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**Circular Letters
1874-1875**

by Father Emmanuel d'Alzon

Addressed to the Members of the General Chapters
May 1874 - September 1875

Translated by Robert J. Fortin, A.A

Worcester, MA 1981

In loving memory

of my mother

R. Blanche (Reed) Fortin

1898 - 1969

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INTRODUCTION

In May, 1874, Father d'Alzon began to prepare the General Chapter of 1876 by sending the Chapter members an impressive series of circular letters in which he successively brought to

their attention various topics which he considered of prime importance for the future of the Congregation. He requested their ideas and advice, for he did not want to decide anything that did not have the consent of his first disciples. "Father d'Alzon," relates Father Picard, "rarely gives orders; he outlines a direction; he knows very well that we are all disposed to accept it immediately. He is the one who gets all the ideas and on whom rests all responsibility; however, since he often consults us on these delicate matters, he wants the Major Superiors to study them and to form an opinion."

These circular letters were written in the context of the First Vatican Council which providentially underlined the miracle of the perpetuity of the Church in the face of the anti-Christian struggle which had once again broken out. The letters brought new insight into the spirit and activities of the Congregation. They pointed out that its spirit is formed in the crucible of prayer and study, that its special goal is the defense of the Church, and that its main concern is the training, through Third Orders and all forms of education, of an elite as preoccupied about its personal sanctification as about the welfare of the Church.

More than ever, the Church needs fresh troops which are bold, generous and unselfish.

Athanase Sage, A.A.

PREFACE

The General Chapter of 1975 suggested that we prepare for the centennial of the death of Father d'Alzon by renewing contact with his thinking. For the English-speaking portion of the Congregation, this poses a serious problem: very little of Father d'Alzon has been translated. Though the older religious still know French, many have lost the habit of reading it; most of the younger religious do not know the language. Under the circumstances, renewed contact with the Founder is difficult, if not impossible, and fidelity to his charism becomes progressively less

assured.

The present English edition of the Circular Letters which Father d'Alzon addressed to the members of the General Chapter of 1876 is a first step toward filling the lacuna. Hopefully, other volumes will follow. Together, they will form a corpus to which the English-speaking portion of the Congregation will be able to turn in its efforts to understand and eventually reformulate in modern terms the lasting values of Father d'Alzon's inspiration. In the words of Father Herve Stephan, "Assumption has only one father, one founder. If we turn our backs on him, we run the risk of adopting, consciously or unconsciously, and according to the fashion of the times, a series of fathers" who have nothing to do with the patrimony of the Institute. These translations are meant to help us stay in contact with that one and only Father. Written toward the end of his life, the letters reflect his mature thinking about the Congregation. They are a fitting series with which to commemorate the centennial of his death.

As Father Athanase Sage pointed out: "These eleven circulars were meant to guide the discussions of the Chapter of 1876. They determined the agenda of the Chapter which was adopted at its first session on September 11th.... The Chapter discussions focused especially on the alumnae, the novitiates, and studies. However, the Chapter also discussed at great length other questions which had not been raised in the circulars, such as the division of the Congregation into three provinces and our relations with the congregations of women. After the Chapter as before, these circulars of Father d'Alzon remain precious guidelines for the Congregation" (ES, p. 289).

The translation was done from the texts edited by Father Athanase Sage as presented in *Les Ecrits Spirituels*, pp. 191-289. By and large, the titles, subtitles and notes are also from Father Athanase. Where special notes or other titles or subtitles were deemed useful for an English-speaking reader, they were drawn up by the translator. While every effort was made to remain as literal as possible, occasional paraphrases were not shunned whenever they could help an English sentence become more intelligible.

Father d'Alzon's frequent Latin quotations posed a problem because he quotes from the Latin Vulgate (modern translations are usually based on the Greek) and at times paraphrases it. Though the quotations generally add little or nothing to the meaning, I nevertheless opted to retain them in translation and, at times, used them to replace Father d'Alzon's paraphrase. To this end, I used various English translations of the Bible (New American Bible, Revised Standard Version, and the Anchor Bible), choosing and sometimes adapting the one which rendered most literally Father d'Alzon's own version of a particular passage.

I owe a special debt of gratitude to the numerous individuals who helped make this work possible. A first group drew up initial drafts: Fr. Edgar Bourque (Circulars #1, 2, 5), Fr. Oliver Blanchette (#3, 4, 9), Fr. Joseph Grenier (#6), Mr. Michael Carey (#7), Fr. Richard Lamoureux (#8). Fr. Wilfrid Dufault painstakingly compared the English with the French for accuracy. Fr. Richard Richards proof-read the typescript and designed the cover. To all of them, I express my heartfelt thanks, so also to the many religious in Worcester, New York and Rome who encouraged me along the long road to publication.

