missionaries, etc.). The participants were workers who came from areas that were far from Paris. As for their active participation in the meetings, very often, only lay-people spoke up, including at times for the commentary on the Word of God. Among these laypeople, there were various tendencies, including those who accepted the Republic (the *ralliement*). The problem of work on Sundays was approached in the following way:

Discussion

in some cases, was it not better to go to work rather than to church in order to feed the family? It would be interesting to see the place given to the laity by other congregations.

Thérèse-Maylis Toujouse, R.A.: Laypeople tried to combine intelligence and social involvement. Frédéric Ozanam and a group of academics asked Bishop de Quelen to create the Conferences of Notre-Dame. The Conferences of Saint Vincent de Paul were also created at this time. Additionally, there were groups of young intellectuals who wanted to know how to adapt the traditional teaching of the Church to young people in the wake of the Age of Enlightenment. In all of these undertakings, intelligence and heart always worked together.

Gisèle Marchand, L.S.A.: The 19th century was also marked by immigration, i.e., by an exodus from the rural areas (the French abandoned the rural areas for the city), as well as by the arrival of Italians and Germans.

In 1865, workers represented no more than 30% of the active population. It was to these workers who had come from the rural areas that Father Pernet addressed himself.

Jean-Paul Périer-Muzet, A.A.: The book *Prier 15 jours avec le P. d'Alzon (Praying 15 days with Father d'Alzon)* dedicates a certain number of chapters to laypeople and to the importance of collaborating with them, especially in our colleges. The Conferences of Saint Vincent de Paul figured among the works of education. Father d'Alzon founded a youth club (*patronage*) in Nîmes. He had great admiration for Pauline Jaricot who founded the *Propagation of the Faith*, and for Agathe Thavet who founded the *Military Apostolate*. In the agricultural orphanages, laypeople educated the working class. Likewise, they got involved in the press which would not have been founded or developed without their input. In the words of the Count of L'Épinois, "We are there to support you. When will you start doing something about it?"

Louis Secondy: *Concerning the place Father d'Alzon gave to laymen in his colleges, he did not require children to attend Mass every day because he thought that laymen should not be educated like alumnists (minor seminarians).*

Origins of the Assumption Family

As for the Fraternities and the Conferences of Saint Vincent de Paul, their creation, animation, etc., were entrusted exclusively to the laity. But, in the Church, there was a certain fear on the part of the hierarchy that the laity was acquiring too much importance. At the time, there were tens of thousands of catechists who were teaching catechism to children (cf. Montpellier in 1907, Colloquium on apostolates). In 1845, Lacordaire wrote from Notre-Dame: "All you who have been baptized, you are the light of the world. . ." We must therefore reconsider the 19th century as not having been only the century of clerics. In the elementary schools, committees of parents were created to keep a watchful eye on the teachers and on the contents of the textbooks.

Occasionally in the Church, what was granted to one congregation was denied to another, e.g., Pierre Valdo and Francis of Assisi. Rome's decisions sometimes depended on a combination of circumstances. . . (e.g., the decision against contraception by Paul VI). The history of the Church is made up of contradictions.

Thérèse-Maylis Toujouse, R.A.: Concerning the education and formation of committed laypeople, Marie-Eugénie said that we must always educate our students, not as religious, but in function of their future life in the world and their social involvement therein. She founded day-schools to allow young girls to be more in touch with their society.

The influence of Lamennais

Clare-Teresa Tjader, R.A.: Can you situate Lamennais and his influence?

Louis Secondy: *An image: Lamennais began as a defender of the established regime, rather conservative and classical. He evolved very quickly, passing from his initial conservatism to an opening onto the major freedoms, the six freedoms he extolled in his newspaper L'Avenir: freedom of conscience, freedom of the press, freedom of nations to govern themselves, etc. They were well-received by young intellectuals: de Coux, Gerbet, and Montalembert. Think-tanks and prayer groups sprang up. Converts and converts-of-sorts proclaimed God and freedom. A new vision of the world emerged for the Christians of France. Young people were marked by an enthusiasm that influenced the liberal-minded*

Discussion

throughout the entire 19th century. But then came the tragedy: Lamennais was twice condemned by Rome. As his friends distanced themselves from him materially, he took an anti-clerical direction. Lamennais' ideas nevertheless made their way. Young people were marked as if they had been branded by them, and they never gave them up.

Origins of the Assumption Family

The Church in the 19th Century, Its Geopolitics and Strategies

CLAUDE PRUDHOMME

I would like to reflect with you about the way in which the Catholic Church in 19th century dealt with the question of globalization. Today, the word is fashionable, but it makes historians smile because, since the 15th and 16th centuries, i.e., since the discovery of America, we in Europe have been involved in an extraordinary globalization.

In any case, the 19th century was another remarkable time in this process since it was the period of European expansion and of what can be called a true Europeanization of the world.

We must therefore re-examine this question in order to see how it came about, how the Catholic Church perceived these changes, and how it tried to respond to them, and then try to make an initial evaluation of it, the first self-critical examination having been made after World War I.

By way of introduction, I am supposing that you have in mind the first great debate of the 19th century about the Church's response to secularization, which included the question of the Papal States, the emancipation of science, and various political issues.

You have seen that, when confronted with the question of secularization, the Catholic Church had two positions, two responses: one was to refuse certain aspects of this evolution (of which Father d'Alzon was a perfect representative), e.g., the French Revolution and the principles of 1789 as they were interpreted at that time. The first step was to "deny" that an evolution was taking place. But then, there quickly arose an awareness of the fact that, if Catholics did not become part of this history in-the-making, they

Origins of the Assumption Family

would not be able to influence it or give it another direction. When the will to conquer and reconquer turned to missionizing among the pagans, it was always accompanied by a denial which came across as an opposition to the ideas and ideals of the French Revolution.

This combination of denial and re-conquest gave rise to a new type of commitment, which strikes anyone interested in studying the missions, because, for the Catholic Church, the 19th century was the great period of missionary reawakening. Though the first major experience—the founding experience—took place in the 16th century, the current position of the Church, except for the advances made in the 16th century, is based on what took place in the 19th century.

Globalization in the 19th Century

Political freedom

When the Catholic Church awoke from the shock of the Revolution, the first thing it discovered was that, henceforth, it was facing ideologies that pretended to be universal in scope. The Universal Declaration of the Rights of Man and of Citizens affirmed straightaway its intention to serve as a kind of charter, a statement of principles that are applicable everywhere and always. It was meant to be broader than any particular culture or any particular period. This was a real shock for a religion that considered itself to be the sole vehicle of true universality. From then on, it had to deal with a competitor, which brought about a first type of confrontation. And throughout the entire 19th century, this confrontation continued, particularly over the major question of freedom. In this regard, the history of the Assumptionists and of Father d'Alzon was closely tied to this demand: exactly what was this desire for freedom that was gaining ground among the nations of the world, first in Europe but also elsewhere? Not to be forgotten was what was happening in countries where slavery still existed, particularly where movements were fighting for and eventually won the emancipation and freedom of slaves.

Then, after this big wave of yearning especially for political freedom, came a desire to participate in the life of the country, particularly through voting. This wave was followed by another, especially in the middle of the century (1848 and after), a desire for social freedom, each case claiming to have universal dimensions. The wave in favor of social freedom was supported by international socialist organizations that were red and truly international.

The Church in the 19th Century, Its Geopolitics and Strategies

To the point where, within the Catholic Church, there was an effort to organize, toward the end of the pontificate of Pius IX, a black international organization, which was meant to be a response of sorts to the red one.

There was definitely new competition, which helps us understand that the stakes involved were worldwide.

Consequently, it must be understood that, especially from Rome's perspective, the problems were international, not just local issues pertaining to a particular country.

The first point: there were henceforth important collective aspirations that were developing internationally, aspirations with which the Catholic Church had to come to terms.

Industrial Revolution

The second reality that completely escaped the Catholic Church as well as all the other religious groups was the Industrial Revolution.

What consequences did this have on the life of the Church?

Transportation was being revolutionized: railroads were being built in the East. It is not possible to understand the Near Eastern Missions without understanding the development of the railroads, nor is it possible to understand the history of the missions without taking into account the regular steamship lines which developed and allowed people to travel much more inexpensively and to communicate much more rapidly.

It was also thanks to these means of transportation that communications became easier by mail and by telegraph.

One example: the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 suddenly created a new balance of power. Constantinople and Turkey were now very close to Europe.

This meant that, for people who belonged to an international organization, there were brand-new means of internal communication. We can sense this today: the Internet is changing our ways of working within our communities as well as within all other organizations.

The Industrial Revolution also meant the globalization of capital: money began to circulate. If the circulation of money became possible for international capitalism, it also became possible through banking systems and available to the churches. Without this banking revolution, the work of the Propagation of the Faith, born in Lyons, would never have been able to establish itself in Latin America and progressively in Africa and Asia, to collect

Origins of the Assumption Family

funds in all parts of the world, and, by means of bank transfers, to centralize their operation and distribute these funds according to needs and the choices of the organizers.

Some churches were closely tied to this banking revolution.

It was also a period of demographic change, to Europe's advantage. It was Europe that sent its surplus workers elsewhere and that blames others today of doing what it did to solve its own problems. 40 million Europeans went to the United States (32 million stayed there); 12 million Europeans went to Latin America. Therefore, massive movements of people became possible by boat. This meant that Europe saw itself as a demographic power that was expanding, a fact which undoubtedly changed its relations with other countries.

Finally, a fourth aspect of the Industrial Revolution: the trade revolution, the demand for free trade, GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade—1947), the great American ideology according to which the happiness of humanity is tied to the liberalization of trade. This was precisely the aim of the free trade treaties of 1860 which, at the time, applied to the major Western powers of Europe, but whose purpose was to eliminate tariffs on traded goods everywhere in order to bring prosperity to all nations.

The major powers thought that this would solve their internal problems.

Additionally, it must be said that the West did not simply export technical knowledge, people, and capital. Europe also exported its culture.

Exporting European culture

It was undoubtedly one of the most spectacular and most decisive changes of the 19th century. Europe had already exported itself before, but it was during the 19th century that it exported its knowledge to the entire world. Since the 19th century, the knowledge and science that are exported come from Europe or the United States. In short, they are Western.

They were exported thanks to an increase in the number of schools. The missions were one of the key factors.

As Europe exported its knowledge, it naturally exported at the same time the values upon which it believed its own success was based. It is not surprising to discover that, regardless of who was writing—explorers, capitalists, politicians from the left or the right, missionaries or not—all of them spoke of the need to work, of the importance of the family, and of the need for savings. These values were thought to be the keys to development,

The Church in the 19th Century, Its Geopolitics and Strategies

success, and progress.

And without giving it a second thought, people also exported their way of living as soon as they arrived somewhere, even if they had to adapt themselves minimally by making do with local materials and the weather.

The implications of exporting Western culture were not known in the 19th century. However, there was already a debate about whether or not it was possible to take from the West its technology and science without taking all of the culture that went with it. The same question has arisen more recently, particularly within the Catholic Church, regarding the notion of enculturation.

That issue had not yet come to the fore in the 19th century, but the problem of knowing whether or not there is a link between science, knowledge, technology, and culture-in-general was already posed.

At the time, what were the Chinese thinking about? Their great plan was to accept Western science but not its philosophy and culture. The Japanese made a more complicated choice and kept the forms of their traditions.

From an historical point-of-view and regarding the expansion of the Catholic Church, I want to mention a fourth point: imperialism, a term that was used to describe this Western expansion. Invented during this period, the term appears just before the war of 1914–18, at the end of the 19th and at the beginning of the 20th century. It was used by English, then German, then French writers because nobody knew how to describe this domination which was so total and so global, and which Europe was establishing throughout the world. At the outset, this concept was not a Marxist concept but one used by liberal economists who simply wanted to state that, in fact, the European economy was in the process of dominating all others.

At the same time, European expansion took two forms: direct colonization (Asia, Oceania, Africa), and indirect colonization of which China was the prototype. China was not conquered because China cannot be conquered. However, various treaties imposed conditions on China in order to bring it in line with European policies.

There was therefore an ideological context that wanted to legitimize this domination. Europeans realized they had to furnish arguments to those who wanted to defend colonization or imperialism.

The Catholic Church also had to take all of this into account.

Finding Answers within Catholicism

Consolidation of Roman centralization

At this time, the government of the Catholic Church was becoming more and more centralized, and the person of the pope was becoming more and more central. Things had not always been that way in the Church. For many European churches, the pope was in Rome and, to be sure, he was listened to. However, except for very particular doctrinal disagreements and in final analysis, each church had its own traditions, had its own organization, and operated without referring very much to Rome.

The change brought about in the 19th century was the affirmation of the authority of this center and of the pope, and the recognition of the pope's right to exercise authority over the whole system.

For historians, it is very clear that at the center of the Roman system is the person of the pope (in France, people spoke of ultra-montanism), which translated itself in the 19th century by a very new attitude on the part of believers toward the pope, by a devotion to the pope.

I am sometimes surprised to find in certain encyclicals affirmations on the borderline of orthodoxy. For example, the pope does not define himself as the successor of Peter, but as the successor and the representative of Jesus on earth. Today, no pope would say that. At the time, Rome was trying to enhance the function of the pope, which led to a few exaggerations in its description.

But Rome was not just the pope. In studying the missions, we are surprised to note, sometimes with admiration and sometimes with irritation, the extraordinary efficiency of the government that surrounded the pope. When we see how the Curia was able to operate with so few people, we are struck by its efficiency. And all of this, because the members of the Curia had a long administrative experience based on their ability to communicate and collect information. They put technical progress to very good use. Progressively, throughout the 19th century, in all of the countries around the world, all of the apostolic vicars were obliged and finally accepted to make annual reports, even those who were living in the bush and who wondered what purpose the reports would serve. Every five years, they also had to submit a five-year report which replaced a visit to Rome, deemed to be too complicated for those living in distant countries. And they had to submit their report in proper form because those who read them in Rome checked

The Church in the 19th Century, Its Geopolitics and Strategies

off the incomplete answers and asked for explanations.

For example, there was a standard question in the questionnaire: “do you prepare indigenous priests?” If the apostolic vicar did not explain what he did, or if it was thought that he did not do enough, he was sure to receive critical remarks.

Rome therefore oversaw what was going on and made corrections.

The Curia was a complicated organization. An historian can never really know what came from the pope and what came from the Curia. The Curia consisted of a Secretary of State, whose functions were very hard to pin down, and of the Roman Congregations: the Holy Office and the various Congregations responsible for certain areas, e.g., bishops, religious, education, etc. The strength of Rome was its ability to invent inter-Congregation structures, whose status was not very clear, e.g., the Propaganda which was responsible for the missions throughout the world. But when a problem of doctrine arose, was it to be brought to the Propaganda or to the Holy Office? This question has really never been resolved.

The Curia felt the need to create inter-Congregation structures. And after the French Revolution, it had to add yet another service: the Congregation for Extraordinary Ecclesiastical Affairs, which was not a real Congregation. It brought together those responsible for the principal Congregations so that, together, they might deal with the problems that depended on two or more of them.

The Curia also knew how to present the Roman model as an example for everyone to follow: the Latin model is the best.

Questions about the Eastern Churches were raised. It was said at one point: let us respect the specificity of the Eastern Churches without imposing uniformity. This was possible because these Churches were ancient. But for the younger Churches (Africa, Asia), Rome felt that this was not possible: they had to follow the Roman model in its Latin form. For example, there was a debate over the Ethiopian Rite. The conclusion was a compromise of sorts: this rite was ancient and should not completely disappear, but the texts specify very clearly that it was meant to be a “temporary measure.”

This desire to impose the Roman model stemmed from the fact that, in a world in transition, strong unity was needed, and, at that time, unity was not possible without uniformity. The notion of pluralism was not a 19th century concept.

All of this was possible provided everyone accepted the idea of centralization. And this is precisely what took place.

Origins of the Assumption Family

Rome did not simply want to invent answers. It waited until it received questions. All of this was done by correspondence. Rome legislated only after it had received a question. Consequently, there were different strategies. There were those who knew that, the fewer questions one sent to Rome, the more peaceful one would be. But there were also those who did not want to change a piece of clothing without consulting Rome.

That was the risk of a system that wanted to centralize everything: legislate about everything.

Intransigent Catholic model

This concept was used especially by some Italian, then by some French historians. It meant two things: first, to be intransigent in the sense of refusing to compromise on certain aspects of modernity, especially regarding the anti-religious philosophy inherited from 1789 (the spirit of the Syllabus and of the encyclical that accompanied it in 1864).

But this model was not just one of refusal and defense but also of reconquest: Catholicism must be something integral. It implies putting all of faith into all of life. Faith must impregnate all of life, whether personal (by accompanying the faithful from birth to death, as was always done in the past), or collective. Consequently, there was a proliferation of associations, works, regroupings, and structures that allowed people to have an impact on society itself. This model had a very strong social orientation. It was this model that was very openly exported to the missions because, in leaving for the missions, missionaries had the feeling that, precisely, they were going into virgin territory to be with populations which could be transformed, because more malleable, and in which some sort of Christian society could be established.

It is essential to grasp this idea of a Christian society exported overseas in order to understand not only the manner in which missionaries developed their centers but also the reason why they often regrouped their Christians in villages, and the reason why they increased the number of their activities (to transform society).

There was therefore some sort of universal Catholic model which we still follow today and which, I believe, is presently in crisis not only because of secularization and but also because of other reasons particular to the mission countries themselves.

Catholic strategy of the 19th century: to be part of history in order to make history

There was a Catholic awakening in the 19th century. Catholics were undoubtedly tempted to withdraw from the holy mountain (Lamennais). Their response could have been: this world is rejecting us, this world does not understand us, so let's withdraw. However, it was just the contrary that happened, first under Pius IX, then under Leo XIII, and it has continued until this day.

What did it mean for the Church to reposition itself and to seek to be part of history-in-the-making? The first objective was to show that true universality was found in the Catholic Church. Since everyone pretended to be universal (the French Revolution, the Enlightenment, Protestants, Freemasons, etc.), it had to constantly repeat that true universality was found in the Catholic Church and that, without it, the world was headed for a catastrophe.

This idea was conveyed by a theology that provoked great interest in the missions because, at the heart of this universality, was this deep conviction that what was at stake was the salvation of mankind. That was the great concern of the 19th century, and that is what I find so hard to have my students understand today. People were truly haunted by the idea of Salvation, with this essential particularity: I can save myself only if I share in the salvation of others. The notion of interdependence was part and parcel of the universality of salvation which was at the heart of Catholic spirituality and which was constantly found in the texts and on the images.

The second characteristic of the period: people were convinced that salvation was taking place in the here and now. There was a sense of the time in which they were living, which was something new in the 19th century, the fruit of the French Revolution. It was for this reason that the reawakening of the missionary spirit took place in France. Theoretically, it was the country that was the least prepared to send missionaries abroad; it was the one that had suffered the most from the consequences of the Revolution. Yet, at the end of the century, around 1900, most of the missionaries were French: 2/3 of the men, 90% of the women. Why was that possible? Because since the French Revolution, French Catholics, more than others, had understood that faith is not something that one inherits or that is automatic, but something that requires choices and personal commitment. That thought keeps coming back in the texts of the missionaries: Salvation is not something that

Origins of the Assumption Family

will take place in the future; it takes place in the here and now. Pastoral programs were therefore set up to prepare people now for their death which could come unexpectedly at any moment.

This salvation was in keeping with a culture, viz., the European culture which is a modern culture. This means a culture that stresses not only the present moment but also the things of this world. From the 18th to the 19th century, a reversal took place in our relation to the hereafter. This can be seen especially in the iconography (votive offerings) of the time: heavenly concerns decreased in favor of earthly ones. A new attitude emerged: people were no longer willing to wait for a happiness that would only come in heaven. Consequently, the speeches that were formerly addressed to workers were no longer acceptable: “you are poor and miserable, but that is not important. Obey your employers, and you will have a place in heaven.” More and more, for the people of the 19th century, their earthly existence took on an importance of its own. It was no longer a simple passage or a valley of tears while waiting for paradise. The Catholic Church, which was part of the culture of the time, directly shared this view regarding the importance of life on this earth. It felt that it had something to offer society, and the missions were a fantastic demonstration of this belief.

Had religion become useless? Look at our missionaries! Who is taking care of the lepers? Who is opening schools, dispensaries, hospitals, etc.?

To be sure, there was a desire to attract believers in these countries. Yes, there was a form of proselytism, but there was more than that. There was also a desire to demonstrate that religion is necessary. Religion has something to say and to do about transforming our earthly existence.

This was a new way of relating to others which stressed especially, though with a few ambiguities, earthly activity carried out through charitable works. A new question arose: how far should the Church go in developing such works? Is the purpose of the missions to increase the number of schools, charitable institutions, etc.?

This overall perspective quickly became part of a specific strategy. We have seen its general principles, but, once on the spot, missionaries needed more specific guidelines.

In the 19th century, things went very well because everything was directed from Rome. For example, when the founder of the Foreign Missions of Lyons went to see the pope for the first time in his life, he had just returned from the Indies. Pius IX received him with a globe of the world in his hand and asked him where he was coming from, how he had come, etc. His vision was

The Church in the 19th Century, Its Geopolitics and Strategies

therefore thoroughly international.

Moreover, the authorities in Rome had a plan. Their idea was to progressively divide the entire planet. They systematically and methodically divided it according to simple principles: once the boundaries of a territory were determined, it was assigned to a missionary congregation of men, and to only one so as to avoid future internal conflicts.

The male congregation then chose the congregations of women that it wanted on its territory.

If Rome had also been responsible for the distribution of the congregations of women, there might never have been any problems!

Missionaries felt that Rome understood nothing of their situation. They had the impression that the “Roman” authorities at the Vatican had never set foot in Africa, Asia, and the Pacific. However, this was not certain because they had people on the spot: synods, local councils, apostolic delegates. When these people returned, they wrote reports of 100 to 150 pages which contained a lot of information, including details.

The Vatican tried to put order into the situation and, at least since the creation of the Propaganda in 1622, had set three objectives which never changed and which proved to be effective in the long run:

- The priority of priorities: missionaries must train local clergy (and they were called to account in this regard).
- Missions must be independent from all political powers (local, foreign, etc.).
- Missions must be self-sufficient. However, this caused problems very quickly because it prompted the missions to enter into the particularly colonial economic system with brickyards, plantations, gardens, etc. And it was embarrassing when missionaries became businessmen.

But very soon, in order to operate the missions, there was a need for support. However, Rome had officially declared that they should not seek the support of political powers. Nevertheless, it spent its time encouraging missionaries to seek political support. Was this an internal contradiction? Not necessarily, because Rome did not mean obtaining the support of the colonists but of the local authorities.

In the real world of the 19th century, the true interlocutors were the major European powers. And this became more and more true as the century

Origins of the Assumption Family

advanced. At the outset, there was a certain amount of conniving that took place (same country, same language, and mutual services). Then conniving led to convergence: the parties wanted the same thing; both wanted to civilize the countries involved. But little by little, this led to confusion because, after a while, it was hard to distinguish between the government official and the missionary. Both parties publicly proclaimed their separate allegiances but, in fact, worked hand in hand. Given the proliferation of institutions, there was a reaction: if you want to develop your institutions, you need a special type of property, and you need a guarantee that you will be able to hold on to this property and that your investment will be profitable. Therefore, the best way to assure all of this is to address yourselves to the colonists in order to obtain laws that will provide you with titles to your property and that guarantee their security.

From the point-of-view of efficiency, this attitude was unimpeachable, but it tied the Church to political authorities more than it might have wanted in the beginning.

Conclusion

Evaluation of the Catholic missionary experience of the 19th century.

In 1914–18, the war aggravated the difficulties that were already emerging. It traumatized the missionary world. In Cameroun, for example, the French missionaries had the German missionaries arrested. How could the people understand this? After the war, German missionaries were expelled from the former German colonies because the latter became French. Rome's immediate reaction was to restate the old guidelines and to forcefully insist upon them: the missions were not to be tied to any particular country and were to have nothing to do with national policies (the encyclical *Maximum illud* of 1919 did not invent anything new; everything had been said before; it merely said it in a particular context and in a very forceful manner).

What were the problems we discovered?

- How to insist on internationalization at a time when the dominant powers and nationalisms were affirming themselves? This was a very complicated problem for the Catholic Church to solve.

How could the Church be both universal and inserted in local cultures which, at the time, were becoming more and more national? How to demonstrate that Catholic missionaries were really devoted to their

The Church in the 19th Century, Its Geopolitics and Strategies

country? The tendency was therefore to say that we are more French than you. But at the same time, they had to explain that they were not first of all French but missionaries of the Roman, Catholic, and Apostolic Church of Jesus Christ. They were constantly torn between these two positions.

Some missionaries realized this more rapidly than others, e.g., certain Lazarist Fathers (Vincentians) in China at the end of the 19th century. The Belgian Vincent Lebbe clearly realized that if the Catholic Church continued to tie itself closely to France, as it did, its chances of establishing itself in China were nil.

- The question of Church institutions. The logic behind them obliged the local churches to enter into negotiations and alliances that became difficult to manage. Two examples: in 1908, an agreement was signed between the Belgian Congo and the Vatican which gave advantages to missionaries. But later on, it took a long time to withdraw from this agreement. In Portugal, the missions were protected by very advantageous accords that were signed by Rome, but these accords eventually put Rome in an awkward position during the war in Angola and Mozambique.
- The most fundamental question: the Utopia of a Christian society. The missionary world developed all of its strategy around the idea that, in foreign countries, it would finally be able to establish the Christian societies it had dreamed about, societies administered under the moral and spiritual guidance of the Catholic Church through its priests.

But the idea of a theocracy began to be questioned shortly before World War I. In fact, there were societies that would never become Catholic, e.g., China. What then was the purpose of our presence? To create Christian enclaves? And what about the Muslim world where the Church was not allowed to convert anyone? Should missionaries go back home or invent something else, as Father Charles de Foucauld tried to do?

- The problem of local culture? How should it be dealt with? Should the Church impose its own model on these people (obligatory celibacy)?

We must recognize that the 19th century was able to introduce into the Catholic Church an awareness of the universal and a willingness to be

Origins of the Assumption Family

part of it, and that it succeeded to a certain degree. If things changed so rapidly, especially in terms of the number of faithful (statistics), it was because of these choices. In 1800, Catholics in Africa were 1% of the population; in 1914, they were 3.5%, and the increase had only begun. Today, including Protestants, Christians are 30% of the population. Today, missionaries claim that Islam has invaded Africa, but Islam was 37% of the population in 1800 and remains at 37% today in 2003. In overall terms, Islam has not progressed.

The solutions that were found were based essentially on directives that came from the center and that tried to give everyone a number of common characteristics. For example, in just a few years, all of the programs of all of the seminaries throughout the world were changed, obliging everyone to teach Thomistic philosophy and theology.

Finally, the 19th century was already trying to reconcile the idea of being rooted in a particular society with, at the same time, the fact that the Catholic Church cannot be identified with a particular society. Enculturation is one aspect of the question, but it is necessary to know what this word means and what it implies.

Claude Prudhomme

André Latreille Center – LARHRA
18, Quai Claude Bernard
69007 Lyons
France

Historical Landmarks

The Church in the 19th Century, Its Geopolitics and Strategies

General History	Catholic History	Other facts
1789: French Revolution	August 26, 1789: Declaration of the Rights Man & of Citizens 1795: first separation	
1815: Congress of Vienna	1800–1823: Pius VII	1817: Lamennais: <i>Essai sur l'indifférence en matière de religion</i>
1830: Expedition against Algiers	1822: Work of the Propagation of the Faith (Lyons), Society of Evangelical Missions of Paris, 1824: Leo XII condemns Liberalism (<i>Ubi primum</i>)	
1830: Liberal revolutions in Europe	1831–1846: Gregory XVI	
	1832: <i>Mirarivos</i>	1834: <i>Paroles d'un Croyant</i>
1842: Unequal treaties with China	1839: <i>In supreme Apostolatus</i>	1845: Fr. d'Alzon founds the Assumptionists
1848: Liberal revolutions in Europe		Circulation of <i>Les Annales</i> : 150,000 copies
1852–1870: Napoleon III		1856: African Missions of Lyons
1859: Capture of Saigon		1859: Charles Darwin, <i>Origin of the Species</i>
	1864: <i>Quanta cura</i> and the <i>Syllabus</i>	1863: E. Renan, <i>Vie de Jesus</i>
1867–1912: Meiji Era in Japan, 1869: Suez Canal		1867: Karl Marx, <i>Das Kapital</i> , 1868: Lavigerie founds the White Fathers
1870: Defeat of the 3 rd French Republic, Unity in Italy and Germany	1869–1870: Vatican I, <i>Pastor Aeternus</i> (Infallibility)	1873–1878: Kulturkampf
	1878–1903: Leo XIII	1880–1904: Measures against the Congregations in France
1885: Berlin Conference on Central Africa (Art. 6: protection of the missions)	1879: <i>Aeterni patris</i> , 1891: <i>Rerum Novarum</i> , 1892: <i>Rallicament</i> (In	1883: <i>La Croix</i> becomes a daily, 1886: Albert de Mun founds the Catholic

Origins of the Assumption Family

**Foundation of the
Congregations belonging to the
Assumption Family and their
Respective Founders and
Foundresses**

Foundation of the Religious of the Assumption

THÉRÈSE-MAYLIS TOUJOUSE

Founder, foundress, founding, foundation: all these words indicate the beginning of something. When that something is a religious congregation, who (or what) are we talking about?

The man (or woman) who had the original idea?

The person who implemented it?

The first group to come together for this purpose?

Someone who was very influential?

The spiritual director?

The ecclesiastical superior?

The local bishop?

In the case of the Religious of the Assumption, the term *founder* was used differently in different circumstances, and subsequent interpretations and misinterpretations were sometimes transmitted in ways which bore little connection to reality. Today, in chronological order, I would like to recall the three most important persons connected with the foundation: Father Theodore Combalot (1797–1873), Mother Marie-Eugénie Milleret (1817–1898), and Father Emmanuel d’Alzon (1810–1880). By examining their respective roles, I hope to clarify the term *founder* as well as our history.

The Religious of the Assumption

Date of birth: April 30, 1839.

Place: Paris, in a small flat on rue F6rou near the church of Saint-Sulpice.

Characters: a young girl, Anne Marie-Eugénie Milleret, born in 1817, and her first companion, Anastasie Etevier, born in 1816. In August and

Origins of the Assumption Family

October, two other young girls joined them: Catherine O'Neill, Irish, born in 1817, and Josephine de Commarque, born in 1811. The four comprised the first community, and all four had been directed to this "work" in a surprising way by Father Combalot.

Father Combalot

Born in 1797 at Chatenay in the Isere region of southern France and ordained a priest in 1820, Father Combalot liked to "*attribute his vocation to the priesthood and his ultramontane convictions to the blessing of Pius VII, received in 1804 when the Pope was on his way through France to crown Emperor Napoleon in Paris.*"⁴⁸

As a disciple of Lamennais, he spent time at La Chesnaie and espoused the ideas of the great master, in particular on the transformation of society.⁴⁹

But after Rome's condemnation of Lamennais in 1832, then in 1834, Combalot broke with him, then tried with all the ardor of his eloquence and the fervor of his friendship to persuade him to be humble and return to his original fidelity to the Church, but in vain.⁵⁰

An apostle of the parish and diocesan missions, with an immense devotion to Our Lady, he traveled the length and breadth of Galilean France sowing the seed of ultramontanism. His thinking on the transformation of society fit into the general spiritual renewal of France and into the eagerness for new foundations after the Revolution.

There is no doubt about this: Father Combalot was the founder of the Religious of the Assumption in all that concerned the original inspiration as well as the will to found and to find "his foundress."

While on pilgrimage to St. Anne d'Auray, he had had the inspiration to found a new congregation, and in 1831–32, with a few girls who included his own two sisters, he had made "*an attempt that was a complete failure.*"⁵¹

⁴⁸*Notes et Documents – Origines de l'Assomption*, vol. 1, ch. 1, p. 15.

⁴⁹As a professor of philosophy at the major seminary in Grenoble, Father Combalot soon had his students sharing his admiration for the author of *The Essay on Indifference in the matter of Religion*. One day the Rector told him: "*It is impossible for me to tolerate the teaching of these doctrines in my seminary.*" He replied: "*And I say that it is impossible for me not to teach them.*" The only solution was for him to leave. (*Origines de l'Assomption*, vol. I, chap. 1, p. 20).

⁵⁰1st and 2nd Letters from Father Combalot to Félicité de Lamennais in reply to his book against Rome entitled *On the affairs of Rome*, 1836 and 1837.

⁵¹Writings of Mother Marie-Eugénie, vol. VI, no. 1505. *Notes on the foundation*.

Foundation of the Religious of the Assumption

His first foundation bore no resemblance to anything Mother Marie-Eugénie did later on:

In fact, he understood so little about our present institute that, in an experiment he made a few years earlier with his own sisters, there were none of our rules and nothing of our way of life. It resembled what some people are trying to found today under the name of Deaconesses.⁵²

In 1837, when he met Anne Eugénie Milleret in confession at the church of Saint-Eustache in Paris, he was delighted to have found someone so suitable.

I was the first of our sisters to be told about the work. At a time when I was begging God to send me a confessor who could teach me how best to serve Him, I thought there were signs from Providence that I should go and talk to Father Combalot. This holy missionary had, for several years, thought about a religious association which, under the patronage of Mary, would be dedicated to the education of young girls with the aim of giving them a totally Christian education. During a pilgrimage to St. Anne d'Auray, he thought he had received special insight about the future success of his project; and, in particular, he thought he had understood that these new daughters of the Blessed Virgin would be named after her Assumption and be dressed in purple.⁵³

Two years separated this occasion from the foundation, two years of preparation and uncertainty for Anne Eugénie, and two years of preaching and long absences for Father Combalot. Their correspondence reflects the relationship between father and spiritual daughter, director and directed (although the roles were occasionally reversed), as well as the differences in character between a levelheaded, realistic young woman and an impetuous missionary always on the move.⁵⁴

⁵²Ibid, vol. VI, no. 1506. *Short account of the foundation of our Congregation.*

⁵³Ibid, no. 1506.

⁵⁴Shortly after their first meeting, Anne Eugénie wrote: "What could have made anyone think that a work would materialize? A poor girl of 19 who did not even know what religious life was and who, when she gave herself to it, only wanted to obey and contribute to giving others an education which was more Christian than the one she herself had received, and a missionary who could never stay in one place." (Ibid. no. 1506)

Origins of the Assumption Family

During these two years, the **project**, which would be refined after the foundation, was thought out and expressed in an *Introduction to the Constitutions of the Religious of the Assumption* (1839–1840) attributed to Father Combalot.”⁵⁵

Here, in a powerful fresco of the history of the Church and of religious life since the apostolic era, he sets out the principal needs of the times and the validity of a new congregation for the Christian education of young girls, the future mothers of families.

Aim: to transform society through the Gospel and through the influence of women, the wives of young men from well-to-do families, who are seeking a broad, modern education.

Model: Mary, in her mystery of the Assumption, a woman completely regenerated by grace, which calls for a reflection on the “social mystery of the Assumption.”

The need: a fundamental revolution in the hearts of the rich in order to awaken them to their responsibilities toward the poor, and to form in them “sisters” to care for the poor.

Basic policy: all subjects to be taught from the Catholic point-of-view.

Spiritual foundations: evangelical poverty, humility, solid religious studies, Latin, the Vulgate, the Roman breviary, the liturgy.

Why the Assumption?

Father Combalot began by suggesting that the Assumption, the name which he heard in prayer at St. Anne d’Auray, filled a gap in the list of the mysteries of Our Lady used by existing religious congregations: the Immaculate Conception, the Presentation, the Annunciation, Nazareth, etc.⁵⁶

⁵⁵Bishop Ricard, author of *L’Abbe Combalot missionnaire apostolique* (Ed. Gaume et Cie 1892), wrote of this Introduction: “It is superb, in the style of Ambrose and Jerome. . . worthy of a place beside the masterpieces of the great founders of the religious life. These are truly inspired reflections on the needs of modern education which has so inexplicably strayed from its Christian, social purpose” (p. 143).

⁵⁶However, before the foundation, Father Combalot had written to Anne Eugénie about some previous congregations dedicated to the Assumption. She replied: “Reading what you tell me of the earlier Assumption Congregations, I remember seeing something about them in Helyot’s History [of religious congregations]. You will find some information there.” February 9, 1839, vol. I, no 74 Feb. 9, 1839.

Also, in a conversation on April 30, 1862 (MOM), Mother Marie-Eugénie mentioned some Religious of the Assumption or “Assomptiades” who disappeared during the Rev-

Foundation of the Religious of the Assumption

In this beautiful history of the glories of the Mother of God, the mystery of the Assumption is left for you, my dear daughters. It seems to have been reserved for you by the merciful goodness of Mary, whose virtues you wish to imitate and whose glories you wish to honor here on earth. . . . When the Blessed Virgin was taken up body and soul to the Kingdom of heaven, Christ honored in his noble mother, the woman transformed by grace. . . .

Before the foundation, in a note dated April 4, 1838, Anne Eugénie expressed her thoughts as she “meditated on the mystery of the Assumption while reciting her rosary.” She reflected on its relation to education and the needs of her times, “under the patronage of the Assumption of the Virgin most merciful, a mystery of glory which fills us with joy and hope, and supports us in our weakness.”⁵⁷

Already in these words, there seems to be a connection between the name and the mission.

The motto “*Maria Assumpta est*” (M.A.E.) was first used by Anne Eugénie at the top of letters she sent to Josephine de Cornmarque (the future Mother Marie-Thérèse) on November 21, 1838, and to Father Combalot on November 25.⁵⁸

To Josephine she explained:

I asked Father’s permission to take as our motto the text from the Office of the Assumption which, he says, must summarize our work, *Maria Assumpta est*. You are the first person with whom I am using it. Indeed, to honor the glories of Our Lady on the day of her Assumption, to renew our courage and hope through her mystery which she wants us to share, to learn from her example to rise from virtue to virtue following the measure of grace given us, and finally to work to raise the girls in our care

olution. They lived under the Rule of St. Augustine, depended on the King’s official chaplain, and had the church of the Assumption near Faubourg Saint-Honoré (now a Polish church). These sisters, who were descendants of the Haudricettes founded at the time of Saint Louis, had been restored in 1622 by a Bull of Gregory XV. A copy of their Constitutions is in our Archives.

⁵⁷In this text, we meet for the first time the expression: “*Jesus. Mary, the Church; that is all we need for our motto.*” *Notes Intimes*, No. 161/05.

⁵⁸Vol. V, no. 1176 A vol. I, no. 53.

Origins of the Assumption Family

above their small preoccupations, lack of purpose, and vanity—that is precisely what we are destined to do.

The Separation

Despite his firm determination to make the foundation, Father Combalot lacked the qualities of a founder in terms of continuity. Marie-Eugénie had experienced this even before the foundation, as she thought about its future organization. She wrote to him:

I can't help thinking that you may not be the right person for this kind of foundation. I would be relieved if someone else, under your direction and with the same ideas, could assume the responsibility of getting it started and regularized. I'm afraid you do not have enough continuity, or calm, or prudence, or sense of leadership.⁵⁹

And again she wrote:

The exact observance of the rule and consistent guidance from you during the novitiate year will be the only things which can create the spirit of the house. . . It seems clear to me that that is the price of success. . . The entire novitiate year will require your presence at least once a week. I am too young for you to make me superior before my sisters have seen me obeying and humiliating myself very often.⁶⁰

After the foundation, his continual changes in the guidance he gave the sisters as well as in the overall orientation of their religious life quickly caused difficulties.

As soon as we established some form of community life, Father Combalot's inability to govern became evident. I had never had any desire to found; I was doing it out of obedience. I had seen a complete and well-ordered form of religious life; I could not see how that could ever materialize.⁶¹

⁵⁹Vol. 1, no. 43, Sept. 23, 1838.

⁶⁰Vol. I, no. 71, February 3, 1839.

⁶¹Vol. VI, no. 1505.

Foundation of the Religious of the Assumption

Insurmountable difficulties and tensions led to a separation in 1841. Father Combalot wrote a letter to the Archbishop recommending “the nascent work” to him.

I hand over to you the authority which my position as father and founder gave me over this work. I was quite happy to create the first community. The idea which led to its creation still seems necessary and opportune, but my direct co-operation in it would be an obstacle to its development.⁶²

Nonetheless, he felt resentful towards the community.

At that point, Marie-Eugénie still hoped that the separation would not be definitive:

In a few years time, you will return to a peaceful and real friendship with me, without the recent irritations, or the enthusiasm of the first days.⁶³

In August 1841, about the time of her first profession, she replied to a letter of rebuke:

None of us, my dear Father, had the least desire to make this foundation. We all came out of obedience to your advice. Do not be surprised that we have continued to write to you and remember you before God. We were convinced, as I still am, that upon reflection, when you are alone in your soul with God, you will be very pleased that we have continued to work for something you once longed to see accomplished for the glory of God.⁶⁴

She remained grateful:

I am and I always will be your daughter, and we all say the same thing.⁶⁵

⁶²*Origines I*, p. 407.

⁶³Vol. 1. no. 134, April 5. 1841.

⁶⁴Vol. I, no. 136, August 1841.

⁶⁵Vol. I, no. 135, no date (after May 1841).

Origins of the Assumption Family

As their relationship developed, Mother Marie-Eugénie speaks first of “your work,” then of “our work,” and finally of “God’s work.”

After Father Combalot’s departure, writing to Father de Salinis, Marie-Eugénie spoke of Father Combalot as “our founder” and reflected on the future of “the work he founded.”⁶⁶

The following year, writing to Father d’Alzon, she confided her weariness in the face of

the responsibility placed on shoulders so young in age and virtue, because this responsibility is more than just being a superior. It includes a foundation, and a foundation without a founder (or even worse than that).⁶⁷

It was in Jesus Christ that she put her hope:

I feel that only Jesus Christ has the right to found something in his Church, to govern souls, to educate souls redeemed by his blood.⁶⁸

Already, in 1837, faced with her hesitations, Father Combalot had said:

It is Jesus Christ who will be the founder of our Assumption.

However, the memory of Father Combalot remained in the heart of the community:

I think that in recent times the sisters have become fond of Father Combalot again. We prefer our spirit and our dedication to Jesus Christ to anything we see elsewhere, and we are grateful to Father Combalot for his influence in this regard. We are also better disposed towards him now that we feel completely sure we will no longer have too much contact with him.⁶⁹

⁶⁶Vol. VI, no. 502, May 16, 1841.

⁶⁷Vol. VII, no. 1561, Sept. 16, 1842.

⁶⁸Vol. VII, no. 1585, March 16, 1843.

⁶⁹Vol. VII, no. 1579, February 2, 1843.

Father Combalot always had some new project in mind.

In 1849, through an acquaintance, he tried to attract Mother Thérèse-Emmanuel into the contemplative branch of the Congregation of the Incarnate Word, inevitably creating

Marie-Eugénie Milleret

Introducing herself to Father Gros, Father Combalot's successor as ecclesiastical superior, Marie-Eugénie wrote:

Daughter of a family which, unfortunately, was unbelieving, brought up in a society which was even more unbelieving, I was able to realize, from a Christian point-of-view, the misfortune of the class to which I belonged. I admit, Father, that even today I know of no sadder thought than this recollection.⁷⁰

Anne Marie-Eugénie Milleret was born in 1817 in Metz, France, of a bourgeois family opposed to the Restoration. Her father's family came from Italy (Miglioretti) and Lorraine, and her mother's from Belgium.

Historically, the family motto was connected with the faith, *Nihil sine fide* (Nothing without the faith). At this point in time, however, whatever faith they had was that of the century of the Enlightenment; it was the faith of the philosophers and of reason. Her father, a financier and politician, considered himself a disciple of Voltaire, and as a child her education was marked by

tensions with Marie-Eugénie. (Vol. X, no. 2079, December 10, 1849).

In 1855, he was in Nîmes and tried to make contact with the community, but Marie-Eugénie could not agree (vol. XII, no. 2513, Dec. 5, 1855). And in 1861, in similar circumstances, Marie-Eugénie again said she wished to "*avoid this visit*" (vol. XII, nos. 2840 & 2841, Jan. 20 & 25, 1861).

During a conversation in 1862, in answer to the question, "*Did Father Combalot ever come back to the Assumption?*" Marie-Eugénie replied, "No. I have always kept the highest esteem for his virtue. He is a very upright priest, full of faith and fervor. He is an excellent confessor for the people he is not directing. He used to talk a lot in confession but in that way of his, full of apostolic zeal, which touches and gives sinners contrition. His words elevate the soul to God, introducing it into a realm of faith and fervor which carries one away in spite of oneself. He had a very venerable appearance even then; it must be more so now. I am sure he said seven or eight rosaries a day, because he had a great devotion to Our Lady, and he would get up at 3 o'clock in the morning to pray." (MOI I)

Father Combalot died on March 18, 1873. His last words were: "*The Church, the Church, the Church.*" He is buried at Chatenay, in the church he himself had built.

Nine years earlier, on August 10, 1864, Father d'Alzon wrote to Marie Correnson after the death of Bishop Gerbet: "My sorrow is even greater when I realize that Father Combalot is the only one remaining of that astonishing group of priests who revived the Catholic spirit at a time, when, alas, it had become very dormant, forty years ago. Let us love the Church of Jesus Christ very much, and make her loved."

⁷⁰Vol. VI, no. 1504, Nov. 1841.

Origins of the Assumption Family

this. On the other hand, the strong presence of her mother, who was taken from her so early, made a deep impression on her.⁷¹ Many of her principles in later life stemmed from her mother's example. She treasured the memory of the grace of her first communion, at Christmas 1829, as "God's first call to her soul."

After a happy childhood came a time of trial: her father suffered financial ruin, her parents separated, and her mother, who meant everything to her, died suddenly. At the age of 15, she found herself alone, "not knowing whether she could ever again become interested in anything."⁷²

She lived successively with two different families, one rich and worldly, the other pious and, she thought, narrow-minded. She had plenty of time to herself and struggled with the great questions of life and death. In 1836, listening to Father Lacordaire in the cathedral of Notre-Dame in Paris transformed her inner confusion and answered her questions.

I was really and truly converted. I developed a longing to devote all my strength or rather all my weakness to the Church which, from that moment on, I saw as the only one having the knack and power of achieving what is good.⁷³

From her first meeting with Lacordaire, Anne Eugénie came away with an unforgettable definition of religious life:

A gift of self to God in order to save souls.

He advised her to pray and wait, and he suggested a serious reading list which, she said, led to her "intellectual renewal."⁷⁴

A year later, in the church of Saint-Eustache in Paris, she met Father Combalot. She was 19, he was 38.

Some months after their meeting, when she had begun working in view of the foundation, he wrote to her:

The more I think about it, the more convinced I am that Providence has predestined you to become the cornerstone of a work

⁷¹Vol. I, no. 3. July 14, 1837; vol. I, no. 94, August 15, 1839; vol. I, no 123. July 9, 1840; *Notes Intimes*, No.178, August 1841; Vol. VI, No. 1515 et seq, on education.

⁷²*Notes Intimes*, no. 178, August 1841.

⁷³Vol. VI, no. 501, December 1841.

⁷⁴*Ibid.*

Foundation of the Religious of the Assumption

all His own. God has given you the strength to answer my call and to break energetically and wisely all the ties which kept you in the world.

A distinguished ecclesiastic of this country, to whom I showed your little work on education, was most amazed, and could only exclaim after reading it: “Father, that’s the woman God has chosen for the important work you have undertaken. Do not look for anyone else” . . . So take courage, my dear daughter. (Turin, November 21, 1837)

Having been co-opted into a work not of her own choosing, Anne Eugénie began to toy with the “notion of apostolate” which, later on, became the reason she gave for the foundation and allowed her to face the difficulties that awaited her.

To the founding intuitions of Father Combalot, Anne Eugénie brought all that she was and all that she owed to her mother in her early formation: a good education, well-developed natural virtues, an open heart and mind, a sense of the woman’s role in the family and in society, and a godless humanist formation. Extremely gifted with a lively intelligence and a great facility for study, she was driven by a longing to know and a need to understand “which nothing could satisfy.”⁷⁵

From her mother, she had also picked up a passion for politics:

I can tell you that three minds have in fact had a transforming effect on me which I still feel: my mother, then two men toward whom I experienced the feelings I mentioned to you once before. . . What I found so exciting was the social mission I thought they had. In my view, they represented and championed this idea. . . . These two minds still seem to me to have been outstanding as well as my mother’s: both were enthusiasts for democracy, not for the useless details of day-to-day politics, for which I have little interest, but for the future, the destiny, and the high moral ideals of our country.⁷⁶

Here we should mention the influence of Buchez⁷⁷ (his early conversations and his writings) and Boulland, an “enthusiastic follower of Buchez and a

⁷⁵*Notes Intimes*. no. 151, 1836–37.

⁷⁶Vol. VIII, no. 1610, March 12, 1844, and *Notes Intimes*. no. 192/01.

⁷⁷*Ibid.*

Origins of the Assumption Family

prophet of social transformations that are easier to dream about than to carry out.”⁷⁸

At 19 or 20, she expressed this passion of hers, prompted by the prevailing climate of her day:

Thus, all this last year, my heart throbbed at the names of my contemporaries who are illustrious defenders of the Faith: Lamennais before his fall, Lacordaire, Montalembert, and all the others. I dreamed of being a man so as to be really useful like them, because I said to myself that they were saving our country by re-connecting it to the source of truth. And I never thought that it might perhaps be granted to me, with all my faults and failings, to be associated in any way with their great destinies. And yet that is the case, because my humble sacrifice, if it is complete, will be just as blessed by God as are their dazzling ideas. Perhaps I will do great things, perhaps I will have saints for children, and perhaps they in their turn will have great influences for salvation.⁷⁹

On a later occasion, she came back to Lamennais’ idea:

Only yesterday, someone brought me a copy of Lamennais’ *Voices from Prison*. There is more than one thing, as you know, which made my heart throb as I opened this little volume, but more calmly. Fundamentally, it is just not possible that the earthly transformation of humanity and its social order should not come from the Word of Jesus Christ.⁸⁰

However, even though Father Combalot’s plan tied in well with her experience, she felt incapable for the moment of going any further with it. A stay at the Benedictines of the Blessed Sacrament in Paris—from October 1837 to August 1838—helped her to discover the Office and Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. Her novitiate at the Visitation at Cote-Saint-Andre—August 1838 to April 1839—gave her time to study and deepen her prayer life:

⁷⁸Vol. VII, no. 1556, July 19, 1842.

⁷⁹*Notes Intimes*, no. 154/10, 1837.

⁸⁰Vol. VIII, no. 1611, March 15, 1844.

Foundation of the Religious of the Assumption

My studies are having an effect on my meditations, and I am surprised to see how everything St. Thomas is teaching me enters into my devotions, giving them life and influencing them. I do not like to base myself on anything erroneous or uncertain. My soul takes flight more freely and surely when it feels certain of the ground under its feet, and when it is guided by the expert faith of the Angelic Doctor.⁸¹

She appreciated the spirit of Francis de Sales and community life, and she longed for the sisters God would give her later on. It was there that she found confirmation of her attraction for a monastic religious life in the tradition of the great Orders.

Having been converted by the preaching of Lacordaire, she chose a form of life very similar to that of the Dominicans who would soon be re-established in France. It was “the only Order we felt attracted to.” These foundations were laid from the very first years of the Congregation:

I love to talk about St. Catherine of Sienna, that great saint of your Order. God permitted that our Congregation should begin on her feast day. Since we found her to be such a perfect model of apostolic life combined with prayer life, she is also a special patron of ours.⁸²

At much the same time, faced with what appeared to be doubts emanating from the chancery about this little group of young women, Marie-Eugénie wrote to Father Gros, the Ecclesiastical Superior. In her letter, she affirmed her belief in the need for this new work: “sooner or later it will be done,” perhaps “by holier hands.” As for herself, “my only vocation is to devote myself to it, whatever suffering or difficulties this may entail.”⁸³

But at the same time, she asked for the help of Father Lacordaire who was at the origin of her conversion:

It was to your preaching alone that I owed my new life and my desire to share in the sacrifice of Christ. No one else had taught me to recognize its power, and I must admit that I found no notion of it in the minds of most Christians.⁸⁴

⁸¹Vol. 1, no. 56, Dec. 20, 1838.

⁸²Vol. VI, no. 1502, Feb. 4, 1842.

⁸³Vol. VI, no. 1504, Nov. 1841.

⁸⁴Vol. VI, no. 1501, December 13, 1841

Origins of the Assumption Family

And she resumed a correspondence begun earlier with Father d'Alzon, Vicar General of the diocese of Nîmes.

Father Emmanuel d'Alzon

Born in Le Vigan in southern France in 1810, Father d'Alzon was 28 when he first met Anne Eugénie Milleret at Chatenay, the estate of Father Combalot's mother. At the time, she was at the Visitation at Côte-Saint-André.

The d'Alzon family motto was *Deo dati* (Given to God), which was an affirmation of a living faith. Here, we can only mention in passing his native soil, his family, Lamennais and his followers, his ideas about restoring the Catholic faith, Rome, his ordination, and the diocese of Nîmes. His roots were very different from those of Marie-Eugénie, whether family, social, religious or political. Nevertheless, their first meeting, recorded by both, was a meeting of minds and engendered instant mutual esteem.

Mother Marie-Eugénie wrote:

It was towards the end of the summer of 1838 that I saw Father d'Alzon for the first time. I had just turned 21. Father d'Alzon questioned me closely about the way I understood the work and my dispositions towards it, but without touching on anything to do with my conscience.⁸⁵

She also wrote:

Without discussing matters of conscience in such a fleeting encounter, I immediately felt great esteem and confidence in him. It was there that, as the three of us talked, he told me in front of Father Combalot that the greatest obstacle to the work this good priest wanted would be himself, and that I had to expect it. . . Father d'Alzon began directing me in December 1840. . . Once I became a religious, I did not see Father d'Alzon again until 1843.⁸⁶

From Father d'Alzon (conversations in 1874–1875):

⁸⁵Vol. VI, no. 1505, no date.

⁸⁶Vol. XV, no. 3636, 1880.

Foundation of the Religious of the Assumption

I got to know Father Combalot at Lavagnac, at my father's home. In 1838, he was staying there for a short time and talked to me about his plan of founding a new religious order for the education of young girls. He told me that for this purpose he had discovered someone highly intelligent: she had learned Latin in three months, was doing astonishing translations of Virgil, and had written a remarkable essay on education. There was certainly no other woman in Europe who could compare with her. "I'll introduce her to you," he told me, because he already regarded her as his property. . .

When they met:

This girl's every word bore the stamp of solid judgment and of a soul not only of great worth but in the habit of conversing with God. I can still hear her telling me about the Catholic attitude to develop in souls. She told me things that were so penetrating that I was struck and, in one stroke, she put into words what I was secretly thinking about education and religious life. Every one of her words seems to have been maturely thought out and weighed before God.

When Father Combalot explained his plans to me and told me that things now had to move quickly and openly, I admit I was very worried about your poor Mother, and I turned to Father Combalot and told him that I could see just one obstacle to his work. "And what is that?" he asked. "You, my dear friend."

At the time of the foundation:

This relationship lasted four years without my ever seeing your Mother or any of the Religious of the Assumption. Everything took place by correspondence. At the end of that time, I wanted to see the faces of these people. . . I arrived in Paris in August 1843.

In the midst of the difficulties with Father Combalot, Marie-Eugénie obtained his permission to consult another priest. After refusing several names, he accepted Father d'Alzon, perhaps because of the distance between Nîmes and Paris. At the very outset, in December 1840, Father d'Alzon wrote:

Origins of the Assumption Family

No, you cannot leave the success of your work to Father Combalot. Remember what I told you at Chatenay in his presence. If I had relied only on him, I would not have encouraged you, even then, to go ahead. . . Father Combalot will not change. He is a little too old for that, and he is set in his ways.

Such a painful situation cannot go on forever. But for now, we can only prepare the way. It is up to Providence to loosen your ties, and you may be sure they will be loosened sooner than you think. In hastening to answer you, I have wanted to prove the interest I have in your work.

A period of uncertainty followed Father Combalot's departure, and Mother Marie-Eugénie consulted Father d'Alzon often about the Constitutions she was writing: how best to express the charism and the spirituality of the Assumption. The references would be too numerous to enumerate. Suffice it to look at their correspondence between 1842 and 1844, the date of the final vows of Mother Marie-Eugénie and the first sisters.

In October and November 1844, Mother Marie-Eugénie went to Nîmes to consult Father d'Alzon in person about the basic topic of their correspondence over the previous two years (the handwritten text of these Constitutions, in the Assumptionist Archives in Rome, shows the extent and nature of their collaboration). Father d'Alzon replied to her questions and gave his advice, but never imposed his opinion. The main ideas and the thinking behind them were always those of Mother Marie-Eugénie.

While she had hoped that someone else would take over as superior, he recognized her role as foundress and reminded her of that fact.

Their correspondence of 1844–1845 is very important because it shows how the work matured. It is full of reflections on the spirit of the Congregation in general, and it broaches the possibility of the foundation of a male branch with “a similar spirit, in order to give young Christian men and especially young priests a character that is stronger, broader, more intelligent, more Christian in one sense, and especially nobler and freer in another sense.”⁸⁷ Father d'Alzon started his much hoped-for foundation in 1845. From then on, they spoke of “our double Assumption,” and of “our two Assumptions.”⁸⁸

⁸⁷Vol.VIII, no. 1627, August 5, 1844.

⁸⁸From Marie-Eugénie: vol. X, no. 2082, December 24, 1849; vol. XI, no. 2265, August

Foundation of the Religious of the Assumption

“Your work,” “our work,” “the work of God”: these expressions which alternated in the letters of Marie-Eugénie and Father Combalot now alternated in the correspondence between Marie-Eugénie and Father d’Alzon. Many examples over the years could be cited.⁸⁹

As disciples of Lamennais and lovers of Jesus Christ and his Church, the two founders had much in common. This same spirituality is found throughout the Assumption family. It is difficult to attribute the central ideas to either one or the other.

In 1855, referring to the possible vocation of Father Gay to the Assumptionists, Mother Marie-Eugénie expressed what she saw as the characteristics of the male Assumption. Since she was speaking about the Assumption in general, we can conclude that these were features she considered common to both our Congregations:

He is the one who conceptualizes what the Assumption is all about. That is why even the Dominicans and Jesuits don’t suit him. . . Recently, a sort of premonition prompted me to speak to him a lot about what I like so much about your ideas. . . : knowledge about Jesus Christ who sheds light on everything; love of the Church; the spirit of dedication to and zeal for the Holy See; the Christian perspective on education, on art, and on the way we conduct our entire lives; our attachment to tradition, the Office, and the Liturgy; our disinterestedness as an Order; and finally all these things which you know better than I, and which are always Jesus Christ, either in himself, or in his Vicar, or in his saints, in our worship of him, and in everything he has inspired to his Church.⁹⁰

There were differences as well. Expressions such as God alone, the Christianization of the intelligence, joyful detachment—so important for the Religious—do not have their parallel in Father d’Alzon. The way she understood the mystery of the Assumption, the love of truth, the contemplative

12, 1852; vol. XII, no. 2454, December 31, 1854; vol. XII, no. 2461, January 31, 1855. From Fr d’Alzon: Letter of June 2, 1855, etc.

⁸⁹In 1859, Father d’Alzon composed a Directory for the Religious of the Assumption. Mother Marie-Eugénie did not accept it, saying that an attractive and encouraging text would be better than one which consisted of examinations of conscience. Later, Father d’Alzon reworked it for his religious and also gave it to the Oblates.

⁹⁰Vol. XII, no. 2469, March 12, 1855.

Origins of the Assumption Family

spirit, all of which are fundamental to our spirituality, are also particular to Marie-Eugénie.

How to live the contemplative spirit was a point of difference. Mother Marie-Eugénie gave her sisters a life modeled on that of the cloistered Orders (all the while refusing full enclosure), whereas Father d'Alzon gave the Assumptionists a more priestly form. Their ideas on monastic spirituality were also different and complementary (cf. the Instructions given by Father d'Alzon to the Religious of the Assumption in Nîmes in 1870, and those Mother Marie-Eugénie gave her Religious in Paris in 1878). Father d'Alzon's spirituality was more active and apostolic, while Mother Marie-Eugénie's was more contemplative, always with an emphasis on the link between the apostolate and the life of prayer.

Mother Thérèse-Emmanuel

In our account of Mother Marie-Eugénie and of the origins of the Congregation, we cannot forget the part played by Mother Therese-Emmanuel. Catherine O'Neill was born in 1817 in Limerick (Ireland) to a profoundly Christian family. Brought up by two religious congregations (the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary at the Bar Convent, York, and the Canonesses of the Holy Sepulcher at New Hall), she went to France on a temporary visit to the Abbaye-aux-Bois, where, in a surprising fashion, she became entangled in Father Combalofs meshes during Lent of 1839. She assured him, however, that she was not "wholly his," but "wholly God's." In spite of differences in upbringing, temperament, religious leanings, and ideas on education (at the beginning), she and Mother Marie-Eugénie developed very close ties, which the trials of the early days with Father Combalot only served to strengthen. More than any of the others, she suffered from the continual variations which he imposed in their formation. A mystic and profoundly contemplative, mistress of novices until her death in 1888, she trained generations of sisters for the Assumption religious life. Father d'Alzon reproached her for steering the sisters too strongly towards the contemplative life. In the midst of difficulties, both internal and external (the role of the Fathers in the government of the Congregation), she was always Mother Marie-Eugénie's faithful, clearheaded assistant, anxious to maintain communion around the Foundress. When she died, soon after the approval of the Constitutions, Marie-Eugénie said of her:

You all know what Mother Thérèse-Emmanuel was for the Con-

Foundation of the Religious of the Assumption

gregation: how, by her religious spirit, her work, her faith and her dedication, she founded this work of the Assumption.⁹¹

I would like to add something about Mother Thérèse-Emmanuel by underlining her great love for the Liturgy. You have all witnessed it, and those who lived with her remember her great love for the Office. There is no doubt that, at the beginning of the Congregation, she insisted more than anyone else that we should say the Office. She desired it ardently, and she was always strongly attached to it. She inspired the novices with love and devotion for the Office of the Church all the time she had charge of their formation. She taught them to say it with respect and attention and to make it the foundation of their spiritual life.⁹²

The Title of Founder and Foundress

Thus far we have seen Father Combalot as the inspiration behind the Congregation, and Mother Marie-Eugénie as the Foundress who implemented his ideas, with Father d'Alzon as a friend, adviser and spiritual director. With respect to the title and role of founder, there exists some confusion. Even today it is said and written, both inside and outside our Congregations, that Father d'Alzon founded the Religious of the Assumption. It is a fact that, as a rule, congregations of women were usually founded from pre-existing congregations of men, but that is not our case. The confusion stems in part from what Mother Marie-Eugénie herself said. She had a great love for the Fathers and their Congregation and always wanted to stress the relationship. Her humility also made her withdraw in favor of Father d'Alzon, treating him as the founder, and even on occasion naming him as the founder. We can also discern a desire to escape from the clutches of the bishops and to avoid all possible conflict with them.

In reality, there were juridical stages in the use of the term founder.

In 1854, referring to a questionnaire addressed by the Archdiocese of Paris to its religious sisters, Marie-Eugénie asked Father d'Alzon: "Do I put Father Combalot or Bishop Affre for our beginnings?"⁹³ Father d'Alzon advised her to reply: "Founded by a priest friend of Bishop Affre who wished that the

⁹¹Chapter Instruction, May 27, 1888.

⁹²Chapter Instruction, July 15, 1888.

⁹³Vol. XII, no. 2393, March 19, 1854.

Origins of the Assumption Family

first act of his episcopate be your investiture (August 14, 1840)—don't put anything about Father Combalot—the soberest truth possible.”

Marie-Eugénie's official reply is found in Volume VI, No 1509. About herself, she simply said “the one who was chosen as superior,” without giving her name.

On several other occasions, when introducing the Congregation, even as late as April 1880, at a period when the political climate was difficult for religious congregations, she referred to Bishop Affre as to a founding authority.

Our Congregation, founded by Bishop Affre, under the Rule of St. Augustine and the Constitutions which he had kindly examined. . .⁹⁴

The important thing is to say that we depend on the Bishop and that we are recognized by the Government. If asked, we should give the name of Bishop Affre as founder.⁹⁵

Most of the time, Marie-Eugénie did not speak of herself as the foundress. She was “the first of our sisters to be told about this work” and the “first stone to be laid. . .” “I want to be like those foundation stones which hold up the building without anyone seeing them or thinking about them.”⁹⁶

At the same time, she recognized that she was the foundress.

To Father d'Alzon she wrote: “I am a foundress, but I see that I am not even a religious.”⁹⁷ “I am trying to see before God what I need most in order to finally resemble a foundress.”⁹⁸ Writing from Rome in 1866: “The Pope will refer the matter to the Bishop of Nîmes, and if through him he is sure not only of the Institute but of my person as Superior General and Foundress, since that is what they consider me, . . .”⁹⁹

Thinking about the first sisters who bore the burden of the foundation, she wrote to Mother Therese-Emmanuel at Richmond in 1851: “We are all foundation stones.”¹⁰⁰

Regarding the application of the title to Father d'Alzon:

⁹⁴Vol. XVII, no. 3959, 1855–1856.

⁹⁵Vol. XXV, no. 7249, April 25, 1880.

⁹⁶Vol. XII, no. 2366, December 8, 1853.

⁹⁷Vol. IX, no. 1798, October 7, 1846.

⁹⁸Vol. XI, no. 2215, January 1, 1852.

⁹⁹Vol. XVI, no. 3740, June 7, 1866.

¹⁰⁰Vol. III, no. 325, March 22, 1851.

Foundation of the Religious of the Assumption

In 1866, when they were presenting the Constitutions to Rome for the approbation of the Institute, Marie-Eugénie mentioned the title “founder”:

In Rome, I would very much like that we be listed under the heading of Nîmes (*Nemausensis*) and that, from now on, it be clearly understood that you are our Father, so that neither you nor I will deny it when people say that you are our founder.¹⁰¹

He did not reply to her immediately, but at least three letters were sent to Father Picard about its implications in terms of authority (letters of September 3, 18 and 25, 1866).

In 1868, in the midst of a tense situation, Mother Marie-Eugénie seriously considered resigning.¹⁰²

On August 26, Father d’Alzon took up the question again from Bagnères de Bigorre:

You are telling me about decisions you must take and are asking whether I accept the idea of continuing to be involved with *our* work as in the past. Please note that I accept to continue doing everything you desire. Let me explain. When I established 23 or 24 years ago what I would do for you, there was no question of giving me the title of founder, which you have since come back on. The title implies something. What part of that something do you want to give me? This is why I have been embarrassed by various remarks you have made. I don’t want anything more than you want to give, but does what you want to give include the title of founder? For me, that is the question. Since you find that, in the greater freedom that I have here, I am coming back on what I said earlier (which is not quite correct because there is no need for me to come back on it), you can at least see that I am quite happy to go along with your ideas, as long as I know what they are.

This is not the place to study the evolution of their personal friendship and of the relationship of authority that existed between them.

¹⁰¹Vol. XVI, no. 3772, August 31, 1866.

¹⁰²Vol. XIV, no. 3186, June 29, 1868: “*When I talk of resigning, I am not saying that anyone desires that I do so, but I would rather take this course of action than deviate from what I believe to be the spirit of the Congregation and its good.*”

Father d'Alzon's Death

Mother Marie-Eugénie was in Nîmes at the beginning of November 1880, waiting for a sign from Father Picard in the hope of seeing Father d'Alzon, which took place on November 14.

When Father d'Alzon died, Mother Marie-Eugénie, questioned by Bishop Besson about the beginning of our Congregation, spoke of Father d'Alzon as our founder. A letter the Bishop wrote to the clergy of Nîmes repeated her remark, causing a great stir among the sisters. Several wrote to Auteuil asking for an explanation. Mother Thérèse-Emmanuel replied in a note dated January 20, 1881:

You are asking how we understand here the sentence that refers to us in Bishop Besson's letter. We see it, not as saying something contrary to the truth, but simply as a sign of respect and affection at this moment for Father d'Alzon.

The Bishop had asked Mother about the beginnings of our Congregation, which she recounted to him. "So," he went on, "Father d'Alzon founded only the Oblates?" Mother replied: "That is not the case, your Excellency. Because of all the services he rendered us, because of the vocations he gave us, Father d'Alzon can be regarded as our founder. We are mourning him. . ." Faced with such a direct question, our dear Mother must have been very embarrassed. She has always been reluctant to say herself that the major role in the work of the Assumption was hers. She has never wanted to call herself the foundress. She thinks she is unworthy of that title. It is God, she repeats, who did it, we were only his instruments. It is He who had the idea and who brought us to put it into effect.

She would hide herself among the "us" of the first sisters, as if she had not had a more important role than the others in all that was done. Also, her humility and her nobility of soul have kept her from attributing anything to herself, but we who know she was the foundation stone chosen by God, who have been built upon her from the beginning, who have relied on her, and who have been supported in the arduous work of those first years by the strength, energy, and stability we found in her, we cannot give anyone else the title only she deserves. For no one else shared with her the

Foundation of the Religious of the Assumption

hardships and difficulties of the beginnings or administered on a daily basis the remedial measures of light, support, and gift-of-self as she did.

The work was already in existence when Mother began having closer contacts with Father d'Alzon. Later on, he had long conversations with her on all the great religious questions which had inspired our work that he found so beautiful. She was so close to his thinking and to his point-of-view that, with her help, he got the idea to found a similar congregation for education, and when he got back to Nîmes, he bought a [secondary] school already called Assumption.¹⁰³ That was how, in actual fact, Mother was instrumental in helping Father d'Alzon develop the plan he then put into effect. He also helped our work grow by his advice and dedication. That is why we have always had great gratitude, affection and respect for the assistance he gave us. It is in that sense that Mother could give him the title of founder when she was with the Bishop. In any case, the Congregation would not use it in any other sense. We jealously keep for Mother General the title that is hers, both because it is the truth and because of the affection we have for her in our hearts. You are perfectly right in saying that our relationship with the Fathers is one of friendship and mutual help, and nothing more.

I hasten to finish this very long letter. I will be pleased if it throws some light on the point you asked about. You see, the Fathers know nothing about how we began. Having come well after us, they saw the relationship that already existed between us and them, and they took it for granted that we did not exist before them. But we believe that, in order to show the real plan of God and what he did for our Assumption, we must tell the facts as they are, along with the dates which show how things happened and what Mother has been for our Assumption, truly its foundress. Farewell. Sister Thérèse-Emmanuel.¹⁰⁴

In December 1880, Mother Marie-Eugénie had herself written to Mother Marie-Marguerite, superior in London:

¹⁰³In fact, the purchase of the college, which took place while Father d'Alzon was away, had nothing to do with his plan to found a congregation.

¹⁰⁴This letter is in both the RA and AA Archives.

Origins of the Assumption Family

Have you read the pastoral letter of the Bishop of Nîmes about Father d'Alzon? It is very beautiful, though he should not have compared him with Lacordaire nor exaggerated what I told him about his influence on our foundation.¹⁰⁵

In addition, when there were serious difficulties regarding the government of the Religious of the Assumption, at the time of the special General Chapter of 1886 and of its consequences, another series of documents must be taken into account.

Thus, Mother Marie-Eugénie wrote to Mother Jeanne-Emmanuel:

It is not Father d'Alzon who is the founder. . . . With respect to the life written by Father Timon-David, it seems to me that His Excellency the Bishop would do us a great service if he brought this mistake to the author's attention without our having to intervene ourselves. It is a flagrant mistake. M. Mermillod says clearly that all who were there when we began say it is not Father d'Alzon who is the founder. However, we should not raise a question that would be resented even more by the Fathers of the Assumption.¹⁰⁶

Shared Intuitions—Mutual Inspiration

While the Religious of the Assumption do not use the word founder for Father d'Alzon, they recognize their great debt toward him. It was he who led Marie-Eugénie to a human and spiritual maturity which the young girl, endowed with a supernatural instinct, did not have when she was chosen by Father Combalot. Between Marie-Eugénie and Father d'Alzon, there was a long history of forty years of friendship. It had its ups and downs, but on both sides the friendship was stronger than any passing mishap.

They were two attractive personalities with very different talents and inclinations which they developed in association and by sheer osmosis. Two personalities who left their mark on their Congregations simply because of all they were. And the two foundations differ, not just because the Religious of the Assumption were founded six years before the Augustinians of the Assumption, but because their respective foundations were marked by these

¹⁰⁵Vol. XXVII, no. 8082, December 15, 1880.

¹⁰⁶Vol. XXII, no. 6360, November 4, 1887.

Foundation of the Religious of the Assumption

founders and by their particular spiritual tendencies: those of a religious priest who was passionate about the Kingdom of God, and those of a woman religious who was both contemplative and apostolic.

They had common intuitions, they spurred each other on, and their respect was mutual.

Father d'Alzon gave expression to this in a letter to Mother Marie-Gabrielle, the superior in Nîmes. After his series of conferences in 1870–71, in the presence of the novitiate of the Religious of the Assumption in exile in Nîmes, Father d'Alzon answered the words of gratitude that had been expressed to him: “If I have given something, I have also received enormously. This type of intercommunication is what enabled me to say what I said. We have bought in the Cévennes Mountains a small property where there are two ravines. Each has a little spring that flows into a single stream. Once the waters intermingle, who can say where the stream really originated?” (July 11, 1871).

Where does the stream originate? The spring? Reflecting on their foundation, both could say, as did Marie-Eugénie:

At Assumption, everything comes from Jesus Christ, everything belongs to Jesus Christ, and everything must be for Jesus Christ.
(May 2, 1884).

There is only one rock which is Jesus Christ. It is on Jesus Christ that we are built (August 1, 1880).

Sister Thérèse-Maylis Toujouse
Archivist of the Religious of the
Assumption

17, rue de l'Assomption
75016 Paris
France

Appendix: The Meeting of Anne Eugénie Milleret and Father Emmanuel d'Alzon in 1838

Marie-Eugénie's Memories of Father d'Alzon (1880)

The first contacts I had with Father d'Alzon were in 1838. He had already been Vicar General in Nîmes for some time. I was at the Visitation in Cote St. Andre. Father Combalot, having come to preach a no-vena, I don't know where, spent some time with Father d'Alzon, perhaps at Lavagnac. He spoke to him about me and his work, and he showed him a letter in which I told him I was afraid about what might be said if I had too many contacts with Father Combalot. He begged him to write and reassure me. That letter from Father d'Alzon, the first I received, was stolen along with a certain number of others in a robbery we had at Impasse des Vignes. . . Some time afterwards, Father Combalot asked the Sisters of the Visitation to let me spend a little time at his mother's house at Chatenay. Father d'Alzon came, and it was there that I saw him for the first time. We did not have many one-on-one conversations because Father Combalot watched jealously so as not to give me that opportunity except that, on one occasion, while visiting a shrine in the mountains, Father d'Alzon finished his office and I my rosary before Father Combalot, and we were able to chat a little. Without discussing matters of conscience in such a fleeting encounter, I immediately felt great esteem and confidence in him. It was there that, as the three of us talked, he told me in front of Father Combalot that the greatest obstacle to the work this good priest wanted would be himself, and that I had to expect it. . . . Father d'Alzon began directing me in December 1840. . . . Once I became a religious, I did not see Father d'Alzon again until 1843.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁷Vol. XV, no. 3636, 1880.

Conversations of Father d'Alzon in 1874–75 about his first meeting with Miss Milleret:

I got to know Father Combalot at Lavagnac, at my father's home. In 1838, he was staying there for a short time, and he talked to me about his plan of founding a new religious order for the education of young girls. He told me that for this purpose he had discovered someone highly intelligent: she had learned Latin in three months, was doing astonishing translations of Virgil, and had written a remarkable essay on education. There was certainly no other woman in Europe who could compare with her! "I'll introduce you to her," he told me, because he already regarded her as his property... We went together to Mon-tauban, where Father was to preach a retreat. There, he asked me to write to Miss Milleret, which I did, but it was a very strong letter in which I pointed out that the work she was undertaking seemed very difficult to me, and that she would need to invoke the Holy Spirit a lot. During our trip, I got to know this good Father Combalot much better, and I no longer had any confidence in him as a practical man. He went to preach a diocesan retreat, then I saw him again in Lyons where he persuaded me to come and see him in Chatcnay, at his mother's. "Come, I will introduce you to Miss Milleret. You'll see what a fine woman she is! You can back her up. You can encourage her..." I took up his invitation, and that was when I met your Mother for the first time. She was already wearing a purple dress, although she was still in the world...

This girl's every word bore the stamp of solid judgment and of a soul not only of great worth but in the habit of conversing with God. I can still hear her telling me about the Catholic attitude to develop in souls. She told me things that were so penetrating that I was struck and, in one stroke, she put into words what I was secretly thinking about education and religious life. Every one of her words seems to have been maturely thought out and weighed before God.

We agreed we would make a pilgrimage to a chapel on a mountain not far away. I was struck by your Mother's beautiful expression as she recited her rosary on the way; and I said to myself that this

Origins of the Assumption Family

was someone who would not give of herself in half measures. I had several very serious conversations with her, which convinced me more and more that she had the makings of a foundress.

When Father Combalot explained his plans to me and told me that things now had to move quickly and openly, I admit I was very worried about your poor Mother, and I turned to Father Combalot and told him that I could see just one obstacle to his work. “And what is that?” he asked. “You, my dear friend.”

Once, your Mother wrote to me at the end of 1839, telling me that the difficulties that had been foreseen had begun to develop between Father Combalot and herself. I thought that I should not attempt to answer her without Father Combalot’s permission. She wrote to me again in 1840 telling me that she had obtained his permission. I was happy to think I could be of some service to your Mother for whom I had had the highest esteem after seeing her for the first time at Chatenay. Furthermore, I could not help pitying a new young community, in which I saw so many fine candidates left almost completely to their own devices. I realized that here were some precious people whom God wanted to use to do a lot of good. This relationship lasted four years without my ever seeing your Mother or any of the Religious of the Assumption. Everything took place by correspondence. At the end of that time, I wanted to see the faces of these people. . . I arrived in Paris in August 1843.

The Title of Founder. At the death of Father d’Alzon

Besides the text quoted earlier about the conversation between Mother Marie-Eugénie and Bishop Besson, the Assumptionist Archives contain a text entitled: *Note dictated on November 22, 1880 by Madame the Superior General of the Ladies of the Assumption.*¹⁰⁸ The handwriting is that of Mother Marie of Christ. The text cannot be Mother Marie-Eugénie’s.

It was in 1838 that, in quite providential circumstances, Father d’Alzon met for the first time the soul with whom he was to begin

¹⁰⁸C.L.D.L., no. 98.

Foundation of the Religious of the Assumption

the work which formed his religious family. These brief initial contacts produced a warm feeling of mutual esteem and confidence. One year later, Mother Eugénie, finding herself together with a few young women for a foundation she was accepting only out of obedience to her confessor, obtained permission in the midst of inextricable difficulties to have recourse to Father d'Alzon. She placed her entire confidence in him. By his advice and dedication, he formed the work that God had blessed with such remarkable growth. During his trip to Paris in 1843, a great deal of his time was dedicated to Mother and her daughters, and in 1844, Mother came to Nîmes to the Ladies of Marie-Therese to write a first draft of the Constitutions. The contemplative life, so dear to Father d'Alzon, was for the most part combined in the Institute with apostolic works. The Roman Office was adopted, and the first house of adoration within the Congregation was the one that Father d'Alzon established in Nîmes in 1855. Thus the devotions dearest to Father d'Alzon had their place in this semi-cloistered Institute which was the first to consider him as their Father.

But if Father d'Alzon was the Father, he never wanted to be the Superior. He always refused to have any greater authority over the Congregation of the Ladies of the Assumption and invariably told the foundress that her Institute consisted of houses where the religious were numerous enough to form regular Communities with semi-enclosure, and that these communities were as close as could be to the life of fully cloistered orders. He told her that the Institute was one of those which, according to the Council of Trent and the recent decisions of the Congregations, ought in each diocese to be placed under the authority of the bishop and depend on Rome as their center. He also told her that the relationship of spiritual direction and mutual help between her Congregation and ours were the most suitable. He was convinced that no bishop would ever oppose the activities of religious men who professed the same rule and could better than anyone preserve their spirit.

For the Missions, his principles were quite different, he thought that the Religious could have spiritual security there only if they were able to find support in a congregation of religious men in terms of both spiritual direction and government.

Origins of the Assumption Family

Perhaps one ought to say here that later on, when Father d'Alzon, now responsible for the Near Eastern Missions, felt the need in Bulgaria to have women religious who were less cloistered and more active, it was a Religious of the Assumption, Mother Madeleine, whom he first placed at the head of a small house of humble, dedicated girls that one of his sons had gathered at Le Vigan for this purpose. Later on, the growing work took on a life of its own and established itself in Nîmes where Father d'Alzon showered it with his solicitude.

