

THE ASSUMPTIONIST SPIRIT

ACCORDING TO

EMMANUEL D'ALZON

ROME 1993

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PREFACE

Brothers,

This modest work which I have the joy of presenting is offered to each of you. You can no doubt guess why. As its title indicates, it should help us to improve our knowledge of the spirit of the Assumption in order to make it our own.

We often hear it said, “*the originality of the Assumption is to not have anything original*”. That reply is a bit too simple. It avoids any serious analysis of the question. The Assumption was thought through at length by Fr. d’Alzon its founder. It was his firm conviction that it appeared at the appropriate time and was willed by God.

He thus gave this new religious family solid foundations. He transfers to it his own spiritual and apostolic experience. The Assumption benefits from the exceptional gifts of its founder, that man impassioned by Jesus Christ and His Kingdom, that mystic profoundly committed to the evangelization of his day.

A digest of our spirit

This study is not a substitute for either the Spiritual Writings or the well documented research already published on the spirit of the Assumption. On the contrary, its purpose is to facilitate access both to the texts of Fr. d’Alzon and to the works that present them in a positive light. That is why the references to the Spiritual Writings are so numerous.

This work is indispensable. We do not sufficiently know our spirit. It is possible that it hasn’t ever been well presented, not even in the novitiate. Today, we need to rediscover and deepen it in order to live more profoundly from it. That initial springing forth must become a new and abundant wellspring which brings new life wherever it spreads.

Present today in Latin America, in Africa, in Korea, in Madagascar, the Assumption is taking root in places further and further from whence it was born and where it developed. Time—already 150 years—also generates distance. We need to know clearly who we are and what we should be in order to face the challenge of the incarnation in increasingly varied cultures.

The Assumption is a gift from God to the Church. Its particular characteristics, willed by our founder, and our Rule of Life, ratified by the Church, are for us two important references.

A practical tool

Many of you want an authoritative synthesis of the spirit of the Assumption, a new version of our spirit for the laity who also wish to live from our spirit. Some desire a sufficiently substantial presentation that will last for years to come. This little work is none of the above. It is simply:

— a collection of reflections, explicitly wanted as such

The spirit of the Assumption can be presented as a unified whole. We preferred to distinguish its different aspects: Jesus Christ, the faith community, the passion for the Kingdom of God, prayer, the model Assumptionist. It is easier thus to study each issue.

Repetitions are consequently obvious and inevitable. But they are not tedious, they are even positive. The core of Assumption's spirit is thus more easily recognizable. Whatever path is taken one always comes back to that core.

— a collective work requested by the General Council from Assumptionists of several countries familiar with Fr. d'Alzon.

The style is thus different from one reflection to the other. In some cases, direct, in others, more doctrinal. That depends on the author but also on the topic presented: some are more abstract than others.

— a little work directed to religious and not to laity.

It has required hours of work. We have sought to be clear, fairly concise, faithful to Fr. d'Alzon without being slaves to his vocabulary. Several reflections were rewritten several times. Even as such, some remain difficult because the subject matter is dense and rich even though we have tried to make it accessible. These reflections are directed to sons who want to better know the views of their Father. Laity risk being derouted. To present our spirit to them, we must follow another path, closer to the Rule of Life. That will be the next step which has already been foreseen.

— *an invitation to do better as soon as possible.*

The Assumptionist data bank and the thesaurus will soon offer us new possibilities. This work will need to be refined and improved. But as it now stands, it should render a real service. We thank all who have accepted to collaborate on it.

May Father d'Alzon help us to assimilate the spirit which he first put into practice! At this feast of Christmas, the anniversary of our foundation, that is the grace which I ask of him for the Congregation.

Rome, Christmas 1992

Fr. Claude Maréchal
Superior General

Reflection I

THE KINGDOM OF GOD ABOVE ALL

The Spirit of the Assumption

Do you want to know the Assumption? Turn to the wellspring, to Father d'Alzon, since it was born of him. And yet here is our first surprise. He never speaks of it as being something he himself invented. In his eyes, the Assumption is the work of Providence which acts at once through him and through his brothers. It was born of an inspiration he received, but which was meditated upon and shared by his earliest companions. This fruit of the Spirit ripened through prayer is the charism, the spirit of the Assumption.

Like every founder, Father d'Alzon speaks the language of his time. He is a 19th-century Frenchman, bearing the mark of the social and religious condition of the France of that epoch. And yet a century later, in entirely different contexts, men can find inspiration in the spiritual and apostolic intuition that was entrusted to him to the point of making it their rule of life. For every great founder in his own day makes contact with the drama of humanity and of the world that belongs to all ages.

The inception of a religious Congregation is a prolonged childbirth. The central intuition takes shape little by little. In Father d'Alzon we see it appear and then develop even during his youth. God is the sovereign Lord; humanity, created by this God, must adore him, love him, and serve him. These two convictions become the driving force of d'Alzon the young student. He notes that God and consequently religion and the Church are not only ignored but actually hated and attacked on all sides and above all by the State. He wants to be God's soldier; he will therefore defend religion by proclaiming the truth, the best remedy against ignorance.

To defend God and proclaim the truth: to these two goals Father d'Alzon was to devote himself throughout his life (cf. D.A. II, p. 75; pp. 241-242; Vailhé. Lettres I, pp. 323-325). Once these foundation stones were laid, the spirit of Assumption could be built. The Kingdom of God would be its heart, as E. d'Alzon already foresaw when he was a young priest: "*...what is left for the priest to do is to work with all his strength to establish the reign of Christ...*" (D.A. II, p. 242)

FOR THE KINGDOM

Adveniat Regnum tuum. Your Kingdom come. This basic idea of Mother Marie Eugénie of Jesus' spirituality was taken by E. d'Alzon as the heart of his apostolic plan. He chose this petition of the Our Father as his motto. It became his mode of action (D.A. II, pp. 285-286) and the goal of his Congregation: to establish the Reign of Jesus Christ in oneself and in others. A fourth vow which was not to be authorized was to seal this commitment to the service of the Kingdom. Cf. the first draft of the Constitutions:

"The purpose of the Order is made clear by the fourth vow to work with all one's strength to spread the reign of Jesus Christ in souls: in our own first, then in the souls of our Brothers and of all Christians" (E.S., p. 647).

From the very beginning the goal was determined once and for all: not the least hesitation later on. But the successive formulations brought new and interesting clarifications. For the Constitutions of 1855, the goal was *"to work for our perfection by spreading the reign of Jesus Christ in souls"* (P.C., p. 37)

The means we must use

"...the means we must use to attain this goal are these: for ourselves, the practice of the religious virtues; for our neighbor, the zealous works we shall indicate below." (PC, p. 37)

The religious virtues, as stated in our earliest Constitutions, are none other than the three theological virtues, but each one of them draws other virtues in its wake. Faith invites to obedience; hope opens the way to evangelical poverty, to humility, to the spirit of prayer; charity, for its part, has a large retinue: chastity, kindness, readiness to render service, zeal in apostolic works and the spirit of unity. This is an interesting regrouping, since it indicates the specific tonality of these virtues for the Assumption. It was to disappear from later Constitutions but would reappear in the Directory. These, then, are the virtues we must practice.

But what are the privileged works we must engage in so as to spread the Kingdom around us? The earliest Constitutions enumerate several with far-reaching implications: *"teaching, publications, works of charity, foreign missions, the destruction of schism and heresy"* but this list varied later on, at the Chapters of 1868 and 1875 for example. It will serve no purpose to

look for a catalogue of Assumption's specific apostolic works. There isn't any! The Assumption is not defined so much by specific works as by a spirit.

Does this mean that any and every apostolate is compatible with this spirit and that in accordance with it we can do practically anything at all? Father d'Alzon sensed this danger. In 1868, in view of the diversity of our works, he stated: *"Should we not fear that we are scattering our resources and weakening ourselves by doing so many things? Because of that I consider it important to remind you, in a more positive way, that our life is built upon the broad vision which must nourish our common life and serve as a bond to bring together all our various efforts"* (F.D. p. 107).

This general orientation is unquestionably the coming of the Kingdom, implying the defense of religion and insistence on the truth.

On the foundation of the truth

In order to make a choice among so many different opinions, we must indeed return to the truth. In order to dispel so much ignorance and so many lies, the truth must be taught. The truth is a basic idea for Father d'Alzon, who, for that matter, admires forthrightness. In fact, in 1844 he makes forthrightness together with the acceptance of everything that is Catholic and promotes freedom, the moral basis of the Congregation he would like to found.

"I know of nothing that attracts the men of our day so much as forthrightness, and I know of nothing more powerful than liberty to fight against the present-day enemies of the Church." (E.S. p. 643).

Referring to the faith, our Constitutions of 1855 speak of the truth in this way:

"We shall also practice this virtue... by our respect for the truth manifested in the deposit of our religious dogmas, deepening our understanding of the importance of our vocation which is to become the defenders and soldiers and, by that very fact, soldiers of Jesus Christ, the Word of God and eternal Truth." (P.C. p. 38)

This affirmation would never be denied later on. Teaching, preaching, publications are at the service of the spread of the Truth. That is why Father d'Alzon gave them a privileged place. The search for and affirmation of the

truth must play a primordial role in our efforts to extend the Kingdom (E.S. pp. 1087-1088). From this passion for the truth also flows the doctrinal character of all our apostolic activities and “the spirit of faith”. For Father d’Alzon’s trust in divine truth is born of his conviction of the goodness and power of God. Faith therefore begets hope. The spirit of faith is this faith-hope that enables a handful of men to accomplish wonders and to confront persecutions with serenity. (*C.f. “the spirit of faith” in the Index of E.S. and in other Reflections of this series*).

The protection of unity

Unity, which the Constitutions of 1855 link to charity, was to be another of Father d’Alzon’s great concerns. From the start it has been one of the hallmarks of the Assumption that has no intention of competing with the secular clergy, at the risk of renouncing certain good works. It is testimony rendered to Jesus Christ, Founder and molder of this unity, visible in the Church and whose symbol and safeguard is the Pope.

Beginning in 1865, the desire for unity was to assume the twofold aspect of the reunification of an increasingly fragmented society that marginalized the poor masses and of a Church compartmentalized into rival religious confessions. The return of Orthodoxy to the Catholic sheepfold was given priority and the penetration of Russia was actively sought.

In a short and dense article our Rule of Life summarizes this primacy of the Kingdom and the fundamental attitudes it implies:

“Faithful to the will of Father d’Alzon, our communities are at the service of truth, of unity and of charity. Thus they herald the Kingdom “ (n° 5)

FOR THE LOVE OF GOD

Love of God first, and then the Kingdom. Love of the Father and of Jesus Christ comes first at the Assumption, as it does for Father d’Alzon. From this love flows the commitment to the Kingdom that became identified with it. Thus, Jesus Christ and his Kingdom are loved with the same passionate love.

Jesus Christ: loved above all else

This was always true of Father d’Alzon. It was so obvious that he paid no attention to it. His illness in 1854 forced him to deepen and purify his

motivations. The difficulties related to the development of the high school at Nîmes, the lack of vocations to his new Institute, the intense effort with which he pursued his many activities resulted in a cerebral hemorrhage which, for all his protests, led to a much reduced program of action for three or four years.

According to Fr. Athanase Sage (Retreat of 1955, p. 6), Father d'Alzon, bearing the burden of these trials, thought that *“if the Assumption appears to be faltering, it is probably because it is not built on Christ with sufficiently pure materials; its faith, its hope, its charity are not sufficiently quickened from within by love of Our Lord.”*

At the end of this trial, Father d'Alzon *“discerns, at the origin of his work and of the zeal which he wants to inculcate in it, a love of Our Lord in which everything, absolutely everything is recapitulated...”* (P.C. p. 43) and he also says this in his counsels to the superiors of the Assumption (H.S. p. 1065).

The Directory, which followed soon afterward, bears witness to this spiritual deepening. We love Christ, and in him we love what he loved most: his Father and the Holy Spirit on the one hand, the Church his Spouse and Mary his Mother on the other. The Constitutions of 1865 record this emphasis in our spirit of the primacy of Jesus Christ: the motto *“Adveniat Regnum tuum” is completed by another “Propter amorem Domini nostri Jesu Christi”* (P.C. p. 107)

The Directory, centered as it is on love of Jesus Christ, gives little space to the Kingdom of God. And yet it does not relegate it to the background, as Fr. Athanase Sage has carefully noted:

“The theme of the Kingdom is not discussed directly in the Directory. Father d'Alzon deliberately chose to leave it out. In the Directory the spirit of the Assumption is presented under a special aspect, as is required of each religious in his interior forum and, we might say, at three levels:

- *at the center of his most personal life, in that secret place where the Father in heaven dwells, the spirit of the Assumption is defined by the triple love;*
- *at the level of our faculties for action, of our virtues, it is defined by the spirit of faith, in the panoply of the virtues of which faith is the cornerstone, faith, of which it is said that it acts through charity;*

- *at the level of the acts in which the virtues are exercised through fidelity to the Rule... in the deployment of a life totally consecrated to the coming of the Kingdom.*" (Sage, Retreat, 1955 pp. 3 and 4)

The great synthesis

Love of our Lord and passion for the Kingdom: these two somewhat parallel movements are welded into one by Father d'Alzon in his masterly discourse at the close of the Chapter of 1868 on the spirit of the Assumption:

"Our spiritual life, our religious substance, our raison d'être as Augustinians of the Assumption is to be found in our motto: "Thy Kingdom Come". The coming of the reign of God in our souls, by the practice of Christian virtues and of the Evangelical Counsels, in keeping with our vocation; the coming of the reign of God in the world by the struggle against Satan and the conquest of souls ransomed by Our Lord and yet still buried in the depths of error and sin. What could be more simple! What could be more ordinary than this form of the love of God! 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 know, under its briefest expression, the spirit of the Assumption." (F.D. p. 78)

That is really our identification card.

Our identification card must limit itself to the broad outlines. The following reflections will bring out its distinctive hallmarks. They do not all apply only to the Assumption. Many will be found elsewhere. It is the total picture and its internal harmony that are characteristic. It would be wise to point out the importance of the theological virtues, the very close interrelationship between the religious life and the apostolic activity, the deliberate inclusion of the laity in the initial plan... The Augustinian hallmark should also be stressed. Virtues like the boldness of faith, faithfulness to the Magisterium, the readiness to serve and selflessness that Father d'Alzon practiced and bequeathed to his disciples should not be forgotten either. But all that will be discussed elsewhere.

Let us say just a few words on the monastic forms or observances that situated the Assumption spiritually between the Dominicans and the Jesuits, as Father d'Alzon noted (E.S. pp. 1062-1064). These observances, as he saw them, are: *"The Divine Office, the Chapter, stricter customs in the*

refectory, regular silence, the whole assemblage of the little practices to which the modern Orders and Congregations have seemed to pay scant attention.” (Letter to Fr. Picard, in April 1865. E.S. p. 297).

Yet the Constitutions of 1855 do not mention these observances, except for the Divine Office: they speak only of our essential apostolic obligation. They stress with insistence only the need of prayer, zeal for mortification, the fundamental importance of humility, love of silence and of recollection, the religious practice of charity among brothers. (Cf. PC. p. 21)

Chapter I of our Rule of Life is really the identification card of the Assumption. In its conciseness, it is a good synthesis of our spirit. In few words, n° 1 truly gives the essentials:

“Assumptionists, we are religious who live in apostolic community. Faithful to our founder, Father d'Alzon, we choose as our prime objective to work out of love for Jesus Christ, for the coming of the Reign of God in ourselves and around us.”

Fr. Wilfrid DUFAULT, a.a.

RECOMMENDED READING

Major texts by Father d'Alzon

- Directory, Part I. pp. 2-26.
- Instruction at the close of the General Chapter of 1868, Foundational Documents pp. 77-93.
- Three of the four Letters to the Master of Novices, F.D. pp. 97-111.
- First Circular Letter, Circular Letters (1874-1875) pp. 1-5.
- The Coming of the Reign of Jesus Christ, E.S. pp. 659-671.

Various Studies

- Dossier sur la vie et les vertus du P. d'Alzon, Rome 1986, chap. 12 (pp. 374-443), chap. 19 (pp. 628-649), chap. 26 (pp. 824-836).
- P. Touveneraud, Charisme du P. d'Alzon et charisme de l'Assomption, “Approches et Recherches”, Rome, 1974.
- H. Stéphan, Lettre n° 33 (April 22, 1984) pp. 4-8.

Reflection II

THE BIRTHPLACE OF THE ASSUMPTION: 19TH-CENTURY FRANCE

Every century has its own distinctive features. Even when we look back into time, it is not easy to discern its broad outlines. Nineteenth-century France, Father d'Alzon's century (1810-1880) is paradoxical. It is a time of great contrasts: one world is disappearing and another is being born, not without pain, or conflict, or violent confrontations. The new world cannot find its way because it comes into collision with the habits or deliberate resistance of the partisans of the past. This is obvious in many areas.