Robert J. Fortin, A.A.

Worcester, MA

February 22, 1980

Feast of the Chair of Saint Peter

FIRST CIRCULAR [\[1\]](#)

Nîmes, May 24, 1874

In carrying out the triple apostolate to which the triple love consecrates us, we should be particularly attentive to defending the Church in the anti-Christian struggle it is facing.

My dear Brothers:

As we established in the Directory, the spirit of Assumption is characterized by the love of Our Lord Jesus Christ, of the Blessed Virgin, his Mother, and of the Church, his spouse. We adore Our Lord, eternal Word and infinite truth, with a deep faith in revelation. We view our devotion to the Blessed Virgin— whose virtues we consider models of inner-life and prayer—in the context of hope. As for charity, we seek its growth through our zeal for the defense and triumph of the Church...

A triple love calls for a triple apostolate

These three characteristics call for a triple action and, as it were, for a triple apostolate. The love of Our Lord Jesus Christ should instill in us the desire to make him known through teaching and preaching. The filial devotion to the Blessed Virgin should prompt us to help direct and sanctify those souls which are called to a certain degree of perfection, a work which seems to be far too neglected in our time.

I have already broached some of these questions with you. Moreover, the meditations I am presently composing should be of some use, at least to the younger ones among us, as examples of the ideas with which you should be nourishing yourselves and of the way in which you should make use of them later on to nourish the souls entrusted to your care. [\[2\]](#)

I. THE DEFENSE OF THE CHURCH

What I would like to stress today, in the context of your love for the Church, is the need to dedicate yourselves to those apostolates which are best suited for countering the attacks to which she is particularly subjected. At the present time, the Church is attacked by: 1) disbelief—which appears under the guise of free-thinking and liberal ethics; [\[3\]](#) 2) the secret societies; 3) the Revolution—whose errors are spreading more and more among the masses.

It follows, therefore, that if we want to work effectively, we must establish for ourselves a triple goal as the very reason for our existence as a congregation:

1) against disbelief, we must spread the faith, establish its proofs and communicate its spirit; we must preach the love of Jesus Christ, the head of the Church, of the Pope, his Vicar, and of the body of bishops under the pope; we must work for the unity of the Church and for a return to the practice of God's commandments, as explained in the Gospels. Preaching, colleges, adult education, Catholic universities should all be powerful means in helping us attain this goal;

2) against the secret societies, we should give serious consideration to re-establishing a Third Order of men. Through it we could, on the one hand, penetrate the various branches of human knowledge and, on the other, take over the trade-unions and oppose them to the secret societies. In this way we could mobilize an army of good against the army of evil;

3) finally, because revolutionary ideas are troubling society and perverting it to its very depth by the inroads they are making among the people, do we not have to accept as a matter of fact the advent of a hateful demagoguery and simultaneously consider whether we should not attempt to make democracy more Christian by increasing the number of worker apostolates we would found or encourage? We hear endless moaning about the progression of evil. I question what people are doing to stop it. Individual efforts are being made, but should these efforts be allowed to be frittered away? Besides, does the idea not come from God to give the Augustinians of the Assumption this specialized and coordinating goal that I am suggesting?

II. PRACTICAL CONCLUSIONS

- 1) a. To begin with, studies. Prerequisite: knowledge of the Truth.
- b. Once the truth is known, growth in piety [\[4\]](#) through the practice of the virtues.
- c. Our apostolic character, concretized by our devotion to the Church.

The following apostolates are particularly consonant with our personal studies:

- Teaching, according to each one's abilities.

- The direction and formation of souls based on mystical theology, an outgrowth of scholastic theology. [\[5\]](#)

- The works of zeal which, in the words of our Constitutions, stem from our love for the Church and suppose teaching at all levels.

2) The establishment of a Third Order of intelligent Christians, and of trade guilds.

3) Finally, all forms of popular evangelization.

I have allowed myself these repetitions to help you better understand my thinking and to explain more fully the importance I attach to it. Please meditate on it. If the order or the focus of my development were to strike you, kindly note your comments and transmit them to me. They will be placed on the agenda of our next Chapter or at least of one of our coming meetings.