There is another copy of this document in the Archives of the Religious [Sisters] of the Assumption. It is complemented by yet another document which explains the remarks made in the margin, in pencil, by "Mother Therese-Joseph of Jesus Mary, assistant general of the Assomptiades from 1927 to 1939, and then archivist until her death on January 15, 1948."¹⁰⁹

This document, which we owe to the hand of Mother Marie of Christ, is ambiguous. In reading the first sentence, "In 1838, Father d'Alzon met for the first time the soul with whom he was to *begin* the work which formed *his* religious family," it would seem that the Institute of the Assomptiades was part of the religious family of Father d'Alzon and had been begun by him. This interpretation runs contrary to the facts. (It was Father Combalot who was the inspiration behind it and, in this sense, the real founder with Mother Marie-Eugénie of Jesus. All of Volume I of the *Origines de l'Assomption* is proof of it).

And, later on, one gets the impression that the establishment of "the contemplative life, so dear to Father d'Alzon, was for the most part combined in the Institute with apostolic works" was due to Father d'Alzon; so also for the recitation of the Office of the Church. In fact, the Religious of the Assumption began to recite the Office of the Church as early as Advent 1839, in the time of Father Combalot.¹¹⁰

Mother Therese-Emmanuel's letter of January 20, 1881 to Sister Marie-Antoinette explains clearly in what sense we should

¹⁰⁹C.L.D.L., no. 100, Assumptionist Archives.

¹¹⁰*Origines*, vol. I, p. 327.

Foundation of the Religious of the Assumption

take the title “founder” given by Bishop Besson in his beautiful Pastoral Letter on Father d’Alzon. Mother Foundress herself complained that he exaggerated what she had told him about Father d’Alzon’s influence on our foundation.¹¹¹ It says: “Have you received the Pastoral Letter of the Bishop of Nîmes about Father d’Alzon? It is very beautiful, although he has exaggerated what I told him about his influence on our foundation.”

All are foundation stones

From Mother Marie-Eugénie to Mother Thérèse-Emmanuel:

I am like someone trying to tidy up for those who will come after me. Not that I have any revelation about my death, but human life goes so quickly that I am thinking a great deal about the degree of obedience due to God and not to persons, and about the level of poverty, of charity towards those we don’t like, of humility, of attachment to the congregation for the glory of God whose instrument it is—and not to this or that house, place, or employment which we like—of love for the community, of dedication, of regularity, which each one of us must have if the Congregation is to flourish. . . . We are all foundation stones. When some of us, you, me, etc., are dead, everything will depend on the young sisters. The Congregation is lost if they do not have all of the spirit which must animate it. The more we, the first sisters, have been poor in virtue, the more they will need to be virtuous, so much so that, at the present time, I prefer having fewer sisters than admitting some who are too weak. I am afraid of growing so rapidly that it would prevent us from insisting above all on candidates who are solid.¹¹²

This week we celebrate the anniversary of the day we first came together. It was a small and fragile group. One thing that astonishes me as I look back is that none of us thought of founding anything. I certainly did not, neither did Mother Thérèse-Emmanuel nor Sister Marie-Augustine. Yet in those early days, we never doubted about the future of the work God had given

¹¹¹Vol. XXVIII, Letter to Mother Marie-Marguerite, December 15, 1880.

¹¹²Vol. III, no. 325, March 22, 1851.

Origins of the Assumption Family

us to do. Truly, Father Combalot, the only one who wanted to found a work and who had taken us as his instruments, never doubted for an instant. His confidence was communicative.¹¹³

The spirit of the foundation

Our Congregation had such weak and powerless beginnings, out of all proportion with the good that Our Lord has seen fit to draw from it, that one would hardly dare recount them, if it weren't precisely for the fact that, in the absence of all human effort and wisdom, its works have shown themselves to be purely from God, and that, as a result, we have the consolation of knowing that it was Our Lord Jesus Christ himself who wanted to bring our institute into existence and, in so doing, wanted to instill in us a very special spirit of dependence on his sacred person. The spirit of Faith, the love of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the desire for his Reign, dependence on his guidance, and confidence in His Providence are, in fact, our work's only foundresses. Please God, they will never be far from its spirit.¹¹⁴

Everything comes from Jesus Christ. Who else, my sisters, outside of Him who called us, had a clear idea of what we would become? No one. Neither he who at St. Anne d'Auray had what he believed to be the revelation of a desire on the part of the Blessed Virgin to have daughters consecrated to the mystery of the Assumption, nor those of us who were the first sisters. All contributed something according to their particular ability. Their greatest merit was to have given themselves unreservedly to purposes still unknown. . . . Our Lord alone knew what they were.¹¹⁵

¹¹³Chapter Instruction, April 28, 1889.

¹¹⁴Vol. VI, 1506.

¹¹⁵*Chapter Instruction*, May 2, 1884.

Relations between the Assumptionists and the Women's Congregations of the Assumption Family

JEAN-PAUL PÉRIER-MUZET

Historical Introduction

The question of formal relations between the Assumptionists and the religious congregations of women of the Assumption family,¹¹⁶ as it existed before and after 1876, calls first for an examination of the context in which this question was debated at the time.

Father d'Alzon, in wanting to found an Assumption Order in 1845, evidently had the same idea as Mother Marie-Eugénie of Jesus: a first Order, an Assumption Order of men; a second, an Assumption Order of women; and a Third Order, a tertiary association of the faithful, laypersons and priests, modeled on those of the medieval Orders. Since the Church no longer favored the creation of new Orders, Assumption was organized into autonomous congregations with spiritual ties and a shared spirit: 1839, the Religious of the Assumption; 1845, the Augustinians of the Assumption (Assumptionists); 1865, the Oblates of the Assumption and the Little Sisters of the Assumption; 1896, the Orants of the Assumption who, from some points-of-view, can

¹¹⁶File ACR 2 TE 75–122: correspondence, depositions, reports (Boulcsteix). 87 references to the d'Alzon data bank. Biographical data on Father d'Alzon (*Documentation biographique du P. d'Alzon*), pp. 758–777. D'Alzon Anthology (*Anthologie alzonienne*), chap. 47, General Chapters 1876.

Origins of the Assumption Family

be considered a re-foundation as a religious congregation of Father d'Alzon's Adorers of the Blessed Sacrament (*Adoratrices du Saint Sacrement*).

This concrete situation prompted the religious families of the Assumption to search for **several possible models of closer institutional ties** according to the possibilities foreseen in church or canon law and in civil religious law, and according to the desires or expectations of each Congregation, its status, and its respective Constitutions. We must therefore take into account the date on which each Congregation was officially recognized as well as each one's particular status.

The Religious of the Assumption were founded in 1839, recognized by a pontifical Laudatory Decree on January 19, 1855, and recognized in civil law by imperial decrees on March 5, 1856 and May 6, 1858. The decree of approval was received from Rome on September 14, 1867, and confirmed on April 11, 1888 (approval of the Constitutions).

The Augustinians of the Assumption, founded in 1845, did not request civil recognition. They received a pontifical Laudatory Decree on May 1, 1857 and the decree of approval on November 26, 1864. They had to wait until 1923 before receiving definitive approval of their Constitutions.

The Oblates of the Assumption were founded in 1865. The group in Nîmes received the Laudatory Decree on February 14, 1893. After the Oblates were reconstituted as a single Congregation, their approval was confirmed and extended to the entire Congregation on July 3, 1934. Their Constitutions were definitively approved on October 27, 1947.

The Little Sisters of the Assumption became a Congregation of pontifical right on April 10, 1897 and were definitively approved on July 30, 1901.

The Orants of the Assumption, founded in 1896 and of diocesan right, were approved by Cardinal Richard on June 29 and November 21, 1906.

We can already understand that, in the 19th century, our Congregations were all in the process of being formed and organized, though all were not concurrently at the same stage of development.

A word about the specific origins of each of the five Congregations:

Relations between the Assumptionists and the Women's Congregations of the Assumption Family

The Religious of the Assumption are indebted to Father Combalot and Mother Marie-Eugénie of Jesus. Father d'Alzon cannot be considered their "founder," despite the efforts that were made along these lines after the withdrawal of Father Combalot. This issue therefore merits an explanation.¹¹⁷

The Augustinians of the Assumption depended directly and solely on Father d'Alzon.

The Oblates of the Assumption were founded by Father d'Alzon who chose from among the souls he directed the person who became the cornerstone and the foundress, Marie Correnson (1867).

The Little Sisters of the Assumption see themselves as the daughters of Father Pernet and Mother Antoinette Fage, Marie of Jesus, both of whom are considered to be the founders.

The Orants of the Assumption also have two founders, Father Picard and Mother Isabelle.

Given these diverse origins and foundations, it already seems evident that any attempt or proposal to unite them all could not be carried out in the same way.

Civil religious law at that time was also in its formative stages. Sister-orders or congregations did exist: Dominican Friars-Dominican Sisters, Vincentians-Daughters of Charity, etc. Each order/congregation found ways of obtaining brotherly help, according to the special characteristics of its life, spirit, and apostolate. There was no single model, only various types of experience or experimentation.

Given the clerical male structure of the institutional Church, the preponderance of religious-priests and bishops in religious life created procedures

¹¹⁷Of the 43 references to this title in the Letters of Father d'Alzon, only nine refer to the ties between d'Alzon and the Religious of the Assumption, four of them in 1866 after the Véron Affair, three between 1866 and 1870, at the time of Vatican Council I, and two in 1878 on the occasion of the audience granted Father d'Alzon by Leo XIII. It is important to note the context in order to avoid misunderstandings. Father d'Alzon never gave himself the title of founder but accepted it temporarily in order to render service to Mother Marie-Eugénie of Jesus. Cf. the following letters: no. 2873 (vol. VI, p. 140); no. 2875 (vol. VI, p. 141) no. 2881 (vol. VI, p. 145); no. 2886 (vol. VI, p.150); no. 3388 (vol. VII, p. 151), no 3972 (vol. VIII, p 298); no. 3994 (vol. VIII, p. 325); no. 6302 (vol. XII, p 441). and no 6303 (vol. XII, p. 442).

Origins of the Assumption Family

that allowed them to intervene or interfere in the government of a congregation of women of pontifical right, procedures that were more or less accepted, more or less limited, and more or less complicated:

- The bishop appointed an **ecclesiastical superior** whose interventions in the life of the congregation or the convent did not depend necessarily on recognized rights and duties but more on the personality of the men in question, which gave rise at times to unwarranted interference in the congregation's internal affairs in terms of appointments, formation, foundations, visitations, etc. Sometimes, decisions were even reversed.¹¹⁸ The list of the ecclesiastical superiors and chaplains in and around Paris is found in the footnote below. Sister Therese Maylis is the only one who can provide you with a complete and accurate list of those who served in all of the other historical RA communities: Cape Town in 1849 (Bishop Devereux), Richmond in 1850, Sedan in 1854, Nîmes in 1855 (Father d'Alzon), London in 1857, Auteuil in 1857, Bordeaux in 1860, Lyons in 1862, Malaga in 1865, Poitiers in 1866, Saint-Dizier in 1868, New Caledonia in 1873, San Sebastian and Sidmouth in 1882, Lourdes in 1884, Rome in 1888, Leon (Nicaragua) and Manila (Philippines) in 1892, and Santa Ana (El Salvador) in 1895. Additionally, in August 1876, Father Picard who had been the confessor at Auteuil since 1857 was appointed "Visitor of the Congregation" of the Religious of the Assumption. We know the main features of this position from the General Chapter of 1876 of the Religious of the Assumption.
- The **Superior General** of a pontifical congregation of women tended to escape, by virtue of religious **exemption**, the interference of a bishop or his delegate by invoking the directives of the Roman Congregations.
- At the end of the line, the simple ordinary **sister** retained a margin of maneuverability regarding the directives of her Local Superior (appeal to the Superior General), those of the Superior General (appeal to the Ecclesiastical Superior), the counsels of her ordinary and extraordinary

¹¹⁸The ecclesiastical superiors and chaplains in and around Paris were the following: Father Combalot (1839–41), Father Gros (1841–43), Father Gaume (1843–49), Bishop Leon-François Sibour (1849–52), the Abbot of La Bouillerie (1852–55), Bishop Sibour (1855–57), Father Darboy (1857–59), Father Veron (1859–67), Father Jourdan (1867–68), Father Deplace (1868–69), Father Bayle (1870–73), Father d'Hulst (1873–90), and Father Odelin (1890–1907). In Nîmes, Father d'Alzon (1855–80).

Relations between the Assumptionists and the Women's Congregations of the Assumption Family

confessor, and the counsels of her spiritual director. Concretely, given the fact that these various instances were more or less in contact with each other, there were many possible sources of friction and reconciliation, and of cooperation and dysfunction in religious life. Examples are not lacking.

- Behind all of these persons and functions, a number of concrete questions emerged about the direction, government, and animation of a congregation: novitiate formation, awakening and discernment of vocations, appointments and transfers of sisters, new foundations, choice of superiors and of those responsible for important positions in the fields of public relations, finances, apostolates, spiritual life, administration, and the preparation of provincial meetings. . .

It was within this overall and constantly changing context that a series of inter-Assumption events took place which are generally called, more or less accurately, the Chapters of Union of 1876 and which had already been prepared by the Assumptionist General Chapter of 1868.

The question of a union: an old and recurring question between the Assumptionists and the Religious of the Assumption

A close examination of the correspondence between Father d'Alzon and Mother Marie-Eugénie of Jesus quickly reveals that this question was an old one and that it had been discussed by several religious: Father d'Alzon, Father Picard, Father Vincent de Paul Bailly, and Father Hippolyte Saugrain. I refer especially to Letters No. 25222 (vol. V, p. 314), no. 2530 (vol. V, p. 323), no. 3081 (vol. VI, p. 328), and no. 3388 (vol. VII, pp. 151–152). The ideas were always the same: freedom, real relations of trust and friendship, followed by requests and questions: what do you want?

Mother Marie-Eugénie of Jesus had an interesting answer to this question. She wrote to Father d'Alzon from Ems on August 9, 1867:

For a long time now, I have thought that the question you asked me could be solved in the manner I described in a memo of which Father Picard surely has several copies. To assure the future and

Origins of the Assumption Family

to strengthen the Congregation, I would like you to be our Fathers rather than our Brothers. You have always held a different opinion. I see that very learned and serious men like Father Vitte have generally been very opposed to this type of organization, and for all congregations. I would like to hear your reasons and to give you mine. How long will your meeting last? Will you finish it in Paris? It would please Father Laurent very much if it did, and I think this could be done without inconveniencing anyone.

Chapter of the Augustinians of the Assumption of 1868

Naturally, therefore, the question of the relations between the Assumptionists and the Religious of the Assumption was discussed at the Assumptionist General Chapter of 1868. These were its two conclusions:

1. The religious shall accept to direct and even govern religious communities of women.
2. They shall maintain reciprocal freedom.

This measure was accepted by the Oblates of the Assumption and the Little Sisters of the Assumption.

Regarding the Religious of the Assumption, a special paragraph was inserted:

If the Sisters who occupy a more influential position or who desire a life more in keeping with that of the nuns of ancient times, as for example the Religious of the Assumption, were to find it more difficult to unite themselves with the Religious [Priests] of the Assumption, it would be advisable to study how this union could take place. Nevertheless, as of today, we declare that such ties and relations are desirable, if the Sisters request them.

Four points were particularly important: the distinction between “directing” and “governing,” the hard and fast rule of freedom, the introduction

Relations between the Assumptionists and the Women's Congregations of the Assumption Family

of the possibility of adopting different positions according to the age or situation of the sisters, and finally the formal desire expressed by the Sisters themselves to establish such relations.

Then came Vatican Council I in which Father d'Alzon participated indirectly, but about which he had high expectations regarding the issue of religious congregations. His disappointment is well-known: the Council was adjourned.

From her point-of-view, Mother Marie-Eugénie of Jesus, who was in favor of a union, understood that such a status would need to be in conformity with the laws of the Church. She hoped that this union would come about during her lifetime, but she did not want to bind the future of her religious family or to impose rules on those who would succeed her at the head of the Congregation, particularly rules that would diminish the authority and independence of future Superiors General. Father d'Alzon, for his part, did not waver: he said yes to whatever was requested and whenever it was requested. He insisted on freedom and preferred ties of friendship and direction rather than of government. One of his conferences on the **spirit of the Assumption** given in Nîmes to the Religious [Sisters] of the Assumption (between November 1870 and March 1871) was on the subject of inter-Assumption relationships.

Chapters of the Assumptionists and of the Religious of the Assumption in 1876

The years went by, and the wishes and intentions of one and all were made manifest and expressed. It seemed like an opportune moment to conclude this haunting question. The opportunity seemed well-chosen: 1876 was a **capitular year** for everyone.

From August 16 to 23, Father d'Alzon preached the retreat to the Religious of the Assumption at Auteuil, giving three instructions each day, one of them to the members of the Chapter. On August 24–26, their fourth General Chapter was presided by Father d'Alzon, except for the session on August 24 during which Mother Marie-Eugénie of Jesus intervened personally and read the decisions of the Assumptionist Chapter of 1868 which were as follows:

While preferring the works of men to the works of women, the Augustinians of the Assumption recognize that most of the reli-

Origins of the Assumption Family

gious communities of women were founded by religious men and that the spirit of the foundation has been maintained by these men. They also recognize that, today, the influence exercised by women on these works and on society can become in their hands a powerful source of good which they would be mistaken to neglect. They shall therefore accept to direct and even govern some communities of women. But, before all else, they must remember that the best way to attain this objective is never to induce these communities to place themselves under their dependence but to wait until they spontaneously desire it and request it. They must respect the freedom of each and must always be ready to give up the authority they have if this authority becomes an odious burden or simply difficult. For example, if it happened that, at a General Chapter of the communities they govern, one third of the members objected to living under their dependence, they must immediately withdraw. Applying these principles to what already exists, the Chapter decides:

The Sisters destined for the Missions, like the Oblates, shall be under the dependence of the religious priests. Authorization shall be requested from the Propaganda at the appropriate time.

The Sisters destined for external works of charity may also depend on the Institute.

If the Sisters who occupy a more influential position or who desire a life more in keeping with that of the nuns of ancient times, as for example the Religious of the Assumption, were to find it more difficult to unite themselves with the Religious [Priests] of the Assumption, it would be advisable to study how this union could take place. Nevertheless, as of today, we declare that such ties and relations are desirable, if the Sisters request them.

Once these general questions have been settled, it remains to be seen by whom and how the authority of the religious priests will be exercised over the sisters. Authority is in the hands of the Superior General of the priests. But, in order not to be completely absorbed by the government of the women's congregations, the Superior General shall not exercise this authority himself but shall delegate it to one of his religious. This religious shall be known

*Relations between the Assumptionists and the Women's Congregations of
the Assumption Family*

as the Vicar General in charge of this or that community.

He shall be presented by the religious priests to the General Chapter and accepted by the Superior General before the meeting of the General Chapter. The Superior General of the Sisters will speak with the Superior in order to be apprized of the religious who are eligible. From among these religious, the General Chapter shall present three names or three lists of three names, but it shall leave the choice of the appointment to the Superior General [of the priests]. If the General Chapter persisted in wanting to present religious whom the Superior General cannot accept, the union shall be dissolved and the community of women shall cease to be governed by the Institute.

The jurisdiction of the Vicar General shall be valid only from one chapter to another of these communities. If, in the interim, the Superior General has need of this religious, he must come to an understanding with the Superior General of the Sisters.

The required jurisdiction shall be requested for this Vicar.

His authority over the members of the community shall ordinarily be exercised through the Superior General of the Sisters. He shall respect the Sisters' freedom of the confessional, but, as much as possible, he shall reserve the spiritual direction of the Sisters to Assumptionist priests in order to maintain the particular spirit of the Institute.

No new foundation and no closing of houses shall be carried out without his approval.

He shall also conduct regular visitations at fixed times. In the Rule of each of these congregations, there shall be a chapter on the application of the above-mentioned principles.

Special regulations shall determine the relations between the religious priests and the sisters regarding the various functions that involve both parties.

The second session of the Chapter was presided by Father d'Alzon who in his address presented the advantages that the Assumptionists could offer their Congregation. He concluded by suggesting that the Sisters choose as

Origins of the Assumption Family

the delegate of the Superior General either Father Picard or Father Vincent de Paul Bailly.

On August 26, the Minutes of the third session were very carefully drawn up by Mother Marie-Eugénie of Jesus and Father Picard:

The members of the Chapter voted unanimously to accept the proposal to request a delegate from Father d'Alzon. The duties of this delegate shall be First and foremost to direct and help the central government of the Congregation by providing it with the knowledge that priests possess but that women do not have. He shall take orders from Rome for everything that must be reported to this sovereign authority as well as from the bishops for everything pertaining to their diocese. He shall help to Finish the Rule and obtain its approval, and to draw up the Directory, the statutes, the customaries, and the ceremonials of the Institute. As in the past, his authority shall remain one of trust, of which we are in need for the direction of the Sisters, for the visitation of the houses, for the support and counsel of the government, and finally for everything concerning the development of the Congregation, the general spirit of the communities, the organization and running of the boarding schools and the direction of studies. He shall counsel and support the Superior General. He shall always be consulted about new foundations, the suppression of existing works, important temporal matters, etc., so that he can submit reports on these matters to Rome or to the bishops.

Father d'Alzon accepted these general principles but insisted once again that the relations that had just been defined be freely accepted, that they be in force only from one Chapter to another, and that each General Chapter be called upon to ratify them.

Father d'Alzon then asked the Sisters which religious they wanted. Father Picard was named by acclamation.

The simple reading of this document naturally raises an obvious question: in this context, what happened to the **ordinary Council of the Superior General of the Religious —Sisters— of the Assumption** which seemed duplicated by this outside counselor? It was not surprising that the Sisters on Mother Marie-Eugénie of Jesus' Council accepted it begrudgingly: the unity of the Congregation, carried on two wings, resembled the two-headed eagle of the Byzantines!

Reactions of the Religious Families

For the **Oblates of the Assumption**, a union between the two Congregations founded by the same Father d'Alzon seemed to be the natural thing to do and to be backed up by the needs of the Near Eastern Mission where Father Galabert was the delegated Ecclesiastical Superior, assisted by the Superior of the Sisters and her local delegate, Mother Chantal Dugas. In Nîmes, Father d'Alzon, the founder, supported Mother Emmanuel-Marie Correnson, though Father Emmanuel Bailly also functioned as his delegate.

In 1876, she signed the document sealing the union of direction and government,¹¹⁹ but she added the clause “*for six years.*”

The **Little Sisters of the Assumption**, also founded in 1865, were asked as well to express their preference regarding the names of three possible delegates. That of Father Pernet was naturally proposed and accepted by Father d'Alzon. However, the Sisters seem to have had a certain number of misgivings about the procedure that was followed.

For the **Religious of the Assumption**, what in August seemed to be agreed upon between Father d'Alzon and Mother Marie-Eugénie of Jesus¹²⁰ soon posed problems. The clearest evidence is the letter from Father d'Alzon to Mother Marie-Eugénie of Jesus dated September 18, 1876.¹²¹ Father d'Alzon concluded: “*Let's simply remain good friends. In that way and without any discussion whatsoever, we'll always be in agreement.*”

It would seem that Mother Marie-Eugénie of Jesus had rushed to judgment basing herself on her personal feelings in favor of the union without sufficiently taking into account those of her council which favored assistance in direction but not in government.

On the one hand, Father d'Alzon was strongly suspicious of Mother Thérèse-Emmanuel.¹²² On the other hand, once the title of delegate was

¹¹⁹Despite the slight difference pointed out by Father d'Alzon to Father Galabert: vol. XI, p. 472 (end).

¹²⁰In her letter to Father d'Alzon of September 10, 1876, she alluded to the union using three words: trust, respect, and gratitude.

¹²¹Letters, vol. XL pp. 469–470. The same reasoning: vol. XII, pp. 37 and 47.

¹²²Letter no. 5681, vol. XI, p. 425 (to Father Picard). The grievances Father d'Alzon had against her amounted to three deviations which, right or wrongly, he attributed to her: in the formation of the young sisters, she overstressed the love of Auteuil and did not stress enough that of the Congregation; she insisted more on the monastic forms than on Assumption's apostolic spirit; she was too “mystical,” which ended up leaving its mark on the young. Little by little. Father d'Alzon came to see this as a sort of rival undercurrent.

Origins of the Assumption Family

emptied of all authority, it no longer suited Father Picard who withdrew his candidacy.

The **Assumptionists**, for their part, held their eighth General Chapter in Nîmes in September 1876. It decided by a 9 to 2 vote with 1 abstention to divide the Congregation into three provinces. It also discussed the question of a union with the congregations of women,¹²³ and it adopted on a trial basis for six years the draft of a *Canonical Directory* for the Little Sisters of the Assumption and the Oblates of the Assumption *who are requesting to be governed by us, and for the R.A.s [Religious of the Assumption] who are asking only to be directed*. The distinction drawn between being directed and being governed inspired Father d'Alzon in 1879 to come up with an astute formula which he confided to Father Vincent de Paul:¹²⁴

I showed little inclination to govern them [the Religious of the Assumption] and even to direct them. I told her [Mother Marie-Eugénie of Jesus] that in final analysis she was not part of the small group of her Sisters who wanted us only in order to use us and that, consequently, it was better to simply remain good friends. She begged me to write to her. I did write mentioning that she was already aware of the repugnance I had had in accepting to govern her Congregation and that I had understood that it would be the [AA] Superior who would govern. But when I realized that they had adopted the modern maxim that the king reigns but does not govern, I was more convinced than ever that it was better to simply remain good friends, that the Sisters could consult us when they so desired, that they could do what they wanted with our suggestions, but that each of us would remain completely free.

This letter used the same terms as those found in a letter he addressed the previous day to Marie-Eugénie of Jesus (no. 6693, vol. XII, p. III) who was seeking a full union. In it, he reiterated his idea of simple friendly relations.

Clearly, it was not possible to duplicate on the congregation-to-congregation level the relations that existed on the personal level between the two founders.

¹²³Letter no 5733. vol XI, p. 468 (to Mother Marie-Eugénie of Jesus).

¹²⁴Letters, no 6691, vol XIII, pp. 109–110; no. 6697. p. 115.

*Relations between the Assumptionists and the Women's Congregations of
the Assumption Family*

Father Jean-Paul Périer-Muzet
Archivist of the Augustinians
of the Assumption

55, Via San Pio
00165 Rome
Italy

Origins of the Assumption Family

Foundation of the Oblates of the Assumption

HUGUES-EMMANUEL D'ESPARRON

Preliminaries

While visiting Rome in 1862, Father d'Alzon understood that Pius IX wanted the Assumptionists to establish a mission in the Near East and help Bulgarian Christians reunite with the Church of Rome.

In November 1862, Father Victor Galabert went to Constantinople to study the situation.

Father d'Alzon joined him in the spring of 1863 and preached the Lenten sermons.

Very quickly Father d'Alzon and Father Galabert understood that the Assumptionists needed to be assisted by a feminine religious presence.

A first joint project with Mother Marie-Eugénie in February 1864 foresaw the foundation of a community of four women religious in view of establishing a “house of adoration” and creating a normal school to train teachers.

The situation changed during the course of the year 1864.

The Ladies of the Assumption, for reasons which they will explain themselves, did not think it was possible for them to go to the Near East. Mother Eugénie and Father d'Alzon then wanted to create a third category in the Congregation, something like Tertiaries which they would call “The Oblates of the Assumption” (T.D. 41, page 128).

On November 1, 1864, Father d'Alzon wrote to Mother Marie-Eugénie:

Here are my proposals:

Origins of the Assumption Family

1. Give the Oblates something distinctive, a bit below the choir sisters and a bit above the lay sisters. They would be like Dominican Tertiaries living in community.
2. I would take them for the [private] colleges¹²⁵ in France and for the schools of the lower class in Bulgaria and in the Near East.
3. Their habit, outside of your houses, would be black like that of the lay sisters, with the woolen veil or the black veil, as you wish. No mantel, but your long black veil to go outside. It seems to me that this is distinctive enough, and at the same time, I see many external similarities.
4. I have at this moment three girls, two of them are very promising. To begin with, Pauline to whom I have spoken at length at Lavagnac.
5. If you don't think that you should accept Oblates under these terms, simply tell me, in which case I will start a little congregation separate from yours. But the example of the Dominican Tertiaries proves to me that we can, it seems to me, do something similar.¹²⁶

The next day, November 2, 1864, Father d'Alzon wrote to Father Galbert:

I will not be writing to Mr. Champoiseau, but I ask you to tell him that I have written to the Superior General of the Religious of the Assumption, and that regardless of what she decides, I have laid the foundation of a small normal school to train teachers for Bulgaria. I already have some people for this project. We would prepare French women and send them to Philippopolis or Adrianople to a house where we would teach them the language of the country and where we would attract young Bulgarian girls. We would then send them into the villages two by two, a French woman and a Bulgarian. This represents my initial thinking, which might be modified later on. Our girls would get accustomed

¹²⁵ *College* corresponds to secondary school or high school in some English-speaking countries. It represents that level of education which prepares students to enter the university.

¹²⁶ Letter 2371, vol. V.

Foundation of the Oblates of the Assumption

to a harder lifestyle than that of the Ladies of the Assumption, which is necessary for going to live among the uncivilized.¹²⁷

Since the death of Viscount d'Alzon on October 25, 1864, Pauline Sagnier, who took care of him, was now free.

It seemed as though she had the qualities needed to head the projected foundation because she wanted to go to the Missions.

On January 25, 1865, Father d'Alzon wrote to Father Hippolyte Saugrain: "*Pauline has arrived. I will ask Mademoiselle Cazals to come. Mademoiselle Schaller is leaving. Everything might be ready by February first.*"

At the end of January, Father d'Alzon wrote to Father Galabert:

"The core group of Oblates for Bulgaria is taking shape. The cornerstone is on retreat. Next week, we will have two others. Pray God that it all succeeds."¹²⁸

The points-of-view between Father d'Alzon and Mother Marie-Eugénie differed about the Rules to be given to these Oblates, which prompted Father d'Alzon to found his own Congregation: he retained the name: "Oblates of the Assumption."

From that moment on, one senses in the correspondence between Father d'Alzon and Mother Marie-Eugénie that their relations were no longer as free as they had been and that the tone was different, though the two always remained great friends.

On the February 22, Father d'Alzon wrote to Mother Marie-Eugénie:

I have a little secret to share with you: Pauline has charmed your Sisters at the Priory in Nîmes. Without realizing it, they painted such a beautiful picture of how happy they are that Pauline wants to enter your Congregation. Something here has gone awry. If Pauline goes to you—and I am not against it—I will be forced to abandon for the moment the work of the Oblates and stop sending to the Priory other promising girls who quite naturally will give in to the temptation of a life less difficult than the one I will impose on my future school teachers.¹²⁹

¹²⁷Letter 2373, vol. V.

¹²⁸Letter 2448, vol V.

¹²⁹Letter 2460, vol. V.

Origins of the Assumption Family

On February 28, Father d'Alzon wrote to Mother Marie-Eugénie in his typical style:

I hope to get you out of a pickle, even before I finish reading your letter. If I had written 48 hours earlier, I would have removed from your head the thought that I was angry, because quite candidly I am not. Here is the reason why. After having studied Pauline very well, I noticed that this girl, who is very intelligent, has a big heart, and is really superior from certain points-of-view, also suffers from the effects of her low social class. Accustomed to getting her own way through cleverness, she naturally and unsuspectingly has the habit of being foxy in order to attain her ends which are good. When I noticed this, I was greatly tempted to let her go because what she does not get in one way she will get in another. I am finding here at Le Vigan some very good vocations. There is certainly a gold mine here to be exploited, and I am thinking about it. I would not want to give the Oblates superiors from elsewhere but persons who will support them in every way possible. And poor Pauline who only dreams of Assumption has somewhat confused the issues. But when I realized the effects that her former life had on her, I did not hold it against her in the least but simply held much less to her as a superior. Can you see my way of thinking and why I am not angry in the least?

This having been said, I return to the reading of your letter. I think that you can accept her without reservation. She will render you precious services, especially if you test her with something or other which has some truth to it, but which is not the whole truth either. Mademoiselle de Regis calls that Jesuit spiritual direction, though I do not completely agree with her. At any rate, you are now forewarned.¹³⁰

This letter was written from Le Vigan. Father d'Alzon was not angry with Mother Eugénie, and Divine Providence had a consolation in store for him. A letter of March 6, 1865 throws additional light on the subject:

¹³⁰Letter 2464, vol. V.

Foundation of the Oblates of the Assumption

I have just spent a few days at Le Vigan and was amazed at the gold mine of vocations we could find there for the Oblates and the lay sisters if we wanted to. Father Hippolyte could be very useful there.¹³¹

During the month of April, the project became clearer, as he explained to Madame de Chaponnay in a letter written from Le Vigan on April 19, 1865:

I am very worried about my [Assumptionist] novitiate as well as about the idea of founding a house of adoration of the Blessed Sacrament for some good mountain girls who could live from their work and from penance and prayer, the most fervent of whom would be sent to Bulgaria as school teachers.¹³²

Foundation of the Oblates of the Assumption at Roche-belle and Le Vigan

Father d'Alzon blessed the house of Rochebelle on May 23, 1865, calling it "Our Lady of Bulgaria." This is where the first six Oblates went to live: Sister Margaret Bernasseau, Sister Madeleine Durand, Sister Marie of the Annunciation Durand, Sister Theresa of Jesus Salze, Sister Louise Damenne, and Sister Veronica Villaret. Of the first six, only Sister Louise Damenne left shortly after the opening.

On May 24, the official date of the foundation day, Father d'Alzon said the first Mass in the small chapel to the left of the main entrance.

About fifteen women from Nîmes were invited to this inauguration. Among them was Marie Correnson, who later admitted that she cried her eyes out because she was not part of this first group.

The following day, Bishop Plantier blessed a statue of the Virgin which had been placed in the garden.

On the Saturday following the Ascension, the Sisters started a retreat, at which time the seventh little rough stone arrived, Sister Marie of the Angels Clavier. She related:

¹³¹Letter 2465, vol. V.

¹³²Letter 2189, vol. V.

Origins of the Assumption Family

We were without a formal superior. We asked our permissions from Sister Madeleine, the oldest one among us; she was 52 years old.

Each day, our good Father would come to give us an instruction in the community room, and to hold the Chapter of Faults. In his absence, it was Father Hippolyte.

On May 29, 1865, Father d'Alzon wrote to Father Galabert:

Last Tuesday I blessed a house where I installed six pious girls, who will be followed by another twenty who are headed for the Bulgarian Missions. The name of the house is "Our Lady of Bulgaria." It will be composed of girls who are less distinguished than the Ladies of the Assumption, but who will be able to go into the villages where we would like to put them in charge of schools. The mountains surrounding Le Vigan produce subjects who are more adapted to the life in Bulgaria. We will be able to find many more such vocations in the neighboring villages.

These girls will be less educated, but will at least be sturdier when it comes to fatigue. In that sense, perhaps will they do more good.¹³³

It was the beginning of a three-year novitiate, the time needed to form these girls to the religious life and to give them additional schooling.

Father d'Alzon asked Mother Marie-Eugénie of Jesus to lend him temporarily a religious capable of forming the new Sisters. He wrote on June 27, 1865:

Would you be able to send me in the near future Sister Marie-Madeleine? Father Hippolyte wants this ardently. If she could arrive as soon as possible, I would have a few weeks to sort out the big question of knowing which ones we should make Oblates and which ones we can give you as lay sisters. I think that there would be a number of them for each category. In the midst of certain scandals, not enough is known about the concrete energetic faith of our people in the mountains.

¹³³Letter no. 2528, vol. V.

Foundation of the Oblates of the Assumption

One month later, on July 29, 1865, Father d'Alzon wrote to Father François Picard:

Sister Madeleine has arrived. She made a good impression, and I hope she will do a lot of good.

Nevertheless, I remain the authority in the house because if the Religious of the Assumption do not go to Bulgaria, it will be up to the Fathers to govern them.¹³⁴

In a letter to Mother Marie-Eugénie on August 8, 1865, Father d'Alzon continued in a similar vein:

Mother Marie-Madeleine is doing marvels, and we deeply appreciate the gift or the loan we have received. Also, while wanting to keep her the longest time possible, we understand clearly that her stay among us is not open-ended. She has established order and the rule, and she has given a direction to the thinking of our girls. She has led them gently and firmly, which I appreciate all the more that, quite obviously, she did not suspect what type of people she had to prepare. Everyday she acts more and more as a superior, and I believe she knows that I am supporting her.

Once she gets to know these young girls in whom honesty, ignorance, intelligence, and faith are intertwined in an extraordinary fashion, at least at first sight, she will come to realize that she can lead them efficiently and influence them extensively for the good. At least, that is my impression, even though it might not yet be hers. They are ten in number. And at this very moment, Father Hippolyte is in the parlor with an eleventh one who has been brought in by her father. Between now and November, we expect seven or eight more. I firmly believe that there will be about twenty before January 1.¹³⁵

The first investiture took place on August 14 with nine postulants. To the seven already mentioned were added Jeanne de la Croix and Nathalie Dalmier, who left shortly thereafter as did Louise Damenne.

¹³⁴Letter no. 2591, vol. V.

¹³⁵Letter no 2601, vol. V

Origins of the Assumption Family

Mother Marie-Gabriel de Courcy, the superior of the Priory of Nîmes, made the pattern for the habits and veils which resembled those of the lay sisters of the Religious of the Assumption.

What do we know about the first Oblates?

The life of the Oblate Sisters was very austere. They got up at 5 AM, maybe even at 4 AM, and then spent a half-hour or three-quarters of an hour in meditation. That is what Father d'Alzon wrote to Mademoiselle Eulalie de Regis on August 21, 1866:

“Can you stay for three-quarters of an hour on your knees in meditation, without an armrest?”¹³⁶

Their schedule included: the daily Eucharist, the recitation of the rosary, and evening adoration, to which was quickly added nocturnal adoration before the Blessed Sacrament exposed. The Divine Office came only later. In a letter dated August 18, 1871, Father Galabert wrote to Father d'Alzon:

Last year in Rome, you spoke to me several times about your wanting to have the Oblates eventually recite Lauds, the small Hours, Vespers and Compline instead of the three rosaries. If you think it proper, I could introduce this practice on Sundays and holy days of obligation with the Religious in Bulgaria. It so, please send a few diurnals.

Mother Madeleine de Peter stayed until December 1866, at which time Mother Marie-Eugénie needed her in Sedan. She was therefore replaced by Sister Emmanuel-Marie d'Everlange, one of the many persons from Nîmes who had been recruited by Father d'Alzon.

On August 31, 1866, when there were about twenty novices, five Oblates left for the College in Nîmes where they rendered a number of services: Sister Félicité Brun and Sister Thérèse Salze were responsible for the infirmary, Sister Nathalie Dalmier, Sister Pauline Peyre and Sister Marie of the Presentation of Mary Bourrier for the laundry. Father had them wear a black veil and gave them the leather belt.

¹³⁶Letter no. 2861, vol VI.

Foundation of the Oblates of the Assumption

Their living at the College did not seem to pose a problem. They were not numerous and they are not from Nîmes.

And yet, Father d'Alzon wrote to Marie Correnson on August 25, 1866:

As long as the Oblates will be living in our house, it will be impossible for you to join them.

The experience with Mother Emmanuel-Marie d'Everlange was less successful than the one with Mother Marie-Madeleine, as noted in the following letter from Father Galabert to Father Hippolyte Saugrain on March 15, 1867:

I am not at all surprised by the problems you are having with the Superiors whom the Ladies of the Assumption gave for the Oblates. The Ladies naturally have certain ideas that should not be allowed to develop in our small nascent congregation. There should be no more than good neighborly relations between the two. In principle, it seems to me that three years of novitiate are already enough to form a superior who can stand on her own two feet, albeit with our help, direction, and advice. In this way, there would be more unity in our ways of looking at things.

On June 10, 1867, Sister Emmanuel-Marie d'Everlange returned to Paris. It was time to find another solution for the Oblates of the Assumption.

Eulalie de Régis, on whom Father d'Alzon had counted at one moment, died in Nîmes on April 4, 1867.

Marie Correnson, co-foundress of the Oblates of the Assumption

For months, Father d'Alzon had been preparing her, as confirmed by a letter dated July 20, 1866:

From the psychological point-of-view, my dear, think well about the questions I am asking you:

Do you have the courage to enter little by little into the core of the project?

Origins of the Assumption Family

While remaining a little longer on the outside, do you think that you have what it takes to become one day its Mother-[foundress]?¹³⁷

A month later, on August 21, 1866, after Marie Correnson had told him of her perplexities, he answered:

How do you want me to decide for you now what you must do?
I do not think that you should enter immediately.

I am convinced that you will enter one day, when God's hour will have struck.

The good you can do to these good girls is immense: the only thing is that you will have to do it more slowly.

I don't see why you wouldn't start a little secrete novitiate.¹³⁸

Marie Correnson replied on August 23, 1866 saying that she would never become an Oblate.¹³⁹

That very same day Father d'Alzon wrote back:

I'm not the least bit surprised by your letter. I must admit that I expected it somewhat, but I think that your repugnance will one day become for you the subject of a very great humiliation because, while searching to follow in the footsteps of Our Lord, you will think that, after all, in order to unite himself to humanity, Our Lord went further from heaven to sinners than you would have gone from your status in life to that of those poor children of mine.¹⁴⁰

She replied on August 24:

With you, it is a bit like with God: all one has to do is to recognize one's fault and to confess it in order to be forgiven. After reading your letter, I offered myself to Our Lord like I have never done

¹³⁷Letter no. 2834, vol. VI.

¹³⁸Letter no. 2863, vol. VI.

¹³⁹Her parents were against her joining a non-established order. Cf. Note 1 of letter no. 2865, Vol VI.

¹⁴⁰Letter no. 2865, vol VI.

Foundation of the Oblates of the Assumption

before, telling him that he can do with me as he wishes because to serve God generously does not consist in wanting to do something other than what he wants of us.

Marie Correnson therefore began the little secret novitiate. Always secretly, on April 7, 1867, she took the habit in the chapel of the College, but with a dispensation allowing her to wear it.

The departure of Mother Emmanuel-Marie d'Everlange convinced her that it was time to carry out her secret departure from her parents who would not have allowed her to leave, even though she was 25 years old. For a number of months already, she had been serving as the protector of the Oblates in Nîmes, but always from the outside.

On June 27, 1867, Marie Correnson left the family home as if she were going to Mass.

She put on her habit and took the first stagecoach to Le Vigan in the company of Isabelle de Merignargues and of Louise Coulomb. Isabelle de Meringnargues described the day to Father d'Alzon:

It is impossible for me to let the letter of our Mother leave without adding a few words to tell you that all went extremely well.

Marie was strong. It was a very pleasant trip. Madame Arnal received us warmly. Our arrival at Rochebelle was most touching.

We went to the chapel. Marie took her place as the Superior and we intoned the Magnificat. I cannot adequately express all the emotion that we experienced. Then we went to the parlor where Marie embraced all the Sisters who are now in seventh heaven since her arrival.

That's about it, Father, for my first impressions. They are excellent. Rochebelle is a charming place. The Sisters are polite, and they will have a treasure as their Superior.

Marie continues to be admirably generous.

Madame Arnal and Father Hippolyte are delighted. They were very nice to us. It is now time for dinner; we will eat with the community. I have just written to my mother. I hope that she was not too chagrined by my departure.

Origins of the Assumption Family

In Nîmes, the Correnson family took Marie's departure very badly. Doctor Pleindoux, Madame Correnson's father, was particularly virulent. Mother Emmanuel-Marie Correnson stayed about two weeks in Rochebelle. She then went to Auteuil where she had to complete her formation with Mother Marie-Eugénie of Jesus. She passed through Nîmes where she received her parents at the Priory of the Religious of the Assumption.

It had been foreseen that Father d'Alzon would join them in August at the thermal baths of Ems. In the end, Mother Marie-Eugénie and Mother Emmanuel-Marie Correnson left without him.

After a brief stop in Nîmes, Mother Emmanuel-Marie Correnson returned to Le Vigan on September 1.

The first Oblates at Assumption College in Nîmes and the Departure for Bulgaria

During the intervening time, people were preparing for a larger contingent of Oblates in Nîmes.

It was at this time that the house at the corner of avenue Feucheres and rue Pradier was given a separate entrance for the Sisters. The entrance has been walled up since then, but its traces are still visible.

About twelve Sisters were expected. They were to staff the kitchen, the laundry, the infirmary, and look after the dormitories. There were plans to open a classroom for little boys on the ground floor.

On October 6, Mother Emmanuel-Marie Correnson returned to Nîmes. From then on, Assumption College became her ordinary residence.

The Oblates were already accustomed to a hard life. At the College, they very simply accepted to sleep in a dormitory which did not seem adequate for the lay brothers. We gather this information from a letter of September 2, 1867 from Father d'Alzon to Mother Emmanuel-Marie Correnson:

I went on the 24th to say Mass for the Oblates and bless the house where they had slept the night before. Imagine that, in order to straighten things out, these good women left their apartment, at least their dormitory, and took the one which Father Vincent de Paul had declared unacceptable. Since it has a wooden floor, they laid their straw mattresses on the floor, and it seems that they

Foundation of the Oblates of the Assumption

slept very well.¹⁴¹

The arrival of Mother Emmanuel-Marie Correnson was not necessarily a panacea. But with much good will on the part of everyone, life began to get organized and moved toward a new development.

1868 was a key year in which the first professions and the first departures for the missions took place.

At one moment, there were rumors of war in the Near East, which made them think of delaying the departure. But Father Galabert played down these rumors and insisted on having the Sisters right away.

The first group was formed.

On April 18, 1868, Mother Emmanuel-Marie Correnson pronounced her first vows, which were at the same time perpetual vows, in the presence of the community.

This profession was the first, as was appropriate for the foundress of the Oblates.

The following day, April 18, 1868, the other five sisters who were to leave for the Near East made their profession: Thérèse Salze, Marguerite-Marie Bernassau, Valérie Sarran, Colombe Balmelle, and Hélène Puech.

Thérèse Salz was the eldest at age 33. Because of her age, she was named Superior. She was an energetic person with good common sense who would be loved by the Sisters and the people in Bulgaria. But she felt handicapped because she had not had much education.

Father d'Alzon suggested to Father Galabert that Father Athanase give her some lessons so that she might better correspond with her Superiors in Nîmes.

On April 25, 1868, Father d'Alzon, Mother Marie-Eugénie of Jesus, and Mother Emmanuel-Marie Correnson accompanied the Sisters to Marseille where they boarded a steamer for the Near East.

After stopping in Constantinople and crossing the Sea of Marmara to Rodosto, the Sisters pursued their journey by land in an ox-drawn cart that was not very comfortable. When they arrived in Adrianople, Father Galabert awaited them with the French Consul and a few gentlemen of the European community. A mere few weeks after they had settled down, on May 24, 1868, three years after the foundation, they opened their first school. Sister Valérie

¹⁴¹Letter no. 3133, vol. VI

Origins of the Assumption Family

Sarran was very successful with the children of the boarding school to whom she transmitted the little she knew. Sister Marguerite was responsible for the free school. Though she was better educated, she was hampered by her timidity. Sisters Thérèse Salze and Colombe Balmelle took care of the sick. Sister Hélène Puech was in charge of the kitchen.

This was the beginning of the Mission of the Oblates of the Assumption in the Near East.

Who were the Founders of the Oblates of the Assumption?

The accepted theory was that Father d'Alzon was the only founder of the Oblates, which is true. But little by little, we paid more attention to the co-foundress, Mother Emmanuel-Marie Correnson.

However, other men and women can be considered as foundation stones, such as Father Hippolyte Saugrain, Father Galabert, Eulalie de Regis, the first Oblates at Rochebelle, Mother Madeleine de Peter, etc. . .

Without getting into biographies of all these foundation stones, we will simply mention those who were there at the time of the foundation of the Oblates of the Assumption, that is, in 1865.

Father Emmanuel d'Alzon

At the time, he was fifty-five years old. He was a man who worked very hard and who was constantly undertaking new projects. But he was also a tired man who had suffered enormously both physically and morally. He had been Vicar General of the diocese of Nîmes for thirty years; he had been the director of the College in Nîmes for twenty-five years; and he had been directing the Congregation he founded for twenty years. He was completely given over to Christ and to the Church.

Just when he thought that he would buy the Cenacle and the house of the Dormition of the Virgin in Jerusalem, Pius IX suggested that he work for the unity of Christians in the countries of the Middle East. Without hesitating, he sent Father Galabert there, and a month later he went himself to Constantinople. Very quickly he realized that he needed women religious to help the Assumptionists. After many disappointments, he founded the Oblates of the Assumption, possibly not in the best of conditions.

Foundation of the Oblates of the Assumption

For about ten years, he was often sick and had to leave Nîmes in order to rest at Lavagnac and to go for treatments at the health spa in Lamalou-les-Bains. These imposed periods of inactivity made him suffer greatly but gave him the occasion to write some very beautiful pages on the spiritual life. As soon as he felt better, he would continue to travel, preach, and engage in a variety of activities.

Assumption College gave him a lot of worries, to the point of almost having to close it. Fortunately, a solution was found, though he always walked a tightrope and suffered the martyrdom of not having enough money.

He lost nearly all the members of his family in a short period of time: his brother-in-law, Count Anatole de Puységur (1851); his sister, Augustine d'Alzon, whom he loved dearly (1860); his Mother, Madame Henry d'Alzon, to whom he was not able to give the last rites (1860); and lastly his Father, Henri d'Alzon (1864). If we add the death of his friend, Jules Monnier, professor at the College (1865), we can say that Father d'Alzon suffered greatly from an emotional point of view.

His Congregation was also a source of worry for him: the closing of the College in Clichy, the purchase of the property on rue François Ier, the departure of the brothers for Australia, recruiting problems. . . and, more recently, the difficulties that preceded the foundation of the Oblates: the withdrawal of the Ladies of the Assumption and difficulties in finding the right person to lead the new Congregation. . .

But Father d'Alzon was not stopped by all these difficulties. He pursued his way because he sensed that it was the will of the Lord.

Father Hippolyte Saugrain (1822–1905)

In a broad sense, the term co-founder can also be applied to Father Hippolyte Saugrain.

Starting in the summer of 1864, he was the master of novices of the Augustinians of the Assumption at Le Vigan. He did not limit his sphere of activity to this. In February 1865, he preached and confessed in the whole region of Le Vigan, which put him in contact with numerous young women who were possible candidates for the religious life.

When Father d'Alzon went to Le Vigan after his set-back in Nîmes, Father Hippolyte let his Superior know that there were many possible vocations in the region.

Origins of the Assumption Family

When in June 1865 Mother Marie-Eugénie was preoccupied about the heavy burden the new Oblates might represent for Father d'Alzon, he responded:

As for the Oblates, it is a work which, until further notice, will occupy Father Hippolyte more than me. I only know the young girls he has brought in. As for those who will follow I don't think that I will have to send him any in the immediate future.¹⁴²

During the very first days of the foundation, even if Father d'Alzon went to Rochebelle every afternoon, Father Hippolyte went there every morning, at least until the arrival of Mother Madeleine de Peter on July 25.

In 1868, when the time came to send the first Oblates to the Near East, Father Hippolyte Saugrain wrote to Father Galabert (1830–85) to inform him about those who were going:

I am very pleased to see that you are preparing good positions for the Oblates in Adrianople, but be careful not to promise too much so as to avoid real disappointment. These poor girls are all very good people, but there has been no one to form them and it will be a long time before there is anyone available to do so. . .

Sister Thérèse Salze (1835–1905), who is to be the superior according to the latest decision, is a young girl for whom I have much esteem and affection. She has good common sense, but has had little schooling. She is hard-working, thrifty, virtuous, and solid; you can trust her. I told her that she should let herself be directed in everything by your advice.

Sister Marguerite Bernassau (1840–69) is also an excellent person whom I know very well. She is a pearl, but has little initiative; she also has good common sense. She is the most educated of all (the others know nothing).

Sister Colombe Balmelle (1843–78) is quite naive, has a good character, is pliable and obedient, but is incapable of studies.

Sister Valérie Sarran (1843–1916), who was to be the superior, needs to be directed firmly, is proud and pretentious, has a difficult character, and does not know much but can learn.

¹⁴²Letter, June 5, 1865, no. 2540.

Foundation of the Oblates of the Assumption

Sister Hélène Puech (1843–78) is a good person, a hard-worker, virtuous to the tip of her fingers, has an excellent character, and is able to study, but she has a tongue defect, which is her only defect that I know of.

All in all, I am sending you five fine people. Tomorrow, I will be present at their profession.¹⁴³

Father Victorin Galabert (1830–1885)

By his requests, his advice, and his numerous reflections, Father Galabert had a great influence on the new Congregation of the Oblates of the Assumption.

During the years 1864–65, Father d’Alzon often spoke about the foundation of a normal school to train teachers for Bulgaria. But in 1865, Father Galabert mentioned that he also needed nursing sisters. He wrote to Father Vincent de Paul Bailly (1832–1912) saying:

The Oblates can become very useful helpers, but they will be almost useless unless, as I suggested to Father d’Alzon, he makes nursing sisters out of them.¹⁴⁴

In 1868, Father Galabert informed Father d’Alzon of the situation at hand:

Do not harbor any fears about the level of schooling needed the first year. The Oblates will only have to learn to read and write and to teach the basic elements of grammar and spelling; the teachers will learn their lessons and do their homework like the students, and they will be considered knowledgeable by local standards. What is important, as I have told you, is to send me a superior who has common sense, who is intelligent and of a certain age, and who can inspire respect.¹⁴⁵

This is what determined the choice of Sister Thérèse Salze, age 29, who had good common sense but very limited schooling. Sister Valérie Sarran,

¹⁴³April 18, 1868.

¹⁴⁴June 2, 1865.

¹⁴⁵January 2, 1868.

Origins of the Assumption Family

more intelligent and able to teach, was only 25 years old, but her character scared people somewhat.

After one year in Adrianople, Father Galabert was able to offer a personal evaluation of the small community. He generally agreed with what Fathers d'Alzon and Saugrain had written:

To be sure, God is blessing the work of your people in a very particular way...

Good Sister Valérie is doing marvels as a school teacher. She does not have much schooling, but she communicates very well the little she knows. Here, she is considered to be an educated person and quite capable.

Sister Margaret, with her crippling timidity, will never be anything more than a mediocre teacher. She has much more depth than Sister Valérie, but she does not know how to communicate what she knows. Everything embarrasses her, everything becomes a problem...

Sister Thérèse is very well liked as superior, both by the Sisters insofar as I can judge, and especially by the people on the outside. She knows how to put a lot of life in the weekly meetings with the Ladies, and she has won over the sympathy of all those who know her. It is unfortunate that she did not receive more schooling and education. But no one here notices it. She is called, I think, to do a lot of good.¹⁴⁶

Marie Correnson (1842–1900)

At the time of the foundation, Marie, a young girl from the bourgeoisie of Nîmes, had known Father d'Alzon for seven years. Father d'Alzon was her spiritual director. She was considering religious life. If Father d'Alzon had encouraged her in the least, she would have joined the Ladies of the Assumption, whom her parents very much appreciated.

However, she did not go to school at the Priory. A private tutor came to the house for her and her sister Augustine.

¹⁴⁶January 23, 1869.

Foundation of the Oblates of the Assumption

Marie's health was not good, which was true of almost her entire family. Her parents would not have agreed that she join a congregation that was just beginning and, consequently, that had not yet proven itself.

When Father d'Alzon suggested to her that she head the Oblates, since the others he had foreseen for this position were not available for one reason or another. . . (Eulalie de Regis, Pauline Sagnier, and Isabelle de Merignargues), she explained her objections to Father d'Alzon, telling him that they were of a personal, family and social nature. And she refused categorically:

Decidedly, I will never be an Oblate because the more I think of it the less I find the strength in me to undertake such a work. I will help you on the outside as much as I can unless you think that I should enter the convent, in which case I will arrange to enter the Ladies of the Assumption. I prefer to obey rather than command. Besides, I have often said this to you. The hard life is not a problem for me. It is the context in which I will be obliged live, for it is something else to visit them in passing when one has the option of returning to another center of interest after leaving them.

Furthermore, I do not have the courage to ask my parents for permission to enter a group which is not yet well-established. I am sure that their answer will be "no." Therefore, do not count on me any longer. God does not want it since he is letting me see all the difficulties that would arise if I were to make that blunder.¹⁴⁷

I have always greatly admired the response of Father d'Alzon who thought that he was solely responsible for her refusal:

Must I tell you, dear Marie, that I blame myself for your discouragement? If I had preached more by example the authentic apostolic life, you would have better understood the beauty of this way of life for which Our Lord began by taking simple and uneducated Fishermen, just as we have begun with our mill-workers and mountain people. Since I do not deny that I am very attached to you, this makes me suffer somewhat. I would be lying

¹⁴⁷August 23, 1866.

Origins of the Assumption Family

if I told you the contrary. But, Marie, there is someone I love one-thousand times more than you, and that is Our Lord. . .¹⁴⁸

Moved by his response, Marie pulled herself together:

I have consecrated myself to Our Lord telling him to take me as he wishes. . .

She regretted her former attitude, but added:

It is good that you saw me in such a state, for you have a too high opinion of me.¹⁴⁹

Marie became the co-foundress of the Oblates of the Assumption on June 27, 1867, at which time the Congregation had already been in existence for two years! It is easily understandable that the first generation of Oblates was less attached to her than those who knew her from the very moment they entered. This was all the more true that, after spending a few weeks at Le Vigan, she left for Auteuil so that Mother Marie-Eugénie could give her a fast-track formation to the religious life. When she returned in 1866, she rejoined the community of Oblates living at Assumption College in Nîmes. Mother Emmanuel Correnson did not go very often to Le Vigan.

Father d'Alzon often had a tendency to consider her as his daughter, often as his little girl, in the sense that he had a hard time refusing her certain things, even though he might not have completely agreed with what she was asking.

On the other hand, he considered Mother Marie-Eugénie as his spiritual sister.

Marie Correnson was 25 years old in 1867 when she became an Oblate of the Assumption. Mother Marie-Eugénie was 50 years old at that time.¹⁵⁰

We sometimes forget this difference in age, which undoubtedly explains certain things.

During the lifetime of Father d'Alzon, she gradually became more independent from him and was no longer the submissive little girl we met when she began corresponding with him.

¹⁴⁸August 23, 1866.

¹⁴⁹August 24, 1866.

¹⁵⁰Letter from Father d'Alzon to Mother Marie-Eugénie, August 25, 1867, no. 1095, Vol VI.

Foundation of the Oblates of the Assumption

After he died, she scrupulously followed the least of his directives, sometimes too closely.

We can consider as co-foundresses **the first six Sisters** who entered at Rochebelle on May 23, 1865: Sister Madeleine Durand (1813–1900); Sister Marie of the Annunciation Durand (1823–1905); Sister Margaret Bernassau (1840–69); Sister Theresa of Jesus Salze (1835–1902); Sister Louise Damenne who left in 1868; and Sister Veronica Villaret (1832–1911).

Other people also played an important role at the beginning of the Congregation.

Between 1865 and 1867 at Le Vigan, there was often mention of **Madame Arnal** who, from the outside, watched over the Sisters. She had lost her husband and lived alone with her three young boys. Therefore, she could not enter the Congregation. The arrival of Mother Emmanuel-Marie Correnson in 1867 did not please her very much.¹⁵¹

From Nîmes, we must not forget **Eulalie de Régis (1829–1867)** whom Father d'Alzon had foreseen to lead the Oblates but whose health declined from day to day. She died in 1867.

From Nîmes, also, there was often mention of **Louise Coulomb**, whose name as an **Adorer** was **Marie de Saint Jean**. She wore the religious habit and replaced Mother Emmanuel-Marie Correnson when she went to Vichy for a cure. She spent some time at Le Vigan and at l'Espérou before leaving without any problems since she had not taken any vows.

Sister Hugues-Emmanuel d'Esparron
Oblate of the Assumption

30, rue Séguier
30000 Nîmes
France

¹⁵¹Cf. the correspondence between Father d'Alzon and Lather Hippolyte Saugrain in 1867 Letters nos. 3149, 3151, and 3155, Vol. VI, among others.

Appendix

Principal Persons Involved

Alzon, Emmanuel (1810–1880) ¹⁵² Founder of the Augustinians of the Assumption (1845) and of the Oblates of the Assumption (1865).

Vicar General to three bishops of Nîmes. Director of Assumption College in Nîmes, avenue Feucheres.

Bailly, Emmanuel (1842–1917) Entered the Assumptionists in 1861. Master of novices (1880 in Osma), Assumptionist Procurator in 1892, and Assistant General to Father Picard. He collected the documents that served to write the biography of Father d'Alzon. Third Assumptionist Superior General, succeeding Father Picard in 1903.

Bailly, Vincent de Paul (1832–1912) Brother of Father Emmanuel Bailly. Founder of the *Bonne Presse*.

Besson, Louis (1821–1888) Bishop of Nîmes. Priest and professor in Besançon, he was appointed to the see of Nîmes on August 3, 1876. Father d'Alzon appreciated his competence but had reservations about his character. He remained his vicar general until 1878 when he finally succeeded in convincing the bishop to accept his resignation. Bishop Besson made a beautiful panegyric of Father d'Alzon.

In 1882, he took under his protection Mother Emmanuel-Marie Correnson and the Oblates of Nîmes.

Chamska, Marguerite-Marie (1842–1926) Directed by Father d'Alzon, she entered the Oblates of the Assumption in 1875. After making her perpetual profession, she became an assistant to Mother Foundress and mistress of novices. She succeeded Mother Emmanuel-Marie Correnson as Superior General in 1897. At the time of the exile, she went to the Netherlands. She returned to Nîmes in 1920 and worked very hard to get back the chapel on rue Siguier and the buildings that are part of that property.

Helped by Father Gervais Quénard, she took the necessary steps to reunite the Oblates of Nîmes with the branch in Paris. She died in

¹⁵²Cf. Siméon Vailhé *Vie du Père Emmanuel d'Alzon*, 2 volumes, B.P., 1934.

Foundation of the Oblates of the Assumption

Nîmes on rue Roussy on April 15, 1926, just a few months before the union she had so desired took place on June 22. Apparently, she was Father d'Alzon's second cousin.¹⁵³

Correnson, Marie (1842–1900) ¹⁵⁴ Co-Foundress of the Oblates of the Assumption with Father d'Alzon.

In 1882, she refused to follow Father Picard to Paris. This brought about a schism among the Oblates.

In 1891, Mother Eugénie, Father Picard, and the Oblates of Paris brought her to court in order to stop her Congregation from bearing the name "Assumption." She lost the case in Nîmes but won it in Rome in 1893.

Dugas, Jeanne de Chantal (1848–1940) The human and spiritual portrait of this great Oblate is outlined in *Pages d'Oblation*, vol. III, page 6, and in the booklet of the Orsay session, *Aînées et Fondatrices*, July 1990.

Galabert, Victorin (1830–1885) Doctor of medicine and canon law. Founder of the Near Eastern Mission. Father d'Alzon sent him at the very beginning to Adrianople. He took care of the first Oblates who were sent to Bulgaria.

Guéranger, Prosper (1805–1875) Dom Guéranger was the one who restored the Benedictine Order in France and who was the first Abbot of Solesmes. He initiated the renewal of the Roman liturgy.

Lamennais, Félicité de (1782–1854) French writer of the 19th century, priest. Deputy in 1848. Ultramontane. Apologist in defense of freedom-of-religion against the Gallican Church. In 1830, he rallied the liberal Catholic youth around the newspaper *L'avenir*. He published *Paroles d'un croyant*.

Condemned by Pope Gregory XVI, he broke with Rome.

Lombard, Mathieu (1858–1951) One of the first alumnists at Notre Dame des Châteaux. He did his novitiate in Paris with Father Picard.

¹⁵³Cf. *Pages d'Oblation*, vol. II, page 62.

¹⁵⁴Cf. *Colloquium Marie Correnson*, 2000.

Origins of the Assumption Family

He was a professor at Assumption College in Nîmes and faced all the problems posed by the government. He became an Assistant General in 1923. He always remained favorable to the Oblates of Nîmes.

Mauvise, Esther de (1845–1922)¹⁵⁵ Known in religion as Mother Marie of Christ. Religious Sister of the Assumption loaned to the Oblates at the request of Father Picard. She was the Major Superior of the Oblates of the Assumption for 36 years until her death.

Milleret, Anne-Eugénie de Brou (1817–1898) Known in religion as Mother Marie-Eugénie of Jesus. Foundress of the Religious Sisters [Ladies] of the Assumption, big friend of Father d'Alzon who helped her with the foundation of her Congregation. Their relations became less close after the foundation of the Oblates of the Assumption and especially after the installation of the Oblates on rue Séguier.

Pare, Berthe-Marie (1860–1946)¹⁵⁶ Third Superior General of the Oblates of the Assumption, but first of the Paris branch from 1924 to 1936 when she resigned for health reasons. Mother Michael succeeded her until her death in 1942.

de Peter, Sister Marie-Madeleine (1832–1888) Religious [Lady] of the Assumption, she received the religious habit from Father d'Alzon. She was prioress in Sedan and Saint Dizier.

From July 1865 to November 1866, she helped with the formation of the first Oblates at Le Vigan.

She was Assistant General of her Congregation for six years.

Picard, François (1831–1903) A student of Father d'Alzon at Assumption College. He became an Assumptionist in 1850 and succeeded Father d'Alzon as Superior General in 1880.

He founded the Orants of the Assumption in 1897. He contributed to the development of the Assumptionists and of the Oblates in Paris as well as to the creation of *La Bonne Presse*.

Quénard, Gervais (1875–1961) Superior of the Near Eastern Mission, then Superior General of the Assumptionists. It was thanks to him that the Oblates of Nîmes and the Oblates of Paris were reunited.

¹⁵⁶Cf. *Pages d'Archives*, vol. IV, page 47.

Foundation of the Oblates of the Assumption

Régis, Eulalie de (1829–1867) ¹⁵⁷ Father d'Alzon would have liked her to be the co-foundress of the Oblates, but her poor health did not allow it. She died before the foundation, bequeathing to the Oblates almost all of her estate.

Saugrain, Hippolyte (1822–1905) Professor at Assumption College, then master of novices at Le Vigan and General Treasurer. He did a lot of apostolate in and around Le Vigan. He recruited the first Oblates and actively participated in their formation.

Serre, Augustin (1850–1910) Assistant Pastor at the Church of Saint Perpetua in 1879, he was Mother Emmanuel-Marie Correnson's lawyer during the trial in the 1890s. He won the case in Rome after having lost it in Nîmes. Mother Emmanuel-Marie Correnson was very grateful to him and visited him at his residence on rue Roussy.

¹⁵⁷Cf. *Pages d'Archives*, vol. I, page 1.

Origins of the Assumption Family

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Origins of the Assumption Family

Foundation of the Little Sisters of the Assumption

GISÈLE MARCHAND

The Congregation of the Little Sisters of the Assumption, visiting nurses of the poor (*Garde-malades des pauvres à domicile*) was founded in Paris in July 1865 by Father Claude Etienne Pernet (1824–99), one of the first five Assumptionists, and by Mother Marie of Jesus, Marie-Antoinette Fage (1824–83).

We are already acquainted with the political, economic and social history of the time. Consequently, I will recall here only a few important points of the context that are particularly important for the history of the Congregation.

Etienne Pernet was born in Franche-Comté in **1824** and Antoinette Fage in Paris that same year. This date calls to mind the Restoration of the monarchy (Reign of Charles X).

Our founders, who were born 35 years after the French Revolution, lived during a complex period, one that was seething with ideas and confrontations. They experienced five political regimes.¹⁵⁸

They also saw the development of the **industrial mechanization**. It was the beginning of economic development. Daily existence was transformed, but this industrial revolution took place at the expense of human lives. It provoked the birth of the **proletariat**, which came into existence as a result of the migration of workers from the less prosperous rural areas to the cities.

It was also a period of ideological fermentation which gave rise to **various socialist trends**.

In the Church, as in society as a whole, it was a period of contradictions and contrasts.

¹⁵⁸The Restoration (1815–30); the July monarchy (1830–48); the Second Republic (1848–51); the Second Empire (1852–70); the third Republic in 1870.

Origins of the Assumption Family

The Church took positions regarding the three main currents in French society: the liberal, republican and socialist movements.

As a whole, it took a **defensive position**. Nevertheless, there were some who wanted to welcome the world that was being formed. It was the beginning of **social Catholicism**.

The Church was sensitive to the extreme poverty of the poor

In order to respond, many religious congregations were founded and initiatives such as the “Conferences of Saint Vincent of Paul,” “worker cells,” and “youth clubs” were launched.

A movement of **spiritual renewal** spread throughout the Church in France during this same period of the 19th century with missionary expansion, the awakening of the laity to an active faith, and the Marian trend (apparitions of the Blessed Virgin: rue du Bac, Lourdes).

Influences and Preparations

In 1865, the year of the Foundation, Father Pernet wrote to Mother Marie of Jesus: *“Remember that you must be an apostle and mother to all the women who will come to you to also become **apostles among the poor and the working class.**”*

Father Pernet had the **intuition of an evangelical response** to the miserable situation of the workers of his time. Mother Marie of Jesus, with her sisters, would “give concrete form” to Father Pernet’s charism.

The assistant general of the time, Mother Marie-Madeleine Tomkowicz, testifies to this:

She was Father Pernet’s support as well as his tireless fellow-worker; they must **never** be separated. What our Father says in the rule, the directory and the customary come from their mutual experience. This does not diminish the Father. When you hear him, you also hear the Mother.¹⁵⁹

The personal and family experience of the Founders was certainly a **determining factor in preparing them** for their mission among the

¹⁵⁹Testimony, no. 130.

Foundation of the Little Sisters of the Assumption

“poor and the workers,” and for their undertaking the adventure of a religious foundation.

Both were marked by the trials of life, both came from disadvantaged families. Both had experienced poverty, loneliness, illness, and an uncertain future. They underwent these experiences in distinct life situations which we do well to recall briefly.

Claude Etienne Pernet was born in a small village, Velleuxon (Haute Saône), on July 23, 1824, into a rural, very simple Christian family. He was 14 when his father died. From then on, the family gradually became poorer, even to the point of destitution. His mother worked as a midwife to provide for her five children then alive. A deeply Christian woman, she let Etienne, the eldest, leave for the seminary in 1838, some months after Mr. Pernet’s death.¹⁶⁰ In 1844, having doubts about his vocation to be a diocesan priest, he left the seminary, in agreement with his superiors, for a time of reflection. He was 20 years old.

After those six years of study, he worked for four years at Dole in Franche-Comté at the “home for orphans” as a supervisor, and then became the private tutor of Joseph de Fontenelle.

In 1848, unemployed like so many other country people, he migrated to Paris to look for work and experienced the trials of all those who arrived in a big city with no relatives or experience. Completely at a loss, he became quite ill. He went to the church of Notre Dame des Victoires every day to ask for light on his vocation; he was thinking of going to distant countries as a missionary. At Notre-Dame des Victoires, he met Father Morcel,¹⁶¹ a Marist, who sent him to Mother Marie-Eugénie of Jesus so that she might introduce him to Father d’Alzon. A series of letters in May 1849 enables us to see the unfolding of events and the climate in which the successive discernments took place. Finally, Father d’Alzon agreed to accept him in Nîmes. He advanced the money for the journey. Etienne Pernet arrived in Nîmes on June 5, 1849. He was a supervisor at the college and continued to seek his vocation.

On October 19, 1849, after a pilgrimage to Notre-Dame de Rochefort, he entered the novitiate of the Augustinians of the Assumption and, on December 25, 1850, he pronounced his first vows. He was ordained a priest

¹⁶⁰Claude Louis Pernet (1798–1838).

¹⁶¹Father Morcel (1813–92), Marist.

Origins of the Assumption Family

on April 3, 1858 by Bishop Nanquette,¹⁶² bishop of Le Mans.

During his religious life, which lasted fifty years, Etienne Pernet had two different apostolic experiences: teaching, either in Nîmes or in Clichy, for fourteen years, and then pastoral ministry for thirty-six years.

A fervent Assumptionist, he imbued himself with the spirit of his Congregation, the directives Father d'Alzon gave to the community, and the openness shown by the persons he came in contact with at the Assumption.

Having a deep rather than a brilliant mind, Etienne Pernet reflected, assimilated and interiorized things as he adjusted to life, letting himself be guided in his faith response by Father d'Alzon, his "*beloved Father,*" as he said later.

Father d'Alzon had an **important influence** on Etienne Pernet. He offered him a strong and understanding friendship, very human and warm, and this throughout all his life. Etienne Pernet found in him the father whom he had lost too early in life.

It was in terms of holiness, and not of apostolic activities that they sought together the will of God for the life of the young religious. Father d'Alzon helped him to spell out his vocation more clearly and to evolve confidently toward accepting himself and seeking new challenges.

While he showed him trust and friendship, he also gave him a firm accompaniment that communicated to Father Pernet his own passion for Christ and love for the Church.

Thus, a young countryman uprooted from his environment, he found his way in life after a long and difficult discernment.

In 1862, Father Pernet was again in Nîmes. For health reasons, Father d'Alzon relieved him of his teaching responsibilities and told him to rest. On October 17, he returned to Paris and joined the community at rue François Ier which, at that time, was engaged in pastoral activity. From the time of his arrival, Father Picard gave him a ministry that was thought to be suited to his frail health: preaching, confessions, and hospitality.

Very soon, he scoured the poor districts of Paris, visited the sick and the dying, intervened on people's behalf, drafted letters of petition, etc.

Father Picard wrote to Father d'Alzon: "*Pernet is working wonders; he's the father of the poor and the consoler of the afflicted in the neighborhood;*

¹⁶²Bishop Jean-Jacques Nanquette (1807–61), bishop of Le Mans (Sarthe) from 1855 to 1861. A friend of the Religious of the Assumption and of Father d'Alzon.

Foundation of the Little Sisters of the Assumption

he is in his element."¹⁶³

For fourteen years, he had been haunted by the condition of so many working-class families, what he eventually called "*le mal de l'ouvrier*" (the evil afflicting the working class). It was in **Nîmes, in 1850**, at the beginning of his religious life, that he had an experience that was decisive for himself and for the congregation he was to found. A supervisor at Assumption College, he assumed responsibility at the same time for a **youth club** linked to the charitable activities of this college. The club had 200 working-class boys, some of whom were working already. It was by visiting their families, particularly those in the "Enclos Rey" district, that he felt the decisive shock:

I saw there distress that I hardly knew existed. It was in Nîmes that I got the idea of founding the Little Sisters.¹⁶⁴

From 1850 to 1864, this question haunted him painfully. At the same time, his family was experiencing great poverty and isolation. After his mother's death (1857), his infirm brother, unemployed and in utter deprivation, came to him in Paris.

His personal experience, **what he had lived himself and what his family was living tied in with what he had seen in Nîmes.**

He was startled by the suffering and the dehumanization of the workers, the break-up and de-Christianization of the working families, and their helplessness, particularly when the mother was ill.

It wasn't simply his kind and generous nature that was moved. He believed that **every person, however poor, is important in the eyes of God.** In them, his faith recognized "*the suffering members of Jesus Christ.*"¹⁶⁵

Marie-Antoinette Fage was born in Paris on November 7, 1824. Unlike Father Pernet who was from a rural background, she **grew up among the Parisian working class.** Her mother¹⁶⁶ was 20 when Antoinette was born. She was a seamstress, like a lot of young women from humble backgrounds. Antoinette's father, Jean Fage¹⁶⁷ was a soldier; he was 24. Her parents were separated at the time of her birth.

¹⁶³April 25, 1865.

¹⁶⁴Biographical Notes II, 1897.

¹⁶⁵Rule of the Augustinians of the Assumption, 1855

¹⁶⁶Jeanne Suzanne Mutonot (1804–38).

¹⁶⁷Jean Fage (1800–54).

Origins of the Assumption Family

Her childhood was spent in poverty and suffering. When she was about 12 years old, she suffered a severe health problem which stunted her growth and left her infirm. Her mother died in 1838. An orphan at the age of 13, she was taken in by neighbors, friends of her mother.

In turn, she became a **seamstress** and, for almost 24 years, carried on this trade in **sewing workshops**, earning her living by hard work.

She was attentive to her fellow workers, particularly the apprentices, to their situation and their future. According to what Father Pernet said,

She knew how to devote her life and strength to supporting others. I don't know how many times she had to replace her household belongings, which she gave to the young girls she helped to get married.¹⁶⁸

In her capacity to love and to give of herself, she tended to go especially towards the people in humble circumstances, the weak, and the neglected. The more one was to be pitied, the more one had a right to the tenderness of her heart and to her services.¹⁶⁹

Around the age of 18 or 19, she discovered the strength of a living faith. During her childhood and adolescence, **suffering had opened her to others**, and she turned towards God. Proud, sensitive and fervent, she was eager for the Word of God and had a deep love for the Virgin Mary.

In 1853, she joined the Association of Our Lady of Good Counsel. At that time, she came in contact with the Dominicans at the Priory of Saint James in Paris: Fathers Lecomte,¹⁷⁰ Faucillon,¹⁷¹ Manuel,¹⁷² Chocarne,¹⁷³ etc. It was through a Dominican tertiary¹⁷⁴ that she met Madame de Mesnard¹⁷⁵ and her daughter¹⁷⁶ who were thinking of founding an orphanage for young

¹⁶⁸September 18, 1884, VIII, 90.

¹⁶⁹January 19, 1896, I, 446.

¹⁷⁰Father Mathieu Lecomte, O.P., died in 1887.

¹⁷¹Father Thomas Faucillon, O.P., (1829–1901).

¹⁷²Father Emmanuel Manuel, O.P., died in 1892.

¹⁷³Father Bernard Chocarne, O.P., (1825–95).

¹⁷⁴Miss Ermance Gaillardin, sister of Casimir Gaillardin, one of the founders with Father Ledreuille and Mr. Nisard from the society of St. Francis Xavier, an organization dedicated to providing mutual help and education among the poor.

¹⁷⁵Flora de Mesnard, born de Bellissen (1808–87). Member of the Dominican Third Order.

¹⁷⁶Caroline de Mesnard, born in 1830. Member of the Dominican Third Order

Foundation of the Little Sisters of the Assumption

teenage girls of the working-class in the Paris suburbs. In March 1861, she agreed to run it. That same year, she herself joined the Dominican Third Order and made profession on April 24, 1862, taking the name of Sister Catherine of Siena. Through the Third Order and the orphanage, she came in contact with people involved in charitable works, with priests, and with Father Gaspard Mermillod,¹⁷⁷ an advisor to the Ladies of Mesnard and the future Bishop of Geneva, who was interested in social questions and the author of *La question ouvriere* (1872).

Of puny appearance and in constant pain, she was nevertheless cheerful, full of drive and loved by the young girls. A conflict arose with the foundresses of the orphanage. It was in these circumstances that Antoinette Fage met Father Pernet in 1864. It was the beginning of a lasting relationship.

For almost 20 years, Etienne Pernet and Antoinette Fage worked together for the foundation of the Congregation. At the time of Mother Marie of Jesus' death in 1883, Father Pernet said to the community:

We never had but one mind and one heart. There was never the least disagreement between us.¹⁷⁸

The Circumstances

May–June 1864: two decisive encounters

In 1864, Etienne Pernet and Marie-Antoinette Fage were both 40 years old. Father Pernet was in contact with a small group of nurses and with Miss Fage. For a year, he reflected, prayed, and remained attentive to events.

At the beginning of June, two young women whose confessor he was, Marie Maire¹⁷⁹ and a friend, both nurses, asked if he could find work for them. After searching for some, he responded with two questions:

My daughters, do you love Our Lord? Do you feel you have the courage to do something for Him?

On receiving affirmative answers, he proposed the following:

¹⁷⁷Gaspard Mermillod (1824–92), Swiss nationality, bishop of Lausanne and Geneva in 1883; cardinal in 1890.

¹⁷⁸September 16, 1883, V, 284.

¹⁷⁹Sister Marie de la Croix, L.S.A. (1828–1905).

Origins of the Assumption Family

Let's agree that you will continue to look after the sick. If rich people need care, you will ask for payment, it's only just. But you will never refuse the poor, whom you will nurse free-of-charge.

Only Marie Maire agreed to this. She rented a room at 73 rue Vaneau, first with one, then with two young women¹⁸⁰ who agreed to share this form of life.

In a report dated March 7, 1867, Father Pernet wrote:

During the month of June, "consecrated to the most Sacred Heart of Jesus," we prayed very hard for the little undertaking, and the three young women got down to work. They had some paying patients, but very few, and it wasn't long before they accepted only poor people...¹⁸¹

In May 1864, Father Pernet met Marie-Antoinette Fage for the first time. He came to ask her for work and lodging for a teacher who had no money. Shortly thereafter, Antoinette asked him to become her spiritual advisor.

Father Pernet quickly sensed that she could bring to fruition the apostolic call he was feeling. Ever since he came in contact with her, he appreciated her simplicity, her straightforwardness, her frankness, and her generosity in view of the Glory of God and of the Apostolate.¹⁸²

1865: The Foundation

In May 1865, he learned by chance from the Religious of the Assumption that the Ladies of Mesnard were seeking to replace Miss Fage in her position as directress. He asked her to assume responsibility for the community of nurses. At first, she rejected this unexpected call, but then discerned in this proposal a call from God. At that point, she committed herself wholeheartedly. At the origin of the Congregation of the Little Sisters of the Assumption, there was this **act of faith** made by Antoinette Fage.

In June, Marie-Antoinette Fage spent some time at Auteuil. In her notes, she recounts the event. Father Pernet said to her:

¹⁸⁰Céline Magnoux and Denise Cayzac.

¹⁸¹4A1, no. 1.