DEMOCRACY AND BOURGEOISIE

Father d'Alzon was to experience various political regimes, several Revolutions (1830, 1848, 1870), several bloody repressions of working-class demonstrations (1848, 1871). A return to former authoritarian forms of political life (1815, 1851, 1871) alternated with short innovative periods filled with liberal and democratic verve (1830, 1848, 1870). Violent crises flared up regularly: the three days of the Revolution of July, 1830 in Paris, known as the "Trois Glorieuses" which liquidated the conservative royalty, the days in June, 1848 as the "juin social", which swept away the liberal royalty, and the "bloody May" of 1871. While after that date the Republic was no longer contested as the recognized political regime, French political life remained troubled until 1914. Then the external danger that was Germany created a kind of national consensus which was baptized "the sacred union".

So we see that democracy was born in France in a climate of very strong political and ideological confrontations. The stakes were high. It was from this epoch that decisive victories stem: liberal Constitutions, universal male suffrage, the abolition of slavery, laws concerning the press and education, the beginnings of social and trade union legislation.

While France was more advanced politically, it was less advanced in economic matters than Great Britain. It was not until the reign of Louis-Philippe (1830-1848) and above all until the Second Empire with Napoleon III (1852-1870) that a few precursory signs of industrial development and capitalism appeared: department stores, banks, railroads, corporations,

industrial and agricultural machinery. The living conditions of the workers were hard, inhuman. The working class was taking shape and becoming aware of itself. But the social consequences of this transformation long remained poorly analyzed, violently repressed by the bourgeois power in authority, and not understood by the rural population which until the 20th century made up the majority of the active population of the country.

Father d'Alzon was viscerally anti-liberal by temperament and formation. He was a traditionalist. This rural aristocrat looked more readily toward the past than toward the future. Yet he was not the man of one regime or of one party. His Cause was God's Cause. That is why he accepted without nostalgic regret everything that was compatible with God's Cause. At the same time, he fought for this Cause through prayer, words, and action.

A SOLDIER'S LIFE DEDICATED TO A CHURCH IN COMBAT

In 19th-century France the religious problem was engrafted on the political problem: the men of the social movement, heirs of the rationalistic "philosophers" of the 18th century who incarnated the spirit of the Revolution, fought for a society founded on the rights of man without any explicit reference to God or to Christian morality. In matters of public concern, the tutelage of the Church which they vigorously combated seemed intolerable to them. For them the Church symbolized the dogmatic and conservative spirit.

The option for or against God was to play a preponderant role in social and political life. Having become a decisive criterion, it finally came to mask the political problem: a system that rejects God or combats him cannot be good; it is unacceptable. That was Father d'Alzon's attitude. What he condemned was less the political ideas than the rejection of God. He was in God's camp. He openly vigorously chose God as he liked to say, and he defended him unceasingly and without respite with all the resources of his words and writings as the vicar general of his diocese (1835-1878), as the director of an educational institution, and as the founder of a religious congregation. D'Alzon took his stand for the God of Jesus Christ and for the defense of God's interests without being committed to any political party whatever.

Since Jesus Christ is inseparable from his Church, d'Alzon's party would be the Church united around the Pope, holy but also human and bearing the features and wrinkles of the times, Catholic and hence truly universal, apostolic and consequently militant. When he waged war for freedom of

education which was monopolized by the State, for the defense of the rights of the Church or of God, he was fighting as a good soldier of God. In his milieu and in his position he personified the Church militant of the 19th century, ultramontane and anti-revolutionary. He symbolized the spirit of the “Counter-Revolution”.

TURNING INCREASINGLY TOWARD THE MASSES

Paying close attention to the events and great stakes of his time, always ready to fly to the help of his sovereign under attack, Father d’Alzon would harden his tone over the years to destroy the enemies of God waiting in ambush on every side. His zeal would be even bolder: he was to launch a veritable counter-offensive on behalf of the common people and he found the appropriate means to reach out to them.

Fr. d’Alzon’s journey corresponds to the course of Catholicism in France. In time he became more and more conservative. Like the society of his own time he showed he was incapable of inwardly espousing the audacities of the great ideals of 1789 and to work out, without a pre-established model, possible political and social translations that would take into account both the past and the burgeoning aspirations of the time. That was the same plan that Lamennais had, but his personal journey and his condemnation in 1834 would strengthen the power of his detractors. It was not only the man who was being condemned but also the program he incarnated!

This was to be a severe blow for E. d’Alzon who was ordained to the priesthood the year of the condemnation of his intellectual mentor. But at that moment already as in the future he put his trust totally in the Church and rejected liberalism even more. He was to hold to this attitude throughout his life.

The same convictions would inspire him to different programs throughout his life. With experience and the passing years, he was to broaden his horizons. The Founder then opened himself more vigorously with his new family, and thanks to it, to the ever-renewed calls of the Spirit. The first works, such as education/teaching, were not abandoned but beginning in 1870 new paths were to be explored.

A less elitist and more popular approach developed in the Assumption thanks to the reciprocal influences of men whom Emmanuel d’Alzon had guided in their religious vocation. Like Abraham, the Assumption would go forth from the shores of its infancy and venture out into a new world which

was mostly unknown to it but which it felt beloved of God. Fr. d'Alzon became a pilgrim himself in his old age and never ceased encouraging his sons and daughters to reach out to the masses for a new birth of the Gospel. Encouraging disadvantaged youth to enter the service of the Church (the alumniates), the public affirmation of Jesus Christ (the pilgrimages), the obsession with the unity of the Church and the return to the fold of the vast land of Russia, newspapers within the grasp of everyone (*Le Pèlerin, La Croix*), the Christianization of the poor of the cities: these were the great concerns of the moment. In response to the pessimism of constantly renewed memories and embellished pictures of the past, the young Assumption now fought the fight of optimism turned toward the present, in order to achieve a renewed apostolic and yet combative action.

THE BURDEN OF AN APOSTOLIC LIFE

At the time of his death (1880), like Augustine confronting the barbarians, Emmanuel d'Alzon, his high school in Nîmes under attack, could have believed his life's battle was lost. The earthly city, once again controlled by passions, fought with him to his very door over the area of liberty he wanted to win for the Church. The unity that he had sought with all his strength solely on the basis of faith for a Christian society seemed lost in a land hostile to the Catholics of his own country. But is it not his claim to greatness that he unremittingly sowed without knowing the time of the harvest?

A true son of his time, E. d'Alzon committed himself to it with all of his Mediterranean ardor. And in response to God's call, he fashioned a way of life for himself and for those who would come after him, the Augustinians of the Assumption who were to be "apostolic monks". They were to evangelize their own milieus boldly while listening intently to the voice of God celebrated in apostolic prayer.

Emmanuel d'Alzon lived this charism before transmitting it to others. His strength lay in reading the Gospel and in the yearning for God in the writing of his rapidly changing and tormented century. His passion was to live "the combat of faith" which assumed the name of kingdom in his life, since Love is absolute. Thanks to this combat he was able to override the rigidity of traditions and heritages and to welcome the changes that anticipated the future.

On November 21, 1880, the dying Father d'Alzon kept in his heart the faith of the Church in the apostolic activities that his heirs would maintain and

develop. It was not given him to reap the harvest he had sown. But was he not always ready throughout his life, day after day, to meet the demands of the *Adveniat Regnum Tuum* without wanting to see or harvest the fruits of his labors?

Fr. Jean-Paul PÉRIER-MUZET, a.a.

RECOMMENDED READING

Fr. d'Alzon's Birthplace and the Cévennes Region

- Pierre Gorlier. *Le Vigan à travers les siècles* Histoire d'une cité languedocienne, Anduze, 1981, 347 pages.
- *Les Cévennes, de la montagne à l'homme*, Privat, 1979, 508 pages.
- Gerard Cholvy's article in "*E. d'Alzon dans la société et l'Eglise du XIXe siècle*", Le Centurion, 1982, pp. 19-36.
- Video by Fr. Jean-Claude Poulignier on Fr. d'Alzon's Languedocian roots.
- Audio-visual presentation of the Centenary of the Assumption.

French Political Society in the 19th Century

- Nouvelle histoire de la France contemporaine, Vols. 7, 8, 9, 10.
- Série Points Histoire, ed. du Seuil, 1973 and 1979.

The Church's evolution in 19th century France.

- Gérard Cholvy and Yves-Marie Hilaire, *Histoire religieuse de la France contemporaine*, Vol. I, 1800-1880, Privat, 1985, 351 pages, (interreligious presentation).
- Under the direction of François Lebrun, *Histoire des catholiques en France*, Chap. 5, Privat, 1980 (Presentation in the spirit of the new historical school).
- Pierre Pierrard, *L'Eglise et l'Histoire*, DDB, 1991, Chap. 11.

The overall Evolution of French Society

- Yves Lequin, *Histoire des Français XIXe et XXe siècles. La société*, Armand Colin, 1983, 623 pages.

Reflection III

JESUS OUR SAVIOR, THE HEART OF THE MYSTERY

Jesus is fully God, and at the same time fully man. He is the unique man in whom are to be found the key, the heart and the end of human history. That is why Father d'Alzon insists so much on the mystery of the Incarnation, on the sacred humanity of Jesus Christ. *"There is nothing more excellent in the world than the human nature of Christ, after God. He is the firstborn of all creation"*(Col. 1:15) (E.S. 1150)

Jesus Christ, the reflection of the Father's glory, is also the perfect man who came to save us: *"Who is better than Jesus Christ? Who is more beautiful than Jesus Christ?"* (E.S. p. 322). That is why we cannot fail to be impassioned with him, to love him.

KNOWING JESUS CHRIST

Can one love someone without knowing him? Knowledge is the indispensable condition for love. *"Everything is summed up in Our Lord, and whoever knows Jesus Christ knows everything that is necessary to go to the Father, that is to say, to God and to heaven."* (E.S. p. 875).

But where are we to search for him? In Scripture. We must tirelessly scrutinize the Book of Holy Scripture, the Bible, and never set it aside (E.S. p. 140). It is God's very Word (E.S. p. 320). But we must also proceed through Scripture to an encounter with Someone who is very much alive (E.S. p. 899). Study is therefore inseparable from prayer. It is at once doctrinal and spiritual.

"We learn to know Jesus Christ through study and meditation; Unless these two means are united, it is impossible to know the divine Master well enough... The study of Jesus Christ is good, but subject to a certain dryness. Meditation without careful study is lost in the vagueness of a false mysticism. When study and prayer are joined together they give fruitful results." (E.S. pp. 240-241).

Fr. Father d'Alzon, it is impossible to truly know Jesus Christ without loving him! Then one's whole life is transformed.

“Unless one is damned, it is impossible to know him and not love him. And it is in this love that the new life begins which makes everything easy because we love him, and also easier because one loves him more and more.” (E.S. p. 323).

In three ways

There are three paths that lead to a personal encounter with Jesus the Word Incarnate: his doctrine, his mysteries, the actions of his life. They are as it were three paths that provide access to the Heart of Jesus.

First of all, his doctrine

It enables us to know God and to understand our world. It is the key that opens up to us infinite and unsuspected horizons:

“In Jesus Christ is to be found the knowledge of God in its essence: knowledge of man, fallen, restored, reconciled, regenerated; Knowledge of the rights of God over man and the duties of man toward God.” (E.S. p. 210)

Then, his mysteries

Jesus Christ is the face of God. Through his birth, life, death and resurrection he reveals to us the most nourishing substance of the faith: the unfathomable Trinity, the world saved through love, the ecclesial body which is the extension of his glorious Body.

Finally, the actions of his life

The human words and actions of Jesus, fully conformed to God (E.S. p 200), his life as the model man (E.S. p. 1006), inspire us to conform our life totally to his, *“for he became man in order to teach us how to divinize our life”*. (E.S. p. 219). Jesus Christ is *“God brought within our reach”*.

“Saint Paul tells us the same thing: “Put on Our Lord Jesus Christ”... Taking on the sentiments of Jesus Christ, the words of Jesus Christ, the actions of Jesus Christ, making them your words, your actions, your sentiments; doing nothing, saying or thinking nothing except what the Savior of the world would have said or done. This, it seems to me, is what it means to put on Jesus Christ”. (E.S. p. 1244).

To imitate Jesus Christ is also to commune actively in his redemptive plan, to work with him for the coming of his Kingdom. (E.S. p. 80).

To know in order to love and hence to imitate him: E. d'Alzon comes back to this constantly: "*Jesus Christ, the perfect man, is always before us. Know him ever more intimately; imitate him ever more divinely*". (E.S. p. 220) Otherwise, our life will be only wind! "*If the religious is not a living copy of the divine Savior, he is only fantasy*". (E.S. p. 318).

Yet it is Christ himself who models us in his own image by forming himself within us and uniting us to his Passion.

"The mystical incarnation"

"Jesus Christ was not content to become incarnate once within the Blessed Virgin's womb. It seems that he wants to become incarnate every day within us."

Born of the Virgin Mary for our salvation, the Word of God also wants to be born in each one of us in order to divinize our personality. This is "the mystical incarnation". Our life, an extension of his, becomes identified with it by being surrendered to him:

"Who can say what perfection I can attain if allowing Jesus Christ the Master to produce a new creation within me, I give him all power over my being, so that he may transfigure it completely into himself? O wonder! Jesus Christ formed within me, I shall be another Jesus Christ!" (E.S. p. 914)

"It is no longer I who live, it is Christ who lives in me. Who will teach me to understand this substitution through which a God takes my life and gives me his?" (E.S. p. 1027)

But more than that, Christ asks us to bring him to birth in the hearts of our brothers as did Saint Paul: "*My children, for whom I am again in labor until Christ be formed in you!*" (Gal. 4:19)

The mystical incarnation, so dear to Father d'Alzon, is in other words the Reign of God within us and around us.

“To conceive Jesus Christ within us, that is the interior life, to bring forth Jesus Christ outside of us through our life, to manifest him by our words, actions, virtues, that is the interior life as we must practice it.” (E.S. p. 908)

And Mary is the most beautiful example of this twofold childbirth.

The passion of Jesus Christ

In tune with his own time, E. d'Alzon emphasizes the redemptive value of suffering. Let us therefore bypass certain formulas that are considered excessive today and look for the great spiritual intuitions, for the Cross truly remains the best school of holiness. There is no greater love than to give one's life for those one loves (E.S. pp. 80, 876). To become a disciple of Christ on the Cross means simply:

To accept the trials of life

This attitude is not a mutilation: it purifies us, brings us closer to God, enables us to bear fruit. The cross is the wellspring of life. Let us therefore accept it the way Christ did, with love (E.S. pp. 1230-1231: our everyday friend).

To commune with the suffering of Christ the Apostle

Just as trials and sufferings are the inevitable portion of every life, they are also the lot of the religious life (E.S. p. 937) and even more of the apostolate, as Saint Paul testifies (Gal. 4.19; 2 Tim. 2:3): *“If you want to spread the Kingdom of God, do not fool yourselves, you will have great disappointments, great persecution, great sufferings.”* (E.S. p. 158)

To die to ourselves

It is by vanquishing sin on the Cross that Jesus merited life for us. We must now follow the path he has marked out (E.S. p. 883). Death to everything that rejects God within us is the condition of life. Self-denial which opens the way to life within ourselves and in others is therefore required.

Just as Jesus emptied himself in order to open himself to the fullness of life, so, too, I must annihilate the me that rebels against God, and give him free access, so He can live in me.

“Then you will sense the more immediate action of the One who was nailed to the Cross for you; you will want to be transformed into him, and to say like Saint Paul: Jesus is my life; and your life will take on a new aspect, you will discover new horizons in Christian knowledge in which you will allow yourselves to be swept away by love; and then all of life, all knowledge, all happiness will be summed up in these two words: “Jesus Christ” and “Jesus Christ crucified”.” (E.S. p. 1231)

E. d’Alzon speaks of the cross from experience. He was deeply marked by all sorts of trials. It was by contemplating the Cross that he learned all that it teaches and all that it signifies. It is by living the Eucharist that he consented to be crushed for the salvation of his brothers: *“It is in the sacrament of his love that we shall find the strength to die to ourselves in order to work for his glory and for the development of his Mystical Body.”* (E.S. p. 983)

“Therefore pray to the Blessed Virgin to teach you something of the value of the fruitfulness of suffering” (E.S. p. 1024). The Virgin Mary, so closely associated with the Passion of her Son, is in this matter a model both “in the trials of the supernatural life” and “in the sufferings of the apostolate” (E.S. pp. 134-135). Cf. also pp. 808, 1011.

When we make the thoughts, words and actions of Christ our very own, when we empty ourselves of self in order to put him on, when we bring him forth and make him grow within us, we cease to be in a sense so that he may in some way be substituted for what we are. Imitation gives way to identification:

“I shall surely have to make room for him, so that my life may be transformed and so I can say with the Apostle: “I live no longer I, but Christ lives in me”” (Gal. 2:20)

WE MUST SEE THE MAN IN JESUS CHRIST

Christ, the Word incarnate, gives meaning to our world and to our humanity. He reveals the vocation of man, and the future of the earth. He takes them back to their origin and to their goal: God and his Kingdom. In Jesus Christ we find *“the knowledge of man, fallen, raised up, reconciled, regenerated, the knowledge of God’s rights over man and of the duties of man toward God”* (E.S. p. 210), that is to say, obedience and love.