Rest assured, my dear Brothers, of my most respectful and fond attachment in Our Lord. [\[6\]](#)

E. d'Alzon

OUR GOAL [\[7\]](#)

The Coming of the Kingdom of Our Lord Jesus Christ

Through Piety, [\[8\]](#) Institutions, Combat [\[9\]](#)

Piety

Through devotion to the Blessed Sacrament and all related works

Through love of the Blessed Virgin, Mother of Our Lord

Institutions

Our own Order

The Religious of the Assumption, The Little Sisters,

The Oblates

Third-Orders of men and women

Alumnates, colleges, our university

Worker guilds, popular works

Combat

Fight against the Revolution

Through preaching, teaching, the press

War against the Secret Societies

Through the Third-Order and Societies of all sort

Work against the Schism

Through missions and the reform of the oriental clergy

SECOND CIRCULAR [\[10\]](#)

Nîmes, June 1, 1874

At the head of a militia for Christ which is especially committed to the defense of the Church, there is a need for an elite group of religious who are faithful to their vocation, pious and well-informed.

My dear Brothers:

Need for an elite

At the Chapter of 1873, we laid some of the foundations of the government of the Congregation when we decided who should be eligible to the General Chapters and to the more important positions. Because the question is so important for our future, permit me to come back upon it.

Since the goal of the Augustinians of the Assumption, as described in my circular of May 24th, directs them in part toward the more popular apostolates, it is to be greatly feared that some day the religious engaged in these works will succumb to the milieu in which they live and, under the pretext of charity, come to neglect the conditions which raise a religious society to a higher level and which prevent it from yielding to commonplace ideas, the forerunners of decadence.

Qualifications of capitulants

Accordingly, would it not be very important for us to state in approximately the following terms the qualifications required of the members of the General Chapters: 1) perseverance, 2) holiness and 3) knowledge.

I. PERSEVERANCE

A religious must have proved himself and permanently so. Although failings are certainly not reserved to a particular age-bracket, there are greater chances that a religious who has been edifying for a long time will continue to be so, than there are for a religious who has just started out on the road to perfection. We should have no regrets, though, about some of the appointments we have made. You will recall how Blessed Jordan of Saxony was named Provincial of Lombardy two months after taking the Dominican habit and declared the immediate successor of Saint Dominic less than two years after entering the Order.

Nevertheless, what might be considered a necessity at the birth of an Order might well prove to be a serious drawback as the Order develops. Therefore, please consider if, in addition to the ten years now required before someone can be elected to the Chapter, we should not draw up some regulations, or at least a directory, that would be more demanding in this regard.

II. HOLINESS

Need for holiness among leaders of the Institute

Surely, only God can probe among leaders of the hearts of men. But there are times—for example when the general welfare of the Congregation is at stake—when charity requires that we make a judgment concerning our brothers. Unquestionably, we must rank among our most important duties our obligation to provide the Congregation with an always more intense and effective fervor, whether it be for ourselves, our brothers, or the souls we are trying to help. But the preservation and increase of fervor depend first of all on the leaders of the Institute. For this reason, in choosing those we should admit to the General Chapter, we should keep in mind that numbers are unimportant. What is essential is that these leaders be living models of religious holiness.

Characteristics of holiness required of capitulants

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 self to God through 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. Let us not require anything more of those who will be chosen by the General Chapter, but let us insist on everything I have just mentioned. At any rate, I will abide by your opinion if you think anything should be added to or subtracted from what I have said about the holiness required of our highest ranking religious. We should remember, though, that personal virtues are not sufficient; one must also have the ability to govern or to share in government.

III. KNOWLEDGE

Knowledge inflates. But when the spirit of knowledge and that of piety are joined together, they protect and support each other. For this reason, I think that, after holiness, knowledge is indispensable.

Need to study constantly

I recognize that some of our constantly religious are not as knowledgeable as they should be, but, because they remain among us, they have the opportunity to learn every day. It is a situation which, incidentally, is quite different from that of the secular priests to whom I have been administering the junior clergy examinations these last twenty-five years. I find that, as a rule, they cannot forget fast enough in a parish what they once learned in the seminary. Because religious priests, by virtue of their vow of poverty, have a strict obligation to earn their bread at the sweat of their brow, they should consider study an essential part of the work to which they are bound by their very profession. It is up to us to dispel the illusions that several entertain in this regard.

Control of studies

In order to attain this objective, I think that, in addition to the courses we are beginning to offer, we should also require very strict examinations. The religious [11] charged with preparing a program of studies will submit a proposal in the near future concerning the overall means we should take to maintain sufficiently high standards within the Congregation.