¹⁸²September 18, 1884, VIII, 90.

Foundation of the Little Sisters of the Assumption

This is what I am proposing after discussion with my superior, Father Picard, namely that you accept the direction of this work. But since, before all else, you need to have some preparation and to know something of religious life, Father Picard is of the opinion that you should spend a few months at the convent in Auteuil.

[...] It was decided that I would go to the Assumption on June 1st.

Miss Fage prepared for her mission with Mother Marie-Eugénie and Mother Françoise-Eugénie (de Malbosc). Father Pernet came to see her every day in Auteuil and together they prepared a *little rule* for the community.

Because of various circumstances, Miss Fage stayed only one month in Auteuil.

The first community

On July 17, 1865, the first community gathered in a little rented apartment at 233 rue Saint-Dominique, in the Gros-Caillou district, chosen because of *“the countless number of poor people living there.”* This house was very close to the Champ de Mars where a world trade fair was being held.

The community had a specific rule for its common life and a prayer schedule that the Congregation followed as a matter of fact for a century. There was also a daily study of the catechism. The nurses called one another “sister” and regarded Miss Fage as the superior, “the Mother” who later took the religious name of Marie of Jesus.

Care of the abandoned sick, in their own homes, was the point of departure of Father Pernet’s foundation. The work of the Little Sisters sprang from ordinary practical life and from simple friendly personalized relations in order to attain the aim of *“refashioning a people for Jesus Christ.”*¹⁸³

The sisters went into the homes, cared for the sick, did the housework, and looked after the children and all that makes up family life. By these **simple acts of service**, the Little Sister sought to be close to the people and to act in a sisterly fashion, thus testifying to the love of God by which she lived.

From the very beginning, the Congregation’s project went beyond the charitable aspect of “care of the sick.” It was **an apostolic project**.

¹⁸³January 21, 1894, I, 472.

In fellowship with the poor

The “little nurses” were poor in the midst of the poor. Practicing poverty in terms of their location, equipment, and daily budget, the first sisters had enough money only to cover the needs of that day. And this lasted for more than two years. They were hungry at times and used tickets issued by the soup kitchens, like the other poor people of the district. “*We had only Providence in the cash box,*” Father Pernet was to say later!¹⁸⁴

Wherever they worked, they shared the life of the families in the slums, which were numerous at the time. They were given help by Father Picard (Father Pernet’s superior), Mother Marie-Eugénie of Jesus, the Dominican Tertiaries, and some friends. Later on, at Monceau, the superior of the Daughters of Charity, Mother Bigour-dan,¹⁸⁵ also helped them. Mother Marie of Jesus’ notebooks enable us to follow all this from day to day.

In March 1867, the “little work,” as it was called, was adopted by the former pupils of Auteuil at Father Picard’s instigation. They organized a fundraising campaign.

In this precarious situation, Mother Marie of Jesus and her sisters also practiced a simple sharing with those around them, responding to the events that challenged them. “*She often invited the community to do without necessities so as to help the poor.*” Many people in difficulty came to live with the community.

During the war of 1870, Father Pernet and Father Vincent de Paul Bailly served as military chaplains. They were taken prisoners at Metz and transferred to Mainz where they lived with Bishop Von Ketteler,¹⁸⁶ who was very open to the social questions of the time. This contact must have interested Father Pernet.

From the beginning of the foundation, Father d’Alzon as well as Father Picard, who was Father Pernet’s immediate superior, encouraged him in his project.

Father Picard supported Mother Marie of Jesus and the first community, sharing in all that was happening in Father Pernet’s life and standing in for him when he had to be absent.

For over 30 years, as the Congregation developed, Father Pernet sought the advice of Father Picard and submitted his problems to him.

¹⁸⁴May 9, 1889, VII, 23.

¹⁸⁵Suzanne Malina, Mother Bigourdan (1826–87), Daughter of Charity.

¹⁸⁶Bishop Wilhelm Emmanuel Von Ketteler (1811–77).

Foundation of the Little Sisters of the Assumption

In 1896, when Pontifical approbation of the Congregation was being sought in Rome, Father Picard wrote to Father Emmanuel Bailly:

Since there will be question of me in connection with the Little Sisters, I want to remind you of two things:

1. At the time of the foundation, I laid down the principle of offering entirely free services and the unshakeable rule of never caring for the rich. I therefore **participated** in the foundation.
2. When I asked Father d'Alzon for the authorization to establish this new work, he replied: "Will you take responsibility for it?" – "Yes!" – "Will you answer to me in the future?" – "Yes, Father!" – "In that case, I give full authorization, but it is your responsibility." I therefore accepted responsibility for it.¹⁸⁷

The Little Sisters and the Assumptionists

From the time of their foundation, the Little Sisters made private vows. They followed the Rule of Saint Augustine and the "little rule" written by the founders during Antoinette Fage's stay at Auteuil. After the war of 1870, with the return of peace and the group's increasing numbers, it became necessary to establish clearly its relationship to the Assumptionists.

Father Pernet insisted on the support and direction of the Little Sisters by the Fathers. A note dated 1877 and preserved at the archbishopric of Paris reads as follows:

The work of the Little Sisters of the Assumption is a work that is full of difficulties and dangers. [...] Until now, I have only encouraged them to count on the Religious [Priests] of the Assumption for matters of government and direction. But, if this support were lacking, my conscience would oblige me not to encourage them to remain in a state from which they might fall into the abyss.¹⁸⁸

1873: Election of the Delegate of the Assumptionist Superior General

¹⁸⁷February 13, 1896.

¹⁸⁸February 6, 1877, 1A1D, 870.

Origins of the Assumption Family

On September 16, 1873, Father Pernet wrote to Mother Marie of Jesus:

[...] We finished the work of our General Chapter today [...] The Chapter members will be giving me the responsibility of communicating to you some resolutions that will be of greatest importance to your little Congregation. From now on, if you wish, you will no longer have to fear being considered as strangers to the Assumption. The bonds between you and us will be as close and lasting as you wish. But I won't say any more to you on that particular subject. I'll explain everything to you when I have the paper in my hands.¹⁸⁹

He knew that he had the agreement of Mother Marie of Jesus and of the sisters, who gratefully welcomed this orientation and proceeded with the election on December 26, 1873. Father Pernet received the absolute majority and became the “Delegate of the Superior General of the Augustinians of the Assumption” to the Little Sisters.

Here is an extract of a letter written on December 26, 1873 by Mother Marie of Jesus to Father Picard:

[...] We could not wish for anything better for the general good of our work than for you to assume its **government** and **direction**. That is why, as soon as our Reverend Father General, Father d'Alzon, asked us to choose as superior either Father Vincent de Paul Bailly, or Father Germer, or Father Pernet, we moved very quickly to do as he wished.

The first Rule and the question of the name

The Congregation was officially recognized by the Church in **1875**. The first **Rule** of the “**Little Sisters of the Assumption, Visiting Nurses of the Poor**” (“*Garde-malades des pauvres à domicile*”) was presented to Cardinal Guibert,¹⁹⁰ Archbishop of Paris, in April 1874 after it had been submitted to Father Picard.

“*It is understood that my response will be one of obedience,*” wrote Father Pernet on April 24, 1874.

¹⁸⁹1A1C, 191.

¹⁹⁰Joseph Hippolyte Guibert (1802–86), O.M.I, in 1823, Archbishop of Paris in 1871, Cardinal in 1873.

Foundation of the Little Sisters of the Assumption

This obedience was to be accompanied by a great deal of patience because, from July 1874 to February 1875, he had to write five letters to Father Picard asking him for the draft of the Constitutions of the Little Sisters of the Assumption which he had submitted to him and which the Archbishopric was asking him for.

In the end, Father Pernet managed to retrieve it:

I found it, almost accidentally, in a little corner of your cell, lost in the middle of a pile of other papers to be thrown out.¹⁹¹

This draft, examined by Father Picard, was approved by the Archbishop. In writing it, Father Pernet had consulted the Rule of the Sisters of Saint Thomas of Villanova because, in the same letter, he wrote:

Unfortunately, the Rule of the Child Jesus (Ladies of St. Thomas of Villanova), from which I had taken a lot of ideas, was not there.

The name of “Little Sisters of the Assumption” was ratified by the General Chapter of the Assumptionists in 1873.

On September 13 of that same year, Mother Marie of Jesus, writing to Father Pernet, then in Nîmes for the General Chapter, signed for the first time: “*Sister Marie of Jesus of the Little Sisters of the Assumption, Nurses of the poor.*”

It is difficult to say when this name was given to us on a regular basis. As a rule, until 1873, we were called the “Nurses of the Poor.” Some Assumptionists spoke of the “Pernettes,” or of “Father Pernet’s sisters,” or of “Miss Fage’s daughters.”

On the other hand, already in 1865, there was a young woman, Laurence, who wanted to become “*a Little Sister of the Assumption.*”¹⁹²

On September 22, 1866, Antoinette Fage was the first to pronounce her vows of religion and to consecrate her life [...] “*to the work of the **Daughters of Our Lady of Compassion**, Sisters of the suffering Jesus, dedicated to the care of the poor and of the abandoned sick.*” On the same page, a note was added the following year:

Renewed forever: August 15, 1867

Antoinette Fage, in religion, Marie of Jesus, **Little Sister of the Assumption**, nurse of the poor.

¹⁹¹February 26, 1875. IAIC, 4121.

¹⁹²Letter to Father Pernet, April 20, 1865.

Origins of the Assumption Family

In fact, the name “Daughters of Our Lady of Compassion”¹⁹³ was never given to the nurses, and it is found nowhere in the voluminous correspondence of the period.

However, many years later, in 1896, in the Directory, Father Pernet was to take up this mystery in the chapter on the “Characteristics of our love for the Blessed Virgin.”

The Little Sister, like Mary, will wish to share in the Cross of Jesus [...] for the salvation of the world. And this life of compassion will be one not only of desire and feeling; it will be expressed in generous acts of immolation, penance, work, and devotedness.¹⁹⁴

In a talk to the sisters on February 11, 1892, Father Pernet said:

You could have been called something quite different from “Little Sisters of the Assumption”: for example, Sisters of St. John the Baptist, of the Compassion, etc. You were almost called the Servants of the Poor. The Blessed Virgin did not want that. She wanted you to be of the Assumption because she wanted to have you close to her heart.¹⁹⁵

Sister Gisèle Marchand
Little Sister of the Assumption

57, rue Violet
75015 Paris

¹⁹³Among the letters sent by Father Pernet to Miss Fage, two are addressed to “The Superior of the Daughters of Mary” (no. 46 on December 22, 1865, and no. 87 on November 19, 1866); another to “The Superior of the Nurses of the Poor” (no. 119 on December 1, 1867). Finally, on the August 17, 1870, from Metz, Father Pernet addressed his letter to “Mrs. Fage, Superior of the Little Sisters of the Assumption, 57 rue Violet Grenelle, Paris.”

¹⁹⁴Ch. VIII.

¹⁹⁵VI, 157.

Appendix I: Sources

- Correspondence
- Report to the benefactresses (1867)
- Account written by Mother Marie of Jesus on her meeting with
- Father Pernet Accounts of the Foundation LSA Directory
- Lectures and talks given by Father Pernet Testimonies (on the Founders)
- *Father Etienne Pernet, yesterday and today*, Father Pierre Touveneraud *Pages d'archives* A.A., April 1966)
- *From the human family to the People of God*, Sister M. Humberte Mollere, Ed. St. Paul, 1967

Appendix II: Additional Information

In discussing the Foundation of the Congregation, I emphasized the circumstances, the influences and what prepared our Founders to undertake the adventure of this Foundation. However, in order to grasp what the foundation meant in terms of its relations with the families of the Assumption, and in particular with the Fathers of the Assumption, it is necessary to touch upon two aspects:

- Father Pernet, the founder: initiative and dependence
- Mother Marie of Jesus Fage, co-foundress

1.—Father Pernet, founder: initiative and dependence

Among the founders of the families of the Assumption, Father Pernet was the only one not to have been a superior.

Etienne Pernet was an **unassuming** man, a little bit brusque by temperament, sensitive, but at the same time, moderate, **reflective** and tenacious. At the time of the foundation, he had learned to master the anxious side of his character, and he knew how to be firm and courageous.

The unanimous testimony of those who were in close touch with him underlines his **humility**. He had experienced the rough path of humiliations. As he said himself, the search to find what was God's will for him was long, and for a long time he also suffered from a feeling of being "ineffective." His correspondence brings out his kindness, his willingness to help, and the warmth of his fraternal relations.

This religious who used to say, "*we will not aim to dry up our heart but, on the contrary, to make it bigger, stronger, and more alive,*"¹⁹⁶ had a reputation for **kindness**. He never despaired of others. This kindness was allied with common sense and discernment.

Because he was one among many other religious, it is important that we examine his thinking concerning the relations of the Little Sisters of the Assumption with the Assumptionists and his attitude towards his superiors.

¹⁹⁶August 2, 1865, 1A1C, no. 36.

1.—His thinking on the relations between the Little Sisters of the Assumption and the Assumptionists

Father Pernet had made his own the spirit of the Assumption. He was impregnated with it. At the same time, he had interiorized his own grace as a Founder.

He wanted the Little Sisters to be supported and directed by the Assumptionists. He expressed this in his correspondence with Baroness Reille¹⁹⁷ in 1877.¹⁹⁸

And on July 2, 1879, in a talk to the Little Sisters, he said:

[...] I confess that I would suffer greatly if I thought that one day you would have to be under the direction of this or that diocesan priest, or under the control of bishop so and so. [...] You see, I want you always to have real Fathers leading you.¹⁹⁹

2.—His attitude towards his superiors

Although a founder, he was also a religious belonging to a community and to a congregation. We read in *Telle fut son ante*: “*In order to achieve the difficult balance between the initiative of a founder and the dependence of a religious, he opted for obedience*” (p. 51).

As a founder, he ran things by consulting the Little Sisters of the Assumption and his superior.

He was very careful about how the Congregation progressed, and he worked in close collaboration with the first two superiors general, Mother Marie of Jesus Fage and Mother Marie of the Blessed Sacrament Jacobs,²⁰⁰ without ever taking their place. He had the same attitude toward the superiors of the communities which he visited regularly. He never interposed himself between the sisters and their superior, keeping to his task as guarantor of the charism and as spiritual animator. With them, he had to study situations, risk innovations, and take decisions, but always in obedience to

¹⁹⁷Baroness Geneviève Reille born Soult de Dalmatie (1844–1910)

¹⁹⁸Letters 1A1C, nos. 2873 and 2874.

¹⁹⁹IX, 322.

²⁰⁰Eugénie Jacobs, Mother Marie of the Blessed Sacrament (1853–1922) Superior General in September 1883 after the death of Marie-Antoinette Fage (1824–83), co-foundress of the Congregation.

Origins of the Assumption Family

his superiors. His local superior was kept informed and, through him, the superior general of the Assumptionists.

As a religious, he had a conviction that marked his whole life. He knew he was “sent” and that he had been given a mission. He never spoke of “his” work, but of the “work of God,” and he resisted all attempts to attribute it to him.

For him, obedience was the guarantee of doing the will of God. It was a spiritual dimension that he transmitted insistently to the Congregation.

As an Assumptionist, Father Pernet, the spiritual son of Father d’Alzon, had Father Laurent as superior of the community in Clichy from 1852 to 1860; in Paris at rue Francis ler, he had Father Picard from 1863 to 1880, and then Father Vincent de Paul Bailly.

Father Picard was a support and a guide for him, which is not to say that everything was easy. For example, there were two questions, among many others, that they had to deal with:

The renting of a house for the community.

In 1867, in agreement with Father Picard,²⁰¹ Father Pernet looked for and found a little house on Passage Gaillard²⁰² in the parish of Chaillot. After consulting several persons, Miss Fage took the necessary steps to rent it. On August 7, Father Picard ruled out the transfer of the community to Chaillot because the Assumptionists were having problems with that parish.

Father Pernet replied:

Because the prohibition was quite formal, I wrote immediately to Miss Fage to suspend all the transactions and to call a halt to the affair. You can see that I obeyed you, and I did so as promptly as I could. Having said that, let me explain my actions to you.²⁰³

There are some ten letters about that affair.

Finally, the Little Sisters of the Assumption rented that house before moving to Monceau the following year. For a year, in order to avoid difficulties with the parish clergy, Father Pernet, in agreement with Father Picard, refrained from visiting the sisters in that community.

²⁰¹Cf. 1A4C 114.

²⁰²Passage Gaillard. This passage no longer exists, it was a narrow lane parallel to rue François Ier

²⁰³August 16, 1867, 1A1C 4072.

Foundation of the Little Sisters of the Assumption

1891: A foundation in New York Father Picard insisted on a foundation by the Fathers at the same time as that of the Little Sisters. Father Pernet's request to found a community in New York received two formal negative answers because the Archbishop's²⁰⁴ Council wanted to accept only the Little Sisters. This position risked putting into question the foundation that had been projected with the support of American friends. In a letter to Father Picard, Father Pernet wrote:

We have prayed and we are still praying, and I am still confused, while being disposed to say no, if you request it.²⁰⁵

At that time, Father Pernet was in Nîmes. In February, Mother Marie of the Blessed Sacrament, on receipt of a letter from the Archbishop of New York, went to see Father Picard. Here is an extract from the letter she then wrote to Father Pernet:

[...] After telling him that, upon receipt of his letter, we had refused for the reasons he was familiar with, I added: "Father, you told us that the Good Lord would bless our obedience and that is what He has done. The obstacle is removed. The Archbishop agrees to accept a Father of the Assumption." He replied: "I expected that." That comment didn't surprise me. Father believes he has obtained everything and, in a way, glorifies himself for having refused. But, no matter.

I translated the letter for him. He said to me: "He doesn't accept a foundation by our Fathers?" "No, Father, at least not for the time being, but I am convinced that when the Little Sisters have settled in and their work is known, that will facilitate a lot of things in the future." I continued with the translation. When I was finished, I looked questioningly at Father Picard and he said: "Well then, go ahead."

In order to clear the matter up, I wanted him to hear once again the whole story of this foundation so that we might not be accused of having acted on our own.

²⁰⁴Michael Augustine Corrigan (1839–1902). Archbishop of New York from 1885 to 1902.

²⁰⁵January 24, 1891, 1A1C 4164.

Origins of the Assumption Family

After re-tracing the history of the foundation, Mother Marie of the Blessed Sacrament, still in the same letter, continued:

[...] When he said to me: “I was convinced that your refusal would bring about this solution,” I said to him: “I must say, Father, that I did not think so and that I was deeply distressed. Moreover, our good Fa ther has often edified me but never so much as on the day when he had to submit in that way, and I must tell you, Father, that I thought the Founder was indeed supplanted by the religious.”

He replied: “it was necessary,” still alluding to the good that was to come of it. Then, picking up on my words, he said to me: “Oh, for that matter, the Founder must never be supplanted by the religious, otherwise it would create an impossible situation for him among our religious.” I said to him: “That is what I have always thought.”

Finally, to finish with this question, Father Picard said: “Well then, write to Father Pernet and let him know how things stand. As for me, I will write to Father Brun telling him to prepare to leave. [...]”²⁰⁶

2.—Mother Marie de Jésus: co-foundress

As has been said, the Congregation was founded by Father Pernet and Mother Marie of Jesus. Father had the evangelical intuition and Mother Marie of Jesus “gave body” to his charism.

“She was the Father’s support and his tireless helper.” “**They must never be separated,**” said Mother Marie-Madeleine.²⁰⁷

The words **support** and **tireless helper** must be noted.

In 1864, Marie-Antoinette Fage was a little woman of 40, frail in appearance, deformed, but radiating obvious charm: “*That little woman is very great,*” Father d’Alzon said in 1867.

We can detect a **strong**, rather **independent personality**. She was an active, enterprising and spontaneous person.

²⁰⁶1A1B 3056.

²⁰⁷Testimony 130.

Foundation of the Little Sisters of the Assumption

When God brought about our meeting,” said Father Pernet, “she was surrounded by orphans who adored her and to whom she was a mother.²⁰⁸

Father Pernet sensed the depth of Antoinette Fage whose first letters in 1864 show both frankness and excessive timidity, her emotions having probably suffered from the harshness of her existence. He perceived her sense of education, along with her “*superior and decisive intelligence in thinking out problems and her strong will in implementing decisions,*” said Father Manuel, O.P., the Dominican novice master, in 1883.

An innate *poverty of heart* was the grace that was common to both founders. Their life and the history of the Congregation at the outset were marked by their abandonment to God.

After her death, Father Pernet said to the Little Sisters of the Assumption:

Among all the persons I have ever met, your Mother was the one who was most at the mercy of the Good Lord. She was the child of Providence.²⁰⁹

Antoinette Fage’s *kindness*, her sense of justice and her *compassion* struck all whom she met.

Your first Mother combined great energy with a big heart. She supported her subjects, corrected them without ever discouraging them, and trained them in virtue.²¹⁰

And again,

Your Mother was a soul of great faith... At the same time, she was very humble and had a great love for Our Lord, the Church, souls, and above all the poor...²¹¹

²⁰⁸September 20, 1883, VIII, 644.

²⁰⁹September 18, 1884, VIII, 90.

²¹⁰September 18, 1890, XI, 118.

²¹¹September 17, 1896, VIII, 87.

Origins of the Assumption Family

The starting point for the common work and the strong spiritual friendship that linked Etienne Pernet and Antoinette Fage was a great love for Our Lord that was concretized by their love for the poor.

You are afraid of nothing when it comes to devotedness and the salvation of souls, Father Pernet wrote to her in 1871.

“Forgetful of herself, very simple, very modest,” she went ahead, with *daring* and *humility*, leading her sisters by her example. “She is a woman who stands on her own two feet, who doesn’t get flustered, who is able to suffer,” said the parish priest of Saint John the Baptist in Grenelle²¹² in 1876.

The writings that have been preserved are few but of great value for getting to know the beginnings of the Congregation. In her humility, Mother Marie of Jesus did not wish that her works be preserved. She used to say to the novices:

No, my children, that would not be appropriate. I have never permitted it for the older sisters, and I do not permit it for you either. Only the words of our Venerated Father should be preserved. He is the one whom God enlightened regarding what was needed for our work. *It is for him to instruct us, to teach us, you and me*, and we should keep all that he says carefully for the generations that will come after us. As for me, I am nothing, my children. I simply try to *help you put into practice the counsels of our Father*, as occasions arise and my advice becomes necessary.²¹³

As *Superior general*, she was Father Pernet’s “tireless helper.”

- 1865: When Father Pernet asked her to join the first group of sisters, he also asked her to take on the responsibility of the community and placed her as superior. Mother Marie of Jesus showed her qualities of heart, intelligence and organization amid all sorts of difficulties. Her strength in times of trial came from her faith.
- When war was declared in 1870, Father Pernet signed up as a voluntary chaplain and left for Metz.

²¹²Father Jacques Théodore Lamarche (1827–92). Bishop of Quimper in 1887.

²¹³Biography, p. 280.

Foundation of the Little Sisters of the Assumption

On the initiative of Mother Marie of Jesus, a military treatment center with 42 beds was set up in Grenelle. The sisters were in charge of four other military treatment centers in Paris,²¹⁴ for a total of ninety beds. They themselves lodged in attics, and Marie of Jesus sheltered some twenty persons from the neighborhood who were hungry and cold.

In 1871, during the Commune uprising in Paris, the gunpowder store on rue de Javel exploded. Mother Marie of Jesus offered hospitality to all who needed it. “*Our house could be called the house of refuge.*” The sisters nursed both the wounded soldiers and the insurgents.

The years 1870–71 were important for the institute which underwent the trial of the Founder’s absence, yet it held firm. Mother Marie of Jesus faced up to the difficulties caused by the war and the Commune. Immediately afterwards, the sisters resumed nursing the sick in their homes. From that date forward, the Congregation took on its specific character adapted to the society of the time. Mother 162

Marie of Jesus had to struggle to safeguard *the aim of the Institute*.

– Convinced that the young foundation needed the impetus given by Father Pernet, she succeeded in having him appointed ecclesiastical superior by the diocese of Paris, strongly opposing the plans of Cardinal Guibert. She managed this difficult negotiation with tact and sensitivity.

– She had a sense of her responsibilities with regard to the sisters and the communities. She closely followed especially the foundations in Creil, Sèvres, Perpignan, and London. In all: fourteen in twelve years. She supported the young superiors “day after day” amid their difficulties. Their correspondence, which has been preserved, testifies to this.

She was on the road and on the building sites, and she had to cope with financial difficulties because, at Grenelle, the house had to be enlarged in order to accommodate everybody. In 1877, the novices went to Sevres while two new stories were added to the motherhouse and the building of the chapel was begun in 1880.

At her death on September 18, 1883, the Congregation numbered 119 sisters and 15 communities in France and England.

– With Father Pernet she founded the Lady Servants of the Poor (1876) and the Fraternity of Our Lady of the Assumption (1881). “*She was the soul of our group,*” said the Lady Servants.

²¹⁴These treatment centers depended on the Hospital at *Les Invalides*.

Origins of the Assumption Family

Every month at Grenelle, she held a meeting for the group called “the Children of Salvation.” She went to Lourdes eleven times with the National Pilgrimage and she helped with the foundation of other congregations.²¹⁵ All her life, Mother Marie of Jesus showed herself capable of shouldering her responsibilities as superior, leaving to Father Pernet his place as Founder. Their missions were complementary.

When Father Pernet spoke of this conversation, he added:

... and she would become very enthusiastic when I pointed out to her that the mission I was proposing would make her and those who would come to join her apostles among the working class. [...] and she accepted it willingly. [...] she was so supernatural, so faithful, and so generous in carrying out what had been asked of her.²¹⁶

The slowly matured wisdom of Father Pernet found in her a dynamism that complemented his own solid qualities. He always recognized this. It was an aspect of his simplicity. Father Pernet, through his spiritual direction, made it possible for the fine personality of Antoinette Fage to free itself. She herself recognized this and said to the sisters during her last illness:

Oh, my daughters, what a good guide! Don't ever leave him!

Additional Sources

- Correspondence
- Talks given by Father Pernet to the Little Sisters of the Assumption about Mother Marie of Jesus.
- *Mère Marie de Jesus, cofondatrice des P.S.A.* (For the centennial, Sister Gisèle Marchand, 1983).
- *Force dans la faiblesse: deux pauvres au service du Projet de Dieu*, Sister Myriam Rabia (PCN, February 11, 1999).

²¹⁵Little Dominican Sisters of Orleans (correspondence with Madame de Bhc) and Servants of the Poor of Angers (Dom Leduc of Solesmes).

²¹⁶September 18, 1884, VIII, 90.

Foundation of the Orants of the Assumption

Isabelle de Clermont-Tonnerre, Countess of Ursel, and François Picard, as they grew increasingly aware of their role as founders during the years preceding the foundation of the Orants of the Assumption

MARIE-JACQUES SEVENT AND ANNE HUYGHEBAERT

On December 8, 1896, the chapel at the novitiate of the Oblates of the Assumption on rue Berton in Paris was the scene of a very simple event: the birth of the Orants of the Assumption. Father François Picard, the Assumptionist Superior General, announced:

The Assumption family included almost all types of activity, strength and energy: it lacked this little family dedicated to prayer, study, and sacrifice. . . Rejoice children of the Assumption!

In the choir of the Oblates, four prie-dieux had been prepared for Isabelle de Clermont-Tonnerre, Countess of Ursel, for two young girls, Sister Anna who would stay only a few months and Sister Thérèse who, on the contrary, would leave for some time then return permanently, and for Mother Marie of the Compassion, Oblate of the Assumption, who had been chosen by Father Picard to initiate them into the religious life. All four took their places.²¹⁷

“Everything took place with great simplicity and profound humility,” wrote Sister Thérèse-Emmanuel 25 year later, a simplicity and poverty imbued with the profound joy that radiated from Father Picard and marked by

²¹⁷*The History of the first ten years of our religious family*, vol. I, Congregation of the Orants of the Assumption, Archive Collection, no. 3.

Origins of the Assumption Family

the total self-effacement of Isabelle: “*What bothers me most is when people speak of ‘the work of Madame d’Ursel,’ when I appear to be something, even the head of this work.*”²¹⁸

For both founders, this day was the culmination of a long process of maturation. It was the inauguration of their common work.

Genesis and Evolution of the Foundation of the Orants in Isabelle

At the end of her annual retreat in 1893, Isabelle reflected on what had been accomplished up to that point concerning the foundation she was still working on:

“God is patient with souls. For 30 years, he has constantly let me feel that one day I will be entirely his and that, through the trials of my life, he has led me to a goal which he alone knew about. . . .”

A young vocation

“Thirty years,” . . . this traces the beginning of her vocation back to 1863 when Isabelle was only 14 years old. The previous year, her mother had remarried in the region of Lyons, which, for the young girl, was both an emotional and cultural choc. After leaving the fashionable districts of Paris, Isabelle spent her youth in the region of Saint-Etienne, at the château of Feugerolles which had all the appearances of a fortress. Its terrace overlooked the village of Chambon and the entire Ricamarie Valley. Today, there is still a striking contrast between the two places, but it was much greater when mines and blast furnaces bristled throughout the valley with their columns of smoke. . . . As soon as she could, Isabelle went to live with the community of the Sisters of St. Vincent de Paul, who were very active in the village, in order to help them in one or another of their works.²¹⁹ It would seem that she had decided to enter the novitiate in 1869 because she wrote to her

²¹⁸Letter to Father Picard, no. P39I.

²¹⁹Letters to her grandmother de Clermont-Tonnerre.

Foundation of the Orants of the Assumption

mother about “*the day when I will wear the cornet*” (the white coif worn by the Sisters of Charity)...²²⁰

This love for the poor, a concrete and committed love, will mark her whole life.

Her poor health—all her life Isabelle suffered from frequent fainting spells—delayed the decision. A Christian marriage was planned. She was to meet Henri d’Ursel at the home of one of her aunts when the war of 1870 broke out. The plans were suspended but questions remained. Before what the family called Isabelle’s indecision, another aunt of hers, the Marquise of Vallin, a faithful supporter of the nascent works of the Assumptionists, put her in touch with Father Picard.²²¹

His support and direction will prove to be decisive.

Under the direction of Father Picard

We can follow her from 1872 to 1903 thanks to an abundant correspondence.²²² From the outset, Isabelle showed herself to be frank and lucid. Sensitive and spontaneous, she did not hide any of her doubts or any of the graces that stand out as landmarks in her spiritual life and that eventually led her to a mystic union. Father Picard’s answers were generally brief, wise, and firm, which did not exclude a certain tenderness when painful events took place. For both of them, the only thing that mattered was to recognize the will of God and to carry it out, hence intransigencies that might appear excessive to our present-day mentalities.

On June 16, 1873, Isabelle became Countess Henri d’Ursel. Her daughter Caroline was born on Christmas Eve 1874 while her husband was already seriously ill. He died on Madeira Island on September 9, 1875. Her decision was immediate and absolute:

At the foot of my husband’s death-bed, I made the vow of perpetual chastity and of consecrating myself to God as soon as my

²²⁰Letter to her mother, no. FA91.

²²¹Excerpts from the Chronicles of the Little Sisters of the Assumption.

²²²This correspondence is under study at the present time. It includes approximately one thousand typewritten pages of Isabelle’s letters, though not all her correspondence has been preserved. She lost the letters she considered to be most important during a trip she took in 1884 or 1885. Letter no. P3 quoted further on (note 32) gives the general direction of the search she pursued throughout her life.

Origins of the Assumption Family

daughter would no longer need me. I had only one reservation: to seek your approval.²²³

That marked the beginning of her inner struggle. In spite of family or even worldly obligations, she never came back on this total gift of herself to God. Quite to the contrary, her spiritual life was deepened through trials and mystical graces. At the same time, Isabelle, the great grand-daughter of Saint Jeanne de Chantal through her mother, refused “*to walk over the body of her child*” in order to respond to that irreversible call. She knew inwardly that that was not her way of life. She had to reconcile the two, but how? Father Picard witnessed and guided this tension as well as the crises that followed from it.

Toward the religious life

A member of the Third Order of Saint Augustine since October 1876,²²⁴ Isabelle went many times to Auteuil where she became imbued with the spirit of the Assumption. Highly considered by Mother Marie-Eugénie, she was admitted to the *Grand Couvent* and participated in some aspects of the life of the community. But, as a rule, she lived with her in-laws. She experienced great tension between these two places: the way of living was very different and critical remarks were made about her choices.

The autumn 1880 marked an important step forward. In agreement with Father Picard and Mother Marie-Eugénie,²²⁵ Isabelle became a resident member of the convent in Cannes which had recently been founded. Caroline was able to receive there a normal education, while she herself was able to benefit a little more from religious life, not only from choral office but also from meals, recreations, the wearing of the habit on feast days. . . and, above all, from regular submission to the superior, Mother Marie of the Nativity (Florence Dillon). Her desire for religious life increased. Then, in the autumn of 1883, when Mother Thérèse-Emmanuel, co-foundress of the Religious of the Assumption, came to Cannes with a few novices, Isabelle committed herself even more:²²⁶ “*Mother Thérèse-Emmanuel is so good. She accepted me in the*

²²³Letter no. P30, November 5. 1875.

²²⁴Letter no. P42 and the archives of the Religious of the Assumption in Auteuil.

²²⁵Letter from Mother Marie-Eugénie to the Superior in Cannes, vol. 24, no. 6741.

²²⁶Letters nos. P119, P123, etc. from Isabelle, no. PIA 4334 from Father Picard, and letters to Mother Thérèse-Emmanuel.

Foundation of the Orants of the Assumption

novitiate, which means that I am living an almost complete religious life... I believe that my formation will take place." She was therefore thinking of joining the Religious of the Assumption.

The Crisis

Isabelle often spoke of her retreat of April 1884 as a time of revolt and rebellion. We have only a few facts on which to base ourselves because there are no documents from that period, probably because she destroyed them herself. There are nevertheless telltale signs in letters and notes drawn up later that allow us to put this revolt in context:

Is it right for a mother to subject her child to a vow of obedience?... I realize that your order, which was based on her advice (Mother Marie of the Nativity), had nothing imprudent or excessive in itself, except that it substituted religious authority for maternal authority.²²⁷

Father Picard responded that God's rights take precedence over maternal duty:

"The only thing that made sense was that a grace was being wasted and that the treasure of a good part of the retreat was being lost."²²⁸

Today, we would say: who are we to judge? But times then were different. Seemingly, the crux of Isabelle's personal problem was the extension of her vow of obedience to include the education of her daughter. In addition to the apparently theoretical question that Isabelle had asked, this vow implied submitting the education of her daughter not only to Father Picard but also to the Superior in Cannes (Mother Marie of the Nativity) whose authority seems to have been exercised in an excessive and uncalled-for manner over Isabelle and particularly over the education of her daughter Caroline, and without Father Picard being aware of it.²²⁹ From April to July, it was one

²²⁷Letter no P141, July 14, 1884.

²²⁸Letter from Father Picard, no. PIA 4347, July 20, 1884.

²²⁹Letters nos. P 182, PI83, P 227 to Father Picard: "*Just think a little about the influence this dear Mother has had on my life! Influence and authority. Was he in a position to judge...? I really believe that some incidents, if not bad, at least dangerous must have taken place. I never thought they were right, but I nevertheless obeyed.*"

Origins of the Assumption Family

thing after another, which prompted her to revolt and subsequently to question. As Isabelle saw the need to purify her motherly love, she nevertheless decided to hasten her entry into religious life:²³⁰

God wants me in the religious state... Difficulties will be surmountable only if I wear the habit in the convent... the habit brings about an admission of sin, and therefore a more complete practice of dependency and poverty... What will be the result? Would a family council not be able to free me from my daughter's guardianship?... But God knows that I want his will, only his will.

In June, even though her family was waiting for her, Isabelle delayed her departure from Cannes, at the request of the superior, in order to take a few days vacation with her daughter in a nearby house in the country. Caroline came back from there with a very bad sore throat that turned out to be diphtheria, often a deadly sickness at that time. The correspondence of both Father Picard and Mother Marie-Eugénie testifies to everyone's anxiety. Prayer became very intense. Thanks to a successful tracheotomy, Caroline was saved, but Isabelle remained shaken. In August 1884, she wrote:

I want to be loyal and to keep my promises faithfully, but the thought that my daughter has been sacrificed to my spiritual life is a thought that haunts and tortures me. Also, since I had the feeling that I was about to walk over the dead body of my child in order to join religious life... , I no longer have a desire for the novitiate that I am supposed to begin next year.

She recognized her great reluctance to go back to Cannes but continued to progress in her union with God.²³¹

"I eventually promised to offer up and accept everything in a spirit of atonement for the infidelities during my retreat."

Later on, however, in November 1886, Isabelle wrote:

²³⁰Letters nos. P130, 133, 135.

²³¹Letters nos. P143, 146, 152, 182...

Foundation of the Orants of the Assumption

“I am pleased that I am no longer under obedience concerning Caroline as I was with Florence.”²³²

After a year during which there was no major event and about which we have few documents, a serious crisis arose at the end October 1885 with the departure of the Superior in Cannes, Mother Marie of the Nativity or Florence Dillon. I will not retrace here the history of this departure, which falls within the competence of the Religious of the Assumption, but merely its repercussions on Isabelle’s resolve to enter religious life.

Learning of the drama while she was on her way back to Cannes, Isabelle stopped in Auteuil where she stayed until December, supporting Mother Marie-Eugénie in her decisions and involving herself personally so that Mother Marie of the Nativity might come back to religious life. Upon returning to Cannes, she faced all the moral and financial repercussions of what had happened.²³³ Under obedience and for the good of Florence, the former superior, and of the sisters, she did not hesitate to assume the debts and the other financial questions left by Florence. However, doubts and discouragement about religious life haunted her:

“A month ago, I blamed myself for not taking the step I had the occasion to take. . . I thought I had grabbed the branch of religious life, but it broke in my hands.”²³⁴

Shortly thereafter, she wrote:

“Religious life is deflowered. . . . In it, I saw many of the feelings that I have myself but that I would prefer not seeing in those who belong to God.”²³⁵

But she soon pulled herself together:

“I would be ungrateful if I were to pass severe judgments on a religious family that welcomed me so well. But in religious life, one would like to find only things that can be admired.”²³⁶

²³²Florence was the former superior in Cannes; cf. letter no. P228.

²³³Numerous letters to Father Picard: nos. P175 to 215 and 228 to 241, etc.

²³⁴Letter no. P183, November 22, 1885.

²³⁵Letter no. P186, December 12, 1885.

²³⁶Letter no P189, December 18, 1885.

Origins of the Assumption Family

It was from the depths of this suffering and deception that the call to become a prayerful soul “*purified by the fire of atonement*” would grow and that the perspective of another kind of religious life would take root.²³⁷

But already, a third crisis was looming. Tensions at Auteuil between the Assumptionists and the Religious of the Assumption were leading to a conflict of authority and influence which the special Chapter of the Sisters would settle in July 1886. The great majority of the Sisters refused to be governed by “the Fathers” and, consequently, and to be subjected to any type of interference on the part of Father Picard in their decisions. Father Picard concluded that he must completely step aside. There was much suffering on both sides, as reflected in the correspondence of Father Picard and Mother Marie-Eugénie. In Cannes, Isabelle was sufficiently integrated into the life of the community to notice these tensions. For a long time, she thought they might be temporary,²³⁸ but her choice was clear:

Madame Superior told me that if ever I had the misfortune of being separated from the Congregation during her lifetime, she would always keep a place for me so that I might return as quickly as possible... There is no doubt in my soul that she will keep track of me... And I see myself as never reaching the port of arrival... Every time I thought I saw land, it escaped me... I have worked to reach religious life, but it too has escaped me.²³⁹

This same letter tells us that what she called phantasmagoria did not leave her:

“... or else God has special plans for me that I know nothing about.”

Did the words she heard at Fourviere during her thanksgiving resonate anew?

“I need you for something big, but I will use you only if you forget yourself.”²⁴⁰

²³⁷Letter no. P210, May 2, 1886.

²³⁸Letters nos. P199 and 210, 211, 212.

²³⁹Letter no. P216, June 3, 1886.

²⁴⁰Letter no. P108.

Foundation of the Orants of the Assumption

It was March 21, 1881 and Isabelle did not attach much importance to it. She only retained the conclusion: “*Out of obedience, you must forget yourself completely.*”²⁴¹

Toward a new foundation

As the separation between Father Picard and the Religious of the Assumption became irreversible in the summer of 1886, Isabelle saw that the ideal religious life she had dreamed of was crumbling and that a call to some type of contemplative life was becoming more and more precise:

“At one moment, Our Lord seemed to be telling me: And if what you have in mind became a reality, you know what you would then have to suffer. . .”²⁴²

Instinct played an important role in the long evaluations she made of her meditations, which were always very sincere. Isabelle hid nothing of the demands of a deep spiritual life and no less of her weakness to respond:

“I will wear the bracelet during the vigil. This will help me to stay awake because I close my eyes in spite of myself. Really, what a beautiful contemplative soul!”

Father Picard made no mistake about it. To be sure, he watched over Isabelle’s poor health but noted:

“The grace you are talking about is very luminous. Remain in this light and let yourself be carried by the one who is calling you.”²⁴³

From the first days of January 1887, everything was becoming clearer:

Our Lord told me that it was not enough that he should give me souls, but that I must give him some, that the fruit of heavenly nuptials is the spiritual birth of souls. . . that he would not tell me anything more, but that he would give me a place, a mission in the Church. . . He added that there is no life more exposed to suffering, humiliation, and all of the rest than that of a foundress, which he seemed to be talking about.²⁴⁴

²⁴¹During the present Colloquium, new ideas were expressed which modify this opinion. Cf. the Appendix at the end of this article.

²⁴²Letter no P231. November 26, 1886.

²⁴³Letters from Father Picard, nos. PIA 4418 and 4426.

²⁴⁴Letter no. P237, January 4, 1887.

Origins of the Assumption Family

Replying to Father Picard who encouraged her to let grace do its work, Isabelle added:

In view of the Tact that you did not laugh when you answered me and that you are possibly taking seriously what I told you, I think it more conscientious to add that, the day you ask me to do so, I am ready to outline the main characteristics of the work I believe God is asking for. . . If you want to pursue it, you can then look for souls who are the direct opposite of what I am. . .

As soon as Father Picard told her to write down her ideas about the project she had in mind (*“Take your pen in hand. Jot down your ideas. . . then shut the door”*²⁴⁵), Isabelle wrote some strong pages from January 23–27, 1887, giving the broad outline of the life of the future Orants:

Jesus Christ first and foremost, life, vitality and strength of every undertaking, therefore a contemplative order dedicated first of all to prayer, then to religious studies. . . Prayer as the first duty through adoration, meditation, and the choral office. . . Study, with God as its only goal and under the direction of the Assumptionist Fathers so as not to get bogged down in useless pursuits, because the (. . .) will be apostles, apostles by their prayer, apostles also by work on the outside, which will be limited, nevertheless, so that prayer might always be the first of their various works. . . The Good Lord probably sees other works, but I see only three: elementary schools, boarding schools, and retreats.

Marked by her time and by her long association with the Religious of the Assumption, Isabelle insisted on Christian education for young girls who are often neglected. She hoped that retreatants would come to drink at the well of Christian austerity:

“Customs change and, consequently, so do religious practices, while vitality never changes and gives a person the light needed to cope with different situations.”²⁴⁶

²⁴⁵Letters nos. PIA 4427 and 4428.

²⁴⁶*Premières Vues*, documents nos. D00001, 2, and 3.

Foundation of the Orants of the Assumption

Two notes written in February clarified what she meant by vitality and austerity:

“We want educated religious, we also want them to be humble and, as much as possible, to feel small and abased. Accordingly, we will not have any lay sisters.”

A *confraternity of apostolates* with the Oblates of the Assumption was envisaged as an opening onto the reality of the world, an opening that was necessary in order to maintain the apostolic spirit as well as the spirit of poverty. Remembering the hardships of others teaches us to deprive ourselves so that we can give more importance to the apostolate.

Are those not the main themes of the vocation she spoke of as a young girl and which she expressed to Father Picard in 1872?

I will never have the physical strength needed to be a serious Sister of Charity. . . . What would I have left to offer to God? . . . The more I belong to God, the more I will be completely devoted to him, and the happier I will be. I do not feel attracted to any particular Order. . . . I am searching for an Order in which I can rediscover my attraction for the poor as well as a complete abandonment of myself and of my weaknesses, all the while not harming my health. . . .²⁴⁷

Love for the poor was something that Isabelle never stopped putting into practice throughout her life, and not solely as a generous provider of charitable works and of a whole variety of people.

Separation from the Ladies of the Assumption— Rapprochement with the Oblates

Upon returning to Cannes, Isabelle was no longer under the complete obedience of the superior. She had difficulty retaking her place in the community:

“I do not know what you will decide about my residing in Cannes. . . .”²⁴⁸

²⁴⁷Letter no. P3, September 4, 1872.

²⁴⁸Letter no. P221

Origins of the Assumption Family

She felt she was in an awkward position, which did not stop her from taking to heart the difficulties stemming from the local situation and from Florence's intrigues.²⁴⁹ From now on, she was certain that she was "*no longer made to be a Religious of the Assumption.*"²⁵⁰ In March 1887, a visit to Cannes by Mother Marie-Eugénie allowed her to explain herself frankly:

It is understood that I will never enter the Religious of the Assumption, even if things settle down among you. The position is clear. Madam the Superior General nevertheless expressed the desire that I remain here on the same terms...²⁵¹

Mutual respect remained but the differences were definitive. In May 1888, Isabelle and Caroline left Cannes permanently. From then on, they rarely returned to Auteuil.²⁵²

The rapprochement with the Oblates took place during the summer of 1886 through Mother Marie of Christ, General Councilor of the Religious of the Assumption and Superior of the school on rue Lübeck in Paris. Isabelle began to rely on her because of the confidence Father Picard had in her.²⁵³ On loan to the Oblates of Paris, Mother Marie of Christ became their Major Superior. It was therefore to the Oblates, at Cours-la-Reine, that Isabelle would go for her annual retreats and other stays in Paris.

The years of waiting

In the autumn of 1888, Isabelle went to live in Belgium with her in-laws where she participated in family life and sometimes in the worldly life that Caroline needed as an adolescent. But, retaining her deep conviction, Isabelle continued to live in an intense union with Our Lord from whom she soon received confirmation of her call to establish a new form of contemplative life: "*You will found and you will have many daughters.*"²⁵⁴ This would now allow her to respond to an old yearning.

²⁴⁹Letters nos. P234–240.

²⁵⁰Letter no P241.

²⁵¹Letter no. P 249, March 28, 1887. Isabelle made no reference to the contents of this frank exchange. The letter she claims she wrote to Mother Marie-Eugénie as a follow-up to this conversation has not been found.

²⁵²See the correspondence of Mother Marie-Eugénie, the Annals of the Convent of Cannes, and Letters nos. P150, 264, 290.

²⁵³Letters nos. P221 and PIA 4412.

²⁵⁴Letter no. P301, October 4, 1888.

Foundation of the Orants of the Assumption

In 1875, Isabelle had been attracted by the work of Calvary founded in Lyons and Paris by Jeanne Gamier, and she remained in touch with the Calvary of Lyons. In 1886, thanks to the support of Adolphe Petit, S.J., and to the generosity of other widows of the Belgian group, she succeeded in opening a dispensary in Brussels to care for women with cancer. In 1888, she committed herself to work there as a volunteer:

I was welcomed yesterday by the Cross of Calvary... This work so obviously blessed by God strengthens my faith... May I add that over and above the chapel of Calvary I am looking beyond? My faith in that future is being strengthened not by the desire but by the belief that it is God's will for me.²⁵⁵

The form of that future continued to take shape in her. During her annual retreat in April 1891, Isabelle vowed "*to remain open to dedicating herself under the responsibility of Father Picard, to the external formation of this work,*"²⁵⁶ a vow that she renewed annually. Yet, she continued to say that she was incapable of carrying out the project and asked Father Picard to find the right person to do it²⁵⁷

The transmission of the charism

To commit herself to work on the project, yes, but with whom?

In 1893, Father Picard put Isabelle in touch with Madame de l'Épinois, the widow of a great friend of the Assumptionists.²⁵⁸ Isabelle doubted she could count on her. Nevertheless, it was with her that she shared her intuitions for more than two years.²⁵⁹ It was then that a young girl, Miss Dienne, a teacher in 1891 in the Ursel family who was questioning her own vocation, placed herself under Father Picard's direction and became Isabelle's spiritual daughter in 1895.²⁶⁰ But she was young. Between them it was more a question of formation than of sharing ideas.

²⁵⁵Letters nos. P303, October, and P309, December 9, 1888.

²⁵⁶See the volume on Spiritual Retreats, nos. S001 12 and SOOI45.

²⁵⁷See in particular letters nos. P367, January 25, P378, May 9, 1894, etc.

²⁵⁸Letter no. PIA 4575, March 14, 1893.

²⁵⁹Letters nos. P364, November, and P366, December 4, 1893.

²⁶⁰Father Picard recognized a contemplative vocation in Miss Dienne and her affinity for the main thrust of the spirit of Assumption. He then entrusted her to Isabelle, cf. letters nos. PIA 4621 and P378, May 1895.

Origins of the Assumption Family

Isabelle's thinking is summed up in several letters of that period.²⁶¹ She also drew up a questionnaire meant for Father Picard and showed it to two possible candidates asking for their ideas. Only Madame de l'Épinois suggested a few additional details. Father Picard had no comments. Therefore, on the eve of the foundation, its inspiration was very concretely that of Isabelle.

A Project Nurtured over 14 Years by Father François Picard

262

We have no personal notes from Father Picard who, contrary to Father d'Alzon, spoke and wrote little about himself. To better discover him, we had to have recourse to known facts, his accomplishments, a few reports made to Father d'Alzon, asides mentioned in some of his letters, a few testimonies that were made, and the advice and teaching he gave in his letters and talks. The study is far from complete.

“I have been nurturing this secret for fourteen years; I need a lot of time to think things out.”

It was with these words that Father Picard concluded his announcement of the foundation of the Orants on November 22, 1896.²⁶³ According to this piece of information, his inspiration to found the Orants goes back to 1882. That was several years before Isabelle told him of her own idea about founding a congregation.²⁶⁴ Exactly what information is available to substantiate the origin of Father Picard's idea?

²⁶¹Letters nos. RA3, April 23, 1895, RAI7, RA 25, RA34, RA37, etc.

²⁶²Only a few aspects of Father Picard's life are mentioned below, viz., those that seem to illustrate his role as the founder of the Orants of the Assumption. In addition to his talks to the Orants, his life and work represent a huge field that is broader than our foundation and that has understandably remained until this day somewhat “reserved to the Fathers.”

²⁶³François Picard, *Instructions aux Oblates*, vol. V, p. 106 (44th Instruction, Paris, November 22).

²⁶⁴We have the testimony of two persons (Sister Thérèse-Emmanuel and Marie-Isabelle herself) to the effect that Father Picard kept silent over the years about this inspiration. However, during this Colloquium, we learned about two letters that seem to suggest the contrary.

Accident and conversion²⁶⁵

Almost day for day, 14 years earlier, on November 25, 1882, he had had an accident on the road from Osma to Madrid that crippled him for the rest of his life.

... Father left on November 25 for Catalayud. The community accompanied him during the morning hours on an all-day outing. Father traveled this part of the trip in the carriage of the Bishop of Osma which was graciously put at his disposal. Around midday, we had lunch together, then said farewell to each other.

For the remainder of the trip to Catalayud, Father's entire equipment consisted of no more than a kind of primitive cabriolet drawn by a mule... Fearing he would miss his train, he asked the coachman to push his mule more rapidly. The animal stubbornly refused to advance... Annoyed, Father Picard took over as coachman, grabbed the whip, and beat that stubborn animal with a volley of blows. The latter took it badly and took off so brusquely that Father Picard who was standing fell forward, violently hitting his leg against the apron in front of the seat. He paid no attention to it at the time, very happy to see the mule finally trotting. He stayed in Madrid for few days until the 29th with Father Brun who was preparing to open a day-school there. Then, accompanied by Brother Jaujou, henceforth his secretary until his death, he returned to France stopping in Saint Sebastian, Lourdes, and Toulouse where he preached, and arriving in Nîmes on December 6.

In Nîmes, the aggravation of his wound immobilized him until the beginning of 1883. He returned to Paris on Saturday January 13. His leg became swollen and the wound painful, which necessitated a complete rest.²⁶⁶

Ignored by biographers, these events remained unknown to us for a long time. Once compared with later testimonies, they seem to be a key to an

²⁶⁵Research done in collaboration with Sister Marie-Salomé Amigon on the basis of notes collected by Sister Marie-Michaël Laguerie, Orant of the Assumption, who died in 2001 before being able to complete her book on the life of Father Picard.

²⁶⁶This passage was found by Sister Marie-Michaël Laguerie. probably in a copy of the diary of the novitiate in Osma.

Origins of the Assumption Family

understanding of the life of Father Picard. From that date forward, all testimonies stress an astonishing, constant, perfect, and rather joyful patience.²⁶⁷

However, in his youth, on the eve of his ordination in 1856, he “*asked the Good Lord for more patience and equanimity.*”²⁶⁸ His correspondence with Father d’Alzon shows the evolution of his youthful impatience but makes no mention of it after 1866.²⁶⁹ It was undoubtedly to this quick-temper that Father Gery referred when he arrived in the Paris community in November 1883. On the 28th, he wrote to the novices in Osma:

Father is always stretched out on a chaise longue. It is there that he receives his visitors. He can nevertheless walk a little inside the house, but very little. Now and again, he also has himself transported by carriage to the Ladies of the Assumption [and to the Oblates in Sèvres] Tuesday a fire broke out in his fireplace. He must now spend the entire day in the little parlor next-door. This inconvenience, embarrassing in the state in which he finds himself, leaves him as calm as does the strong pain he sometimes experiences.

I had nevertheless known him years ago at the novitiate, but I found him as I had not known him before. He spoke words of faith that were stronger and more penetrating than ever and that moved me deeply. Everyone who approaches him says that since his illness he is sanctifying himself in an extraordinary manner. With that in mind, this ordeal is a blessing for himself and for his children.²⁷⁰

His injury did not heal and would not heal. His doctors did not understand why, but without the shadow of a doubt he knew the reason: was not his illness the cure for his impatience?

He had complete control over himself and his initial reactions. Father Picard was quick by nature, but from the day he injured

²⁶⁷See especially the testimonies of Fathers Gervais Quénard, Andre Jaujou, his private secretary, and Octavien Caron, one of his chamberlains.

²⁶⁸Letter to Father d’Alzon, no. PIA0030, May 19, 1856.

²⁶⁹Letters to Father d’Alzon nos. PIA0007, 0011, 0032, 0047, 0070, 0074, 0521, Letters of Father d’Alzon. nos. H2I 126, 21129. H 01760, 01774.

²⁷⁰Letter of Father Géry, November 28, 1883, quoted from *Pages d’Archives* – “Le Père André Jaujou,” no. 7, p. 91.

Foundation of the Orants of the Assumption

his leg, he fully accepted the life of dependence that he had to live for 21 years. He never complained nor let it be known that it bothered him in the least as he went about his duties as Superior General. He remained calm, serene, abandoned to the will of God, attentive to use anything that might make him practice mortification. Alone or in the company of others, he remained the same... he was at peace, troubled by nothing.²⁷¹

Everything seems to indicate that for Father Picard this accident was the source of a grace of conversion linked to a greater self-awareness. From this small incident full of serious consequences, did he not want to master or even force events to bring them under his control? As a matter of fact, in one way or another, all anger, all impatience, anxiety and detours involve this type of independence of the will.

He said of himself: *“God held me by the leg to stop me from running around the world”*²⁷² ... to do as he pleased.

That wounded leg was for him a constant reminder, even to the point of being a genuine and concrete sign from God.²⁷³ Henceforth, the natural abilities of the Father Picard were strengthened by a constant effort to unite himself to God and to do his will. That obliged him to accept reality which did not depend on him as coming from the hand of God, even when it was most unpleasant. This gave him a great serenity which was noticed by those who were close to him.²⁷⁴

Several other important events also occurred in 1882.

²⁷¹See the testimony of Father André Jaujou as noted in our chronicles, October 5, 1910.

²⁷²Quoted by Father Gervais Quénard in his testimony.

²⁷³According to Father André in a testimony found in our chronicles (December 16, 1908), he never asked to be cured, but when other people prayed for that, even without his knowledge, he knew about it from the aggravation of the pain. Only once did he accept at Lourdes to join in prayers said for his healing. The prayer was immediately granted, and Father André testified that he could then touch and hit his leg which was ordinarily extremely sensitive and painful at the least touch. But Father Picard would say that it would not last. In fact, at the end of seven hours, the pain was back as before. But God, by submitting him to this severe trial, gave him at the same time the grace of an unflinching patience. He never complained, not only about suffering but even about the embarrassment that accompanied it as he carried out his duties as Superior General.

²⁷⁴For example, according to the testimony of Father Octavien Caron: *“One day we said to him: ‘Father, despite all your preoccupations, you do not look preoccupied.’ ‘Do not go by what you see,’ he joyfully responded. ‘It is probably when you see me smiling the most that I am suffering the most.’”*

Origins of the Assumption Family

The first pilgrimage to Jerusalem was decided in January, and it was Father Picard who led the 1,013 participants in a memorable fashion from April to June. He returned with a deep attachment to the Garden of Olives: *“Pay a visit for me to the Garden of Gethsemane; I left my heart there.”*²⁷⁵ Mystery of *Voluntas tua*, dear also to Mother Isabelle and that marked our Congregation.

It was also in 1882 that letters and meetings between Father François Picard and Mother Marie Correnson led to the painful division between the Fathers and the Oblates of Nîmes, accompanied by the painful schism that followed and by the simultaneous opening of a novitiate in Sèvres (the future Oblates of Paris). While in Spain, Father had learned a few days before his accident that, with the visit of the Bishop of Nîmes to the Oblates on rue Signier, the division was finalized. These events only accentuated the spiritual experience he had had on the road in Spain: *“God is the Master!”*

God is the Master

Father Picard began to use this expression borrowed from Father d’Alzon and others, particularly in the face of adversity or of simple mishaps. *“God was above everything else in his thought and in his heart. And in all circumstances, he had only one desire: to be sure of God’s will and to carry it out without reservation or weakness, because God,”* he often said, *“is the Master.”* Aware of God’s presence and constant action, he wanted to *“render homage to his absolute mastery and to serve him relentlessly.”* He would repeat very often that *“we should do God’s will before all else.”* On his death bed, his last words were none other than: *“We must want only what God wants. . . Can we desire anything other than what God wants?”*²⁷⁶

Given that state of mind, it is not surprising that

“the dominant impression of all those who were close to him is that Father Picard lived in constant union with Our Lord, which explains his invariably hearty welcome, his unruffled calm amid all types of circumstances, and the fruitfulness of his works.”²⁷⁷

²⁷⁵Letter from Father Picard to Father Emmanuel Bailly, May 23, 1889, no. PIA2506

²⁷⁶Articles by Father Aubin Colette in view of the Cause of the Servant of God Francis Picard, Bois le Due, Imprimerie Saint-Paul, 1959, nos. 149, 202, 213, 124, 283. . .

²⁷⁷Testimony of Father Octavien Caron, Augustinian of the Assumption.

Foundation of the Orants of the Assumption

Although people saw in Father Picard especially his works and activity, witnesses say that this constant union with God was clearly nourished with intense prayer:

“For hours and hours, we could gaze at him absorbed in a divine conversation.” “In the midst of a very active life, he gave a lot of time to prayer. It was in that intimacy with God that he found his light and his admirable energy.”²⁷⁸

Conscious of his infirmity and of his weakness, he would say very often, for his own benefit and in spiritual direction, *Infirma mundi elegit Deus*, God chose the weak according to the world. Father Picard found his strength in God; he only lived through, with, and in him. It is not surprising that he wrote:

“Prayer is indispensable. It alone can bring to fruition among us the plans of Our Lord; outside of it, I find weakness, sickness, and powerlessness.”²⁷⁹

Father Gervais Quénard testified:

After the Commune, he launched a true crusade of prayer throughout all of France.—At the same time, he launched great pilgrimages, solemn demonstrations of public prayer.—The creation of the newspaper *La Croix* was itself inspired by prayer.—Father really believed that prayer could “obtain everything” according to the promise of Our Lord. He was before all else a man of Catholic deeds based on prayer.—Prayer always had to precede and accompany his undertakings. It was to permanently guarantee all of his works that he founded the Orant Sisters.

And Father Gervais added:

“His personal charism was to unite prayer and action,”²⁸⁰

²⁷⁸Testimony of Father Aubin Colette.

²⁷⁹Letter of Father Picard to the Orants of the Assumption in December 1898. quoted by Sister Thérèse-Emmanuel in her notes on Father Picard written in 1931.

²⁸⁰Extracts from the testimony of Father Gervais Quénard about Father François Picard.

Origins of the Assumption Family

a conclusion which Father Picard himself had reached:

“Let us be men of prayer and apostles. Everything else is of little value.”²⁸¹

Disciple of Father d’Alzon

“*A man of prayer and an apostle*”—If his constantly developing union with the Lord indicates that he was eminently contemplative, he was no less and first and foremost a disciple of Father d’Alzon. He was steeped in his teaching which he made his own. And—if it is not already done—it would be easy to develop how much he had assimilated, lived, and handed down the d’Alzonian and Assumptionist ideas.²⁸²

Besides fully living the three Assumptionist trilogies, he was zealous about working to extend the Kingdom of God in himself (as mentioned above) and around himself. His works and various foundations concretely testify to the fact that he had what was called at the time a “zeal for souls.”

During the “Trial of the Twelve” in 1900, he stated publicly to the State Prosecutor:

“We are religious and nothing else but religious. Our goal is to extend the Kingdom of Our Lord in souls, and that is our sole ambition.”

One of the forms of this constant search for the Kingdom of God was his total respect for and defense of the “Rights of God,” preoccupations that had such broad implications in his life that it would be interesting to study them more systematically. They are particularly interesting in terms of his charism as a leader, of his spiritual direction, and of the choices he made. Since this last point does not directly concern his role as the founder of the Orants of the Assumption, I will mention it only briefly.

What we know about Father Picard’s childhood and youth is that he was headstrong, combative, and absolute. If the work on himself and later the “grace of Osma” submitted him to the will of God to the point that he became patient, even-tempered, and kind, his manners nevertheless remained

²⁸¹Letter CDPIA 1889 from Father François Picard to Father Vincent de Paul Bailly, November 1882.

²⁸²Inter alia, cf. the lecture given by Father Claude Maréchal, A.A., at Bonnelley December 8, 1996.

Foundation of the Orants of the Assumption

so straightforward that, especially with those closest to him, they often appeared to be blunt, clear-cut, or even curt, which at times contributed to his charisma as a leader.²⁸³

Disturbing positions have been easily attributed to his temperament, positions that had unpleasant consequences but to which he held tenaciously. Besides causing him profound personal pain, they were, in his estimation, no more than a duty of conscience and a mark of respect for the absolute primacy of the rights of God. “*If Father Picard believes that it is his duty, he will never give in,*” said Mother Marie-Eugénie in 1886.²⁸⁴

Did he push too far the absolute nature of the rights of God? Did he inject them with an intransigence that was all too human? It is not up to me to judge. I would only like to underline here that, in order to analyze these unpleasant questions and situations, I think it indispensable to look for, situate, and shed light on everything that—rightly or wrongly—might have provoked Father Picard to want to “defend the rights of God.” Whatever the other causes and aspects of the problem, I believe that we will never obtain reliable results if we do not examine this question.

His qualities of leadership and spiritual direction stemmed from the same art of knowing how to mobilize people for God’s service. Instead of personal “aura,” it was a question of spiritual “unction” based on his personal adoration of God and on his adherence to God’s will.

Spiritual direction

Father Picard’s art of spiritual direction was very well known, and his confessional, like Father Pernet’s, on rue François Ier was kept very busy. From the time of his arrival in Paris, he was appreciated by Mother Marie-Eugénie because of his precision, his firmness, and his supernatural views. She wrote to Father d’Alzon:

“Father Picard is proving to be an excellent confessor, which surprises me at his age. He may be a bit harsh, but that is not a

²⁸³Concerning the relations that existed among the first Assumptionists, read for example what is said about Fathers Picard and Vincent de Paul Bailly in E. Lacoste, *Le Père V. de P. Bailly*, Bonne Presse, pp. 86, 158. See also Letter no. BAD23070 from Father Vincent de Paul Bailly to Father Picard, etc.

²⁸⁴Quoted by Mother Isabelle in her letter to Father Picard, May 2, 1886 no. P210

Origins of the Assumption Family

fault. Besides, he is doing well enough so as to satisfy his penitents, children as well as religious. He is, I keep saying, the best confessor we have ever had.”²⁸⁵

Mother Isabelle used to say of him that

“above all, he made sure that souls remained faithful to and did not deviate from what God intended for them.—And that was the secret of his extraordinary ascendancy over souls. People saw him as God’s mediator.”²⁸⁶

Once again, we see here how much his charism was linked to his service of God’s wishes, plans, and “rights.” In the same way, he detested subterfuges, dissimulation, and underhanded procedures, but he also brought peace to people of good will who came to him worried, in revolt, or troubled. He pacified them, not by diplomacy, but by frankness, encouragement, and light on the path leading to God.

Father Picard’s first role in the foundation of the Orants was that of spiritual director, particularly of Mother Isabelle, but also later on of the first sisters:

“It was not long—but the response was precise, enlightening, and always calming. Father’s spiritual direction was austere, but it was also accompanied with great simplicity, kindness, trust, and broad-mindedness. One could say anything to Father: he wanted complete frankness. He greatly respected whatever appealed to a soul. He knew how to patiently wait a long time for a soul to see the light, but as soon as it did, he brought the fruit to maturity without procrastinating.—In the face of cowardice, Father remained inflexible and his will, united with God’s, would triumph over the resistances of nature.”²⁸⁷

Father Picard had a profound influence and a definite ascendancy over Mother Isabelle whom he directed from 1872 to 1903 and who vowed obedience to him in 1877. He formed her in the spirit of the Assumption, and

²⁸⁵Letters of November 12, 1857 and December 16, 1858, quoted by Father Aubin Colette.

²⁸⁶Document no. DN12.10: page from the chronicle of our origins, corrected by Mother Isabelle.

²⁸⁷Notes about Father Picard written in August 1931 by Sister Thérèse Emmanuel, Orant.

Foundation of the Orants of the Assumption

he trained her to be always more generous and to develop a love that was more and more delicate, faithful, and pure for the Lord. He supported her in her intimate struggles and in her terrible moral suffering, but he never let himself be moved by her complaints about his ways, and he held firmly and affectionately to the divine demands. Very often, Our Lord inwardly enjoined Isabelle to confide to Father Picard the demands she had heard interiorly so that he might affix the seal of obedience on them. In fact, obedience was her salvation, and Father Picard knew how to have her carry out all of God's plans.

Walking along paths so extraordinary as a result of what she was told or of what was prescribed during her prayer, Mother Isabelle surely benefited from a particularly enlightened direction about the ways of God and about mysticism. Some of her words are revealing: "Father Picard was himself frightened [about the great distress I went through]. Father seems so afraid that I am not letting this light penetrate. . . ." ²⁸⁸

The direction of Father Picard was not less admirable for wisely putting the brakes on the impulses of her soul, for pushing her towards a dreaded self-sacrifice, and—even more delicate—for astonishingly going beyond human prudence so she could lead, according to God's calls, a kind of life that entailed separations and decisions that went against common sense and human wisdom. Towards the end of his life, she would marvel at the ways in which he had helped her to walk.

A common project

We said about Isabelle that Father Picard had welcomed her first intuitions about a future foundation. He even showed great keenness in doing so, qualifying them two days later as a "luminous grace" despite their imprecision. He then invited her to write down her ideas for him, which she did in January-February 1887. Then there was silence for a year because Father held dearly to the silence in which the work of God matures. Great was Isabelle's astonishment when, after his retreat of 1888, he came back and said to her: "*I am telling you this for your consolation. I expected that. I knew in advance what you would write to me.*" These words, which she repeated many times, understandably marked Mother Isabelle because they let her know that Father

²⁸⁸Letter AB.53 of March 11, 1907 to Father Emmanuel Bailly; Notes of her retreat of 1889, no. SN4.7.

Origins of the Assumption Family

Picard had had a similar inspiration. For her, it was not only a consolation but a source of strength for the rest of her life.

There are no letters or records of conversations describing how they worked together on this project. However, Mother Isabelle did say:

I spoke to Father about it at times, but rather rarely. In principle. Father Picard could not imagine a ready-made undertaking. He would think, act under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, study the circumstances, seek to discover God's intentions in their regard, listen patiently to what he was told, to both the pros and the cons, and above all, make sure that the soul was faithful. Also, he used to say that a work was never completely carried out just as it was first conceived.²⁸⁹

We note especially that there was a great communion between the two of them in terms of respect and mutual admiration,²⁹⁰ as well as perfect agreement in their thinking:

I want you to know how happy I am to hear you describe the way in which you are developing the spirit of our work in perfect harmony with all that I received about it in prayer over the last few years. I would not have known how to say it in those words, but it is the development, the explanation, the blossoming of all that I have in my soul regarding this work. I do not understand it otherwise, and I understand it only in this way.²⁹¹

Decision and organization

Father Picard has often been presented as a "leader" and a good organizer. He did have these qualities and charisms whose fruit he gave to his Congregation. That fruit, often lasting, must not be attributed first of all to his natural abilities, which Father d'Alzon had already discovered in Nîmes. In creating or managing his works, communities and missions, Father Picard

²⁸⁹Document no. DN12.10: page from the chronicle of our origins, corrected by Mother Isabelle.

²⁹⁰"*What a beautiful soul! Thank God for having created such a beautiful soul!*" These words were spoken by Father Picard to Mother Marie of the Compassion, Oblate of the Assumption.

²⁹¹Letter to Father Picard, no. P392, classified after those of 1896.

Foundation of the Orants of the Assumption

did not neglect the needed reflection and preparation.²⁹² However, he did not rely primarily on the latter, but on searching for God's will and on trusting in divine help. In their creation and later in their daily unfolding, his works were first of all acts of obedience and faith. This can easily be verified in the narratives describing the foundation of the pilgrimages and of the daily newspaper *La Croix*.

Once Father Picard was sure he was doing God's will, his faith pushed him to boldness. He personally mentioned this tendency only when speaking about the foundation of *La Croix* and of the Orants. In creating both of them without any human guarantee of security, he admits having hesitated, but then adds: "*I have faith; you must have it also, and I take responsibility for everything.*"²⁹³

Father Picard was certain that this foundation was in conformity with God's will, and he repeated it throughout the first difficult years:

I have the firm conviction that Our Lord wants the little work we are starting, and that he inspired it. He leads us along obscure paths, but toward a goal that is sure. . . Let us abandon ourselves to God's plans, let us proceed slowly at the present time, since that is what he wants, and let us be ready to go forward rapidly when it pleases him. . .²⁹⁴

Because he was that sure of what he was doing, neither circumstances nor the lack of candidates stopped him. He organized the foundation and concretely set it up. For her part, Mother Isabelle always remained aware that

"this work would never have been continued or begun if he had not seen in it God's will for me."²⁹⁵

²⁹² "No one more than he was inclined to consult, and to seek the opinion of those who had his confidence," words spoken by Father Edmond in a talk on Father Picard given to the Orants on April 16, 1909.

²⁹³ Article 133 by Father Aubin Colette regarding the Cause of Father François Picard.

²⁹⁴ Words addressed by Father Picard to the first Orants gathered at Livry on July 13, 1899 and quoted by Sister Thérèse-Emmanuel in her notes on Father Picard written in 1931.

²⁹⁵ Letter no AC22. April 27, 1903, to Father André Jaujou.

Two Founders

Though Mother Isabelle would occasionally express her embarrassment about being a foundress, she did not deny that reality.

Until 1903, Father Picard spoke and acted as the superior with the full consent of Mother Isabelle.

Many texts and the oral tradition testify to this: during her lifetime, Mother Isabelle always referred to Father Picard as “our Founder” or as “the one who founded us,” and she spoke in this way to the other sisters.

Sister Thérèse-Emmanuel, incidentally, believed for a long time that Father Picard was the principal founder and that Mother Isabelle was simply directed by him.

Father André, who knew very well the part each one played in the foundation, called both of them founders.

The sisters fully discovered Mother Isabelle’s real-life experience only progressively after her death through her writings which became known in 1932. They were unaware of her mystical life and did not know to what extent she was the foundress of the Congregation, even in its very first inspiration.

Long before discovering these facts, the older sisters continued to call Mother Isabelle “Our Mother Foundress” or more often, in its shorter form, “Our Mother.”

Although Father Picard was called the co-founder of the Orant Sisters of the Assumption when his Cause was introduced in 1959, that fact was rather quickly forgotten and the sisters spoke instead of “our two founders.”

Mother Isabelle’s responsibilities as a foundress were clear:

- She unquestionably received from God on several occasions the decisive words, and it is in her writings that we find the first formulation of the founding intuitions.
- She completely surrendered herself to God in this work through a long obedience and a total sacrifice of herself.
- In 1899, she became Superior General. The progressive separation, then the death of Father Picard led her to take over, in collaboration with Father Andre Jaujou, the ecclesiastical superior, the formation of the sisters and the organization of the community, then of the nascent congregation by setting up its structures and preparing its Rule.

Foundation of the Orants of the Assumption

Father Picard, for his part, had a very important personal role in the foundation:

- He assured the spiritual formation and the enlightened direction of the foundress.
- He transmitted to her the spirit of the Assumption and confided it to the sisters who contributed to this transmission.
- He assumed responsibility for the work under particularly difficult conditions.
- He collaborated in determining the way of life of the projected institute.
- He concretized and shaped the work at the very beginning.

Father Picard, who died too soon, had nevertheless accomplished his mission by forming the foundress in a way that enabled her to carry out her own. However, if she had been left to herself, the foundress would undoubtedly not have dared to undertake the creation of a new religious family: the humility God had so deeply implanted in her inclined her to a distrust of herself that gave way only to obedience.

All of this, in addition to their common inspiration and project, allows us gratefully to consider both of them as our founders.²⁹⁶

Sisters Marie-Jacques Sévenet
and Anne Huyghebaert,
Orants of the Assumption

6, Sentier Henri Dupuis
94230 Cachan
France

²⁹⁶Cf. also the well-documented chapter on the respective roles of our two founders given by Mother Marie-Madeleine to the Orants at Sceaux on February 11, 1957.

Appendix

297

Two documents shed new light on the period 1881–1882.

These letters from Mother Marie of the Nativity, Superior of the convent in Cannes, were addressed to Mother Marie-Eugénie (HSP X All):

Just between you and me, my dear Mother, I wonder if Father Picard has decided anything about the future of Madame d'Ursel. Is he thinking of using her for some project of his own? Do not speak to her about this, or especially to Father Picard. We must be prudent about all this. He met Isabelle in Lyons where she is still staying with her mother for a while. She wrote to me saying that she had had a conversation with him which left her with painful impressions. . . I would not be pleased with Father Picard if he stands in the way of this vocation. . . ²⁹⁸

There is a serious difference of opinion between Madame d'Ursel and Father Picard. She is asking him to speak to you about it, but play innocent. She wanted him to allow her to put her heart and soul in the Assumption, i.e., to consider herself as destined to join us. He answered that that was enthusiasm, and that he had counted on her for a work, etc., etc. However, if she did not like that work (note that she did not know what work he was talking about), he would drop it.²⁹⁹

These letters give a new meaning to Isabelle's letter to Father Picard:

I was so overcome by fatigue and a headache that I did not tell you the other day half of what I had to say. I am counting on God to make up for this since he tells you directly things that concern me. You know that I am shattered by your words. Shattered is the right word because it is neither a revolt against obedience, nor some sort of fear of what God will ask of me. But I am afraid of myself; it's a horrible fear. I feel I do not have the strength or

²⁹⁷During the present Colloquium, the Religious of the Assumption gave us these documents which were unknown to us until now.

²⁹⁸March 20, 1881, Cannes.

²⁹⁹April 12, 1882, Cannes.

Foundation of the Orants of the Assumption

the virtue to make whatever sacrifices I will be called to make, and I wonder how I will manage when the time comes for me to obey. (...) ³⁰⁰ At Fourvière, during my thanksgiving, Our Lord said to me: I need you for something big, but I will use you only if you forget yourself. (...) ³⁰¹

We always understood from Mother Marie-Madeleine de Dain-ville³⁰² that the word received at Fourvière on March 21, 1881 was like a distant interior announcement of the foundation, the entire letter having been interpreted nevertheless as a reflection of Isabelle's great fear of the spiritual demands that Father Picard would have laid out before her (there are other similar examples in his correspondence).

In 1881, it was a question of *a fixed idea about the future... about something of his*, but in 1882, it was clearer that he *counted on her for a work*...

But which work was he talking about? Was it already a future foundation of contemplatives?

We can conclude nothing at the present time. Besides that letter,³⁰³ no other one sent to Father Picard during that same period mentioned this project. (Between November 1881 and June 1883, Isabelle sent only 9 letters to Father Picard, and he sent even fewer to her, the most precious ones being those which she kept with her at all times but which were stolen during her trip to Germany in 1885.) A study would be needed to systematically identify in the writings of Father Picard possible references to this desired work.

We presented Father Picard's accident in November 1882 on the road to Osma as a spiritual turning-point that might have been at the origin of a project to found a contemplative community. As it turned out, it did occasion a spiritual conversion and a transformation in his behavior, but it should be noted that the letters about entrusting a work to Isabelle date back to many months before that event and to several days before the first pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Which work was he talking about? Isabelle herself was not informed about it.

Even without knowing if the letters we have just discovered already refer to a contemplative work to be founded, they invite us to qualify what we

³⁰⁰P00108, Lyons, March 19, 1881.

³⁰¹POO108, March 21, 1881.

³⁰²Biography of Mother Isabelle, p. 114

³⁰³P00108, March 19, 1881.

Origins of the Assumption Family

have just written, first about Father Picard, then about Isabelle having had the same intuition to found a community.

On the one hand, Father Picard's idea to found a contemplative congregation probably came to him shortly before his accident in Osma. On the other hand, before this accident, in 1881–1882, Father Picard's silence about the nature of his project did not prevent him from speaking about a work for which he relied on Isabelle, nor did it prevent him from seemingly having had the tendency, at first, to dissuade her from joining the Religious of the Assumption. Isabelle, nevertheless, kept this idea until 1886, without any disagreement on the part of Father Picard.

Discussion

Chairperson: Bernard Holzer, A.A.: Now that we have spent a significant amount of time trying to understand another century, another society, and listening to stories and adventures that we know more or less well, the Coordinating Committee suggests that we continue our effort to understand the period of our Founders and Foundresses. But before proceeding, the Committee invites each participant to express what has struck him/her the most until now.

Maureen Connor, R.A.: I was struck by three things: the open and friendly atmosphere; we sense that we are at home at Assumption and among family. I learned a lot, especially about the place of women in the 19th century. Finally, I discovered a thread running throughout: everyone we have spoken about was trying to do the will of God.

Marie-Françoise Phelippeau, L.S.A.: I felt the depths of human nature and the daring of each of the Founders. Each one took his/her destiny in hand and trusted in God.

Concerning our group, we are increasing the trust we have in each other by pointing out our wounds, our faux pas, and our support throughout history. This allows us to go forward.

Richard Brunelle, A.A.: I was struck by the desire of all the Founders to do the will of God, and by their humility. . .

Georgette-Marie Fayolle, O.A.: Throughout history, each Congregation has experienced difficult times. I was struck by something Father d'Alzon said about a person who went to him with a bundle of troubles: "The Lord does what he did for Adam: he blows on that person and brings forth something very good."

Origins of the Assumption Family

Richard Lamoureux, A.A.: I was very impressed by the communications that took place among our Founders and Foundresses: letters, conversations, and very regular contacts. They stimulated each other and inspired themselves mutually.

Irene Mupitanzila, O.A.: Our Founders always listened to the Lord and let themselves be guided by him. Marie-Eugénie of Jesus participated in the foundation of the other Congregations.

Leela Kootlor, R.A.: I am struck by the diversity among the Assumption families, as well as by the ties which these families developed as a result of their specific charisms. I have also sensed a positive attitude among the members of this assembly.

Cristina-Marie Gonzalez, R.A.: I was struck by the words of Louis Sec-
ondy: “Our Founders did not choose the time in which they lived, but they entered into their time in order to change it.” After the presentation on each Founder, I better understood what they did to try to change their times. Transforming society is part of our perspective. Yesterday, we accepted the challenge of this colloquium, which is to listen to each other so that we can start talking.

Marie-Aline Vauquois, O.A.: A Founder is the depository of a charism. In order to concretize this charism, he/she needs help. This means that each of us is called if we want to give life to the Assumption Family.

Marcel Poirier, A.A.: I liked yesterday’s fraternal atmosphere. I learned a lot. I was struck by the fact that the Founders were not people living in isolation. In each case, there were male and female influences. It was a community that was being created, not just an individual who was bringing individuals together. They were not alone.

Their deep-rootedness in the society of their time, whose limits they had calculated, struck me, as did, for example, their militant tone in a besieged Church. They felt it was impossible to build a world without God.

The self-effacement and the humility of the Founders who refused to be given the title of “founder” also struck me.