Apart from Jesus Christ there is no future, no fulfillment, no happiness possible for man. For Jesus reveals man to himself. He, too, is part of God's wondrous creation.

Every man is created in the image of God, and is therefore a human brother of Jesus Christ. How can we love Christ without loving the multitude of his brothers and sisters, the human race? And how can one announce Jesus Christ without knowing those with whom we want to communicate?

It is therefore important to study the trends of thought "that govern the world, to learn the current language, current ideas" (E.S. p. 1294), to be attentive to the events that reveal social change (E.S. pp. 143, 163, 1074), to have the sense of one's epoch in order to answer today's objections and not those of yesterday (E.S. p. 1294), without neglecting the knowledge of the heart: "*Those who know how to read men's hearts and minds teach them much more than books do*". (E.S. p. 749)

* * *

"And so this is the wonderful thing: the study of Jesus Christ produces the knowledge of the divine Savior. The more we know him, the more we love him; the more we love him, the more we want to imitate him. But in order to imitate him better, we need to study more, and the soul progresses unceasingly in this threefold effort of study, love and imitation". (E.S. p. 326)

It is not easy to truthfully say: "*Christ is my life*". Father d'Alzon opens the way to us, the way he followed. He constantly seeks to encounter Christ, to imitate him, to become identified with him, to bring him forth in hearts, to give him the whole world. For him, to know is to love, and to love is to act: a very simple linkage, but one with formidable demands.

Fr. Emmanuel BRAJON, a.a.

RECOMMENDED READING:

- Directory, Part One, Ch. IV; part three Ch. XXII; E.S. pp. 28-31, 122-123.
- Instruction of 1868, F.D. pp. 79-81; 87-88.
- Circular No.4, "On the purpose of our studies", C.L. p 18.

- Circular No.5, "On prayer", C.L. p.26
- Circular No. 7, "On Education" C.L. p. 47-48.
- Meditation No. 2, "Jesus Christ and the Religious on retreat", E.S. pp. 318-326.
- Retreat on the knowledge of Our Lord J.C., E.S. pp. 875-979.
- "Jesus dwells within us" E.S. pp. 899-903.
- The birth of J.C. within the Christian, E.S. 887-891.
- The Incarnation of J.C. within the religious soul, E.S. pp. 907-918.
- The Crucifixion. E.S. pp. 936-938.

See also E.S. pp. 1005, 1150, 1230, 1231, 1244, 1247.

Reflection IV

JESUS CHRIST, PATH OF THE FATHER AND FULLNESS OF THE SPIRIT

“I dream of a mystical theology according to Saint Thomas. That sounds hard, and yet it is easier than we think.” So wrote Father d’Alzon in 1872. This rather cursory course systematizes to a degree the study of the union of the soul with God that is apparent elsewhere on many occasions.

It would be a waste of time to seek a carefully elaborated doctrine from Father d’Alzon. He was not a theoretician. He was a pastor and a spiritual guide rather than a theologian, and avoided speculation. He was a man of action, but also a contemplative. In his concern to promote the Christian experience he wanted this experience to be understood in order to make it more universally practiced: doctrine needs to be lived.

TO KNOW AND LOVE THE FATHER

Human destiny, eternal life in God, is prepared here on earth through the loving knowledge of the Father. That is why *“adoration of the Blessed Trinity”* is fundamental (Directory, Ch. 2). And this consists traditionally in adoration of the Father through the Son in the Spirit.

But how are we to know the Father and come close to him when there is no common denominator between the divine Being and created being? Father d’Alzon answers: *“It is possible through union with his Son.”* Our path toward God the Father is none other than his own journey toward us. In short, he passes through the Word Incarnate. And yet this process is possible only *“in the love that the Son kindles in my soul through the Holy Spirit.”* The path to the Father has two inseparable aspects: Christ and the Holy Spirit, the Incarnation and divine inspiration. This conforms closely to the experience and description habitually given of this journey.

For theology, including mystical theology, (E.S. pp. 849-860), has defined this experience in terms of faith and love. Faith, a gift received at baptism, has as its object Christ, the Redeemer and revealer of the Father. Love, inspired by faith is, in the theology of Saint Augustine on which Father

d'Alzon relies, a very special mark of the Holy Spirit. Christians go to the Father in faith and love through the Son and the Spirit.

Two paths

However, the Directory opens up another perspective. Faith relates directly to “God, infallible truth” (p. 45), in other words, to the thought of the Father, the ultimate wellspring of all creation and all revelation (11th Med., E.S. pp. 399-403). Faith consists essentially in “believing in God” (E.S. p. 399), a very pithy expression that evokes “the total surrender of one’s soul” to God. It enables us to see “things the way God himself sees and judges them” (p. 46). Hope is directed to Jesus Christ and to his merits (II, Ch. 4). Love or charity relates to “the Spirit of Love” (p. 68), who is also called “the spirit of unity” (p. 67).

Speculation therefore begins with the Father so as to understand something of his Word and of his Spirit. Spiritual experience, on the contrary, has its origin in the gift received. This gift comes graciously from the Father, “the author and principle of all good and of every perfect gift” (I, Ch. 2, p. 23). It comes to us in two inseparable forms:

- ***the Word incarnate*** “Jesus Christ... the living book” (E.S. pp. 856-857) received in Scripture (E.S. pp 853-855), commemorated in the Church’s tradition, notably in spiritual tradition (E.S. p. 213) and shared in the liturgy (the Eucharist, 16th Med., E.S. pp. 448-455; E.S. p. 861); Dir. II, Ch. 6; choral office, Dir. II, Ch. 17;
- ***the Holy Spirit***, who is the personal Gift of the Father in the depths of the soul, received in silence (E.S. p. 292; 9th Med. E.S. pp. 383-386) and in “the night of faith” (1st Med. E.S. p. 316), for he is the inspirer of prayer (14th Med. E.S. pp. 419-426) and of meditation (15th Med. E.S. pp. 427-447).

God’s infinite beauty

Jesus, the Word Incarnate, the path toward the Father, reveals the Being of God, whom Father d’Alzon conceives both in his plenitude of perfection and in his beauty, which is often misunderstood (Dir. I Ch. 3 and E.S. pp. 245-246 and pp. 1402-1414).

“If God is the wellspring of the beautiful, we must turn to God himself in order to acquire the true concept of the beautiful. And if art has no other

purpose than to manifest the beautiful in things that are perceived by the senses, we immediately understand how it must nonetheless seek its inspiration in God;... When the artist uses material elements and gives them his thought and his living breath, he is the most faithful image of the Creator. But in order to remain at such a height he must, placed as he is between heaven and earth, ask the earth to provide instruments for his thought and ask of heaven the models of the beautiful that his enthusiasm wants to manifest” (E.S. pp. 1403-1404).

Therefore it is in Jesus Christ that we know the Father, that we participate in the divine Reign and also reflect his beauty, according to Saint John of the Cross whose writings Father d’Alzon strongly recommended.

Through our baptismal union (Dir. I, Ch. 6) and our Eucharistic union (16th Med., E.S. pp. 448-450) to the Word of God, inseparable from the Holy Spirit in his divine life as well as in his human life, since his humanity is filled with the Spirit, we can also share in the love that is the Holy Spirit. Under the heading “The Spirit of Our Lord”, the Directory speaks more of the perfection of Jesus Christ in his doctrine, in his mysteries, and in his actions (Dir. I, Ch. 4). It shows the humanity of Jesus filled with the Holy Spirit. But where the Church-Spouse is concerned, Father d’Alzon opens up a horizon that reaches out to the infinite: a spousal union with the Creator “*in the flames of the Holy Spirit*”.

ADORATION AND IMITATION

The experience of the Trinity makes us understand the Father, the “principle” of all that is (E.S. p. 871). “*Everything is not God*”, Father d’Alzon writes, “*it is the knowledge of everything that is God*”, This is an astonishing statement in which the relationship of the Father to his Son is discerned. For the Son is “knowledge and truth”.

This experience is the source from which the broad spiritual outlines of Father d’Alzon’s thinking spring. He recalls them often: knowledge of the perfection of God, of the irrevocable rights of God, adoration as the normal attitude of the creature toward the Creator, intimacy with the Spirit.

For Father d’Alzon, to seek God presupposes knowing and meditating on the attributes of God, which he often calls God’s perfection: love, justice, mercy, providence (E.S. pp. 893-894), and predestination, that “incomprehensible mystery” in which the power of God paradoxically

assures “the nature of beings and consequently the liberty of man” (E.S. pp. 868-869).

The sovereign God.

Worship of the Father also includes:

- the notion, rarely used today because it seems too legalistic or canonical, of the “rights of God” (E.S. pp. 659-666);
- the fundamental choice of the Kingdom of God for the interior life (within us: E.S. pp. 150-154) as well as for the apostolate (around us: E.S. pp. 155-156);
- concern to teach the worship and knowledge of the Trinity;
- the will to imitate God and the practice of mental prayer defined as a movement by which we go to God by imitating Jesus Christ:
“Since everything that Jesus Christ did here below was divine, in order to give a divine stamp to our sentiments, our thoughts, our words, our actions, we need only to turn to Jesus Christ as our model, and thus, taking a man as our model, we shall reestablish in our souls the image of God destroyed by sin” (5th Circular, E.S., p. 219);
- the central place given to adoration (16th Med., E.S. pp. 448, 627, 672-672):

“Yes, the earth is the Lord’s and all praise is due to him, and the great crime of man is failure to adore, failure to give thanks. Incessant praise should rise up to God from the lips of this being drawn out of nothingness, and yet in the universal concert of adoration that rises from earth to heaven, man’s voice is often silent” (E.S. p. 672).

- Adoration, but also prayer (E.S. pp. 615-616) and the sense of the presence of God (E.S. pp. 291-192, 627-628).

“It is through prayer at the foot of the Cross that we shall learn how Jesus Christ brought forth souls, and how we in our turn must bring them forth: not that we have the power that emanated from him but because he will communicate it to us if we ask him to.” (E.S. p. 615).

The temples of the Spirit

The experience of the Trinity also makes known the Spirit who is the flame that glows in the silence of the soul (E.S. p. 293) and we must allow him to “operate within us” (E.S. p. 298) for we are his temples (E.S. p. 295) and we should have profound devotion to him (id). By making prayer an act of love (5th Circ, E.S. p. 220), “the Consoler” who is also “the Spirit of truth” inspires Christian liberty when he guides the disciples “to become in a certain way one Spirit with him” (E.S. pp. 222-223).

This perspective appears in the official writings of Father d’Alzon as well as in his letters. He constantly invites the Adorers of the Blessed Sacrament to be nourished by it. And above all, he lives by this spirit himself, he consecrates his life and his work to the extension of the “Kingdom of Our Lord, to the defense of God against his enemies (the “Revolution”), and to the unity of the Church, which can only be the work of the Spirit of love and truth. He sees in it the context and the inspiration of his religious community.

In the Rule of life

That is why we find in the Rule of life of 1983, if not a Trinitarian statement, at least many discreet allusions and suggestions:

- to “*the coming of the Kingdom of God*” (n° 1);
- to Jesus, “*witness to the Father’s love*” (n° 2); to the inseparability “*of God and man*” in their “*great works*” (n° 4) and in “*love*” (n° 7);
- to the praise of the Father (n° 46);
- to the “*trust*” that Christ invites us to place in the Father (n° 27);
- to the fidelity of Christ to the Father, the root and model of our own fidelity (n° 40);
- to our “*eagerness to do the will of the Father*” (n° 43).

Fewer and less notable, although very real, are the allusions to the “promptings of the Spirit” (n° 22) and to his action in vocations (n° 24).

Let us once more let Father d’Alzon speak for himself: “*Is it possible to do good to souls if we have not thoroughly chewed the food we want to give them , if we have not vivified our natural studies through supernatural study?*” (E.S. p. 857). An affirmation that applies in a special way to the Father, to the Son and to the Holy Spirit.

Fr. Georges TAVARD, a.a.

RECOMMENDED READING:

- 1) Passages indicated for the *Ecrits Spirituels* which are to be found mainly in the Directory, or the Meditations addressed to the Augustinians of the Assumption, or the Circulars and Instructions for the Third Order (IT).
- 2) Georges Tavard: *The weight of God*. (1982), *Le Père d'Alzon et la Croix de Jesus* (1992) and *La Trinité* (Cerf, 1991).

Reflection V

TWO PRIVILEGED LOVES: MARY AND THE CHURCH

“I need to love Jesus Christ very much” Father d’Alzon confided in 1854, *“and everything that Jesus Christ loves, solely because he loved them.”* (Letter of February 15, 1854 to Mother Marie-Eugénie of Jesus, E.S. p. 813)

The following year he defined the foundational concept of the feminine Third Order in this way: *“We love Our Lord very much, as well as his Church which is his Spouse”* This is one of the earliest expressions of what we have called the triple love.

This sums up the spirit of the Assumption, he would say in the Directory (1859): *“The spirit of the Assumption is summed up in these few words: love of Our Lord, of the Blessed Virgin, his Mother, and of the Church, his Spouse”*. Father d’Alzon comments: *“Mary and the Church are the two great loves of Jesus Christ on earth. It is for love of Jesus, toward whom all the powers of our being strain, that we must in our turn love what he himself loved most”*. (E.S. p. 21).

E. d’Alzon goes from Jesus to Mary and to the Church. His Marian devotion, his loving commitment to the Church stem from his truly incomparable love of Jesus Christ. Everything emanates from Jesus and must return to him. This preeminence of Jesus is so deliberate for Father d’Alzon that Mother Marie-Eugénie of Jesus is surprised to see it so sparsely affirmed in the rough draft of the first Constitutions.

“...this unique character of the Assumption that consists in finding everything in Jesus Christ is not emphasized... That does not have the stamp of what you used to tell me about the work. You used to tell me that Our Lord would be your philosophy, your mysticism, your passion” (Letter 475).

MARY

Love of the Mother of God was very pronounced at the start, and clearly affirmed when a high school dedicated to Our Lady of the Assumption was purchased, and it grew through the years: references to Mary become more numerous and devotion to her more explicit.

Tenderness and Trust

From that time on, his intimate notes and disclosures manifest growing tenderness and trust toward Mary.

“It seems to me that my devotion to the Blessed Virgin is growing every day.”

“I would never have believed I could love the Blessed Virgin so much.”

“I really feel I am placing myself like a child in her arms.”

“If I dared I would affirm that there is an intimacy between us.”

“The older I get the more I say my Rosary. There are days when I say four, five, six. The Rosary contains all the virtues of a religious soul.” (Letters of 1845, 1852, Retreat in 1860).

Besides, he readily places his great commitments under her patronage. It is to the Consolata of Turin that in 1844 he makes the vow to renounce any idea of ecclesiastical dignities, and it is at Our Lady of Victories in Paris that the following year he pronounces his private vows of religion. In 1846, the feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin, he vows to dedicate himself to the perfection of Blessed Marie-Eugénie of Jesus, and it is on the feast of the Annunciation that he renews this vow in 1854.

The great moments

The “great encounters of Father d’Alzon with Mary” are the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption, the Annunciation and the Cross.

The sanctuary where the Son of God was to become incarnate had to be immaculate and this body that sin had never grazed was certain to receive a triumphal welcome in heaven. But between this Immaculate Conception and this triumphant Assumption, Mary was called on to formulate at the Assumption the fiat to which we owe our salvation and, during her entire life and especially on Calvary she united her suffering through her Compassion to the redemptive Passion of her Son.

The account of the Annunciation points to a major theme of d’Alzon’s spirituality, the incarnation of Jesus Christ in the religious soul. Allowing Jesus to be formed in our soul as he was formed in Mary’s womb must be

the central concern of every moment of those of us who want to live according to the spirit of the Assumption.

The theme of the Compassion of the Mother of God is especially dear to Father d'Alzon. Several of his retreat instructions, sermons, meditations, were devoted to it. To accept the sufferings that come our way, to practice voluntary sacrifice, to want even to be a victim in union with Jesus are ideas that constantly recur in Father d'Alzon's letters of spiritual direction. Now, on this painful journey, is there a more perfect model than Mary, after Jesus?

My model and my mother

Mary, therefore, is my model and my mother. Every time Father d'Alzon expresses his thinking on the Virgin Mary he stresses these aspects.

Mary is our Mother. Since Mary adopted me at the foot of the Cross she is my Mother and I must have the most absolute trust and tender love for her. Our tenderness for the Virgin Mary, to which we are led by our love for her Son, knows no limits. We must entrust ourselves to her and await help and healing from her.

Mary is our model. Mary's love together with Jesus' love is "*the totality of the knowledge of the mystical life. The perfections of Jesus Christ, the virtues of Mary are like two volumes where we meditate on the holiness to which we are called*" (E.S. p. 141). The holiness to which we are called but also the holiness to which we must lead others, for our Marian devotion is eminently apostolic and, in the light of Mary's Compassion, we will understand the power of sacrifice when love is its origin (E.S. pp. 134-135).