Nevertheless, allow me a comment which I think important. Though we must make allowances for the inadequacies of some of our religious, inadequacies we will have to put up with because of our difficult beginnings, it would be very dangerous, as a rule, to allow the religious not to study. [12] On this question, I can make no concessions whatsoever. However, I do recognize that we have not always studied properly. Some individuals are lazy, incompetent or sickly. They are with us and we must bear with them and try to use them as best we can.

But when I look at all the work accomplished by the majority of the religious, I cannot accept the criticism leveled against us that we do not study, and even study a great deal. Obviously, studies must be directed and regulated in order to avoid indifference, a certain self-sufficiency and fuzzy thinking. That is why a program of studies is in the making. During the last two and a half years, we have put part of the program into effect. It has already produced some very rewarding results and some well-founded hopes for the future. This I want to underline in order to allay certain fears which I find unwarranted and fraught with danger.

Seriousness of studies

In my opinion, I think we have reached a time in our religious existence when proceeding slowly can only work to our great advantage. We should stop to examine ourselves. Since most of the young people whom we might be tempted to judge harshly are still novices and therefore forbidden to pursue any formal studies, we should take strong measures against the ignorant, the lazy and the incompetent. Some should be punished, others warned, and still others dismissed if need be. As a matter of fact, the Congregation would be better off if some were dismissed. In any case, these people will never be called to the Chapter.

My dear Brothers, these, then, are the remarks I thought I should make in order to elicit your attention, comments and opinions on the very important subject of the formation of the religious who are called to roles of leadership.

Rest assured of my most respectful affection in Our Lord.

E. d'Alzon

THIRD CIRCULAR [\[13\]](#)

Nîmes, June 8, 1874

“Because the Church must constantly fight new battles, she is in constant need of fresh troops.”
Assumption’s tertiaries must be as concerned with the defense of the Church as they are with their personal sanctification.

My dear Brothers:

I. THE FIRST THIRD-ORDERS

One of the best intuitions of Saint Dominic and Saint Francis of Assisi was certainly the establishment of their respective Third-Orders.

Religious life accessible to the laity

Through these associations, they afforded countless Christians, who could not otherwise enter religious life because of position, health or other legitimate reasons, the possibility of living as much of the religious life as feasible. While the Order gave the example of more austere practices, more rigorous commitments and a more complete separation from the world, the tertiaries tried as best they could to emulate their loftier models and sometimes attained a holiness canonized by the Church. Surely, it was a remarkable accomplishment to have infused the spirit of the founders into all classes of Christian society and to have challenged its members, without imposing on them the bonds of the evangelical counsels, to undertake a life which encouraged them to go beyond the simple fulfillment of the Christian law.

Influence of Third Orders

The Third-Orders were, moreover, a practical form of teaching. The spiritual family to which they were affiliated had the right to be more demanding of its members. A rule imposed obligations concerning fasting, prayer and good works. Because these practices affected one's entire life, they influenced the lives of others through good example and necessarily improved the overall moral climate of the times. In this way, the striving for holiness, which originated in the cloister, reached the ordinary faithful through the Third-Order. The rigorous, penitential life of the religious frightened some. The life of the tertiary made it possible for the weak to strive for greater virtue. The effects of these associations were felt even in the privacy of the home where a Christian mentality was able to develop, human respect recede, and Jesus Christ become more known, more obeyed and more loved.

Defense of the Church

More specifically, before the Third-Order of Saint Dominic took on its penitential character, it was called the Third-Order of the Crusaders of Jesus Christ. The title reflected its goal: to defend the Church against certain claims made by the Lombards, claims quite similar to those raised against the Church today in Italy, Germany and elsewhere. All Christians were invited to join a new type of crusade. After those to the Holy Land and against the Albigenses in which Saint Dominic played such a great role, it was thought very useful to lead another in the defense of the rights of the Church against the encroaching claims of the temporal power. With time, however, the Third-Order became simply a form of the pious and strict life led by certain Christians. But why not return to those dynamic forms which so advantageously establish strong bonds between people: "A brother aided by a brother is like a fortified city" (Prov. 18:19). Oh, how we need those fortified cities on the frontiers of the kingdom of Jesus Christ to

repel the attacks of the enemy and to prepare sallies into the lands this enemy has usurped from us!