Discussion

Michele Ropp, Or.A.: It is an opportunity to be able to speak about the things that have hurt us and fashioned us. . . . It is a source of the support we are called to give each other.

I strongly felt the influence of Marie-Eugénie of Jesus, the grace of formation she gave us.

I sense that today she wants us to help each other in order to advance the coming of the Kingdom.

Lucie Licheri, L.S.A.: It is a pleasure to feel that we are a family. Discovering the personality of Marie-Eugénie of Jesus makes us want to know more about her. We can sense suffering in the midst of some of the conflicts that were briefly mentioned. I was very surprised to hear that Sister Gelsomina was the foundress of an Assumption Congregation. What are the criteria for deciding that a new congregation has come into existence?

Mercedis Martínez, L.S.A.: I very much appreciated the rich contribution of Louis Secondy about the realities of the 19th century. I can now better understand how our Founders and Foundresses were shaped by the social and political realities, and I admire the way in which the strong personality of Marie-Eugénie was presented.

I discovered the human side of each Founder/Foundress with its riches and weaknesses as well as their desire to do the will of God.

Henri Kizito Vyambwera, A.A.: I am very happy because I learned many things. Louis Secondy said that our Founders lived in a period of crisis. Such periods therefore existed long before today. Our Congregations were born in a crisis situation. This encourages me and allows me to hope that even in today's crisis situation, which we believe is more critical than the one experienced by our Founders, we can still do something worthwhile.

Lucas Chuffart, A.A.: Our Founders worked with laypersons. Why can't two or three laypersons participate in this colloquium?

Micaela de Wilde, L.S.A.: I liked the historical contribution and I learned a lot from each speaker. I discovered the human side of our Founders with their qualities and their faults, thanks to which we exist today.

Origins of the Assumption Family

I discovered the influence of Marie-Eugénie on our male and female branches.

Thanks to this mutual help, God's work was done. By helping each other, and despite our shortcomings, we can continue to do God's work and to do it in today's historical context.

Monique Blondel, L.S.A.: I very much appreciated the humility of each of those who spoke about their Founder/Foundress. It is a quality of the Assumption.

Eugenia Guadalupe Acosta, R.A.: I am very pleased to be here and to hear about the richness of all the Congregations. This opens up possibilities for responding to today's situations. This is the moment for us to pray hard to the Holy Spirit so that we can do even more.

Céline Héon, L.S.A.: I felt God's grace. In listening to what was said, we were able to discern what our Founders were like; we were able to discern the human element in what they did. This is a key to understanding them today. Fortunately, we have hope.

Elodie Tsongo Bota Nashe, Or.A: From now on, we will be able to understand our Founders in their society. We must love our Founders, understand them, and not judge them.

Marie-Claude Prat, L.S.A.: In this history, I noted the weight of the human element and the work of the Spirit at the heart of our human nature.

I was struck by the place of laypersons, which is something that must be pursued today. I was also struck by the importance of forming intelligences.

Chairperson: Bernard Holzer, A.A.: We will now take time to clarify certain points in order to build the future. We will first try to understand what we were told yesterday, and then ask questions. After that, we will try to underline and identify a certain number of difficulties and problems which arose at the beginning of our Congregations and about which we would like to have an explanation.

Discussion

Questions

Tomas Gonzalez, A.A.: I was struck by the illnesses of our Founders and of their first disciples. It is said that Father d'Alzon was sick all his life.

According to the biography of Marie-Eugénie, 209 sisters died before she did.

How many religious left our Congregation during the life of Father d'Alzon?

Éliane de Montebello, L.S.A.: In the presentation of the Oblates, I noted that there were four Founders. In final analysis, who are their Founders? Were there really four?

Céline Héon, L.S.A.: In the presentation of the founders of the Assumption, I am surprised to find Sister Gelsomina as a Foundress. That's really overstated. What is a Founder, what is a foundation?

Micheie Ropp, Or.A: Regarding the Orants, there were tensions between our institutes due to the influence of the Assumptionists in their capacity as priests on our Foundresses. This tension existed in Auteuil. There was a conflict of authority. What were the lines of authority in the 19th century?

Luc Fritz, A.A.: I did not know the history of the Orants. Some points still seem rather vague to me. What were the relations between the Religious [Sisters] of the Assumption and the future Orants in Cannes?

Mercedis Martínez, L.S.A.: I am surprised by the comment made by Jean-Paul Périer-Muzet. What are the criteria for deciding that a congregation belongs to a religious family, and who decides this? The Sisters of Charity in Italy have kept the name of Assumption but have nothing to do with the Assumption. They are part of the movement of *Communio e Liberazione*. They have their own formation and a community school. Who is their Founder?

Georgette-Marie Fayolle, O.A.: Could someone clarify the relations between the Religious [Sisters] and the Oblates after 1882, in Paris and in Nîmes?

Origins of the Assumption Family

Jean-Michel Brohec, A.A.: Can someone explain the role of Marie-Eugénie in the birth and development of the Assumption family? If some religious are Founders, others are “super-Founders.” Marie-Eugénie and Emmanuel d’Alzon formulated ideas, plans, and a spirituality that are very rich and very complex. Were the other foundations not created in order to develop certain aspects of their plans and to implement them?

Marie-Claude Prat, L.S.A.: What is the history of Cannes? What were the divisions?

Monique Blondel, L.S.A.: Concerning Father Pernet’s relations with his own Congregation and given the fact that he was the Founder of another Congregation, what type of dependence did he have on his own Superiors? At the beginning of our Congregation, we had difficulties with certain Sisters who left their mark on us and who were not mentioned yesterday. I am alluding to the very first community on rue Saint-Dominique and to Sister Marie of the Cross and, shortly after her, Sister Marie of Jesus. There were difficulties which were subsequently overcome, but with difficulty. I am also alluding to a certain Léontine [Martin]³⁰⁴ who created enormous difficulties for Mother Marie of Jesus, especially at a time [1879] when a mistress of novices [Sister Marie Lucie]³⁰⁵ left with several novices.

Concerning the Orants, have I understood correctly the founding roles played by Father Picard and Isabelle? From what I just heard, it was Isabelle who got the idea to found the Congregation, whereas I thought that it was Father Picard.

Clare-Teresa Tjader, R.A.: In the midst of all our difficulties, the name “*Dames de l’Assomption*” (“Ladies of the Assumption”) that was given to the Religious of the Assumption also came into play.

Antonio Echániz, A.A.: Father Pernet was both a Founder and the member of a Congregation. The other Founders were autonomous. Pernet had to ask permission.

³⁰⁴Léontine Martin, left in 1867.

³⁰⁵Léonie Martineau (1854–1918), left in 1882.

Discussion

During his fourteen years of teaching, he suffered being among the children. He was very happy to discover the youth center (*patronage*). He also suffered as treasurer in Clichy. Because he was sickly, he had to abandon teaching. He went to François Ier which was a pastorally-oriented community. There, he began to do what he liked, that for which he felt he was called. It was through all of this that Pernet was able to do what the Holy Spirit was calling him to do. All the stages of one's life are what constitute one's calling!

Richard Lamoureux, A.A.: What is a Founder, a Foundress: the one who gets the idea first? Who has the charism of government?

Who started the first Community? It would be worthwhile re-reflecting on this question because our Congregations have several Founders. It is a thought that needs to be deepened. It could shed light on certain difficulties in our history.

INITIAL ANSWERS TO THE QUESTIONS

Jean-Paul Périer-Muzet, A.A.: Father Remi Kokel wrote a book about Father Bailly, not about Father d'Alzon.

340 Assumptionists left during the lifetime of Father d'Alzon. There were 70 religious at his side as he was dying.

As for the question of knowing who were our Founders, was Saint Bernard a founder when he left Cluny and founded Cîteaux? Was Marie Correnson a foundress when Father Picard provoked the foundation of the Oblates or when he refused to accept the title of Founder? We will come back to this question when we discuss the court trials in Nîmes over the name "Assumption."

Concerning the comment about the different Congregations of the Assumption, a distinction must be made between the 19th and 20th centuries. The congregations of the 19th century are recognizable by a constitutional link among them. That is not the case for those of the 20th century. Among the Founders, we must distinguish three tutelary figures: Father Combalot, Mother Marie-Eugénie, and Father d'Alzon. If you remove one of these three persons, the Assumption families no longer exist. In making this comment, I simply wanted to underline that we do not have a monopoly on the name Assumption. It is a

Origins of the Assumption Family

difficult point in history: the name Assumption does not belong to us exclusively.

Clare-Teresa Tjader, R.A.: To speak of “Congregations of the Assumption” is a recent historical development. When we decided which Congregations would be invited to the meetings of the “five Assumption Families,” we excluded the Missionary Sisters, not because they did not share in the basic charism described by Jean-Paul Périer-Muzet, but so as not to be obliged to invite all the other Congregations founded by the Assumptionists (a condition imposed at the time). Nevertheless, they recognize themselves and we recognize them as sisters of “the Assumption.”

Thérèse-Maylis Toujouse, R.A.: For a long time, the Missionary Sisters of the Assumption considered themselves to be Religious of the Assumption, and Marie-Eugénie maintained all her life hopes of a reunion. It wasn't until 1932–34, when it became clear that the Sisters were living something different from the Religious of the Assumption, that the then-Superior General of the Religious, Mother Marie-Johanna, asked them to draw up other constitutions and take another name.

Mercedes Martínez, L.S.A.: For the Sisters of Charity of the Assumption, things were different because they were born from *Communio e Liberazione*. They were not trained as Little Sisters of the Assumption, though they place the photo of Father Pernet and Mother Marie of Jesus in their communities. They do not have the Assumption spirit. We maintain fraternal relations with them.

Céline Héon, L.S.A.: Mercedes underlined the differences in formation and spirituality. The living tradition of the Little Sisters of the Assumption has historically ended. Since 1962, that tradition is no longer their point of reference. The international dimension was a sticking point for them at the time when we undertook a discernment. We had to recognize that we were not on the same wave lengths because their Foundation depended on *Communio e Liberazione*.

Eliane de Montebello, L.S.A.: In their constitutions, they mention Father Pernet more than we do. That is part of the difficulties I have with this story.

Discussion

Louis Secondy: When people speak of the Missionary Sisters of the Assumption, what are they talking about? Is the Assumption family the same thing as the spirituality of Assumption?

Céline Héon, L.S.A.: The constitutions of the Sisters of Charity have troubled us. They clearly state that Father Pernet was the founder of this Congregation in 1993. This surprises everyone. Between 1987 and 1993, we conducted a discernment among ourselves in a climate of charity. We tried to understand what we had become. Sister Gelsomina was honest with herself. She discovered the Lord within the movement *Communio e Liberazione*, and since then the Sisters have remained attached to the movement.

Clare-Teresa Tjader, R.A.: God carries out his work with sad stories such as these (cf. Esau and Jacob). Let us be thankful that, today, these Congregations are solid and love the Lord.

Céline Héon, L.S.A.: I do not think it necessary to say that we belong to the same family, even though I recognized that the Holy Spirit is at work in this Congregation. There is something great here that escapes us. Should we look forward to a rapprochement? I see it more in terms of a hope and a desire. We must be Church before all else.

Mercedes Martínez, L.S.A.: We are presently living a fraternal relationship that still needs to be deepened, but their view of things still remains very different from ours. They are another Congregation.

Michelle Barrot, L.S.A.: I was very involved in this reality, very close to what happened. I had many fraternal ties with the Sisters. All of a sudden, we were no longer speaking the same language. The pain was so deep that we both needed to take our distance. We were not happy when our brothers said that this was the Assumption. There is so much pain that we cannot accept this tie to the Assumption family.

Appendix: Founders and Foundresses of the Assumption

From the origins to today

19th century:

- Father Theodore Combalot (1797–1873).
- Mother Marie-Eugénie of Jesus, born Anne-Eugénie Milleret de Brou (1817–1898): Religious of the Assumption.
- Father Emmanuel d’Alzon (1810–1880): Augustinians of the Assumption and Oblates of the Assumption.
- Mother Marie-Gertrude de Henningsen (1822–1904): Missionary Sisters of the Assumption.
- Mother Emmanuel-Marie of the Compassion, born Marie Correnson (1842–1900): co-Foundress of the Oblates of the Assumption.
- Mother Marie of Jesus, born Antoinette Fage (1824–1883): Co-foundress of the Little Sisters of the Assumption.
- Father Étienne Pernet, A. A. (1824–1899): Founder of the Little Sisters of the Assumption.
- Mother Isabelle-Marie of Gethsemane, born Isabelle de Clermont-Tonnerre, widow of Henri d’Ursel (1849–1883): Orants of the Assumption.
- Father François Picard, A.A. (1831–1903): Co-Founder of the Orants of the Assumption.

20th century:

- Father Marie-Clement Staub, A.A. (1876–1936) and Mother Jeanne de la Croix, co-Foundress: Sisters of Saint Joan of Arc.
- Bishop Henri Piérard, A.A. (1893–1975): Brothers of the Assumption, Little Sisters of the Presentation of Our Lady.

Discussion

- Father Elpide Stephanou, A.A. (1896–1978): Sisters of the Cross.
- Father Niklaas Nicolaes, ex-A.A. (1913-?): Secular Institute of the Little Missionaries of the Cross.
- Sister Gelsomina Angrisano: Sisters of Charity of the Assumption.

Date of foundation:

- Religious of the Assumption: 1839—Paris
- Augustinians of the Assumption: 1845—Nîmes
- Missionary Sisters of the Assumption: 1852—South Africa
- Oblates of the Assumption: 1865—Le Vigan (Nîmes)
- Little Sisters of the Assumption: 1865—Paris
- Orants of the Assumption: 1896—Paris
- Sisters of Saint Joan of Arc: 1914—Worcester
- Sisters of the Cross: 1939—Athens
- Brothers of the Assumption: 1951–1952—Beni (DR of the Congo)
- Little Sisters of Our Lady: 1952—Beni (DR of the Congo)
- Little Missionaries of the Cross: 1955—Colombia
- Sisters of Charity of the Assumption: 1993—Milan

Origins of the Assumption Family

Original Intuitions: Spirit and Spirituality of the Assumption Family

The Religious of the Assumption

Original Intuitions

THÉRÈSE-MAYLIS TOUJOUSE

We already explained the role of Father Combalot, his intuition and his goal, and we have seen how he was incapable of seeing through the project he had started. It was Mother Marie-Eugénie who, over time and in her flesh, so to speak, gave form and life to our spirit.

Spirit is the aggregate of ideas and priorities that express the deep meaning of the institute and guide its action. It is this that we believe we have in common with the entire Assumption family: the central place of Jesus Christ and of the Kingdom, a love for the Church, a doctrinal spirituality, a social perspective in what we do, and a sense of what it is to be Catholic.

Spirituality is the spirit, plus the attitudes and practices that incarnate this spirit. It is a lived experience that is shared and that constitutes a school of thought or a path that is mapped out and offered to successive generations. Spirituality is strongly marked by the personality and the experience of the founder/dress and by the first members of a congregation (the lived experience of the community).

To tell the truth, we have always found our spirituality to be very complex and difficult to express. It has as many explanations as there are sisters. Fundamentally, there is deep agreement, but there is such an abundance of texts and expressions of Mother Marie-Eugénie that one or another chooses this or that text, giving it at times a different interpretation.³⁰⁶ Nevertheless, we all find ourselves in some key quotations of Mother Marie-Eugénie. One

³⁰⁶You have only to open the websites of the Religious of the Assumption to see how each has its own version of the charism and spirituality of the Assumption.

Origins of the Assumption Family

of them is: “Our spirit is to be rich with the spirit of the Church. . .”³⁰⁷ Our monastic and apostolic lifestyle unites us beyond words and explanations.

In this document, I will insist on a few particular traits of the spirituality of Mother Marie-Eugénie and of the Congregation, and on the manner in which the Religious of the Assumption live certain aspects of our shared spirit.

The apostolate was the dominant idea behind the foundation of the first Congregation within the Assumption family.³⁰⁸ The Congregation had an apostolic aim and followed the Rule of St. Augustine. Realizing how the rich and influential class³⁰⁹ was alienated from Jesus Christ and the Church and how it was seeking a broad and modern education, Mother Marie-Eugénie wanted to offer young girls the type of education they were looking for, but one imbued with the spirit of the Gospel. Her own experience of this liberal aristocracy made her feel its sad religious situation and inspired her to bring about a change in society through the intervention of women. It was a question of bringing about a real revolution in people’s minds and in society, a colossal task to which she gave herself.³¹⁰

This work had to be carried out not only through an extensive intellectual education, but also through a transformation of persons, minds, and hearts. This implied a similar transformation of educators and the educational milieu. For the sisters, their particular form of education flowed from a spiritual life and a Christianized intelligence.

In fact, Mother Marie-Eugénie had a vision of the world transfigured by Christ through the Church. She was aware of creating something new. But, at the same time, she wanted to link up her work to the ancient Orders and to the great Tradition of the Church. She had difficulty expressing her vision and in getting our style of contemplative and apostolic life accepted by the ecclesiastical Superiors. The big stumbling block was the choral recitation of the entire Divine Office combined with teaching. (This lifestyle also implied a semi-enclosure.)

³⁰⁷*Instructions de Chapitres (Chapter Talks)* of Mother Marie-Eugénie: March 3, 1878.

³⁰⁸“The apostolate (*une pensée de zèle*) was the dominant idea behind the foundation,” letter of Mother Marie-Eugénie to the Father Gros, ecclesiastical Superior, no. 1504, November 1841.

³⁰⁹*Ibid.*, Irreligion, Unbelief, Indifference. Cf. same letter.

³¹⁰Cf. Introduction to the Constitutions, Father Combalot; Letter of Mother Marie-Eugénie to Father d’Alzon, no. 1555, July 6, 1842.

The Religious of the Assumption

So, four years after the foundation, Mother Marie-Eugénie was able to write to Father d'Alzon about the drafting of what became the 1844 edition of the Constitutions:

We are not yet well enough established for me to dare express our aim, as I understand it, in [sic] the contemplative life enriched by religious studies and the source of an active life of faith, of apostolic involvement (zeal), and of freedom of spirit.³¹¹

She continued:

For me, the real aim, the real character of a work, is found in its interior dedication to this or that divine mystery to which it remains a living homage. I believe that we are called to honor the mystery of the Incarnation and the sacred person of Jesus Christ, and to be united with the Blessed Virgin and to Jesus Christ. This also governs our views on education. And regardless of what you might think, Mary seems to be very much our Mother, inasmuch as she is the purely human soul most clothed with the life of Jesus Christ. But how do you expect me to dare express anything of the sort, even with all of the circumspection I would have to observe and with all of the explanations I would have to give, if I were not writing to you.

Finally, almost fifty years later, she arrived at the following formulation for the Constitutions, one that satisfied Rome and followed the appropriate style for a Rule:

Aim of the Institute

... to imitate the most holy Virgin in her love for Our Lord Jesus Christ, especially in the Blessed Sacrament of the altar, and (to) work through education and works of apostolate (zeal), to make Jesus Christ and his Church known and loved. (Constitutions of 1888³¹²)

³¹¹Letter of Mother Marie-Eugénie to Father d'Alzon, no. 1590, August 27, 1843

³¹²Letter of Mother Marie-Eugénie to Father d'Alzon: "It is strange that we have supporters who are poles apart. The friends of monastic antiquity claim that we are resurrecting

Origins of the Assumption Family

The desire to combine action and contemplation³¹³ in a congregation with an apostolic aim goes contrary to the Jesuit lifestyle. This is what distinguishes us from the Jesuits. Mother Marie-Eugénie wanted to keep what Ignatius rejected, viz., the monastic forms: the Office in Choir, a strong community life, the role of the Superior along with the Chapter and spiritual accompaniment, silence, and studies that nourish one's prayer, life, and teaching.

An attraction to the contemplative life expresses a very marked characteristic of Mother Marie-Eugénie's spirituality: a sense of God who is above all things and who deserves the total gift of his creature—what she would call the **spirit of adoration**. At her first Communion, at the age of 12, she experienced being seized by God and by his fullness, which Christ enabled her to adore.³¹⁴ Towards the end of her life, Mother Marie-Eugénie wrote as a last entry in her spiritual diary: "Follow my inclination to adore through him and to give through him all that is due to God."³¹⁵

She liked to talk about the adoration of the rights of God: his right to our love, his right to our faith. In her teaching, the Virgin Mary is the perfect adorer.

In 1855, Nîmes was the first house to be called a "house of adoration," with the exposition of the Blessed Sacrament. Progressively, adoration became part of the life of the communities, depending on the number of sisters and the permission of the Local Ordinary. This devotion was officially written into the Constitutions of 1866. In her talk to the Chapter on the spirit of the Assumption (1878), Mother Marie-Eugénie affirmed that devotion to the Blessed Sacrament is the full flowering of our spirit."³¹⁶

The Incarnation In the above-mentioned quotation on the aim of the Congregation, Mother Marie-Eugénie placed the mystical dimension of her work within the context of a consecration to the mystery of the Incarnation.

the ancient religious studies once the custom in large monasteries They like us because of our knowledge and respect for the old customs; whereas elsewhere, we are liked as a kind of innovation. You who now know our ideas, you understand that, in fact, we must have this double character." (Letter no. 1592, September 12, 1843)

³¹³Or else, according to an Ignatian expression taken up again in 1954 by Mother Marie-Denyse, Superior General from 1953–1970: "Contemplatives in Action" (November 1, 1954 Circular Letter).

³¹⁴*Notes Intimes* of Mother Marie-Eugénie, nos. 175/01 and 178/01, August 1841.

³¹⁵*Notes Intimes*, no. 238/01, March 31, 1890.

³¹⁶Chapters, February 24 and May 5, 1878.

The Religious of the Assumption

She was certainly influenced by the French School of spirituality during her stay with the Visitation Order, and at the beginning of the foundation the sisters prayed the Office of the *Grandeur of Jesus*. The spiritual life of the first sisters was shaped by this current, which was centered on the mystical Incarnation:

“The Incarnation is the mystery to which they must have a special devotion because it is in this mystery that everything human is divinized and finds its end.”³¹⁷

For Mother Marie-Eugénie, the desire to imitate Jesus, to allow him to live out his mysteries in us, translated itself into a consecration to the Incarnation she made on the feast of the Annunciation in 1843.³¹⁸ Mother Thérèse-Emmanuel sanctified herself by adhering to this spirituality, whereas Mother Marie-Eugénie was swept along by the great theological current of St. Augustine and the Tradition of the Church. Nevertheless, the Incarnation remained central to the spirituality of the Congregation and to her philosophy of education.

The Reign of God is at the heart of the first intuition of Mother Marie-Eugénie. Her conversion led her to understand Christ as Liberator and King. His Kingdom is the goal and meaning of the world.³¹⁹ The Reign of God / of Jesus Christ is the *raison d'être* of the Congregation: to know and love Christ, to make him and his Church known and loved; to extend the Reign of Christ in society. The first sisters made the vow “to extend by their whole life the Reign of Jesus Christ”; later, this implied being sent to far-off missions. The Reign must be extended more and more “in us, around us,” and in the world.³²⁰

It should be noted, however, that the Reign does not play the same role in the spirituality of the Religious of the Assumption as it does in that of the Assumptionists and the Oblates. Mother Marie-Eugénie had taken the motto *Adveniat Regnum Tuum (Thy Kingdom Come)* upon the suggestion of Father

³¹⁷Letter of Mother Marie-Eugénie to Father d'Alzon, no. 1592, September 12, 1842.

³¹⁸Notes Intimes, No. 188; Letter to Father d'Alzon, no. 1586, April 18, 1843.

³¹⁹Letter of Mother Marie-Eugénie to Father Lacordaire, c. 1844; Foundation Texts [English trans] p. 72.

³²⁰Notes Intimes, no. 234, September 1878; no. 237, May 1886; Chapters: October 16, 1870 (unedited), December 3, 1882.

Origins of the Assumption Family

d'Alzon, but for her, the expression did not have the same importance as it did for him. For example, on her letterhead, she did not write ART. [*Adveniat Regnum tuum*], but D.S., *Dieu seul!* (*God alone!*) In her talk to the Chapter of May 12, 1878, Mother Marie-Eugénie referred to *Adveniat Regnum Tuum* as “our motto for the active life,” but in her talk of May 5, 1878 she referred to it as “the motto of the Assumption Fathers.”³²¹ Unfortunately, the Chapters do not speak much of the Kingdom. They explain for the sisters the theology of St. Thomas as found in the liturgy and in the great Tradition of Western spirituality. Perhaps the fact that there was no developed theology of the Kingdom at that time explains this absence. Her ideas of the social Reign of God were surely inspired by Lamennais and his school of thought.

Her great preoccupation was personal prayer and the quality of life of the sisters, from which all action flows. The theme *Contemplare et contemplata aliis tradere* (*Contemplate and communicate to others what has been contemplated*), received from the Dominicans,³²² better reflects her daily instructions.

Doctrinal Spirituality – This expression of Father d'Alzon is not found in the writings of Mother Marie-Eugénie. For the Religious of the Assumption, love of the truth, of which Augustine is the great model, expresses the same reality. This love is concretized largely through studies and spiritual reading. Spirituality is well nourished doctrinally not only through study but also by praying the Divine Office.³²³ During the time of Mother Marie-Eugénie, praying the Office took about three hours a day. (All of the spiritual exercises took more than five hours a day.) Our contemplative life was to lead to a transformation of one's intelligence (an “alteration,” she would say in the Chapters of 1878) or to the “Christianization of the intelligence” by truth. It should make us live in faith, which becomes “the climate of our souls.”³²⁴

³²¹Cf. also the following Chapters: December 14, 1873; April 14, 1878; November 17, 1878.

³²²“... the aim of our Congregation is to communicate to others a life filled with Jesus Christ or, better said, *contemplata tradere*...” *Notes Intimes*, No. 217, September 26, 1856. Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Ila Ilae* Q188, R6

³²³Chapter: May 12, 1878.

³²⁴Chapter: March 3, 1878.

The Religious of the Assumption

Augustinian Roots – As an apostolic congregation, we have had, since the beginning, the Rule of St. Augustine as the basis of our Constitutions.³²⁵ Augustine is “our Father.” The Rule of St. Augustine was faithfully read in the refectory every Sunday. We could smile at the expressions: “never go out less than two together” and “hair stylishly arranged,” but the lessons on interiority and authenticity, poverty and pardon were assimilated. Mother Marie-Eugénie commented the Rule in her Chapters of August 13, 1876 and July 13, 1879. Many times she made reference to the Prologue because of her insistence on charity, love of God, and love of neighbor.³²⁶

In the Chapters on the Spirit of the Assumption (1878), St. Augustine appears as an example of all major points: his great heart, his love for the truth, his love for the Church, humility... (February 24; March 3; March 10; April 7; May 5; May 12; May 19). Above all, Mother Marie-Eugénie resembled St. Augustine in her search for God in everything and through everything.

Today, I would like to speak to you about St. Augustine and tell you something that seems practical for us. With this great mind, endowed with such great wisdom, enlightened with such great light, consider how much good he saw. The greatness of his soul lies precisely in having followed through with the light he had to the very end.³²⁷

Her spirituality is Augustinian because her theology is Augustinian: God, Jesus Christ, the Church, love for the Truth and the study of doctrine, contemplation, and the absence of other “little” devotions. The Congregation is Christocentric because Jesus Christ is God’s great mediator.

The sisters also became Augustinians by adopting the prayer of the Church, the Breviary, not only the psalms, but also the commentaries of the Fathers of the Church. Among them, the writings of Augustine are more numerous than those of any others.

³²⁵Mother Marie-Eugénie chose the version of the Ladies of the Good Shepherd, a translation approved by Pope Gregory XVI in 1826, which itself was a text inspired by the Rule of the Augustinians. In the version chosen, in the chapter on Obedience, the expression “Superior General” replaces the word “priest,” which is important in reference to the way government is understood in a congregation.

³²⁶Chapters: February 24, 1878; July 13, 1879; August 1886, 1853 (unedited) and 1870 (unedited)

³²⁷Chapter. September 1, 1882.

Origins of the Assumption Family

Concerning penance, Mother Marie-Eugénie stressed interior mortification, especially of our thoughts, which is more in the Augustinian tradition and in keeping with our particular vocation.

In the *City of God* that Father d'Alzon considered as “a second revelation,” Mother Marie-Eugénie was struck by the idea of the two loves.³²⁸ Back in 1842, in her “Advice on Education,” she referred to this work:

St. Augustine said that there are only two cities in this world. . . that is to say, egoism and self-sacrifice; you have there in a nutshell all of the mystery, all of the principle of good and evil in the things here below. . . Since “the aim of education is to prepare a child to face all the duties of life,” it is important to have him enter into the city of self-sacrifice.³²⁹

Her preoccupation with the contemplative life of the sisters made her come back often to this idea.

We know these words of St. Augustine: There are two cities in this world, one built on the love of God leading to the contempt of self, the other built on self-love leading to the contempt of God. . . Obviously, we are in the city built on the love of Jesus Christ that leads to contempt of self. This is where an examination of conscience must begin. Are we living according to this principle? Do we accept its consequences?³³⁰

We have already seen how the Congregation received from the Father Combalot the name of **Assumption**, with the Blessed Virgin as our patroness. With the same logic that made her deepen our Augustinian roots through the Rule of St. Augustine, Mother Marie-Eugénie took the title of the Congregation seriously and developed a **spirituality of the mystery of the Assumption**. She suggested that we imitate Mary by rising above the difficulties, annoyances, and miseries of daily life through a *Sursum corda* (*Lift up your hearts*), that we allow ourselves to be attracted on high by God as Mary was when she went up to heaven, and that we live in joyful detachment from all that is not of God,³³¹ as Mary did in this mystery.

³²⁸ Chapters: January 12, 1875; April 7, 1878; May 27, 1881, June 18, 1886.

³²⁹ *Foundation Texts*, p. 371.

³³⁰ Chapter: June 13, 1884.

³³¹ There is a joyful accent on the “all” of God, in contrast with the “*nada*” (nothing) of St. John of the Cross. Cf. Chapter: May 19, 1878.

The Religious of the Assumption

You are daughters of the Assumption. This mystery, which is more about heaven than about earth, is a mystery of adoration. . . In Mary, everything was adoration.³³²

Conclusion

Jesus Christ, the King of Eternity, living in souls and in his Church, the extension of his Reign within us and in others, a strong spirit of prayer supported, on the one hand, by the Divine Office in which we find the traces of the saints and the devotions of the Church, and, on the other hand, the adoration of the Blessed Sacrament where we enter with Our Lord into the four purposes of his divine Sacrifice. . . a certain freedom of spirit that respects each one's particular grace. . . this family spirit full of respect and simplicity, this little something which creates closer bonds with the Ancient Orders, the type of education that flows from it all
...

And also the joy!

This is one of the last formulations of the spirit of the Assumption, given on the occasion of the anniversary of the foundation.³³³

Sister Thérèse-Maylis Toujouse
Archivist of the Religious
of the Assumption

17, rue de l'Assomption
75016 Paris
France

³³²Chapter: Febraury 24, 1878.

³³³Chapter: May 2, 1884

Origins of the Assumption Family

The Augustinians of the Assumption

Original Intuitions

JEAN-PAUL PÉRIER-MUZET

Praying 15 Days with Emmanuel d'Alzon is a book based on interrelated aspects of the Assumptionist spirituality. From beginning to end, it takes up the important theme of Trinitarian and Christological love (chap. 1, 2, 3, and 15). It then touches upon the Augustinian and Marian dimensions of this spirituality (chap. 4, 6) which is accessed through prayer, after which it discusses the characteristics and preferential options of the Assumptionist apostolate: unity (chap. 7), the Church (chap. 9), and foreign missions (chap. 10). Father d'Alzon's concrete life inspires and illustrates this spiritual journey. He responded in faith as he fought to carry his daily cross (chap. 8), concerned as he was to concretize that faith, all the while maintaining earnest friendships (chap. 12). History also records his conviction that the mission must be shared with the laity (chap. 13) as well as his preoccupation to supply the Church with "permanent defenders of the Gospel" (chap. 14). Also, this spirituality, which is deeply rooted in the love of a triune God but which expresses itself in a Christocentric manner, is lived on a daily basis in and through a vocation completely dedicated to the mission of the Church.

Father Jean-Paul Périer-Muzet
Archivist of the Augustinians
of the Assumption

Via San Pio V, 55
00165 Rome
Italy

Origins of the Assumption Family

The Oblates of the Assumption

Original Intuitions and Spirituality

CLAIRE DE LA CROIX RABITZ

Our spirituality flows from that of the Assumptionists: we have the same founder and we were created to work together for the Near Eastern Mission.

For us Oblates of the Assumption, the spirit of Assumption was expressed by Father d'Alzon himself in the closing statement of the Assumptionist General Chapter on September 17, 1868:

Our spiritual life... is found in our motto *Adveniat Regnum Tuum*. The coming of the Reign of God in our souls... the coming of the Reign of God in the world... And if to this basic love you add the love of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of the Blessed Virgin, his Mother, and of the Church his Spouse, you will have in a nutshell the spirit of Assumption."³³⁴

The Triple Love

Our spirituality is before all else Christ-centered, witness the numerous texts addressed by Father d'Alzon to Mother Emmanuel-Marie Correnson or to the first Oblates of the Assumption.

You love **Our Lord** very much as your spouse, but maybe not enough as your king... You want him for yourself... The Foundress of the Oblates must want him for her daughters, for all the souls that her daughters will convert, for the whole Church, for all sinners.³³⁵

³³⁴*Écrits Spirituels*, p. 130. Also, *Foundational Documents*, Milton, MA, p.78.

³³⁵Letter no. 3635, VII to Mother Emmanuel-Marie Correnson, July 17, 1869.

Origins of the Assumption Family

The Oblate must renew as often as possible the gift of herself to Jesus Christ her spouse...and ask unceasingly for his most ardent love in all of the concrete details of life.³³⁶

This unconditional love of Jesus Christ entails an untiring apostolic zeal expressed in our first two mottos: *Propter amorem Domini Nostri Jesu Christi* and *Adveniat Regnum Tuum*.

1 – Love of Our Lord Jesus Christ especially in the Eucharist, not so much as a devotion but as an instinctive frame of reference. A particular link exists between our foundation and the Eucharist. Father d’Alzon wrote:

Pray ardently for a work which preoccupies me a great deal here. It is the foundation of a House of Adoration entrusted to poor women who would consecrate themselves to manual work, penance, and prayer.³³⁷

As soon as he arrived in Rochebelle, Father d’Alzon set up a tabernacle with the Blessed Sacrament and organized nocturnal adoration.

He had noticed that there was little devotion to the Eucharist in the East when he traveled there. He mentioned this in his very first explanation of the purpose of the Oblates:

1. An ardent love of Our Lord sacrificed on the altar.
2. The desire to repair the insults he endures, by prayer, penance, zealous works, and [he added a little further on] perpetual adoration which is to be established in these countries.³³⁸

The veneration of the *Eucharist*, which he intended to give to the Oblates of the Assumption, was immediately geared to unity in order to serve his concept of unity.

³³⁶Letter no. 5842 XII to Mother Jeanne de Chantal Dugas, January 30, 1877. Also, *Écrits Spirituels*, p. 1199.

³³⁷Letter no. 2493, V to Madame Doumet, April 21, 1865.

³³⁸Letter no. 2342, V to Mademoiselle Marie Correnson, October 4, 1864.

The Oblates of the Assumption

Think everyday, while making your visit to the Blessed Sacrament, about the distance which separates you from Our Lord. If from one communion to the other, if from one adoration to the other, you try to reduce this distance, it will become impossible for you not to make considerable progress on this or that point.³³⁹

The love of Our Lord naturally applies to what Jesus Christ loved most, viz., his Mother and the Church.

2 – Mary, loved as our Mother, is first and foremost for us a model to be imitated, a model of availability: “*from the ‘yes’ of the Annunciation to the ‘yes’ of Compassion.*”³⁴⁰

Do not let the month of Mary elapse without having made a special gift of yourself, as the Blessed Virgin used to do constantly.³⁴¹

Father d’Alzon loved to call Mary the “Queen of the Apostles”:

“Be the Mother of the little apostolic family which is entrusted to you, just as the Blessed Virgin was the Mother of the Apostles before becoming their Queen.”³⁴²

In his spiritual testament to the Oblates of the Assumption, Father d’Alzon wrote:

I am trying to stress more energetically the particular trait which must characterize you and by which others will be able to recognize you as real daughters of the Blessed Virgin, Queen of the Apostles.³⁴³

³³⁹Letter no. 4009, VIII to the Oblates of the Assumption of Nîmes, April 28, 1870

³⁴⁰Rule of Life of the Oblates of the Assumption, no. 63.

³⁴¹Letter no. 4039, VIII to Mother Emmanuel-Marie Correnson, May 15, 1870.

³⁴²Letter no. 3004, VI to Mother Emmanuel-Marie Correnson, May 17, 1867.

³⁴³Letter no. 5731, XI, September 10, 1876. Also *Écrits Spirituels*, p. 1198

Origins of the Assumption Family

3 – Love of the Church (Jesus Christ continued in time) flows naturally from the love Father d’Alzon had for Christ: we are born from this love,

“a supernatural, daring, and disinterested love.”³⁴⁴

A little later, in speaking about the Oblates, he said to his brothers:

“Like us, they want to sanctify themselves by having an immense apostolic love for the Church. From this point of view, their special characteristic helps us deepen our own.”³⁴⁵

In summary, our life as Oblates of the Assumption is energized by **Christ** who is loved above all else, who lives in the **Church**, and who is present in the **Eucharist**. This essentially apostolic life has the **Virgin Mary** as its model.

Apostolic contemplation

Our apostolic congregation is not “contemplative” in the sense that the main activity of the Sisters would be to spend their time in prayer. Father d’Alzon insisted on this point in various letters he sent to Father Galabert.

He wanted the Oblates to have

the hearts of seraphim and of apostles.³⁴⁶

The seraphim represent the type of love which consumes an entire life in praising God. For the Oblates, contemplation and apostolate are so intertwined that they are one and the same reality.

Father d’Alzon explained to Father Picard the big difference he saw between the Ladies of the Assumption and the Oblates of the Assumption:

“Semi-cloistered religious and missionary religious.”³⁴⁷

³⁴⁴*Écrits Spirituels*, p. 136, Closing of the General Chapter of 1868.

³⁴⁵*Écrits Spirituels*, p. 144.

³⁴⁶Letter no. 3742, VIII to Mother Emmanuel-Marie Correnson, November 17, 1869. Also, *Écrits Spirituels*, p. 1270.

³⁴⁷Letter no. 2847, VI, August 6, 1866.

The Oblates of the Assumption

For Father d'Alzon and Mother Emmanuel-Marie Correnson, the members of both congregations were indeed “religious.”

In a letter to Eulalie de Régis, Father d'Alzon explained the purpose for which the Oblates were founded:

“Work, penance and prayer: work to live, penance to obtain the conversion of heretics, and **prayer to adore the Blessed Sacrament.**”³⁴⁸

The enthusiasm Father d'Alzon wanted to give the Oblates was stimulated by the needs of the Church and of the world.

On the one hand, the notion of apostolic mission calls to mind the idea of contemplation: working to bring about the Reign of Christ prompts us to pray to the Father in order to become better workers and to increase the number of these workers so that he can accomplish himself what we cannot do. Father d'Alzon suggested prayer intentions that were directly linked to the people the Sisters were encountering on a daily basis,³⁴⁹ all the while broadening these intentions to the dimensions of the Church.³⁵⁰

On the other hand, contemplation develops itself in the apostolate, as it is said in the last chapter of the *Directory* entitled “The Interior Life”:

“I cannot love Jesus Christ without wanting everyone to love him, and that is what gives my life its apostolic character.”³⁵¹

The entire *Directory* must be read in the light of this small sentence:

“Oh! How I wish that, in the midst of your work, your hearts might always be united to your divine Master.”³⁵²

Action and contemplation are forever called to come together in our lives whose occupations are diverse. Everything—prayer and work—converges towards the same goal.

A few weeks later, he again wrote to the Oblates of the Assumption:

³⁴⁸Letter no. 2494, V, April 22, 1865.

³⁴⁹*Écrits Spirituels*, p. 624.

³⁵⁰*Écrits Spirituels*, p. 626.

³⁵¹*Écrits Spirituels*, p. 123.

³⁵²Letter no. 3912, VIII to the Oblates, February 20, 1870.

Origins of the Assumption Family

“... everywhere, constantly bear this thought in mind: I must be an apostolic religious.”³⁵³

“As long as you are apostolic women, I will be happy.”³⁵⁴

What is the Mission of the Oblates of the Assumption?

Together with the Assumptionists

We were founded to work with the Assumptionists in the Near Eastern Mission:

“You were founded to be our assistants in the Missions.”³⁵⁵

This means that we were founded not only to render service to the religious, but especially to serve the Church along the same lines and in a complementary fashion.³⁵⁶

As he did for his brothers, Father d’Alzon gave us as a basic rule, the *Rule of St. Augustine*. And in the spiritual testament he left the Oblates he wrote:

Keep the framework of these instructions as the basis of your spiritual life. I have already given you the *Constitutions* and a *Directory*. These two works are just about the same for you as for the men religious.³⁵⁷

In an ecumenical perspective

The name which Father d’Alzon gave to the first novitiate is self-explanatory: **Our Lady of Bulgaria**. We were founded to work for the rapprochement of the Eastern Churches. What Father d’Alzon called the “conversion of

³⁵³Letter no. 3915, VIII, April 28, 1870.

³⁵⁴Letter no 5164, X, December 24, 1874

³⁵⁵Letter no. 5142, X from Father d’Alzon to Mother Emmanuel-Marie Correnson December 27, 1874. Also *Écrits Spirituels*, p. 1195.

³⁵⁶*Rule of Life of the Oblates of the Assumption*, no. 58.

³⁵⁷Letter no. 5713, XI, September 10, 1876. Also *Écrits Spirituels*, p. 1198.

The Oblates of the Assumption

schismatics,” we have translated over the years by “ecumenism,” and now by “inter-religious dialogue.” What counts is the spirit in which it is done. We cannot understand unity today in the way Father d’Alzon did in the 19th century in an ultramontane perspective.

If the three great causes which bring the Assumption together are the proclamation of **Truth**, the manifestation of **Charity**, and the restoration of **Unity**,³⁵⁸ all three are found in our *Rule of Life*, nos. 2 and 56. For us Oblates, the cause of Unity seems to have been in the forefront at the time of our foundation: “What foolishness to want to work at overturning the Greek, Eastern, and Russian schisms with a handful of poor girls! . . . God uses all sorts of means and will use even you,”

said Father d’Alzon in giving the habit to Sister Thérèse-Augustine on September 25, 1878.³⁵⁹

This ecumenical thrust is also found in the inscription inside the bell of the chapel on rue Séguier in Nîmes which he baptized in the name of the foundress of the Oblates:

I, Emmanuel-Marie, praise God,
I gather apostolic virgins,
I call those who err far from the Kingdom of Our Lord Jesus
Christ
So that there can be only one flock and one shepherd.³⁶⁰

“Beyond the seas”

The ecumenical goal was not exclusive. From the beginning, the missionary perspective encompassed the whole world. The texts are unambiguous in this regard. The mission began in the Near East, but Father d’Alzon did not exclude other countries. The bell in Nîmes gathered together “the apostolic virgins” without any other details.

At the Chapter of 1868 held six months after the departure of the first Oblates for the Near East, Father d’Alzon spoke of us and of our “apostolic love,” using a formula which set no boundaries:

³⁵⁸ *Écrits Spirituels*, pp 303–304.

³⁵⁹ *Écrits Spirituels*, p. 1210.

³⁶⁰ Letter no. 6664, XIII: Latin inscription found in a letter to Emmanuel-Marie Correnson on April 2, 1879.

Origins of the Assumption Family

“My daughters, you will go beyond the seas.”³⁶¹

The *60 million schismatics* were cited only as an example of this *enormous field*, of which we will never see the end: “the foreign missions.”

In the same letter, after having mentioned the presence at the Vatican Council of bishops from North America, South America, Chaldea, Asia, Syria, Egypt, and Central Africa, Father d’Alzon added:

“These are almost all mission countries where the Oblates can work.”³⁶²

On May 1, 1873, Father d’Alzon asked Father Picard to inquire about a proposal he received:

“They are asking for six Oblates for Iquique, a city in Peru. . . I would be tempted to let them go, but only with one of our religious.”³⁶³

There was no follow-up to this request, but it corresponded perfectly to the Oblate vocation which Father d’Alzon had in mind.

As a matter of fact, the missionary aspect marks the person of an Oblate:

The vow to consecrate themselves to the foreign missions will cause many difficulties, in the sense that people will consider them to be like in a novitiate in the houses of education, except for those who must remain there to form the others. . . This vow will be a stumbling block for many, but will distinguish the work in a very precise manner.³⁶⁴

Seven years later in writing to Mother Eugénie, he said:

“The big difference, besides the name Oblates, is that they are missionary religious, and I can assure you that they hold dearly to this difference.”³⁶⁵

In 1878, Father d’Alzon wrote to Mother Emmanuel-Marie Correnson:

³⁶¹*Écrits Spirituels*, November 17 1868, at the end of the General Chapter, p. 144.

³⁶²Letter no. 3742, VIII to Mother Emmanuel-Marie Correnson, November 17, 1869.

³⁶³Letter no. 4799, X.

³⁶⁴Letter no. 2868, VI to Mademoiselle Marie Correnson, August 25, 1866

³⁶⁵Letter no. 4865, X, August 12, 1873.

The Oblates of the Assumption

... We must do everything possible to increase the number of Oblates. I need some for Odessa in the near future. Father Galabert is gaining influence in the Near East, especially through the charity and devotion of your Sisters. And so, I am convinced that they are destined to open the doors to Russia, first of all with a hospital, then with a boarding school.³⁶⁶

The activities of the Sisters in France were clearly intended by our Founder to be a preparation for the missions, for example:

You will see that we will set up at Le Vigan a work of nursing sisters who will be able to prepare themselves to care for the sick in Bulgaria and in the foreign missions.³⁶⁷

This is how the orphanage in Arras and the foundation in the Esperou region came about.

In summary, we can say that an Oblate Sister must be attentive to and ready to serve the needs of the Church and of the world. In this discernment lies its specific mission:

“Apply yourselves to the study of everything that can make you better appreciate what the Church needs most.”³⁶⁸

4 – At the service of the poor Our missionary and ecumenical aim does not limit us to any particular social class. We are at the disposal of all.

Nevertheless, there is a marked affinity between the Oblates of the Assumption and the poor.

Founded to be sent to a country where *“the good to be done must be accomplished through schools for the working people,”*³⁶⁹ the first Oblates were destined to work in this poor environment.

The modest background of our first Sisters made them well-suited for their mission, although Father d’Alzon wished from the very beginning that there be candidates from all walks of life: *“shepherds and magi.”*³⁷⁰

³⁶⁶Letter no. 6260, XII, March 29, 1878

³⁶⁷Letter no. 3331 to Mother Emmanuel-Marie Correnson, June 22 1868.

³⁶⁸Letter no. 3635, VII to Mother Emmanuel-Marie Correnson, July 17, 1869.

³⁶⁹Letter no. 1916, IV, February 24, 1863.

³⁷⁰Letter no. 5201 to the Oblates, January 4, 1875; *Écrits Spirituels*, pp. 1196–1198

Origins of the Assumption Family

He wanted them to live together without privileges, without lay sisters. It was an audacious project for the times.

In the Near East, the Oblates of the Assumption helped all classes of society.

In Nîmes, the first school run by the Oblates was for pupils who came from a simple milieu.

In speaking of *“his weakness for the Oblates because of this more humble spirit which was more apt to reach a certain part of the world that Our Lord loves especially,”*³⁷¹ Father d’Alzon conveyed very well the intimate link between our Congregation and the world of the poor.

Ecumenism, Foreign Missions, and Predilection for the Poor, in collaboration with the Assumptionists as much as possible, are the characteristics that Father d’Alzon wanted to give the Oblates of the Assumption when he founded them. These three traits include love of Jesus Christ and availability at the service of the Church.

Conclusion

Father d’Alzon wanted his “daughters” to be as broadminded as he was and to have a heart in keeping with the mission. He wrote from Rome to Mother Emmanuel Marie Correnson:

“We must have not only a catholic heart but also catholic ideas. And when we speak about broad ideas, I do not think that we can find any that are broader than this one.”³⁷²

In writing to the Oblates in Nîmes on April 3, 1870, he said:

“I would like you to have a heart as immense as the ocean.”³⁷³

On the other hand, Father d’Alzon had great respect for the freedom of each person in his/her way of going to God. He did not want to impose any particular devotion or method of prayer. However, he often said to the Sisters and to his own novices:

³⁷¹Letter no. 3784, VIII to Mother Emmanuel-Marie Correnson, December 14, 1869.

³⁷²General Chapter, September 17, 1868, *Écrits Spirituels*, p. 131.

³⁷³Letter no. 3974, VIII, to the Oblates of the Assumption April 3, 1870.

The Oblates of the Assumption

“Let us seek the Kingdom of God, let us proclaim it with all the fullness of our freedom and love, for God does not want to rule over slaves, but over free men.”³⁷⁴

The spirit Father d’Alzon wanted to give the Oblates of the Assumption is summed up in a letter he sent to them on February 28, 1870. Its main points are the following:

The more I reflect on the purpose of your foundation, the more I find that it has all it takes to do a lot of good. . . But for that to happen, there are several conditions:

1. Great selflessness
2. A spirit of prayer
3. Frank and loyal obedience
4. Fraternal charity
5. Love of the Church
6. Love of Our Lord. One has to begin and finish with this. What is an Oblate for whom Jesus is not her life?³⁷⁵

The spirit of Assumption

For me, the spirit of Assumption is not linked to the glorious mystery of the Virgin Mary, but to the lifestyle and to the way of being and of relating to others which characterize us and which **Father d’Alzon wanted for us**. In short, it is:

- a passion for the Kingdom (cf. Note below) based on a Christ-centered life and on apostolic contemplation,
- an Augustinian community life,

all of this lived in **great openness, freedom and a family spirit**.

This spirit is undoubtedly the result of various influences experienced by Father d’Alzon: Augustine, Dom Guéranger, Lamennais, and Mother

³⁷⁴Idem.

³⁷⁵Letter no. 3915, VIII to the Oblates of the Assumption, February 28, 1870.

Origins of the Assumption Family

Eugénie. . . a spirit that is *sui generis*, as he explained to Mother Eugénie on July 10, 1865.³⁷⁶

We know also that Father d'Alzon chose the name *Assumption* not because he knew and was friendly with the Ladies of the Assumption, but because it was the name inscribed on the College, which his friend Goubier bought for him without his knowledge:

We did not choose the mystery of the Assumption; it was somewhat imposed on us. The stone above the entrance door of our house had been engraved many years before we came to take possession of the birthplace of our religious family. We can say that it was not us who chose Mary triumphant in the heavens to be our protectress; it was Mary, from heaven, who seems to have said: this house was given to me and I, in turn, give it to you. . .³⁷⁷

Note: Our motto “**Thy Kingdom Come**” comes directly from Father d'Alzon and from nobody else. He said so himself in a letter addressed to the Ladies of the Assumption in 1871:

I recall when, at Impasse des Vignes, we were talking with your Mother General about the beginnings, I suggested the motto *Adveniat Regnum Tuum*. It had struck me by its beauty and its depth at the Sisters of Marie-Thérèse. . . Will we always do less than what is needed to obtain this glory for God? I believe that, if understood, this motto can be applied to the present time.³⁷⁸

Sister Claire de la Croix Rabitz
Superior General of the Oblates
of the Assumption

203, rue Lecourbe
75015 Paris
France

³⁷⁶Letter no. 3040, VI.

³⁷⁷*Écrits Spirituels*, p. 1025.

³⁷⁸*Écrits Spirituels*, p. 569.

The Little Sisters of the Assumption

Spirituality and Spirit

GISÈLE MARCHAND

Father Pernet considered it essential to be inspired by the spirit of one's congregation. It is that which invigorates and sustains us.

The source of Etienne Pernet's inspiration was first of all his religious family.

He accepted as his own the Assumptionist spirit and was imbued with it. At the same time, he interiorized his personal grace as a Founder. And from that, our spirit was born.

Most of the **writings** of our Founders were **occasional**. Father Pernet did not leave any spiritual treatise. He never organized his thought or his spiritual principles into a logical whole.

Nevertheless, before 1870, he wrote for the Little Sisters of the Assumption the first Rule which was approved in 1875. Then, in 1896, he made this Rule more specific by writing the Constitutions (approved in 1901) and the Directory.

The **Directory** was inspired by that of the Augustinians of the Assumption. Father Pernet borrowed the structure of the chapters but came up with a new text reflecting the specific grace he had received as a Founder and containing our original character among the families of the Assumption. This Directory was the fruit of thirty years of reflection, prayer, and discussions with the Sisters.

The Spirit of the Assumption

Father Pernet followed Father d'Alzon and the spirit of the Assumption “*which I wish I could breathe into the depths of your hearts and into the marrow of your bones. . .*”³⁷⁹

For “*the Little Sister who is the least in the family of the Assumption,*”³⁸⁰ the Founder wished that the Congregation be grafted onto this “trunk,” as he said, with its own specific characteristics:

The order of the Assumption is a trunk that has several branches. Let us remain united to the trunk and be content with the place we occupy. In a flower-bed, the daisy does not want to be a rose; each flower retains its own specific character.³⁸¹

From the beginning in 1864, he gave the Sisters the *Rule of Saint Augustine*.

The aim of our life: the extension of the Reign of God

For the Little Sisters of the Assumption, as for the Assumption itself,

“the glory of God and the extension of his Reign should be the aim of our life,”³⁸²

but for the Little Sisters of the Assumption, this takes place

“*in the midst of the poor.*” “Their **motto** will be: *Adveniat regnum tuum* [. . .]. They will contribute to the extension of this Reign by charitably dedicating themselves to the poor and the working classes.”³⁸³

The extension of the Reign of God in us and around us. This presupposes a personal conversion and a transformation of the society in which we live.

³⁷⁹Letter no 283 to Antoinette Fage, August 26, 1881.

³⁸⁰Directory, p. 41.

³⁸¹August 28, 1880, IX, 466.

³⁸²July 31, 1881, IX, 583.

³⁸³First Rule – Aim of the Congregation.

The “threefold love”: Christ—Mary—the Church

The Little Sister of the Assumption must convince herself more and more everyday that her spirit must be that of the Assumption. This spirit consists chiefly in the love of Our Lord, of His Blessed Mother, and of His Church, with the duty to spread this threefold love throughout the world.³⁸⁴

For Father Pernet, **Jesus Christ is at the center of everything**. In Him, “*our sole Savior and unique Mediator*,” we love the Church, Mary, and the poor. Father Pernet’s words were clear:

May Our Lord be your all.³⁸⁵

May Jesus Christ be the center of your life.³⁸⁶

May Jesus be your all in everything and in everyone.³⁸⁷

Everything begins with Christ; He is the one who leads us to the Triune God. The purpose of our life is to be configured to Christ, to be transformed in Him:

“Clothe yourselves in Our Lord. May your actions speak Jesus Christ. If you are not another Jesus Christ, you cannot be a Little Sister of the Assumption.”³⁸⁸

For the Little Sister, her relationship with Christ is primary. It prompts her to work for **the Glory of God and the salvation of souls**:

*To glorify God and save souls, that encapsulates Our Lord*³⁸⁹ We have told you and we constantly repeat that the Little Sister of the Assumption is destined in a very special way to bring about **the glory of God through the salvation of the poor and the little ones** [...] That is a view you must never lose sight of [...]. A Little Sister who would not have a passion for all that pertains to the Glory of God would not be a Little Sister.³⁹⁰

³⁸⁴Directory, chap. 1.

³⁸⁵December 22, 1881, IX, 645.

³⁸⁶August 28, 1885, XI, 60.

³⁸⁷Letter to Antoinette Fage, January 26, 1865, 1A1C18.

³⁸⁸October 16, 1884, X, 14.

³⁸⁹January 5, 1893, VI, 23.

³⁹⁰June 23, 1892, VII, 193 4.

Origins of the Assumption Family

Father Pernet constantly emphasized the bond that exists between the fruitfulness of the apostolic life and the union of the apostle with Christ. The life of the Little Sister has a **contemplative dimension**. She encounters God in prayer as well as in her “dedication to her neighbor.” She also grows in **freedom** as she lives in harmony with God and shares in his very life:

“Yes, my daughter, complete freedom, but within obedience, You must stifle neither persons nor their initiatives.”³⁹¹

The Word of God and the Eucharist

It is through the Word of God that we come in contact with “the spirit of Our Lord.” Father Pernet said that it is like an “*abundant spring gushing forth into eternal life.*”³⁹² The Word of God must be read every day and have an effect on the way we live.³⁹³

The Eucharist is at the center of our lives and of our communities:

“The Eucharist transforms us in Jesus Christ.”³⁹⁴

It is an invitation to surrender our life and to offer ourselves with Christ.³⁹⁵ It is a source of unity:

“Having only one life with Him, and loving with Him and like Him, our minds and our hearts are united in truth and charity.”³⁹⁶

It is in Jesus Christ that we love Mary, the Church, and the poor.

Mary: Contemplate her, imitate her, love her, and make her loved

because, “without Mary we cannot have Jesus, and love for Mary is the surest guarantee of our love for Jesus.”³⁹⁷

³⁹¹EP, January 22, 1866, 1A1C, no. 52.

³⁹²November 14, 1897, III, 588.

³⁹³Directory, chap. V, p. 20.

³⁹⁴July 3, 1892, IV, 503.

³⁹⁵Cf. February 12, 1872, IX, 68.

³⁹⁶September 29, 1895, V, 390.

³⁹⁷Directory, chap. VII, p. 30.

The Little Sisters of the Assumption

He presents her for our contemplation principally in her “*immaculate purity,*” in the mystery of the Visitation where she is “*the model that you should imitate,*”³⁹⁸ and in “*her compassion at the Cross*” where she became the “*mother of the Elect.*”

Associated with the redeeming work of Christ, she has a special place in God’s plan and in the life of the Church.

The Church

After Our Lord and the Blessed Virgin, the Little Sister must love the Church her Mother more than anything else on earth [. . .]. The Little Sister, while always remembering to love the Church as her Mother, must never forget that in the Kingdom of God she must cherish as her own special inheritance the poor, the sick, the ignorant, and those of least account.³⁹⁹

For Etienne Pernet, as for his contemporaries, the Church was strongly institutional. Nevertheless, he underlined especially **the mystery of the Church**.

For him, it is a matter of “*re-fashioning a people for God.*” The Reign of God establishes new filial relations with God and fraternal relations among people, into which we enter through **baptism**. For Father Pernet, the aim is really **unity through communion**: union of minds and union of hearts, with everyone living in harmony with God (truth) and sharing his very life (charity). It is the Holy Spirit who renews us. Indeed, that is how he sees the community life of the Little Sisters

“where unity reigns despite the diversity of persons.”⁴⁰⁰ “Any community that does not reproduce the Blessed Trinity is not a true community.”⁴⁰¹

³⁹⁸July 2, 1891.

³⁹⁹Directory, chap. IX, pp. 36–38.

⁴⁰⁰June 8, 1884, II, 581.

⁴⁰¹June 8, 1884, II, 581

A Few Essential Points for the Little Sisters of the Assumption

Among these various dimensions, there are some **intertwined and inseparable aspects** to which Father Pernet constantly and insistently referred, asking us to live by them because he considered them to be essential for the Little Sister.

The “Mission” is constitutive of the Congregation

The Little Sister is sent to a clearly-defined people:

“Her place is with the poor—the working man and his family. She must have a preferential love for this mission.”⁴⁰²

Father Pernet directly linked the “**sending**” of the Little Sister to that of the **Apostles**. In his talks, he often commented on the apostles and disciples being sent on a mission.

Today, my daughters, you are continuing the work entrusted to the Apostles because Our Lord sends you as He sent them: “*Et misit eos praedicare Regnum Dei.*” Go and preach the Kingdom of God.⁴⁰³

As followers of the apostles who were sent to the whole world, the Little Sisters of the Assumption in the Church are **intended for the whole world**.

You will go everywhere, because everywhere there are sick people, poor people, and souls to be saved [...]. The Little Sister is a missionary, all the more so that she must live in the midst of the poor.⁴⁰⁴

⁴⁰²Directory, chap. X, p. 41.

⁴⁰³February 15, 1894, VI, 176.

⁴⁰⁴June 7, 1894, VII, 138.

Sent to those “who are [spiritually] far away”

By our vocation, we are sent to those who are “far away.” We are called to meet people where they are and to proclaim Jesus Christ in a way they can understand. We are called, as the Founder said, to “prepare the way.”

You have by your vocation the responsibility of carrying the Child Jesus into Egypt, and, by Egypt, I mean the country where God does not reign [...], the desolate country where people die of spiritual thirst. My daughters, Jesus comes to you and says: I entrust myself to you, and you will carry me to such and such a garret, or neighborhood, or city, or country, or province, where I am neither known nor served.⁴⁰⁵ You put oil in the lock so that the key can turn more easily, in other words, you prepare the way.⁴⁰⁶

In the directory, Father Pernet highlights the person of John the Baptist:

“The Little Sister, like St. John the Baptist, does her utmost to announce Salvation to the sick and the poor.”⁴⁰⁷

Women have a very special mission to accomplish [...]. They must be the “John the Baptist” of modern times, preparing the way for the renewal and salvation of Society.⁴⁰⁸

Everything starts with charity, with the love poured into our heart by the Holy Spirit. Since the apostolic purpose of the Assumption is to “work for the coming of the Reign of God in the world by spreading truth and charity,” for Father Pernet the apostolic work of the Little Sisters was always first and foremost one of charity:

It is through the tenderness and the charity of the Good Samaritan that the Little Sister must present herself to the world.⁴⁰⁹

Charity is disappearing from the world. For that reason, faith is in jeopardy. The day charity is re-born, faith will be revived.⁴¹⁰

⁴⁰⁵ January 4, 1891, I, 301.

⁴⁰⁶ April 12, 1894, VI, 443.

⁴⁰⁷ Directory, chap. VII, p. 29.

⁴⁰⁸ April 11, 1882, to the Lady Servants.

⁴⁰⁹ June 21, 1885, III, 25.

⁴¹⁰ July 21, 1887, VII, 331.

Origins of the Assumption Family

The Little Sisters bear witness by their actions:

It is not enough to preach and to speak. You must bear witness to God by your actions.⁴¹¹

I can well imagine that when you go into a house where there is poverty and you begin sweeping up and doing the cooking, I can well imagine that you might find all of that uninteresting and, at the same time, not very stimulating for your zeal, and that you might be tempted at first not to see the link between that sort of work and the sublime purpose of your apostolate. However, my daughters, you must accept to use the broom and wash the dishes, and you must serve the poor, not as servants but as apostles.⁴¹²

Following Christ the Servant

In presenting for our contemplation **all** of the mysteries of the life of Christ, Father Pernet naturally emphasized the mystery of Jesus who made his own the mission of the Servant: the obedient, humble and poor Christ who came to serve.

He suggested that, out of love for Jesus Christ and following his example, the Little Sister must become “*the humble servant of the poor,*” to the point of making a total gift of herself and of offering her life for the salvation of the poor and those considered unimportant:

Being a Little Sister of the Assumption and being the very humble servant of the abandoned poor is one and the same thing.⁴¹³

Your cross is the gift of yourself. Use all the life you have to throw yourself into the fray so as to make Our Lord known.⁴¹⁴

Remember that the Little Sister must be an apostle, a prophet and a martyr. An apostle by teaching the truth, a prophet by proclaiming it with courage, and a martyr by affirming it even to the point of shedding her blood.⁴¹⁵

⁴¹¹January 9, 1887, 1, 377.

⁴¹²November 13, 1890, VIII, 373.

⁴¹³August 8, 1878, IX, 236.

⁴¹⁴January 31, 1889, VI, 116.

⁴¹⁵December 23, 1880, IX, 521.

The Little Sisters of the Assumption

Father Pernet refers in many ways to “*Jesus the poor man, the friend, the Father, and the King of the poor.*”⁴¹⁶

He offers for our contemplation Jesus, “meek and humble of heart,” who lived poor among the poor, refusing powerful means and identifying himself with the poor.

He proposed to the Little Sister a poor and humble life among the poor, her brothers and sisters whom she respects and loves.

Poverty is your cloak, and humility your diadem. That is how you must preach Jesus Christ.⁴¹⁷

Poverty unites us to Our Lord just as humility brings us closer to Him.⁴¹⁸

At the sight of such misfortunes, we can understand better the tenderness and the feelings of Our Lord for the simple people. Oh! Let us love the poor, the deprived, those without instruction. Let us respect them, and may this always be one of the characteristics of our family spirit.⁴¹⁹

At the beginning, the Little Sisters were known as the “visiting nurses of the poor” (*Garde-malades des pauvres à domicile*). In the directory, Father Pernet specified what he meant by the poor, viz.,

“the poor, the ignorant, the outcast, the sick, the suffering, the forsaken, the friendless, the sick and the dying. . .”⁴²⁰

In 1876, Father Pernet said:

“You will be the eye of the blind, the feet of the lame, the ear of the deaf; you will be the mothers of the poor.”⁴²¹

He often emphasized the dignity of the poor:

⁴¹⁶Directory, chap. VII, p. 78.

⁴¹⁷October 19, 1876, IX, 98.

⁴¹⁸January 27, 1889, I, 467.

⁴¹⁹January 1, 1899, I, 285.

⁴²⁰Directory, chap. II, p. 57 and chap. IX, p. 142.

⁴²¹October 19, 1876, IX, 96.

Origins of the Assumption Family

There is a royal dignity in the poor. The more destitute they are, the more worthy they are of the attention of the Son of God and consequently of your own.⁴²²

In each of them, the Little Sister must see Jesus Christ Himself, demeaned, destitute, suffering, sick, and buried in misery and humiliations.⁴²³

Refashioning a people for God

As a matter of fact, Father Pernet began the foundation by **caring for the neglected sick in their own homes**. The Sisters met both **the patient and those close to the patient**: the family and their neighbors. As they gained experience, the Little Sisters became more aware of this entourage and of the **neighborhood environment** (e.g. the foundations in Levallois, Belleville, and Creil).

In the context of the 19th century, Father Pernet understood the special place of the family in society and in God's plan. He explained his thinking in the Directory:

Refashion a people for God by converting the poor, the workers and their families, and by giving them a Christian education.⁴²⁴

On earthy the human family is like a living reproduction of the Blessed Trinity.⁴²⁵

He asked that the Little Sisters carry out an apostolate that “aims” and, in fact, “makes a special effort” to advance God's plan for humanity by promoting the family, “*as the Good Lord wishes it to be.*”

In your dedication and in the work you carry out, you should make a special effort to refashion the families of workers, as the Good Lord wishes them to be. [...] By rebuilding the family, you will create a people for Jesus Christ. [...] By rebuilding the family, you will refashion populations, and through them, society. (10.12.1891 – VIII, 495)

⁴²²July 19, 1894, IV, 555.

⁴²³Directory, chap. II, p. 57.

⁴²⁴Directory, chap I, p 8.

⁴²⁵January 23, 1898, I, 479.

The Little Sisters of the Assumption

Your sole aim must be to work for the salvation of souls by the Christian renewal of the family. [...] Salvation lies in that.

I don't think that society can be refashioned by arrangements and concessions coming from above. We must address fundamentals, work with the family, refashion a people for Jesus Christ, prevent divorce, and rehabilitate marriages. May fathers be fathers, may mothers be mothers, and may children learn to respect their parents and obey them.

Congresses and committees can help to do good, but they will never achieve much if they move away from that. [...] ⁴²⁶

Refashion society according to the spirit of Our Lord⁴²⁷

Attentive to the daily experience of the first sisters, Etienne Pernet reflected deeply and sought to respond to the apostolic needs they perceived. That was how he came to found **three associations of lay people from all classes of society** who shared the Congregation's apostolic work of evangelizing the working-class. All of them wished to be animated by the same spirit and were in contact with the communities of the Little Sisters:

- **1876** – The Lady Servants of the Poor
- **1881** – The Fraternity of Our Lady of Salvation, which became the Fraternity of Our Lady of the Assumption.
- **1884** – The Daughters of Saint Monica, the feminine branch of the Fraternity.

Relations with laypeople

The Lady Servants of the Poor

It was the exhausting work being done by the Little Sisters that led them in 1876, after reflection, to call on the benefactresses of the nascent Congregation to assist them by “personally” sharing in the work, and not simply by contributing their money.

They committed themselves by annual promises to

⁴²⁶January 21, 1894, 1, 472.

⁴²⁷Talk to the superiors, April 25, 1883, XI, 35.

Origins of the Assumption Family

“dedicate themselves alongside the Little Sisters of the Assumption, and **in the same spirit and under the same guidance**, to the care of the sick poor in their homes and to the renewal of the working-class family through the Catholic religion” (affiliation promise).

The commitments made by the Lady Servants were in keeping with the lifestyle of the upper classes.

Father Pernet called them to live authentic Christian lives, to live in a spirit of poverty, and to be apostles, exercising their influence in their families and over their domestic staff:

Always speak the word of God. [...] In your living rooms, you will often have the opportunity to speak the language of truth. Be apostles at all times, even at the risk of being taken for crazy women. [...] Don't let a day go by without doing an act of charity. You who are accustomed to giving orders, I would ask you to forget at times that you are in charge in order to give of your person when you are among the poor.⁴²⁸

According to our registers, there were 273 affiliated Lady Servants in Father Pernet's lifetime. He met with these new collaborators every fortnight.

The Fraternity of Our Lady of Salvation

The Association changed its name to *Fraternity of Our Lady of the Assumption* after it had been established in England where the word “salvation” recalled the Salvation Army.

While they were present in the families, the Little Sisters occasionally witnessed an openness to the Christian faith, which sometimes came to an end after they had left the families.⁴²⁹

The Fraternity of Our Lady of Salvation and its feminine branch, the Daughters of Saint Monica, brought together the fathers and mothers of working-class families.

It was after prolonged discussions with the community (their account has been preserved) that Father Pernet began to bring the Fraternities together,

⁴²⁸Talk to the Lady Servants, July 4, 1882.

⁴²⁹Talk at Perpignan, January 23, 1883.

The Little Sisters of the Assumption

thus broadening the Sisters' apostolate and ensuring its deepening and continuity.

“We must bring the men together,” said Father Pernet, and “see them and talk with them. The beginning will be difficult, but with the grace of God we will succeed.”⁴³⁰

He added:

“This is perhaps the real solution to the Christian and Catholic renewal of the working-class family.”⁴³¹

At the first meeting on July 31, 1881, Father Pernet brought together at rue Violet a carpenter, two rag-pickers, two workers, a foreman, and an architect. The statutes he wrote that same year stated the Fraternity's aim and conditions:

The Fraternity of Our Lady of Salvation is not a mutual-aid society. It undertakes to work for the Christian renewal of the families of the working-class through the Association of the Fathers of families.

The Brothers are all workers; the majority of them are married. [...] They must have a good reputation, be intelligent, upright, frank, and energetic.

The members of the Fraternity of Our Lady of the Assumption committed themselves to:

Love one another as true brothers, helping one another according to the needs of each one and according to their means.⁴³²

The Fraternity is based on this word of Our Lord: My command is that you love one another. Put this into practice.⁴³³

It is not enough for you to work for your own welfare and that of your family. You must also, according to your strength and means, extend the Reign of God around you in society.⁴³⁴

⁴³⁰4N1, no. 106.

⁴³¹Letter to Mother Marie of the Blessed Sacrament, Superior at Perpignan September 21, 1881, no. 343.

⁴³²Statutes 1881.

⁴³³Grenelle, November 26, 1882.

⁴³⁴February 1897.

Origins of the Assumption Family

Etienne Pernet presented them with the demands of an authentic Christian life, without uprooting them from their human milieu. Their commitments were related to the concrete lives of the worker-families of the 19th century:

“Not to belong to a secret society, not to frequent bars and taverns, and to bring home at the end of the week one’s entire salary.”⁴³⁵

By bringing the Fraternities together, he showed confidence in men who had not received much education, who were not given to much religious practice, who had a simple and unpolished faith “like that of the Apostles in olden times,” and whom he simply placed “face to face with their baptism” and with their responsibilities as parents. Father Pernet would say to them:

My friends, I have not come to promise you anything or to wave temporal advantages before your eyes. I have nothing to give you. On the contrary, I have a lot to ask of you. But I speak in the name of the Good Lord to whom you owe everything. He wishes that you renew here your commitment to live as faithful Christians. And since you are weak, He asks you to come together to help one another mutually and to help his law reign in your families.⁴³⁶

The meetings were held every fortnight. Every month, there was a meeting by area and a general meeting at the Mother House of the Little Sisters of the Assumption (Statutes 1881). The Fathers of the Assumption were often the chaplains of the Fraternities.

These meetings were meant to be first of all a place where people could enjoy a **fraternal atmosphere**, but they were also meant to be a time of **human and spiritual formation**.

The first year, the workers met among themselves with Father Pernet, then later, a few men belonging to a different social class began to appear among the participants. Father Pernet felt the need to be helped by competent facilitators.

He recruited **collaborators** from among his own friends and the people who frequented rue François I^{er}. These were mostly lawyers, legal advisers,

⁴³⁵Statutes 1881.

⁴³⁶Testimony of Sister Marguerite-Marie, 4N1, no. 106.

The Little Sisters of the Assumption

journalists, members of parliament, a few doctors, not many industrialists, and a few army officers. They were called **Decurions** because each of them was to be in close contact with ten families (in fact, the plan was never implemented). Father Pernet envisaged their activity as one of service and charity. In his 1896 report on this work, he defined them as “*men of a certain rank who come to place their words and dedication **at the service** of their brothers.*” According to the registers, there were one hundred and nineteen affiliated Decurions during his lifetime. Their affiliation to the Fraternity took place at the same time as that of the Brothers.

From that time on, the meetings took the form of talks/lectures. The workers’ major problems were discussed. The information dealt also with the life of the Church itself, with the objections of the period, with the scientific discoveries of the time, as well as with contemporary events and social advancements. The then-current political situation was behind everyone’s mind, but was only alluded to.

All this information was meant to train people for action. All of the religious, family, and social input attempted to form Christians to be witnesses to their faith in their family and among those around them, witnesses in everyday life, at work, and in society.

If you were the type of workers we would like you to be, you who are in daily contact with other workers, you would eventually reform labor practices as they exist today and transform the workshops. And you would solve that great question of the relationship between the employers the foremen, and the workers in our industrial establishments.⁴³⁷

There are good things about our century, we don’t deny that, but it would be a truly great century if the great progress that is being made in science were also Christian. Let us react against the trend that draws society away from God. Good has never been done except by a small number of people. Our Lord had only twelve apostles, and He often said to those around Him: “*You are a little flock.*” And with this little flock, He invaded the whole world. What prodigious things are done by the infinitely little people! Leaven causes the dough to rise, and the Fraternity

⁴³⁷EP 4N1, no. 4, May 25, 1884.

Origins of the Assumption Family

of Our Lady of Salvation can become good leaven that will raise the masses.⁴³⁸

The Fraternity developed quickly. In 1890, there were 810 affiliated Brothers. In 1930, they numbered 9,000, and the women's branch eventually became even bigger.

The women's branch: the Daughters of Saint Monica

The mothers of families whose husbands were members of the Fraternity demanded a similar association for themselves. This came into existence in 1884 under the name of the Association of the Daughters of Saint Monica.

Its aim was the Christian renewal of working-class families.⁴³⁹

The first meeting was held at Sèvres on February 24, 1884. It sought to make of these women good family mothers. At a meeting on August 16, 1885, Father Pernet reminded them:

“Work for your own good, be women of faith: Christian mothers, model spouses, and strong women.”

Like for the Fraternity, over and beyond the convivial aspect, the meetings were times of formation conducted by the Lady Servants. But, at the heart of this formation given to help renew families, there was also a missionary dimension that looked forward to the renewal of all of society.

The Fraternities as well as the Daughters of Saint Monica therefore had as their aim to renew the families of workers and, through them, to remake society in line with the intuition of Father Pernet who, in turn, was inspired by the spirit of the Assumption.

What was the path proposed by Father Pernet in creating associations of laypeople?

Without uprooting people from their ordinary human milieu, Etienne Pernet presented to everyone the demands of an **authentic Christian life**.

⁴³⁸4N1, no. 6, April 9, 1893.

⁴³⁹Statutes of the Daughters of Saint Monica, 1884.

The Little Sisters of the Assumption

Because of their baptism, all are Apostles, and all are called to fidelity. Every Christian, as a member of the People of God, has a role to play in the Church.

You cannot sanctify yourselves just for your own sake, not even just for your sisters. You must be in the Church instruments of salvation for everyone. This applies to the Little Sister, to the Lady Servant, to the Brother of Our Lady of Salvation, and to all those who are working with us for the renewal of working-class families.⁴⁴⁰

The Gospel can inspire social transformations

The conversion of each person, but everyone together, is the foundation of a society that is renewed in Christ and of a society that is regenerated and re-focused on God's plan.

Etienne Pernet believed in the **universal fraternity** of Christians:

If only we lived in this way (with charity, truth, and true fraternity), it would cause an upheaval in the order of nature because it would mean placing ourselves in the supernatural order of Our Lord Jesus Christ."⁴⁴¹

From the point-of-view of the Reign of God, he thought of bringing the social classes together in mutual acceptance, in person-to-person relations, and in relations founded on faith and on the love of God:

In this order of faith and charity, the classes must be drawn together. May the man of the world fraternize with the worker, may he support him. May the woman of the world draw close to the worker's wife. [...] In this way, we will be able to bring together all the various segments of society, marvelously combining them in the unity of faith, fraternal charity, and submission to God and to his Christ. And the happy result of all this will be a new people of children of God.⁴⁴²

⁴⁴⁰June 5, 1884, VII, 126.

⁴⁴¹Talk to the Lady Servants, February 20, 1883

⁴⁴²1890.

Origins of the Assumption Family

The above quotation is taken from a note dictated by Father Pernet in 1890 on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the foundation. He explained the foundation in the reverse order of history. The care of the sick and the foundation of the Little Sisters came last, after he had acquired an overall view of the society of his time and had devised an apostolic program to “bring about the Reign of God.”

It was in “this perspective of faith and charity” that he set about trying to bring the social classes together. In actual fact, men and women of different social backgrounds were brought together, and human bonds were created among them.

For Father Pernet, the Lady Servants, the Decurions, and the Brothers and their families, regrouped and committed to live authentic Christian lives, were a Christianizing leaven in society and his response to the realities he was facing:

The Little Sisters, the Lady Servants, the Decurions, and the Brothers of Our Lady of Salvation succeeded each other by force of circumstances. We counted for nothing in all of this. The Good Lord did everything. The work was like that of a plant that sprouts, grows, and bears flowers in its own time.⁴⁴³

Sister Gisèle Marchand,
Little Sister of the Assumption

57, rue Violet
75015 Paris

⁴⁴³Talk to the Lady Servants, January 8, 1884.

Appendix: Sources

- First rule of the Little Sisters of the Assumption
- Directory of the Little Sisters of the Assumption
- Talks given by Father Pernet
- Reports of the Meetings of the Fraternity and of the Lady Servants
- *From the human family to the People of God*, Sister Humberte Mol-liere (1967)
- *Father Pernet and the Family*, Sister Humberte Molltere (1975)
- *The Origins of L.S.A. Spirituality*, Sister Gisèle Marchand (1991)

Origins of the Assumption Family

The Orants of the Assumption

Original intuitions and the Assumptionist spirit

ANNE HUYGHEBAERT

Why Orants. . .

In December 1897, one year after the foundation, Father Picard and Mother Isabelle, each separately, thought of the same name of Orant but reacted very differently to it. On December 16 for the first time, Father Picard suggested to the Sisters the name of “Orants of the Assumption.” They took exception to the suggestion, finding it pretentious. This word was not well-known: it was used only in archaeology. The Sisters noticed, however, that it corresponded exactly to their vocation. Mother Isabelle also was not inclined to accept it. Father Picard did not insist. But since Mother Isabelle had thought of it that same night, no other name was sought and it was finally adopted. In suggesting to the Sisters this name which he liked very much, Father Picard associated it with the life of prayer and self-giving for which they were founded at a time when religious life was being persecuted and was obliged to go into hiding like at the time of the catacombs. The same applied to the white habit which he suggested but which could not be worn for a long time.

. . . of the Assumption?

We were born from the Assumption, for the Assumption, and throughout a long process carried by the Assumption, which leads us to believe that we were wanted or were at least well received by our four elder branches in the Assumption family.

Part of the Fabric of the Assumption Family

Circumstances surrounding the foundation

444

Immediate preparation

In 1894, the foundation began to be prepared in earnest. A first companion, Madame de l'Épinois, seemed determined, and Miss Dienne, a young elementary school teacher in the d'Ursel Family, was about to become the second. Caroline's wedding was being planned. So Father Picard took the initiative.⁴⁴⁵

In early July 1895, the first meeting of the future Orants took place in Livry. Father Picard stated its purpose:

To provide his religious family, his ardent missionaries spread throughout the world to extend the Reign of Our Lord, with the permanent assistance of the prayers and sacrifices of contemplative religious souls.