So Mary will lead us to Jesus by teaching us to imitate him. Mary is the model of all the virtues. In the last of his meditations for the Month of Mary in 1874, Father d'Alzon invites us especially to imitate her humility, her purity, her faith, her recollection, her prayer, her zeal for her neighbor and her love for God, Jesus Christ and the Church, the supreme work of the Son on earth, won by his blood.

THE CHURCH

Like Mary whose Fiat made possible the Incarnation of the Son of God and who through her Compassion became the Co-redemptrix, the Church is intimately united to the work of salvation.

“We love the Church because she holds all the treasures of the supernatural order which were entrusted to her by her Heavenly Spouse and which the Revolution hates. In her, we find the preaching of truth, the perfect law, and the seed of all virtue. In her, we find the true Kingdom of God on earth, the assembly of saints and disciples of Jesus Christ. In her, we contemplate stability in the midst of societies which are crumbling. Because of her, we have the divine hope of a happiness unattainable by man alone. Because of her, we experience the strength to fly from this earthly exile toward Heaven, our eternal and glorious home. But all this is beyond nature. All this belongs to the divine order, to which we are initiated by Christ only through His Church. It is for this reason that our love for the Church is, above all, supernatural” (E.S. p. 137)

God’s dwelling

The Church is the great family of those who are saved, the tabernacle of God among men, the Body of Jesus Christ which has become mystically incarnated in her, his spotless Spouse (E.S. pp. 135-136). It is through her that we were born in the waters of Baptism into the very life of God which Jesus Christ nurtures in us through the sacraments which the Church administers. Since the Church has been given the deposit of faith, it is her duty to teach and enlighten our minds. She is the citadel of truth. We should therefore love her in all her members, for the love of Jesus, as the birthplace of our souls and as our Mother, we must love her with total commitment (E.S. pp. 36-39).

We must love the Church in all her members, and first of all in our neighbor. We must therefore dedicate ourselves to the salvation of the souls that must be dear to us in the Heart of Jesus Christ (E.S. pp. 78-81). Besides, to wrong our brothers and sisters is to attack members of the Mystical Body of which Christ is the head, it is to affront Jesus Christ himself.

Fidelity to the Holy See

We must also love Christ in those to whom Christ has entrusted his visible Church: the ecclesiastical hierarchy and first of all its head, the successor of Peter. Our love for the Church will thus find expression in an inviolable love for the Holy See, in a *“limitless submission to the teaching of the Church, but also to the spirit of this teaching, in our faithful obedience to the Supreme Pontiff whom we are to follow eagerly in all his expressed*

intentions.” (E.S. p. 652). There are many examples of this devotion to the Holy See that has sometimes been condemned as fanaticism in the life of Father d’Alzon. In fact, Father Vailhé has devoted a whole chapter of his biography to Father d’Alzon’s “Love of Rome and of the Friends of Rome”.

Father d’Alzon’s devoted commitment to the Pope is motivated by his love for the unity of the Church of which the Pope, in his eyes, is at once the symbol and the guarantor. Besides, in the area of faith, what better guarantee can we yearn for than Papal infallibility?

This love for the unity of the Church was already included in his draft of the Constitutions (1849-1850). It is presented as a means of making faith triumph within us and around us, whereas the efforts to destroy schism and heresy appear among the means of extending the reign of Our Lord (E.S. pp. 647 and 649). Is there any need to remind ourselves that it is through love of the unity of the Church and in response to a desire expressed by Pius IX that Father d’Alzon launched his sons on the roads to the East?

Totally dedicated to the Church

Prayer for the Pope, for the Church, her needs, her triumph will then be the constant concern of the Assumptionist religious (E.S. p. 51). Prayer and action: “*The Kingdom of souls whose supreme monarch is Jesus Christ and the Church, his Spouse, his Mystical Body. Love for the Church, the defense of her rights, the study of her teachings, the holiness of her members, the extension of her boundaries, that is our goal, because when I consecrate myself to the Church I consecrate myself to the supreme work of Jesus Christ*” (cf. E.S. p. 622).

“O my God, grant that I may realize this plan. Grant that I may know you through Jesus Christ, that I may serve you through the grace of Jesus Christ, that I may love you eternally in the love of Jesus Christ, through whom alone I can go to you.”

Fr. Désiré DERAEDT, a.a.

RECOMMENDED READING:

- Closing address to the Chapter of 1868, F.D. pp. 81-83.

- “Mois de Marie” of 1874, presented by Father d’Alzon as the commentary on our devotion to the Virgin Mary, in “Meditations on religious perfection”, Paris, 1925-1926, Vol. I, Cf. especially pp. 343-344; 354-357; 479-483; 445-450; 483-489.
- On the Compassion of Mary: a sermon (1871) and a meditation (1874), E.S. pp. 1009-1024.
- Directory, Part One, Ch. 6.
- Third Letter to the Master of Novices, F.D. pp. 107.
- Closing Address to the General Chapter of 1873, F.D. pp. 139.
- L’Eglise dans “Les Sources de la théologie mystique”. E.S. pp. 860-864.

Reflection VI

BUT ONE HEART INTENT ON GOD: A FAITH COMMUNITY

“Assumptionists, we are religious who live in apostolic community” for the sake *“of the coming of the Reign of God within us and around us”* (R.L. n° 1). Jesus Christ is therefore *“at the center of our life; it is he who gathers us together”* (R.L. n° 2, 3). Jesus Christ, the wellspring of our unity, *“we commit ourselves to follow him in faith, hope and love”* (R.L. n° 2), *“living in community according to the Rule and the spirit of Saint Augustine, in view of the Kingdom”* (R.L. n° 6). Our common life is one of the signs of this *“coming of the Reign of Jesus Christ for us and for our neighbor”* (R.L. n° 6). In a few sentences our Rule of Life gives us the essentials of Father d’Alzon’s thinking on this gathering of believers living by the very life of God which is the Assumptionist community.

Let us not look to E. d’Alzon for an outline of the present-day religious community. Habitat, forms of life, interpersonal relations, understanding of the community as such have gone through great changes in more than a century. Being a man of his time, Father d’Alzon did not linger, at least in his directives, on the relations, conflicts, and inevitable difficulties of any human group, even one gathered together by and for Jesus Christ. As a good disciple of Saint Paul and Saint Augustine, he certainly did not neglect human relations and even gave some judicious advice relating to them:

“Everyone should therefore strive to have for one another a charity filled with tenderness, esteem, respect, seriousness; each one of us should see in the members of our little Society the living images of Jesus Christ, the temples of the Holy Spirit, the children of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of us all.”

“They should avoid any unfitting familiarity, any special personal affection which is the bane of communities, as well as any antipathy that might tend to loosen the bonds of a holy affection, all offensive words, all relations that could lead to scandalous talk” (E.S. p. 70)

To see one’s brothers as living images of Jesus Christ, temples of the Holy Spirit: that is what is most important for E. d’Alzon the Founder. He binds the community to God through the theological virtues and a Trinitarian perspective. He goes straight to the heart of the mystery, relegating to the

background in his explanations the more prosaic aspects, to which he is however very attentive in everyday life.

FAITH, HOPE, LOVE

“By Faith, we learn what God is and what we owe Him; by hope we reach out to Him as the source of all riches and perfection, the infinite beauty, the splendor of eternal glory, the author of all love and joy, the goal of all our efforts” (Directory p. 39).

“God is love, and whoever dwells in love dwells in God, and God in him. That is my whole life: to dwell in God through love” (E.S. p. 68).

Under the heading “Goal and Spirit of the Order”, the Constitutions of 1855 speak immediately and at some length about faith, hope and love as the means of promoting the Reign of Jesus Christ. The entire life of the Assumptionist in its various aspects is profoundly marked by this theological imprint which is stressed so much in the Directory. Three traits are especially clear:

1. The three virtues are interdependent, so closely interrelated that the boundaries of each one are not well defined. While the place of honor belongs to charity, faith is also highly valued. But in the knowledge that leads to love, faith is indeed truly faith-commitment to the Truth but also faith-trust, faith-surrender, faith-love.
2. God-Trinity gives himself to us through faith, hope and love to the point of subsisting within us, of being one with us: *“What is the object of my faith? Is it not divine truth ? And is it not through the light of Jesus Christ, the eternal Word, infinite Truth that I believe? I draw Jesus Christ into my heart through faith; through faith he lives in me...”* (E.S. p. 45). Interior self-stripping allows God to penetrate more deeply into me because it gives him free access.
3. The virtues relating to faith are humility, *“the most indispensable of all virtues for the religious of the Assumption”*, and obedience; the virtues relating to hope are evangelical poverty and the spirit of prayer. These spiritual attitudes flow normally from the theological virtues but their content is, as it were, remodeled in this light which gives it a special savor.

For Father d'Alzon what mattered first and foremost was to root the personal and community life of the religious at the needed depth. In his

view, the very structure of the religious life is theological. Can we go even farther and say that community life is the icon of the Trinity? It would seem we do not find any affirmation as explicit as that. Besides, would that have been possible in his time? Yet we are permitted to relate different scattered elements in a more systematic construction whose d'Alzonian inspiration is undeniable. It takes existing materials and adjusts them into a coherent whole, which now explicitly make of community life a manifestation of the life of the Trinity.

THE IMAGE OF THE TRINITY

Faith, hope, love: that is the heart of both our personal and our community life. This threefold gift, this grace given in three ways, is the presence within us of the One God, Father, Son and Spirit. This gift refashions in each one of us and in all of us together the image of the Trinity by purifying our memory, our intellect and our love, the discrete mark within us of God-Trinity.

This theological life which is faith, hope and love recreates us in the image of God...

- It makes us men of communion, constituted in a single Body; having but one heart and one soul;
- It gives obedience an unsuspected amplitude in the measure in which our submission to God participates in that of the Son to the Father within the very bosom of the Trinity. *“This virtue of obedience, under a vow which is the bond of the religious life, consummates the sacrifice of the whole being of the religious, and that is why he must seek out its origin in the very bosom of the adorable Trinity and in the eternal obedience of God the Son, the Word incarnate, to the will of God the Father”*. So writes Father d'Alzon (E.S. p. 52).

Within us, as in Mary, under the action of the Spirit who is love, faith-obedience which is recognition of the Father, makes us adhere through hope to the Word-made-flesh.

The imprint of the Trinity within the community

Seen in this Trinitarian background, several of Father d'Alzon's great intuitions assume their full importance, allowing us to see the community as

the conjoined action of the Father, the Son and the Spirit who give themselves in many ways.

- In Scripture, the Eucharist, the Church, these three realities so dear to Father d'Alzon, it is always Christ who gives himself to us to make us commune with him. Through the body of the Scriptures he makes one single soul of us through faith; his Eucharistic body transforms us into a single Body through hope; in his ecclesial body we become one Heart through love.
- The Trinity appears to us as an Ocean of Power-Life, of Wisdom-Truth, of Charity-Love. The appropriate attitude on the part of the creatures that we are is adoration, which is the recognition of the Absoluteness of God and of his Plenitude as the “alpha and omega”. Adoration is also the recognition of our “nothingness”, that is to say, of our fundamental incapacity and our absolute dependence. This adoration creates a space where God can deploy his Kingdom within us.
- The Eucharist is the center of the communitarian life, for through the Eucharist we commune with the Father, the Son and the Spirit. It unites us to the permanent offering of the Son to his Father, surrendering himself for his brothers. In the Eucharist our adoration and the gift of our whole being are united to Christ for the salvation of the world. The Spirit makes this twofold attitude grow within us.

The Passion and death of Jesus on the Cross are the final stage of the humiliation begun at the Incarnation. The kenosis of the Son is inseparable from the salvation of humanity. E. d'Alzon speaks from experience when he invites his sons to have a tender and passionate love for the Crucified. Through the mystery of his death and Resurrection the Crucified conforms each of us to himself and gives our communities a single heart and soul.

THE TRINITARIAN FOUNDATION OF OUR FAMILY TRAITS

Boldness, forthrightness, generosity: these qualities that are highly prized at the Assumption find their ultimate foundation in the Trinity. Father d'Alzon did not go as far as that, but we can point to some approaches to this view.

1. God is the Plenitude of Love freely offered and given. So gratuitousness and gratitude come from him, as does true liberty, the condition for apostolic initiative, creativity and boldness.

2. We live the Universal Truth which is proposed in Jesus Christ by the Church and affirm it forthrightly, sincerely and simply, without any reservations.

3. The infinite Love that the Holy Spirit pours into our hearts inspires cordiality, mercy, mutual forgiveness, tenderness exceeding our limitations and divisions (R.L. n° 8), boldness, disinterested generosity, the passion for the Kingdom. By uniting us to his humiliation, his Kenosis, Christ leads us to his most destitute brothers, to the poorest of the poor, to the most severely wounded, without forgetting our sick and aged brothers in our communities.

4. We express the unity within the distinction between the Father, the Son and the Spirit by our will to live in communion and to seek an explicit ecumenism which rejects exclusions, prejudices, excesses and narrow-mindedness, and which has recourse to dialogue, to a favorable *a priori*, to patience, and to selflessness.

“He who sees me sees the Father”. God assumed a human face in Jesus Christ. To live in God and like God, we must constantly come back to the actions and words of the man Jesus. Is he not Truth, Love, Unity?

“You are a living stone, but the One who is the living model of all beings, the Work of God, became man and came to share in your very life. And just as the sculptor who cuts stone in order to decorate a building constantly looks at the model that has been given him, so you, too, must always keep your eyes on this divine model toward whom everything must be directed....” (E.S. p. 353)

Frs. Enrique GOIBURU and Claude MARÉCHAL, a.a.

RECOMMENDED READING:

- Directory. Parts I and II, E.S. pp. 20-31; pp. 45-71.
- The formation of Christ in our souls: E.S. pp. 879-891; 906-918.

Reflection VII

THE PASSION FOR THE KINGDOM OF GOD IN TODAY'S WORLD

“Assumptionists, we are religious who live in apostolic community. Faithful to our Founder, Fr. d’Alzon, we choose as our prime objective to work, out of love for Jesus Christ, for the coming of the Reign of God in ourselves and around us.” (R.L. n° 1).

The way the Rule of Life presents the Assumption from the start requires us to speak immediately of the Kingdom of God and the love of Christ, so true is it that *“Jesus Christ is at the center of our life”* (R.L. n° 2) and that *“The Assumptionist community exists for the coming of the Kingdom”* (R.L. n° 4).

The Rule of Life is the faithful echo of d’Alzon’s closing address to the General Chapter of 1868 (F.D. pp. 75-94) which is at once the identification card of the Assumption and the charter of its apostolate.

“Our spiritual life, our religious substance, our raison d’être as Augustinians of the Assumption, is to be found in our motto: “Thy Kingdom Come”. The coming of the Reign of God in our souls, by the practice of Christian virtues and of the Evangelical Counsels in keeping with our vocation; the coming of the Reign of God in the world by the fight against Satan and the conquest of the souls ransomed by Our Lord and yet still buried in the depths of error and sin. What could be more simple! What could be more ordinary than this form of the love of God!”

Within us and around us

The coming of the Kingdom of God was always a primary concern for Father d’Alzon. As a young priest he already thought about the mission of the priest: *“It is to work with all one’s strength for the establishment of the reign of Christ.”* (D.A. II, p. 242). As early as 1832, he wanted *“to defend religion at the moment it was being most fiercely attacked”* (F.S. p. 750). If he became a priest, he wrote in 1835, it was *“only on condition that I come down from the altar to mingle with society”* and to exercise whatever meager influence he could (E.S. p. 768).

The Kingdom of God must come simultaneously in our souls and in the world, in other words, within us and around us. The coming of the Kingdom of God has two aspects, but each must be joined to the other. Personal sanctification and evangelization are the two inseparable forms of one and the same event, so much so that the Assumptionist works to attain his perfection by spreading the reign of Jesus Christ, as the Preamble of the 1855 Constitutions affirms: *“The purpose of our little Association is to work to attain our perfection by spreading the reign of Jesus Christ in souls; that is why our motto is to be found in the Lord’s Prayer: “Adveniat Regnum tuum.”*

FIRST OF ALL, WITHIN US

“The Kingdom of God is within you” (Lk. 17:21). Father d’Alzon likes to rely on this affirmation. *“Before working to make Jesus Christ reign over others, do make him reign over you. Realize that together with the external kingdom, there is the interior kingdom”* (E.S. p. 663). That is where we must begin: *“He must reign over us before we can make him reign over others, he must really be our King”* (Ibid.)

But what is this Kingdom of God within us? Father d’Alzon asks this question in one of the four Letters to the Master of Novices that comment the instruction of 1868. He answers: *“It is the state of intimate communication with God that we must attain, in accordance with the nature of God and with our own nature.”* Or again: *“The Kingdom of God within us is the most absolute dependence of our being and all our faculties on the intimate action of God. God is the master, we are the subjects”* (F.D. pp. 99-101). As the Creator and Sovereign, God has the right to our submission as creatures and to our free adoration and total receptiveness to his action (F.D. p. 102).

A Kingdom without division

The Incarnation, the formation of Christ in our souls, in relation to the Incarnation of Jesus in Mary, one of Father d’Alzon’s major themes, is the coming of the Kingdom of God within us.

“To conceive Jesus Christ, to give birth to him through the Holy Spirit under the protection of the Father, this is what is most admirable in Mary!” Does she not give birth to the One who will reign forever over the entire world! *“Now, we can make Jesus Christ reign **within us and around us***

*through the power of the Father: **within** us when we give him absolute dominion over our faculties, our intellect, our will, our heart, our senses; the absolute reign of Jesus Christ within us is holiness; we can make Jesus Christ reign **around us** through our zeal to make him known, and that is the apostolate."*

"Now, how will all this be accomplished? Through a relationship with the Blessed Trinity similar to Mary's. Jesus Christ will be formed in me through faith through the intervention of the Holy Spirit and of the Most High (...). I must allow the Blessed Trinity to act within me in order there to form the Kingdom of Jesus Christ" (E.S. p. 909).

The Kingdom of God within us is the combined work of the Father, the Son and the Spirit. Now, the reign of God around us also relates to the Trinity: *"The reign of God the Father in the universe, the reign of God the Son in the Church, the reign of God the Holy Spirit in souls. This, it seems to me, must be the fundamental goal of the Assumption family" (E.S. p. 162)*

Father d'Alzon's own experience

Father d'Alzon practiced what he asked of his sons. When he speaks of the Kingdom of God within us, he refers to his own experience, to his own spiritual journey.

"It seems to me that in spite of numberless infidelities on my part, Our Lord is taking more complete possession of me every day. It is a combination of gravity, seriousness, simplicity, dryness, painful affection, surrender, fear, renewal of the spirit of faith, but above all of the need to love Jesus Christ very much and to love everything that Jesus Christ loves solely because he himself loved". (E.S. p. 813); Cf. also p. 841.

Our Rule of Life stresses this action of God within us (R.L. n° 44, 46), this desire of total self-giving in response to his call (R.L. n° 24, 33, 40, 41, 51), this will to be dispossessed of self and to be ready to serve (R.L. n° 18, 20, 27, 31, 35, 39, 41, 43).

Our common life, lived in relation to Jesus Christ and to his Gospel, and our vows call to mind the ultimate meaning of human realities and are the sign of the Kingdom already here and still to be awaited (R.L. n° 25, 26, 32, 33, 34, 38, 40, 43).

AROUND US

Your Kingdom come: how can such a motto characterize a religious family? *“Why claim as special to us that which is the legacy of all?”* (F.D. p. 79). Because it is normal for a Congregation to consecrate all of its energy to the Kingdom of God at the very moment God and Jesus Christ are publicly rejected and scoffed at. God calls the Assumption into being to counteract the rejection of God by mobilizing it totally in the service of the great Cause of the Kingdom (E.S. p. 660). The Assumption is willed by God to oppose the spirit of the Revolution.

Defending God who is scoffed at

The Revolution was the great enemy which, along with others, Father d'Alzon ferreted out everywhere and relentlessly pursued. Because it set itself up against God, rejected Jesus Christ, challenged the Church which it wanted to supplant and annihilate. The confrontation between the Revolution and the Church was a new episode in the permanent rebellion of Satan against God. The Assumption, being the champion of the rights of the Sovereign God, was therefore in total opposition to the Revolution as the symbol of a Godless world. The very reason for the Assumption's being was to constitute an efficacious barrier to this rejection of God, the cause of all evils.

“Today we are dealing with the Revolution. God is driven out of governments, society, family life and morality by Satan, the head of the Revolution. That is more obvious every day”. Indeed, we are heading for catastrophe “unless God in his mercy impresses upon the hearts and minds of the guilty a spirit of repentance and conversion.” “From this point of view, if it is true that God calls us as we believe it is, our vocation is admirable both by its timeliness and by the greatness of its goal” (F.D. p. 104)

The Assumption, born at the dawn of the modern age, came to grips from the start with the indifference and atheism that it was combating. For the Revolution, in Father d'Alzon's eyes, was not the historical event that promoted democracy and the emancipation of peoples. For him the Revolution was synonymous with the liberal spirit, the philosophy of the Enlightenment in which reason supplants Revelation, in which the State claims to be secular and promotes freedom of conscience. In his view, therefore, it drives God out, since for him it no longer refers to God or reserves any room for God in public institutions. The Revolution, as

d'Alzon understood it, was the symbol of the self-sufficiency of man who divinizes himself by thinking of himself as the ultimate norm of all things. This is something that he could not accept as a believer and as the passionate defender of the Kingdom of God.

Restoring the Honor of God

For the Kingdom of God was the great passion of Father d'Alzon who lived only for Jesus Christ. Until his death, this tireless and bold fighter, was overflowing with plans and initiatives. But the Assumption was profoundly marked by the time and the country in which it was born. It was because of his opposition to the rejection of God, of Jesus Christ and of the Church that he insisted so much on the rights of the Sovereign God, commitment to Jesus Christ, love of the Church. Their rejection redoubled his commitment to them. (E.S. pp. 133, 137).

Father d'Alzon had a deep insight into his own time and fiercely denounced its immorality, its cupidity, its insensitivity to the sufferings of the workers (E.S. pp. 166, 458-459). He saw in the rejection of God the root of all social evils, and hence saw cleaving to God and the acknowledgment of his rights as the only possible remedy.

The Cause of God was the only one that d'Alzon defended. He was not wedded to the past. He was much too clear-sighted not to discern the transformations taking place.

The triumph of democracy, in full swing, was in his eyes inevitable (E.S. pp. 143, 163). He was not frightened by this. How could democracy be baptized so that it cease attacking God and the Church and best serve the interests of the people: this was his great concern. (E.S. p. 142)

The greatest of causes

The Kingdom of God embraces the entire history of humankind and concerns the whole world. The ambition of d'Alzon and of the Assumption after him is in accord with this great plan. The humble servant of the Kingdom in the service of this great Cause must not lose sight of the objective in its full scope, or overplay the inevitable quarrels among individuals (E.S. p. 140), or above all attribute importance to questions of vanity (E.S. pp. 138-139). The Kingdom of God demands that the Assumption be mobilized for the great Cause of God and of the Truth that is

Jesus Christ in order to proclaim and manifest them for the regeneration of society, by banishing fear and half-measures.

“The Kingdom of Jesus Christ is the greatest of causes. Alas! How many obstacles stand in its way: prudence, sloth, fatigue, boredom, yours as well as that of the others!”

“(…) Minds and hearts must be opened to the great cause of God, new horizons must be revealed to the short-sighted, great fires must be kindled for those who ask only for foot-warmers and who are afraid they will catch cold if they are given too much heat. Fortunate are those superiors who embrace the whole world in their ambition because they are eager to make Jesus Christ reign everywhere!” (E.S. p. 693)

According to the 3rd Letter to the Novitiate in 1868, the reign that we are to spread is the reign of the Three Persons of the Trinity in opposition to the three great errors of modern times (F.D. p. 107). The proclamation of the rights of God is the affirmation of the rule of God the Father which is rejected. The defense of revealed truth, the worship of the Eucharist, dedication to the Holy See are three ways of spreading the contested reign of the Son. To labor for the reign of the Holy Spirit, the source of all holiness, of which the Virgin Mary is the most perfect human model, passes through the proclamation of God's plan in Jesus Christ and through imitation of the Mother of God. To relate the Reign of God to the Father, the Son and the Spirit as it affects the great needs of the time: Father d'Alzon's intention is clear, even if the systematization goes too far.

By inviting us to be men of faith and men of our time (R.L. n° 2) and *“to make the great causes of God and man our very own, to go wherever God is threatened in man and man threatened as the image of God”* (R.L. n° 4), our Rule of Life corresponds very well with Father d'Alzon's broad horizons. Our religious profession, our vows relate to the concrete world in which we live (R.L. n° 23, 26, 39). *“Recognizing the perfect man in Jesus Christ, finding in God our strongest reason for living and acting”*, we are at the service of *“his plan to be present to men and to be in communion with them since He has personally called us to accomplish it in us and through us”* (R.L. n° 23).

Conceiving works that conform to this Great plan

To re-Christianize minds and hearts in order to reconstitute a society that conforms to God's plan revealed in Jesus Christ, is indeed Father d'Alzon's

ambition. But how? Through preaching, education, teaching, but also “*all sorts of works through which the masses can be lifted up, instructed, taught morality, through which democracy can be made Christian*”. This is Father d’Alzon’s answer in 1868. The criteria for choices are very broad! Should we be surprised that the activities to which the Assumption was to devote itself, activities enumerated in four documents separated in time, do not coincide (E.S. pp. 655-656; 139-145; 161-162; 179-186). The basic ideas are indeed the same, but the concrete consequences that flow from them vary according to the needs of the moment and the comprehension Father d’Alzon has of them. He does not want truth to be frozen in the past. For E. d’Alzon, ultra-conservatism in the apostolate is impossible. Concerned first of all with teaching, then impassioned for the reunification of Christians around the Pope and the reconciliation of the East and the West, he would be haunted toward the end of his life by Russia (E.S. p. 186) and the re-Christianization of the working classes by social works, the press, the public affirmation of God, vocations of humble origin.

Father d’Alzon wanted to return to Christ a society that was adrift and turning away from him. And he chose the means to do this. All programs that led more directly toward this goal appeared desirable to him. He did not change his perspective or his social perception, for his criteria remain the same, essentially religious. But he broadened his horizons remarkably. With his keenly active mind, he spotted the needs, conceived new solutions to respond to them, broadened his field of action more and more. Unable to be satisfied with what was already accomplished, he bubbled over with initiatives that he brought to maturity with others.

The following generations would certainly consolidate certain works born above all of Father d’Alzon’s final intuitions, which were the most fruitful: Schools, the Eastern Mission, the Press, Pilgrimages, Vocations, Higher Education and Scientific Institutes, distant Missions (E.S. p. 144). They truly constitute our apostolic patrimony. But they are still only historical translations of our Founder’s fundamental intent.

This is truly the option of our Rule of Life. While it gives a privileged place to five orientations (R.L. n° 20), it is simply noting the varied forms of our apostolate over the years (R.L. n° 18) in order to call to mind the twofold need of being ready to serve and to be inventive, two virtues very dear to Fr. d’Alzon (E.S. pp. 137-140; 710) which the Rule of Life frequently stresses (R.L. n° 4, 17, 20).

To evangelize the poor

Both the broadening of the apostolate and the attainment of spirituality were dear to Father d'Alzon throughout his life, and they were given equal attention by him. This twofold experience was to open him more, as he grew older, to the importance that God sees in the lowly and the humble, in the poor. *"It is through the evangelization of the poor that the evangelization of the world began. Let us be faithful to our vocation in this respect"* (E.S. pp. 163; cf. also : 175; 1191-1192). The Rule of Life follows the same line of thought (R.L. n° 26, 30, 31).

Here are two final citations both borrowed from the Instruction of 1868:

"From our motto "Thy Kingdom Come," it follows evidently that we are an apostolic institute. The zeal that we should have for God's rights and the salvation of souls is the essential embodiment of our charity. Abnegation and the forgetting of self are above all imposed upon us. We put to good use anything that comes our way, "as long as Christ is announced."(F.D. p. 87.).

"Without useless regret for the past, without too deceiving a hope concerning the future, let us keep on with our work as God proposes. (...) I am neither excessively sad nor overly hopeful. The essential is to be confident in Jesus Christ, in Mary, in the Church, and to keep working. All the rest doesn't matter." (F.D. p. 90).

Frs. Lucien GUISSARD and Claude MARÉCHAL, a.a.

RECOMMENDED READING:

- Closing Instructions of the General Chapters of 1868 and 1873 and four Letters to the Master of Novices (1868-1869), (F.D. pp. 75-138).
- The coming of the Reign of Our Lord Jesus Christ, E.S. pp. 658-672.
- The incarnation of Jesus Christ in the religious soul, E.S. pp. 906-913.
- 18th Meditation, E.S. pp. 464-471.

- Jean-Marie Mayeur: “*Les idées politiques du P. d’Alzon*”, in “*E. d’Alzon dans la société et l’Eglise du XIXe siècle*”, Paris, 1980, pp. 144-165.

Reflection VIII

A SPECIAL STYLE OF APOSTOLIC LIFE

Our Directory begins with these words: *“Christ is my life”*. It closes by saying: *“I cannot love Jesus Christ without wanting everyone to love him, and that is the apostolic character of my life”*.

APOSTLES

Father d’Alzon has bequeathed to us this marvelous unified life that was his own. Why an apostle? Because he was possessed by the love of Christ and wanted to communicate his passion.

That is where we must begin, that is where we must return as soon as we speak of the apostolate in our spiritual family. Evangelization, the name now given the apostolate, is a way of saying and proving that the name of happiness is Jesus Christ.

Our Congregational documents will tirelessly call to mind this conviction of Father d’Alzon: the love of Christ commands everything, and hence it commands the apostolate.

With his delight in asking challenging questions, as a man who is not ready to believe everything he hears, Father d’Alzon makes us verify the reality of our primordial love: *“All the affections of my heart, all the powers of my being must strain toward him. Is he my everything? Is my heart entirely free?”* (E.S. p. 20). If the answer is “Yes” we can launch out into the open sea.

No amateur apostles

But without this anchor and this fire we are in danger of the worst: being amateur apostles. There is, if I dare say so, a professionalism of the apostolate, and by this I mean taking the apostolate seriously, practicing it competently, having the stamina to overcome defeats and weariness. This serious approach stems from one source only: Jesus Christ, whom we love so much that we want everyone to love him. To attain this goal we are ready to learn what we must learn (the d’Alzonian obsession with study) and we

resolve to do what must be done, that is to say, the maximum. Father d'Alzon was never in any sense a minimalist.

That settles for us once and for all the ways of meting out contemplation and action. There has been no measuring, no balancing among priorities, no "or" but a solid "and" ever since the earliest days when Father d'Alzon taught us his powerful inclusion: we are both contemplative and active, the one never without the other even in the smallest details of our lives.

The Assumptionist apostle is an arrow shot from the bow of mental prayer. When he lags in his devotion ("*Isn't your devotion selfish?*" d'Alzon asks pitilessly) or when he drowns himself in action, he abandons the primary truth of the Assumptionist apostolate: to love Jesus Christ enough to go forth to make others love him without ever leaving him.

We could almost make a natural law of it: for Father d'Alzon, the power of the apostolate is equivalent to the vitality of our love for Christ. Claude Maréchal has chiseled a formula that joins the Chapter of 1987 forever to the mind of Fr. d'Alzon: "*We are mystics committed to action*"

AMONG OTHERS

The beginning of our Rule of Life gives us a second clarification: "*We are religious living in apostolic community.*"

This notion of an apostolic community does not come to us from Father d'Alzon. Here we see that fidelity to our Founder must unassumingly take a creative form. Father d'Alzon was so completely a man of his time that he certainly wanted us to be men of our community-oriented time.

To unite our efforts

We read in our first Constitutions that before accepting a postulant one must see "*if community life is not too burdensome for him*". And "*the novices shall be trained in community living, that is to say, in getting along with various personalities*". Our current texts give warmer praise to the community as the center of love where the laborers of the Kingdom are molded.

Unfortunately, superiors cannot help noting the distance between lyrical praise of community life and the day-to-day reality of living this life.

Speaking of apostolic initiatives, Claude Maréchal regrets that they are too individualistic: *“the innovators do not always accept the communities’ right to oversee. In return, certain communities marginalize the restless religious who challenges their tranquility”* (Letter n° 6 p. 41).

To be an apostle “among others” obviously goes beyond the boundaries of the community. But in the measure that one has learned to bear with one another in community and above all to exchange personal views and counsels (“cordial community relations and communication” has become one of the tribal passwords before becoming a reality), we can collaborate more easily with others in all areas of the apostolate.

In this domain Father d’Alzon has bequeathed to us a precious apostolic virtue that he never ceased teaching...and practicing: the revulsion against any jealous competition where there is question of working for the Kingdom. Living the life of a founder and of a vicar general at the same time demanded a royal selflessness, scrubbed of all egoism and pride.

He also planted us in an Augustinian movement that makes a common apostolate possible and fruitful: to remain always at the service of truth, unity and charity, one of the trilogies that constitute the Assumptionist personality.

Collaboration between religious and laity

Here Father d’Alzon is the fountainhead. From the start he sought to collaborate with the laity. We had reduced this collaboration little by little to friendship for benefactors or for persons who like to render us some service and to pray with us.

The present-day importance given to the laity makes an apostolate carried on without them increasingly unthinkable. This collaboration is now permanently based on the ecclesiology of Vatican II. Our Rule of Life tells us: *“We work for the building up of the Church through the formation of responsible lay persons”*.

Collaboration with the laity requires that we clearly understand the specificity of their vocation. They are not our auxiliaries, but laborers for the Kingdom who are called *“to penetrate and perfect the temporal order with the spirit of the Gospel”* (Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, n° 5).

We share “co-responsibility” with them, and this implies a mutual respect and the sense of our complementarity. These words are quickly said but they demand tact and a resounding “No!” to all touchiness on our part. Achieving or restoring fraternal communion deserves every possible sacrifice on all sides.