⁴⁴⁴We follow here the information found in several texts written by Sister Thérèse-Emmanuel, the first Orant after Mother Isabelle:

Souvenirs de la fondatrice des Orantes de l'Assomption, Mère Isabelle-Marie, écrits par Soeur Thérèse-Emmanuel, Congregation of the Orants of the Assumption, Archive collection no. 4. Provides the sequence of events beginning in 1895.

- *Histoire de notre famille religieuse, les dix premières années*, Vol. I, Congregation of the Orants of the Assumption, Archive collection no. 2, written by Sister Thérèse-Emmanuel and based on the Chronicles of the Congregation. Retraces our history starting with the foundation.
- *Mère Marie de la Compassion (Marie Dubron), notes et souvenirs, (1859–193J)*, Ed. Bonne Presse. Mother Thérèse-Emmanuel speaks in chapter IV, “Au berceau des Orantes,” pp. 40–66.
- M. de Dainville, *Isabelle de Clermont-Tonnerre, Comtesse Henri d'Ursel, Fondatrice des Orantes de l'Assomption, 1849–1921*, Ed. Lethielleux. A well-documented biography that also provides a lot of information.

⁴⁴⁵Letters DIA/4597 and 4612. There are fewer documents from this period. Correspondence was rare and often dealt with other material questions.

The Orants of the Assumption

And he outlined the main characteristics of the project: total gift-of-self, in silent adoration and in union with the liturgical prayer of the Church.

During the summer of 1896, Father Picard chose Mother Marie of the Compassion (Marie Dubron), Superior of the Oblate convent in Nîmes, and entrusted her with the initiation of the first Orants to the practices of religious life. He knew that he could count on her spirit of prayer and on her affectionate dedication. A second meeting of the future Orants was planned, but finally a series of meetings took place in Livry. They discussed the practical questions of the foundation. The “questionnaire” sent by Mother Isabelle to Father Picard was probably written at this time.⁴⁴⁶ Only Madame de l’Epinouis made one or two minor comments.

After Caroline’s wedding to Count Henri de Virieu on May 21, 1896 in Brussels, Isabelle arrived on July 13 at the Oblate novitiate on rue Berton in Passy. She was ready to begin her religious life immediately, but Madame de l’Epinouis asked for an extension until December 8. This additional time was needed to prepare accommodations for the future Orants.

At Lourdes during the National Pilgrimage, Father Picard asked the pilgrims to pray for a “work of prayer” that he wanted to found. Only Madame d’Ursel and Madame de l’Epinouis knew that he was talking about the Orants:

The Hail Mary came out of these hundreds of mouths recommending us to God. We were there. . . lost in the crowd that did not suspect who were the poor instruments God was counting on to serve him. . . .⁴⁴⁷

On September 28, while Isabelle was finishing her round of farewells in her family, and Madame de l’Epinouis was prevented from leaving hers, Father Picard confirmed the date of the foundation:

“It is not advisable to delay the opening of our house. . . You can count on my being there well before the feast of the Immaculate Conception.”⁴⁴⁸

The foundation was publicly announced to the Oblates on November 22.⁴⁴⁹

⁴⁴⁶Document no. DN2–01.

⁴⁴⁷See also no. MA 32, September 1, 1896.

⁴⁴⁸Letter from Father Picard to Isabelle, no. PIA 4634

⁴⁴⁹Father Picard, *Instructions aux Oblates de l’Assomption*, vol. V, no. 44.

Origins of the Assumption Family

The foundation supported by the Oblates

For the foundation on December 8, 1896, Mother Marie of Christ generously offered hospitality to the first Orants at the Oblate novitiate on rue Berton.⁴⁵⁰ She had had installed against the chapel a little house made of wood and metal which looked like a shed on a construction site. Everything there was poor, even miserable.

Father Picard was radiant. After the Gospel, in a short talk to the Oblates and Orants gathered together, he expressed his joy at placing the new work under the protection of the Immaculate Virgin Mary: “*Let us rejoice, sons and daughters of the Assumption...*” Then followed the blessing of the “*small monastery.*” As Mother Isabelle repeated at the end of her life,

“Father Picard was happy! He did not say: this is a wooden house. It will be cold; it will be hot! No, he was happy! It reminded him of Nazareth. . . .”⁴⁵¹

For her part, Mother Isabelle was in tears but had no hesitations:

“The burden is very heavy. It weighs on me, and nothing attracts me except the desire to do the will of God.”

Years earlier, she had asked Father Picard to put someone else in charge of “the work.” It was now time for that to happen, so she completely withdrew under the direction of Mother Marie of the Compassion, considering herself to be a simple novice on the same footing as the other sisters (soon reduced to one!). The definitive departure of Madame de l’Epinois in January 1897 grieved Sister Isabelle who wrote:

“This isolates me morally and puts me more in the forefront. But I feel only one thing, the immense need to remain in the background and to be nothing at all.”⁴⁵²

⁴⁵⁰The Sisters there were known as “the ladies on the corner” because, coming down the hill from Passy, in front of the present Turkish embassy, rue Berton, at the height of the convent, turned toward the Seine which is nearby.

⁴⁵¹“Be holy and joyous,” pp. 4–7, *Instructions aux Oblates*, vol. V, no. 43; testimony of Mother Isabelle at the Chapter of October 4, 1919.

⁴⁵²Letters to Father Picard, nos. P391 and P393.

The Orants of the Assumption

Seemingly, no one was fooled by this. Around her, the Orants were unmistakably seen as “the work of Madame d’Ursel.” The biography of Mother Marie of the Compassion says it clearly:

On December 8, 1896, Father gathered a small group that had been meeting for a long time, a group he had chosen for the dual purpose of contemplation and of uninterrupted prayer for the fruitfulness of his works. The Countess of Ursel, foundress and first Superior General of the Orants was there with her first daughters to be trained in the monastic practices. Father Picard had entrusted this care to Mother Marie of the Compassion.

We can only admire the reciprocal simplicity and humility with which Mother Marie of the Compassion and the future Mother Isabelle accepted and carried out this collaboration in an unflinching mutual esteem, to which our chronicles often bear witness.

It is said that, when the first postulant, Sister Anna, became discouraged, it was in Mother Isabelle that she confided, despite the solicitude of Mother Marie of the Compassion. Admitting that she listened too much to Sister Anna, Mother Isabelle recognized that she felt “*she was something other than a novice.*”⁴⁵³ Nevertheless, Mother Marie of the Compassion was in charge of the organization and of the day-to-day running of the religious life. The Orants will always be very grateful to her for having done this.

Apart from his responsibility as founder, Father Picard had promised that he himself would be the master of novices. Beginning on December 9, by means of a series of sometimes daily instructions, he sought to transmit the spirit of Assumption and regularly assumed the spiritual formation of each sister. His health and his responsibility as superior general eventually obliged him to break with this initial regularity, but he never failed to follow the sisters and to give them a lot of his time whenever he was in Paris or in Livry. However, his absences became even more numerous after the Laws on Exile were enacted in 1901.

The support of the Oblates was constant: the presence and loan of Marie of the Compassion, accommodations in a separate house connected to the chapel and to the community, daily participation in the Liturgy for Mass and vespers, mutual feasts and attentiveness, the possibility of benefiting from the instructions given to the novices, concrete material support with

⁴⁵³Letter no P395, February 14, 1897.

Origins of the Assumption Family

full meals, heating, etc. Hence, lasting ties were established which withstood all trials. However, as we will see, these various supports eventually decreased one after the other.

Formation of the Assumption spirit

The notes of Mother Isabelle's personal retreats, beginning with the one she made in 1875, only two months after her husband's death, until the one of 1904, allow us to follow the evolution of her spiritual life. They also tell us something about her spirituality which was characterized by four main elements: the liturgy, St. Augustine, Father d'Alzon, and St. Ignatius.⁴⁵⁴

Deepening her spiritual roots

Retreats based on the scriptural readings found in the Missal or the Office of the time reveal the real impact the liturgy had on her. There is no lack of Latin quotations in her writings—and even less of a lack in those of Father Picard.

As a young woman, Isabelle had discovered St. Augustine through *The Confessions* which she read in Latin with her husband at the beginning of their marriage. Later on, she became acquainted with the complete works of St. Augustine which she read extensively. Four of her retreats were based on the writings of Augustine: his *Commentaries on the Psalms*, his *Treatise on St. John*, and his *Sermons*. After she left Brussels in 1896, her library, which served the needs of the future Orants, contained not only the complete works of St. Augustine but also numerous commentaries on the Holy Bible, the complete works of St. John Chrysostom, St. Bernard, St. Francis de Sales, St. Chantal, etc.

At that time, the text of the *Exercises* of St. Ignatius was not directly usable, but great Jesuit preachers throughout 19th century gave and published retreats inspired from them. Five of Isabelle's retreats followed themes given by Jesuit Fathers Olivaint and Ravignan.

⁴⁵⁴These sources certainly helped Mother Isabelle to question and structure her own spiritual life, but they never limited her. The interior calls and the demands of a life totally given over to the Lord's action in her will be so compelling that, very often, after quoting a title or extracting a quotation from a given text, Isabelle continued her own personal questioning according to what she perceived was being asked of her.

The Orants of the Assumption

In 1888, Isabelle began meditating on the Retreats of Father d'Alzon, the manuscript copy of which she probably received from Father Picard.⁴⁵⁵ Five of her retreats took up these meditations again in various ways. But there were also other ways in which Mother Isabelle greatly profited from Father d'Alzon's formation.

Disciple of Father d'Alzon

Steeped in the teaching of Father d'Alzon which he made his own, Father Picard remained faithful to the Assumptionist mission just as he had received it from the founder. Regardless of his own expression of it, he enunciated clearly the teaching and mission left by Father d'Alzon. Through the ongoing direction and correspondence Mother Isabelle had with him from 1872 to 1902, as well as through his talks to the Oblates and then to the Orants, his preaching and retreats, and, of course, through the example of his life, she in turn became steeped in d'Alzonian and Assumptionist ideas. The sermons and visits of other Assumptionists also contributed. Later on, when after the death of Father Hyppolyte (June 1905) Father d'Alzon's letters to the Adorers were sent to them, the Orants were very comfortable with the spirit of these texts.

Close to the Religious of the Assumption

At first a member of the Third Order of St. Augustine, then welcomed into the community in Auteuil and especially in Cannes for eight years (one of them in the novitiate), Isabelle received there a solid religious formation. Through a teaching in which the spirit of Father d'Alzon and of Mother Marie-Eugénie could not be separated, d'Alzonian and Assumptionist concepts were passed on to her. Father d'Alzon had given a series of conferences to the novices of the Religious of the Assumption in 1870–71. We do not know if their texts or contents were taken up again during the formation at the novitiate in Cannes, but we note that their spirit was very present in the spirituality of Mother Isabelle.

⁴⁵⁵The first editions date from 1898 and 1908.

Origins of the Assumption Family

With the Oblates

As we have already pointed out, during the crisis of 1886, a third source of formation was added to the two previous ones, viz., the Oblates of Paris who warmly welcomed Madame d'Ursel and whose novitiate welcomed the first Orants at the time of their foundation.

They were instructed at the novitiate with the Oblates and by Oblates (Mother Marie of the Compassion, Mother Marie of Christ. . .)⁴⁵⁶

Mutual contacts and support in the Assumption

In addition to the proximity stemming from living in the same community and to the formation received from these three “elders” in the Assumption, many other contacts and gestures of mutual support marked the history of the Orants of the Assumption. Without going into detail, we cannot overlook them because they greatly contributed to shaping the Assumptionist family spirit that characterized our origins.

With the Little Sisters of the Assumption

In reading the background material, we found a number of indications of the friendly relationship that existed between the Orants and the Little Sisters.

In 1872, when Father Picard had just become her spiritual director, Isabelle still a young girl visited the poor in Grenelle with her cousin and went to the convent of the Little Sisters to make a novena of prayers with them.⁴⁵⁷ Therefore, Isabelle knew the Little Sisters and visited them, though we do not know how often or what impact this had on her. It undoubtedly rekindled her desire to serve the poor . . .

Much later, in October 1901, as she was preparing to move into her first autonomous “small monastery,” the Orant community paid a visit to the Superior General of the Little Sisters who had expressed the desire to meet her. The simple bravery of Mother Marie of the Blessed Sacrament as she faced the developments surrounding the persecution deeply touched Mother Isabelle and her community. This meeting sealed the communion between

⁴⁵⁶Esther de Mauvise, a Religious of the Assumption, was loaned to the Oblates in 1886 and became their Major Superior. Cf. what is said elsewhere about this situation.

⁴⁵⁷Father Pernet's report to the benefactors, January 1, 1873 (orig. ms AC PSA 4A1, no. 16.)

The Orants of the Assumption

the Orants and the Little Sisters.⁴⁵⁸ There must have been other contacts between them because the study of our First Constitutions shows that the latter relied heavily on those of the Little Sisters, repeating exactly the same text in many paragraphs.

In 1918, when the Orant community was decimated by the Spanish Flu, a Little Sister (a nurse) was sent to care for them. The Orants have transmitted to each other the touching memory of this gesture from one generation to the next.

With our three “elders” in the Assumption

After taking a certain distance in 1886 from the “Ladies of the Assumption,” Isabelle nevertheless kept a real affection for them and continued to be grateful. They remained on good terms with each other and there are no traces of any negative criticism between them. After she left Cannes in 1888, Isabelle rarely went back to Auteuil, except with Caroline whom she did not want to cut off from the Assumption. She corresponded especially with Florence Dillon⁴⁵⁹ whom she continued to support with her friendship and to whom she extended financial and spiritual help.

Before our foundation, Mother Isabelle already knew a certain number of priests whom she had met in various apostolates, retreats, etc. In the first years of our foundation, the circle continued to get bigger with those who came to preach to the Orants or who helped with their formation, as well as with those whom she met on rue Berton, in Livry, or on rue François Ier.⁴⁶⁰

Throughout the events of 1899–1901, the Orants, who had become a little more numerous, felt that they were very much part of what was happening to the Church and the Assumption family. Our chronicles of that time reflect the strong links that united us to the entire family as it endured the trials in a missionary spirit. In addition to the doctrinal and spiritual formation given by Father Andre Jaujou and others, the chronicles mention Assumptionists who came to preach sermons or recollections, or who, on home-visits from abroad—Bulgaria, Chile, England, etc.—gave conferences and spoke about

⁴⁵⁸Biography of Mother Isabelle by M. de Dainville p. 251.

⁴⁵⁹The former Mother Marie of the Nativity—See what is said elsewhere about Nativity affair.

⁴⁶⁰Fathers André Jaujou, Léopold Gerbier, Claude Allez, Emmanuel Bailly, Marie-Charles, etc.

Origins of the Assumption Family

their missions. Father Vincent de Paul Bailly⁴⁶¹ frequently visited the Orants.

Starting in 1888, during her stays with the Oblates at Cours-la-Reine, Isabelle became friendly not only with Mother Marie of Christ (Esther de Mauvise) but also with other sisters in the community whose generosity she appreciated. From 1896 to 1901, the first Orants would spend some time during the summer in Clichy-sous-Bois at the Oblates' country residence from where they could easily go to see Father Picard in Livry, as they had previously done in 1895 when they were preparing the foundation.

Isabelle's generosity

Marked as a young girl by the poverty she had experienced at Feugerolles, Isabelle exhibited a concrete and committed love for the poor. Throughout her life, she generously gave them of what she had and of herself. She did this on a rather large scale during her widowhood by making large and numerous donations to a wide variety of persons and works, and by directly visiting and actively helping the poor of the neighborhood or by getting involved in various welfare organizations.

From 1872 until her death in 1921, she was particularly keen on contributing to the work and needs of the Assumptionists. There are many traces of these very diverse donations, the most important ones having been noted in her reports to Father Picard—and later to Father André. For our purposes here, we will mention only the three most significant ones. As one of the pillars of the charity bazaar for vocations, Isabelle prepared this event and actively participated in it every year, sometimes in several places.⁴⁶²

Because the Nativity affair (1886) entailed important financial consequences for the Ladies of the Assumption, Isabelle contributed as much as she could to lighten their burden. In 1882, at the request of Father Picard and in order to save this heritage, she bought the house where Father d'Alzon was born in Le Vigan⁴⁶³ on condition that it not be sold to anyone except to the Assumptionists, which her daughter did in 1933. After the foundation in 1896, Mother Isabelle continued to make numerous and significant donations,

⁴⁶¹He remembered that Isabelle's father had supported the beginnings of the Conferences of Saint Vincent de Paul.

⁴⁶²We have traces of this, at least as of 1886 (letter to Father Picard, P203 P197, etc.)

⁴⁶³Father Picard wrote: "I managed to find someone to buy the house in Le Vigan at a very high price. The person who bought it (Countess of Ursel) is very devoted to us... By encouraging her to buy it, I had in mind..." (Letters nos. PIA 5103 and PIA 1937)

The Orants of the Assumption

but on a smaller scale.

In all this, Isabelle was not simply a charitable person. She got involved personally and gave much more than her surplus. After Father Andre had criticized her, she wrote to him:

God has the treasures of the world at his disposal.—Had I reasoned differently, instead of giving a large amount, I could have simply given a smaller one and donated to others according to circumstances. But I did not look at things in this way, no more than did Father d’Alzon who could have left you some money but who threw both interest and capital to the four winds of charity.⁴⁶⁴

The “small monastery” of the Orants

In 1902, the Orants residing on rue Desbordes-Valmore became autonomous. The ties they had with the Oblates and the support they received from them had been strong over the years. Intense especially until 1905, these ties also continued thereafter. The convent of the Orants was often a place of transit between Belgium and the Near East. Despite the risks of being discovered and denounced, they did not hesitate to welcome with joyful hospitality the Assumptionists who were passing through town, in transit, and especially their Oblate Sisters. Many of the latter sometimes ran into each other in this small house where the monastic rules and schedules were often disrupted by the accommodations and meals that had to be prepared, and by the precautions that had to be taken, often unexpectedly. The Council of the Oblates held its meetings there with superiors from foreign countries. Other Oblates came from “la Bonne Presse” or from their houses in Paris in order to find a place for prayer and silence,⁴⁶⁵ or to meet Father André.

Later on, as our enclosure became more and more strictly established, the ties became less visible but remained good as did the solidarity between us, e.g., at the time of the departure for Lourdes in 1914, of the Spanish

⁴⁶⁴Letter no. AC.22, March 6, 1905.

⁴⁶⁵According to testimony found in *Les Oblates de l’Assomption au service de la presse catholique*, p. 27, it seems that the Oblates might have had another perception of some of these visits to our chapel: “three sisters were appointed each Sunday to help the Orants of the Assumption who were newly founded and who were not numerous enough to assure the adoration of the Blessed Sacrament exposed all day long. This day spent entirely in the chapel and in silence was a burden for me.”

Flu Pandemic in 1918, and of the installation of the Orants in Sceaux in 1920–21. . . .

Born for the Assumption

In 1886, the Orants began to develop their own spirit

Contrary to what she had envisioned previously when she was emerging from the crisis of 1886 which we described earlier, Isabelle decided that she would not join the Ladies of the Assumption. In her mind, this was both painful and certain. But why? Where did this certitude come from? We have very little information about it because she only gave an oral account of it.⁴⁶⁶

To be sure and for a long time, Isabelle really thought of joining the Ladies of the Assumption. Then finally, almost by “surprise,” she decided that her path was not there. When she spoke about it, she justified her decision by the circumstances she had encountered.⁴⁶⁷ As we explained, these circumstances included the illness of Caroline, followed by Isabelle’s rebellion over the extension of her vow of obedience to include Caroline’s education; the Nativity affair and its consequent disenchantment with religious life; and the crisis between the Ladies of the Assumption and Father Picard which ended with the withdrawal of the person in whose hands she had made a vow. She came out of these trials with the conviction that she should *become a prayerful soul “purified by the fire of atonement.”* But where and how?

I understand that it is very good for me to be detached from everything and to attach myself only to the Master who will do with me as he pleases. I express only one thought at Communion: *My God I come to obey.*⁴⁶⁸

While Isabelle placed herself entirely in God’s hands, he used the circumstances she referred to in order to make her understand something which she was not ready to accept spontaneously. In fact, in the same letter of May

⁴⁶⁶The letter she claims to have written to Mother Marie-Eugénie about this has not been found.

⁴⁶⁷See, for example, the correction of the chronicles, nos. DN 10–12 of 1919 in which she stated that “it was due to circumstances” that she did not join the Ladies of the Assumption

⁴⁶⁸Letter to Father Picard. May 2, 1886, no. P2I0.

The Orants of the Assumption

2, 1886, Mother Isabelle said to Father Picard that she regretted the idea of leaving Auteuil, which she was about to do: “*How dreadful it would be!*” She then mentioned the qualities of the Ladies of the Assumption beneath which she also saw dangers he could spare them: that they not become women who are more gracious than religious, practicing a piety that is too sugary and a poverty that is not always lived out . . .

From this we can conclude that she wanted something poorer and more entirely given to God. Although she had not yet formulated anything, this already foreshadowed the poor and hidden life completely devoted to atonement and self-abasement toward which she was moving. Though she was not yet aware of it, a spirit proper to the future Orants was already taking shape, as she recaptured aspects of the vocation she felt as a young girl:

“to belong entirely to Our Lord. The more I will belong to God, the more I will be completely given over to him, and the happier I will be.”

But, in all of this, where was her “interest in the poor”?⁴⁶⁹

I was in a very painful state of ignorance about God’s will for me when, suddenly, Our Lord made me understand that he destined me for a new work. He told me that he would give me a place, **a mission in the Church**. [...] He added that there is no life more exposed to suffering, humiliation, etc. than that of a foundress, which he seemed to be talking about. This was probably nothing more than an illusion. . .⁴⁷⁰

She had a premonition that a foundation would be made, but she did not see herself as its foundress, nor did she talk about it or outline its main features until 1887–88.⁴⁷¹ What she had in mind was a contemplative order centered on Jesus Christ, who is the life and strength of all undertakings, and focused first of all on prayer, and secondarily on religious studies. The Sisters would be apostles by their prayer and also, to a lesser degree, by their apostolate on the outside . . . She added:

⁴⁶⁹Letter to Father Picard in 1872, no. P 003.

⁴⁷⁰Correction of the Chronicles no. DN12–10 and letter P237.

⁴⁷¹*Premières Vues*, no. DN1 – Book 1.

Origins of the Assumption Family

“I did not insist enough on the confraternity of works. The works of the Fathers must be reflected in our prayer and, when it becomes possible, in the work of the Sisters.”

For his part, as we have seen, Father Picard accompanied and welcomed Isabelle’s personal evolution and the beginning of a project which, he said, corresponded totally to what he had in mind. He did not put his own project in writing, but he clearly wanted to support the Assumptionists by means of an apostolate of prayer for its members and their works, in other words, a contemplative foundation within the Assumption family.

However, almost ten years of caring for the needs of young Caroline still kept Mother Isabelle from pursuing some type of project of religious life. A spiritual deepening and personal resistances complicated matters, but she remarked:

“Despite whatever doubts and fears I had, I was never able to seriously look for a path that was not new, for one that did not yet exist.”⁴⁷²

Evolution in her thinking

Over the years, until 1912 and even later, there was an evolution in the way Mother Isabelle envisioned the Orants. She was aware of it and was not concerned about it because she thought it was normal to only progressively understand and adjust to the ways of God. Besides, Father Picard would say:

A work is never completely done in the way it was originally conceived. And this is understandable because, after God’s real but rapid call, creatures necessarily throw in their own thinking and imagination. The human mind naturally wants to scrutinize the word of God to find out exactly what it means. This is not forbidden, quite to the contrary. But what we think is not always what God wants. Very often, it is only little by little that he manifests his will through human circumstances, personal reflection, the wisdom of spiritual direction, the faithfulness of souls, and the type of vocations⁴⁷³

⁴⁷²Correction of the Chronicles, no. DN12–10

⁴⁷³Correction of the Chronicles, nos. DN12–10, June 7, 1919 and DNI, Book I.

The Orants of the Assumption

On May 5, 1905, during a council meeting with her first two daughters, Mother Isabelle told them that,

“contrary to what she had planned at the beginning of the foundation, the Good Lord brought [them] very humble vocations that had neither material resources nor talents,”

and she asked them whether they would accept the new candidate:

Personally, she added, I do not consider the work of the Orants to be mine; it belongs to God. I had not foreseen it in the way he is shaping it, but I am letting him do as he wishes, and I am trying to respond to his desires as he manifests them to me on a daily basis. It seems as though God wants us to be a very poor and humble congregation, completely hidden from the eyes of the world.

Founding intuitions: three basic characteristics⁴⁷⁴

In spite of the evolution that took place, three basic characteristics, all of them d’Alzonian in tone, structure us even today: gift-of-self through adoration and prayer, transmission of spiritual paths, and presence to the materially and spiritually poor.

Gift-of-self and adoration

The ideal of our Christocentric spirituality is the prayer of adoration accompanied by a generous offering of self to God and by a love of the Church. This has been the central point of our life throughout the years.

Gift-of-self, generosity, love of Christ, love of the Church. . . these are part and parcel of Assumptionist spirituality. In fact, in Father d’Alzon’s footsteps, Mother Isabelle understood adoration as the recognition of the rights of God and of our nothingness before him. As a result of the many family and moral trials she went through, she easily fell into a certain “dolorism,” the then-current theory about the usefulness, need and excellence of pain.

⁴⁷⁴Concerning the teaching of Father Picard in his Instructions to the Orants, we follow here the synthesis given by Marcel Neusch, AA, in his introduction to *Soyez saintes et joyeuses*, Congregation of the Orants of the Assumption, Archive collection, no I.

Origins of the Assumption Family

Regardless, the self-giving, reparation, atonement, and self-effacement which she talked about were themes that closely resembled Father d'Alzon's own idea of adoration. This life of adoration was clearly offered for the Assumptionists and their works. It was not meant to remain in a chapel but to move beyond it into the middle of the Church in a spirit of love for this Church whose head is Jesus Christ.

In his instructions which were often practical, Father Picard underlined that, in order to focus her life on Christ, an Orant had to look for solitude and silence. The Eucharist was one of those privileged moments because

“it is the center toward which everything converges in the Church.”

In the same way, time spent before the tabernacle must be encouraged because “it is there that one learns how to become real daughters of prayer.”

Constantly called upon because of the events that were taking place, he underlined the importance, urgency, and power of prayer with a conviction that he himself drew from prayer. How to pray? He did not suggest any particular method, but he reminded people of the attitude that prayer requires: perseverance, humility, fervor, a spirit of faith, etc.

On several occasions, Father Picard reminded others of the Assumptionist motto: *Adveniat Regnum Tuum*.

“We exist only to obtain the extension of his Kingdom.”

The life of an Orant was inconceivable if it did not have an apostolic dimension:

“In religious life, you must be apostles, that is to say, you must make Jesus Christ known . . .”

By making the apostolate part of our lives, we avoid self-centeredness in our prayer:

“I don't like devotions that turn souls in upon themselves. . . Forget yourselves Don't lose your time thinking about yourselves”

Prayer is where one develops an apostolic soul:

The Orants of the Assumption

“Pray, recollect yourselves, humbly prepare yourselves for the apostolate to which you might be called later on . . .” Be apostles and avoid turning in upon ourselves: for our two founders, those were the indispensable corollaries of adoration.

To be an apostle

Mother Isabelle also wanted her sisters to be apostles,

“apostles especially by their prayer, as understood by St. Theresa, and apostles by their external work, but these external works will be limited. . . so that prayer always remains their first work.”⁴⁷⁵

Both emphasized liturgical prayer, the prayer of the Church without any marginal devotions, which Mother Isabelle particularly wanted to share with others. To encourage prayer and to transmit the faith and the ways of the spiritual life were yearnings she passed on to the Orants, knowing full well that these aspects made the contemplative life more difficult:

The other day I attended Mass at the Poor Clares. Communion was brought to them behind the altar. I thought we should practice this same type of immolation, but with the following difference which would make it more difficult. In our case, the immolation would not take place behind the altar or in the oblivion of a hidden life. Quite to the contrary, it would be carried out with the desire to implant in the souls of the world the love of the hidden life, of mortification, and of the cross.⁴⁷⁶

When Mother Isabelle “*expressed the idea of a secondary work of charity to be joined to our contemplative life,*” Father Picard did not exclude it for “*later on*” but privileged the time of the novitiate and the initial formation, after which some of the sisters could exercise an apostolate. At any rate, and especially during this initial period, it was prayer itself that had to be apostolic. Since the purpose of the apostolate was “*to bring souls to Christ,*” this had to be done first of all by prayer. In all of his talks, Father Picard entrusted to the Orants the major intentions of the Church, including those of the Assumptionists.

⁴⁷⁵12 Premieres Vues, no 1)N I, Book I. M Letter no P293, May 14, 1888

⁴⁷⁶Letter no. P293, May 14, 1888.

Poverty without turning in on oneself

Sustained by a great trust in divine Providence, the poor and simple life lived by Father Picard was joyful and communicative. He bequeathed this to the Orants.

Isabelle always exhibited a concrete and committed love for the poor. Since 1886, she thought that religious should live like servants and be poor. Combining a search for personal poverty and humility with a concrete communion with the poor characterizes our life.

The decision not to have lay sisters corresponded to this desire for a humble and poor religious life and, at the same time, concretely put the community in communion with the lifestyle of simple people. Father André Jaujou underlined this particularity of the Orants' contemplative life.⁴⁷⁷ This same concern for the poor was possibly what prompted Mother Isabelle to put so few restrictions on accepting candidates who had no money and little personality.

Besides her concern for the poor, Mother Isabelle like Father Picard tried to avoid favoring a contemplative life that fostered egoism, sought comfort, and encouraged a turning in on oneself. From the beginning, she foresaw a secondary work that permitted us, according to circumstances and needs, to help the poor and to respond, according to our possibilities, to certain social or pastoral needs that others could not meet:

“I ask you to study so that, later on, you will be able to enlighten souls with doctrine.”

What was “The Assumption” for our Founders?

When Mother Isabelle or Father Picard spoke of the Assumption in the context of the foundation and of the life of the Orants, they presented it as a family and a spirit.

A family

I am preparing a small foundation (...) I believe that God wants Assumption to grow and that, after including persons who edu-

⁴⁷⁷From the sermons he preached during his first retreat to the Orants in 1902.

The Orants of the Assumption

cate the rich, care for the poor, and become missionaries, it is time that it include some who dedicate themselves to prayer and study. In this way, we can support each other (...).⁴⁷⁸

It was with these words that Father Picard announced our foundation and, as we have already described, it is in this way that we have lived, supporting each other.

Given the Assumption context in which the Orants were born as well as the mission they received, it is not surprising that, in the footsteps of Mother Isabelle, they are very conscious of the fact that the Assumption is a family.

From the very beginning of the “work” in 1887, Mother Isabelle wanted it to be the contemplative branch of the Assumptionists. She saw it as having very strong ties to them, almost as a dependency. It was thus that in 1906, when the First Constitutions were being drawn up, she foresaw:

Since the purpose of the Orants of the Assumption is to pray for the works of the Assumptionists and the sanctification of their members, it is important that the Sisters remain imbued with the spirit of their founder and united under the direction of the Father of their religious family. For that reason: for serious matters, the Superior General of the Orants is to consult with the Superior General of the Augustinians of the Assumption.⁴⁷⁹

The archbishop of Paris did not accept this provision, which Mother Isabelle regretted more than once.

A spirit

In the talks he gave to the Orants during the first months following the foundation,⁴⁸⁰ Father Picard chose to comment first on the motto *Adveniat regnum tuum*, then on all of Part 1 of Father d’Alzon’s Directory. In these pages we discover what the Assumptionist spirit meant for Father Picard and, at the same time, how he applied it to the Orants.

⁴⁷⁸Announcement made during a lecture to the Oblates of Cours-la-Reine on November 22, 1896.

⁴⁷⁹Draft of the First Constitutions of the Orants of the Assumption, 1906, Rook 1. p 4, no D000I2 on government.

⁴⁸⁰December 9. 1896 to June 14, 1897.

Origins of the Assumption Family

His comments were exhortations rather than an organized systematic teaching, but their spirituality focused on a few main points: Jesus Christ at the center, prayer, the apostolate, formation, and a certain number of Assumptionist traits such as courage, broadmindedness, simplicity (poor life and moderate asceticism), joy and a spirit of faith which seems to be the dominant characteristic of the “spirit of the Orants.”

Besides underlining the standard themes of the time (mortification, atonement, etc.), Father Picard exhorted the Sisters to live an intense faith totally dedicated to the service of the Kingdom. In keeping with the longstanding Assumptionist tradition, he directed their spirituality toward its one and only center, Christ: at the center of an Orant’s life, prayer nourished with the Word of God; at the heart of her prayer, an encounter with Jesus; in this encounter, a single preoccupation: the coming of the Kingdom. Such a spirituality leads to a permanent decentering of oneself.⁴⁸¹

“*The last to arrive of the large Assumption family,*” the Orants were formed and encouraged by Mother Isabelle to pray and adore for all the works and members “of the family.” For them, the Fathers are the pillars inasmuch as they are the direct heirs of Father d’Alzon’s spirituality. Accordingly, she referred to “the doctrine of our Fathers” and never tired of coming back to the texts of the big retreat” and especially of Father d’Alzon’s Directory which she commented to the Sisters during the retreat of 1904 and at her chapters. She mentioned her gratitude to the Ladies of the Assumption for having trained her in religious life and in the spirit of Father d’Alzon, but she did not quote Mother Marie-Eugénie. For her, the spirit of Assumption was clearly the spirit given by Father d’Alzon, which Father Picard inherited, then by Father Emmanuel Bailly and the elders (Fathers Saugrain, Vincent de Paul, etc.), and which is lived by the family in brotherly friendship and mutual support, according to the complementary nature of each one’s mission and of their different charisms.

Sister Anne Huyghebaert
Orant of the Assumption

62, rue de Normandie
1081 Brussels

⁴⁸¹According to a study by Marcel Neusch, A.A., in his introduction to the edition of these Instructions, *Soyez saintes et joyeuses*, Congregation of the Orants of the Assumption, Archive collection, no. 1.

The Orants of the Assumption

Belgium

Origins of the Assumption Family

Discussion

Answers to the Questions

How did Father Pernet, the Founder of the Little Sisters of the Assumption, relate to his own Congregation?

Gisele Marchand, L.S.A.: Father Pernet was the only Founder who was not a superior.

- What was his situation in terms of obedience?

From 1865 to 1899, he was an active member of his Congregation and participated in all of its General Chapters. In 1898, he was elected Assistant General.

He held dearly to the relation of the Little Sisters of the Assumption with the Assumptionists. At the same time, he interiorized the grace he received as a Founder. To achieve “the difficult balance between the initiative he took as a Founder and his dependence as a Religious, he opted in favor of obedience” (*Such was his soul* p. 51).

As a Founder, he conducted his affairs by seeking the opinion of his Superior, and he collaborated with the two Superiors General of the Sisters without substituting himself for them. He never interposed himself between the Sisters and their Superiors. With them, he studied the situation, for example the foundation of the Fraternity of Our Lady of Salvation, but always in obedience. His local Superior was kept up to date and, through him, his Superior General. His letters testify to the fact that he was just as obedient with Father Picard as he had been with Father d’Alzon.

For example, the foundation in New York City in 1891. Father Picard wanted to found a community of priests at the same time

Origins of the Assumption Family

as a community of Little Sisters of the Assumption. The archbishop did not want the priests. Finally, after a long and difficult dialogue, Father Brun went to become the chaplain of the Little Sisters.

- Father Pernet's 14 years of suffering: 1850–1864

It was indeed a very important period in father Pernet's life, a period during which he matured psychologically and spiritually.

On December 25, 1850, he pronounced his first vows and was ordained a priest on April 3, 1858 by Bishop Nanquette,⁴⁸² Bishop of Le Mans.

From 1849 to 1863, he was involved in teaching. He admitted himself that "he had to suffer, indeed severely, for 14 years, in order to be sure of what God wanted of him." Lacking in self-confidence, lively, and impressionable, he had to master his sensitivity. He was a modest man, more of a profound thinker than a brilliant one. He would reflect, assimilate, and interiorize as he adjusted to life, responding in faith under the guidance of Father d'Alzon.

Though his health was precarious, he spared nothing to live the life of the community. During this period, he was grappling with reality and facing problems in his work as treasurer of the college, in his duties as an educator, for which he thought he was not suited, and in his family life. He was really walking in darkness. When his mother who supported the family fell sick, misery fell upon the Pernetes. In 1856, he wondered if he should leave religious life in order to help his family. *47 am walking in deep darkness which is making me lose my common sense.*" He did not give up prayer and asked his brothers for help. He also noted changes in himself and asked for the grace of conversion. All of this is what gave Father Pernet the heart of a poor man. He experienced the tenderness and mercy of Christ. At the same time, he was cleansed and purified by events. He was recognized as Venerable on May 14, 1983.

⁴⁸²Bishop Jean-Jacques Nanquette (1807–1861), bishop of Le Mans from 1855 to 1861, a friend of the Religious of the Assumption and of Father d'Alzon.

The community in Cannes and its Superior with respect to the history of the Orants and Father Picard.

Thérèse-Maylis Toujouse, R.A.: Cannes was founded in 1879. The Superior was Mother Marie of the Nativity, Florence Dillon.

She was the one around whom revolved the so-called “Nativity affair.” In Cannes, there was a school and a boarding house for women, among whom was an Armenian, Marie de Savalan, age 27, who came from a very complicated family. Her mother had said that she was capable of deceiving the devil himself! This young woman had been led from heresy to the faith by Mother Marie of the Nativity. At one point, Marie de Savalan spoke about a vocation, on condition that she could always stay with Mother Marie of the Nativity. Their attachment to each other was mutual.

At the same time, Madame d’Ursel, who would visit Cannes for long periods of time with her granddaughter, participated in the life of the novitiate. She was a tertiary. Father Picard, Superior General of the Assumptionists since 1880, was recuperating there from a leg injury. At that time, he was the spiritual director of Mother Marie of the Nativity.

On October 16, 1885, Mother Marie of the Nativity left the Assumption convent in Cannes, under the pretext that she was going to rest in Auteuil. In fact, she had left with Marie de Savalan. In the days that followed, Mother Marie-Eugénie noticed letters arriving for Mother Marie of the Nativity. Some time later, she received letters from Mother Marie of the Nativity who now went by the name of Florence. Florence was in Belgium. She begged Mother Marie-Eugénie to come and fetch her. She returned to Auteuil at the end of October. Mother Marie-Eugénie asked her to be her secretary. During the month of November, Mother Marie of the Nativity left a second time, undoubtedly to rejoin Marie. 1885 was the period during which the Congregation was questioning itself about its government and direction by the Assumptionists. Father Picard had a strong tendency to govern.

Faced with these difficulties with the Assumptionists and with Mother Marie of the Nativity, Marie-Eugénie fell sick. She went to Cannes to rest. Mother Marie of the Nativity was left in the care of Mother Marie of Christ (in the Monastery) in Auteuil and of Mother Louise-Eugénie, Superior of the Little Convent. Efforts were made to keep peace and

Origins of the Assumption Family

remain discrete. Marie de Savalan was often there and created dramatic scene*. Nearly every day, she sent letters to Marie-Eugénie.

Florence began speaking of leaving the Congregation in December 1885. Father Picard was the confessor of the community, and Bishop d'Hulst was the Ecclesiastical Superior. On December 28, 1885, Florence finally decided to leave. On the doorstep, Mother Louise-Eugénie gave her, with the consent of the Ecclesiastical Superior, the letters from Marie de Savalan which she had kept until then on orders from Father Picard. It must be said that in the Rule of Saint Augustine, in the chapter on obedience, it is said: *"They shall obey their Superior as a mother, and even more their Superior General who has care of you all"* (women's translation published by the Sisters of the Good Shepherd). In the men's translation, it is said: *"They shall obey the Superior as a father, and even more the priest."* According to this translation, it was clear to Father Picard that Mother Louise Marie had disobeyed the Priest. Father Picard imposed an interdict on the Little Convent, which meant removing the Blessed Sacrament. The interdict remained for two months. In Cannes, Mother Marie-Eugénie suffered from all of this. Father Picard did not blame Marie-Eugénie personally, but rather the spirit of the Congregation "which no longer exists in Auteuil."

The problem of relations and of government became so acute that Marie-Eugénie thought that she should convoke a special General Chapter to discuss the question of government and to study the Congregation's relations with the Assumptionists. The conclusion: most of the Congregation opted for the Superior General of the Sisters; only a small number opted for the Assumptionists. Father Picard was hurt. The suffering lasted a long time on both sides. Marie-Eugénie begged him to return as confessor. He refused. She went to speak to him at François Ier.

After that, Florence lived foolishly for 20 years: Cote d'Azur, etc. Madame d'Ursel helped to defray her expenses.

Previously, Florence had also been the Superior of Ramsgate in England. It was in England that she entered the Sisters of the Good Shepherd around 1906. She lived there for 26 years. She died returning from communion in April 1932. When she made perpetual profession in this Congregation, she asked for the parchment of her first vows in order

Discussion

to renew her offering to the Lord after her long break. Accounts of her speak about “a miracle of grace.” An article bearing that title was written about her by Sister Jeanne-Marie, my predecessor as archivist.

Clare-Teresa Tjader, R.A.: On the subject of the letters and the obedience due a confessor, the authorities consulted did not support Father Picard. The Nuncio, who had ties with the family of Mother Louise-Eugénie, intervened. This put Mother Marie-Eugénie in a bind because she could not give in to Father Picard who wanted Louise-Eugénie to leave Auteuil.

Another subject of disagreement between Mother Marie-Eugénie and Father Picard was the refusal of Mother Marie-Eugénie (her Council) to appoint Mother Marie of the Nativity as Mistress of Novices.

Concerning the vocation of Mother Isabelle, it was influenced by both the Nativity Affair and Father Picard’s plans for Madame d’Ursel.⁴⁸³

Marie-Jacques Sevenet, Or.A.: The Orants know nothing about Father Picard’s plans for Madame d’Ursel in 1882. We will need to re-examine this question in light of the documents we have just received.

From our point-of-view, if Mother Isabelle decided not to enter the Religious of the Assumption, it was the result of a personal evolution based on her own re-thinking of the education of her daughter, which was being unduly influenced by the strong dominating friendship of Mother Marie of the Nativity (Florence Dillon), as well as by her vow of obedience to Father Picard which, she realized, had been broadened to include even the education of her daughter. It was a very complex situation in which a number of factors came into play that cannot be summarized here. In the end, she began thinking of taking another direction in keeping with the ideas of reparation and of a greater presence to the poor. In 1881, at Fourviere, she heard: “I need you for something big . . .” This is what we consider to be her first call to found the Congregation.

I also want to call attention to the fact that Isabelle, returning to Cannes after 1885, always stopped in Auteuil to see Marie-Eugénie and

⁴⁸³Two unknown letters from Mother Marie of the Nativity were given to the OranM of the Assumption during the present colloquium. Extracts can be found in the Annex to the talk given by Marie-Jacques Scvcnct and Anne Huyghebaert, Or. A.

Origins of the Assumption Family

always faithfully helped her and prayed for her during the difficulties and episodes concerning Florence. I also want to underline Father Picard's discretion when he spoke to Isabelle about the difficulties he was having as well as his wisdom regarding all that was happening.

Anne Huyghebaert, Or.A.: Father Picard's autocratic attitude was tied to his desire to protect the "rights of God" in all things. For him, it was therefore a matter of conscience.

In one of her letters to Father Picard, Isabelle says that she wrote to Mother Marie-Eugénie telling her of her final decision not to enter the Congregation of the Religious, but this letter has not been found. She wanted something that would allow her to make a greater gift of herself and something poorer.

The history of Cape Town, South Africa The first division in the history of the Assumption

Thérèse-Maylis Toujouse, R.A.: The Religious of the Assumption were founded in 1839. In 1848, they received a first request to establish a mission in China. They could not accept despite their desire inspired by their "fourth vow." In 1849, Bishop Devereux, Apostolic Vicar in South Africa, requested a foundation in Cape Town. He asked for three Sisters to direct a small school and to teach catechetics. The project was accepted after much deliberation and with enthusiasm "because of the fourth vow." The bishop of Paris said that it was folly. At the time, the Congregation comprised only about twenty Sisters, most of whom were novices. Two of them, in their eagerness, managed to convince the bishop to let them go.

In August 1849, the first four missionaries left with their Superior, Marie-Gertrude. Before leaving, they made the fourth vow. It was well understood that there would be a contract between the bishop and the Congregation regarding a school, the number of Sisters, respect for the Rule, and no other apostolates.

The Sisters left with the full assurance that the bishop would never separate the Sisters from their Motherhouse. If there were permissions to be granted, given the slowness of the mail, the Superior could request them from the bishop and then inform Marie-Eugénie.

Discussion

Added to this small group were two young Irish Sisters and a person from the Third Order, the bishop's sister. The voyage was difficult. When they arrived in Africa, there was a war going on: battles, famine, dangers, etc. The Sisters were called upon to leave the convent more often than had been foreseen, to visit families, to receive many people in the house and in particular the bishop, which was something unheard of. Apparently, from the very beginning, the bishop wanted more than what he had asked for. The Sisters were confronted with a difficult situation. They would go out and not recite the Office. Later on, they would live like at Chaillot, but this was much later, much later. . . . The bishop requested more Sisters and more money. When he was displeased with the Sisters, he would send them back and ask for others. Marie-Eugénie felt that those whom he requested were not ready to go, which was a matter of conscience for her. Two groups left Cape Town. Those rejected by the bishop were happy to come back to Auteuil. It would seem that both the bishop and Sister Gertrude were prompted by their apostolic zeal.

But if, from the outset, the Sisters were living something other than our Constitutions, this was another congregation.

The bishop did not have enough money. Marie-Eugénie sent him some, but the ship sank en route. But in Cape Town they concluded that she was not interested in the mission. For all practical purposes, the bishop had founded a new group with Irish Sisters whom he recruited on the spot.

Upon the suggestion of the bishop of Paris, Marie-Eugénie sent in 1852 a very moving letter to Sister Gertrude recalling her to Chaillot in the name of obedience. So that the mission would not be abandoned, Marie-Eugénie offered "to pay the passage of an equal number of Sisters of another Order whose vocation it is to do all the works for which you have been successively responsible;¹

Sister Gertrude did not answer and did not return. A few months later, she sent a letter addressed to Madame the Superior and to the bishop of Paris. She wanted to enter a "congregation that Bishop Devereux was thinking of founding." There remained with Sister Gertrude another Sister who had not understood the implications of what was happening, Sister Marie-Marthe. Later on, this Sister realized the situation and

Origins of the Assumption Family

came back under the name of Anna-Marta. Throughout the life of Marie-Eugénie, attempts at rapprochement were made.

The community in Cape Town continued to live under the name of the Religious of the Assumption with the same but modified Rule. In 1893, after Sister Gertrude had been Superior since 1849, a Chapter was held at the request of the Church. Sister Catherine Quirck was elected to replace Sister Gertrude. This was dramatic for Sister Gertrude. In 1896, Sister Catherine asked to come to Auteuil to learn about the original Congregation. Sister Gertrude accompanied her. . . . Sister Catherine (Cape Town's second Superior General) met Mother Marie-Celestine, the vicar of Mother Marie-Eugénie. She discovered the Congregation of the Religious of the Assumption and remained there as a novice. Sister Gertrude went back alone as a missionary, but the style of life begun in Cape Town was not that of the very recent foundation of the Religious of the Assumption.

In 1932–34, the Cape Town Congregation, present also in Ireland, changed its name and its Constitutions. It became the Missionary Sisters of the Assumption. Sister Marie-Philip, the former Superior General of these Sisters, came twice to Auteuil in 1982 to study the original documents. We have very good relations with the Missionary Sisters of the Assumption. We were the first Congregation to go to South Africa.

Disagreements and Difficulties at the Beginning

Problems of Government and of Relations between the Religious of the Assumption and the other Congregations of the Assumption

CLARE-TERESA TJADER

The Constitutions of the Religious of the Assumption

From the beginning, the government of the Congregation was well established in the mind of Mother Marie-Eugénie and the first Sisters. It was expressed in a series of documents in which Mother Marie-Eugénie sought the official establishment and approval of the Institute: the Constitutions of 1840, 1844, the Statutes of 1854, the Constitutions of 1866 and of 1888. The Constitutions of 1888 marked the end of this search and the definitive approval of the Congregation by Rome.

On March 16, 1840, the Sisters received permission from Bishop Affre to follow the Constitutions, copied from those of the Visitation, *ad experimentum*. In Chapter 21 of this document it is said:

Because the Congregation of the Sisters of the Assumption has as its aim to educate young girls wherever Divine Providence will deign to favor the setting up of a school, it is under the

Origins of the Assumption Family

immediate authority of a Superior General. So that all may tend towards perfect unity, the members of this little community must be attached to a common center, which will become their soul, heart and head.⁴⁸⁴

The Superior General was elected by all the Professed Sisters and could be re-elected indefinitely. She chose her councilors who needed the approval of two-thirds of the electors.

The Superior shall consult her council about all the important affairs of the Congregation, both spiritual and temporal, and shall listen to their advice with much deference and graciousness, taking decisions in accord with the majority of her council. However, she may postpone a vote in order to give the councilors enough time to consult the Spirit of God.⁴⁸⁵

This spirit and this system concerning the Superior General and her Council remained in force in all the successive Constitutions, with only minor changes in order to be more in line with the thinking of the Vatican⁴⁸⁶ and to take account of the growing number of Sisters. The Sisters lived under this regime for more than 30 years.

There was, however, a detail in the Constitutions of 1840 which was not repeated in later Constitutions:

“As long as the Founder (Father Combalot) is alive, he shall be a member of the General Council and shall have a vote.”⁴⁸⁷

There was also a remark written in the margin of a draft copy in the handwriting of Mother Marie-Eugénie on the subject of the chaplain. She was 25 years old and had only a few years experience!

I would like to be able to dispense with a titular chaplain, as this rule demands. I can only see very serious disadvantages stemming

⁴⁸⁴*Foundation Texts, Religious of the Assumption*, Rome, 1991, p. 105.

⁴⁸⁵Idem, p. 109.

⁴⁸⁶So as not to weigh down the text, we do not quote changes which concerned the mandate of the Superior General, the list of decisions which required the vote of the council, and the age and years of profession of the Superior General and her councilors.

⁴⁸⁷*Foundation Texts*, op. cit. p. 109.

Problems of Government and of Relations between the Religious of the Assumption and the other Congregations of the Assumption

from their relationships with the religious houses. Some convents here have only a non-resident chaplain and confessor. I prefer this arrangement which keeps both of them further away from the house and leaves the sisters freer to change them.⁴⁸⁸

Here I must underline the immense prestige which Mother Foundress had in her Congregation from the beginning. Intellectually, she was considered exceptionally gifted for education and business matters of all kinds. She had a strong personality and was universally liked for her spirituality as well as for her great goodness. Her human and spiritual stature would only grow with the passage of time. One can well imagine that for these reasons the Sisters bowed readily before her opinions and directives.

For the Constitutions of 1844, Marie-Eugénie had recourse to Father d'Alzon.⁴⁸⁹ The correspondence bears witness to this. He had great experience because of his role as Vicar General of the Diocese of Nîmes and his connections with all the congregations of the Diocese. Marie-Eugénie consulted him, but it was she, along with her Sisters, who composed the Rule and who always had the last word. No letter attests that the Father wrote or edited any part whatsoever of the Constitutions of the Religious.⁴⁹⁰ For twenty years, Father d'Alzon did not intervene in the decision-making and showed no desire for power over the Congregation, quite to the contrary.

Father d'Alzon was the director and spiritual father of Marie-Eugénie. In 1845, he allowed Mother Marie-Eugénie to make a vow of obedience to him. And in 1846,⁴⁹¹ he in turn made a vow to work for the perfection of his spiritual daughter. He seems to have had a lot of influence over Marie-Eugénie, and she cultivated an attitude of humility and respect towards him, always taking his opinions seriously and trying to make them her own. The two Founders were always frank and open with each other. But there was always a distinction between the obedience due to Father regarding matters that pertained to her personal life, and her freedom regarding all that concerned

⁴⁸⁸Ibid, p. 127.

⁴⁸⁹If you are my father, you have to help me in the things which are for the service of God. And before presenting our rule for approval, I will need someone for a lot of problems" (Letter to Father d'Alzon. September 18, 1842). Marie-Eugenic had not seen Father d'Alzon since 1838, but a correspondence was already under way. She will see him again in 1843.

⁴⁹⁰See the handwritten copy of the Constitutions in the Assumptionist Archives in Rome, with notes and parallel remarks.

⁴⁹¹A vow that was renewed formally and definitively in 1854.

Origins of the Assumption Family

the Congregation. Indeed, it is to Father d'Alzon that the sisters owed much of their freedom. For years on end, he refused all authority over the Religious and preferred to "remain friends."⁴⁹²

In 1858, strongly encouraged by Father d'Alzon, Marie-Eugénie agreed to be elected Superior General for life, as Foundress. They did not see the great risk that this posed and were only thinking of assuring the spirit of the Order.

In the successive drafts of the Constitutions, the authority of the Superior General became more strongly accentuated. The Congregation was governed by a Superior General aided by a Council. "All authority in the Congregation resides in the Superior General from whom derives the authority of the other superiors" (1866). Assistants and Councilors were elected by a simple majority of vote*. This phrase remained unchanged in the Constitutions of 1888 which received Rome's definitive approval.⁴⁹³

Every congregation of women was under the jurisdiction of ecclesiastical superiors: the Ordinary of the place and the person more particularly responsible for religious sisters, and, of course, the Pope and the Roman authorities. In speaking about them, Marie-Eugénie could not have been clearer. The following quotation is certainly copied from other Constitutions:

Since their Lordships the Bishops are the Superiors of the different houses established in their dioceses, the Superior General will treat them with all the respect and veneration she must have for their high dignity, and she will see to it that no one is found wanting in giving them the respect, veneration and submission which is due to them.⁴⁹⁴

These Superiors were to be the cause of many difficulties, especially concerning the approval of the rules and customs. One way of escaping them was to come under a congregation of men. But subsequent history proved that there was no easy and problem-free solution.

A successful government is largely a question of clarity about roles and powers, but still more important are the relationships. Everyone knows that the relations between Mother Marie-Eugénie and Father d'Alzon were characterized by a deep understanding coupled with an equally great affection

⁴⁹²Cf. B.2903, October 14, 1851, B. 5624, May 11, 1879.

⁴⁹³*Foundation Texts*, op. cit. p. 271.

⁴⁹⁴*Ibid.* p. 223.

Problems of Government and of Relations between the Religious of the Assumption and the other Congregations of the Assumption

and mutual esteem. There were, nevertheless, moments of deep crisis and misunderstanding⁴⁹⁵ and, at the same time, a desire to be in communion with one another.

Mother Marie-Eugénie, anxious and hypersensitive by temperament, needed for a long while to be calmed and reassured by Father d'Alzon. During her years of insecurity and interior crisis, she really was his daughter. By the age of forty, however, Marie-Eugénie had overcome these psychological problems and was now fully in control of herself. It was noted that, in turn, she now became a mother to Emmanuel d'Alzon, particularly after his illness in 1854. She took a keen interest in the material affairs of Father d'Alzon and shared his pains as well as his joys. After a few years, about 1861, they wrote less to each other and their letters were full of business matters. Each of them was taken up with their respective Congregation and its concerns. They shared the latter and helped one another.

Throughout their correspondence, the history of the external and internal life of the Religious and of the Assumptionists emerges. Everything is there: money matters, purchases and constructions, the spiritual health of communities and individuals, and relations with bishops and other authorities. The founders advised one another and mutually rendered each other a thousand services. Father d'Alzon was the director of many of the sisters. Oftentimes, letters intended for one or another of the Sisters or for Father d'Alzon passed through his hands or those of Mother Marie-Eugénie. Father d'Alzon was the spiritual father of Mother Marie-Eugénie who gave him an account of her soul. Father d'Alzon gave her "direction," while the Mother did not hesitate to offer a little direction to him. It was never a question of orders or imposed decisions. Nevertheless, Marie-Eugénie, disappointed by Father d'Alzon's inability to be present at the Chapter of the Religious in 1864, wrote to him saying:

... many problems could arise from everything that could make this chapter incomplete, and it certainly will be incomplete without you, because there are many decisions which we cannot take without you.⁴⁹⁶

⁴⁹⁵Problems of spiritual direction between 1846 and 1849; the request for sisters for the mission in Bulgaria; the cooling of relations in 1866; everyday misunderstandings stemming from written communications.

⁴⁹⁶Mother Marie-Eugénie to Father d'Alzon L.3029, August 19, 1864. The questions seemed to bear on the fact of having another Assistant in addition to Sister Thérèse-

Origins of the Assumption Family

That same year began a series of letters of accusation, rather unclear, about dissatisfactions and reproaches, which left Marie-Eugénie perplexed. At the end, she said she no longer found the Father “good enough” for her,⁴⁹⁷ and she did not know why. In this same letter, she recognized Emmanuel d’Alzon “as a priest, as a father, and as her personal superior.”

The discomfort and hurt are imperceptible to today’s reader, but both of them admitted that something had changed. Nevertheless, nothing broke the relationship: they explained themselves to each other and declared that, whatever the cost, they wanted to maintain their friendship. And this friendship, this collaboration in government, despite misunderstandings and sufferings, continued intact right up to the death of Father d’Alzon.⁴⁹⁸

Problems of Government

Ever since the departure of Father Combalot in 1841, the Religious had lived without problems for 25 years from the point-of-view of the government of the Congregation. They had to struggle to get our style of contemplative and active life accepted by the ecclesiastical authorities but, in general, the Congregation and the Mother Foundress were held in esteem.

In 1866, at the time when the Institute was seeking Roman approval, there arose what has been called in the Congregation the “Veron Affair,” from the name of the Ecclesiastical Superior in Paris. Mother Marie-Eugénie prepared to go to Rome and took with her a first copy of the Constitutions.⁴⁹⁹ She was thinking of finishing the section on government in line with the advice she would receive from certain superiors and from the Vatican. Archbishop Darboy, the Archbishop of Paris, was in agreement and promised her a letter

Emmanuel and an “enlarged” Council of 9–10 sisters. During the Chapter, Sister François-Kugeme was elected second Assistant once they were assured that Father d’Alzon would not object to seeing her leave Nîmes. Cf. L. 3011, September 6, 1864. It was this Chapter which put off till later the foundation in Bulgaria for lack of Sisters and funds, and also because of a desire to see the *hathcri* better established in the Near East.

⁴⁹⁷L. 3036, October 6, 1864. The letter of Father d’Alzon which provoked this reply has been lost. Perhaps it was about the question of Sisters for Bulgaria. But both of them realized that things were not going well between them, and that they were hurting one another.

⁴⁹⁸When there was a misunderstanding, they often arranged to speak face to face, which leaves us without documents!

⁴⁹⁹At this moment, there were 131 professed sisters and around 50 novices and postulants.

Problems of Government and of Relations between the Religious of the Assumption and the other Congregations of the Assumption

of attestation and recommendation. However, one clause in the attestation spoke of future supplementary information⁵⁰⁰ from him, which raised questions in the mind of Marie-Eugénie who returned to consult the Archbishop. He assured her that it was only a standard formula and that Father Veron would write a note along these lines. Marie-Eugénie left for Rome. In June, Rome asked Archbishop Darboy for the supplementary information.

On receiving from Rome a new request from Mother Marie-Eugénie, Father Veron got worked up into a “French fury” (*furia francese*) and turned violently against the Mother. From that moment on, he started making enquiries and visits, as if he knew nothing about the Congregation. Marie-Eugénie returned from Rome in July to be subjected to suspicions, interrogations and humiliations which clearly showed that the Priest was making it a test of his authority and that his judgments were unreasonable. Recourse to the Archbishop only increased the tensions. The Priest continued with a real persecution and threatened Auteuil with an Interdict. Marie-Eugénie, finding it impossible for her to govern under these conditions, offered to resign her position. After six months of this drama, the Priest was appointed parish priest and calmed down almost as suddenly as he had become inflamed.⁵⁰¹ Marie-Eugénie received a kind letter from Archbishop Darboy. Four months later, Father Véron died.⁵⁰²

This was the first experience in which Marie-Eugénie was truly attacked because of her government of the Congregation. Father d’Alzon and Father Picard encouraged and supported her throughout this long trial which was both harsh and humiliating.⁵⁰³

It was not until 1865–67 that the correspondence between Mother Marie-Eugénie and Mother Marie-Gabrielle, the then-Superior of the Priory of Nîmes, allows us to see that Father d’Alzon enjoyed a very great authority over this house and that he was involved in many of the decisions and

⁵⁰⁰In his letter of April 30, 1866, Archbishop Darboy, after offering praise, added that he would send to Rome “information and observations when he is consulted.” For further details, see *Foundation Texts, Religious of the Assumption, 1991* (English translation, p. 1890)

⁵⁰¹The report of Father Véron was judged in Rome as having “a tone of animosity towards the Institute and especially towards the Superior General.” *Ibid*, p 190.

⁵⁰²The steps needed for the approval of the Institute could now be taken up again more peacefully; they led to the approval of the Institute on September 14, 1867

⁵⁰³Cf Vols XIV and XVI of the Correspondence of Mother Marie-Eugénie and the Archives: MSP III For a summary of this very complex history, see the *Foundation Texts*, pp 188–191.

Origins of the Assumption Family

details of daily life. The authority of Father d'Alzon was strengthened by the fact that he was also the bc-clesiastical Superior. He expressed what he saw and made recommendations to Mother Marie-Eugénie, which she nearly always followed.⁵⁰⁴ Father d'Alzon was very much liked and respected by the Sisters who saw him very often in their house. He had an office in the Priory where he received the Sisters and the Ladies of Nîmes. He met with the Third Order and the "Adorers" for conferences and prayer, and it was there that he directed their works.

In the correspondence of the Sister Superior of Nîmes with Auteuil, there is mention of Father's fatigue, his financial difficulties (and his hope of receiving help from Auteuil!).⁵⁰⁵

This began to grate when Father seemed so attached not only to the work of the Oblates but also to "the little mother."⁵⁰⁶ (These handwritten letters, which cover the years 1866–79, are so numerous that I will not give you a list of quotations.) Reading them provides an interesting overview of the environment and daily life of the Assumption: Fathers, Religious, Oblates, communities, and schools. Mother Marie-Gabrielle seemed objective enough and knew how not to generalize passing events, how to listen to everybody without creating divisions, and how to be concerned about maintaining charity. There was Father d'Alzon's project, which was to prepare the missionary Oblates to accompany the Assumptionists to the Near East and to help them materially and in the elementary schools. There was also Mother Emmanuel-Marie's project, which was quite different. Mother Marie-Eugénie collaborated from the beginning in Father's project to found the Oblates. She was interested in the choice of the first group of young women in Nîmes; she loaned Sister Madeleine for the formation of a group of young women at Le Vigan with Father Saugrain; and she took charge of the formation of Mother Emmanuel-Marie to the extent that Father d'Alzon asked for this.⁵⁰⁷ Progressively, Father d'Alzon, believing that Mother Marie-

⁵⁰⁴Cf. L. 3017, June 16, 1864.

⁵⁰⁵Marie-Gabrielle to Mother Marie-Eugénie, Archives FMI C: unpublished letter, June 1, 1868.

⁵⁰⁶This affection as well as the political tendencies of Father d'Alzon made tongues wag in Nîmes for a certain time. The parents of pupils at the Priory were afraid that the Father was looking for vocations for the Oblates among their daughters, and some withdrew their children. Cf. Correspondence of Mother Marie Gabrielle to Mother Marie-Eugenie, Archives FMI C: Unpublished letter October 28, 1867.

⁵⁰⁷She did not make a real novitiate before her vows. When Marie seemed too attached to the ideas of the Ladies of the Assumption, Father d'Alzon took charge himself of her

Problems of Government and of Relations between the Religious of the Assumption and the other Congregations of the Assumption

Eugénie had given up on the mission to the Near East and reacting to the tensions, consulted her less and less and took charge himself of all of the formation of the Oblates.

Progressively also, the project of Mother Emmanuel-Marie was clarified. She refused peasants from the Cévennes and did not want to take young women who had been “maid servants.”⁵⁰⁸ Her mother bought her a piece of land next to the boarding school run by the Religious,⁵⁰⁹ and the young Superior made plans for a school. In fact, the Correnson family played an important role during this period.

When Mother Marie-Eugénie became anxious about the steps being taken by “the little mother,” Father d’Alzon reassured her and made promises to her that he would not be able to keep.⁵¹⁰ Mother Emmanuel-Marie took advantage of Father’s absences and, without his knowledge, went on with her plan for opening a day-school.⁵¹¹ Everything got even more complicated when there were two “Superiors of the Assumption” and two Assumption schools with their respective pupils wearing nearly identical uniforms almost within the same enclosure.⁵¹² Sometimes Father d’Alzon confessed his powerlessness before the reactions of the Mother;⁵¹³ sometimes he defended the young Superior.

These questions touched upon the government and upon the lack of au-

formation. Letter of Mother Marie of Christ to Mother Marie-Eugenie, July 12, 1883.

⁵⁰⁸Father d’Alzon suggested these persons to Mother Marie-Eugenie as prospective lay sisters.

⁵⁰⁹Unpublished letter of Mother Marie-Gabrielle to Mother Marie-Eugenie, April 22, 1868. Archives FMI C

⁵¹⁰Father d’Alzon to Mother Marie-Eugenie, July II, 1873.

⁵¹¹Cf. Mother Marie-Emmanuel, “Historical paper with supporting documents, establishing the rights of the Lady Oblates of the Assumption, against the claims of the Augustinian Fathers of the Assumption,” p. 10: “In the month of October, the house was opened and we had five pupils the first day: Misses Thérèse Pares, Theoline Correnson, Elisa Blanc. . .” and p. II: Reception of the first boarder May 17, 1875.

⁵¹²Mother Marie-Eugénie to Mother Marie-Gabrielle: “*I am delighted that you are in agreement with father d’Alzon, but we must obtain that the Oblates will not use the name of Assumption on anything having to do with this work of education they are undertaking, their prospectus, notes, or anything else. . . Anything which could cause confusion between the two houses would be unjust towards us and would harm our work, which is what Father d’Alzon promised would not happen and which will destroy the charity between us through endless explanations that we are not the same work, and that their pupils are not our pupils.*” L.5699, Auteuil, August 13, 1873.

⁵¹³Letter of Father d’Alzon to Mother Marie-Eugénie: July 11, 1873.

Origins of the Assumption Family

thority of Father d'Alzon over Mother Emmanuel-Marie.⁵¹⁴ The situation is succinctly summarized in an exchange of letters between Father Vincent de Paul Bailly and Father d'Alzon. In these four letters, we read about Father Vincent's criticisms of Mother Emmanuel-Marie, the indignant reply of Father d'Alzon who asked for explanations, the reply of Father Vincent de Paul with the facts—deviation from the original project, competition with the Religious of the Assumption—and the reply of Father d'Alzon who was still dissatisfied but who did not deny the facts.⁵¹⁵

But even this difference did not break the ties between Father d'Alzon and Marie-Eugénie who seemed to face the facts and continued to move ahead.⁵¹⁶

Status of the Union

In August 1867, Father d'Alzon had asked Mother Marie-Eugénie: “Should we be more your fathers than your brothers, or more your brothers than your fathers?”⁵¹⁷ Unfortunately for us, many subjects were discussed face to face

⁵¹⁴Mother Marie-Eugénie to Mother Marie-Gabrielle: “*He (d'Alzon) is not sufficiently obeyed by the Oblates to be answerable for the direction they are giving to these beginnings.*” L.5695, July 14, 1873. Many details about the opening of the school can be found in the correspondence of Mother Marie-Gabrielle to Mother Marie-Eugénie, Archives FMI C. Unpublished letters: July 5, 1873, July 18, 1873, August 2, 1873, August 10, 1873, September 28, 1873, November 19, 1873, and December 26, 1873.

⁵¹⁵Letter of Father Vincent de Paul, no. 1494, December 13, 1873; Reply of Father d'Alzon, no. 4924, December 14; Reply of Father Vincent de Paul, no. 1496, December 16; Reply of Father d'Alzon, no. 925, December 18, 1873. Father Picard repeats the same criticisms in a letter of October 28, 1882 at the time of the break between Paris and Nîmes.

⁵¹⁶Father d'Alzon found himself caught between the two Congregations. It is difficult to know whether he gave in to Mother Emmanuel-Marie out of real affection and a sort of preference for her, or out of necessity because of the Mother's character, her unreasonable and childish reactions, and also because of the fact that he had insisted that Marie Correnson be the Superior of the newly formed Congregation. Mother Marie-Gabrielle to Mother Marie-Eugénie, Archives FMI C: Unpublished letter, May 16, 1867.

⁵¹⁷“Allow me to put a question to you about which you can reflect at Ems and to which you can reply at your leisure. Given that the two Assumptions ought to support one another mutually, what should be, in your opinion, the precise nature of these relations? First, note that once you have disclosed your ideas, it will be possible for us in subsequent conversations to modify them together. Second, note that, since it seems more than likely that Father Picard will replace me one day, it will be easy to come to an understanding with him more than with anyone else. But we must begin to reflect very seriously about these things. Should we be more your fathers than your brothers, or more your brothers than your fathers? What means should we take to avoid the disadvantages? In chatting with

Problems of Government and of Relations between the Religious of the Assumption and the other Congregations of the Assumption

between Father d'Alzon and Mother Marie-Eugénie, without any record of what was said. We can suppose that the question was being raised regarding the Religious Sisters either because the Fathers were asking it regarding the Oblates and the Little Sisters, or because Father d'Alzon was being pressured by his brothers and by the Sisters, or because he was foreseeing his own departure. Perhaps all these reasons were at play at the same time.

As was said earlier, Father d'Alzon himself always resisted the idea of having juridical authority over the Religious.⁵¹⁸ In addition to his spontaneous and almost innate spirit of freedom, he knew of the difficulties caused in other congregations by such ties between congregations of women and men. His advice was always "Let us remain friends,"⁵¹⁹ and the two founders worked at this.

Marie-Eugénie leaned towards the authority of the Fathers. At different moments, she expressed different and valid reasons: to avoid control by the bishops, to respect her deep affection and esteem for the Fathers, and to preserve the spirit which unites the two Congregations. In her reply to the letter quoted above, she mentioned the idea of "security" which, apparently, was tantamount to speaking of freedom vis-à-vis the bishops and of protection by a male congregation before the Roman authorities and elsewhere. She already knew that the Churchmen whom she esteemed were not in agreement with this opinion,⁵²⁰ but she nevertheless leaned in that direction. She replied on August 9:

For a long time now, I have thought that the question you asked me could be solved in the manner I described in a memo of which Father Picard surely has several copies. To assure the future and to strengthen the Congregation, I would like you to be our Fathers rather than our Brothers. You have always held a different opinion. I see that very learned and serious men like Father Vitte have generally been very opposed to this type of organization, for

Father Picard, several ideas have come to my mind, but we will discuss them." (August 2, 1867)

⁵¹⁸Cf. So many letters. Emmanuel d'Alzon October 14, 1851, September 18, 1876, May 11, 1879.

⁵¹⁹Father d'Alzon to Mother Marie-Eugénie, May 10, 1849.

⁵²⁰Father Gay, Father Vitte, Father Stanislas, O.F.M. Cap., etc. Father d'Alzon was not too happy when Mother Marie-Eugénie consulted others than him. Cf. Archives FMI C: Unpublished letter of Mother Marie-Gabrielle to Mother Marie-Eugénie, June 20, 1868.

Origins of the Assumption Family

all congregations. I would like to hear your reasons and to give you mine.⁵²¹

The Fathers, for their part, studied their relations with the women's Congregations. At their Chapter of 1868, they asked the following questions:

- Are relations between the communities of men and women desirable?
- Can the Institute accept to govern a community of women?
- If we lean towards the affirmative, who would have the right to exercise this authority?
- Finally, what would be the extent of this authority?

Father d'Alzon brought up "two indisputable facts which ought to guide us in this matter":

- On the one hand, Rome and the Councils have tended to suppress or restrain such relations because of abuses.
- On the other hand, the Church approves such relations when they are established at the time of the foundation of a women's Congregation by a male religious or by the founder of a Congregation of men.

When the time came for a decision, these observations did not win over either the Religious of the Assumption or the Assumptionists. The Chapter of the Assumptionists decided:

While preferring the works of men to the works of women, the Augustinians of the Assumption recognize that most of the religious communities of women have been founded by religious men and that the spirit of the foundation has been maintained by these men. They also recognize that, today, the influence exercised by women on these works and on society can become in their hands a powerful source of good which they would be mistaken to neglect.

They shall therefore accept to direct and even govern communities of women. But before all else, they must remember that the best

⁵²¹Letter of Mother Marie-Eugénie to Father d'Alzon: L3143, August 9, 1867.

Problems of Government and of Relations between the Religious of the Assumption and the other Congregations of the Assumption

way to attain this objective is never to seek to persuade these communities to place themselves under their dependence but to wait until the communities spontaneously desire and request it. They must respect the freedom of each and must always be ready to give up the authority they have if this authority becomes an odious burden or simply difficult. For example, if it happened that, at a General Chapter of the communities they govern, one third of the members objected to living under their dependence, they must immediately withdraw.⁵²²

Applying these principles, the Chapter decided that the Oblates of the Assumption would depend on the Fathers, that the Little Sisters of the Assumption could also depend on them in the way the Daughters of Charity are connected to the Lazarists (Vincentians), and that these ties and relations were also desirable with the Religious of the Assumption “provided the Religious request them.” The Chapter recognized that such a union with the Religious would meet with more difficulties “because of their monastic lifestyle and their place in society.”

As for the authority of the Assumptionists over the Religious of the Assumption, we shall see that it was to be vested in the male Superior General who would exercise it by appointing a delegate who would be called a Vicar. From a list of male religious drawn up in consultation with their Superior General, the General Chapter of the women’s Congregation would choose three names or three lists of three names in view of the appointment by the Assumptionist Superior General of the religious delegated as his Vicar. The powers of the Vicar would extend from one General Chapter to the next of the women’s Congregation.

With respect to powers, the Chapter proposed that the Assumptionists would be responsible for spiritual direction but would respect the Sisters’ freedom of the confessional, and that they would make the canonical visitations and keep themselves informed about finances. No foundation would be made without their approval.

In their Chapter of 1873, the Fathers drew up directives “which the experience of the last five years has just confirmed”.⁵²³

The setting up of our relationships with women religious stems

⁵²²*Acts of the Chapter of 1868.* Assumptionist Archives.

⁵²³We do not know whether the Religious figured among these experiences.

Origins of the Assumption Family

from the size and providential development of the different communities of women which have ties with our own. By their work among the upper classes, the Ladies of the Assumption exercise an undisputed influence in a world which can be of great help to our work. By the humble and disinterested character of their apostolate, the home-nurses of the poor, called the Little Sisters of the Assumption, touch the poor and working classes. Finally, by the Good they are doing in the works which are preparing them in France,⁵²⁴ the Oblates of the Assumption demonstrate an apostolic character likely to draw numerous vocations and to facilitate the fulfillment of the promises made to the Pope to attend to the missions in the Near East.

So, in 1876, at the General Chapter of the Religious, Mother Marie-Eugénie explained to the Sisters why she saw a more structured union with the Assumptionists as desirable:

After this reading, the Superior General explained the advantages which the Congregation will draw from continuing the relationship which, in fact, has existed from the beginning, and which, after contributing so greatly to the formation of the spirit of the Institute, seems necessary in order to maintain this spirit as well as to preserve the special character of our studies and of our teaching.⁵²⁵

Father Picard presented a document that had already been written in 1867 with this in mind. This document, "Relationships with the Religious of the Assumption," amended at the Chapters of the Fathers in 1868 and 1873, was put to a vote of the Chapter of the Religious Sisters. This Chapter, presided by Father d'Alzon himself, accepted the work of Father Picard *ad experimentum* until the next General Chapter. After the vote, the delegates asked Father d'Alzon to appoint Father Picard as Delegate.

The duties of this director or delegate shall be first and foremost to direct and help the central government of the Congregation by assisting it with the knowledge that priests possess but that women do not have.

⁵²⁴Interesting phraseology! Was the school of the Oblates preparing Oblates for their missionary work?

⁵²⁵*Acts of the Chapter of 1876*, Archives of the Religious of the Assumption.

Problems of Government and of Relations between the Religious of the Assumption and the other Congregations of the Assumption

Father Picard had powers that were “very extensive in order to maintain the spirit of the Institute.” He made canonical visitations, attended certain meetings of the General Council, and had veto power over questions involving new foundations, contracting debts, and mortgaging houses. In particular, he had to keep an eye on the novitiate and the Motherhouse. The Sisters could have recourse to him “as to a Father” and a friend of the Institute. He gave instructions and offered advice. His right of oversight extended to nearly everything: boarding schools, the level of studies, finances, and relations of the Sisters with Superiors and confessors. Concerning things that needed to be changed, as noted in the reports he drew up after a visitation, he was to reach an agreement with the Superior General of the Sisters toward whom he had an important role of support, advice and encouragement.

When Father d’Alzon, on his return to Nîmes, received the Minutes of the Chapter, he was very surprised.⁵²⁶ The Minutes, which were a summary of the text which had been voted, did not in his eyes express what had been decided but mentioned only the union that existed already, accompanied by a few obligations: to be an “ambassador” to the bishops and to Rome, and to be “your spiritual-affairs agents,” to use his own expressions. Returning home with this document, Father Picard begged Father d’Alzon not to force him to accept the title of Delegate.⁵²⁷

Marie-Eugénie hastened to explain that Father Picard’s document should be appended, that it had been fully accepted, etc. Above all, she insisted on the fact that the text of the Minutes would be more acceptable in Rome.⁵²⁸ From these documents and the exchange of letters, it is difficult to discover the whole truth of the affair. However, one sentence seems to imply that the Sisters feared too much interference and perhaps were afraid of the authority of Father Picard compared to that of Father d’Alzon:

We do not have the least difficulty accepting the primary authority which, in a paragraph of this work, is vested in the (male)

⁵²⁶Letter to Mother Marie-Eugénie, September 18, 1876.

⁵²⁷Ibid. “Father Picard had assured me that (his register contained the transcript of his work. The corrections which he suggested to us went in the opposite direction of your discussion. He might have protested a little too much. Besides, he begged me not to force him to accept the title of delegate.”

⁵²⁸Letter to Father d’Alzon, L.3476, September 20, 1876. The question of Rome was important. Marie-Eugénie was conscious of the fact that Rome was reticent about approving this kind of relationship between Congregations of men and women, but she hoped and went ahead. The Fathers did not seem to be really worried about it?

Origins of the Assumption Family

Superior General.

Of late, I think I have found the formula which fits the situation, viz., that neither the (male) Superior General nor his delegate will exercise *ordinary* jurisdiction, but will leave it to the women Superiors. The men will have a sort of higher jurisdiction.⁵²⁹

The role of Father Picard in this affair was not clear either. Marie-Eugénie protested that it was he who did not want his document to be put as an appendix, claiming that he had to make some corrections. Then he asked Father d'Alzon not to oblige him to accept the title of Delegate. Would he have felt some opposition toward him? Something displeased him, which came out in 1879 in a conversation between Mother Thérèse-Emmanuel and Father Pernet who stated that Father Picard had never even accepted to be Delegate for the Religious!⁵³⁰ But in 1876, the Religious were totally in the dark about this. And in 1886, Father Picard admitted himself that he had suffered “these last ten years”—since 1876—from a lack of trust on the part of the Religious.⁵³¹

In any case, Sisters and Fathers began to live this new relationship under the Delegate or “Director” or Visitor, whom they thought was Father Picard. In fact, the scene had been set for many misunderstandings and problems because Father Picard's document was just as complex on the subject of authority as he was himself. At the same time, the role of the confessors, priests and directors became muddled. In their various letters, it is difficult to understand clearly what was going on, despite the fact that, at the beginning, everybody thought they agreed on the rules of the game. Since there is no reference document and since no changes were ever made in the Rule of the Religious of the Assumption, even this agreement is not certain.⁵³²

It must also be remembered that the Sisters had been accustomed to a different regime for a long time! They had known only one major superior for

⁵²⁹Marie-Eugénie to Father d'Alzon, L. 3476, September 9, 1876.

⁵³⁰Unpublished letter of Mother Marie-Sezaphine to Mother Marie-Eugenie, May 1, 1879. Father Pernet: “You might have noticed that there has been a cooling of your relationship with the Fathers. Well, that goes back to your last Chapter. Father Picard felt that you did not give him the place he thought he should have had.”

⁵³¹Letter of Father Picard to Mother Thérèse-Emmanuel, January 10, 1886.

⁵³²We have no definitive document. However, there might have been three of them: the document of Father Picard which he corrected, the document voted at the Chapter and summarized in the minutes, and the final document for Rome and the Constitutions—if such a document was ever drawn up.

Problems of Government and of Relations between the Religious of the Assumption and the other Congregations of the Assumption

over thirty-five years. The local superiors lived fairly independently under her sole control, which was broad and maternal. Above all, the Sisters were not accustomed to having several authorities and to distinguishing between their roles and areas of responsibility. Apparently, neither were the Fathers. (Father Picard allowed himself to be the confessor and director of certain Sisters, among them Mother Marie-Eugénie and Mother Marie of Christ, and at the same time the Visitor/Delegate.) Difficulties were quick in coming.