When we go forth to work with others, these words should echo in our hearts: be at peace in order to give peace.

ACCORDING TO OUR OWN RULES

In his famous Instruction of 1868, the charter of our apostolate, Father d'Alzon defined our spirit as being very simple: “*We are very simply Catholics*”. But he hastened to add: “*as completely Catholic as it is possible to be*”. This “*as it is possible to be*” which defines Father d'Alzon is the originality proposed for our apostolate: we must go to the utmost limits of the possible and of the impossible.

At the 1873 Chapter, Father d'Alzon was obliged to admit: “*we are only fifty*”, but then he stood tall and said: “*we must act like a thousand! What vast horizons are opening up before you!*” As long as we stand tall like that at the Assumption our apostolate will retain its mark of exploratory creativity.

Hervé Stephan opened the Chapter of 1987 by even calling our Father Saint Augustine to the rescue: “*You who say: That's enough! are lost*”. Well, I dare to say to you: “*Let us go still farther*”.

And beginning in his very first Letter, Claude Maréchal, in evoking the international extension of the Congregation, instinctively rediscovered the Alzonian tone: “*Yes, it is folly to imagine foundations when we are not equal to the task. But is it invigorating to cease imagining anything new?*”

In moments of doubt, a voice will always importune us, the voice of a Founder who was never discouraged by the most humble beginnings, never lacking in inventiveness. He vigorously decried what he called prudence in bedroom slippers: “*We claim we are prudent because we do not dare*”.

Openness to the poor

Another great lesson for us: sympathy for the humble. He loved his Oblates, unpolished girls from the Cévennes, and he wrote to their Superior: “*My*

weakness for them is indeed that humble spirit, better suited to reach a portion of the world that Our Lord loves in a very special way and for which it is most urgent to provide help”.

He accepted *Le Pèlerin* from the start, even when he considered it common, because he saw in it an effort to reach the general public. He went out to seek his vocations among the small peasants. In 1868 he turned his efforts squarely toward those whom he called “the poor” or “the masses”. We shall rediscover this impetus with two new accents.

First, a solidarity that leads to transforming action for the poor into action with the poor, going sometimes so far as to live their life in their own quarters.

The other accent is a greater concern to analyze conditions that breed poverty. The Chapter of 1987 discusses four aspects of such analysis:

1. *The reality of our information;* **2.** *The serious study of socioeconomic processes* (“serious” indicating the rejection once again of any amateurism in the apostolate); **3.** *Knowledge of the Church* (Encyclicals, the theology of liberation,...). But to study an Encyclical means going further than reading press releases or watching three minutes of television. A doctrinal apostolate demands that the price be paid for it; **4.** *Knowledge of the organizations that support the struggles of the poor and call for our possible participation in their work.*

Against the Revolution?

In the index to the *Ecrits spirituels* there are thirty references to the struggle against the “revolution”, including the terrible pages 136-137 and 1030-1031. What can we draw here for our apostolate? Something of great importance: we must roar as loudly as our Father every time we face a rejection of God and before men who are working to bring about this rejection. Our struggle against religious ignorance, indifference and unbelief cannot be calm if the suffering of Fr. d’Alzon still boils in our veins: “*They are driving the masses away from God!*”.

When the Rule of Life tells us that: “*Our Founder leads us wherever God is threatened in man*”, we discern the social dimension of our apostolate, the Alzonian logic of the Kingdom in us and around us: one heart is won for God; it in turn wins other hearts; and these hearts filled with God have an impact on the socio-political structures.

Free apostles

Our apostolate, whether it be doctrinal, social or ecumenical, in accordance with one of our beloved trilogies, demands great liberty of heart.

Liberty where money is concerned. Father d'Alzon saw poverty as a means of being a noble character, which was the supreme compliment he had to give: *"There is nothing so noble as a selfless character, no one is as independent as the person who knows how to want nothing"*.

In the line of liberty, the Rule of Life speaks of our poverty, noting that it places us *"on the side of the poor"*. Too many apostolic ventures are held back by the fear of lacking things we want, and this leaves us *"on our own side"*.

The second battle to maintain a free heart is prayer which liberates from all fear. Father d'Alzon experienced terrible moments: the sparsity of vocations, the harassment of financial questions, the illness that made it hard for him to think. He remained an indomitable apostle through his faith constantly recharged by prayer: *"O my God,...with your aid I run against an armed band, and by the help of my God I leap over a wall"* (Ps. 18:30)

This is perhaps the most typical image of the Assumptionist apostolate. Our earliest Fathers did extraordinary things, and we, too, shall do the same if we look at Jesus and not at the obstacles. For the man who looks at Jesus with the trust that Father d'Alzon bequeathed us, there are no walls, no barriers.

Fr. André Sève, a.a.

RECOMMENDED READING:

1. Fr. d'Alzon's teaching in the "Ecrits Spirituels."

- Chapter 11 of the Directory (78-81).
- The Instruction of 1868 (130-146. To be studied "in toto").
- The Second Letter to the Novitiate (155-159)
- 22th Meditation (Poverty and the apostolate pp. 499-502).
- The apostolate (pp. 692-697).

2. The First Constitutions of 1855.

- Chapter 11: on the vow to devote oneself to the salvation of souls.

3. The Rule of Life.

- Chapter III: Our life of apostolic service.

4. General Chapter of 1987.

- Report of Fr. Hervé Stephan. Part One, Chapter 3: The apostolic community.
- Official acts: Chapter 2, Our apostolic Style.

5. Letters of Claude Maréchal.

- Letter 1. Apostolic priorities (6-8).
- Letter 2. Evangelizing (10-18).
- Letter 3. How to witness to Jesus Christ (21-28).
- Letter 4. How to achieve an Apostolate of Communion? (20-28).
- Letter 5. For an ecumenical apostolate (20-23).
- Letter 6. We are free in order to be able to Liberate, the apostolate and money (20-21; 41-46).

6. Vatican II.

- Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity.
- This should be complemented by the Apostolic Exhortation, *Christifideles laici*, of December 30, 1988 by Pope John Paul II.

Reflection IX

LET CHRIST PRAY WITHIN US

The prayer of a worker for the Kingdom

Can we ask Fr. d'Alzon: "*teach us to pray*"? Did he only tell us to pray the way the Church prays? Our question would surprise him because he dealt with prayer on many occasions. He even uses the expression "the Assumptionist prayer" in a meditation for the Novices in 1875 (E.S. p. 615). If it is true that the Assumption has its "own particular perfection", that is to say, its own Christian way of life, it must have its own form of prayer as well as its own form of apostolic life. E. d'Alzon was convinced that he had founded as it were a "school of apostles". He spoke about it many times, especially in the great text of 1876 (E.S. pp. 692-697).

Mental prayer is not forgotten. "*What must it be at the Assumption?*" This question had been asked of him. He answers clearly in the General Chapter of 1873. He refuses to pour mental prayer into a mold. He imposes no single master, nor a single method. He refers to the great men of prayer: Augustine, Francis de Sales, John of the Cross... And yet he proposes no less than what he "*dares not call the spirit of our mental prayer*" (E.S. p. 217).

An original way to pray

Our prayer is not vague, undefined, without a distinctive mark of its own on the pretext that it is Catholic. As was already the case in 1868, we have trouble appropriating according to our own spirit that which is the common treasure of the Church. This is true of the apostolate as well as of prayer. Because we have not sufficiently studied Father d'Alzon's thinking on prayer we have often in our history ended up praying like Benedictines, Carmelites or others. Our Assumptionist vocation has a right to an Assumptionist prayer. The Novitiate is the first school of this prayer, but not the last. For our Founder, apprenticeship is the first of the objectives of the Novitiate. "*It would be very dangerous not to allow ourselves to be formed according to the principles that presided over the birth of our family... for if they are not applied we are nothing as a Congregation*" (Letter to the Novices in 1874; C.L. pp. 67 81).

A LOYAL WORKER FOR THE KINGDOM

Our spiritual life, our religious substance, the Assumption's reason for being is to be found in our motto ART, in the Kingdom to be accepted within us and to bring forth around us (E.S. p. 230). That is the beginning of the allocution of 1868, our great Foundational text. "*Above all, we will be apostles... You are workers of the Kingdom*", so wrote Father d'Alzon to the Novices that same year. Our prayer will therefore be the prayer of a worker for the Kingdom.

It is the apostolic prayer of a son of God called to the Kingdom and working to spread it among men, "*for it welcomes and celebrates God's action in the lives of men*", to use the terms of our Rule (R.L. n° 22). In this prayer, the worker for the Kingdom "*returns to the ever refreshing fountain of his apostolic action*", (R.L. n° 44) and "*finds constancy in faith and generosity in action*" (R.L. n° 46). Without the input of an authentic apostolic life Assumptionist prayer is empty of substance. And without the life-giving breath of this prayer, the worker for the Kingdom is committing himself to a merely human undertaking.

Two paths are clearly indicated for anyone who wants to be formed in the practice of such prayer.

Thanksgiving

It is bound up with one of our characteristics: selflessness. For this trait is the poverty of the religious: he is simply an envoy receiving everything from the One who sends him (E.S. p. 712). Selflessness also includes the chastity of the apostolic religious who refuses to monopolize people or to glory in his successes (E.S. pp. 157, 695). Only the selfless religious gives thanks. That is easily verified in our life.

Supplication

The worker for the Kingdom must be "*a man of great desires*" (E.S. p. 695). Since the Assumption exists only for the Kingdom, it makes the great Causes of God and of man its very own (R.L. n° 4). Now, these great desires "*are kindled only in prayer*". And they place the religious in contact with the tasks willed by God. It is therefore necessary to "*pray in order to conform with the immensity of the desires of God and of Christ*" (E.S. pp.

695-696). This is a second simple sign that is easy to read. Cf. E.S. pp. 62, 81, 624-626, 950...

CONTEMPLATION OF GOD, THE FOUNDATION-STONE.

“As Religious of the Assumption, we give ourselves to the pursuit of a life of prayer, in a habitual awareness of the presence of God.” (Directory, Chapter on prayer).

Was Father d’Alzon a contemplative? Yes, he was, as every man called and dedicated to the Kingdom must be. He was an apostolic contemplative. He calls us to be one like him; to live our life under the weight of God (E.S. p. 668). *“It is with zeal that we must walk before God, but it is with love and tenderness that we must work for our Father in his presence.”* (C.L: p. 35).

As a worker for the Kingdom, the Assumptionist is called to a prayer rooted in this contemplation of God. It is a question of coherence and truth, and more than that, of life or death. For he is aware that his being, his vocation, his mission belong to God. He has nothing of his own, he receives everything. (E.S. pp. 152-153). This is a very powerful conviction on E. d’Alzon’s part. According to him, the first right of God is to be known and honored for what He is.

According to Fr. Athanase Sage, E. d’Alzon had received the grace of emphasizing the apostolic aspect of all authentic contemplation (Un maître spirituel du XIXe siècle, pp. 57, 116, 203). *“Contemplation and action are united for us in one and the same goal: to serve the extension of the Reign of Jesus Christ”* (R.L. n° 54). The only explicit citation of our Founder in our Rule of life emphasizes this orientation. That indicates how important it is. The Chapter of our Rule on the apostolic life urgently invites us to this apostolic contemplation: *“to welcome and celebrate God’s action in the lives of men... forgiveness for our refusals to answer the promptings of the Spirit... to enkindle our Hope of becoming Christ’s witnesses until He comes.”* (R.L. n° 22)

THE WAY OF CHRIST

In its prayer the Assumption has only one path to God; Jesus Christ (E.S. p. 133). E. d’Alzon resolutely chose the God of Jesus Christ. *“He is our sole Mediator”* (R.L. n° 48).

Christ will therefore be Assumption's truth in prayer. This means that he must be studied in order to be known. It is thus that we avoid the excesses of a religiousness that is more sentimental than doctrinal and theological. "*Sloth is like a wall placed between Jesus Christ and ourselves*". The study of Jesus Christ is necessary to avoid "*falling into the vagueness of all sorts of sterile reveries*" (E.S. p. 321).

However, it is still more important to enter into Christ's prayer today, and let Christ pray within us. With Augustine we pray "*through, with and in Jesus Christ so that, forming one with him, it may be evident that his prayer is ours and ours will be heard because of him*" (E.S. p. 449). Christ prays through us. The Eucharist, the Gospel, the Cross are the three great portals through which he draws us to himself and unites us to himself in his prayer. This is especially true in the following instances:

- ***the celebration of the Eucharist***. It must be at the center of our prayer! So Father d'Alzon tells us. It is the affirmation that counts, and less the doctrine which bore the mark of the unduly narrow theology of the 19th century (E.S. pp. 448, 984 ff.). Cf. R.L. n° 2 and 47.
- ***the divine office***, our second great communitarian prayer. "*Have I sought to become one with Christ always living to make intercession for us?*" he asks. (E.S. p. 114)
- ***the adoration of the Blessed Sacrament***, which has lost favor today unfortunately in spite of our Rule which lists it among the elements of a religious personal prayer program (R.L. n° 54). It has become too disconnected from the Eucharist as the memorial and the bread of life for the Church, and has occasioned criticism on that score. Our Founder would certainly rejoice over the sound Eucharistic recentering of Vatican II and the richness of concelebrations. Would he renounce this silent personal prayer in the presence of the tabernacle? Most probably not.

For Father d'Alzon, as for the tradition of the entire Assumptionist family, it is the prayer of an apostolic man at the heart of his mission. It is the prayer of a man who returns home filled with memories of faces, joys and cries and who comes close to Christ to present them with him to the Father. It is an apostle's link to the great Eucharistic prayer (E.S. pp. 448 ff, 948 ff).

THE CHURCH AT PRAYER

“*The Assumptionist’s prayer is the prayer of the Church*”. So it is said. Has this become a trite and empty repetition? Actually, it is a very powerful affirmation.

1. *The Assumption accepts the prayer of the Church.* It follows the teachings of the Church, the Mother and Teacher of prayer. The Assumption receives with joy and fidelity from Christ the prayer that the Spirit inspires in the Church. “*Its prayer shall be the prayer of the Church*” (R.L. n° 3 and 47). This is a very significant statement.

2. *The Assumption accepts the prayers of the Church* as a priority and in preference to all other prayers in the same order in which the Church chooses them and loves them: the Eucharist, the Divine Office, and also Marian prayer. Like the Church, we love Christ and all that Christ loves and hence we love the Virgin Mary, his Mother. (E.S. p. 135)

In its prayer the Assumption chooses, to use a well-known image, to be in the nave, before the main altar, in preference to the side altars. That does not mean that prayers to the saints have been abandoned.

3. *The Assumption accepts the Church’s style of prayer.* It is neither elitist nor cerebral. Deeply committed to the truth, it remains simple, humble, as befits a true people of God. It has a poor man’s heart. Our prayer must be modeled on the prayer of the Church.

“I believe that in order to regain a little love and the springtime freshness of love, we must become somewhat like children with Our Lord. In general, we are too much like persons of distinction in our dealings with our God. A few acts of humility, simplicity and mortification would gladden our hearts and allow grace to fill them much more easily with loving tenderness.” (Letter to the Adorers dated June 21, 1857).

AS TRUE SONS OF THE ASSUMPTION

Day-in-day-out prayer is difficult, especially our personal prayer. That was already true during the lifetime of the Founder. “*You ask me: Are you [fond] of mental prayer?*” So wrote Fr. Picard to Fr. d’Alzon in 1875. “*It is undeniable that there is a lack among us. The principles are clear-cut. You can count on absolute dedication. But how few religious know how to pray!*” Prayer is difficult but necessary. (R.L. n° 44, 51).

Like E. d'Alzon, the Assumptionist must follow the teaching of Jesus on prayer ever more closely, for he is the true model of the apostolic man (E.S. p. 615). After long and busy apostolic days, Jesus withdrew to pray (Mk 1:35-39). That is Jesus' secret. That is how he was able to keep going to the end, even to Jerusalem.

Since the Assumptionist wants to live the ART in his turn, he must enter into all the sentiments and passions of Christ. *"Is my heart eager to love Jesus Christ and all that he loves? Am I willing to pray, to suffer, to fight, and to be His apostle?"* (Directory, p. 63).

If we are to believe Fr. d'Alzon shortly before he died -he was then 68 years old- mental prayer is very simple.

He wrote: *"To learn to pray becomes the science of my efforts and I cannot give you any other advice than that which I apply to myself. It consists in this: remain before God, tell him you are nothing, that you have such great need of him; ask Our Lord to give us his spirit, ask the Holy Spirit to give us his love. It's as simple as that and I find in it all the strength and love I need. In a word, I simplify myself as much as I can..."* (E.S. p. 844).