The authority of Father d'Alzon had been simple and straightforward, and he had had a very clear relationship with Mother Marie-Eugénie and the Sisters for a long time. But Father Picard was a very different person. Father d'Alzon had experienced this for himself and described his sorrow to Marie-Eugénie in October 1876:

...Father Picard and his despotism. You don't want to be subjected to it and forced to go here or there. The men religious here are no longer disposed to accept him as an infallible oracle. I think this is most unfortunate. But also, why could he not be more flexible, and why must he be so categorical? You must go along with his way of thinking, otherwise he will submit his resignation which, he knows very well, I cannot accept at the present time. I put up with his demands, but in conscience I must remember them.⁵³³

But Father Picard had been the confessor of Marie-Eugénie since 1857. She must have known him and his authoritarian ways very well. But she liked him very much and held him in esteem. She always managed to dialogue and to resolve the misunderstandings. At least, that is the impression we get of the relations between them at this period. It is less certain that things were sorted out as easily from the point-of-view of the Sisters in the communities. Documents are lacking. But with the passing of years, there were many complaints from Father Picard about the attitude of the Sisters towards

⁵³³Letter to Mother Marie-Eugenie, October 22, 1876. Also: "My dear Daughter, I am grateful that you are willing to discuss the difference between my ideas and those of Father Picard. Alas! You have kindly given me a twentieth edition of what he has said to me himself, re-edited by Father Vincent de Paul. But that is not the question. The question is to know whether it is better to proceed with tact or to be uncompromising. What are the results of Father Picard's way of doing things?...Unity was maintained. You will see that, like the Jesuits, but with fewer subjects, we will have two novitiates. The inflexibility of Father Picard is what produced this result." Nîmes, October 26, 1876.

Origins of the Assumption Family

certain fathers. We can only suspect that there was a big gap between what the Sisters thought and said about the authority of the Fathers and the experience of Marie-Eugénie. Regardless, things developed into a crisis. There was a misunderstanding.

Nîmes and Paris

In 1879, the Religious of the Assumption had eighteen houses, but there were only a few Assumptionists.⁵³⁴ The difficulties between the two Congregations were centered in Nîmes with Father d'Alzon and his community and in Paris with Father Picard and his brothers. Hundreds of Sisters were not involved in what was happening, apparently unaware of the disagreements and complaints of both sides.

In a monograph, Father Wilfrid Dufault describes the history known as “The Priory Affair” and tries to untangle its threads. Mother Marie-Gabrielle⁵³⁵ was the Superior in Nîmes from 1866 to 1879.⁵³⁶ Of Irish origin in a community of sisters mostly from Nîmes itself, she replaced Mother Françoise Eugénie who was transferred to Paris as second Assistant to Mother Marie-Eugénie. In the beginning, everything went well. The Superior was good and capable, and was liked by children and parents. Father d'Alzon had nothing but praises for her.⁵³⁷ (The Statute of Union appears to have changed nothing in the government of the Priory.)

After ten years as Superior, Mother Marie-Gabrielle became a little too good, lacking authority, and Mother Marie-Eugénie wanted to change her.⁵³⁸ Father d'Alzon was against this because of the parents of the pupils, and Mother Marie-Eugénie left her there. A little later, Father d'Alzon faced the

⁵³⁴According to Father Pernet, there were “only five of ours” [in Paris?]. Unpublished letter from Mother Marie-Seraphine to Mother Marie-Eugénie recounting a conversation with Father Pernet, May 3, 1879.

⁵³⁵Marie-Gabrielle of the Redeemer, de Courcy McCarthy, born in Edinburgh, July 15, 1830. She converted to Catholicism in 1853. Entered the Assumption in 1854, vows in 1856, foundation in London in 1857, in Auteuil in 1858, Nîmes 1859–64, Lourdes 1865, and Superior in Nîmes 1866–79.

⁵³⁶It was Father d'Alzon who asked for her as Superior. Letter to Mother Marie-Eugénie, Sept. 4, 1864.

⁵³⁷Letters from Father d'Alzon to Mother Marie-Eugénie, September 4, 1864, June 15, 1865, March 14, 1874. He expressed no complaint about Mother Gabrielle before 1879.

⁵³⁸Letter from Mother Marie-Eugénie to Father d'Alzon, L.3506. September II, 1877.

Problems of Government and of Relations between the Religious of the Assumption and the other Congregations of the Assumption

facts,⁵³⁹ but now Mother Marie-Eugénie felt obliged to respect the three-year mandate that Mother Gabrielle had just begun.

But then, a crisis which would change everything arose around Sister Marie-Paul and her nephew, an orphan and pupil at the College. Marie-Paul went to visit her nephew who was sick in the infirmary. She had misgivings about the former doctor (before Dr. Correnson) and made an impertinent remark.⁵⁴⁰ Father Laurent overheard her and repeated the story to Father d'Alzon who, in turn, demanded the departure of Marie-Paul. All of a sudden, Sister Marie-Paul became, in the eyes of Father d'Alzon, the instigator of criticisms against the College and the source of a thousand other wrongs.⁵⁴¹ Mother Marie-Gabrielle found herself caught between the Fathers and the Sister who, she thought, was being treated unjustly.⁵⁴² She resisted this brutal change. Marie-Eugénie tried to listen to everybody before deciding what to do, but this time Father d'Alzon said that the fathers would not go to the Priory again until Marie-Paul left. "The community did not respect the priests."

These difficulties now led Father d'Alzon to see what Marie-Eugénie had seen for some time: the lack of order and discipline in the community, the too frequent number times the sisters went out, a religious life without vigor, and—for him—the superabundance of sisters from Nîmes!⁵⁴³ Marie-Eugénie complained that the Superior was not telling her about what was really happening in the house. The weakness of Marie-Gabrielle meant that Mother Marie-Eugénie always had to remove difficult sisters because the Superior did not know how to correct them on the spot.⁵⁴⁴ Marie-Paul was yet another example, but Marie-Gabrielle did not want to let her go. In the end,

⁵³⁹Letters to Mother Marie-Eugénie, April 1, 1879, March 27, 1879, and to Father Galabert, April 2, 1879. D'Alzon saw her shortcomings.

⁵⁴⁰Mother Marie-Gabrielle to Mother Marie-Eugénie. Archives FMI C: March 19, 1879. This affair of Marie-Paul was the subject of letters between the two Mothers for an entire month.

⁵⁴¹D'Alzon to Mother Marie-Eugénie, March 24, 1879.

⁵⁴²Father Laurent must have exaggerated. Father d'Alzon complained about him in a letter to Mother Marie-Eugénie on July 18, 1879. In another letter to her dated August 10, 1880, he stated that he wanted to send him away permanently from the College and from Nîmes because of his eccentricities.

⁵⁴³Letters of Father d'Alzon to Mother Marie-Eugénie, March 27 and 30; April 20; July 17, 1879; and to Father Picard, June 7, 1879.

⁵⁴⁴Cf. the Letter from Mother Marie-Eugénie to Father d'Alzon, L.3515, November 6, 1877.

Origins of the Assumption Family

Marie-Paul and Mother Marie-Gabrielle both left Nîmes. Marie of Christ was appointed Superior; order and calm returned.

What emerges regarding the government of the Congregation, even before 1876, is confusion over the role of Father d'Alzon. He imagined that the relationship was one of friendship and advice, but in fact he got accustomed to exercising the great power Marie-Eugénie had given him. The Statute of Union of 1876 seems to have changed nothing in their way of doing things. It must be concluded that the relationship between Mother Marie-Eugénie and Father d'Alzon was unique and above all statutes. Neither of them seems to have thought about the Constitutions, or the structures, or the Statute in their mutual relations and in their government. Father d'Alzon expressed his thoughts and desires, which Mother Marie-Eugénie always took seriously and tried to respect. So she rarely disagreed with his decisions, which were sometimes absolute or rapid. But the decision was always referred to Madame the Superior, as the Assumptionists called her, and they worked together. Father d'Alzon might have insisted, got angry, and displayed his susceptibility, but they dialogued together, and the relationship of friendship, mutual respect, and freedom remained unbroken, even during the Priory Affair.

We must recognize that a situation like that of the Priory seems to have been calculated to create problems: approximately one hundred people living in a closed world due to the religious enclosure, and in a Provincial town where many of the families and friends of the Sisters lived. The Fathers were the confessors, teachers, colleagues, and spiritual directors of the Religious. It is easy to imagine the confidences and the complaints, the affections and the antipathies, as well as the power-plays between the internal and external authorities. The Sisters reacted, rejected certain confessors,⁵⁴⁵ and refused the authority when they judged it unjust or excessive. All this was all talked about during recreations.

In fact, the "Priory Affair" was not so much a single affair as a series of affairs, which were not all centered on the Priory. In turn, they involved the Religious, the Fathers, and the two schools, as well as, at times, Mother Emmanuel-Marie and her Sisters. In reading the correspondence between Mother Marie-Gabrielle and Mother Marie-Eugénie, one gets the impression that the refined Catholic world of Nîmes was watching and talking about the

⁵⁴⁵Father d'Alzon to Mother Marie-Gabrielle, May 6, 1879. The Sisters were refusing to confess themselves to Father Laurent.

Problems of Government and of Relations between the Religious of the Assumption and the other Congregations of the Assumption

Assumption! Even the Bishop.⁵⁴⁶

Apart from his unique relationship with Marie-Eugénie, there was an evolution in the thought of Father d'Alzon on the question of government. In conversations and exchanges of letters with various people, Father d'Alzon had a feeling that would not go away. It was an uneasiness about Mother Thérèse-Emmanuel. For him, she was the *bete-noir*. He did not like her spirituality and her way of forming the novices.⁵⁴⁷ He believed that she was working against him. In 1866, this feeling was clearly expressed in a letter to Father Picard:

... Except for the Superior General, I am less interested in the Congregation of her daughters. When I try to analyze my feeling, I attribute it to the manner in which, I believe, my way of seeing things and that of Sister Thérèse-Emmanuel are opposed to each other. Maybe I am wrong, but I no longer feel at ease in the Congregation, except with the Superior General, Sister Marie-Gonzae, and the Superior of Nîmes in whom I have the greatest confidence.⁵⁴⁸

This malaise only got worse.⁵⁴⁹

It is true that these two had very different temperaments, spiritualities, and visions of Religious Life. It is equally true that Mother Thérèse-Emmanuel saw no reason why the Religious of the Assumption should be

⁵⁴⁶Cf. the handwritten letter of Sister Jeanne-Marie Pérouse to Mother Marie-Eugénie in which she recounted what her own mother was saying about the community of Nîmes and the Bishop. Unpublished, RA Archives.

⁵⁴⁷From time to time. Father d'Alzon reproached Marie-Eugénie that the life of the Religious was too contemplative. Cf. the letter of August 22, 1864. According to him, this was due to the influence of Mother Thérèse-Emmanuel which was too great. One never finds this idea expressed within the Congregation.

⁵⁴⁸Emmanuel d'Alzon to Father Picard, August 6, 1866.

⁵⁴⁹In 1868, in a conversation with Mother Marie-Gabrielle, Father d'Alzon reproached Marie-Eugénie for "not acting according to his ideas." And he put the blame especially on "Mother Thérèse-Emmanuel who has always had a way of thinking that is different from his. Ultimately, if I dare say so, she is the one who is becoming like a wall of separation between you and him. . . . He claimed that this had been going on for the last ten years but that the trip to Rome had changed everything" [at a time when Father d'Alzon thought that Mother Marie-Eugénie ought to stay in Rome for the question of the approval of the Rule but, in fact, returned to France]. Unpublished letter from Mother Marie-Gabrielle to Mother Marie-Eugénie, June 20, 1868. Cf. also the unpublished letter of Mother Marie-Eugénie, June 1, 1868.

Origins of the Assumption Family

incapable of governing themselves. Mother Thérèse-Emmanuel was a Councilor, an Assistant to Mother Marie-Eugénie; she understood the Constitutions and the Statute of Union. It is very likely that she did not let herself be led by external views and pressures and that she kept an eye on the limits of everyone's power. Her opinions show that she was informed and objective.

There are no criticisms of Father d'Alzon, either of his person or his spirituality, in the letters of Mother Thérèse-Emmanuel. What one does find is a strong defender of the authority of Mother Marie-Eugénie. Perhaps Father felt a certain resistance on the part of the Sisters to his authority and to that of the Fathers. In any case, if the Sisters talked about this in their communities, they left no traces of it in their letters.

Finally, the exchanges of letters that took place in 1879 between the members of the General Council of the Foundress⁵⁵⁰ enable us to understand that there was in Paris a great misunderstanding about the authority of the Fathers. If we can trust what Father Pernet said, Father Picard accepted without objections to deal with the Religious according to their understanding of the Delegate, all the while interiorly refusing the title. The Assumptionists had wanted the Statute of Union with the Religious because of their "work among the upper classes" and their influence "in a world which could be of great help to our works." They had profited greatly from it. Now, they were expecting a great number of novices, but they were very few in Paris. Perhaps they had to measure their strength against the cost of helping the Religious. Or perhaps they were thinking that the differences of orientation between the two Congregations must be brought to an end. Whatever the case, the Statute of Union, which left the ordinary jurisdiction to the Superior General of the Sisters, was no longer satisfactory. Some Assumptionists now seemed to want to govern the Congregation of the Religious of the Assumption, or nothing at all. The pressure they brought to bear in this sense raised questions.

On May 11, 1879, Father d'Alzon wrote a letter to Mother Marie-Eugénie (who happened to be in Nîmes) in reply to the Sisters who were asking for details on the relationship between the two Congregations.⁵⁵¹ This letter proposed going back to the relationship of advice and friendship as before

⁵⁵⁰Mother Thérèse-Emmanuel (May 5 and 8), Mother Marie-Seraphine (May, 3, 5, and 10), Mother Marie of Christ (May 3) to Mother Marie-Eugénie on the subject of conversations with Father Pernet. Unpublished letters.

⁵⁵¹Letters of Father Emmanuel d'Alzon, Vol. XIII, Rome: 1996. Note I, p 111, Letter of May 11, 1879.

Problems of Government and of Relations between the Religious of the Assumption and the other Congregations of the Assumption

because "... I thought that a Superior should govern. At the time, you seemed to be adopting the modern formula that the king rules but does not govern..." In conversation, Marie-Eugénie pointed out that the Jesuits, the Dominicans, the Redemptorists, and the Capuchins were content to care for religious sisters without governing them, but for Father d'Alzon this formula was a waste of time.

The following day, he explained to Father Vincent de Paul:

...I say that we must either govern or not govern at all. However, at the present time, it is impossible for us to govern the Ladies, and it is too late to force them into it. As for direction, it can be effective only to the extent that we are perceived as not holding on to it, and the proof of that is the great fear of the Superior that one day there will be a separation... But my conviction is that this indifference is the only thing that will convince the Council.⁵⁵²

To govern without seeming to do so.

From Paris, Father Vincent de Paul Bailly and Mother Thérèse-Emmanuel each wrote to their respective superiors about the conversations with Father Pernet. Father Pernet stated that the seed comes from the father, that the Religious need the Fathers in order to keep the spirit of the Assumption, that they ought to be governed by them, etc.⁵⁵³ On May 3, 1879, Father Pernet insisted that "the Delegate should be able to go into the houses *with authority*... you have restrained his [Father Picard's] powers. You have not wanted a *Presbyter*, someone placed above you all... The Priest

⁵⁵²Letter from Father d'Alzon to Father Vincent de Paul Bailly, May 12, 1879.

⁵⁵³It concerned the same incident that was reported above in note 47. There was a first conversation, on a train, between the Mothers of the Council, Thérèse-Emmanuel and Seraphine, and Fathers Pernet and Vincent de Paul. This conversation was followed by others and by clarifications between Father Pernet and Mother Thérèse-Emmanuel. Mother Thérèse-Emmanuel wrote to Mother Marie-Eugénie on May 2, 1879: "He [Pernet] replied that we will follow our Rules, but that it was a question of seeing whether we want the inspiration of their Congregation to push us towards our aim, and whether we want their spirit to preserve ours. All that may be excellent, but we cannot deny a certain fear that we have that they will push us a bit too strongly, given their spirit of initiative and activity, and that they will seize upon us as an instrument of their power to do the works which, according to their idea, are in conformity with our objective, but which could well draw us away somewhat from the life of contemplation and action which we believe is more the particular characteristic of our Assumption than theirs."

Origins of the Assumption Family

is above the Superior General. . . The Delegate should be at the head of everything.” Mother Thérèse-Emmanuel gave the impression of being surprised and dismayed by these remarks. Perhaps Father Vincent de Paul was also. However, Father d’Alzon agreed with this doctrine and showed the letter of Father Vincent de Paul to Mother Marie-Eugénie who was “distraught” by it.⁵⁵⁴ By what? At any rate, “the conversation with Father Pernet displeased her [Marie-Eugénie].”⁵⁵⁵

At the end of the month, Father d’Alzon wrote to Father Vincent de Paul:

Father Picard is pushing to have authority. I fear that he may be taking a bad course. With women, one must make oneself wanted. That is essential if you want to lead them. I will not make a big issue of Father Picard’s ideas. If he wants to be the Delegate, I shall let him be, but I shall never push for our governing the Sisters. It would weaken us too much. We must keep all our strength for ourselves.⁵⁵⁶

In summary, three years after the Statute of Union, it was impossible to disentangle, even theoretically, the rights and limitations of the jurisdiction of the Assumptionists vis-a-vis the Religious and their monasteries. What Father d’Alzon said seemed to change from one situation to the next. Marie-Eugénie, for her part, wanted to assure a union with the Assumptionists, but she stepped back from being governed by them. She was ready to cede much to Father d’Alzon and, concretely, to Father Picard, but not on matters of principle. This way of acting must surely have confused the Sisters. In fact, the Fathers interfered in the life of the Sisters and in the boarding schools according to their understanding of the Union and their individual personalities. There were some who thought they were responsible for the spirit of the Assumption among the Religious. The General Council of the Religious continued to play its role, sometimes giving in, sometimes resisting. On the whole, the Religious could not adapt themselves to this new regime about which no one was clear. And “it was too late to force them into it.”

In addition, Father d’Alzon had his own Sisters, the Oblates, whom he had to care for. Over them, his authority was simple and complete. Basically, he seemed to attend to Mother Emmanuel-Marie but kept a greater distance

⁵⁵⁴Ibid.

⁵⁵⁵Letter of Father d’Alzon to Father Vincent de Paul Bailly, May 14, 1879.

⁵⁵⁶Letter of Father d’Alzon to Father Vincent de Paul Bailly, May 31, 1879.

Problems of Government and of Relations between the Religious of the Assumption and the other Congregations of the Assumption

with regard to the other Sisters. Nevertheless, history had created multiple connections between the Fathers and the Religious which, for him, became more and more complex.

So, in 1879, we find this situation: the Religious were pushing for independence from the Fathers, while the (some) Assumptionists wanted to govern rather than direct the Religious. Mother Marie-Eugénie in no way wanted a separation from the Fathers and showed herself ready to yield in many ways so as to keep strong links.⁵⁵⁷ Father d'Alzon wanted to govern without appearing to do so!

Relations got worse. Marie-Eugénie and Emmanuel d'Alzon never ceased to engage in dialogue. What was astonishing was that at the following General Chapter in 1882, the Religious neither evaluated nor stopped the experience! This had been foreseen by the Chapter of 1876. There is no trace of an evaluation or of a conversation about this matter. We must remember that in 1882 Father d'Alzon was no longer there and that it was the period of the expulsions of the Assumptionists. They might have thought it insensitive to talk about relationships of government under such circumstances. Perhaps Marie-Eugénie feared a clarification, she who was always for a union—her way.

This Internal Crisis

In September 1877, we find this astonishing statement from Father d'Alzon addressed to Father Picard: “She [Sister Charlotte] has learned that they want to prepare Sister Marie of Christ as Superior General, and she is plotting against her.”⁵⁵⁸ This idea or intention to prepare the succession appears nowhere else but will crop up in 1885 at the time of the Special Chapter of 1886.

Marie of Christ, Esther de Mauvise, had been elected General Councilor in 1876 at the age of thirty-one. She was then Superior at Montpellier. In November 1879, she replaced Mother Marie-Gabrielle in Nîmes and restored discipline in the community.⁵⁵⁹ At the same time, she knew how to stand up

⁵⁵⁷Letter to Mother Thérèse-Emmanuel, May 26, 1879

⁵⁵⁸Father d'Alzon to Father Picard, Letter no. 6011, September 9, 1877

⁵⁵⁹Mother Marie of Christ wrote about all the abuses and shortcomings which she found in her new community. A letter to Mother Thérèse-Emmanuel describes a painful situation created around Guitta, the niece of Mother Marie-Eugénie, as well as nasty statements on

Origins of the Assumption Family

to Father d'Alzon by defending the freedom of Mother Marie-Eugénie and the Sisters.⁵⁶⁰ Father d'Alzon respected her, feared her somewhat, and held her in high esteem. She was the spiritual daughter of Father Picard.

At the Chapter of 1882, Mother Marie of Christ was re-elected General Councilor. This young Superior had always shown herself faithful to the Congregation, to its spirit, and to the Superior General. While still very young, she had been given important responsibilities and Marie-Eugénie had complete confidence in her. The letters of Marie-Eugénie up to 1885 reflect nothing but this trust and a certain concern for the health of her Councilor which was always delicate.

In Council, Marie of Christ was told about the financial situation of the nephews of Marie-Eugénie and was scandalized by the help authorized by the Council.⁵⁶¹ All this began to raise questions. In November 1884, after accusations from Mother Marie of Christ and reprimands from Father Picard, Mother Marie-Eugénie refused to treat these matters personally. At the time of the Chapter of 1886, Emmanuel was on the brink of ruin. The Chapter, under the Presidency of Bishop d'Hulst, set up a financial commission, in which Mother Marie-Eugénie had no part, to study and settle the question. Mother Marie-Eugénie asked for nothing better, but the situation was sad

the part of Father d'Alzon about Mother Marie-Eugénie. As this Superior had a tendency to exaggerate a lot, one hesitates to put too much trust in what she said. Unpublished letter, November 3, 1879.

⁵⁶⁰Mother Marie of Christ to Mother Marie-Eugénie, October 31, 1879: "... may God protect us from ever being governed by them [the AssumptionistP" Archives RA: FMI C.

⁵⁶¹Mother Marie-Eugénie was the sole heir in the wills of her mother and of M. de Franchessin. Her mother added a paragraph to her will asking that Eugenie should be good to her brothers, who apparently did not need money, in case anything should happen to them. In fact, after the ruin of her father, her mother did not leave her very much. In addition, her elder brother Louis helped both the Assumptionists and the Religious of the Assumption several times, and Emmanuel, his son, helped Mother Marie-Eugénie carry out a good business deal—once by way of exception! Because of the will and these services, Mother Marie-Eugénie felt obliged to help her nephew and niece. So the two children of Louis turned to her. Emmanuel got involved in bad business ventures, wasted everything, and, in the end, even misused the name of the Superior General of the Assumption to cover his debts.

There were children of her father's second marriage, Ferdinand and Georges, who also dared to abuse of her good heart. Mother Marie-Eugénie also made the mistake of letting members of her family come to live at Auteuil. It was her too scrupulous and tender heart that prompted her to act in this way. However, she was never disobedient: she asked the Council to give them some money, she went through the Bursar's Office, etc. Unfortunately, out of respect for Mother Marie-Eugénie, the Council did not interfere.

Problems of Government and of Relations between the Religious of the Assumption and the other Congregations of the Assumption

and humiliating for her. This came out later in letters to Father Picard and in a confrontation with Mother Marie-Eugénie. Also, Mother Marie of Christ had already had problems with Guitta, Marie-Eugénie's niece, at the boarding school in Nîmes. And when she went to Paris, she saw how annoying was the presence of Marie-Eugénie's nephews at Auteuil. We do not know if she had ever talked about these problems with the Superior General before the big crisis.

In the correspondence found in the archives in Auteuil, there is a letter that recounts a difficult moment in her relationship with Mother Marie-Eugénie. Marie of Christ took offense and seemed to have been ill at ease in her relationship with the Foundress. In a private conversation with the latter, she complained that Mother Marie-Eugénie did not trust her. Our documents tell us no more than that, but later letters suggest that the subject was money and the family of Marie-Eugénie. Once this difficulty was overcome, Marie of Christ increased her signs of affection in her letters to Marie-Eugénie: "This trust [in you], dear Mother, has remained so intact in me that to see you doubting it, has broken my heart perhaps more than you think. I have really and truly kept you in my heart."⁵⁶²

However, the Archives of the Assumptionists reveal another point-of-view. Mother Marie of Christ wrote to Father Picard⁵⁶³ that her character had suddenly changed because of a difficulty with "Our Mother." This letter is undated, but to judge by an event it recounts, we can presume that it is from 1883.⁵⁶⁴ In any case, a number of letters sent from Nîmes betray a sort of double-dealing vis-a-vis Marie-Eugénie and a passion for Father Picard and the Fathers:

I carry something in my heart that nothing will ever extinguish. I know that I owe no one in this world as much as I do to you. I also know that I want to act on my own and that you are not responsible for anything that upsets me... What does not change and

⁵⁶²And "Thank you from the bottom of my heart, dear Mother. You will never know the full extent of my love from the very moment I began to love you." July 16, 1884. "You are the one I have loved most in the world." July 23, 1884. See also July 26, 1884, August 25, 1884 and September 9, 1884.

⁵⁶³Handwritten letter of Marie of Christ to Father Picard 2SL, no. 65, 1883(7). Date added in pencil by an Assumptionist archivist.

⁵⁶⁴Did the Assumptionist archivist give 1883 as the date because of what was said about the Oblates?

Origins of the Assumption Family

will never change is the unique *confidence, affection and devotion* that I have for you, without the *shadow* of a doubt.⁵⁶⁵

In September 1883, a critical letter about Mother Marie-Eugénie and Mother Thérèse-Emmanuel concluded in this way: “Basically, Father, they need to go away and rest, and a Mistress of Novices and a Superior should be appointed in Auteuil.”⁵⁶⁶

Nothing of this about-face appears in the correspondence between Mother Marie-Eugénie and the Sisters, or in that with Father Picard, which lets us suppose that nothing changed on the surface. We find nothing either in the archives of the Religious about the opposition of Mother Marie of Christ to the Superior General before 1885. However, the letters of Marie of Christ to Father Picard reveal a feeling which became a sort of aversion to and repudiation of her Congregation. She had declared her total devotion to the Assumptionists, to “all of you,” ever since she entered the convent. It was almost the beginning of her vocation.

Throughout this entire period, there were painful situations. The principal actors in Paris were Fathers Picard and Jean Lehec,⁵⁶⁷ and the two General Councilors, Sisters Marie of Christ and Seraphine. Jean Lehec was in charge of the pupils, the Ladies, and the Sisters in various areas. Intelligent and gifted, he acquired a lot of influence in the little world of the Assumption. From his correspondence with Father Picard, it seems that he considered himself the delegate of Father Picard for the Sisters, who had a lot of confidence in him. Mother Marie-Seraphine was very attached to him and some Sisters allowed themselves to be led by him.⁵⁶⁸ In 1885, the trio, Jean Lehec, Marie of Christ and Mother Marie-Seraphine, were joined by

⁵⁶⁵Handwritten letters of Marie of Christ to Father Picard, Assumptionist Archives. The revealing letters are two letters bearing the date of July 6 without a year [1883?]: 2SL, no. 65, 2SL, no. 66; September 18, 1883, no. 70; March 9, 1885(7), no. 76; 1885, no. 82.

⁵⁶⁶A very long handwritten letter, in which Marie of Christ speaks about money, about her difficulties and those of Mother Marie-Séraphine, and about the jealousy of Mother Marie-Eugénie regarding Father Picard’s affection! September 18, 1883, 2SL, no. 70.

⁵⁶⁷Jean Lehec, born in l’Eure on January 25, 1854, Final Vows in 1878, secularized in 1888. He was in Paris from 1883 to 1886.

⁵⁶⁸After the events, Mother Marie-Ceistine, Vicar of Mother Marie-Eugénie in 1894 and second Superior General, wrote: “After acquiring a lot of influence over Father Picard and winning the overly good heart of Mother Marie-Seraphine, he turned against Our Mother who did not want to be directed by him... He listened to all the critics as if they were oracles.” (1922)

Problems of Government and of Relations between the Religious of the Assumption and the other Congregations of the Assumption

Sister Hélène de Castex and a few young Sisters in their opposition to the government of Mother Marie-Eugénie.⁵⁶⁹

Father Picard, friend and confessor of Mother Marie-Eugénie for almost thirty years, was also the confessor and director of Mother Marie of Christ. And of how many other sisters? His role with respect to Mother Marie-Eugénie was complex. Marie-Eugénie accorded him the same confidence, the same attachment, the same friendship and fidelity that she had given to Father d'Alzon. He was a support whom she seemed to need and who was completely devoted to her and to her Congregation. At one moment, he was* blamed for taking more interest in the affairs of the Religious than of his own Congregation. The need of the Mother General to have the approval of her confessor could be a burden for the Father, so too her "impressionability." From 1885, he supported her, but blamed her ceaselessly. Though he replied with great restraint to the flow of letters of Marie of Christ which reveal a sick mind, he seemed to believe what she reported about Marie-Eugénie, the Mothers, life at Auteuil, what was said against the Fathers, and above all her judgments on the quality of life of the Sisters. However, it seems clear that there was a serious distortion between what Mother Marie of Christ "understood" and reality. Mother Marie-Eugénie could not speak in the terms of modern psychology, but she was aware of the role played by Marie of Christ's imagination, and she resented her opposition.⁵⁷⁰

It was above all to Father Jean, who left the Assumptionists in 1888⁵⁷¹ after causing them as many problems as he had caused the Religious, that the "Mothers" attributed the division among the Sisters, for and against the

⁵⁶⁹After the special Chapter convoked to settle a number of contentious questions in 1886, Mother Marie of Christ went to the Oblates (of Father Picard) on loan, either for an indeterminate period of time or for two years [there are contradictory witnesses]. Helene-Marie went with her, and Sister Marie of the Child Jesus (Pissot) joined her later. Mother Marie-Seraphine and Mother Claire-Emmanuel, both Superiors, "returned loyally." Sister Franvois-Xavier remained in the Congregation while continuing to cause problems, as she had always done, and Sister Anna-Marie went to Poitiers.

⁵⁷⁰Perhaps she was not aware of what dampened her relations with the Sisters and the Mothers, but it was the warlike attitude she had adopted, even with members of the Council. How can that be remedied?" Mother Marie-Eugénie to Mother Marie of Saint John: L. 11566, January 9, 1885.

⁵⁷¹From Father Picard, May 19, 1888, no. 2443: "By his character, his criticisms, his violence and his irregularities, he forced me . . ." He preferred to leave than to correct himself. "It is not enough to be intelligent to be a good religious. We can do without talent, but we cannot do without a positive attitude."

Origins of the Assumption Family

Fathers. He allowed himself to write brazen letters to the Foundress and understood Canon Law in a way all his own.⁵⁷²

Father Pernet, in discussions with the Mothers in 1879, expressed the conviction that the priesthood confers something essential and superior to anything a sister can possess in terms of government. This exalted idea of the priesthood which makes men superior to others, especially to women, explains much of the attitude and behavior of the Fathers. On the one hand, they could claim particular rights with regard to the Sisters; on the other hand, they interpreted reactions and divergent views as a lack of respect for the priest.

We believe that this way of looking at things was not altogether shared by Father Vincent de Paul Bailly who kept himself more at a distance from all these affairs.⁵⁷³ But these ideas were undoubtedly shared by Picard and the young religious, above all by Father Jean in Paris and Father Alexis⁵⁷⁴ in Nîmes. They gave hardly any thought to the fact that Rome was strongly advising against the government of women by men of the same religious family. They did not seem to be well-informed about the Church's practice regarding men and women religious of a same spiritual family. They invoked instead an interpretation of the role of the priest as found in the Rule of Saint Augustine.

Two ideas were gaining ground in the minds of the sisters: the members "of the opposition" thought that Marie-Eugénie was no longer capable of directing the Congregation, and rumor had it that they wanted to put Marie-Seraphine in her place.⁵⁷⁵ They thought that formation was not what it

⁵⁷²Father Jean Lehec to Mother Marie-Eugénie: "Father Combalot was thrown overboard, and the same thing happened to Father d'Alzon. Is the same thing being prepared for Father Picard?"

⁵⁷³In a letter to Mother Marie-Eugénie, Mother Thérèse-Emmanuel repeated what Father Vincent had said to her. Later, everything was decided at the Chapter: "Father Vincent sees things like you do regarding relationships with the Fathers: friendship, freedom, trust, and no authority whatsoever. He deplors what is happening and thinks that the young Fathers (especially Father Jean and Father Alexis) have worked up Father Picard. He says: "You were founded several years before us, and you had your life and your rules before we existed. You have your own Foundress. If God had wanted you to be like us and to be governed by us, like the Oblates and the Pernettes, He would have waited until we existed before founding you" . . . "Father Vincent strongly believes that we should have our own life and spirit. He knows that Father Jean wanted to give us their spirit."

⁵⁷⁴It must be said that we have found no complaints about Father Alexis.

⁵⁷⁵The idea that Mother Marie-Seraphine wanted to replace the Superior General was denied by Mother Marie-Eugénie in her introduction to the Chapter of 1886 (L.I 1718). In

Problems of Government and of Relations between the Religious of the Assumption and the other Congregations of the Assumption

should be and that the “Mothers,” the older sisters who surrounded Marie-Eugénie, were protecting her from the reality of the situation.⁵⁷⁶ According to Marie of Christ, Marie-Seraphine, the Mistress of Novices, could do nothing with the young sisters because of the presence at Auteuil of Mother Thérèse-Emmanuel. At Auteuil, the Sisters were becoming aware that there was a conflict.

The truth escapes us. Surely, Mother Marie-Eugénie and Mother Thérèse-Emmanuel were no longer “with it.” Marie-Eugénie certainly no longer had the energy of her younger years. In her Instructions to the Superiors, one senses that she was thinking of the future and taking a conservative stance, which is typical of someone at “the end of her career.” In addition, she was distracted from her everyday responsibilities by dramas like the difficulties with the Assumptionists and the Priory, and the trials with her family. (We will see further on that she had a heart-attack during the Nativity Affair.) The Archives of the Religious of the Assumption do not provide us with anything that allows us to conclude that the direction of the Congregation was beyond her or that the Sisters wanted a change of government. If there had been general discontent, the Congregation would not have survived another ten years under the authority of the Foundress, as it did in fact. If some Sisters were waiting for changes, they had the faith to wait for the hour of God.

Marie of Christ and Marie-Seraphine seem to have felt misunderstood and persecuted. The great majority of Sisters appear to have been totally in the dark about these misunderstandings. Mother Marie-Seraphine appears to have been a bit innocent and manipulated. She complained of her wounds after the Chapter of 1886. In June 1885, Mother Marie of Christ submitted her resignation⁵⁷⁷ as General Councilor for personal reasons. This was the beginning of the big drama which led to the need for a special Chapter.

March 1886, this idea appeared in the correspondence of Mother Marie-Eugénie: “Here, we still have a sad situation. Father Jean has an irritation that he is sharing with his own. I have learned that his plan was to oblige me sooner or later to submit my resignation (do not speak about this) so that Marie-Seraphine could replace me. The complaints about the government stem from that.” L.I 1685 to Mother Ter*se of the Sacred Heart. And elsewhere: “They are tired of my government.” L.I 1678

⁵⁷⁶A letter from Father Picard to lather Alexis accused Maric-Fugenie of half-truths and of wanting to destroy everything.” And he seemingly alludes to the departure of Mother Marie of the Nativity whom he sees as the core of the problem. But he was perhaps mixing a lot of things together in these accusations. December 24, 1885, L.2188.

⁵⁷⁷Letter to Mother Marie-Eugénie, June 15, 1885

The Nativity Affair

The breaking-point came with the **Nativity affair**, so called from the name of the Superior of Cannes, Marie of the Nativity (Florence Dillon). This Sister, who fell in love with a young Armenian woman, was shaken in her religious vocation. At first, Mother Marie-Eugénie called on Father Picard, the spiritual father of Mother Marie of the Nativity, and on Mothers Marie of Christ and Marie-Séraphine who helped her as best they could. “Nothing unites people as much as a common anguish,” wrote Marie-Eugénie.⁵⁷⁸

But everything ended badly when Father Picard decreed that the letters of the young woman should not be given to Mother Marie of the Nativity and when, pressured by this Sister, Mother Louise-Eugénie gave her the packet of letters after seeking the advice of Bishop Gay.

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Father Picard saw this as an act of disobedience and as a lack of respect for the authority of the priest. Since Mother Louise-Eugénie was Superior of the Little Convent of Auteuil, he put the chapel under interdict! The Archbishop of Paris and the Ecclesiastical Superior⁵⁷⁹ did not agree with him, but Father Picard did not give in. Mother Louise insisted on the fact that she had no intention of disobeying and saw no reason for asking to be forgiven a fault she did not recognize. Her community, knowing nothing about what had happened and about the interdict, simply went to the Monastery of Auteuil next door for their daily Eucharist. Even after Mother Louise and Father had explained the situation to each other, there was no reconciliation. Father Picard always refused to go to Auteuil unless Mother Louise were sent elsewhere.⁵⁸⁰ With hindsight, we can understand that this was not the real cause of the rupture, but the climax of all of Father Picard’s complaints and

⁵⁷⁸Mother Marie-Eugénie to Father Picard, L.I 1613, November 11, 1885

⁵⁷⁹The situation got even more complicated when the Nuncio, pressured by the Russian Ambassador, intervened because of his friendship with the family of Sister Louise-Eugénie.

⁵⁸⁰Though Mother Louise-Eugénie was sent to Spain after the Chapter, Father Picard did not return to Auteuil. Then, on the order of the Archbishop, Mother Louise-Eugénie came back to Paris, but not to Auteuil. Mother Marie-Eugénie was completely cornered because Mother Louise was the General Bursar, and the ecclesiastical authorities—the Archbishop, the Ecclesiastical Superior, and the Nuncio—did not approve of Mother Marie-Eugénie giving in to the demands of Father Picard.

Problems of Government and of Relations between the Religious of the Assumption and the other Congregations of the Assumption

hurts.⁵⁸¹

What were the complaints?

Father Picard relayed to Marie-Eugénie what had been reported to him about what the Sisters were saying in community and about what she had said to undermine respect for the Fathers. According to the letters, Father Picard did not mention money matters to Marie-Eugénie until much later, even though they figured prominently in his correspondence with Marie of Christ. The same applies to the question of her family at Auteuil. But, since they saw each other frequently, it is highly possible that these matters were dealt with face to face.

As for the Fathers, the criticism that the spirit of the Assumption was being lost was often raised but without concrete explanations. What that meant was summed up in a letter written at the beginning of 1886 to Mother Thérèse-Emmanuel, who had questioned Father Picard about his dissatisfaction:

I feel torn to pieces everywhere in your Congregation, and I think the time has come for me to retire.

Minds are divided. (Example: the history of the letters returned to Marie of the Nativity).

This accidental disagreement reflects a painful state of affairs. Some set themselves up as judges regarding questions of confession and direction, others criticize and mock. And in the end, we get to the point where we do not understand one another as we did in the past. Fear of offending God which overlooks what people will say; zeal for souls which entails sacrifice-of-self and of earthly interests; goodness of heart which rejoices in the good accomplished by others and excludes the petty preoccupations of jealousy; ardent love of the cause of God and of his Church which sacrifices the creature and manifests itself in an absolute disinterestedness in the work one is doing; and frankness in pursuing and affirming the truth. These are all things we love according

⁵⁸¹We must point out the great goodness, but also the sensitivity and the heightened susceptibility of Father Picard, like Saint Jerome or Cardinal Newman, that emerge from his letters to Mother Marie-Eugénie. A letter from Father Edmond to Father Picard undoubtedly refers to the situation with the Religious of the Assumption His wishes for the New Year: "That Paris cease a bit to obsess you and to monopolize you to such an extent," January 7. 1885, no.203.

Origins of the Assumption Family

to the spirit of the Assumption and which, in my opinion, are no longer a priority for the Sisters.”⁵⁸²

We can well imagine the effect of this on Mother Thérèse Emmanuel, who tried in vain to defend the Sisters and the Congregation by reminding Father of the favorable report he had made on the communities and of the collaboration of the Sisters in their apostolates.⁵⁸³

Finally, Mother Marie-Eugénie faced the facts. On the advice of Bishop d’Hulst, the Ecclesiastical Superior in Paris, she decided to convoke a special General Chapter, two years before the normal date, to settle once and for all the question of the authority of the Fathers. This was set for August 1886. At the Chapter, seven Sisters out of forty-four indicated their preference for the government by the Fathers.⁵⁸⁴ The Statute of Union of 1876 was annulled upon the adoption of a new plan of government for the Constitutions.⁵⁸⁵

In brief, we cannot claim to have access to the whole truth about this situation because of the absence of less-involved and less-passionate observers, and because of the nature of some of the documents—so many letters—and the absence of others. But we can note, I believe, that the Statute of Union with the Assumptionists was the greatest mistake of the long generalate of Mother Marie-Eugénie. It was an illusion to think that the Sisters, who had known no other authority than that of the Superior General and who deeply loved her as well as their own freedom, could put up with the “interference” of young priests who had very little experience⁵⁸⁶ like Fathers Jean and Alexis,⁵⁸⁷ to say nothing of the vision and style of government of a man like Father Picard. Nor could they accept to see their “Mother” called into question.

Basically, Marie-Eugénie loved the Congregation of the Fathers as part of

⁵⁸²Letter of Father Picard to Mother Thérèse-Emmanuel, January 2, 1886.

⁵⁸³Reply of Mother Thérèse-Emmanuel from Cannes, January 7, 1886: “I cannot hide from you that your last letter moved me profoundly and sadly. It contains things which are so serious that I needed 24 hours of prayer and reflection before answering you.”

⁵⁸⁴Letter of Mother Marie-Eugénie to Father Picard, L.I 1712, undated, but certainly of August 7.

⁵⁸⁵Acts of the Chapter of the Religious of the Assumption 1886. August 4–12, 1886. Archives of the Religious of the Assumption.

⁵⁸⁶Mother Thérèse-Emmanuel wrote to Marie-Eugénie of her desire to have “confessors with white hair.”

⁵⁸⁷Among the complaints of the Sisters, Father Alexis was never mentioned. Me was appointed Delegate for the Religious and the Oblates of Nîmes and of Montpellier.

Problems of Government and of Relations between the Religious of the Assumption and the other Congregations of the Assumption

“our dual Congregation;”⁵⁸⁸ their destinies were linked by history and in her heart. She was at its complete disposal and gave it her money and even her reputation. She could see and judge situations objectively enough, but her heart prompted her to follow the path of affection and fidelity. Her life was intertwined with two Assumptions as well as with her family. All this was expressed in her opening address to the Special Chapter of 1886. After ten years of quarrels, the question of Union with the Fathers was finally going to be resolved. Before the work began, she exonerated everybody.⁵⁸⁹ She never basically stopped trusting Father Picard, even after the decision against the Union in matters of government. It was even possible that she feared for the future, after she was gone.

But not all the Sisters shared her idea, nor followed it. Their experience and their interests, with few exceptions, went in another direction. Every encroachment on the freedom of the Sisters or of the Superior General was badly received. Marie-Eugénie, having been Superior for more than forty years, suffered certainly from short-sightedness and from the “infallibility”⁵⁹⁰ which nearly always accompanies long mandates. But the Sisters, “the Mothers” who should have been able to help her see things in a different light or to renew herself, through veneration for her holiness and attachment to her goodness, saw no more clearly than she did.

⁵⁸⁸Letter L 3521 of Mother Marie-Eugénie to Father d’Alzon, December 22. 1877 See also: Letters of December 24, 1849; August 12, 1852; December 31. 1854, January 31, 1855; June 2, 1855.

⁵⁸⁹Introduction to the Chapter of 1886, L.1 1718: “For the past thirty years, the Fathers of the Assumption have been in relation with us as confessors, directors, friends, and counselors. Never has the devil been able to cast a shadow on these relationships, which have always been holy and above all suspicion. I believe that it is the Enemy of all good who wants to take vengeance today... by placing divisions among us God alone knows the pain I have experienced for the past six months The question of the breakup of relations with our Fathers is very serious, so is that of our Rule.” *Chapter Instructions*, 1878.

⁵⁹⁰Letter from Father Alexis to Father Picard while Mother Marie-Eugénie was resting in Cannes at the time of the Nativity Affair: “I have seen very little of Madame the Superior General. She is very affected. We must hope that once this matter is finished she will get over it. It is very difficult to react against the adoration of which she was the object on the part of certain religious, especially at this time of illness which is endearing her to them even more. They were too accustomed to granting her a certain infallibility. And, I repeat, I find that all the more serious that there seems to be almost nothing that can be done about it. Fortunately, what is impossible for human beings is possible for God.” December 31, 1885, ON 797, no. 2873

Origins of the Assumption Family

In fact, she complained little, and she defended herself objectively with the facts, but not without being troubled by them. From time to time, she tried to clarify things with her friends among the Sisters. It is there that we can sense some of her suffering.

In her papers, we find a note (for herself) which expresses her complaints. It was surely written in 1886 and refers to the Assumptionists:

- Perpetual collections and sales [to support the works of the Fathers],
- Absolutism in spiritual relationships, no compromises possible regarding the welfare of the children,
- Filling minds with ideas which make them blame and turn away from their legitimate Superiors,
- Attaching them to the works of the Fathers and detaching them from us,
- Non-encouragement of vocations for us.⁵⁹¹

Mother Thérèse-Emmanuel found it annoying that among the Fathers the criterion for appointing our Superiors should be their degree of union with them; that they found discontented sisters in the communities, as there are everywhere, and set them against their Superiors; and that Father Picard placed too much confidence in the young priests.⁵⁹²

At the time of the Special Chapter of 1886, Bishop d'Hulst had a private conversation with each capitulant. The Chapter confirmed the government of the Foundress, but she came out of it with a broken heart. Father Picard refused to return to Auteuil. The letters of Mother Marie-Eugénie begging him to return are sad. But Father was hurt. He felt that some of the Sisters

⁵⁹¹L11719 [undated paper, seems to be a personal note.]

⁵⁹²Mother Thérèse-Emmanuel to Mother Marie-Eugénie: "... I must say that everywhere, from time to time, there are chaplains who stir up disagreements. With us, the older Fathers would not do that. With me, Father Picard has always been above reproach." L.I 106, April 13, 1886.

(Young) Father Jean has been giving Father Picard all types of "information" he has picked up through third-parties: "... this noon Mother Marie-Seraphine told me that all the conflicts have done nothing else at the present time but separate you the mother general. That a recent letter of Mother Marie of Christ about you had provoked this comment... I will write to you again from here if I learn anything new." (September 10, 188[5?]).

Problems of Government and of Relations between the Religious of the Assumption and the other Congregations of the Assumption

had refused his authority; his interpretation of the role of the priest had not been upheld; and Mother Louise-Eugénie remained in Paris. Father Picard needed time before he could accept to go back. But he continued to be the confessor of Mother Marie-Eugénie. However, she was the one who went to see him. The help given by the Assumptionists to the Religious did not stop either, nor did that of the Sisters to the Assumptionists. Later on, Father Picard was at the bedside of Mother Marie-Eugénie to prepare her for death.

On March 12, 1898, he wrote to his brothers:

I recommend to your prayers, in a very special way, Madame Marie-Lugdnie of Jesus, the Superior General and Foundress of the Ladies of the Assumption.

Her life was intimately linked to that of our Founder, Father d'Alzon, and to the beginning of all our works. She loved our Assumption almost as ardently as her own, until the time when, after their foundation, both congregations were able to do the good Our Lord expected of each. For over forty years, I have been her confessor. Until the very end, her soul, so dear to Father d'Alzon, remained the object of my prayers and my solicitude. So I ask that, in each of our houses, the prayers which we customarily say at the death of one of our religious be said for her.

There is not a single work undertaken in our congregation until 1886 in which she did not participate, and to which she did not devote herself. . . Our two congregations were united by the most intimate bonds, and the day I was called to give the Last Sacraments to this faithful handmaid of the Lord, it seemed to me that one of the earliest witnesses of our foundation was leaving us and was going to join our Founder.

The Religious [Sisters] of the Assumption weep for the most tender of Superiors and the most enlightened of guides. Our tears are mixed with theirs. We suffer with them and we pray for her who was the mother of so many of our works and of so many vocations.

This last testimony says as much about Father Picard as it does about "Our Mother Foundress."

Origins of the Assumption Family

Sister Clare-Teresa Tjader
Religious of the Assumption

1001 South 47th Street
Philadelphia, PA 19143
U.S.A.

Appendices: Regarding the Special Chapter of 1886

N. 11705 – Auteuil, June 5, 1886

From Mother Marie-Eugénie to Mother Marie-Marguerite, Superior in London

I am very happy at the thought of seeing you all, my dear Mothers. I know what that will mean to Mother Thérèse-Emmanuel and me. After seeing you, no one will be able to think that we are taking a long time to give our place to others. However, you must also come with conciliatory ideas regarding our relations with the Assumptionists. Right now, I am getting on very well with Father Picard, and I wish you could help me change his idea about withdrawing his religious. This is more my opinion than that of Mother Thérèse-Emmanuel.

N. 11713 – Very confidential

From Mother Marie-Eugénie to a Superior

My dear Mother,

Father Picard is leaving and withdrawing his religious. He told me that one of the things he cannot accept at all is the antagonism that has been developing between him and me. I am writing to tell you what I told him: that I did not accept it either and that I would say so to the Mothers. I am telling you this right away, my dear Mother. No matter what happens, I will always remain devoted and attached to Father Picard who has always given me good advice and helped me throughout so many years in the work of the Good Lord. I cannot accept that, out of affection for me, the sisters would oppose him, no more than he himself would accept that, out of deference to him, they would oppose me. The circumstances are serious. Pray. Come with the desire to give glory to God in our Congregation. Very truly yours in Our Lord,

Sister Marie-Eugénie of Jesus

N. 11714-July 19, 1886

From Mother Marie-Eugénie to Mother Marie-Marguerite, Superior in London

More or less the same thoughts on the subject of the antagonism: “Father has always given me good advice, I have affection and respect for him. He has helped me in many things, and I cannot accept anything that would establish the need to oppose one side in order to be loyal to the other. Before God, you must seek the good of the Congregation We must seek it together without human considerations. I hope God will bless us . . .”

From the Acts of the extraordinary General Chapter of 1886

Preparatory Session of August 4, 1886:

The Superior General distributed to the Chapter Members the Proposal on Government, asking that it be put into effect as soon as it is approved by the Chapter.

N.B. This proposal had been worked on since 1866 (approval of the Institute) and in the General Chapter of 1876 with all of its consequences . . .

Session of August 5, 1886

The President declared the Chapter officially open. He added that, having been invited to hear in private the opinion of the Capitulants on certain questions, he postponed to the following session the examination of the rules on government and all the other matters to be dealt with.

There follows a blank page for the 6th (Friday) and the 7th (Saturday). We can suppose that the individual encounters with Bishop d’Hulst took place on those days.

Session of August 8, 1886 (Sunday)

The President recalled that in a previous session the credentials of the Capitulants had been checked and accepted. He then submitted the questions that would be examined in the Chapter.

Problems of Government and of Relations between the Religious of the Assumption and the other Congregations of the Assumption

1. The Proposal on Government. The President noted that the large number of representatives from all the houses of the Congregation in so many diverse countries seemed to indicate that the time had come to present to Rome a Project on Government in conformity with the *animadversiones* of 1867 and to ask for the approval of the Rules.
2. The appointment of a finance commission, which the Chapter will empower to render an account of all temporal matters and to approve its management.
3. The appointment of assistants or councilors that might seem necessary.

The President then asked one of the councilors to read aloud the Proposal on Government given to the Capitulants.

The reader paused after each article and the President reminded the Capitulants that they must, in total freedom, make all the remarks they judged appropriate regarding the plan that was just read to them. He indicated the articles in which the new draft differed from the old one, and he submitted them to the Chapter for approval.

1. The *animadversiones* indicated that after the death of the Superior General who was appointed for life because she was the Foundress, future Superiors General will be elected for a period of 12 years and cannot be re-elected, either one or more times, except with the approval of the Holy See. The President declared that he believed this span of time was advisable and asked if there were any opposing opinions on this issue. There were none.
2. Until now, the Council had been composed of only 1 Assistant General and 3 Councilors. The President pointed out that if one of the Councilors has been considered as a second Assistant General, the Minutes of the elections at the last Chapter made no mention of this. The new proposal requires 4 Councilors elected by the Chapter, plus an Assistant General designated by the Superior General and agreed upon by the Chapter in a vote taken with white and black voting-balls. The President asked if this point of the Constitutions was accepted. It won almost unanimous acceptance.
3. In conformity with the *animadversiones*, the President asked that the entire General Chapter, composed of all the Superiors and of a delegate

Origins of the Assumption Family

from each community, meet every six years and that the Bursar General and the Mistresses of Novices be included. This was unanimously accepted.

4. The President thought it advisable to specify the composition of an interim Chapter which the Superior General, with the consent of her Council, may call at six-year intervals. This Chapter would be made up only of the General Council, the former Superiors General, all the Superiors of the Congregation, the Bursar General, and the Mistresses of Novices. Individual Superiors who would ask to be dispensed because of distance could be excused with the consent of the Council. This article was adopted.
5. When the Superior General has herself replaced by a Visitor, she is asked to choose her from among the members of the interim Chapter, or, if this is not possible, to designate, with the consent of her Council, an experienced professed Sister. Adopted.
6. The President noted the accuracy of the article that taxes the houses 20% of their revenues to help the Motherhouse with its many undertakings. Both charity and justice are maintained because a house that cannot afford this expense may have it canceled by requesting a subsidy.

After the reading of the Proposal on Government, the Chapter proceeded with the election of the members of the Finance Commission by secret ballot. Elected were: Mother Marie-Catherine, Mother Thérèse-Emmanuel, and Mother Marie-Marguerite.

The Superior General then asked the President to propose to the Chapter the election of a fourth Councilor in accord with the decision taken during the discussion on the Proposal on Government. After consenting to his proposal, the members of the Chapter proceeded to elect a fourth Councilor by secret ballot. Mother Marie-Catherine was declared the elected Councilor.

The Superior General explained that she, as well as her Assistant General, had been sick the past winter and invoked the article in the Rule that had just been adopted to propose to the Chapter a possible Assistant General to replace her or her Assistant General in the event that either one of them would be unable to carry out their duties because of illness. After the President agreed to the proposal, the Superior designated Mother Marie-Marguerite. She abstained from voting. Once all the beans had been placed in a box, Mother Marie-Marguerite was unanimously elected.

Problems of Government and of Relations between the Religious of the Assumption and the other Congregations of the Assumption

Having fully discussed all of the questions, the President suspended the Chapter until August 12 in order to have time to put the Constitutions in conformity with the points he had indicated and which had been adopted.

Session of August 12, 1886 at 2:30 P.M.

The President opened the session saying that a meeting of the Finance Commission had just taken place in his presence. A report was read to him by one of the Commission members in the presence of the Bursar General who provided the documents. The President stated that he made a few comments and that he was given satisfactory answers to his questions. Since the Commission represented the Chapter, it was not necessary to make the report known to the General Assembly. It remained in the Archives of the General Administration. Then the President noted that the time elapsed between the opening of the Chapter and its closing had been well used to determine the terms of the definitive edition of the Constitutions regarding Government. Completing the Constitutions now allowed the Superior General to present a *Postulatum* to Rome in view of obtaining their approval *ad experimentum* and, hopefully, their final approval in a few years. There was question of adding a special chapter on relations with the Ordinary, but the Archbishop who was consulted did not think it necessary. Ecclesiastical jurisdiction was sufficiently established in Article I on government, which placed each house under the authority of the Diocesan Bishop, since the rights and powers of the Ordinary are already determined by canon law.

The President asked if any member of the Chapter wished to submit other questions. There being none, he declared the session ended and the Chapter closed.

N. 11712—Undated but probably around August 1886

Letter of Marie-Eugénie to Father Picard

My dear Father,

Bishop d'Hulst wants to see you. Please be good to him. Your return would be a joy for everyone. I don't understand how he could tell me that there was a 34 majority after telling me that there were only 7 against on a total of 44. And of these 7, were there not Superiors from other houses, and, to my knowledge, 2 who had not spoken to me beforehand and who did

Origins of the Assumption Family

not understand since they were incapable of doing so? Did he deduct those who told him they desired the return because I wanted it and because I knew best? That is surely not your thinking. But these numbers are only for you; *do not say anything to him*. I attach herewith the old rules of government proposed to Rome that I neglected to give him. Please do not forget to give them to him. I would like to see you tonight. Please suggest a time.

With all my affection and a thousand best wishes in Our Lord.

Sister Marie-Eugénie

From Mother Thérèse-Emmanuel to Mother Marie-Eugénie, January 6, 1887 (HS IV4)

...I am telling the Lord about your suffering, my dear Mother, begging him to help you carry and to relieve the pain you feel in your heart as a result of this decision ...

It is for Him, for the freedom of His Work that you accepted him, and you certainly did everything you could to distance him as well as to improve the situation and maintain peace. But how can one have this peace with someone who does not want to come to an agreement with others, who does not want to give up an iota of his views, despite the advice of those in authority over him and over us and who are capable of judging the situation. When we think about this, we cannot help seeing a divine will that gave you, dear Mother, the freedom to be fully a foundress and to exercise your authority without hindrance. ...I hope that Our Lord will allow you to find peace and happiness in the ideas that decided you and convinced you to sacrifice everything for your work—this work that He gave *you*—namely, the mission of founding and completing the work you began according to the lights and graces of *his Spirit*. You have worked and fought to keep it on its true path and with its original spirit. God will take this into account and the Congregation will praise you a thousand times for having re-Founded it, so to speak... The future will bear the fruit of your pain, and we and those who will come after us will harvest in joy what you have sown in tears. The Congregation wishes to receive everything from *you*. it wants to be your work. This desire is legitimate, and it is a sign of God's will because it signifies the union of all hearts with the Mother He has given us ...

The Priory of Nîmes Affair⁵⁹³

JEAN-PAUL PÉRIER-MUZET

The facts pertaining to the Priory of Nîmes Affair are mentioned in Father d'Alzon's correspondence between January and November 1879, sometimes incidentally, sometimes directly. They were the subject of exchanges among several persons:

- First of all, Father d'Alzon, age 69. He was sick most of the time, certainly diminished, and inclined to exaggerate or paint situations and problems darker than they were in reality. The overall context was gloomy: there was a hostile republican majority in the Senate as of January 5, 1879; MacMahon was replaced by Jules Grevy as president (January 31); and the decrees of Jules Ferry (March 1879) were being put into effect.
- His direct interlocutor was Mother Marie-Eugénie of Jesus, age 62. She was equally preoccupied by the foreseeable consequences of the republican policies which targeted the teaching-congregations of religious. She was also very affected by the death of Sister Marie-Agnes Devereux, the superior in Malaga who died of poisoning. In April, she began to travel, particularly to Nîmes where she saw the Sisters at the Priory (April) and Father d'Alzon (beginning of May). The two had already seen each other in Paris at the beginning of April.

This crisis began in January, reached its highest point in the spring, and ended shortly thereafter with two decisions: the removal from the community

⁵⁹³Cf. *Documentation biographique du Père d'Alzon*, vol. II, chap. 30. Touveneraud, Lecture given on July 1, 1979 to the Religious of the Assumption at Auteuil, *Anthologie atzoniennne*, chap. 47.

Origins of the Assumption Family

of Sisters Marie-Paul Hummel (from Strasbourg, age 39) and Marie-Gabrielle de Courcy, the former superior (from a Scottish family, age 47), who was replaced by Sister Marie of Christ de Mauvise (from the Poitou Region, age 34).

But this crisis obviously concerned everyone in Nîmes who was involved in one way or another, sisters as well as priests:

– Priests: Father d’Alzon (superior), Father Laurent (ordinary confessor who resigned from his post), Father Dumazer (in Ales, age 35), Father Emmanuel Bailly (director of the College, age 37), Father Marie-Edmond Bouvy (temporary confessor who also asked to be relieved of his duty, teacher, age 32), and Father Justin Grelet (teacher, age 28).

– Sisters at the Priory:⁵⁹⁴ there were at least 11: the superior, Marie-Gabrielle de Courcy, and the directress of the boarding school, Marie-Paul Hummel. Others are also mentioned in the correspondence: Marie-Thérèse de Rocher (age 41, from Nîmes), Hélène of the Visitation Micheau (age 47), Marie-Henriette Magne (age 37, from Nîmes), Marie-Eulalie Olivier (age 43), Marie-Elisabeth de Balincourt (age 53, from Nîmes), François de Sales Bosc (age 50, from Nîmes), Thérèse of the Conception Bardou (age 40, from Paris), Marie-Ange de Lansade, and Cecile-Elisabeth de Lansade (two sisters from Jonquieres in the Hérault Region)

To be noted at the outset: the relative youth of many of the people involved and the considerable number of religious from Nîmes.

Grievances

There were four grievances that Father d’Alzon had to address at the Priory:

The government of the Congregation. Father d’Alzon wrote to Mother Marie-Eugénie of Jesus: “*Your constant dissatisfaction discourages rather than encourages the Sisters Your persistent distrust must not become a stumbling block.*”⁵⁹⁵ As a matter of fact, since 1876, Marie-Eugénie had been thinking of removing Mother Marie-Gabrielle as superior because she was being accused of weakness. Father d’Alzon opposed the move.

The direction of the boarding school in Nîmes. This was about Sister Marie-Paul Hummel who, in Father d’Alzon’s view, embodied all of the

⁵⁹⁴Reconstruction according to the letters of Father d’Alzon. The exact number of sisters in the community is unknown.

⁵⁹⁵Letter, February 6, 1879, p. 32.

The Priory of Nîmes Affair

shortcomings and abuses of the Priory of Nîmes: bad spirit, spitefulness, out-of-place remarks, gossiping, lack of firmness with the students and parents (leniency in granting permissions and authorizations to leave the property), and allowing formal balls and extravagant dresses.

The internal life of the community of the Religious of the Assumption. *“How can a house function with a collection of simpletons and fools?”*⁵⁹⁶ What was missing, according to Father d’Alzon, was a leader capable of governing. According to him, there were many abuses that needed to be corrected: over-use of the parlor, too many visitors, gossiping (cutting remarks) and intrigue, and a domineering attitude on the part of Sister Marie-Paul who, by putting pressure on the Sisters, had a bad influence on them. He also thought that she was critical and worldly, lacked piety, slandered others, was secretive, wrote clandestine letters including an anonymous letter of protest, joked about the preaching, objected to spiritual direction, demonstrated weakness by the concessions she granted families, and was not frank. Father d’Alzon did not directly implicate the Superior, but he blamed her for being under the thumb of Sister Marie-Paul, for supporting her,⁵⁹⁷ and for not seeing the overall problem behind the personal one. Marie-Eugénie sensed the problem and had been thinking of replacing the Superior since 1876.

The attitude of the Religious of the Assumption toward the Assumptionists. There were inopportune visits by Sister Marie-Paul Hummel to her sick nephew at the College (François Wittman);⁵⁹⁸ *laissez-faire* regarding a few favored students who were relatives (among them, a certain Cordelia, a relative of a Religious of the Assumption, Thérèse Wittman, the niece of Sister Marie-Paul, and a Miss Chalmeton); impertinence on the part of Sister Marie-Paul toward Father Laurent; accusations of undermining the work of the Assumptionists;⁵⁹⁹ and disobedience to directives.⁶⁰⁰ The lack of consideration on the part of the Sisters toward the priest-chaplains, the spiritual directors or the ecclesiastical superiors seems to have been a con-

⁵⁹⁶Letter, January 14, 1879, vol. XIII, p. 16.

⁵⁹⁷Letter, March 23, 1879: *“You had nothing to do with this sad affair, except to have let yourself be influenced,”* p. 67.

⁵⁹⁸Letter, March 20, 1879, p. 64.

⁵⁹⁹Letter March 23, 1863 to Sister Marie-liabriclle de Courcy, vol. XIII. p. 67.

⁶⁰⁰Letter, July 25, 1879: *“If I allowed myself to threaten you, it is because for twelve years, at the Priory, I have been repeating the same things and nothing has changed in one way or the other,”* vol. XIII, p. 166.

Origins of the Assumption Family

stant if we are to believe the list of names Father d'Alzon sent to Mother Marie-Eugénie of Jesus in August 1878.⁶⁰¹

In the end, Father d'Alzon decided to bring his spiritual authority to bear on the community of the Religious of the Assumption by offering his resignation as ecclesiastical superior,⁶⁰² by withdrawing the Assumptionist confessors and spiritual directors from the Priory, and by replacing them with secular priests (Paradan). However, his intention and the measures he took were not entirely negative: he suggested to Marie-Eugénie a number of transfers of personnel and an internal measure of reform:

“You desired the departure of Sister Marie-Paul? You have fifteen days to give her another appointment.”⁶⁰³

It was decided that Sister Marie-Paul would leave Nîmes during the Easter vacation of 1879. But Father d'Alzon also wanted to go further. He wrote to Marie-Eugénie of Jesus on April 26:

You must profit by this storm to make your sisters understand the need to give all priests the respect that is due them We have the impression that there is a strong trend among you that is saying to us: if you fall short, others will take your place. However, no one seems to know exactly to whom they would turn, except possibly one or two sisters who would be inclined to look to the Jesuits. This would be completely opposed to your way of thinking, but from heaven you will see that things will turn out this way.

Again, this ties in with the broader question of the spiritual direction of the Religious by the Assumptionists. According to the preferred formula devised by the two heads of the two Congregations, it was to be voluntary, not imposed. Not yet settled, however, was the freedom of the Sisters to look for a confessor or a director of their choice.

⁶⁰¹Letter, vol. XII, p. 518: Fathers Faber, Hermann, Capel, R6dier, and Galeran. D'Alzon seems to have deliberately forgotten that, in other circumstances, he had backed the Religious of the Assumption against a certain number of cases of ecclesiastical meddling: Combalot, Véron, etc.

⁶⁰²Letter, February 6, 1879 to Mother Marie-Eugénie of Jesus: *‘I am the Superior of the Priory and therefore I am responsible for it. If I am not able to reform certain abuses, I am ready to pull out.’* Cf. also p. 42.

⁶⁰³Letter, March 20, 1879, p. 64.

Outcome of the Crisis

This crisis had multiple repercussions, some foreseen and others unforeseen, in terms of the solutions that were adopted. Not all of them seem to have been successful, though the overall effect was rapidly positive:

In April, Father d'Alzon and Mother Marie-Eugénie consulted each other. It was decided to transfer Sister Marie-Paul to Montpellier, which provoked a few protests on the part of parents and the withdrawal of a few students. Father d'Alzon described the details of the changes that were made in a letter to Mother Marie-Eugénie dated July 17, 1879.⁶⁰⁴

The community at the Priory, which had too many Sisters from Nîmes, was reorganized. Mother Thérèse-Emmanuel O'Neill, former mistress of novices, was asked to come on a temporary basis and to take charge.⁶⁰⁵ Father Picard preached a pacifying retreat in November 1879, which was well received.

Sister Franfois de Sales Bosc was transferred.

The religious vocation of Sister Marie-Ange de Lansade seems to have been shaken. Two other temporary (?) departures, probably not connected to the crisis, nevertheless took place at the same time: Sister Cecile-Elisabeth de Lansade (October 1879) and Sister Marie-Véronique Guiraud (Montpellier) left the community.

Sister Marie-Gabrielle de Courcy asked to be transferred, which Father d'Alzon opposed. She was replaced at the beginning of the new school year by Sister Marie of Christ de Mauvise (age 34).

Moreover, Father d'Alzon requested the transfer of Sister Marie-Rose Michel of Nîmes, whose elder brother, in Nîmes, sided with the republicans and whose younger brother, who was half crazy, presided over a civil burial which caused a scandal.

The arrival of Sister Marie-Catherine Doumet (age 27) in Nîmes did not help the boarding school. It was Sister Jeanne-Marie Pérouse, another sister from Nîmes, who in fact reopened the academic year and took charge of the school in 1880.

When classes reopened in the fall, everything seemed to be back to normal: "The Priory is calm," confided Father d'Alzon to Father Picard in September. In 1880, given the Ferry decrees, the danger lay elsewhere.

⁶⁰⁴Vol. XIII, p. 158.

⁶⁰⁵Vol. XIII, p. 160.

Conclusions to be Drawn from the Nîmes Crisis

To be sure, Father d'Alzon let himself be influenced by Father Laurent who was very worked-up against the Priory. Did he not say that it was the straw that broke the camel's back? It is also true that Marie-Eugénie of Jesus, beginning in 1876, was more perspicacious than Father d'Alzon in her appreciation of Sister Marie-Gabrielle whom Father d'Alzon supported until 1879. His support was the underlying cause of the distortion of attitudes, judgments, and decisions which poisoned the atmosphere.

There was surely a polarization concerning the case of Sister Marie-Paul Hummel. The unwarranted interference of her nephew (François) and of her niece (Thérèse), both students in Nîmes, probably gave rise to accusations of nepotism and preferential treatment. But, in fact, did people not generalize by describing as objectionable conduct what was undoubtedly nothing more than the obvious sign of a superior and influential person? At any rate, the speed with which Father d'Alzon underlined the return to normal justifies that judgment. It was somewhat of a storm in a teacup.

Father d'Alzon's deep feelings for people deserve consideration and attention: freedom, forgiveness, discretion, friendship, and flexibility. He was not a spiteful person. On occasion, however, he did exhibit a painful pragmatism which was psychologically understandable: "Do not quarrel with anyone and do not get too close to anyone at all."⁶⁰⁶ "For my part, I have forgiven a lot of things that I have never spoken about."⁶⁰⁷ At the height of the crisis, he wrote to Marie-Eugénie:

I understand that the Nîmes Affair has worn you out and broken your heart. That's life. As I take more and more refuge in solitude, I see that many things are falling, people included. This makes me suffer. However, we should be saying: only God remains steadfast, and the few friends he allows us to have! You are at the top of the list of those I still have.⁶⁰⁸

At any rate, we might do well to follow the somewhat macho advice given on May 15, 1879 to Father Vincent de Paul Bailly who probably did not really

⁶⁰⁶Advice to Father Galabert, vol. XIII, p. 103.

⁶⁰⁷Letter to Sister Marie-Gabrielle de Courcy, vol. XIII, p. 67.

⁶⁰⁸Vol XIII, p. 121 (letter of May 24, 1879).

The Priory of Nîmes Affair

need that advice:

The best way to deal with women is to make oneself wanted.
That has been my big principle. Women want to be sought after.
The best way to keep them under control is to leave them alone
until they come to you.⁶⁰⁹

Father Jean-Paul Périet-Muzet
Archivist of the Augustinians
of the Assumption

55, Via San Pio V
00165 Rome
Italy

⁶⁰⁹Vol XIII, p 117.

Origins of the Assumption Family

Relations between the Oblates and the other Congregations of the Assumption

CLAIRE DE LA CROIX RABITZ

The Assumptionist General Chapter of 1876

Father Picard submitted a report on the relations between the Assumptionists and the religious communities of women.

This question had already been discussed at the General Chapters of 1868 and 1873: the religious women of the Assumptionist family, namely the Ladies, the Little Sisters, and the Oblates, had to choose between being governed *or* directed, or being governed *and* directed by the Assumptionists. The Little Sisters and the Oblates chose to be governed, and the Ladies to be directed.

Here is what Mother Emmanuel Marie Correnson drew up for the Assumptionist General Chapter:

Reverend Father,

We ask that you accept to govern our Congregation and to confirm the delegate whom you have named. We are convinced that, after you, your religious will consider themselves duty bound to maintain the rules and spirit which you have given us.

Sincerely and devotedly yours,

Sister Emmanuel-Marie of the Compassion

September 13, 1876.

Origins of the Assumption Family

Mother Correnson added on this sheet the following note:

This copy is identical to the one we gave the Assumptionists. “You will always be free to change your mind on this?”: words of Father d’Alzon.

Father Picard told me in 1882 that this letter had displeased the Assumptionists. The delegate should normally have been Father Emmanuel Bailly (1842–1917). Since he remained the regular confessor of the Sisters until he left, he therefore did not complete his mandate.

In an appendix to his report, Father Picard described in detail how this government should be carried out on both sides.

The Chapter adopted on a trial basis for six years the draft proposal of a Canonical Directory which laid down the rules and regulations determining the relations between the Assumptionists and the Little Sisters and the Oblate Sisters who were asking to be “governed” and the Ladies of the Assumption who were only asking to be “directed.”

Father d’Alzon stated his opinion orally and in writing on several occasions. He preferred that the Assumptionists direct rather than govern the women’s congregations.

On a trip to Rome in 1877, he discussed this problem with some cardinals, and even wrote to Father Picard:

Father Laurent is recopying for me the decisions of the Chapter, suppressing on my order, what was said about our relations with the women religious. Rome would delete these things in horror, so we might as well delete them ourselves.⁶¹⁰

Conflict between Father Picard and Mother Emmanuel Marie Correnson in 1882

In 1882, the six years had elapsed, but Father Picard did not question the relations between the Assumptionists and the Oblates. He continued to govern in his own way.

⁶¹⁰Letter no. 3860, February 1, 1877 in the *Letters* of Father Picard.

Relations between the Oblates and the other Congregations of the Assumption

Father Picard always preferred Paris to Nîmes and tried to interest Father d'Alzon in going to Paris permanently, but without success.

Father Picard wanted to create in Paris a social apostolate which would help him develop a Catholic Press. To achieve this, he asked Mother Emmanuel-Marie Correnson for a Mistress of Novices to begin a novitiate for the Oblates in Paris. (Letter of April 11, 1882)

In a letter dated June 18, 1882, he reiterated his request.

Mother Emmanuel-Marie Correnson, wanting to be faithful to Father d'Alzon, did not think she could change the place of the novitiate. She answered Father Picard on June 19, 1882:

The novitiate must stay in Nîmes at the Motherhouse where Reverend Father d'Alzon placed it and for which he built a chapel. If it is difficult for you to follow the novices at such a great distance, will not the same problem arise for me? How can I admit a person whom I do not know if, according to our Rule, it is the Mother General who admits to the novitiate and who governs the house with the help of her council, as it is written in our book of government.

Father Picard criticized her for several things, especially for the lack of obedience she owed him,⁶¹¹ but she found his criticisms baseless.

The Constitutions of the Oblates of the Assumption

The texts of 1864, 1867, and 1876

Father d'Alzon wrote the first Constitutions of the Oblates with Mother Marie-Eugénie (1817–98) in 1864, at the time when the Oblates were to be a third category of the Ladies of the Assumption, witness Father d'Alzon's letter to Father Galabert of December 14, 1864:

It seems to me that we have created a masterpiece by taking from the Rule of the Assumptionists everything that can serve our purposes, and from the Rule of St. Vincent de Paul everything

⁶¹¹Letter of June 26 1882.

Origins of the Assumption Family

that is suitable for women called to live in the villages or to help in the colleges.

The text written for the Oblates in 1867 was the fruit of exchanges with Mother Emmanuel-Marie Correnson and resembled almost completely the text of the Assumptionists. The gender of words was changed from the masculine to the feminine, and certain words were replaced by synonyms which were undoubtedly clearer for the Sisters. Omitted were the sections on relations between the regular and secular clergies, which was understandable.

What is noteworthy in the text of 1867 is that only the Superior General of the Assumptionists is mentioned. He is the one who seems to govern the Congregation.

However, the text was changed in 1876 with the help of Father d'Alzon. The words "Superior General" in the masculine form were replaced by Superior General in the feminine form. A few other details were also changed.

Disagreements with Father Picard over the texts

In this disagreement with Father Picard, Mother Emmanuel-Marie based herself on the Constitutions which Father d'Alzon had written for the Oblates, as can be seen in the letter she sent him on July 14, 1882:

Your letter of last Sunday prompted me to reread the excerpt of your General Chapter. In it, I see three situations which apply to the Assumptionists vis-a-vis the communities of women. They can be asked to direct, to govern, or also to direct and govern. I have spoken about this to my councilors and we believe that we are being faithful to the views and intentions of our good and regretted Father d'Alzon in asking you for "Direction." We are convinced that no one better than the Assumptionists will be able to preserve the spirit of our founder. I think, dear Father, that this will be the occasion for you to notice that we are progressing in confidence and simplicity.

Since the foundation of the house in Nîmes (1873), and therefore of the Motherhouse, Reverend Father d'Alzon always left full authority to the Superior General of the Sisters, reserving only the spiritual direction to himself. It was he who wrote in the book of our Constitutions the passage I quoted to you the other day:

Relations between the Oblates and the other Congregations of the Assumption

“The power of receiving candidates who present themselves resides with the Superior General of the Sisters, who can delegate this power to the local Superiors. However, the latter shall not receive anyone without having first requested authorization.” . . .

Father Picard sent her a copy of the letter she had sent to the General Chapter of 1876, asking to be governed by the Assumptionists.

Mother Emmanuel-Marie Correnson responded on August 2, 1882, insisting on “Direction.” She considered the idea of government to be out of the question:

I had not forgotten the letter that you so kindly sent me: I had even reread it after reading the extract from your Chapter. But, let me tell you, dear Father that, a short while after that letter was written, experience quickly demonstrated to Father d’Alzon how much we had been correct in hesitating to do such a thing. Father d’Alzon in a way abrogated this provision by giving up all government during the last four years of his life. Since we were always worried about this document, he calmed our fears by stating that we could always freely come back on it, which the extract from your chapters confirms. . . For all that, do not think, Reverend Father, that I do not want the Sisters to get all the help they can from the Assumptionists. On the contrary, I understand the usefulness of it all. But that does not mean that the local sister superior, supported by the ecclesiastical superior, should not come under the authority of her Superior General. Believe me, Father, this is not a personal issue that I am defending. Quite to the contrary: in this case, I would prefer not being a part of it.

Father Emmanuel Bailly’s Position

Father Emmanuel Bailly had always had excellent relations with Mother Emmanuel-Marie Correnson and the Oblates of the Assumption of whom he was the confessor. Many letters sent to the Foundress testify to the high degree of consideration and affection they had for him. But as soon as disagreements began to surface between Father Picard and Mother Correnson, this friendship was finished. Whenever Mother Emmanuel-Marie Correnson

Origins of the Assumption Family

thought she could find support, she only met with hostility, which she had a hard time understanding. In a letter from Osma, in the fall of 1882, Father Bailly, all the while exaggerating them, unearthed points of disagreement which he thought existed between Father d'Alzon and Mother Emmanuel-Marie Correnson, quoting them out of context: works for the poor, government by the Assumptionists, attitude of Mother Emmanuel-Marie towards the Assumptionists and toward the Sisters. . . money given by Father d'Alzon to the Oblates . . .

Mother Emmanuel-Marie Correnson addressed Father Emmanuel Bailly's allegations point by point in a letter dated November 21, 1882.

Father Emmanuel Bailly would nevertheless have been the normal person to serve as an intermediary, to settle the situation, and to arrive at a compromise in order to avoid a complete break.

Secession

Mother Emmanuel-Marie, not wanting to give in on the question of the novitiate in Paris, placed herself *de facto* in opposition to Father Picard and the Assumptionists.

The vote

Each Oblate in the Near East and in Nîmes was asked to choose between being governed by Father Picard or by Mother Emmanuel-Marie Correnson.

For a longtime Father Galabert had been quite critical of the Superior General of the Oblates of the Assumption. He expressed his criticisms in numerous letters, either to Father d'Alzon, to Father Picard (July 23, 1882), or to Father Vincent de Paul Bailly (December 14 1880). In a letter to Father d'Alzon in 1876, Father Galabert wrote:

Since the Superior General is now feeling better, I think it might be good for her to take more interest in the Mission and to write or have someone write regularly to Mother Veronica.

The Sisters complain, and for good reason, that they count for nothing in the eyes of their Mother General. They know nothing about what is happening at the Motherhouse; they are not informed of the Investitures, nor of the Professions, nor of the little

Relations between the Oblates and the other Congregations of the Assumption

celebrations that take place now and then. Such communiques would maintain the life of the family and would surely increase the authority of the Mother General who, at this time, is accepted by all of the Sisters in the Mission. A few affectionate letters to the older Sisters would melt all the old prejudices. To achieve this, it would be necessary for the community of Nîmes to write only once a month to the one in Bulgaria and to give intimate details which would permit them to live the same life.

On September 25, Father Galabert wrote to Father Picard:

I have already written this to you. Our Oblates in Adrianople, having all made the vow to consecrate themselves to the Foreign Missions, all want to remain faithful to that vow. They all understand that they can work usefully in the Missions only if they are placed under the immediate direction of *our* Superior General. They will let you know whenever you ask them. All of them are ready to accept as Superior the sister you choose to give them. Most of them have no great opinion of their Mother General. Those who are most attached to her will easily drop her, especially if they have to withdraw from the Mission and not remain under your overall direction.

Also, when they were asked to choose between Father Picard and Mother Emmanuel-Marie Correnson, about thirty of them rallied to the Assumptionists, except Sister Louise de Gonzague Simon (1860–1917). How could they continue their mission in the Near East without them? Father Picard knew this all too well for a long! . . .

In Nîmes, all but a handful remained faithful to Mother Foundress.

Mother Emmanuel-Marie's reaction

Mother Emmanuel-Marie's reaction was both firm and painful. She wrote to Mother Jeanne de Chantal Dugas (1848–1940), Superior of the Near Eastern Mission, on September 26, 1882:

. . . if only we could have come to a perfect agreement! This was and would be my most fervent desire. But unfortunately, at the

Origins of the Assumption Family

present time, you must undoubtedly have been told by Rev. Father Galabert of what happened. It was especially about a very important question to which many things are connected: who is in charge of the government of the Congregation? Our Constitutions seem to be very clear on this point: Father d'Alzon wanted the authority to reside in the Mother General, and the Council thought that it could not accept any other form of government. But Rev. Father Picard declares that, this being the case, he refuses to take responsibility for this apostolate. Just imagine, dear daughter, how painful this is. . . I have tried all I could to avoid such a crisis whose numerous symptoms have scared me for a long time.

On the following day, September 27, 1882, she wrote to Father Emmanuel Bailly:

. . . last Sunday, the Feast of Our Lady of Mercy, the Council of the Oblates, believing that it had to uphold the article of the Constitutions which assigns the government to the Superior General of the Sisters, the Very Reverend Father Picard formally declared that in such conditions, it was impossible for him to take responsibility for the work. Will this be definitive? I surely fear that it will be and I am profoundly saddened by it. To think that we lived the same life, venerated the same common Father and Founder, and are now taking different paths.

Mother Emmanuel-Marie Correnson was very upset but did not weaken.

The Consequences

Father Picard began his novitiate of Oblates in Paris with professed sisters and novices from Bordeaux (Augustinian Sisters of Providence), with professed sisters and novices from the Near Eastern Mission; and with a few Sisters from Nîmes.

The Oblates in Paris developed very rapidly thanks to Father Picard and Mother Marie of Christ de Mauvise (1845–1922), Lady of the Assumption, to whom he gave responsibility for the Oblates. However, she never became Superior General.

Relations between the Oblates and the other Congregations of the Assumption

Mother Emmanuel-Marie Correnson and the Oblates who remained faithful to her became diocesan Sisters under the Bishop of Nîmes, Bishop Besson. They developed slowly, but always had a few novices.

Wanting to remain faithful to the desires of Father d'Alzon and with the help of the Jesuits, Mother Emmanuel-Marie Correnson founded four communities in Armenia: Tokat, Trebizond, Marsivan, and Amassia.

Mother Emmanuel-Marie Correnson was never at ease with Father Picard. It could be that this was due to the difference in their social background. Moreover, she thought for a long time that he was taking the place of Father d'Alzon. Witness the letter she wrote to Father Vincent de Paul Bailly on October 28, 1869:

... Since yesterday, I have been asking myself who is the Superior General of the Assumptionists. Is it Father Picard or Father d'Alzon? I believe that I am not mistaken in saying that one is the superior in name, and the other is the superior in fact.

Father d'Alzon had foreseen for a long time that there would be problems with Father Picard. He had forewarned Mother Emmanuel-Marie Correnson and Mother Marie-Eugénie, as the following letter of October 22, 1876 reveals:

With the best of intentions, the one who will bring about rivalries will be Father Picard, with his despotism. . . . But also, why can he not be more flexible and why does he have to be so categorical? We must go along with his way of thinking; otherwise he will submit his resignation which, he knows very well, I cannot accept at the present time. I put up with his demands, but in conscience I must remember them.⁶¹²

Father Picard did not like to be opposed by a woman!

Mother Emmanuel-Marie Correnson had very poor health, which might explain certain aspects of her personality. She was not personally attracted to the Near Eastern Mission, even though she thought it her duty to form Sisters for this Mission, as Father d'Alzon had asked her to do. On the other hand, she trusted Father Galabert, which could have left the impression that

⁶¹²Letter from Father d'Alzon to Mother Marie-Eugénie, October 22, 1876, no. 5764, XI.

Origins of the Assumption Family

she was uninterested. She was sincere when she said that she wanted to be faithful to Father d'Alzon. For her, the Near Eastern Mission represented the purpose of the Oblates. She tried to fulfill this purpose to the best of her abilities by sending to the Near East the majority of her Sisters and by keeping in Nîmes only the core needed to care for the novices and to assure the good functioning of the day school, which provided the Congregation with essential financial resources.

Reunion brought about by Mother Marguerite Cham-ska and Father Gervais Quénard

Mother Marguerite-Marie Chamska (1842–1926) succeeded Mother Emmanuel-Marie Correnson as Superior General in 1897. Though she completely agreed with Mother Emmanuel-Marie Correnson, she always suffered from being separated from the Assumptionists.

When Sister Myriam Franck (1837–1918), who wanted to reunite the Oblates of Nîmes, asked her opinion about opening legal proceedings against the Assumptionists, Mother Marguerite-Marie replied:

Be charitable towards those whom we still love despite the harm they have done to us: they are the sons of our Beloved Father. This reason alone must bring us to adopt a policy that every neutral lawyer would suggest.

After having met Father Gervais Quénard (1875–1961) and Father Mathieu Lombard (1858–1951) in Nîmes, the idea of a reunion between the two branches of Oblates was born. Mother Marguerite-Marie Chamska wrote to Father Lombard on January 9, 1925:

Father, did you really think that we were hostile to the sons of Reverend Father d'Alzon? But we are not the ones who caused this painful reparation, much less the ones who wanted it.

With Father Gervais Quénard and Mother Berthe-Marie Pare (1860–1946), the first Superior General of the Oblates of Paris, Mother Marguerite-Marie Chamska prepared the way for the reunion of the two branches.

But she died in April, just a few weeks before the official text arrived from Rome in June 1926.

*Relations between the Oblates and the other Congregations of the
Assumption*

Sister Claire de la Croix Rabitz
Superior General of the Oblates of
the Assumption

203, rue Lecourbe
75015 Paris
France

Origins of the Assumption Family

Disagreement between the Religious [Sisters] of the Assumption and the Oblates of the Assumption about the name “Oblate”

CLAIRE DE LA CROIX RABITZ

During Father d’Alzon’s Lifetime

An old fear

On August 30, 1868, Mother Emmanuel-Marie Correnson was in Lourdes. She wrote to Father d’Alzon for his birthday:

I prayed for you, for your work, and for your chapter. I even prayed for the Ladies of the Assumption. I had already done so before. I had asked God to grant them whatever they might desire. I am now asking the Blessed Virgin that they not have the right to take away our name of Oblates Sisters of the Assumption, and I pray that the Blessed Virgin will take our cause in hand. Also, I do not fear anymore, since Mary is our advocate.

We do not know what Mother Emmanuel-Marie Correnson was alluding to. But we know that three years after the foundation, the name of the young Congregation of the Oblates of the Assumption was already being contested!

The creation of a day school

In 1873, Mother Emmanuel-Marie Correnson opened a little day school at 26 rue Seguier, believing that she had the approval of Father d'Alzon because this small establishment could not possibly hurt the Ladies of the Assumption located about 300 meters away.

Mother Marie-Eugénie dreaded the opening of this school and, in a letter dated July 19, 1873, wrote to Father d'Alzon about *“the creation of a rival institution, which you do not want.”*

Father d'Alzon thought that a day school for children from another cultural and social milieu was not a danger for the Priory. He felt that Mother Marie-Eugénie was exaggerating the situation and he told her so.

Father d'Alzon told her what Bishop Plantier had said when he authorized Mother Emmanuel-Marie Correnson to open this day school:

There are in Nîmes 5,000 more girls than boys. There is no day school in the neighborhood where you are establishing yourselves. Given the price you intend to charge, you will not be competing with the Ladies of the Assumption. It is a completely different public.⁶¹³

The name of “Assumption”

Mother Marie-Eugénie sensed, even before the opening of the day school, that there would be problems with their using the name “Assumption.”

She asked Father d'Alzon in a letter dated August 11, 1873 that the name Assumption not be used at the day school of the Oblates or on its official papers. Here are some excerpts of Father d'Alzon's response:

The Oblates did not receive the name Assumption from you but from us. If we were to change our name, they would be only too glad to change theirs also. I have proposed this to them, but they are resisting. And frankly, if ever our religious go to Nice, will we be obliged to change our name because the Religious [Sisters] of the Assumption are there already? The ecclesiastical authorities do not get involved with such things. You can see this by the

⁶¹³Letter no. 4859, X to Mother Marie-Eugénie, August 6, 1873.

Disagreement between the Religious [Sisters] of the Assumption and the Oblates of the Assumption about the name "Oblate"

numerous Sisters of St. Joseph or of the Immaculate Conception who have been approved and have different rules.⁶¹⁴

Father d'Alzon was taken aback by Mother Marie-Eugénie's reaction and privately mentioned it several times to Father Vincent de Paul Bailly:

The Superior General wants to take away from the Oblates the name "Assumption." I'm like Louis XIV with Madame de Montespan and Madame de Maintenon. I would prefer having all of Europe on my back.⁶¹⁵

The Superior of the [Religious Sisters of the] Assumption is asking me to change the name of the Oblates. Can you tell me a mystery of the Blessed Virgin which has not yet been taken? I am suggesting that we surrender our name to her. Of what would we be the Augustinians?⁶¹⁶

A few days later, he said that he did not want to hear about it anymore.⁶¹⁷

Besides the name, the Fathers and the Ladies of the Assumption, albeit unconsciously, wanted to keep a tight rein on the Oblates. But Mother Emmanuel-Marie showed that she could manage her affairs very well by herself.

After the bishop had approved the opening of the day school, she wrote to Father Emmanuel Bailly on November 21, 1882: "*the Ladies of the Assumption and Father Picard never again set foot in this house.*"

After the foundation of the Oblates of the Assumption, the opening of the day school on rue Seguier constituted the second problem which harmed relations between Father d'Alzon and Mother Marie-Eugénie. . . These two subjects were often raised by Mother Eugénie and affected their friendship.

After the Death of Father d'Alzon

Ban on the use of the name "Assumption"

In 1882, after the break between Father Picard and Mother Emmanuel-Marie Correnson, Father Picard asked that the Oblates cease to be called "of the

⁶¹⁴Letter no. 4865, X, August 12, 1873.

⁶¹⁵Letter no. 4867, X, August 13, 1873.

⁶¹⁶Letter no. 4869, X, August 14 1873

⁶¹⁷Letter no. 4870, X, August 20 1873

Origins of the Assumption Family

Assumption” because, by refusing to follow him to Paris, they no longer worked for the Assumptionist apostolate.

In 1883, Bishop Besson officially asked them to no longer add the name “Assumption” after the name “Oblates.”

For about ten years, they continued to use the name on their official papers, but without insisting too much on it as long as Bishop Besson was still alive.

In 1885, Mother Emmanuel Correnson asked Rome for the Laudatory Decree and the approval of the Constitutions. She renewed the request in 1890 with the help of the Jesuits who had returned to Nîmes in 1881.

Bishop Gilly supported this request with a highly laudatory report, along with his two Vicar Generals. Undoubtedly, he did not notice that, on the letter of request, the name was very clearly stated: “Oblates of the Assumption.”

Trial before the Ecclesiastical Tribunal of Nîmes

The Oblates continued to circulate printed materials and invitations which could easily create confusion between their day school and the boarding school of the Ladies of the Assumption. This led to a number of mistakes and misunderstandings.

Tired of the family squabbles, the Ladies had recourse to the Bishop in order to stop the Oblates from using the term “Assumption” in their name. The Bishop referred them to the Ecclesiastical Tribunal of Nîmes.

The Ladies initiated civil court proceedings in 1891 and asked Father Picard and the Oblates of Paris to join them as plaintiffs in the case. Father Picard and the Oblates of Paris accepted, basing themselves on the harm the Oblates of Nîmes had supposedly caused them (cf. the reports of Father Picard, Mother Marie of Christ, and the Sisters in the Near East).

Public opinion having been aroused in the city, the Ladies of the Assumption, on the advice of the Bishop, withdrew their complaint without advising Father Picard.

The Officialis of Nîmes maintained the ban that the two bishops of Nîmes, Besson and Gilly, had imposed on the Superior of the Oblates and her Sisters, forbidding them to use the name Assumption. This judgment was rendered on August 13, 1891.

Mother Emmanuel-Marie Correnson and her lawyer, Mr. Serre, appealed to Rome.

*Disagreement between the Religious [Sisters] of the Assumption and the
Oblates of the Assumption about the name "Oblate"*

The trial in Rome

The trial lasted two years. It was a very trying and painful period for Mother Emmanuel-Marie Correnson. She sent her Assistant, Mother Marguerite-Marie Chamska to represent her in Rome and defend the cause of the Oblates. An almost daily correspondence took place between the two Sisters.

These letters are an excellent source of information about all the phases of the trial, the persons who were contacted, and the sue cesses and failures in Rome, as well as about daily life in the city of Nîmes, in the convent of the Oblates, and in the Church.

The Oblates obtained the Laudatory Decree on February 10 1893.

The Laudatory Decree

On September 18, 1890, the Oblate Sisters on rue Seguiet had asked the Sovereign Pontiff for a Laudatory Decree (*decretum laudis*) of their Institute and for the approval of their Constitutions. On February 10, 1893, upon the advice of the Consultors of the Congregation for Bishops and Religious, the Most Eminent Cardinals were asked to respond to the two following questions:

Must the Institute and the Constitutions of the Oblate Sisters of the Assumption in Nîmes be approved? How must we approve them?

The Most Eminent Cardinals answered the first question: the above-mentioned Sisters should be given a Laudatory Decree. As for the second question, the answer was differed.

According to this decree, the Oblate Sisters on rue Seguiet can henceforth be called the "Oblates of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary."⁶¹⁸

The court proceedings concerning the name Oblates of the Assumption seriously affected the health of Mother Emmanuel-Marie Correnson, but she persevered to the end to have the right to bear the name which Father d'Alzon had given her, even though she had been accused of having given it to herself.

She repeated over and over again in letters to Mother Marguerite-Marie Chamska:

⁶¹⁸Excerpt from the *Semaine Religieuse* of February 24, 1893, p 13.

Origins of the Assumption Family

I hold to my name.

People should know that we have been called Oblates for the past twenty-five years and that we therefore have priority over those who just arrived before the trial began (an allusion to the Oblates of Paris who had just installed themselves on rue Sainte Perpetue). As for the Ladies of the Assumption, the name *Oblates* sufficiently distinguishes us from them.⁶¹⁹

The name “Oblates of the Assumption” is engraved on our vault in the cemetery as well as on the cornerstone of the chapel.⁶²⁰

We at least have the merit of having defended our name and having suffered to keep it.⁶²¹

Today, we like to add to our name **Oblates of the Assumption** the words **Missionary Sisters** in order to recall the fourth vow made by the first Sisters who left for the Foreign Missions (Oblates of the Assumption of Nîmes until 1882—Oblates of the Assumption of Paris until 1926).

Sister Claire de la Croix Rabitz
Superior General of the Oblates of the
Assumption

203, rue Lecourbe
75015 Paris
France

⁶¹⁹August 20, 1891.

⁶²⁰January 19, 1892.

⁶²¹May 1, 1892.

*Disagreement between the Religious [Sisters] of the Assumption and the
Oblates of the Assumption about the name "Oblate"*

Addendum: Sister Thérèse Maylis Toujouse, R.A.

It was said that the Statutes of the Religious [Sisters] of the Assumption mentioned Choir Sisters, Lay Sisters, Oblates, and Tertiaries.

The question of Oblates had arisen following the difficulties in Cape Town with respect to persons who would devote themselves to outside apostolates and pronounce annual vows (Cape Town 1849, England 1850). In council and in community in 1854, the Religious [Sisters] of the Assumption accepted the possibility of having Oblates. The question arose again in 1857 for London.

When the question arose of helping the Near Eastern Mission, the Religious [Sisters] of the Assumption immediately thought of Oblates. Indeed, the first Rule of the Oblates was prepared by the Religious [Sisters] of the Assumption.

At the same time, the Religious [Sisters] of the Assumption always considered the Oblates as associates. Well before 1865, Mother Eugénie wrote to Father d'Alzon on the subject of Oblates. . . The Third-Order for the Missions was made up of Oblates.

Confusion about the name in Nîmes

The reason for the disagreement was that everything was getting mixed up: the mail, student enrollments, and the work of each congregation. Collections were made in the name of Assumption, but which one? There was great confusion about the uniforms worn by the pupils. In 1891, there was a decision by the civil court forbidding the Oblates from being called Oblates of the Assumption.

A change of name was requested from the Ecclesiastical Tribunal of the Diocese of Nîmes.

There had already been problems about the name in Nancy, but that was far from Paris. Realizing that the situation was getting very complicated in Nîmes, Marie-Eugénie withdrew her claim and informed Father Picard about it. Finally; the question was referred to Rome and became the object of a lawsuit.

In 1892, Marie-Hugénie also wrote to the Bishop. In Rome, the Oblates won the lawsuit and were allowed to keep their name.

Origins of the Assumption Family

Disagreement between the Religious [Sisters] of the Assumption and the Oblates of the Assumption about a boarding school in Nîmes (1873)

JEAN-PAUL PÉRIER-MUZET

Introduction

Among all of the questions raised, this is the simplest and the easiest one to describe. We must keep in mind that Nîmes, in the history of the Assumption, was the city in France where, except for the capital, there was the greatest concentration of inter-Assumption communities and that this simple fact can partially explain the origin of certain difficulties:

1845: Augustinians of the Assumption (college and novitiate). 1855: Religious of the Assumption (Priory), rue de Roussy, then later, rue de Bouillargues.

1866: Oblates of the Assumption (at the college, then after 1873, rue Séguier).

1882: Two branches of the Oblates of the Assumption (Nîmes, Paris), rue Séguier, rue Roussy, and rue Sainte-Perpétue.

1885: Little Sisters of the Assumption (rue Briçonnet).

Fear of competition from a boarding school provoked rivalry between two Congregations

It suffices to reread various letters of Father d'Alzon to discover what caused the difficulties between the Religious and the Oblates of the Assumption concerning the opening of a boarding school by Mother Correnson during the summer of 1873 and to note the progression of the crisis up to the time of its solution.⁶²²

Mother Marie-Gabrielle, who got worked up over the Martin courses, is again getting worked up over a nursery school for little girls that the Oblates want to open. Be mindful that I would never allow myself anything that would harm the Assumption, but you will have to take my word for it. You will understand why. The Superior of the Oblate* has come to the point where she will slowly waste away, unless she is cured by some miracle. She has become so sensitive that she is having terrible crises that can last for months, and over nothing. The real cause of the distressful weakness she had last winter came from the fact that the Sister who cooks for them said that the nurse had too often requested partridge for her. Also, I saw her go into a rage (I left) which lasted four hours because, on the subject of questionable behavior on the part of Madame Correnson toward Mr. Barnouin, I had said: "There are underlying problems with which, you'll excuse me, I do not want to get involved . . ."⁶²³

Father d'Alzon, who was at Le Vigan at the time, minimized the affair and assured Marie-Eugénie of his support for the Priory. But, not wanting to upset Marie Correnson, he asked not to be held responsible for things over which he had no control.

And so, my child, have you begun to convince yourself that the Religious of the Assumption can, without too many disadvantages, compete with the Oblates whose superior does not always

⁶²²Vol. X, pp. 76, 78, 79, 95, 99, 104, 106, 107, 108, 115, 118, 154, 155, 218, 225, 227.

⁶²³To Marie-Eugénie of Jesus, July 11, 1873.

Disagreement between the Religious [Sisters] of the Assumption and the Oblates of the Assumption about a boarding school in Nîmes (1873)

spell correctly and whose other members, with only one exception, barely know French and have never taught school, except for the A B C's? I nevertheless wrote to your Mother General about this mountain of problems which is about to crush you all We will bring peace to the troubled soul of Mother Marie-Gabrielle who imagines that her boarding school is about to be devastated by mountaineers, taffeta weavers, and seamstresses-become-Oblates.⁶²⁴

Father d'Alzon treated as a joke an affair that could have been compared to the combat between David and Goliath. As a matter of fact, the Priory had nothing to fear from competition.

My letter will be transmitted to you by Mr. Gros, an architect who only wants permission to quickly examine your cloister. I received your letter. It would be very serious if Miss Moriau were to go to the Oblates to teach the day students. And if she goes, I have decided that I will no longer go myself. However, no one has mentioned anything to me about this, though I believe that my permission is required. You can tell people that I know nothing about it, except for what you have told me. Either I am the superior or I am not.⁶²⁵

But that same day, Father d'Alzon must have learned that a qualified person had been hired. The place had gone from a nursery school to a day school. He reacted more strongly to decisions that had not been referred to him in his capacity as Superior.

Thank you, my child. I am not at all upset about your wanting to state a fact. That having been said, may I ask about the status of the projects we have never discussed.

In a conversation I had with the Superior of the Oblates some time ago, she did speak to me about taking in a young person from Adrianople as a boarder, an idea which I again rejected. However, I believe that a girl from Adrianople, if she were to come—which is not likely—would do you no harm. Moreover, if

⁶²⁴To Sister Marie-Gabrielle de Courcy, July 11, 1873.

⁶²⁵To Sister Marie-Gabrielle de Courcy, July 13, 1873.

Origins of the Assumption Family

she does come, I believe it would be better to entrust her to you. I am going into all these details to show you how I would accept the absurd idea of a boarding school.⁶²⁶

Father d'Alzon, always at Le Vigan, denied having had anything to do with the very idea of a boarding school run by the Oblates. To be noted are the various terms that were used (nursery, day school, boarding school), as well as Father d'Alzon's hesitations and uncertainties ("some time ago," "if," "I believe).” On the other hand, his judgment is clear about *the absurd idea of a boarding school*.

The Oblate Affair had been somewhat distorted by Mother Marie-Gabrielle. First, there was never question of offering courses, nor of Miss Moriau. Second, there was never question of a boarding school, nor of a half-boarding school: 10 francs a month before First Communion, 75 francs after that. You can see that this is not at all your public. Besides, the half-boarders sent by the bishop are to Mother Marie-Gabrielle's advantage. After Mother Marie-Gabrielle had spoken to me about specific facts that fortunately were untrue, I wrote a very strong letter, from Le Vigan where I was still staying, to the Superior of the Oblates. Upon my return, I received an explanation from Mother Marie-Gabrielle. Sadly, I saw that she was all worked up, as she had been about the Martin courses. I also had a conversation with the Superior of the Oblates in which I was somewhat curt. What did she do? I had barely left her that she took a car and went to see the Bishop, who first had her explain that she only wanted a day school. He then said to her: kln Nîmes, there are 5,000 more girls than boys, as stated in this year's statistics. There is no day school in the neighborhood where you have established yourselves. Given the price* you will be asking, you will not be competing with the Ladies (Religious) of the Assumption. You are dealing with a completely different public. I our years ago, I took the boarding school away from the Visitation Nun*, but I cannot refuse a day school that would hurt neither the Ladies [Sisters] of Besançon nor those of Saint Maur who are bursting at the seams with students.'

⁶²⁶To Sister Marie-Gabrielle de Courcy, July 25, 1873.

Disagreement between the Religious [Sisters] of the Assumption and the Oblates of the Assumption about a boarding school in Nîmes (1873)

That's the whole story. I had told Mother Marie-Gabrielle to accept some half-boarders, but she wanted them to come from the Bishop through Father de Cabrières. And what is strange is that the Bishop made his decision without speaking to me about it beforehand. . . .⁶²⁷

This time, the die was cast. It was clear that Mother Correnson, facing Father d'Alzon's opposition, went around him to obtain episcopal authorization from Bishop Plantier who decided that a new day school, in a badly served neighborhood, would not create competition between the religious communities. Father d'Alzon was therefore able to get out of a difficult situation that had been created by others.

Then, the question changed: from possible competition on the part of a school, the issue now focused on the use of the common name "Assumption," which risked being prejudicial to the Religious of the Assumption, according to Mother Marie-Eugénie:⁶²⁸

The name "Assumption" was given to the Oblates, not by you, but by us. If we change, they will only be too willing to change also. I suggested it to them, but they refused. And really, if ever our religious [the Assumptionists] were to go to Nice, would they too have to change their name because in the same city there will be some Sisters of the Assumption (*Assomptiades?*). The big difference is that, besides the name Oblates, they are also called Religious [Missionaries], and, I can assure you, they hold to this difference. Moreover, in the foreseeable future, they won't have a prospectus available. I see so many people predicting a complete failure (between us, I too expect one) that I don't see why we should worry. You can see that, by exaggerating the difficulties, Mother Marie-Gabrielle managed to obtain the bishop's permission behind my back. Undoubtedly, more unpleasant problems than you can imagine are yet to come

This intervention on the part of Mother Marie-Eugénie must have annoyed Father d'Alzon who wrote to Father Vincent de Paul Bailly between August 13 and 14:

⁶²⁷To Marie-Eugénie of Jesus, August 6, 1873.

⁶²⁸Letter of Father d'Alzon, August 12, 1873.

Origins of the Assumption Family

Doesn't the Superior General [of the Religious of the Assumption] want to take from the Oblates the name "of the Assumption"? I am like Louis XIV with Madame de Montespan and Madame de Maintenon. I would prefer having to deal with all of Europe. When a tarantula bites these good ladies, God help us! Isn't the Superior of the Religious [Sisters] asking me to change the name of the Oblates? Can you tell me if there is a new mystery of the Blessed Virgin that has not yet been taken? I'm thinking of turning our name over to her. Of what would we be the Augustinians?

There was a return to reasonable language when Father d'Alzon wrote to Marie-Eugénie of Jesus on August 20, 1873:

Reduced to its present dimensions, the Oblate Affair is no longer a problem. Excuse me if I add that, if there had been no rumors, everything would have been easily solved. Remember how you were horrified when Father Combalot came to preach the Advent series in Nîmes. What came of it? Nothing. It will be the same thing this time around. Also, I ask your permission not to talk about this anymore. If there had been a combat, it would have been the story of David and Goliath. So, why be alarmed?

Consequently, they were moving toward peace. On August 31, 1873, Father d'Alzon felt reassured:

I am pleased to see that the Oblate question doesn't frighten you as much. If you had relied on me, I would have told you that it was an unfortunate venture, and you would have tortured yourself much less. As a matter of fact, who do they have to teach their classes? The fact is that they need money. Moreover, I think I have found them a richer source than all the boarding schools. Nevertheless, I, too, need money.⁶²⁹

Well after the beginning of the school year, Father d'Alzon serenely came back to the question of the two boarding schools, speaking again of a day school for the Oblates:

⁶²⁹To Mother Marie-Eugénie of Jesus.

Disagreement between the Religious [Sisters] of the Assumption and the Oblates of the Assumption about a boarding school in Nîmes (1873)

The two boarding schools, as I had foreseen, absolutely do not serve the same people. Mother Marie-Gabrielle is busy maintaining one in Nîmes for 80 pupils, she says, which is to her credit. I had to recommend someone to her because the teacher wants to become a Religious of the Assumption. I do not begrudge Mother Marie-Gabrielle, and I am not interfering with the Missionary third Order. However, at Assumption, people will no longer have grounds to complain because we create Missionary Third Orders and support boarding schools like the one run by the Oblates. Do you understand?⁶³⁰

In April 1874, there was question of absorbing the Bourdet boarding school and of increasing the teaching personnel of the boarding school run by the Oblates, which provoked a new appeal on the part of Mother Marie-Eugénie of Jesus to Father d'Alzon, but which was useless because this proposal never got off the ground and because Father d'Alzon made known his opposition to it.

Conclusion

An all-out school war over competition did not take place in Nîmes in 1873. Nevertheless, this whole affair seems to have provoked hostility on the part of the Religious [Sisters] against the Oblates of the Assumption. Things remained very uncertain and ready to further deteriorate at any moment (the affair over the name). Moreover, in 1882, the quarrel over the name was fueled by the Religious of the Assumption in order to support the argument made by the Assumptionists against Marie Correnson regarding her acts of disobedience to Father d'Alzon.

Father d'Alzon was certainly overwhelmed by the initiatives of Mother Correnson. But these initiatives were not intended to put in question the educational leadership in Nîmes of the Religious of the Assumption. This feminine jealousy which targeted Father d'Alzon and had recourse to him as an arbitrator made him vulnerable in terms of his twofold fidelity: fidelity to the Religious, and fidelity to the Oblates. Though he wanted to remain a Father to all of them, he had not yet succeeded in making them true sisters among themselves.

⁶³⁰To Father Vincent de Paul Bailly, c. December 18, 1873.

Origins of the Assumption Family

Father Jean-Paul Périer-Muzet
Archivist of the Augustinians
of the Assumption

55, Via San Pio V
00165 Rome
Italy

Discussion

Clare-Teresa Tjader, R.A.

July 14, 1873: “He [Father d’Alzon] is not obeyed enough [by Mother Marie Correnson].”

Father d’Alzon was in Nîmes at the time. Mother Marie-Gabrielle, appointed Superior of the Religious of the Assumption at the request of Father d’Alzon, was also in Nîmes. When the Oblates opened a school, Father explained himself to Mother Marie-Gabrielle, and things fell into place (Letter of Marie-Gabrielle to Mother Marie-Eugénie, July 3, 1873). But Mother Marie-Eugénie saw where this would lead, and she reacted. It was charity that would suffer, as pointed out in Note 29 of my document. Mother Marie-Eugénie wrote to Mother Marie-Gabrielle:

I am delighted that you agree with Father d’Alzon, but you must get the Oblates to agree that they will not put the word Assumption on anything pertaining to this work of education they are undertaking, either on their prospectuses, their notes or anything else. . . . Anything that could cause confusion between the two houses would be unjust towards us and would harm our work, which is something that Father d’Alzon had promised would not take place. **It would destroy the charity between us by our having to explain endlessly that we are not the same work and that their students are not our students.**⁶³¹

We have approximately 400 handwritten letters by Mother Marie-Gabrielle to Mother Marie-Eugénie. They read like real news bulletins about the life of the Assumption in Nîmes. In fact, “the Nîmes Affair” is but one

⁶³¹L. 5699 Auteuil, August 13, 1873.

Origins of the Assumption Family

affair among many others. Mother Marie-Gabrielle seems to have been a reliable witness, objective about what she was describing. She wrote that the Correnson family did not accept Marie's vocation, especially that she should be an Oblate; that the bishop did not dare to oppose the Correnson family; and that her mother wanted to give her daughter a boarding school like that of the Religious. It was the Correnson family who bought the school property. Marie took steps without Father d'Alzons knowledge. Things then became more complicated. There were two "Superiors of the Assumption," and two schools of the Assumption. The uniforms of the students were identical! Mail got mixed up: that of the students of the Assumption boarding school run by the Religious [Sisters] of the Assumption ended up by mistake at the Oblates.

Claire Rabitz, O.A.

We can always learn more about these situations. Until yesterday, I did not know of the existence of the letters of Marie-Gabrielle to Father d'Alzon. Father d'Alzon would have said about an eventual boarding school: "Only the bishop can give this permission." Who bought the land? The Correnson family or Father d'Alzon? At the time, there were only six students from very modest families. Mother Gabrielle said that her boarding school was full.

Money needed to be raised for the Near Eastern Missions.

In 1891, there were three Assumption communities of women. One of them, the community on rue Sainte Perpetue, was closer to the Priory than to the one on rue Seguier and was set up by Father Picard to be a boarding school.

Bishop Plantier must have been very friendly with the Correnson family. It is said that he would not have wanted to refuse them anything.

When Mother Marie of Christ (Religious of the Assumption) became an Oblate of the Assumption

CLARE-TERESA TJADER

For me, everything started with a conversation with Sister Claire in which she said that the Religious of the Assumption “got rid of Mother Marie of Christ” by sending her to the Oblates. We do not know exactly why Marie of Christ went to the Oblates. This was the point of departure of my research.

In our Archives, I did not find anything against Mother Marie of Christ before 1884. Born in Poitiers, she was intelligent and fervent. In 1876, when she was elected General Councilor, the Superiors had to obtain an indult because she had not reached the age required by Canon Law. At one point, “someone” thought of her as a successor to Mother Marie-Eugénie. We do not know who this “someone” was.

During a difficult moment in the Council, Marie of Christ complained that Mother Marie-Eugénie did not trust her. This was settled and I concluded from the incident that, in the eyes of the “Mothers,” her youth was the only problem. I understood afterwards that the relationship was beginning to deteriorate. In examining her letters to Father Picard in the Assumptionist Archives, I discovered another side to Marie of Christ. Though the most important letters are undated, their content led the archivist to write 1883 on them. They contain many complaints against Mother Marie-Eugénie and reveal the hardening of her heart. Nevertheless, in 1884, Marie of Christ wrote to Mother Marie-Eugénie:

Origins of the Assumption Family

Thank you from the bottom of my heart, dear Mother. You will never know the full extent of my love from the very moment I began to love you. You are the one I have loved most in the world.⁶³²

... Always believe in my unflinching trust and affection in Our Lord.⁶³³

And on September 9, 1884, she wrote:

“there is not the slightest problem between you and me.”

All that—and a lot more that I will not go into—seems to indicate a very complicated person who was going through an emotional crisis: an adoration of Mother Marie-Eugénie that turned into disillusionment when she saw her human side, with its weaknesses and faults. Some of her remarks perhaps betray a certain jealousy.

In any case, Marie of Christ became friends with Father Jean Lehec, an Assumptionist, and Mother Marie-Seraphine, another General Councilor. The three believed that Mother Marie-Eugénie and Mother Thérèse-Emmanuel were too old to govern.

Father Picard needed someone in Paris for the formation of the Oblates (after the split). He suggested Mother Marie of Christ, undoubtedly knowing that Mother Marie-Eugénie was unaware of the great discontent of Mother Marie of Christ.

It was in 1885 that Mother Marie of Christ openly opposed the government of Mother Marie-Eugénie. Mother Marie-Eugénie very rarely spoke about the situation, but in a letter at the beginning of the year, she wrote:

Perhaps she is unaware of what has antagonized the Sisters and Mothers. It is the warlike attitude that she has taken, even against the members of the Council. How to deal with all of this?⁶³⁴

In March 1885[?], Mother Marie of Christ wrote to Father Picard that she was a victim in her own Congregation:

⁶³²July 23, 1884.

⁶³³July 26, 1884.

⁶³⁴L 11566 to Mother Marie of Saint John, January 9, 1885.

*When Mother Marie of Christ (Religious of the Assumption) became an
Oblate of the Assumption*

To suffer and die... *for all of you*. This seems to be the purpose of my life... You hold the key and are the head of the Assumption. It is the order established by God and nothing will change it... You are wrong in referring to my devotion. I do not have and will never have any for my congregation from now on. Nothing resonates nor will ever resonate again. Everything is destroyed. I knew well enough that the day when I would no longer be concerned about the common good, I would have thousands of reasons to be interested in nothing else but to leave the congregation as soon as possible. I consider myself no longer part of it. There is no longer *anything* between her [Mother Marie-Eugénie] and me, I repeat, Father. I am now devoted to *you*, not to *her* [Notre Mère]⁶³⁵

In June 1885, Mother Marie of Christ submitted her resignation as Superior and Councilor. Her resignation as Superior was accepted, but not as Councilor because she had been elected to that office. Mother Marie of Christ considered herself a victim (although she had asked to be replaced). This would create reactions and opposition to her and to her allies in the community. This made her suffer and “victimize herself even more. Another undated letter:

...I should *love them* because I see them as coming from divine justice, but each day brings so many additional *broken bonds* with my congregation that what I endure by continuing to live in it, wearing the habit, and seeing the Sisters is enough to *kill me physically*. There is only Hélène and Mother Marie-Seraphine for whom I do not feel this insurmountable repulsion, because I know they are attached to the congregation only by a thread...⁶³⁶

During the special Chapter of 1886, Mother Marie-Eugénie was confirmed in her office and in the hearts of the Sisters. There was certainly a still greater hardening of hearts on the part of the Sisters against Mother Marie of Christ who did not realize how very obvious her aggressiveness against the Mothers was. She was always the victim.

⁶³⁵Letter no. 76, March 9, 1885?, from the Assumptionist Archives.

⁶³⁶2SL no. 82 Mother Marie of Christ to Father Picard. Date: Thursday evening, [1885?] written in pencil by the Assumptionist archivist.

Origins of the Assumption Family

My conclusion is that the transfer of Mother Marie of Christ to the Oblates after the Chapter of 1886 suited first of all Father Picard and Mother Marie of Christ herself. Certainly, Mother Marie-Eugénie was a bit relieved but she always forgave everyone. (See her Introduction to the Special Chapter) It was she who did everything to save the face of Mother Marie of Christ at the time of her departure and kept contact with her after she settled in with the Oblates.

Thérèse Maylis Toujouse, R.A.

The Congregation had placed a lot of hope in Mother Marie of Christ. After the Priory affair, she was sent to Nîmes to restore order. That was at the time of the death of Father d'Alzon. After that, she became Superior of Auteuil (Little Convent) and of the day school of Lübeck.

On June 12, 1885, feast of the Sacred heart, she submitted her resignation as Superior and as Councilor to Mother Marie-Eugénie. The latter said that it was difficult to resign as Councilor because she had been elected.

The Chapter of 1886 was convoked to deal with questions regarding relations between the Religious of the Assumption and the Assumptionists. Father Picard had already asked Mother Marie of Christ to help with the formation of the Oblates in Paris. Mother Marie of Christ was present at the start of the Chapter but not at the end, as evidenced by the absence of her name and signature. We do not know why. Bishop d'Hulst received each Sister in private. The result was that seven Sisters favored government by the Fathers. The Constitutions which had to be reviewed were discussed paragraph by paragraph. The proposal of government was taken up again. A new proposal was adopted. In the Acts of the Chapter, there is no mention that she was on loan to the Oblates. But it is written in the records of the Council: "Mother Marie of Christ is on loan for an undefined period. . ." She remained a Councilor and a Religious of the Assumption. In her absence, another Sister was appointed Councilor. What happened after that? Mother Marie of Christ left for Lourdes to rest. We have in our possession the letters she sent to her family. So that she would not be alone, she was accompanied by another Sister, Sister Hélène, who was also favorable to Father Picard.

What is astonishing is that her letters always showed a very strong attachment to Mother Marie-Eugénie, but there was a great sacrifice involved because she always remained a Religious of the Assumption. Her inconsistent language says something about her psychology. I think she arrived in Paris

*When Mother Marie of Christ (Religious of the Assumption) became an
Oblate of the Assumption*

at the Oblates early November. She wrote to Mother Marie-Eugénie that she would go to see her; she was welcomed with open arms.

1888: Ordinary Chapter after the death of Mother Thérèse Emmanuel, approbation of the Constitutions, and fiftieth anniversary of the Congregation. Mother Marie of Christ wrote to Mother Marie-Eugénie asking her if she could attend the Chapter. The Council thought that if Mother Marie of Christ wanted to come back to the Congregation on a permanent basis, she would be welcomed with open arms. But if she thought that her work was not finished with the Oblates, it would be better for her to stay there because the Chapter was going to deal with internal questions of the Congregation.

It seems that Bishop d'Hulst thought that she could come to the Chapter, but he did not want to go against the Council. Another Councilor was elected to replace her.

In 1889, steps were taken to transfer Sister Hélène to the Oblates. At that time, Bishop d'Hulst wrote that no steps needed to be taken for Mother Marie of Christ because she was thinking of coming back to the Religious of the Assumption. We do not have the official document.

In 1898, at the death of Mother Marie-Eugénie, Mother Marie of Christ came back to Auteuil. She was filled with emotion, but she also felt a cold shoulder on the part of the Sisters. And understandably, because no one knew her status.

In 1900, fourteen years after her transfer to the Oblates, she wrote to Mother Marie-Ceistine, "*You are my only Superior General...*" It is not at all clear to us, or to the Oblates.

There were problems. The Congregation held her in high esteem but, juridically, we do not know what her status was. She died in 1922. How was she buried? In which habit? There were no Religious of the Assumption present at her burial. Religious congregations were being expelled from France. The Mother House was in Belgium. The Superior General died in Rome, as did the Pope!

Additional Information from Sisters Claire Rabbitz, O.A.

Marie of Christ was revered by the Oblates in Paris. The big problem from the point-of-view of the Oblates of Paris was that she was presented as the

Origins of the Assumption Family

Major Superior of the Oblates of Paris, never as the Superior General. The first Superior General was Mother Berthe-Marie Pare in 1924. When the two groups were reunited in 1926, the Laudatory Decree of the Oblates of Nîmes benefited the Oblates of Paris.

Soon after, there was rivalry between Marie of Christ and Mother Myriam Franck. The Frank Mothers had not received an adequate formation to the religious life. It was Father Picard who placed them at the head of the Oblates. They were sent back to Bordeaux without any explanation. It was very hard. Father Picard said, *“I did not promise you anything.”*

Mother Myriam Franck recounted how Marie of Christ had been welcomed: Father Picard presented her to the Franck Mothers who thought she was coming for only a few days. While Father Picard was still alive, things went well enough. Later, Mother Marie of Christ joined Father Emmanuel Bailly in opposing Mother Myriam Franck, especially over questions of money (the Franck Mothers had a lot). *“I accepted the authority of Mother Madeleine (Little Sister of the Assumption who came in the early days to help with formation), and of. . . I can do as much for Mother Marie of Christ. . . as long as I have Our Lord . . .”*⁶³⁷ Mother Myriam Franck wrote to Father Picard.

Feminine psychology was not Father Picard’s forte.

In the beginning, I thought that the Religious of the Assumption had rid themselves of Mother Marie of Christ. I think rather that she was happy to respond to Father Picard’s invitation. In this way, she did not leave religious life or the Assumptionists. When I read the texts, I saw her great attachment to the Assumptionists and her love for religious life. All the reports I received from the older Sisters testify to the great veneration everyone had for Mother Marie of Christ.

Georgette-Marie Fayolle, O.A.

I agree with Sister Claire Rabitz. The problem at Charlton was badly dealt with because there was no one to whom Mother Franck could normally and legitimately appeal, and because the Fathers were going through a difficult period. There were no clear canonical standards. Furthermore, the Franck Mothers were Jewish, a very painful recollection for the Assumptionists and the Oblates.

⁶³⁷Extract of a letter of Mother Myriam Franck to Father Picard.

*When Mother Marie of Christ (Religious of the Assumption) became an
Oblate of the Assumption*

Very difficult situations ensue when situations are not clear and when normal channels of appeal are not available to individuals.

Sister Clare-Teresa Tjader
Religious of the Assumption

1001 South 47th Street
Philadelphia, PA 19143
U.S.A.

Origins of the Assumption Family

The Near Eastern Mission and the Foundation of the Oblates of the Assumption

JEAN-PAUL PÉRIER-MUZET

This question, which is certainly the most complex and the most difficult of all those encountered during the period 1840–80, tested the relations between Father d’Alzon and Mother Marie-Eugénie of Jesus. It has already been treated many times,⁶³⁸ albeit from perspectives somewhat different from ours today. To shed light on the question, I will first examine its significance, the protagonists, and the documentary evidence.

What Significance did it Have for the Church?

It was not the first time that Father d’Alzon or Mother Marie-Eugénie had to face the issue of Eastern Christianity. Both of them, or more precisely one through the other, became interested in this geo-political dimension of Catholicism after 1835, especially through the intermediary of the *Polish Resurrectionists*, then subsequently, in 1860, at the time when the *Maronites* were being persecuted by the Druze.

⁶³⁸*D’Alzon*, 1980 (Fouilloux, Julian Walter), and Julian Walter, Centennial Series, no. 6, *The Assumptionists and their Near Eastern Apostolate (1863–1980)*, Paris, 1980. *Documentation hiographique sur la vie et les vertus du Père d’Alzon*. 1986, vol II, chap. 22, pp. 693–729, and chap. 28, pp. 847–871. *Correnson Colloquium*, 2000. *D’Alzon Anthology*. 2003, chap. 23, 32, 33.

Origins of the Assumption Family

However, in 1860–61, the question of a *Union of the Bulgarian Church with Rome* convinced the papacy of the need to undertake sustained missionary activity in Bulgaria which was seeking a twofold independence: a political independence to free itself from Ottoman dependence (the Crimean War had revealed both the weakness of the Turkish Empire [“the sick man of Europe”] and the appetite of the Russians), as well as a desire on the part of the Bulgarians to withdraw their Church from the jurisdiction of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate in Constantinople.

It was in the middle of this complex situation that Father d’Alzon immersed himself, on the vague suggestion of Pius IX during his famous blessing on June 3, 1862 when he said: “*I bless your works of the West and the East.*” This sentence redirected Father d’Alzon’s original desire to found two communities in Jerusalem, one at the tomb or at the Dormition of Mary for the Religious of the Assumption, and one at the Cenacle for the Assumptionists. The private audience with Pope Pius IX on Friday June 6, 1862, the conversation Father d’Alzon had with Cardinal Barnabo that same day, and the undoubtedly concerted intervention of three prelates of the Curia (Bishops Talbot, Howard, and Lavigerie) resulted in Father d’Alzon giving up Jerusalem in favor of Bulgaria.

His mind was made up: on August 1, 1862, in Nîmes, the speech he gave at the traditional distribution of prizes at the College was on working in Bulgaria. He went into high gear during the fifth General Chapter of the Assumptionists held in Nîmes in September 1862 during which Father Galabert volunteered to go. In October, Father d’Alzon received from his father the sum of 500,000 francs for the Near Eastern Mission, and on December 20, Father Galabert, after making a detour by way of Rome, arrived in Constantinople to found the Near Eastern Mission and sought the opinion and suggestions of Archbishop Brunoni who, at that time, was Apostolic Delegate in Constantinople.

All of 1863 was spent learning the ropes: how to approach the Near Eastern reality which was so complex and multi-dimensional, what to do, and where to start. The mission was launched and resources were found (personnel, money), but the strategy was not clear. On the spot, Galabert tried to gather information, made visits, and learned the language.

Father d’Alzon, not wanting to rely solely on his informant, went there personally from February to April 1863 in order to study the situation and to meet the local people. His stopover in Rome on the way back (April 22-May 3) and the presentation of his report to Pius IX and to the Congregation

The Near Eastern Mission and the Foundation of the Oblates of the Assumption

of the Propaganda did not adequately answer the questions he had, quite to the contrary. Therefore, even though the importance for the Church was clear (help the return of the Bulgarians to Rome), the means and support he needed could not be taken for granted. It was therefore in this very uncertain and hazy context that the protagonists of the Near Eastern Mission struggled among themselves.

The Protagonists of the Original Near Eastern Mission

During the years 1863–65, **Father d’Alzon** was caught between influences and relations that were more than contradictory on this subject. Many of his religious thought that this new foundation in the Near East was yet another foolish adventure on his part, at a time when another distant mission had been started under difficult conditions in Australia with an unmanageable bishop, Bishop Quinn.

From Constantinople, **Father Galabert**, buried like a foundation stone, clamored unceasingly for resources and personnel, money and men. Very soon, he realized the indispensable need for religious auxiliaries to stabilize his apostolic activity in the fields of education and health care, with Church unity being sought through truth and charity. Though Father d’Alzon encouraged him, he nevertheless kept putting him off, saying “*non possumus.*”

In Paris, the fraternal friendship of **Fathers Picard** and **Pernet** did not lag behind in supporting the work of Father Galabert, but the means they had at their disposal were no less virtual. In Nîmes, **Father Vincent de Paul Bailly**, tormented by his new duties as director of the College, was becoming more and more frustrated.

Father d’Alzon then began working closely and urgently with **Mother Marie-Eugénie of Jesus** to involve the Religious of the Assumption in the Near Eastern Mission. In Nîmes on May 29, 1863, he mentioned to her the part the Religious could take in this foundation. Mother Marie-Eugénie of Jesus was in favor of it, but she had to come to terms with her Council which, without being against it, underlined especially the present impossibilities: Who? Where? What type of cooperation? The letters that went back and forth between Nîmes and Auteuil during the years 1863–64 were full of questions: Where? Constantinople? Adrianople? With whom? At the

Origins of the Assumption Family

time, the Assumptionists had only one name, Father Galabert. With the Resurrectionists? The Religious of the Assumption did not want to hinder or duplicate in Adrianople the work of the Sisters of the Resurrection.

Father d'Alzon did not let up on pressure. On August 1, 1863, at the distribution of prizes at the college, he made another brilliant speech about *Rome, Constantinople, and France*. He followed it up with talks in favor of the *Near Eastern Schools* (Nîmes, Paris, Toulouse, and Marseille). In September 1863, he preached 22 sermons to the Religious in Auteuil, and in November, 26 sermons to the Sisters at the Priory in Nîmes. In December, he spoke again in Nîmes to Mother Marie-Eugénie about the Near Eastern Mission.

October 1863 brought a ray of hope to Father Galabert when **Brothers Augustin Gallois** and **Jacques Chilier** were sent to be his companions at Philippopolis-Plovdiv in Bulgaria. The Capuchin bishop, **Bishop Canova**, accepted to entrust the Assumptionists with a small elementary school, Saint Andrew, next to the Catholic cathedral. The school opened its doors on January 3, 1864 in the presence of the bishop who gave the inaugural blessing. That is the list of the events and protagonists during these two preparatory years.

Documentary Evidence about an Open Crisis between the Assumptionists and the Religious of the Assumption

It would not be completely accurate to present the foundation of the Congregation of the Oblates of the Assumption as the direct result of the refusal of the Religious [Sisters] of the Assumption to go to the Near East. In order to describe the thorny situation that arose more from a disagreement or dispute over the *timing* of a foundation in the Near East by the Religious of the Assumption than over the idea itself, we must examine the correspondence between Father d'Alzon and Mother Marie-Eugénie of Jesus and recall Father d'Alzon's many efforts to interest several groups of women in his Near Eastern foundation: the Adorers of the Blessed Sacrament, Assumption's Third Order of women, and the Children of Mary.

The first four women, besides the Religious of the Assumption, came from the Adorers and from other pious movements in Nîmes: *Eulalie de Regis*, the

The Near Eastern Mission and the Foundation of the Oblates of the Assumption

person in charge of the group of Adorers, *Isabelle de Merignargues*, a former student of Saint-Maur, *Marie Correnson*, president of the Children of Mary, and *Pauline Sagnier*, said *de Lavagnac*, former nurse of Viscount d'Alzon. It was on this group that Father d'Alzon counted at the beginning of 1865 after exploring in 1864 the possibility of the Religious of the Assumption.

Father d'Alzon's letter to Marie-Eugénie of Jesus on February 24, 1863 was explicit: "*Will you open a boarding school in Philip-popolis?ty* He was thinking of two types of presence in the Near East for the Religious of the Assumption: a work of adoration and a work of education, including a normal school.

Mother Marie-Eugénie's answer (Auteuil, March 8, 1863) was reticent:

In principle, I accept in the projects you are proposing everything we are capable of doing. But, in practice, nothing serious can come from them until we talk things over upon your return, once you know more about the situation and the region.

High costs, a work of adoration without a garden, a normal school without knowing the Bulgarian language!

The conversations and visits that took place throughout 1864 then went in the direction of a work conducted by the Oblate Tertiaries,⁶³⁹ an intermediate category of Religious of the Assumption between choir sisters and lay sisters. Since Father d'Alzon could count only on four volunteers from among the Religious of the Assumption, he suggested a threesome: Pauline Sagnier, Eulalie de Regis, and Isabelle de Merignargues, since Marie Correnson was having difficulties with her family about her choice of religious life.

But already on November 1, 1864, he came up with an alternative solution: "*If you think you cannot accept Oblates under these conditions, please tell me very simply because I will then create a separate Congregation. . . .*" Marie-Eugénie answered this request favorably (letter, November 3, 1864). But there already seemed to be two distinct projects: one to be entrusted to the Oblates who would assist the Assumptionists in their "works of zeal" [*oeuvres de zèle*], the other to the Religious of the Assumption in view of a normal school.

⁶³⁹This is the first mention of the name Oblates of the Assumption in his correspondence, vol. V, p. 149 (September 25, 1864). Clearly, d'Alzon, on his own, was preparing his project which was going in the direction of a separate Oblate Congregation (vol. V, p. 179).

Origins of the Assumption Family

Then, all of a sudden, the situation became muddled: Pauline Sagnier, the person chosen to be the foundress, went to the Priory in Nîmes where she became enamored with the life of the Religious and now wanted to become a Religious of the Assumption and not an Oblate (letter, February 22, 1865). Father d'Alzon's attempt to found an Oblate community in Nîmes, in a house rented for this purpose, also failed because of differences of opinion and a clash of personalities between Isabelle de Merignargues and Eulalie de Regis.

But Father d'Alzon did not let himself be stopped by this failure. Thanks to the help he received from Father Hippolyte Saugrain, who discovered in the Cévennes Mountains the possibility of recruiting vocations of women from among the working classes, he began to think of founding a congregation that would be distinct from the Religious of the Assumption, to which he gave the name Oblates of the Assumption, Bulgarian apostolate. He shared this idea with Mother Marie-Eugénie of Jesus in a letter dated April 27, 1865, which was a prelude to the foundation that took place on May 24.

However, in no way did he cut his ties with Auteuil. In fact, he asked Mother Marie-Eugénie to provide a religious formator to begin his foundation of Oblates (letter, June 5, 1865). It was Mother Marie-Madeleine de Peter who, after negotiations, was finally chosen by Mother Marie-Eugénie of Jesus to direct this first community (July 25, 1865) before Father d'Alzon was able to appoint Marie Correnson, still a would-be postulant, as Superior General.

Marie Correnson eventually went to Auteuil for her formation under the direction of Mother Marie-Eugénie of Jesus. She took the habit on April 7, 1867, became Superior General on June 27, 1867, and made profession on April 18, 1868. Mother Marie-Emmanuel d'Everlange, another Religious of the Assumption, succeeded Mother Marie-Madeleine de Peter between December 1866 and June 1867. As another tangible sign of unity, Mother Marie-Eugénie of Jesus went with Father d'Alzon on April 24, 1868 from Nîmes to Marseille to accompany the first five Oblates who departed for the Near East on April 25. The Oblates established themselves in Adrianople on May 24, under the direction of Father Galabert.⁶⁴⁰

⁶⁴⁰Sources: *Note of Father d'Alzon* (1865) about the Bulgarian Mission, *Mémoire de Sœur Marie des Anges* [Clavier] O.A. (March 18, 1911).

The Period after the Crisis

Surely, the written traces of this turbulent history of the foundation of the Oblates do not stop there. It is clear that Father d'Alzon was saddened and annoyed by the reserved and distant attitude he encountered, not on the part of Mother Marie-Eugénie of Jesus who, despite some reservations, was personally won over to the Near Eastern project, but especially on the part of the Religious of the Assumption at Auteuil whose negative attitude apparently brought them together around Mother Thérèse-Emmanuel O'Neill who, in Father d'Alzon's estimation, was by temperament more mystical than apostolic. At any rate, Father d'Alzon drew from this episode a few personal conclusions.

He learned better to distinguish in his relations that which united him with Mother Foundress from that which separated him from the Sisters. It was an exercise in autonomy, which took nothing away from his personal feelings regarding his favorite daughter but which reminded him of and reawakened in him everything he felt toward Auteuil: friendly relations, to be sure, provided God and his servants the Sisters wanted them, but no ties of subordination or authority. With the Religious, it was better to be asked than to ask, a solution that history has undoubtedly validated. Father d'Alzon's basic idea about this issue never changed since the day he put it in writing on May 10, 1849!⁶⁴¹

Regarding the Near East, his idea became clearer. Father Galabert and his successors were not to expect help or female associates except from the Oblates of the Assumption, not from the Assumption families. This explains why Father d'Alzon responded negatively and forcefully to Father Galabert when the latter asked for additional personnel from the Little Sisters of the Assumption, through the intermediary of Father Pernet. The Assumptionist Near East will be "private land," only the Assumptionists and the Oblates.

Grievances and recriminations against Auteuil became sharper under the pen of Father d'Alzon, undoubtedly because of this painful experience of the Near Eastern Affair, which he tended to exaggerate or amplify.

Already back in November 1864, he had said rather bluntly to Mother Marie-Eugénie of Jesus, but also with a bit of malice and humor:

"Since you are founding in Poitiers and Malaga, you might have subjects available for a foundation that has been in the works for

⁶⁴¹Letters, vol. C, p. 436.

Origins of the Assumption Family

a long time.”⁶⁴² Was this double talk? Was there any trust?

Father d’Alzon wanted to make a distinction between Mother Marie-Eugénie of Jesus and her Congregation:

I find there is a big difference between what you do, which I like very much, and what is done at the novitiate in Auteuil, which I like a lot less. That impression baffles me. Maybe I’m wrong, maybe I don’t understand, but since you accuse me of lacking confidence in you, don’t accuse me of having shown you too much confidence by speaking in this way. The older Sisters had their faults, but there was something charming about their openness and their easy-going attitude, which I find much less present in the younger ones. But this does not necessarily make them more supernatural. Finally, I regret what seems like a spinal degeneration of the Congregation. It is the same institution, but it no longer has the same character. . . .⁶⁴³

Clearly, Mother O’Neill, who insisted too much on love for Auteuil and not enough on love for the Congregation, was the one to whom he alluded in this letter.⁶⁴⁴

There was also another quip regarding the acceptance of a young Paul (sister of one of the Religious [Sisters] of the Assumption in Nîmes):

If I wanted to be nasty, I would add that this way of acting would perfectly legitimize what some Religious [Sisters] of the Assumption have said to some individuals, who told me about it, viz that it was time for people to prove that they can get along without me.⁶⁴⁵

To make others feel that they are no longer needed, isn’t that a way of pushing them aside or of rejecting them?

What Father d’Alzon thought he especially noticed in the attitude of the younger sisters—about whom, it must be said, he knew much less than he

⁶⁴²Vol. V, p. 189.

⁶⁴³February 28, 1865, vol. V, p. 260.

⁶⁴⁴Vol. VI, p. 145.

⁶⁴⁵Letters, vol. V, p. 410, October 7, 1865.

The Near Eastern Mission and the Foundation of the Oblates of the Assumption

did about the earlier generations he had visited on *impasse des Vignes* or on *rue de Chaillot*—was a lessening of an apostolic or missionary sense. In 1866, the Veron Affair, which was a much more troublesome event, brought back to him all these impressions which remained painful memories, as he confided to Mother Marie-Eugénie of Jesus in July 1867:

I admit very simply that the first idea of founding the Oblates came to me two or three years ago, I can't remember exactly when. The year before, in your community room, some of your sisters had promised me that they would give themselves to the foreign missions. When, a few months later, having gone back to see them again, I noticed that not one of them, except Sister Marie-Antoinette [d'Altenheim] wanted to devote herself to the missions, I had pangs of conscience, which I was probably wrong in keeping to myself, because I was left with a sad impression about the devotedness of the Sisters of the Assumption. And it was one of the signs that led me to believe that there was an undercurrent at the novitiate, to which you do not subscribe and about which I have often spoken to Father Picard. I suspect that this might cause difficulties because it will be impossible for me or my religious to speak about the foreign missions to your students without people thinking that I want, or that we want, to make Oblates out of them.⁶⁴⁶

To be sure, the Congregation of the Oblates summoned up all of Father d'Alzon's enthusiasm. Nevertheless, this did not diminish in the least his esteem for the Religious of the Assumption. He continued to direct toward them vocations from the upper classes, reserving for the Oblates those from the more popular or working classes who, in his mind, were intended principally for the foreign missions. Obviously, this division according to social class was due more to the mentality of the time than to solid evangelical criteria. Nevertheless, after 1870, it was not without having an influence on the different points-of-view between him and Mother Marie Correnson who, as a matter of fact, came from the bourgeoisie of Nîmes.

As for the average or ordinary Assumptionist opinion, it remained indelibly marked by the distancing that took place in 1865 and did not change very much, as exemplified by this extract from Galabert's Diary:

⁶⁴⁶Vol VI, p. 285.

Origins of the Assumption Family

Madame the Superior of the Religious of the Assumption instructed me to tell Reverend Father Picard that she regretted having been such a poor correspondent, and she assured me that she was always well-disposed toward our work. I did not hide from her that I had been deeply hurt by her attitude toward me because her doubts, her hesitations, her promises, and her failure to keep these promises had put me in a very awkward and uncomfortable position. Father Picard responded saying that they had never been very enthusiastic about coming to Bulgaria and that the fear of not having close to them a priest whom they could trust had held them back. . . .⁶⁴⁷

Father Jean-Paul Périer-Muzet Archivist of the Augustinians of the
Assumption

55, Via San Pio V 00165 Rome Italy

⁶⁴⁷June 20, 1867, Vol. II, p. 135.

Appendices

A. Sister Thérèse Maylis Toujouse, R.A.

1. Additional information on the Near Eastern Mission

I would like to thank Jean-Paul Périer-Muzet for having pointed out that Marie-Eugénie did not refuse to send sisters to the Near East. This is clear from her 1863–65 correspondence.

Among the reasons that have been presented to us, the main one was obviously the uncertainty. At the time, the Sisters were not very numerous. It was not a question of refusing a mission, but of accepting it prudently. Moreover, Marie-Eugénie desired Father d'Alzon's presence at the first Chapter in 1858 and at the second in 1864.

For two years, the question of collaborating with the Assumptionists in Bulgaria had been under study. In 1864, the Chapter members re-examined it. The Chapter decided to postpone collaboration with the Assumptionists in the Adrianople foundation until they became more solidly implanted. At that time, the Sisters had two other foundations under way: Poitiers and Malaga. During those two years, Marie-Eugénie tried to find sisters to send, sisters who were both healthy and capable. Neither those chosen for Poitiers nor for Malaga were suitable for Bulgaria.

In January 1865, Mother Marie-Eugénie wrote to Father d'Alzon about the future foundation of the Oblates and their Rule:

Father Picard must have sent you yesterday by mail the Rule of the Oblates in which I inserted material from our rules that I thought might be necessary. I have kept a copy. I would be grateful if you were to send me whatever changes are made. In any case, the essentials come from St. Vincent de Paul. Since experience has proven that that is what works best in the Missions, I think that we should be very sure of ourselves before changing it.⁶⁴⁸

In February 1865:

“In God's view, a different life-style is based on a different vocation.”

⁶⁴⁸No. 3054

Origins of the Assumption Family

In June 1865:

As for the Oblates you are in the process of founding, I hope that we will be their best friends, and that they have good vocations and an excellent spirit. If, later on, they have a better spirit than ours, we will gain by our contacts with them. If, on the contrary, they need us for something, we shall help them. Did you think I was trying to be difficult when I couldn't find a Sister to give them? I suspect you did. I wish you could come and see how poor we are this year in young women capable of properly carrying out such a task. You have seen what we sent to Malaga. None of them would have been suitable for you, and it will be more or less the same for Poitiers.⁶⁴⁹

In July 1867, Mother Marie-Eugénie wrote to Father d'Alzon who thought that he noticed a weakening of the sisters' missionary sense.

Don't have any reservations. If ever I deserved any, it isn't now. I regret the one you have which is based on the absence of some Sisters from the recreation during which you spoke about the Bulgarian Mission. The truth is that, in such cases, those who put themselves forward the least are the ones on whom you can count the most. Regardless, the foundation of the Oblates is a good thing, and their rule is more suitable for small schools. What matters is that we support each other, brushing aside in all candor and true charity all that the devil wants to sow between us. I beseech you not to take any decision or any other action until we have seen each other.⁶⁵⁰

2. "Message of Communion" read by Mother Marie-Eugénie at the preparatory session of the Chapter of 1886 (August 4)

For the past thirty years, the Fathers of the Assumption have been in relation with us as confessors, directors, friends, and counselors. Never has the devil been able to cast a shadow on these relationships, which have always been holy and above all suspicion. I believe that the Enemy of all good wants to take vengeance

⁶⁴⁹No. 3083

⁶⁵⁰No. 3137

The Near Eastern Mission and the Foundation of the Oblates of the Assumption

today on that purity, which he has not been able to besmirch, by sowing division among us. This causes me deep pain. I want to insist that if anyone thinks there is an antagonism between Father Picard and me, I do not accept the allegation, nor does he. Whatever happens, I shall always remain devoted, grateful and attached to Father Picard, who has always given me good advice and has helped me throughout the years in the Lord's work. At the beginning of my religious life, Father d'Alzon was my support, then Father Picard. I have always been deeply attached not only to Father d'Alzon and Father Picard but also to their congregation, and I have sought to serve it whenever I could. God alone knows the pain I have experienced over the past six months.

The question of the break in relations with our Fathers is very serious, as is the question of our Rule. Let us place ourselves in the presence of God, and let us render ourselves worthy to do His will and to receive His light.

3. Correspondence between Father d'Alzon and Mother Marie-Eugénie – 1879

On May 24, 1879, Father d'Alzon wrote to Mother Marie-Eugénie:

We must evidently make our final arrangements here below and prepare for our judgment. Let us pray hard for one another, that we may be treated with great mercy. I understand that the Nîmes affair has worn you out and broken your heart. Such is life. As I take refuge more and more in solitude, I see that many things are falling, including people. This makes me suffer. However, we should be saying: only God remains steadfast, and the few friends he allows us to have. You are at the top of the list of those I still have.

On May 29, Mother Marie-Eugénie answered:

I really needed your thought about fidelity in friendship. It is supportive and is the grounds on which we will always meet.

And on December 9, she paid him this homage:

Origins of the Assumption Family

I recognize in you a religious, a priest, and a man who—I know from all my past experience—does not want to leave souls, who are in the service of God, in ways characterized by poor and earthly behavior.

In her Christmas greetings, she wrote again:

I sense that even if people have managed to put sticks in the wheels, it is the Holy Spirit who establishes the very pure link of supernatural unions, and it is to Him that we must entrust them by affectionately trying to obtain the best possible gifts for those we love.

4. Statement by Mother Marie-Eugénie of Jesus upon the death of Father d’Alzon on November 21, 1880:

On the occasion of this very holy death, in which all the beautiful traits of Father d’Alzon’s piety shined so beautifully during his suffering, souls—and mine in particular—are filled with the memory of his virtues and good works. Even if emotion provokes tears because of the break and the sadness of a painful separation, the impression remains that “God’s hand has made itself felt, sweetly and in a holy way, in the events which have taken place for all the Assumptions.”⁶⁵¹

5. Circular Letter written by Father Picard to the Religious [Priests] of the Assumption on March 12, 1898, upon the death of Mother Marie-Eugénie

My very dear Brothers,

I recommend to your prayers in a very special way Madame Marie-Eugénie of Jesus, the Superior General and Foundress of the Ladies of the Assumption. Her life was intimately linked with that of our Founder, Father d’Alzon, and to the beginning of all of our works. She loved our Assumption almost as much as her

⁶⁵¹This text is quoted in “At the death of Father d’Alzon, the comfort of a religious friendship between the two Assumptions” by Father Pierre Touveneraud (Rome, August 28, 1979). Father Touveneraud died in December 1979.

The Near Eastern Mission and the Foundation of the Oblates of the Assumption

own, right up until the time when, after the foundation of the two congregations, each one was able to do the good which Our Lord expected of it. I have been her confessor for over forty years. Her soul, so dear to Father d'Alzon, remained until the end the object of my prayers and my solicitude. I therefore ask you to say in each house the prayers we customarily say at the death of our own religious. There is not a single work undertaken by our congregation until 1886 in which she did not participate, and to which she did not devote herself.

Our two Congregations have been united by the most intimate bonds. The day I was called to give the last sacraments to this faithful handmaid of the Lord, I had the impression that one of the oldest witnesses of our foundation was leaving us and was going to join our Founder. Madame the Superior General of the Assumption was one of the most intelligent women I have ever known. She blended her brilliant intellectual qualities with a heart full of tenderness and generosity. She loved the Church, as Father d'Alzon knew how to make us do. To all who came close to her, she imparted a great love for the Liturgy and the Office. Deeply attached to the Pope, she transmitted to her Congregation her spirit and her love for all that is Catholic.

The Religious [Sisters] of the Assumption weep for the most tender of superiors and the most enlightened of guides. Our tears are mixed with theirs. We suffer with them, and we pray for the one who was the mother of so many our works and of so many vocations. I bless you very paternally.

B. Sister Gisele Marchand, L.S.A.

Constantinople

The Little Sisters of the Assumption were twice asked to make a foundation in Constantinople (Istanbul).

– In 1873, eight years after the foundation of the Congregation, the request made by Father Galabert was deferred. Father Pernet wrote to him on the July 23, 1873:

[...] We are only beginning, as you know. Although the number

Origins of the Assumption Family

of our Nurses of the Poor is increasing respectably (there are 36 at present), I wouldn't yet dare detach them from the trunk to transplant them so far away. My opinion is that, for the present, we continue our development and training in Paris [...].⁶⁵²

On November 15 of the same year, Father d'Alzon, for his part, wrote to Father Galabert: "I think you would do well to drop Father Pernet's Sisters."⁶⁵³

And on September 7, 1877, in another letter to Father Galabert, he wrote:

I ask you not to attract the Pernettes or the Religious of the Assumption to the Near East. Believe me; everyone should mind their own business. The reason why some Oblate Sisters have not been sent is because they are being formed very seriously.⁶⁵⁴

– In 1883, this request was renewed in a letter dated November 16 of that year from Father Galabert to Father Pernet. It would appear that Father Picard was pushing for that foundation.

[...] Like the Very Rev. Father Picard, I believe that this foundation must take place and that it must be started as soon as possible. My opinion would be that it be done immediately after Easter. We would reserve the occasion of the visit by Father Picard for the definitive foundation. You could then come to Constantinople and we would see about establishing your daughters on a firm base.⁶⁵⁵

We do not have Father Pernet's reply to that letter in our archives.

Though this foundation did not take place, it seems as though the Little Sisters wanted to go to Constantinople.

Indeed, in 1881–82, Father Pernet wrote three letters to Father Chilier concerning some young women who were being approached about entering the Little Sisters. One of them, Blanche Ottelet,⁶⁵⁶ entered in 1885.

On the 11 December 1881, Father Pernet wrote:

⁶⁵²IAIC, no. 4111.

⁶⁵³Letter 4910.

⁶⁵⁴Letter 6008.

⁶⁵⁵1A1B, no. 3218.

⁶⁵⁶Blanche Ottelet (1864–1891), Sister Marie-Adrienne of the Blessed Sacrament, L.S.A.

The Near Eastern Mission and the Foundation of the Oblates of the Assumption

I thank you for the two prospective young recruits for our Little Sisters. We are already praying for the success of these two vocations who would be the first to come to us from the Near East where we ourselves would all like to go. You can tell them that, before too long, there will be Little Sisters of the Assumption, if not in Philippopolis, at least in Constantinople.⁶⁵⁷

⁶⁵⁷1AIC, no. 3710.

Origins of the Assumption Family

Relations between the Little Sisters of the Assumption and the Assumptionists

SISTER GISELE MARCHAND

Father Pernet participated in the General Chapters of his Congregation in 1868, 1873 and 1876 at which relations between the Assumptionists and the women's congregations were discussed.

In 1896—twenty years after the last of these chapters—when Father Pernet began to take the necessary steps in Rome for the Pontifical Approbation which the Little Sisters of the Assumption ardently desired, there was a period of deep crisis between him and Father Picard, “. . . *everything having been called into question*” (Letter of Etienne Pernet, March 8, 1896). However, in reading the correspondence, it is obvious that the same questions had been lying under the surface since 1872. There were three periods: 1872–75, 1876–80, 1896 and later developments.

1872–1875

As we have already seen in speaking of the foundation, in 1873 Mother Marie of Jesus accepted the statute drawn up at the 1868 General Chapter: government and direction by the Assumptionists, with the election of Father Pernet as “Delegate of the Superior General of the Assumption” (December 26, 1873).

1874: Request for approbation by the Archdiocese of Paris

In March 1874, steps were taken at the Chancery of Paris to obtain approbation of the Rule of the Congregation. Mother Marie of Jesus Fage and her assistant⁶⁵⁸ met Father Lagarde, Vicar General, who received them very cordially and asked to meet Father Pernet (Annals, March 1874)

The correspondence between Father Picard and Father Vincent de Paul Bailly brings out points-of-view that were at variance with those of the Little Sisters of the Assumption. We can imagine the tensions that existed at the time.

From Nice, on March 28, 1874, Father Picard wrote to Father Vincent de Paul Bailly:

Approval of Father Pernet's daughters. [...] You are the judge at the moment with Father d'Alzon, but do believe that the opinion concerning Madame Fage is well thought out. For nearly two years now, I have been trying to prevent the matter from developing in the direction it seems to be taking at the present time. If the Archbishop of Paris does not wish to give approval with the Augustinians of the Assumption, we'll wait until there are two houses in a diocese that will give its approval.

On April 6, he specified what he meant:

As for the Little Sisters, if they want to be independent, I don't see any problem with that, but if they want to depend on us, I don't think they can keep their present position within the Assumption⁶⁵⁹ because their life is entirely different. It is only by a more direct and complete authority that we will be able to maintain the spirit. [...] We have the duty to conform ourselves to the decisions taken [in chapter]. Moreover, these decisions seem to me to be very wise. If they are not followed, I will plead for a complete break because I believe it is impossible to maintain the spirit and the unity of such works without having authority.

⁶⁵⁸Mother Marie-Madeleine of the Sacred Heart Tomkowicz, Assistant General and Mistress of Novices.

⁶⁵⁹The reference is to the Ladies of the Assumption.

Relations between the Little Sisters of the Assumption and the Assumptionists

Father Pernet, in a letter dated April 24, 1874, wrote to Father Picard to clarify the question:

[...] As for the Chancery, we are at the stage of a simple investigation, very cordial by the way, by Father Lagarde.⁶⁶⁰ The latter said to Father Pernet [...] “It is time to regularize the position of the new community and to propose its approval to the Archbishop.” While thanking him for so much interest and kindness, I told him that I was only a simple religious in all this and that it was my duty to refer the matter to my superiors. This is where we are at. Nothing has been started on our part and it is understood that my response will be that of obedience.⁶⁶¹

After the approval by the diocese, the Little Sisters made their first annual canonical vows on July 13, 1875.⁶⁶²

During that same period, our Founders raised the question of the Laudatory Decree from Rome. From the beginning of the Congregation, they had envisaged the presence of the Little Sisters in other countries.

“France is your cradle, but the whole universe is open to you.”⁶⁶³

That was probably why they wanted to have pontifical approbation. On November 13, 1874, Father Pernet wrote to Father Picard:

At this point. Father, I want to call to your attention to and ask you to support the preparation of a Laudatory Decree from Rome in order to facilitate the development of the Nurses of the Poor. Despite the fact that we have not intervened, the Chancery is taking an interest in them and in very kindly terms.

We don't know the response to this request.

⁶⁶⁰Father Ernest Lagarde (1826–1882), Vicar General.

⁶⁶¹1A1C 4114.

⁶⁶²Cf. Minutes of the Council of June 29, 1875, approved by Father Pernet on July 2, 1875.

⁶⁶³January 1, 1882, IX, 653.

1876 to 1880: The Question of the Eccliaistical Superior

This came to the fore in October 1876, one month after the Assumptionists' General Chapter which had been held in September and confirmed the union of the Little Sisters of the Assumption with the Assumptionists who were to "*lead, govern and direct them as children of the Assumption.*"

Assumptionist General Chapter of 1876: Union of the Little Sisters with the Assumptionists

At that time, the founders envisaged that the Little Sisters

“would one day be a real Third Order Regular of the Augustinian Fathers of the Assumption, dependent on them for government and direction.”⁶⁶⁴

In preparing the 1876 Chapter, the Little Sisters of the Assumption worked with Father Picard. During that period, Father Pernet was at Notre Dame des Châteaux. We do not have this work, but Father Pernet's correspondence refers to it and Father Picard mentioned it in 1896.

On August 3, 1876, Father Pernet wrote to Mother Marie of Jesus:

M. [Marie] Lucie [Martineau] mentioned some work that you will be doing tomorrow with Father Picard. It is an important matter. I ask you to please send me a copy of it so that I can have an idea of it before the Chapter begins. In all this, don't lose sight of the aim of our work; the type of bond it has with the Congregation of the Augustin-ians; its direction and government; your independence with respect to temporal goods and affairs; your desire to eventually *depend on Rome* and *make perpetual vows*; and finally the need to have the daughter houses *centralized at the Motherhouse for absolutely everything.*⁶⁶⁵

⁶⁶⁴Letter from Father Etienne Pernet to lather d'Alzon March 2, 1877 (IA 4127) and Minutes of the Council meeting of June 28, 1875.

⁶⁶⁵1A1C 206 (what is printed in italics is underlined by Etienne Pernet in his letter).

*Relations between the Little Sisters of the Assumption and the
Assumptionists*

On September 10, Mother Marie of Jesus wrote to Father d'Alzon confirming the request for union with the Assumptionists:

Very Reverend Father,

We thank you for having accepted us as your daughters, and we ask you to be so good as to continue to lead, govern and direct us as children of the Assumption. We are happy to have as delegated superior our Father, the Reverend Father Pernet who founded us and to whom we owe so much, and we hope that, according to your promise, you will leave him with us until he dies. Nevertheless, we wish above all to be the Daughters of the Assumption and we accept in advance all that you and the Chapter of our Fathers will decide for our constitutions and our direction.

Please accept, Very Reverend Father, the humble submission of your respectful children, the Little Sisters of the Assumption, Home Nurses of the Poor.

Signed: Sister Marie of Jesus

Superior

Paris, September 10, 1876

On September 14, Father Pernet wrote to Mother Marie of Jesus: “*Yesterday, we discussed the question of your union with us. Everything went very well, you will be hearing about it.*”

Intervention of the diocesan authority of Paris

A month later, in October 1876, Cardinal Guibert, Archbishop of Paris, appointed in Council an ecclesiastical superior other than the Founder, namely, Canon Quinard,⁶⁶⁶ Promoter of the Diocese.⁶⁶⁷

This marked the beginning of the “affair of the ecclesiastical superior,” as Father Vincent de Paul Bailly called it. Mother Marie of Jesus herself left an account of the events that took place at the time.

The foundress was officially asked to give her opinion on the matter.

⁶⁶⁶Father Quinard (1831–1886), Promoter of the diocese of Paris from 1877 to 1882

⁶⁶⁷Archdiocesan Councils of October 17 and 20, 1876.

Origins of the Assumption Family

She met Father Pernet and Father Picard. It was agreed that she would first consult Father d'Hulst who was astounded that she was not willing to accept a superior from the diocese. He sent her to Coadjutor Archbishop Richard

“who listened to her very kindly and advanced good reasons in an effort to convince her.”

Correspondence from December 1876 to March 1877

This correspondence enables us to follow the events and the thinking behind them. On December 23, Father Picard wrote to Father d'Alzon:

There's a struggle brewing over the Little Sisters. They have been given a superior without even advising Father Pernet who does not feel inclined to accept the decision. The Little Mother said very gently to Father d'Hulst and Archbishop Richard that she would not be able to do without the Father Founder, and that they shouldn't be surprised she wasn't going to see Father Quinard. In the meantime, the Bishop of Versailles authorized an establishment in his diocese and permitted us to be superiors and confessors. We will make a foundation quickly and the novitiate will be placed out of reach.

Mother Marie of Jesus met Father Quinard at Grenelle where he was accompanied by the parish priest,⁶⁶⁸ who had exerted pressure along these same lines.

On January 29, 1877, Father Picard, writing to Father d'Alzon, kept him informed of the situation:

The Grenelle affairs are taking a turn for the worse. (...) 'The superior who has been imposed is to present himself on Wednesday in his capacity as Promoter and to deal severely if necessary. Yesterday, I went to see Madame Fage and told her that we were

⁶⁶⁸Father Jacques Théodore Lamarche (1827–1892), parish priest of St. John the Baptist in Grenelle until 1877; bishop of Quimper in 1877.

*Relations between the Little Sisters of the Assumption and the
Assumptionists*

giving her full freedom, if she so wished, so that she would be the only one involved on Wednesday and our house would be harder to implicate. Plans have been prepared against us, but what can we do about people who tell us they are ready to pull out from the work in Paris? We will keep after them, nevertheless, because we hold to this work. We see it is running well, and we want to keep it going in such a way as to be kicked out on the first day. The Mother doesn't want to hear of it. She is firm and gentle. She says she would not have undertaken the work without the Assumption, and that up to now Father Pernet has always worked closely with the Chancery as well as with the parish priest. Unable to work otherwise, she would prefer to withdraw rather than take on such an impossible task.

Father d'Alzon was in Rome and passed on to Father Picard the various opinions he had received:

I have just left de Luca.⁶⁶⁹ I talked to him about the Little Sisters of the Assumption. He thinks that the Archbishop is following the principles of the Roman court according to which the founder can complete his foundation, but after him there must be a return to the general principle.⁶⁷⁰

I wrote to you about my conversation with de Luca. Today, I had a better one with Bianchi.⁶⁷¹ [...] Father Pernet can be in charge of the government of the Sisters as their founder, provided they request it.⁶⁷²

On February 17, 1877, Father Picard wrote to Father d'Alzon:

The questions of the Nurses came up also in the course of the conversation, and the Archbishop⁶⁷³ wants to see me about this matter. [...] Obviously, they are anxious to keep them, and the

⁶⁶⁹Pietro de Luca, Auditor of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars.

⁶⁷⁰February 2, 1877.

⁶⁷¹Raimondo Bianchi, O.P., Consultor to the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars.

⁶⁷²February 3, 1877.

⁶⁷³Archbishop François Benjamin Richard de Lavergne (1819–1908), Coadjutor Archbishop of Paris.

Origins of the Assumption Family

thought that they might prefer to leave the diocese greatly bothers them. Perhaps this thought will bring a satisfactory solution? God willing!