Obviously we do not have the spiritual gifts of Fr. d'Alzon. And yet in our lives as workers for the Kingdom let us acknowledge with him that this mental prayer is one of God's rights (E.S. pp. 293, 1275), and one of the rights of the religious (E.S. pp. 218, 223-224), one of the rights of our people (E.S. pp. 218, 223), and of the Assumption. For *"If anyone does not have the sacred flame of the love of Our Lord, if he has no enthusiasm for the Church's struggles... how can he transmit the flame to others if he does not have it himself? And how can he urge to action if he is asleep"* (C.L. pp. 63-64)

"Lord, give me the prayer of apostolic men and grant that in this prayer, if I am not enough of an apostle, I may become a little more of an apostle every day" (E.S. p. 626)

"Lord, grant that I may be a man of prayer, a man of evangelization and that in my work I may sanctify myself, that I may bring about the extension of your Kingdom and the salvation of souls." (E.S. p. 618)

RECOMENDED READING

- **On prayer:** Directory (E.S. p. 61). Meditation of 1874 (pp. 615-626).
- **On the Eucharist:** Meditation to the A.A. (pp. 448-455). Cf. also pp. 948-952 (Fr. Picard's recomposition of a sermon by Fr. d'Alzon).
- **On mental prayer:** E.S. pp. 1320-1325 (in 1851); pp. 1274 (in 1862); pp. 623, 427, 215 and 291 (in 1876)
- **On the Divine Office:** E.S. pp. 113 114
- **On Marian prayer:** E.S. pp. 112, 134-135.

Reflection X

MAN OF FAITH, OF PRAYER, OF STUDY

An Assumptionist portrait

What are the Assumptionist's distinctive traits? The answer will unquestionably be: "**He is bold, generous, selfless.**" Our Rule of Life strongly supports this view. It gives a privileged role to daring, initiative, selflessness, forthrightness (R.L. n° 4, 17, 20). It even insists on these points. It relates inventiveness to readiness to serve, one of the forms of personal selflessness: "*In response to Assumption's distinctive vocation, we must never cease to keep ourselves available and ready to do new things.*" (R.L. n° 17). Readiness to serve also implies "*effort, initiative and inventiveness*" (n° 20). It follows from obedience (n° 43) and it is lived in very concrete situations (n° 45).

The Rule borrows these terms from Fr. d'Alzon himself. They are part of the d'Alzonian vocabulary. But for him the terms bold, selfless, describe our love for the Church, a love which must above all be supernatural. The Assumptionist is first of all a man of faith who must therefore be bold, selfless, and also poor in order to remain free. As a man of faith, impassioned for the Kingdom of God, loving Christ with every fiber of his being, he must be a studious man and a man of prayer. Faith is the fundamental resource of the Assumptionist temperament.

A BOLD, SELFLESS MAN OF FAITH

As early as 1846, E. d'Alzon, who was then 36 years old, wrote to his bishop: "*One of the facts that distresses me most is this weakening of practical faith among devout people. This destroys religion the way deterioration of the plaster and walls ravages a monument. Soon humidity penetrates and destroys the cohesive strength of the cement. Among the evils that afflict the Church of Jesus Christ, this is one that education can and must repair*" (E.S. p. 795)

The seeds of the Assumption are contained in this text. Faith will be its cement and its apostolic goal. The closing Address to the General Chapter of 1868 is simply a development of this intuition (F.D. pp. 75-94).

Describing the Assumption, celebrating commitment to Christ who is loved all the more when he is most rejected, proposing Mary as our Mother and our model, it makes use of three adjectives to characterize our love for the Church: Supernatural, bold, selfless.

- ***Supernatural in opposition to the rejection of the Church*** which contains “*all the treasures of the supernatural order that have been conferred upon her by her divine Spouse.*” But “*all that is of the divine order to which Jesus Christ initiates us through his Church alone, and that is why our love for the Church is above all supernatural*” (E.S. p. 137) Cf. also pp. 183-184.

- ***Bold in opposition to an overly human and timorous prudence.*** When Jesus Christ is rejected as he is, the most audacious, indeed reckless undertakings are required in order to defend his Reign. “*We are accused of taking too many chances, and this is to our glory*” (E.S. p. 138). So-called prudence is very often only a screen for our fears, for our lack of courage:

“*Real prudence is the queen of the moral virtues; and a queen commands, acts, and if necessary, fights. Some have transformed prudence into a frightened old woman. Such prudence is in bed slippers and dressing gown... with a cold, coughing a lot. Conventional prudence, I do not want. You must not heed such prudence.*” (F.D. p. 136)

- ***Selfless like every authentic love.*** “*It is sad to see how man hurries to make his own the little bit of good he is capable of doing, how much he aspires to be the only one doing it and to prevent others from doing it when he cannot do it himself*” (E.S. p. 138). From this conclusion which is often repeated, stems a very clear orientation: “*the victories of the Church would be more numerous and our love for her more consoling, if we left aside mean and personal considerations and made the triumph of the Church the exclusive desire of our hearts! I cannot recommend enough to you this unselfish love.*” (F.D. p. 86)

To strip ourselves of every form of self-seeking, to work to increase the influence of Jesus Christ and not our own, to strive toward a total readiness to serve, that is the first result of this more personal attitude. (E.S. pp. 665; 694; 709-710; 859; 1176). The second result, on the contrary, is more collective: the rejection of all forms of cliques (E.S. pp. 699, 710) and rejection of all divisions among the defenders of the same Cause, deep

commitment to Unity, the exclusive service of Jesus Christ (E.S. p. 140). Therefore there must be tolerance within the Church, but intolerance toward the militant Godless (E.S. pp. 133-134).

While these three attitudes are often emphasized, they should not overshadow other more discreet but very real attitudes, such as:

- **poverty**, which involves both rigorous labor (E.S. pp. 65, 94, 200) and rejection of every form of sloth (E.S. p. 64); but also a real detachment, the pledge of true liberty (E.S. pp. 157, 500-502, 1257) and great love for the lowly and the humble (E.S. pp. 143-144; 667; 1064; 1191-1192).
- **acceptance of the inevitable sufferings and defeats of the apostolate**, even to the point of rejoicing in being identified with Christ who draws into his own humiliation those who want to bear witness to him (E.S. pp. 158, 135).
- **breadth of vision**, in opposition to narrowness of spirit (E.S. pp. 693, 695).

“Our goal does not call for severe austerities. What we do require is prayer, work, a generous and open personality, a supernatural spirit, and, above all, the complete gift of oneself to God through the the Superiors. Those, it seems to me, should be the criteria for judging which religious should take part in the government of the Congregation. I have not mentioned prudence, courage, firmness or initiative. These are obviously indispensable.” So wrote Fr. d’Alzon in 1874 in a circular (C.L. p. 8). As an incidental reference, this portrait is all the more significant.

A MAN OF PRAYER AND STUDY

The Assumptionist must work like four and even like a hundred (K.S. p. 182), that is well known. But this emphasis on work, which is traditional at the Assumption, must not make us forget prayer which is even more strongly emphasized by our Founder. (Cf. Reflection IX, the prayer of the worker for the Kingdom) Fr. d’Alzon never sets prayer and activity in opposition any more than prayer and study. For study is never praised for its own sake: it is centered on Jesus Christ. The better we know him the more we will love him. *“Let us study out of love, that is, out of love for God, for Our Lord and for the Church; the better we know them, the more we will love them.”*(C.L. p.23).

The ignorance of believers: a real calamity

For Fr. d'Alzon ignorance is the grave-digger of faith. The false ideas that have prepared the ruin of faith were born of the ignorance and self-sufficiency of believers and preachers: *"No one can give what he does not have, and one of the great reasons for the loss of faith is the laziness of catechists and preachers. They do not know, they do not understand anything"*. Then citing Ps 82:5, Fr. d'Alzon continues: *"It is useless to cast this anathema at the unbelievers; let us begin by casting it at those preachers who are puffed up as much with self-sufficiency as with ignorance, who cause the word of God to be scorned and rejected because of the lack of preparation they devote to their teaching. God will some day demand a terrible reckoning for the time they have wasted, and it will be hard for them to find an excuse for their sloth and intellectual paralysis which renders them incapable of any serious thinking!"* (E.S. pp. 585-586). Cf. also pp. 209, 1085.

The priest, it is said, is no longer listened to, no longer understood. *"The priest's word has become a dead letter"* Fr. d'Alzon admits. *"... He speaks a foreign tongue"*. But Fr. d'Alzon asks: *"how can he draw society to himself, since he no longer knows it. He tries to answer objections that no longer exist, he refutes forgotten errors that are now replaced by other errors, other objections"*. He is not armed to answer the objections of modern science because he has not studied the sciences even though they could give him powerful support. *"He remains lost in mysticism and he is asked for facts, history, proofs, reasoned arguments. He no longer draws a crowd, but has kept only an audience of devout ladies. Humanity escapes him, he knows nothing about it"* (E.S. p. 1294).

Study is therefore indispensable for every apostle: *"If our religious family is to bear the mark of apostleship... in order to be a true religious of the Assumption, it is necessary to devote oneself to serious study"* (E.S. p. 585). For whoever does not work damns himself, is exposed to every kind of temptation, and is befouled in ignorance (E.S. pp. 208-209).

The study of Jesus Christ and of the Church

"It is not only necessary to study, we must also assign a goal to our studies. Now, for us, everything must relate to God, to Jesus Christ, to his Church" (E.S. p. 209).

“Jesus Christ is at the center of our life” (R.L. n° 2) and hence of our study. Being the mirror of God whom he manifests, he also reveals man to himself. He is the Law and the Truth, the foundation of all truths. And the Church is the depository of this treasure. *“God, Jesus Christ, the elect, these are the last words on the Church, on its history, on the history of mankind, and on all historical and social sciences. (...) I do not believe that the religious of the Assumption could adopt a broader view than this one.”* (C.L. p. 21)

Even when Jesus Christ is the ultimate end of study, it can be dangerous if one does not have the necessary attitude. It can encourage insatiable curiosity or ridiculous ambition; it can even be a source of vanity, of stubbornness (E.S. pp. 585-589). It therefore demands, if it is to be fruitful, humility and apostolic charity, as the saints have practiced it: *“Let us be formed on the model of so many saints who studied but who chose as their motto: humility and love”* (E.S. p. 589). Study also stems from the vow of poverty since the religious must earn their bread by the sweat of their brow (E.S. p. 200).

Together with Saint Paul, Fr. d’Alzon calls to mind the fact that knowledge inflates, but *“when the spirit of knowledge and that of piety are joined together they protect and support each other”* (E.S. p. 199). Cf. also pp. 856-859. The objective never to be lost sight of is this: to restore by serious study true wisdom in our minds, both by intellectual work and by prayer. Failure to obtain results proves *“that our prayers and our studies are a matter of routine and done mechanically”* and that it would be possible to do much better by pursuing mystical development and intellectual development at the same time. (E.S. p. 1085)

Assimilate in order to transmit

Faith which inspires selfless apostolic boldness is always fortified when study and prayer are united. But that is even more indispensable today than in earlier times. *“The world, even when in decadence, is governed by ideas. After the Council, religious who are sowers of ideas provided they be true and fruitful ideas, will be the true renewers of society. You ought therefore also to fill yourself with true ideas and great principles. Where are these to be found if not in the treasury of divine learning entrusted to the Church whose mission it is to communicate it to the world?”* (E.S. pp. 1085-1086).

While study is always centered on Christ as entrusted to the Church, it cannot disdain everything that fashions the mind-set of an era. Communication is possible only on this condition:

“To build on the spirit of domination is to ruin the work undertaken. There is too much independence around us, too many resistances to absolute principles. Even while isolating oneself in the religious life it is necessary to renew interrupted contacts, to breathe the air of society. It is necessary to study with a living point of view, not a dead one, to become familiar with objections of all sorts and to use current terminology, current ideas...”

“There is great profit in drawing back from the eagerness that impels the secular mind to all sorts of investigations, from the curiosity that leads to the pursuit of solutions to all problems and invites delving into the deepest problems of science. This evil and opposing curiosity must become a dedicated curiosity and, armed with the torch of faith, be used in the study of religion, the sciences, and literature in view of defending religion and upholding the truth” (E.S. pp. 1294-1295).

Work constantly to begin anew

Certainly, *“the Gospel will always have sublime answers for all the needs of the soul”*. Nevertheless, *“the work of distributing the truth must always be done and done over again”*. Some excellent ancient sermons, brought to light long afterwards, are lacking in vigor: *“the needs are different, the battlefield has changed”*. Various kinds of knowledge must not be piled up one on the other, but they should be restudied, reflected upon in order to transpose them. Only the word of Our Lord belongs to every age and to every situation (E.S. p. 1037). It needs to be constantly actualized. *“You must through constant intellectual effort seek the teaching that is appropriate and applies to the needs of the present time”* (E.S. p. 1036).

Our Rule of Life rightly describes our spirit as doctrinal, emphasizing teaching and study (R.L. n° 18), demanding regular evaluation of our apostolic activity (R.L. n° 15, 21). Yet in spite of n° 160, our Rule remains too discreet on rigorous doctrinal study and the link between study and prayer. The *Ratio Institutionis* is much more vigorous. So much the better! There we find Father d'Alzon's conviction. He did not hesitate to tell the Sisters of the Assumption, and all the more so the male religious: *“If you want to accomplish the work of the Assumption, you must study. I make it an obligation for you in your role as soldiers of the Church”* (E.S. p. 1036).

Fr. Claude MARÉCHAL, a.a.

RECOMMENDED READING:

Distinctive Traits:

- Closing address to the General Chapter of 1868, F.D. pp. 75-94.
- Forthrightness, E.S. pp. 1296-1298.

The study of Jesus Christ

- On study, Directory, pp. 77-79.
- 2nd and 4th Circulars (1874), C.L. pp. 6-12; 18-26
- 33rd Meditation, Studies, E.S. pp. 585-592.
- 37th Conference to the Sisters of the Assumption (1870), E.S. pp. 1035-1037). Cf also pp. 683-686.
- To the Religious of the Assumption at Nîmes (1870), E.S. pp. 1084-1086).
- The ecclesiastical spirit and the secular spirit, E.S. pp. 1292-1294.

Reflection XI

AT THE SCHOOL OF SAINT AUGUSTINE

Saint Augustine is our patriarch, as Father d'Alzon loves to call him. The works of this "immortal" Father of the Church (E.S. p. 1037), and especially *The City of God*, are always included in Fr. d'Alzon's own program of study (E.S. p. 789) as well as that of his sons (E.S. pp. 213, 1096), and also in higher education (E.S. pp. 303, 1096). It is true that Saint Augustine is "*an inexhaustible source for everything, but surprisingly for solid principles of piety*" (E.S. p. 1094). He is also one of those saints who studied and produced so much "*but who chose humility and love as their motto. (...) Therefore even though we do not have his genius, we must strive to introduce his virtues into our studies*" (E.S. p. 589).

Undeniable and preponderant as the influence of Saint Augustine is on the Assumptionist spirit to which E. d'Alzon gives form, it is paradoxically difficult to encompass for several reasons.

This influence goes far beyond the explicit citations of the Bishop of Hippo, which are less frequent than we sometimes think. It is much more diffuse, more penetrating. And yet is it direct, drawn from the very wellspring, or indirect through the works of more recent authors who have themselves been nourished by the Augustinian doctrine? Besides, we would need to verify the origin of certain elements too quickly associated with the study of Augustine when they were really part of the spirit of the epoch, and to be found in other spiritualities that came into being at the same time.

In short, the absence of rigorous analysis does not authorize unshakable conclusions. Even so, without danger of error we can discern Augustine's signature in the very style of the Assumptionist religious life and in its spirit.

On the Augustinian model

"The more I read Saint Augustine, the more I am struck by the truth that the religious life is founded on the practice of the counsels, the counsels being founded on charity, and charity on God to whom charity unites us, and that

the religious life is the means of uniting us more perfectly to God through charity. Everything else relates to the means of perfection” (E.S. p. 305).

Toward the end of his life E. d'Alzon summed up his lifelong conviction in a formula: the heart of the religious life is union with God through charity. All the obligations are at the service of this great plan. That is Augustine's central intuition for his various monasteries. We Assumptionists call him our Father. In fact, we bear his name and his Rule is a part of our Constitutions. It is an important point of reference for us. It defines a spirit bearing the mark of the primacy of the communitarian life centered on God, possessing all things in common, manifesting unity in diversity, humility and wonder, moderation in penance.

A single heart turned toward God

- ***To live in a household of perfect harmony having but one mind and one heart intent on God***, this is the very reason why religious gather to live in community. The search for God is essential. And it is in the community that we encounter God. *“To be a family of God, a community of love and thus to manifest as perfectly as possible the ideal of the Christian life, this was the central thought, the life that created the conventual life as Augustine saw it” (A. Zumkeller).* Turned toward God, the community bears witness to him by its very existence (Rule n° 1, 2; E.S. pp. 20-27; 130-131; 345-356; R.L. n° 6, 23-25).
- ***Possessing all things in common***, the sharing of possessions is not first of all a form of detachment but the means of entering into communion with one another, for true love wants to share and make of a private possession the possession of all. Sharing strengthens brotherhood. (Rule n° 1,4, 8; E.S. pp. 64-66, 506; R.L. 26-32).
- ***Unity in diversity***. The Rule is the same for all, but its applications must take into account the earlier life and the current health of each one. Needs, capacities, limitations must be taken into consideration. Uniformity is neither possible nor desirable. Proving pride and jealousy are banished. (Rule 1, 4-8; 5, 1-3; E.S. pp. 145-146; 569-576; R.L. 8, 11).