On February 27, 1877, he wrote again:

“Concerning the Little Sisters [...], they are meeting a need and that is their strength [...] God is visibly blessing this work, and the discussions with Archbishop Richard are not going badly.”

Father Pernet had an appointment at the Chancery on March 1, 1877, which he explained to Mother Marie of Jesus:

Father Quinard sent me a note yesterday, asking me to be at the Chancery today from 1 to 2 P.M. He is to take me to Archbishop Richard who will give me the answer that corresponds most to our wishes and to the good of our Work. Those are the very words he used.⁶⁷⁴

Father Pernet gave an account of that conversation to Father d’Alzon in a letter dated March 2, 1877:

From the moment of my arrival, Father Quinard assured me that the work of the Little Sisters of the Assumption had the sympathy and the goodwill of the diocesan authorities. The proof, he told me, is what was decided in their favor at the last Council meeting. His Eminence Cardinal Guibert recognizes you and gives you full authority to govern and direct this nascent Congregation. You can sell, buy, administer, and found as you wish for the good of the work. You will be the one who will examine candidates for admission to the novitiate and profession. You are asked simply to keep the Administration informed, and, for ecclesiastical and jurisdictional matters, to have recourse to the Ordinary in the person of the official of the Chancery who will be designated for that purpose.

[...] With a kindness that I shall never forget, Archbishop Richard granted me in approximately the same terms, as much

⁶⁷⁴IAIC 223

Relations between the Little Sisters of the Assumption and the Assumptionists

in his own name as in that of His Eminence, all of the above-mentioned powers indicated by Father Quinard with regard to the Little Sisters of the Assumption, with this restriction, however, that it would be thus for as long as the Sisters made only annual vows.

I expressed my deep gratitude to His Excellency, telling him at the same time that these favors would help us with the Constitutions the Little Sisters of the Assumption intend to have. According to these Constitutions, they would one day be a true Third Order Regular of the Augustinian Fathers of the Assumption and depend on them for their government and direction. In this regard, Archbishop Richard noted, with great kindness, that this objective was not in keeping with the usual discipline and was therefore difficult to attain, as he had remarked to Father Picard some days earlier. But, this was the Congregation's own affair.

Finally, as I took my leave of him, Archbishop Richard blessed the work and me with most fatherly kindness.

I think that that is the best we can hope for in Paris.⁶⁷⁵

The same day, Father Picard wrote to Father d'Alzon:

“At the last Council meeting, a very favorable decision was taken in favor of Grenelle. Father Pernet has full authority even for examining candidates for the novitiate and profession. Archbishop Richard showed great kindness.”⁶⁷⁶

In the midst of these difficulties, the Congregation of the Little Sisters of the Assumption became deeply rooted in the Church, and Father Pernet sought to establish it solidly. Nevertheless, the situation remained delicate with the Ordinary of Paris.

On September 6, 1878, Father Pernet, then in Sevres, wrote to Mother Marie of Jesus:

When you come back here, we will have urgent and important affairs to deal with: 1) the extension of the novitiate; 2) the

⁶⁷⁵1AIC 4127.

⁶⁷⁶March 2, 1877.

Origins of the Assumption Family

permanent foundation in Creil; 3) the question of perpetual vows. I have done the groundwork. We must now go with Father Picard to submit the requests in Versailles. . . ⁶⁷⁷

The authorization for perpetual vows was given by Bishop Goux⁶⁷⁸ of Versailles on September 7, 1878:

“The Little Sisters will only be admitted to the profession of perpetual vows after making annual vows, renewed for ten consecutive years following the completion of their novitiate.”⁶⁷⁹

In November 1880, Father Quinard resigned and Father Pernet was appointed unofficially the Ecclesiastical Superior of the Little Sisters of the Assumption. He wrote to Father Emmanuel Bailly:

Last Monday, Archbishop Richard called me to the Chancery. It was especially to tell me that Father Quinard was resigning as Superior of the Little Sisters and that I was being *unofficially* appointed Superior in his place. We will talk about that at a suitable time because it only half satisfies me. In the meantime, since they are letting us act freely, we will have peace from that side.⁶⁸⁰

1896: Steps taken in Rome to obtain Pontifical Approval

In 1896, there were approximately “400 sisters residing in 22 houses, which are located in 9 dioceses.”

Mother Marie of the Blessed Sacrament, Superior General, expressed herself in the following way when she requested the Laudatory Decree:

The Congregation of the Little Sisters of the Assumption, being dispersed in this way and coming under the obedience of several bishops, feels the need to be more immediately under the authority of the Sovereign Pontiff so as to ensure for its works and its

⁶⁷⁷1A1C 233.

⁶⁷⁸Pierre Antoine Goux (1827–1904).

⁶⁷⁹Minutes of the Council meeting of October 10, 1878.

⁶⁸⁰November 19, 1880, 1A1C 4129.

*Relations between the Little Sisters of the Assumption and the
Assumptionists*

constitutions that type of stability which alone, with the grace of God, can continue to assure its success.

This question of Pontifical Approbation began to be negotiated especially in 1890.

In **January 1890**, Father Pernet fell ill and hovered between life and death for a month. When he recovered, he continually prayed and got others to pray, so as to obtain the final approbation, (cf. Biography)

On **April 1, 1893**, Mother Marie of the Blessed Sacrament, Superior General, wrote to Father Emmanuel Bailly, then the Congregation's procurator in Rome:

[...] 'We cannot ignore the fact that the Little Sisters are not yet even baptized in the Church.

[...] To be sure, we have in our favor all the bishops of the dioceses where we have houses. Some have even asked us why we weren't going to Rome and are urging us to do so.

Other persons are telling us that we can not only look forward to a Laudatory Decree but that we are in a position to have the Approval of the Institute, something we desire very strongly, lather, as you can well understand.

Father Emmanuel Bailly replied a month later:

I have closely examined the question bothering you. But I must tell you that, in the interest of the desired objective, the present would be an ill-chosen moment to undertake any step in the direction you mentioned.⁶⁸¹

"The moment would be ill-chosen for those steps¹' for two reasons, continued Father Emmanuel Bailly. First, because of the jurisprudence followed by the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars and "secondly, because we have just obtained from the same Sacred Congregation an important decision concerning the Oblates."

At the beginning of 1896, on January 29, Father Picard suddenly suggested to Father Pernet that he go to Rome with Father Emmanuel Bailly

⁶⁸¹May 2, 1893.

Origins of the Assumption Family

who was returning there the following day. He authorized him to consult, clarify matters, inform himself, and act under his responsibility in full freedom (cf. letters from Father Bailly of February 13 and 14, 1896). Father Pernet did this as soon as he arrived in Rome, for he was encouraged by Leo XIII's kindness during the audience on February 2.

As for Father Bailly, he wrote to Father Picard:

I'm greatly confused about Father Pernet. You tell me that if he asks for the Laudatory Decree, we must expect that the conditions set down today will determine the future. But, he has come here solely with that intention and with the sole idea of getting the ball rolling. He doesn't think that you authorized him to come here for any other purpose.⁶⁸²

We know Father Picard's position from his correspondence with Father Emmanuel Bailly:

My dear friend,

I am returning to what I wrote to you yesterday and summarizing my thinking so as to respond to your new question.

1. Father Pernet and the Sisters have such a strong desire to obtain the Laudatory Decree that, in spite of my reluctance and the certainty that the present request will affect the future, I am letting them be, not giving them any advice and not forbidding them anything.

2. Let Father Pernet do as he wishes, but on his personal responsibility and with full knowledge of the facts. If in the future the separation of the religious from the Fathers becomes an established fact, I am quite decided not to fight to prevent the consequences of all this.

[...]

5. I offered Father Pernet the trip to Rome in order to give him a rest and to satisfy his heart. I thought and I still think it quite natural that he should take advantage of this trip to consult, to clarify matters, and to inform himself.⁶⁸³

⁶⁸²February 11, 1896.

⁶⁸³February 14, 1896.

*Relations between the Little Sisters of the Assumption and the
Assumptionists*

In the previous letter, he had noted:

I am convinced that, in order to maintain or obtain this union canonically, we will still need to wait a long time. Since the Sisters and Father Pernet do not believe this, it is up to them to shoulder the responsibility.

That is my view, my dear friend. Let things be.⁶⁸⁴

Father Pernet spoke to Father Bailly about what he was thinking of doing, and the latter mentioned this conversation to Father Picard:

He told me he had advised you of his reservations about leaving the sensitive question to be dealt with later on, without raising it at present and without compromising the future. He is contenting himself with presenting things as they are at the moment, that is, according to the prescriptions of Canon Law, along with a summary of the constitutions.⁶⁸⁵

On February 25, Father Picard himself was in Rome.

There was an extremely difficult moment between Father Picard and Father Pernet who, in a letter of March 8, 1896, on the eve of the audience with the Pope, spoke to Mother Marie of the Blessed Sacrament of the “torture” he was going through:

Everything having been called in question, (...) some are convinced that the first step taken or the first action performed to obtain approval from the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars will break the contract of union passed between us and the Fathers. It would be a rupture. (...) This being the case, would it not be better for us to stop, suspend everything, and wait a while longer?

It will be very humiliating for your servant who will have come to Rome for nothing. I will suffer a lot from it; in fact, I am already suffering a great deal from it. But, in the face of what is good for all of you, and of the general good, I will remain silent and disappear, which I will do with God’s help.⁶⁸⁶

⁶⁸⁴February 13, 1896.

⁶⁸⁵February 12, 1896.

⁶⁸⁶1A1C no. 641.

Origins of the Assumption Family

On March 9, at the pontifical audience, Father Picard presented Father Pernet to Leo XIII as the founder of a new congregation. The Pope enquired about the origins, the development and the apostolate of the Little Sisters.

“They can easily be presented (for approval),” the Pope concluded. “They must be baptized because they were born long enough ago.” And he added, “Father Picard protects you and I, for my part, bless you.”⁶⁸⁷

In a letter to Mother Marie of the Blessed Sacrament dated March 10, Father Pernet gave an account of this audience, at the end of which he requested

“the favor of being able to give the apostolic blessing to my children (the Little Sisters of the Assumption) and to other groups involved in our work. “I didn’t know,” he added, “that I was asking something the Pope rarely grants.”

In a postscript to this letter, he added:

“I think that all my apprehensions are coming to an end.”⁶⁸⁸

Indeed, in three days, Father Picard’s position changed because on March 11 Father Pernet sent Mother Marie of the Blessed Sacrament the petition requesting the Laudatory Decree.

I’m sending you the Petition. Father Picard thinks it is very good. It is the work of one of the consultors in the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars. Bishop Battandier is our friend. [...] At the present time, all the difficulties have been straightened out. We will be able to go as far as the approval of the Institute without any further resistance, and even with the encouragement and support of our Fathers.

I don’t think I am mistaken: we can, with the greatest and most complete confidence, abandon ourselves even more than before into the arms of the Lord. Let us love Him, let us love Our Lord, and let us not refuse him anything since He is granting us everything, in spite of our unworthiness.⁶⁸⁹

⁶⁸⁷ *Souvenirs*, April 1, 1896.

⁶⁸⁸ 1A1C no. 642.

⁶⁸⁹ March 11, 1896, IAIC, no. 643.

*Relations between the Little Sisters of the Assumption and the
Assumptionists*

The Laudatory Decree was signed on April 2, 1897. The Constitutions were approved on August 3, 1901.

At the death of Father Pernet (April 3, 1899), Archbishop Richard of Paris, “in accord with the formal wish and request of the Little Sisters,” agreed to appoint as ecclesiastical superior the religious presented by the Superior General of the Assumptionists and chosen by the Little Sisters. In the minutes containing the decisions taken by Cardinal Richard (see appendix), Father Picard added so that

“in the event of my death, my successor will be able to see that, while respecting the rules of Canon Law and the Roman Congregations, I felt obliged to grant certain favors that seemed necessary for the good of the work of the Little Sisters and the preservation of their spirit.”⁶⁹⁰

Father François Mathis became ecclesiastical superior, but **clarifications** soon became **necessary** concerning the respective roles of the Superior General of the Sisters and the Delegate of the Assumptionists.

In 1909, an agreement that was more explicit than the declaration of 1899 was submitted to the General Chapters (1909 for the Little Sisters of the Assumption and 1912 for the Assumptionists). This agreement was in force until 1964.

In attempting to draw a conclusion, I think that the review of the events between 1876 and 1896 highlights the same underlying questions and the respective positions of Father Picard, Father Pernet, and the Little Sisters of the Assumption.

The Little Sisters wished to have Pontifical Approbation and held “to being Daughters of the Assumption.”⁶⁹¹

In 1896, Father Pernet wrote to Mother Marie of the Blessed Sacrament from Rome:

There is the conviction that the first step taken or the first action performed to obtain approval from the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars will break the contract of union passed between us and the Fathers. It would be a rupture. This being the case, the Fathers would no longer owe anything to the Little Sisters,

⁶⁹⁰Council Meeting of April 18, 1899.

⁶⁹¹Mother Marie of Jesus, September 10, 1876.

Origins of the Assumption Family

except what they would choose to give them and what their zeal might impel them to do for Religious who would no longer belong formally to the Assumption family.

The project of a Statute of Union with the Augustinians of the Assumption can be placed in the context of the **ecclesiastical laws of the period**.

“I am convinced that in order to maintain or to obtain this union canonically, we will still have to wait a long time. The Sisters and Father Pernet do not believe this.” [...] ⁶⁹²

The Laudatory Decree would have been easy to obtain if there had been no mention of a Statute of Union but difficult if it were mentioned in Rome,

“... an easy matter if we are not mentioned, but inextricable, I think, if we are...” ⁶⁹³

The authority of the Assumptionists was exercised through the interpersonal relations of people of very different temperaments.

Father Pernet was subordinate to Father Picard. The latter had a strong temperament and was taken up by a great number of activities. Father Pernet was more timid and reserved and was surely less categorical, but tenacious. This can be seen in several events. With regard to the pontifical approbation:

Father Pernet thought that the Congregation of the Little Sisters of the Assumption would in any case preserve, in the future, the spirit of mutual help and collaboration with the Assumption. Father Picard thought it necessary to wait until the law permitted us to speak about this, but he had too much esteem for Father Pernet and for his work to impose his point of view. ⁶⁹⁴

Sister Gisele Marchand
Little Sister of the Assumption

57, rue Violet
75015 Paris
France

⁶⁹²Father Picard, February 13, 1896.

⁶⁹³Father Picard, February 13, 1896.

⁶⁹⁴Father Pierre Touveneraud, 1973, Beatification Process, *Responsio ad alias nova animadversions*, Part 111, p. 81.

Relations between the Little Sisters of the Assumption and the Assumptionists

Sources

Correspondence (Archives of the Assumptionists and of the Lit-tie Sisters of the Assumption)

- Minutes (General Council)
- Mother House Journal 1874
- *Notes sur l'oeuvre* 1876 and 1877 by Mother Marie of Jesus Fage
- Letters of December 26, 1873 and March 8, 1896, and Minutes May 13, 1899 (included as appendices)

Appendices

Letter from Mother Marie of Jesus to Father Picard, December 26, 1873

Reverend Father,

The chapter in your Constitutions concerning the relations of the Reverend Augustinian Fathers of the Assumption with the Communities of women has been communicated and explained to us. We could not wish for anything better for the general good of our work than for you to assume its government and direction. For that reason, as soon as our Very Reverend Father General, Father d'Alzon, asked us to choose as Superior either Father Vincent de Paul Bailly or Father Germer or Father Pernet, we hastened to do as he wished.

We held the vote by secret ballot last Sunday, the 21st of this month, with the whole community gathered together. Here, Reverend Father, are the results:

The Rev. Father Germer received 3 votes.

The Rev. Father Vincent de Paul Bailly received 5 votes.

The Rev. Father Pernet had the majority with 33 votes.

We humbly ask you to approve this vote and to see in the desire it expresses our firm determination to conform ourselves in everything to the paternal authority of the religious family which has adopted us.

Please accept, Reverend Father, the renewed assurance of the deepest respect of your daughter and servant in Our Lord.

A. FAGE

Superior of the Little Sisters of the Assumption

Nurses of the Poor⁶⁹⁵

December 26, 1873

⁶⁹⁵Letter written by Sister Marie-Madeleine of the Sacred Heart, Tomkowicz; only the signature is in the handwriting of Mother Marie of Jesus.

Letter from Father Pernet to Mother Marie of the Blessed Sacrament, March 8, 1896

[...] I had a private interview with Father Picard last evening that has left me highly perplexed. I am betwixt and between, and at the present moment I don't know what to decide for your good and that of our little Congregation.

It is at a time when everything is in place and the road is open before us—a time when all we have to do is go forward with the certainty of reaching our goal—that everything is being called into question. No one wants to cause us any pain or annoy us. The desire to advance and to establish ourselves in the Church is good and very legitimate. People are not opposed to this and leave us all the more free than your desire for the approval is now stronger and more precise among all *ut* you. All this is being respected. But it is no less true that *some* firmly believe that the first step taken or the first action performed to obtain approval from the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars will break the contract of union passed between us and the Fathers. It would be a rupture. This being the case, the Fathers would no longer owe anything to the Little Sisters, except what they would choose to give them and what their zeal might impel them to do for Religious who would no longer belong formally to the Assumption family.

As you can see, things are serious, especially in these times that are so troubled [...]

This being the case, would it not be better for us to stop, suspend everything, and wait a while longer?

It will be very humiliating for your servant who will have come to Rome for nothing. I will suffer a lot from it; in fact, I am already suffering a great deal from it. But, in the face of what is good for all of you, and of the general good, I will remain silent and disappear, which I will do with God's help.

So consult Little Mother Marie-Madeleine [Tomkowicz]⁶⁹⁶ and the others around you who will readily understand the gravity and

⁶⁹⁶Marie Tomkowicz, Mother Madeleine (of the Sacred Heart), (1840–1905), Little Sister of the Assumption, Assistant General.

Origins of the Assumption Family

the importance of the decision to be taken and the solution to be found. Then send me a short telegram letting me know your feelings. I need to have them as soon as possible.

[...] I still intend to leave with Father Picard, who has not yet determined the date. Tomorrow, Monday, he will be having his audience with the Pope at 11.15 A.M.

And Father added at the end of this letter:

I am taking up again the letter I began before noon. I am sending it as it is so that you'll have an idea of the agonies I've been going through. This evening, things seem to be falling into place. However, I'll only know the outcome tomorrow afternoon, Monday.⁶⁹⁷

Text of the Minutes of May 13, 1899

In conformity with the express desire of their founder, the Reverend Father Pernet, who died in the odor of sanctity on April 3, 1899, the Little Sisters of the Assumption, Home Nurses of the Poor, wishing to remain faithful to the spirit in which they were founded by the Religious (Fathers) of the Assumption, have asked His Eminence Cardinal Richard, Archbishop of Paris, to deign grant their Institute the means to remain faithful to this spirit and this wish of their founders. For his part, His Eminence graciously declared of his own accord that he thought that the good and the future of the work required the maintenance of the spirit that had been present at the foundation. It was therefore important that, while retaining the higher authority granted him by the rules of the Church in his capacity as Archbishop of Paris, he believed he ought to appoint in his place the Superior General of the Augustinian Fathers of the Assumption who, either himself or through the religious he might appoint, would have the responsibility of carrying out the canonical examinations on behalf of His Eminence. Moreover, in accordance with the formal wish and at the request of the Little Sisters, His Eminence will appoint as Ecclesiastical Superior of the Little Sisters the priest whom these

⁶⁹⁷1A1C no. 641

Relations between the Little Sisters of the Assumption and the Assumptionists

same Little Sisters will choose from among three Religious (Fathers) of the Assumption presented by the Superior General of the Fathers of the Assumption.

Judged necessary for the good of the Institute by His Eminence, requested unanimously by the Superior General of the Little Sisters and her Council in accord with the formal wish already expressed by the foundress, Sister Marie of Jesus and her entire Council since 1875, and agreed to by the Superior General of the Fathers of the Assumption in his Council, these arrangements have been recorded in the form of a declaration and included in the present Minutes which the Mother General of the Little Sisters, as well as the Superior General of the Fathers of the Assumption have signed, after and at the request of, His Eminence.

Paris, April 19, 1899

Sister Marie of the Blessed Sacrament, Superior General of the Little Sisters of the Assumption.

Father Picard, Superior General of the Augustinians of the Assumption.

Read and approved,

Paris, May 13, 1899⁶⁹⁸

François Cardinal Richard

Archbishop of Paris.

⁶⁹⁸Archives of the Little Sisters of the Assumption.

Origins of the Assumption Family

The Orants of the Assumption

Did the initial project undergo any transformation after the death of the founders?

The role of Father André Jaujou⁶⁹⁹ in the evolution of the Orants of the Assumption

ANNE HUYGHEBAERT

The decision to speak here about the difficulties encountered in governing the Congregation after 1903 (Father Picard's death) brings us into the 20th century and can therefore seem to have nothing to do with our topic. However, since we were established after the other branches, we were still in the process of being founded. Also, this subject can help clarify the evolution that has taken place in our lifestyle over the years.

1896–1903: A Progressive Autonomy

As I pointed out in my earlier talk on “The Foundation of the Orants,” Mother Isabelle, in full agreement with Father Picard and submissively under his direction, was no less the one who had had the founding intuitions of this “little work.” Though each one stressed different aspects of it, both were very

⁶⁹⁹André Jaujou (1859–1929), Assumptionist, from the Midi, religious of the Province of Paris, secretary to Father Picard (1882–1903), and General Assistant (1892–1923). As Father Picard's private secretary, he accompanied him for 20 years and participated in all of the important events in the life of the Congregation. He wrote his letters, shared his intimacy, and rendered him the many daily services he needed because of his infirmity. He was not only his confidant but was also acquainted with all of the dossiers and all of the business pertaining to the religious and the Congregation. Fortunately, he was most discrete. After the death of Father Picard, he was put in charge of the Orants by Father Emmanuel Bailly and appointed their Ecclesiastical Superior by Cardinal Richard of Paris.

Origins of the Assumption Family

humble in serving and in submitting themselves completely to the “rights” and will of God. Their relationship, maintained by the spiritual direction Isabelle received from Father Picard, by their collaboration in serving various apostolates, and by their complementary roles in founding the Orants, was unflinching.

Since the date of the actual foundation in December 1896, and despite the fact that, for several years (1880–88), she had participated in religious life, particularly at the novitiate of the Religious of the Assumption in Cannes, Mother Isabelle had positioned herself as a novice who had everything to learn about religious life. But at the end of February 1899, Mother Marie of the Compassion (Oblate of the Assumption) fell sick. On March 3, Father Picard entrusted the government to Sister Isabelle. It was now up to her to implement Father Picard’s directives on an everyday basis. During this same period, sickness and the persecutions that were taking place in France were increasingly keeping Father Picard away from the new foundation. Mother Isabelle suffered from this forced absence and from the uncertainty it provoked, but she nevertheless progressively assumed her responsibilities.

On April 17, 1900, while the persecutions were emptying the convents, the three first Orants made their private vows, adding a fourth one to devote themselves to the Assumptionists by prayer and sacrifice. That same week, the Assumptionists were condemned by the court and had to disappear. “*Persecution strengthens real love,*” concluded Father Picard.

Exile and the secularization taking place in France also kept him away from the Oblates. On July 10, 1901, the Orants left rue Ber-ton permanently. They went first to Clichy-sous-Bois, then, on October 2, to the convent of the Augustinian Sisters, rue de la Sante in Paris, for a stay that was very beneficial. Finally, after obtaining permission to have a chapel, Mother Isabelle installed the Orants in their first house at 27 rue Desbordes-Valmore in Passy in March 1902. In exile, Father Picard was obviously not present, and his letters were rare and brief. He was only able to visit this small monastery for a few hours on September 2 before leaving for the Near East. Shortly after his return, he visited the Orants for the last time on December 8, the anniversary of their foundation. He wanted to preach the Sisters’ retreat but, for the first time, had to be replaced by Father Andre Jaujou. The retreat greatly impressed Mother Isabelle who recognized in what he said the views of Father Picard and the spirit of their “little work.” The Orants paid a last visit to Father Picard on December 13, just before his departure for Rome where he died four months later, on April 16, 1903.

1903–1904: New Guarantors of the Spirit of the Work

Embodying the founding intuitions of the “small work,” Mother Isabelle now had to shoulder her responsibilities alone. Father Andre advised her by letter of the details surrounding Father Picard’s death, adding: “*the suddenness of his death did not allow me to ask him what he wanted for the [Orants].*”⁷⁰⁰ He nevertheless thought that Father Picard had entrusted him with this work, and he assured her that “*to the best of my ability, I will help you bear the responsibilities that this death imposes on you.*”⁷⁰¹ Mother Isabelle was thinking along these same lines, which she confirmed to Father André in writing.⁷⁰²

After consulting the three eldest sisters,⁷⁰³ Mother Isabelle wrote to Father Emmanuel Bailly telling him of the desire of the Orants to place themselves in the hands of Father Picard’s successor and to have Father André continue his work among them.⁷⁰⁴

In response to her request, Father André paid a first visit to the “small monastery” on May 18, conveying to the Sisters Father Picard’s blessing and the witness of his death and life. Two days later, Father Emmanuel wrote to the Orants asking them to pray fervently for the Chapter of Elections and giving them the answer they awaited:

... I have for the work that is so dear to you a predilection that prompts me to desire its development more than that of any other. Without the slightest doubt, the one who has understood you

⁷⁰⁰Letter from Father André Jaujou to Mother Isabelle, quoted by M. de Dainville in *Isabelle de Clermont-Tonnerre Comtesse Henri d’Ursel, fondatrice des Orantes de l’Assomption*, Ed. Lethielleux, p. 266.

⁷⁰¹For details regarding the way in which Father André considered himself to have been entrusted with the care of the Orants by Father Picard, cf. *Histoire de notre famille religieuse, les dix premières années*, vol. 2, Congregation of the Orants of the Assumption, Archive collection, no. 3, pp. 93–95.

⁷⁰²Letter from Mother Isabelle to Father André Jaujou, April 27, 1903, no. AC.8.

⁷⁰³*Souvenirs de la fondatrice des Orantes de l’Assomption, Mère Isabelle-Marie, cents par Sœur Thérèse-Emmanuel*, Congregation of the Orants of the Assumption, Archive collection, no. 4, pp. 81–82, and *Histoire de notre famille religieuse, les dix premières années*. vol. 2, Congregation of the Orants of the Assumption, Archive collection, no. 3, p. 93.

⁷⁰⁴Letter from Mother Isabelle to Father Emmanuel Bailly, April 27, 1903, no. AB.12

Origins of the Assumption Family

and done you some good will be able to continue, in accord with Father's own desire, to care for this beautiful, great and dear work, as small as it is in its cradle.⁷⁰⁵

The "small monastery" had a chaplain, Father Victorin, but when Father André was in Paris, he went there often, even daily. He went—often unexpectedly—to say Mass, to hear the confessions of the Oblates and the Orants, to take care of the Oblates, meeting at the convent on rue Desbordes those who were passing through, and to preach a retreat or give a talk to the Orants . . .

Father preached this strong and profound doctrine he picked up from being close to our Founder. The text of his sermon may seem strange: "*When a tooth is extracted, God strengthens the gums.*" I do not know in what book he found this, but it expressed his thought very well. When God removes a support or a light, it means that he wants to be himself the support and the light.⁷⁰⁶

From his teaching, one gathers that he combined originality, profound doctrine and contemplative spirituality. Mother Isabelle appreciated Father André's words to the Orants and told him after the retreat he preached in August 1918: *I must tell you how much we agree about the work of the Orants which you have described so well. . .*" Subsequently, Father André's teaching remained very much appreciated by several generations of Orants who were spiritually nourished by reading his sermons and instructions.

Mother Isabelle found that Father Emmanuel Bailly, in whose hands she placed the Orants, was just as strongly imbued with the spirit of Father Picard. She discovered that he appreciated, understood, and spoke well of their vocation. He reinforced the contemplative dimension and the love of the Church, but, "on the ground," he seemed less open than Father Picard, for example, regarding studies and external contacts. Mother Isabelle put her trust in him. She reported to him about the life of the small monastery and submitted to him questions concerning both the present and the future.

⁷⁰⁵The entire letter, which arrived on May 20, and the details of Father André Jaujou's visit are found in *Histoire de notre famille religieuse, les dix premières années*, vol. 2, Congregation of the Orants of the Assumption, Archive collection no. 3, pp. 99–101.

⁷⁰⁶Taken from our chronicles written by Mother Isabelle and repeated in *Histoire de notre famille religieuse, les dix premières années*, vol. 2, Congregation of the Orants of the Assumption, Archive collection, no. 3, pp. 111–112.

The Orants of the Assumption

Given the trust she had in him as well as the similarity of their thinking, she ended up by entrusting him with the direction of her soul.⁷⁰⁷

Mother Isabelle did not receive the same type of support from Father Andre⁷⁰⁸ to whom she was nevertheless strongly and sincerely grateful for the concrete devotion he had for the work of the Orants. She did not doubt his intentions, but, apart from his teaching, she did not always agree with all of his ideas. She consulted Father Emmanuel about this:

... Do you want Father Andre to have more authority and to be responsible for all of our formation instead of having this formation given, by mutual agreement, by him and me? In other words, do you think that I should remain the Mother? In all of this, I only want to do the will of Our Lord as it is made known to me through obedience, and I would not feel that I am called any less because I will be obeying even more.⁷⁰⁹

She wrote to Father Andre:

... You told me that in the event of differences between us, I am the one who must be obeyed, but Monsieur [a pseudonym of Father Emmanuel] told me that you were my Ecclesiastical Superior. So I must obey you. That is clear. But he also told me that my opinion must be discussed. Consequently, you must dot the i's for me and let me know when I must remain silent and obey, lest this issue be referred to the higher authorities. In the meantime, however, you can count on my filial and respectful gratitude.⁷¹⁰

⁷⁰⁷Letter from Mother Isabelle to Father Emmanuel Bailly, September 2, 1904, no. AB.15. This was the first letter to speak clearly about her personal spiritual direction, but previous letters had already contained similar exchanges.

⁷⁰⁸In her letter to Father André Jaujou on October 2, 1903, no. AC.12, Mother Isabelle said to him: *“Not a word from you since you left! However, this is not good because after all, my dear Father, how do you understand our common work if you say nothing to me???* How do you think I can rely on you if there is no exchange of ideas? ... If you allow me to get into the habit of ruling my little kingdom, who knows if I'll be able to do otherwise?... You probably cannot do otherwise, but I'm telling you this... because I sense the effects it will have on me. It's already very difficult to speak to someone younger, to confide in him, and, on occasion, to obey him. Don't think that this will come naturally

⁷⁰⁹Continuation of the same letter from Mother Isabelle to Father Emmanuel Bailly, September 2, 1904, no. AB 15.

⁷¹⁰Letter from Mother Isabelle to Father André Jaujou, October 26, 1904, no. AC.19.

Origins of the Assumption Family

Therefore, even though she retained a filial respect towards him, relations between Mother Isabelle and Father André were not easy. The fact that each one was convinced that he/she was the heir of Father Picard's thinking probably contributed to the tensions that appeared in the concrete management of the Congregation. There are traces of this regarding various important points about which references were or were not made to Father Emmanuel's opinion. Mother Isabelle called upon him especially to "arbitrate" two debates about the spirit Father Picard wanted to give the Orants, which we will discuss below.

It should be noted that some of the tensions were resolved by the submission of Mother Isabelle, as noted in Sister Thérèse-Emmanuel Dienne's⁷¹¹ written testimony. This habitual submission shows that the points about which she disagreed or debated with Father Andre reflected her own charism and what she perceived to be her responsibility as a foundress.

1904: Orants outside [the Monastery] (*Orantes du Dehors*)

In January 1904, in the small house at 27 rue Desbordes-Valmore which could barely accommodate ten persons, Father Andre brought together about thirty of his spiritual daughters to attend the retreat he was about to preach to the Orants. There were a few Oblates and especially workers from the "Bonne Presse" as well as laypeople, young girls and widows in whom he discerned an attraction to contemplative life. All the retreatants took their meals in the refectory with the community; some of them were given complete accommodations.

The number of places were calculated and recalculated in the chapel, the refectory, and everywhere. Since Father André refused to recognize that there were too many people and not enough places, the Sisters rose to the occasion. Given her deep respect for the Priest, the Religious and the Superior,

⁷¹¹Cf., *Souvenirs de la fondatrice des Orantes de VAssomption, Mere Isabelle-Marie, écrits par Soeur Thérèse-Emmanuel*, Congregation of the Orants of the Assumption, Archive collection, no. 4, pp. 95-96: "I always saw Mother Isabelle holding firmly to that principle of supernatural obedience. At times, I would tell her that she was exaggerating this duty to submit and that, as the foundress of the Orants, she had more insight about directing them than did Father Andre. But she did not listen to me. I was thinking humanly. She was right super naturally."

The Orants of the Assumption

and given the humble and supernatural submission of which we have already spoken, Mother Isabelle did—and would continue to do—the impossible to please Father Andre. She herself went out to buy chairs, tables, etc., because there were not enough for such a large number of people. Exhibiting good humor and even cheerfulness, she tried to make each retreatant as comfortable as she could. At the same time, with spiritual and joyful words, she encouraged the Sisters who were overloaded with work. This helped them to accept the difficulties because they were serving only as “Martha” throughout the retreat. Indeed, for them, viz., two visiting postulants and nine Sisters, this retreat was hardly anything more than hard work at a breakneck pace at the service of “Father’s invited guests.”

This could have been no more than a picturesque episode, as experienced in all beginnings, but it was the beginning of a long debate about the “Orants outside [the monastery]” (*“Orantes du dehors”*).

Indeed, as he finished the retreat on January 17, 1904, Father André founded this work which brought together nine persons who wanted to effectively unite themselves to our prayer life, but without leaving the world where they continued to have various responsibilities. Father gave them a prayer schedule which resembled our own, telling them that they were members of our Congregation, and that, after a trial period of two years, they would make in his hands the same vows as the Sisters. As often as possible, they were to share in the life of the community and would be admitted to all of its community exercises, except the Chapter of Faults.

Almost all of the Orants outside [the monastery] were very edifying and devoted, but their invasion of this very small convent continued to be a real trial for the calm and regularity of the religious contemplative life that was already disrupted by the effects of the persecution being carried out in France against the religious congregations.

Father André wanted collectedness and preached it admirably, but by making our small hermitage the center of his active apostolate,⁷¹² he himself

⁷¹²As secretary to Father Picard, Father André had already been exercising a broad apostolate at the workshops of the Bonne Presse, the communities of the Oblate Sisters, and the Assumptionist chapel on rue Francis Ier. But at this time, because of the religious persecution, he could no longer access these places. Testimony: *“He constantly disrupted our schedule, arriving unexpectedly with many penitents whom we had to welcome in our private quarters, support spiritually and also feed physically. In order to listen to Father’s sermon in the morning and to his conference on the Summa of St. Thomas in the afternoon, and in order to receive his spiritual direction in private and to go to con-*

Origins of the Assumption Family

was an obstacle to the practice of what he preached.

In this delicate situation, Mother Isabelle wanted to obey the Superior, who represented the will of God for her and, at the same time, to maintain for her Orant daughters the climate of recollection needed to live their contemplative life. Remaining submissive, she spoke up at times to defend the contemplative life. Because she held firmly, the number of Orants outside [the monastery] was never greater than about a dozen. She also insisted that they not be admitted to the intimate life of the community before being carefully screened and submitted to the approval of the community:

We must protect the inside from being invaded by the outside and create a prayerful milieu which the Sisters Outside can join in order to increase its fervor, without ever diminishing its intensity or upsetting the regularity of the religious life.

It was not the work of the Sisters Outside that Mother Isabelle disapproved of. On the contrary, she yearned to see the Orants become a center for prayer comparable to a hearth radiating outside by its fervor. But for that to happen, it was necessary to avoid too many drafts that might extinguish its flames. Father André was possibly aware of the situation and of its disadvantages,⁷¹³ but he took his role seriously and gave priority to increasing the number of Orants. All of these difficulties give us additional insight.⁷¹⁴ Father André and Mother Isabelle both favored openness, but prudence, priorities and the means to be taken were different, causing tension in its application.

Throughout her life, Mother always held to a spirituality that was communicative, but at the same time she made sure that “*prayer always remained*

fession to him, some of the Orants Outside installed themselves for the day in the small monastery which was always open to them because that was what Father Andre wanted. In this tiny house, we were immediately overwhelmed by this wave from the out-side. . .” Sister Thérèse-Emmanuel, *Souvenirs*, p. 84.

⁷¹³In May 1905, Father André suggested that Father Emmanuel preach a retreat to the Orants, “only to those living inside. . . You will be able to close your door to all outside noise. . . I will take the opportunity to go somewhere else so as to avoid giving vertigo to the community by changing the pews or by imitating Samson who apparently knew how to take down walls . . .”

⁷¹⁴Only one of these first Extern Sisters ever became a true Orant. On the other hand, it was by adding the number of Orants living outside to that of those living within that our Congregation was presented to Cardinal Richard for approval.

the first priority.” This is undoubtedly what we must retain from this adventure.

1905–1906: Drawing up of our First Constitutions

Rather than trace the history of our First Constitutions, we will highlight here only one aspect about which we have questions. Besides his function and the much appreciated steps he took with the archdiocese, what was Father André’s role in the elaboration of the text? To what extent did he have an impact on the expression of the spirit and charism of the Orants?

To obtain the recognition of the Orants, Father André zealously increased the number of times he approached the archdiocese where he was well-known and always welcomed by Archbishop Richard, even when he was sick. Since the Archbishop had asked that a project of our Constitutions be brought to him during the year 1905, Mother Isabelle drafted a first version in a student work-book in collaboration with the elder sisters. Full of words that are crossed out, this book is in our possession but it was only a draft. It was probably written cleanly by a Sister with a nice handwriting and completed by Mother Isabelle before it was given to Father Andre Jaujou. The text Mother Isabelle gave him has not been found.

Our various chronicles and souvenirs of the foundation mention the work and the preparatory meetings on the Constitutions, but we have no written traces of the exchanges that took place between Mother Isabelle and Father Picard on this issue. Sister Thèrèse-Emmanuel wrote:

“Father André completely revised this project in order to give it a more canonical format. He added a chapter on the Orants Outside [the monastery], which he hoped to have approved at the same time as our Congregation.”

And she added that after Christmas 1905,

“Father Andre came here to spend his days busying himself with... an important work for our small Congregation.”

Combined with specific times of adoration, this work was surely that of editing the Constitutions and was done in collaboration with Mother Isabelle.

Origins of the Assumption Family

At her request, the finished-product was presented to the Sisters: “*Father gathered the professed Sisters to read the work he had done for us and to ask our opinion.*” Unanimously approved by the Sisters and subsequently presented to Cardinal Richard at the beginning of January 1906, this text has not been found either.

In the depths of the religious persecution, in the aftermath of the severing of the Concordat, and in the midst of the effervescence caused by the inventory of the churches by tax officials, Archbishop Richard had a lot of other worries but nevertheless weighed and discussed with Father Andre all the articles in the text that had been submitted. Among the changes he made, he suppressed the chapter on the Orants outside [the monastery] and did not even accept that they be mentioned in the Constitutions, leaving Father Andre responsible for this work. There were also other discussions and changes about which we have no details. A second version, of which we do have the text, was then submitted. The decree of approbation of our Constitutions for ten years by Cardinal Richard, Archbishop of Paris, was signed on November 21, 1906.

At the present time, not having in hand the intermediate texts of the Constitutions, we do not know the extent to which the intermediate step and the necessary revisions of the text were worked out in real collaboration and in complete keeping with the foundress’ opinion. For this same reason, we do not know the evolution in Mother Isabelle’s thinking on this subject before her document of 1912 entitled *Explanation of the Constitutions*. Our oral tradition explains this document by the need felt by Mother Isabelle to complete and comment the Constitutions with which she was not entirely satisfied but which she nevertheless gratefully accepted from the Church. We cannot say if this dissatisfaction was linked to other things besides canonical questions.

1913: La Croix-en-Brie

In order to lead a life of prayer and of union with God, Mother Isabelle knew that souls need a calm, well-ordered and silent atmosphere. This need led her to take little interest in the work of the “Orants outside” (*Orantes du dehors*) as it had been conceived: the life of the community was not protected from the arrival of persons habitually living in the world. In spite of her desire to spare the community the agitation coming from outside, Mother Isabelle

The Orants of the Assumption

burned with zeal for the well-being of all souls. She warmly welcomed Father Emmanuel's suggestions to give spiritual advice to people who would like to come for a retreat, or occasionally to teach catechism to children. Besides, this also corresponded to the ideas expressed at the time of our foundation by Father Picard who wanted us to have an enlightened and radiating piety.

It always pleased Mother Isabelle very much when, during their few outings, some of the Sisters had the opportunity to help the poor materially or spiritually. It pleased her because of the additional good that was being done and because of the renewed hope it gave her at seeing the concretization of the secondary work that had been part of the original project. It was for her like the first fruits of a foundation she hoped would be open to the world. She expressed this clearly on the occasion of a rest the Sisters took together for health reasons at Berck-sur-Mer (Pas-de-Calais) in 1911 during which a little girl was left in their care for catechism:

I am absolutely delighted I almost cried for joy. I wanted so much for God to show me his will regarding the secondary work, and then all of a sudden he shows it to me for indeed it is him. We had nothing to do with all of this, and yet here is the realization of the desire we expressed last winter to have children to prepare for their first private communion. I have the impression that we should not take the initiative of our secondary work. It should be pointed out to us by Providence, and the best thing for us is to be nothing more than helpers. . . ⁷¹⁵

The Following year, a new stay in Berck was again the occasion for a charitable deed: a 10-year-old crippled boy, who had never heard about God and who was thought to be incurable, was so well taken care of that he got better and became a good Christian.

The health of the Sisters having improved after those two summers in Berck, they never went back. A house in the countryside now became necessary in order to accommodate during the summer the Sisters who had lost strength as a result of their sedentary life in Paris. Mother Isabelle found such a house in the Department of Seine-et-Marne, in a town called La Croix-en-Brie, a small village where the faith seemed almost dead. Its young parish priest had tried to reawaken the Christian faith in the area, but he only managed to gather a few children. He asked our Sisters to take care of the young

⁷¹⁵Letter to Sister Thérèse-Emmanuel Dienne, August 19, 1911, no. RA. 152.

Origins of the Assumption Family

girls who had not been catechized and to create a youth club. This was the origin of a new debate with Father André.

We have sought to discover the idea behind the foundation, the desire of Father Picard regarding the secondary works authorized by our Constitutions. This article in our Constitutions must not remain a dead letter. We must keep the privilege of being in contact with the poor who are the suffering members of Jesus Christ. However, we must not let ourselves be dragged into works that are too external and that might divert us from our contemplative goal and therefore from our intimate union with Our Lord. The question is complex, but since we desire to do only the will of God, we trust that he will show it to us according to circumstances. Accordingly, it was decided that we should accede to a certain extent to the desire of the parish priest of La Croix-en-Brie and welcome the young girls by trying to do them some good, speaking with them, instructing them, and having them sing, but that we should not open a youth center as such.

These decisions as well as Father André's directives were not easy to implement because the young girls preferred to play. Furthermore, Father blew "hot and cold." He would give permissions, then deny having given them or withdraw them. He gave the impression that he agreed with this opening and, at the same time, that he did not want it. Mother Isabelle wrote to Sister Thérèse: "*Father André had many objections to the youth center. He fears too many distractions that could lead to something else.*" For her part, Mother Isabelle rediscovered the desire she had had with Father Picard to avoid having the contemplative life turn people in upon themselves:

Going to the poor is like going to Our Lord. If we do it in a spirit of faith and in such a way as not to detract from the observance of the rule and from recollection, our contemplative life will not suffer. It is good for the soul to devote itself and to be in touch with the miseries of this world! Selfishness is one of the dangers of contemplative life. We can easily be content, we must admit, with what pleases us in our work. We can also be content with a poverty that lacks nothing and that frees us from a good number of worries. It is good for us to see real poverty. It makes us more

The Orants of the Assumption

detached and especially less annoyed by the sacrifices we have had to make. Humility wins out.

Mother Isabelle was so taken up with this issue of charity toward the poor that she talked about it profusely, especially during this period. She was attracted by the prospect of a future foundation in a poor and de-Christianized area where, by the presence of the Sisters, a lot of good could be done in places where there was no one to do it.

The discussions and tensions that were taking place influenced the Sisters in one way or another and risked dividing the community and instilling a certain vagueness about what was or was not the basic lifestyle of the Orants. The experience would not be repeated. The following year, war broke out and absorbed everyone's energy with its share of exterior miseries and of worries about how to support the community in these difficult conditions. As for Mother Isabelle, she lost part of her fortune in Russia: *I have always desired poverty, and now I am living it.*"

Until 1918, she kept her desire to be near the poor: *"When we move, we must find a way to be close to the poor."* After that, either out of weariness or because she followed the opinion of the majority of the Sisters, she never spoke again of this idea of presence to the poor. The move of the community to Sceaux in 1920 was done without foreseeing this dimension of openness. At the end of her life, Mother Isabelle insisted more on silence and separation from the world.

In spite of her long resistance, Father André's influence seems, in fact, to have modified Mother Isabelle's initial project. The admission into the community of persons not very interested in openness and not very capable of pursuing systematic studies also influenced this evolution.

In this study of the role of Father André other points would also need to be examined, particularly the place of studies in the vocation of an Orant, the impact of the crisis of Modernism, and the reasons for which Sister Thérèse-Emmanuel, on whom Mother Isabelle thought she could count, was excluded from every position and influence in favor of Sister Anne-Marie. In the absence of a complete analysis, here are nevertheless a few facts. A "daughter" of Father André" since the age of 14, Sister Anne-Marie was proposed by him in 1908 to be a member of the Council at a time when she was still a young professed. Mother Isabelle refused. She became a Councilor in 1914, replacing Sister Thérèse who was put aside. Since each one had a natural tendency to share more easily the ideas of their respective spiritual Father

Origins of the Assumption Family

or Mother, this increased the influence of Father Andre with whom Sister Anne-Marie easily sided.

1921: Chapter of Elections, Full Habit, Enclosure, Work of the Sisters. . .

At her death on July 3, 1921, Mother Isabelle was surrounded by about thirty Sisters who had been living for a year in larger quarters that were conducive to greater silence and withdrawal from the world. The General Chapter, composed of the eleven eldest Sisters, took place on October 4. After deliberating, it voted to elect a new Superior General Superior and two Assistants. It lasted only a quarter of an hour and elected Sister Anne-Marie Loysel as the new Superior General.

A new era was about to begin. Directed and counseled by Father André, Sister Anne-Marie put her virtues and organizational skills at the service of her new responsibility. Their agreement about ideas and decisions marked a turning point in the organization of the Orants. Withdrawal structures were set up in which the dimension of openness wanted by Father Picard and Mother Isabelle had no place.

- On November 21, 1922, the entire community definitively began wearing the long white religious habit with the choir mantel and the mantel with train at the prie-dieu of adoration.
- Strict enclosure was established shortly thereafter.
- The office was henceforth celebrated in choir seven times a day, as it is by the major orders, and it took on a particular splendor on major feasts.
- A new category of Sisters was founded: the *External Sisters* who were now in charge of all links and contacts with the outside.
- Work was organized within the enclosure in order to meet the needs of the community which no longer benefited from the property and income of Mother Isabelle.

The Orants of the Assumption

- On February 2, 1926, perpetual adoration before the Blessed Sacrament was begun day and night. This was the fulfillment of one of the great desires of Mother Isabelle.
- In 1927, the article on the secondary work that Mother Isabelle had had inserted and approved in our First Constitutions was deleted by Father Andre.

Mother Isabelle had said that the life of the Orants would take a very different direction depending on who—Father André or herself—would die first. Her prophecy was borne out.⁷¹⁶

Later, when the Church of Vatican II asked religious congregations to rediscover their original charism, the Orants stopped wearing their big mantles and went back to being present to the world, though “prayer always remains the top priority.”

Sister Anne Huyghebaert Orant of the Assumption

62, rue de Normandie 1081 Brussels Belgium

⁷¹⁶ “One thing that preoccupies me a lot is the difference that exists between father Andre and me concerning the formation of the “work... No matter what each of us does, I by obeying and agreeing with him, he by not making the situation more difficult for me, we absolutely cannot agree. I am very certain that if he or I disappear, there will be a notable change one way or another.”. Letter no. AB.22 to Father Emmanuel Bailly, Paris, February 14, 1905.

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Discussion

Luc Fritz, A.A.: I discovered the very rich personality of our founders, along with their qualities and shortcomings. I learned a lot about our history.

For each Congregation, we might want to underline two positive points and two negative ones.

Jean-Paul Périer-Muzet, A.A.: We would need to be more explicit about the relations between Father d'Alzon and Marie Correnson because they changed over the course of time. We would also need to include Father d'Alzon's relations with his entourage, especially with the foundress of the Oblates.

Michele Ropp, Or.A.: I am struck by the desire of each Congregation to remain attached to the Assumption family. I am also struck by the importance of the principle of subsidiarity. Today, we have nothing to fear from this moment of truth, but we must face this common desire of the Assumption family: how can we build the Assumption of today and of tomorrow?

Clare Teresa Tjader, R.A.: Direction and government are not clearly distinguished or explained in our documents. Money and temporal goods seemed to be the only things that remained outside the purview of the directing authority. Did the Augustinians of the Assumption have from the Church a plan on which to base themselves in their relations with our Congregation? The question of the spirit of the Assumption family that the Religious of the Assumption are supposed to have lost was never explained, except in a letter you will find in my document. Was it a question of too much contemplation? However, Mother Marie-Eugénie never alludes to difficulties with Mother Thérèse-Emmanuel

Origins of the Assumption Family

on this subject.

Jean-Michel Brochec, A.A.: I discovered flexibility on the part of Father d'Alzon.

Amid all of the disappointments that took place, I noticed that all of the Congregations wanted to form a family.

Question: *Were the difficulties between the Assumptionists and the congregations of women concerned only with questions of government? What about the spirit? Were there any other fundamental issues involved?*

Céline Héon, L.S.A.: The people in place had very clear ideas. But wherever Father Picard appeared, there was a crisis. I don't see very clearly the distinction between direction and government. In the future, we should define what allows us to be a single family.

Thérèse-Agnes de Balincourt, R.A.: I am struck by the personality of these women and, at the same time, by their desire to be attached to the Assumptionists. It would be a good idea to compare the Constitutions of our Congregations. I will remember the impact of history on our present-day relations. I am amazed by the strength of the oral tradition of each family. It could lead to a greater conviviality.

Mercedis Martínez, L.S.A.: I was able to understand the complexity of the situation, particularly the relationship between men and women, which was still more difficult during that century than it is now. We are living a time of grace. How can we put it to good use for the future? I would like the Religious of the Assumption to clarify the role of Marie of Christ from the point-of-view of their Congregation.

Richard Lamoureux, A.A.: The role of women in the 19th century, with their feelings and beliefs, has become clearer. It is not the same today as it was in the 19th century. The desire on the part of men to play a decision-making role is difficult for us to understand today.

I also believe it is difficult for us to interpret the 19th century. We would need supporting documentation and proof. Regardless, human nature has not changed since the 19th century. We must continue to be in communication with each other in all openness and maintain friendship among our congregations.

Discussion

Cristina Maria Gonzalez, R.A.: I am struck by everyone's freedom of expression, especially that of the women. I am convinced that it was very risky business in the 19th century to want to found a congregation of men and women. We all risked something and we could not avoid difficulties. I would like to know more about Father d'Alzon, independently of the difficulties. Also about Father Picard and the other great figures we have talked about.

Marcel Poirier, A.A.: I note that our history is marked by the idea of the role of women in the 19th century, at a time when it was evolving rapidly. Our foundresses were feminists before their time. Our history is also marked by a juridical vagueness within the Church. The miracle is that we are here today searching together to recapture the vigor of our origins.

Céline Héon, L.S.A.: I discovered the complexity of the 19th century. The difficulties of our families stem from this complexity as well as from those of our founders.

Richard Brunelle, A.A.: There are different ways of understanding obedience. Father d'Alzon's idea of it was rather broad, while that of the two others was much narrower. That narrowness even manifested itself within the Assumptionists, particularly during the crisis of 1917. Though the General Chapter was supposed to elect the successor to Emmanuel Bailly, the Holy See had to intervene and impose a Vicar and eventually chose a Superior General.

Georgette-Marie Fayolle, O.A.: The Lord can draw good from all types of situations, provided we cooperate with him. The crisis led the Oblates of the Assumption to involve themselves heavily in the Bonne Presse. Providence can work through us. It is a call to build the future in a very positive way. I am very happy to live today in a Church that frees us from a very strong ecclesiastical tutelage, all the while leaving us the possibility to choose and to open ourselves to the richness of others.

Henri Kizito Vyambwera, A.A.: How are we living this history today? Our Superiors General meet and work together, but the religious do not know about it. There might be things that are causing problems today.

Origins of the Assumption Family

Maureen Connor, R.A.: I am struck by the simple and humble way in which the problems were presented. This way of proceeding is a grace. I situate problems on three levels: the role of women, the contusion of roles, and the strong personalities with their qualities and shortcomings.

How did we get out of these crises? Someone dared to take a step forward. The Spirit also intervened when Father Picard changed his mind from one day to the next. Having more information is also a way of getting out of a crisis.

René Mihigo, A.A.: We are truly a family that has weathered violent storms and gone beyond the seas. I congratulate our Fathers who knew how to manage all these charismatic women and to keep alive the founding spirit of the Assumption family. Our family is in the process of nursing its past wounds which we have exported to mission countries, possibly even unconsciously.

Claire-Myriam Milanese, R.A.: I would like to know more about the impact of the ecclesial and political context on our different crises, the influence of the positions taken by the bishops and politicians.

Bernard Holzer, A.A.: I would like to see a clarification of the role played by the entourage of our founders, the role of their Councils. It is less clear in the case of Marie-Eugénie. Are there any Minutes of the Council meetings?

Thérèse-Maylis Toujouse, R.A.: (in answer to a question from Father Bernard Holzer): Yes, we have the notebooks of the Council minutes.

Marie-Jacques Sevenet, Or.A.: We would need to place certain problems regarding government in the broader context of the diocese. Should not the appeal that was made to the Assumptionists be placed in the context of the relations they had at the time with the dioceses, for example, with the diocese of Paris in the case of the Little Sisters?

Luc Fritz, A.A.: It would be interesting to know something about the mutual financial help that existed and that still exists.

New insight into Father Picard's categorical temperament

Point-of-view of an Orant of the Assumption at the end of the colloquium

ANNE HUYGHEBAERT

Father Picard has been mentioned many times in connection with the disagreements that took place during the early years of the various congregations of the Assumption and that have been discussed during this colloquium. The discovery of several facts and quotations have allowed us to better understand the harsh side of his temperament that has not been transmitted to us by the writings of our foundress, nor by the tradition of our Congregation, nor by the testimonies, generally posthumous, of the Augustinians of the Assumption of his generation.

We knew him to be fraternal, often paternal, to the point of expressing his tenderness in some of his letters. During this colloquium we have discovered, for instance, that Father d'Alzon, who often praised him, gave the following thumbnail sketch of him in 1876:

Concerning the rivalry between the provinces, I am the guilty one (...). We have a secondary school where people are overloaded with work, but where the religious are much more energetic than those at the novitiate (...) With all of the best intentions in the world, the one who will foment these rivalries will be [Father] Picard with his despotism. You don't want to be subjected to it and forced to go here or there. The religious here are no longer

Origins of the Assumption Family

disposed to accept him as an infallible oracle. I think this is most unfortunate. Bui also, why could he not be more flexible, and why does he have to be so categorical? We must go along with his way of thinking, otherwise he will submit his resignation which, he knows very well, I cannot accept at the present time. . . ⁷¹⁷

In this extract, Father Picard is depicted to be just as domineering toward Father d'Alzon and the other Fathers as he was toward Mother Marie-Eugénie. His rigidity cannot simply be reduced to a problem of not accepting women who stood up to him. His relations with women were surely marked by his time and his place of origin, but they were marked even more by his notion of obedience which he applied to all his relations, whether in spiritual direction or government. With Father Jean-Paul Périet-Muzet, A.A.,⁷¹⁸ we note that for Father Picard obedience was especially a question of humility and self-effacement, while for Father d'Alzon, it was marked especially by dialogue. Since Mother Isabelle had deepened her consecration to God by practicing profound humility during her entire life, she was able to find support and to harmonize her life with this spirituality of Father Picard.

Moreover, it should be noted that the rigidity we have spoken about can co-exist with “the best intentions in the world.” That is why, for example, Father Picard could consider a project, which had a social dimension and involved the Christian press, to be, at the same time, something good for the Oblates, as he did when he suggested to Mother Correnson that she open a novitiate in Paris:

We could seize this opportunity to prepare a major development of the Oblates, which I am hereby suggesting to you. Please see in this overture my desire to help a work that is very dear to me and to which you have consecrated your whole life.—I believe that [this project] would be very useful to the Oblates. I ask you to do the impossible to make sure that a Sister can come as mistress of novices. I believe this combination would open the

⁷¹⁷Letter of Emmanuel d'Alzon to Mother Marie-Eugénie of Jesus, October 22, 1876, no. 5764. The quotation was stated orally during the colloquium by Sister Clare Teresa Tjader, Religious of the Assumption.

⁷¹⁸This opinion was expressed orally by Father Jean-Paul, the Assumptionist archivist, in one of his talks during the colloquium.

New insight into Father Picard's categorical temperament

way to a real development of the work. . . .⁷¹⁹

But he then had trouble admitting that Mother Correnson might have had other views, and he insisted (letter of June 26, 1882).

It has been said that, in that same letter quoted in its entirety below, Father Picard “blamed” her for many things:

Paris, June 26, 1882

Reverend Mother,

I understand your dilemma, but I hope that you understand mine. No more than you, would I want to stray from the intentions of our dear and venerable Father, but by acting as I intend to do, I am sure that I will be following his known intentions and the authorizations he has given.

You told me: there should be only one novitiate, and this novitiate should be in Nîmes. However, I had just experienced the pain of having to assume the burden of leading the Assumptionists when a first report arrived from Bulgaria informing me of a second novitiate. Among other things, I had been authorized to start something in Paris or in Sèvres. All that in the name of the Oblates of the Assumption. Today, circumstances seem to be calling for what I found desirable approximately three years ago. I therefore allow myself to insist. If you have no one in Nîmes, we might be able to borrow one of the Sisters from Bulgaria. This does not contradict in any way the point in the rule that you quoted. The superior indeed is the one who admits to profession, but this admission is always preceded by the examination and consent of the [ecclesiastical] superior.

This brings me to the more serious question you raised in your letter and about which it is indeed important that we agree. Sending Sisters to Spain to raise money without informing me beforehand, and organizing special sermons and retreats without the approval of Father Laurent are things that are just not done. I should have spoken to you about this when I visited you, but it was difficult for

⁷¹⁹Extracts from Father Picard's letters to Mother Correnson, April 11 and June 18, 1882, nos. 5104 and 5105.

Origins of the Assumption Family

me to do. I preferred waiting for the right moment, which would not be long in coming, to ask you the question: exactly what is the situation of the Oblates with regard to the Assumptionists? I fear a misunderstanding, and you alone can clear up my doubts. Please clarify this question completely. I hope that the situation will be one that we can all find acceptable. I ask Our Lord to enlighten us and to lead us. Before all else, we must be able to proceed with trust and simplicity. Please accept, Reverend Mother, the expression of my very best wishes. Respectfully and devotedly yours in Our Lord, Father Picard. (Letter from Father Picard to Mother Correnson, no. 5106).

The tone of this letter remained moderate, and the briefly stated remarks—for example, about the existence of a novitiate in Bulgaria, which we have not checked, or about collections made on behalf of the Assumption seem understandable and legitimate, especially in the context of the agreement of 1876. It would obviously be more interesting if we could complete this impression with Mother Correnson's own response and opinion regarding these matters.

After receiving this letter, Mother Correnson clearly stated that she did not want the Oblates to be a congregation governed but rather directed by the Fathers along the lines of the authority given by Father d'Alzon to the Superior General in Nîmes. But the situation in the Near Eastern Missions was quite different because the Sisters there were entirely supported and directed by the Fathers to whom they belonged. Not only would the Oblates have been unable to continue their mission without them—something Father Picard was well aware of—but, especially in this mission context, the Fathers thought that it would have been impossible for them to continue assuming the expenses of Sisters who would no longer depend on them except for spiritual direction. *“I do not find it possible to retain the responsibility without the authority”; “in the missions this is impossible”; “in the missions, we cannot accept to remain [financially] responsible for the Sisters.”*⁷²⁰ It was for this last reason that Father Picard asked all of the Oblates to express by secret ballot their choice as to whether they wanted to be governed by the Assumptionists or not. This provoked the painful schism of which we are all aware.

⁷²⁰Extract from Father Picard's letters of September 1882, nos. 1869 and 1871.

New insight into Father Picard's categorical temperament

In September 1882, Father Picard initiated conversations with Mother Correnson in Nîmes to search for an understanding. Were they able to truly dialogue? Did he try to convince her? Did his categorical temperament stop him from searching and suggesting a solution of reconciliation? Did such a solution exist? We have no reliable information about all of this.

We are now more aware of the situation. The rigid character of Father Picard led him to be inflexible and intransigent, the damages of which the history of our congregations bears traces and scars, some of them long-lasting and often hard to pin down as to their causes. However, we must not forget that the positive side of this same character-trait greatly contributed to his charism in terms of faith, spiritual direction, and government as well as to his unflinching commitment to the service of the Kingdom of God and of the Assumption. Both aspects of his character were indispensable to him as he personally confronted the turmoil caused by the contradictions and persecutions of the time and as he guided his Congregation through it all, as he did.

Sister Anne Huyghebaert Orant of the Assumption

62, rue de Normandie 1081 Brussels Belgium

Origins of the Assumption Family

Synthesis

LOUIS SECONDY

I have retained five main points, reactions, reflections, and/or comments from this colloquium and from the contacts we have had during these days of study and sharing.

I. You have dared

You have dared to discuss things that, in the past, opposed your families and made them suffer, things that have left traces today, in order to make the best possible use of them, to turn them into a work of purification not only of your memories but also of your feelings and emotions. And to do that, it was necessary to clarify the facts. You did this without making any concessions to serious history and without leaving things unsaid. You confronted different points-of-view based on primary sources, studying testimonies and accounts in order to better grasp the issues involved and to get a clearer idea of what really happened. That is good history. But your merit does not stop there. Indeed, it wasn't a question of discussing a topic external to yourselves, but, quite to the contrary, of discussing facts about your heritage, your family history, things that implied calling the past into question.

You have also dared to give your colloquium broad objectives by focusing on three aspects:

- An understanding of a complicated and unstable century, and therefore of the overall context.
- An analysis of dossiers that are precise and meticulously drawn up.
- An active participation of the heirs present in this room, by giving them the floor—which made of this meeting a true colloquium.

II. Mission accomplished

This colloquium has accomplished its mission by fulfilling two of the three objectives it set for itself. I will come back to the third objective in my conclusion.

Rereading your history

You have reread your history by:

Creating excellent dossiers compiled by your archivists who were rigorously methodical and extremely knowledgeable about their subject;

Presenting dossiers that were carefully explained in keeping with a strict analysis of their contents that left nothing to improvisation;

Using long quotations, which are less easily slanted in favor of one's point-of-view, rather than short ones, which can sometimes be taken out of context;

Engaging in historical discussions at the university level.

One avenue that perhaps still needs to be explored is researching external public archives—municipal, departmental or national—regarding this or that issue, for example, all that concerns the boarding schools of the Assumption Family in Nîmes. It would be a good idea to specify that the questions that were debated and that had something to do with this city—which had a population of more than 62,000 in 1872—concerned especially Catholics from among the upper-class. The business of the Priory and of the boarding schools was probably not the major preoccupation of the inhabitants of L'Enclos Rey. Father Pernet, on the other hand, though living at Assumption College, was nevertheless concerned about them.

Consequently, and thanks to these methods, everyone here now understands the essential aspects of the topics that were chosen in order to help us interpret the events that sometimes made for a painful past during and after the 19th century.

III. Comments about the crisis

Your reflection revolved around this question. What can we conclude from it?

1. A clarification: what was the cause of the difficulties?

You approached this question on a case-by-case basis and discovered its complexity. Some causes stemmed from one or another person, others from the difficulty involved in determining the nature of the relations among the various “Assumptions,” and still others from external causes: a particular situation or the concept of a given mission, for example Cape Town.

2. This study of the crises paradoxically provoked in me a number of unexpected reactions

On listening to all these accounts, I discovered that there were as many positive aspects as there were crises among the various “families of the Assumption,” the very idea that united you all. There were solid bonds that often allowed you to bear up under the trials and conflicts, as well as a chain of mutual help that extended from the Religious of the Assumption, to the Augustinians of the Assumption, to the Orants, then to the Little Sisters of the Assumption and the Oblates of the Assumption. It is striking.

I also discovered the major element that brought everyone together and that played itself out around a name which, while creating unanimity, also became on certain occasions the object of a quarrel. We explored this aspect. But, strangely enough, it is a name which, by and large, does not correspond to the spirituality of the mystery of the Assumption but to a type of Christocentric spirituality that is lived out in a variety of charisms.

These charisms led you to assume many commitments, works, and institutions in all of the fields which the Church has traditionally entrusted to religious congregations: education and teaching at all levels, including a concern to “re-Christianize intelligences” and to make society more livable and more Christian, as well as a concern for the poor, the humble, the unfortunate, the missions, and contemplation.

All of that came from a common trunk and from a family that has many branches.

3. A brief comment about the crises

A crisis is a regrettable accident, but one that is inevitable in all walks of life. We can say that you were much more exposed than others. Wanting to

Origins of the Assumption Family

create a sort of existential link among five branches, in which important key people interacted, could only increase the occasions for a crisis. With five persons, there are more occasions for misunderstandings than with only two. You had some, which you have just described. At this point, must we not ask the key question: why did your crises, very serious at times, not bring about what happens so often elsewhere, viz., a complete break?

4. That being the case, you need to ask yourselves the following question:

How did you overcome these crises? A basic but helpful distinction might be useful in finding the answer, viz., the distinction between crises that were quickly overcome, and crises that had long-lasting consequences. How and when were these consequences overcome? Have they been overcome? Have they yet to be overcome? What was the final outcome of these crises? Was there a complete break? Has there been a reconciliation? Were meetings held that eventually became constructive, like the ones you have had with the Sisters in Cape Town?

5. Putting crises to good use

If crises are overcome in the short-term, they can have quick positive effects. They can also have positive effects if they are overcome over the long-term. They can also lead to separations, which, at times and from some points-of-view, can almost become a necessity, in which case separation can be preferable to a brutal deterioration of the situation or to deadly gangrene.

Today, group-therapists as well as politicians use mediation. Would this be a new way of limiting the scope of future crises?

IV. This colloquium shows the unique contribution that the Assumption family made to the Church of France

I will underline three aspects:

First, the idea of evangelizing young girls of the upper class at a time when boarding schools for girls were often no more than schools without

Synthesis

particular characteristics. This insistence was not unique, but was especially strong with Mother Marie-Eugénie.

Second, the creation of a teaching Congregation from within an institution. Education then becomes, at one and the same time, basic, pre-existing, and internal to the Congregation.

Third, the Near Eastern Utopia of looking to Poland and Bulgaria in order to reach Russia, with the extraordinary desire of putting an end to the schism and of bringing the Orthodox back to Rome. And this, in absolute terms: you are in error, but we are in the truth and have the truth.

V. The place of laypeople

Father d'Alzon gave the example in his college, even if this meant having to pay the price. Moreover, he stated that the same obligations should not be imposed on future laymen (college students) as on future priests (students in the alummates), for example, presence at daily Mass. Father Pernet and Marie Fage, for their part, constantly sought ways of including laypeople in what they were doing. It is absolutely necessary to analyze this way of doing things in the documents of the Little Sisters of the Assumption.

This is a point that needs to be deepened in each of your Congregations because it is essential to an accurate history of the Church of France in the 19th century.

Conclusion

But in your inter-congregation relations, you still need to implement the third objective of this colloquium, viz., greater communion among yourselves. This is not the work of an historian, though it will be once you have achieved it and it has become history. As a result of this colloquium, I have the impression that the number of your encounters will increase. To see each other and to speak with each other will give you occasions to correct misconceptions and to dress and heal past wounds. By better knowing each other, you will better appreciate each other.

At any rate, thank you for having welcomed me, the stranger and the outsider. I have profited from these encounters, and I leave enriched in terms of my personal thinking and my teaching, and full of admiration for

Origins of the Assumption Family

a Church that is so human that we sometimes ask ourselves how it can still survive after two-thousand years under these conditions. By daring what you dared to do, you have made a contribution to the Church in your own way. Thank you for all you continue to do.

Louis Secondy

9, rue de la Frigate 34084 Montpellier France

Conclusion and Dismissal

RICHARD LAMOUREUX

At the end of a colloquium that has in part dealt with relations between men and women in the 19th century, I feel compelled to explain why I (the only male Superior General) am speaking at the conclusion of our work. I want to assure you that I do not attribute to myself any special authority. On the contrary. I am, in fact, acceding to the will of the four other Superiors General who have asked me to speak. I should add that what I am about to say has not been reviewed and approved by them, each of them has contributed in one way or another to what I am about to say.

You might consider these words a secular equivalent of the “*ite missa est*” from the end of Mass. We have been celebrating something of a Eucharistic ritual, with times for reconciliation, for historical narrative, for celebration and for thanksgiving. The “*ite missa est*” at the end of Mass was always a moment to remind us that what was just celebrated must now have consequences. And so that is the case for us at the end of this colloquium. Our work has given us certain responsibilities and entrusted to all of us a mission.

I would like to summarize all of this in two major convictions, and then three practical suggestions.

Do not be afraid of the truth

The first point is summarized in these few words: do not be afraid of the truth. Sister Mercedes already reminded us at the beginning of our work: “Remembering the past is liberating” (*Hacer memoria es liberador*). The fourth evangelist had put it in similar terms, “The truth will set you free”:

“Jesus then went on to say to those Jews who believed in him:
‘If you live according to my teaching, you are truly my disciples;

Origins of the Assumption Family

then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free”
(John 8:31).

Truth is hard to come by, but we gathered here because we thought that it was worth the effort and that it would bear fruit. We tried to enter into the minds and hearts of our foundresses and founders, to avoid judging them with the criteria and, yes, the prejudices that are ours today. This colloquium made it possible to clarify a number of difficult questions (e.g. the initial efforts to organize the Near Eastern Mission). In the process, we were able to admit that interpretation is rarely easy. During our discussions, the same text could be used to substantiate very different interpretations, but at least we made the effort to provide evidence for our interpretations. We also realized that the truth is often much larger than what we initially are able to grasp. We couldn't study everything about all of the questions that we would have liked to address, but we accomplished a good deal, we identified some questions that need to be pursued, and best of all we proved to ourselves that we could do this kind of work together and that serious research and reflection do allow us to resolve certain problems and do make possible greater progress in our relations.

We also understood that what is in our archives is not always very edifying or uplifting and does not always correspond to the idealized image that we have of our founders or of our histories. I recently read a letter that we've integrated into our archives in Rome, from Father Léon Déhon to a friend of his who had become an Assumptionist but decided to leave the Congregation. What Father Déhon had to say about Father d'Alzon was not especially flattering, but perhaps there is some truth in what he had to say.

I am pleased about your plan to leave the Assumption. It carries on feverish activity that seems to have satisfied you for a while, but that is not the way the big congregations began. I have the impression that Father d'Alzon does not have what it takes to be a founder. Surely, he has a lot of heart and sometimes the insights of a genius, but he is extremely unstable in his character and affections, unsure in his judgments, and irascible. With him, it is impossible to do a serious novitiate. There is little coherence in what he does and, after a hundred changes, he has not yet determined his aim and rules. There are a lot of natural and human sides to dear Father d'Alzon. Nevertheless, his person is

Conclusion and Dismissal

what holds everything together. This congregation looks to me like a flash in the pan that will not last.⁷²¹

Yes, history is not always edifying, but to ignore it would be folly. Our love for the truth would have us avoid all false hagiography. Perhaps our motto ought to be these few words of Mother Marie-Eugénie: “frankness and *true* charity.”

Let us not forget what we have seen in the mirror

The second major conviction is summed up in this passage from the letter of Saint James.

A man who listens to God’s word but does not put it into practice is like a man who looks into a mirror at the face he was born with: he looks at himself, then goes off and promptly forgets what he looked like. There is, on the other hand, the man who peers into freedom’s ideal law and abides by it. He is no forgetful listener, but one who carries out the law in practice. Blest will this man be in whatever he does (Jas 1, 23–25).

It is sometimes difficult and painful to look at oneself in the mirror. And it is even more difficult to change one’s ideas, to forge new paradigms, to convert. To look at and to see oneself is not enough. At the end of this Colloquium, we each need to do some thinking. We would do well first of all to identify what we have learned. Perhaps we should do what Father Luc Fritz suggested at one point. And then we have to change (and that’s the challenge) the stories that we’ve been telling for the past century if they do not correspond to what we have now learned to be the truth. Change the stories that have become legend, that have almost become “gospel”—but that are simply wrong! Perhaps the change has to go even more deeply: we need to purify our memories, forget wounds inflicted by real or imagined offenses. It is a real conversion of the spirit to which we are called by this colloquium.

And then, more concretely, we need to organize ourselves (by sessions for formators, by revised formation programs, by publications, etc.) so that what we’ve learned here gets transmitted with precision and accuracy, instead of

⁷²¹Father Léon Déhon to his friend Father Charles Desaire, St. Quentin, January 18, 1873.

Origins of the Assumption Family

the errors that we have, perhaps unwittingly, been propagating. One way we might do this effectively is to publish, as a family, a formation module, with the common elements of our charism and with explanations in each Congregation's own words of its particularity.

But conversion goes even further than this. Beyond simply teaching us something about the past, what does the example of our mothers and fathers inspire us to do today? I've been impressed during these few days by the capacity of the founders to read the signs of the times and then to respond. I'm impressed by their flexibility, their "availability," their attentiveness to the Spirit. Maybe what impresses me is their holiness. Perhaps it's easier to found than to re-found, but this is what we are called to today: to re-found for a new day. If re-founding is more difficult, then probably we have to be even more holy. Such presumption!

Three Suggestions

Now, let me address three practical matters.

The importance of archives and of archivists, if ever we were tempted to doubt it.

Archives must be gathered together (in dry, safe spaces, on solid, clean shelves, and in appropriate boxes and cases), they must be physically preserved (and today how can we not think of computerizing all of the documents?), they must be indexed (with reference information on paper and in computer data-bases), and they must be published. All of this is in view of making them available for the enlightenment and edification of the religious and the general public interested in our history. Should everything be accessible? Clearly, discretion must be respected when documents touch upon people who are still living, but it seems to me that reverence for the truth should compel us to make every document in our archives accessible to the serious researcher. Once again, no false hagiography!

Archivists are responsible for all of the tasks listed above. But for them to do all of this well, they need to be people who love this type of work and they must be well trained. It is important then to foresee long in advance the university training of a certain number of religious in history. As for the technical know-how of the archivist, it is more easily acquired on the job

Conclusion and Dismissal

and through specific workshops. Perhaps we also need to enlist the help of our lay friends in the organization of our archives and in their utilization for scholarly research.

The importance of continuing our research and dialogue on the questions that have been studied, on the questions that have been raised, and on other questions that will come up

We agree on the importance of all of this, but how should we go about it? This colloquium was organized in the context of Jubilee 2000, but let us not wait for another millennial jubilee or a second colloquium of this importance. There are simpler ways.

The first, of course, is the publication and the distribution of the content of our discussions during these days. A committee has accepted to prepare the Acts of the Colloquium, and to them we should be grateful. We can be confident they will do their work with dispatch. But then what will we do with this publication? I insist once again on the importance of a “live” transmission of what we have learned here, using the published Acts as our book of reference.

The second could be an annual meeting of our archivists or of religious who are engaged in a study of these kinds of questions. At such a meeting, the participants could talk about the projects on which they are currently working, share the questions that they think it would be important to investigate, and maybe even study together specific issues that they identify.

Finally, the third would be the publication by our individual Congregations of studies, major or more modest, that would be of interest to the other Congregations.

Finally, the role of the Superiors General and General Councils in identifying questions and ways of pursuing them

The Superiors General and their Councils meet very regularly and are often more aware of questions that need to be studied than other religious who are more taken up by immediate problems. Consequently, it would be good for the members of our general governments to propose on a regular basis

Origins of the Assumption Family

specific studies to be undertaken. Some of the questions that have already arisen include the following:

The famous “common trunk,” that is to say, the common elements that unite us as Assumption religious. This discussion should also include a common reflection on what distinguishes us and allows each of us to make our own particular contribution to the Church.

“Let us stay connected to the trunk; let us be happy about who we are.” (Pernet?)

“Let us remain loyal to our roots.” (Mother Marie-Eugénie)

The role of women and the importance of friendship in the Assumption family.

Power in the Church, collaboration, and clericalism.

The role of the laity (e.g. the idea behind the fraternities of the Little Sisters of the Assumption).

The role of intelligence and reflection at the level of the mission itself; the link between study and social action (“remake a people for Jesus Christ,” Pernet).

Ite Miss Est. Deo Gratias

These are just some thoughts that come to mind after celebrating this important event or “liturgy,” as I’ve come to think about it, in the life of our religious family. At the end of such a “liturgy,” it is appropriate to give thanks for many things in our history:

- The discovery of both the crises and the times of grace;
- The dialogue, the conversation (even the differences), and the encounters over the years;
- The diversity of charisms, and the depth of what unites us.

We also give thanks for our founders for:

- Their faith, their humility, and their docility;
- Their innovations, their ability to truly revolutionize the thinking of people;

Conclusion and Dismissal

- Their ambition to “remake a people for Jesus Christ” (Pernet);
- Their desire to be women and men of their time, in tune with their century;
- Their ability to combine contemplation and action;
- Their freedom and their friendship.

Finally, we thank the sisters, brothers, and friends who helped us during this colloquium:

- The archivists: Giselle Marchand (Little Sister of the Assumption), Hughes-Emmanuel d’Esparron and Claire Rabitz (Oblates of the Assumption), Thérèse-Mayliss Toujouse and Clare-Teresa Tjader (Religious of the Assumption), Marie-Jacques Sevenet and Anne Huyghebaert (Orants of the Assumption), and Jean-Paul Périer-Muzet (Assumptionist).
- The Preparation Committee: Cristina Maria Gonzalez (Religious of the Assumption), Bernard Holzer (Assumptionist), and Louis Secondy.
- The speakers, particularly Louis Secondy.
- The Organizing Committee, particularly Marie-Claire Debionne, Marie-Claude Prat (Little Sisters of the Assumption), and Jean-Michel Brochec (Assumptionist) for the museum.
- The Animation Committee: Louis Secondy, Bernard Holzer (Assumptionist), Christine Foulon (Religious of the Assumption), Luisa Drago (Oblate of the Assumption), and Eliane de Montebello (Little Sister of the Assumption).
- The Committee in charge of drawing up the Acts: Blandine Fougerat (Religious of the Assumption), Luc Fritz (Assumptionist), Catherine Lesage (Oblate of the Assumption), and Bernard Holzer (Assumptionist).
- The community of the Little Sisters of the Assumption which has received us so well.

Origins of the Assumption Family

Many thanks to everyone. Let us go in the peace of Christ.

Father Richard Lamoureux Superior General of the Augustinians of the
Assumption

55, Via San Pio V 00165 Rome Italy

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Origins of the Assumption Family

Initials and Abbreviations

A.A.	Augustinians of the Assumption (Assumptionists)
ACR	Assumptionist archives
A.R.T.	Adveniat Regnum Tuum (motto of the Assumption)
BVM	Blessed Virgin Mary
CM.	Congregation of the Missions / Lazarists
C.R.	Congregation of the Resurrection (Resurrectionists)
C. SS.R.	Redemptorists
D. C.	Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul
D.R.C.	Democratic Republic of the Congo
D.S.	Dieu Seul (God Alone) (Marie-Eugénie of Jesus)
F.S.C.	Brothers of the Christian Schools (Christian Brothers)
L.S.A.	Little Sisters of the Assumption
M.A.E.	Maria Assumpta Est (Mary Assumed to Heaven)
M.Afr.	Missionaries of Africa (formerly known as the White Fathers/W.F.)
M.S.A.	Missionary Sisters of the Assumption
O.F.M.	Order of Friars Minor (Franciscans)
O.F.M. Cap.	Order of Friars Minor Capuchins (Capuchin Friars)
O.L.J.C.	Our Lord Jesus Christ
O.A.	Oblates of the Assumption
O.Carm.	Order of Carmelites (Carmelite Fathers and Brothers)
Or.A.	Orants of the Assumption
O.M.I.	Oblates of Mary Immaculate
Orat.	Oratorians
O.P.	Order of Preachers (Dominicans)
O.S.A.	Order of Saint Augustine (Augustinians)
O.S.B.	Order of Saint Benedict (Benedictines)
R.A.	Religious [Sisters] of the Assumption
S.J.	Society of Jesus (Jesuits)
S.J.A.	Sisters of Saint Joan of Arc
S.M.	Marist Fathers
S.M.A.	Society of African Missions Index