Recognition and rejection of the excesses

- ***Humility and wonder***. For d'Alzon, as for Augustine, humility which is the opposite of arrogant self-sufficiency, is fundamental. For, in contrast

to the other vices, pride infiltrates even good actions, infecting and depreciating them. This means we must follow the example of Jesus who renounced his prerogatives to become a man to humble himself still more. The entire human life of Jesus is a lesson in humility.

“Of all the virtues, humility is surely the most indispensable to an Assumptionist religious: because if it is true, as Saint Paul says, that knowledge puffs up, then we are bound to be exposed to very grave temptations arising from the type of work we will be doing. The danger will lurk in the very good expected of us; therefore, we must strive, by being humble, to perform all our actions with the purest of intentions.”
E. d’Alzon, Directory, p.30; Cf. also E.S. p. 212, p. 257, pp. 420-422.

Self-satisfaction lies in wait for each of us, and even more for the one on whom God heaps his graces. Here again our model is Jesus, who was free of any self-satisfaction, but always filled with wonder at every gift of God as his grateful Son.

“I give thanks to you, O my sweetness and my happiness and my trust, my God, I thank you for all your gifts. But it is up to You to preserve them for me, for then you will guard me and what you have given me will develop and attain perfect completion. And I shall be with You because, if I am, that too will be because you gave it to me” (Conf. 1, 20, 31). Cf. also R.L. n° 22, 46.

- ***Moderation in penance.*** The renouncement of every form of overly earthly affection must bring man to the one love that is necessary: God. The scattering of affections is succeeded by the gratifying reunification of self in God. That is the goal to be attained and it does not involve any extraordinary, impressive penances. For Saint Augustine as for the Assumption, penance is not excessive. It is regulated by love. Cf. E.S. pp. 75-77, 380-387; R.L. n° 20, 27, 28, 36, 41, 43.

Jesus Christ, the heart of God’s plan

“Jesus is God-made-man. I must expect, then, that His life on earth will be inseparable from the Infinite, and so will be full of mysteries. These, being beyond the reach of my mind, are the object of faith, yet I can draw wonderful lessons from them. In their human aspect, they captivate me by being brought within the range of my understanding; in their divine element, they lift me up and out of myself into the most intimate relationship with God.

The study of the mysteries should be the concern of my whole life, for through Jesus Christ I shall learn to know God as much as it is possible to know him here below. But just as in the life of Jesus Christ these mysteries follow one another, I can, according to my preference, pay greater attention to this one or that; the Incarnation, the Nativity, the hidden life, the public life of preaching, the sufferings and humiliations, the death and the Resurrection, can occupy my mind in turn.” (Directory p. 23-24).

In Saint Augustine Fr. d'Alzon finds a religious Rule of Life, but still more an understanding of the salvific plan of God in Jesus Christ. Augustine is the true spiritual father of E. d'Alzon and still more, his intellectual teacher. In Augustine, the genius who combines the most penetrating intellect of the theologian with the dazzling simplicity of the pastor and teacher, E. d'Alzon discovers Jesus Christ, the God-Man, Truth, Charity, Unity, the center and Key of the history of salvation, inseparable from the Father and the Spirit on the one hand, from the Church his Spouse and from Mary on the other.

An overall view

In following the teachings of the Bishop of Hippo the disciple receives an organic presentation of the faith which was never intended as such, embracing the whole of history, from Satan's rebellion to the present day as a plan of salvation culminating in Jesus Christ. Conforming as it does to the Apostles' Creed, this statement of the Christian mystery assigns to each revealed truth, from the Trinity to the theological virtues, the place it deserves. In his teacher Augustine, E. d'Alzon finds substantial knowledge, a pedagogy of the faith at the service of the faithful, an extreme sense of God as the Absolute, a passionate love for Jesus Christ and for his words and actions, and through Jesus a passionate commitment to the Father, the Son, the Spirit and to the Church.

For, although they are many centuries apart, the primacy of love is as strongly emphasized in the one as in the other, and the formulas they use are equally absolute. Generally speaking, Augustine is more direct, personal, and warm, but Father d'Alzon sometimes allows his heart to speak to celebrate Jesus Christ or his Church. Then lyricism and tenderness appear. Cf. for example F.D. pp. 80-86.

Being an assiduous reader of Saint Augustine, E. d'Alzon assimilated his thought to the point of constructing the first part of his Directory, which is essentially doctrinal, *“according to an order and a method that represent*

what is no doubt most universal in Augustinianism, with explanations that constitute his personal contribution” (F. Cayré). For Fr. d’Alzon does not hesitate to simplify and sum up in order to better define the spiritual process that is proposed. Cf. also R.L, n° 13, 23, 24, 26, 27, 33, 39.

The two cities

“Propter amorem Domini nostri Jesu Christi”. Our second motto, borrowed from Saint Paul but dear to Saint Augustine, should not conceal the Augustinian touch of the first: *“Adveniat Regnum Tuum”*. God alone is God, there is no other. He alone is the sovereign of the kings of this earth. As our Creator, our Savior, God has the right to our adoration and our gratitude. As Christians we are adherents of the Kingdom of God and defenders of his rights. The more they are scoffed at, the more we must defend them. This includes both respect for God and the salvation of man.

The Kingdom of God is the fruit of a battle between God and Satan that antedated even the creation of the world. The Kingdom of God is a combat whose vicissitudes are unknown but whose ultimate end, the triumph of God, is certain. He alone is the Master of history. We must reconquer with God’s arms the terrain that Satan seized with the complicity of his henchmen. We must remain solidly attached to the Church, the unshakable rock, in a world on the way to ruin. The influence of *The City of God*, so warmly recommended by Fr. d’Alzon, is undeniable. For, to his mind as for Augustine, the man who is in harmony with the Kingdom of God is the opposite of the other.

“Two loves have therefore built two cities: self-love to the point of scorning God, the earthly city; love of God to the point of scorn for self, the heavenly city.

One glories in itself the other glories in the Lord. One seeks its glory from men; for the other, God who witnesses its conscience is its greatest glory... The one, in its leaders or in the nations it subdues, is possessed by the passion to dominate; in the other, there is mutual service born of charity, the leaders in governing the subjects in obeying...” (*The City of God*, 14, 28).

The prominent place given the three theological virtues in the explanations of Fr. d’Alzon is another Augustinian trait, as is the Trinitarian perspective which is customary with him.

The same basic themes

Saint Francis de Sales, Saint John of the Cross, are known and appreciated by Fr. d'Alzon. Saint Thomas is his theological reference. While we note here and there the possible influence of Cardinal de Bérulle, we do not discern the specific marks of his spiritual approach: the primordial role of the spirit of religion, insistence on the interior states, the emphasis on attitudes of homage, of commitment, of servitude. The influences of these great spiritual masters remain limited whereas Fr. d'Alzon's dependence on Augustine is constant and all-embracing.

The basic themes are the same for both: the primacy of Christ, the love of the Church, the Spouse of Christ; the two Kingdoms, the emphasis on the communitarian life; a bold apostolate; emphasis on the theological virtues; the primacy of the supernatural; great attention given to Holy Scripture; a taste for study in the service of love; a profound esteem for liberty, for breadth of vision, for the rejection of cliques, love for purity of doctrine, for grace, a thirst for God and at the very summit, the Trinity.

Frs. Edgar BOURQUE and Claude MARÉCHAL, a.a.

RECOMMENDED READING:

- Index of names of the *Ecrits Spirituels*. Cf. Augustine, p. 1476.
- T.J. van Bavel, *La regie de saint Augustin*, Louvain, 1989.
- Zumkeller, *La vie monastique de saint Augustin*. Thesis.
- F. Cayré, *Vers Vaction, avec saint Augustin. La spiritualite du P. d'Alzon*, Lethielleux, 1950.
- M. Neusch, *Augustin, un chemin de conversion*, D.D.B., 1986.

Reflection XII

SEVERAL BRANCHES ON THE SAME TREE

The Assumption, a large family

Impelled by the Holy Spirit, the Assumption is implanted today in the four corners of the world. Its religious reality and spiritual richness that span two centuries of history have progressively deployed like a tree with many branches growing from the same trunk or, to use Fr. d'Alzon's image, like the branches of a single river flowing from the same wellspring, divine Love.

The Assumption is at work today in at least 60 countries. This is still a modest figure when compared to 209 or so countries or geographical entities recorded by the United Nations in 1991. Yet it is a harbinger of hope for a more visible internationalism as we approach the third millennium of Christianity. This worldwide "dispersion" of the Assumptionist families during the 20th century conforms perfectly to Fr. d'Alzon's spiritual and apostolic ambition: "*We must open minds and hearts to the great question of the Cause of God, we must open up horizons for the shortsighted, kindle furnaces for people who ask only for their foot-warmers and who are afraid they will catch cold if they are given too much heat. Happy are the superiors who embrace the entire world in their ambition, because they are ambitious to have Jesus Christ reign everywhere*". (E.S. p. 693)

Eleven religious families

Eleven religious families have come into being under one name or another from the mother-inspiration of the three historic figures who guided or founded the Assumption: Father Theodore Combalot (1797-1873), Mother Eugénie de Jesus, born Anne Eugénie Milleret de Brou (1817-1898) and Father Emmanuel d'Alzon (1810-1880). Let us call to mind the name and date of birth of each of these families:

- **the Religious Sisters of the Assumption** (R. A.) founded in Paris in **1839**;

- **the Augustinians of the Assumption** (A.A.), founded in Pans in **1845**;
- **the Missionary Sisters of the Assumption** (M.S. A), founded after secession from the Religious Sisters of the Assumption in South Africa in **1852**;
- **the Missionary Oblates of the Assumption** (OA), founded in Nîmes in **1865** by E. d'Alzon and Emmanuelle-Marie of the Compassion, born Marie Correnson (1842-1900);
- **the Little Sisters of the Assumption** (L.S.A.), founded in Paris in **1865** by Fr. Etienne Pernet (1824-1899) and Marie of Jesus, born Antoinette Fage (1823-1883);
- **the Orantes of the Assumption** (ORA), founded in Paris in **1896** by Father François Picard (1831-1903) and Mother Isabelle of Gethsemane, born Isabelle de Clermont-Tonnerre, widow of Henri d'Ursel (1849-1921);
- **the Sisters of Saint Joan of Arc** (S.J.A.), founded in **1914** in the United States by Marie-Clement Staub (1876-1936);
- **the Sisters of the Cross**, founded in **1939** in Athens, Greece by Father Elpide Stephanou (1896-1978);
- **the Brothers of the Assumption**, founded in **1951** in Beni (Zaire) by Bishop Henri Piérard, A.A., first bishop of Beni (1893-1975);
- **the Little Sisters of the Presentation of Our Lady**, founded in 1952, likewise in Beni (Zaire) by Bishop Piérard;
- **the Little Missionaries of the Cross**, founded in **1955** in Colombia, by Father Niklaes.

These families vary greatly both in the number of their members and in their geographic extension, in their history which may be longer or shorter and more or less eventful, in their particular spirituality. The broad outlines of the Assumptionist spirit are not always evident when they are manifested in the six families born in the 19th century clearly from the same inspiration.

One single family in mind and heart

Of the first six Congregations of the Assumption, five came into being in France and only one of them was the masculine branch. They all clearly reveal strong family traits, similarities in their personalities and apostolate. Besides all of them bear in their name and in their genes as an official denominator the name “Assumption”. This is not a simple hyphenated name or a mere historical fact, but the original mark of their spiritual birth.

Fr. Pierre Touveneraud has given a very good synthesis of this “common foundation of the Assumption” in a small booklet. While respecting the particular vocations of the families as well as their autonomy, he discerns a history woven out of spiritual friendship and truly fraternal cooperation. His analysis quickly reviews one after the other the varied areas: the names, the Augustinian spiritual heritage, family bonds, places, times of origins and relations, without overlooking the difficulties and trials that sometimes resulted from interferences by priestly authority. The respective lives of our Congregations have known their own rhythms, they have listened to the renewed appeals of society and the Church, amid the difficulties that occur in the life of any family.

The history of the relations among the various families is not limpid as spring water. The Assumptionists have sometimes been very authoritative, going so far as to impose their views on one or another Sister-Congregation. They were not strangers to the division in 1882 of the Oblate Sisters into two branches, the Nîmes branch and the Paris branch, a division which Fr. Gervais Quénard did much to bring to an end in 1926.

The source of inspiration

It is not easy to discern the central core of the traits that are common to the Assumption as a whole. Affinity to what remains the indefinable spirit of the Assumption does not necessarily create a consensus. While the spirit of the Assumption certainly comes from Mother Marie-Eugénie of Jesus and Fr. d’Alzon, we still ponder today what is the deepest source of inspiration.

Fr. Cayré, a recognized authority on the Fathers of the Church, thinks the predominant influence comes from Saint Augustine. Names, rules, studies, institutes, spirituality, almost all of these bear his imprint, his authority and his genius. On the old Augustinian tree the Assumption of the 19th century engrafted a new and original branch for a “modern” apostolate, as the name “Augustinians of the Assumption” bears witness.

For Fr. Sage, a scholarly analyst of the Founder’s texts, d’Alzon goes beyond Augustine to establish his foundations in line with his favorite themes, the combined themes of the Kingdom and of the Triple Love, which were slowly developed under the shared influence of Marie-Eugénie. Their doctrine became clearly “Christocentric”, with the mystery of the Incarnation at its center, together with the prayer of adoration and the passion for the Kingdom.

Without challenging the value of the preceding analyses, Fr. Tavard focusses attention primarily on the Trinitarian mystery, from which, to his mind, stemmed the committed actions and cogent reflections of the Founders on “the rights of God”.

Signs of inter-Assumptionist unity

Whatever the predominant influence and key to the interpretation of the spirit of the Assumption, we can point to many concrete signs of inter-Assumptionist unity:

- the kinship between the Rules of Life,
- the central place given to Christ, the Word Incarnate,
- the love of the Church at the service of evangelization and of human betterment,
- the two causes, the Cause of God and the Cause of man, the missionary commitment of the Congregations,
- the Marian tone,
- the proclaimed Augustinian spirit (life in common, co-responsibility, fraternity),
- the insistence on human values, (forthrightness, simplicity, cordiality),
- the compenetration of three fundamental elements: prayer, community, mission,
- collaboration with the laity...

Since the 1970's especially our various religious families have been reemphasizing in a visible way these strong links to the earliest days: inter-novitiate encounters, inter-Assumption youth gatherings, a session in common of the General Councils every two years since 1974, common celebrations of family anniversaries, witnesses by the various families in a single periodical *L'Assomption et ses oeuvres*, reflection in common between two or three congregations in various fields, mutual assistance...

The imprint of this unity of spirit resulting from the common origins and close bonds that linked the Founders and Foundresses in their mission, does not however lessen their originality and diversity. The R.A. faithfully pursue their one mission to “adore and educate”. The L.S. A. bravely realize the *aggiornamento* of their social apostolate among the disadvantaged. The Orantes vigorously carry out their original goal of apostolic and missionary contemplation without benefit of cloister. The Sisters of Saint Joan of Arc do not deviate from their generous apostolate at the service of the

priesthood and of the pastoral service of parishes. The diocesan congregations of Greece and Zaire serve, sometimes under difficult conditions, the daily life of the Church. All of these congregations have sought, after the period of their original foundation and implantation, to provide the broadest possible service of the universal mission.

Augustinians and Oblate Sisters: sons and daughters of the same Father

The particular character of the Augustinians and of the Oblates of the Assumption stems from their common Father and from their missionary apostolic vocation. They were both born in the French Rome of Southern France, 19th-century Nîmes. Our two Congregations worked side by side and helped one another in an exemplary and faithful manner in the crucible of the Eastern Missions. They stimulated each other apostolically in their common service: education (alumniates), the press (Bonne Presse) social work (orphanages, social centers) and the parochial apostolate (catechesis, various movements).

Like two hands joined for prayer and open for the mission, these two families live fraternally today as they did in earlier days, having received their mission from the same Father. It has happened that such close proximity had its drawbacks or its wounds, but never to the detriment of the missionary imperative. The Assumptionist grounding which is finding new directions in Zaire, Korea, Chile or in Romania, extends their common life woven in the Orient and in the countries of Western Europe. Their one goal is a new life of the Kingdom, a spiritual and apostolic fruitfulness always lived as a family for the benefit of the mission.

Nîmes preserves the mortal remains of our Founders which were transferred to the same place the same year (1942), to symbolize this common service to the Church by our two families from which missionaries have been continuously sent. It is as if from that place the power of a spirit sprang up one day, a spirit which by grace of a passionately shared faith no longer knows any limitations of time and space.

Tomorrow still more

The *Adveniat* motto, which all of our Assumptionist families bear, quickly went beyond the national, linguistic, or cultural boundaries of the first foundations. May our common roots, despite the appearance of legitimate

differences over the years, never loosen these bonds of fraternity which can stimulate still more our common passion for the Kingdom.

Fr. Jean-Paul PÉRIER-MUZET, a.a.

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