II. ASSUMPTION'S THIRD-ORDERS

Evils of modern society

The brief comments just made explain the very good reasons we have for wanting to bring people together to work for something which seems indispensable in our time, a more active defense of the Church. It is painful to see efforts frittered away and to be deprived of the positive results we could otherwise obtain from a master plan intelligently drawn up. We will applaud heartily if the Third-Orders of Saint Dominic and Saint Francis, the Congregation of Saint Ignatius, and so many other pious associations manage to give new life to their members. But, do we not have to undertake something of our own in the light of the vocation God has given us? Really, what do we see in so many well-intentioned people? 1) a profound ignorance, 2) a knowledge perverted by erroneous ideas, 3) the results—let us be frank—of an extremely disappointing Catholic liberalism, 4) the ever-mounting dangers of the State University and of government-controlled education; 5) theories propounding disbelief or opposing social welfare, 6) from the religious point-of-view, the destruction of all piety because of soft-living and the inability to carry a burden, and 7) the loss of vocations because of a love of comfort, which in turn renders unthinkable the idea of living an austere life.

Means of combating these evils: 1) Intellectual apostolates

But how to fight such evils? Would it not be useful to establish a Third-Order or some other association—which you can call by whatever name you please—that would bring together a group of intelligent men willing to help us set up:

a) courses or planned conversations that would attract men of good will desirous of becoming better informed about the Syllabus, the Council, or the war now being waged against the Church from one end of the world to the other;

b) Catholic universities. Some universities are founded with a lot of money; others are founded with ideas, men and little money—the money coming later, in due course. It would already be a great achievement if we could attain the latter; I am convinced that a Third-Order would be extremely useful in bringing it about.

2) Popular apostolates

We could hope for even greater results if the Third-Orders considered themselves as the nuclei of the worker apostolates with which it is important that we be involved. What interesting studies could be conducted, what discussions organized from which we could derive beneficial results! What a powerful means of kindling, maintaining and developing the zeal of these productive groups!

In charity, there is need for order. Would the Third-Orders not have the great advantage of being able to establish more of it and to settle many difficult matters through obedience? If some of our religious devoted themselves to directing these Third-Orders, what great legions they could train for God's cause!

Source of vocations

There would be another advantage. By imposing a strict rule, the Third-Order would be automatically imposing mortifications and sacrifices regarding the love of comfort and easy living. Though such a protest would itself be a form of preaching, could we not turn it into a source of religious vocations? From this point-of-view, instead of waiting, we should in fact hasten to propose the Third-Order to young people. It would be attractive to the most hearty; they would find it enticing in their struggle against the flesh, in the victories to be won and in the test of their strength. By speaking more energetically about a life of penance, we would stimulate a desire for it. When Saint Paul stated that he felt no need to know anything else except Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ crucified, was he not determining standards for those devoted people who ultimately choose religious life?

CONCLUSION

It seems to me that, from the triple point-of-view of the dissemination of Christian ideas, of the popular and social apostolates, and of the fostering of vocations, the Third-Orders offer advantages we should seriously think about. Judging from the encouraging results we have had with our associations for women, we could certainly obtain similar results with a Third-Order for men, be it for priests or for fervent laymen whom we would challenge to an even more austere way of life. [\[14\]](#)

More importantly, however, we would be setting up an organization to counter the Secret Societies. [\[15\]](#) Though I have already written about this in a previous circular, I hope that the present one will help you better understand my thinking on the subject. Please meditate on it and let me know your suggestions. Rest assured of my most respectful attachment in Our Lord. [\[16\]](#)

E. d'Alzon

FOURTH CIRCULAR [\[17\]](#)

Nîmes, June 18, 18/4

Ours are the weapons of light; study is indispensable.

My dear Brothers:

At the last General Chapter, Father Laurent was asked to prepare a program of studies. I am

confident he will submit it to you before the next Chapter, which, if my hopes are fulfilled, will take place within the next two years. However, at this time, I think it imperative to propose some guidelines that will give a direction to our studies.

I. NEED FOR STUDIES

Means of salvation

Study is indispensable for the religious who does not work with his hands. It is the means by which he earns his living at the sweat of his brow. Whoever does not work damns himself. Although study is not our only means of salvation, let it be understood that if ever the religious stop studying, it will be the sign that the Congregation has outlived its usefulness and has been cursed by God.

Study is a penance, an atonement and a safeguard. It allows us to atone for our sins and, if we so desire, to acquire merits that will help atone for the sins of the souls we are called to evangelize. It also allows us to protect ourselves against the vices that come from idleness and to occupy our minds with higher concerns—a benefit which is particularly important if we are to react against the popularism and mediocrity of modern ideas. These truths are so evident that it is useless to develop them here. However, I do encourage you to meditate on them often.

Protection against temptations

Inasmuch as study becomes an occupation, it protects us against the temptations which await all who devote themselves to the service of God. From this point-of-view, I cannot encourage you enough not to lose a moment of your time, for use of the shortest moments is what yields the greatest results. We sometimes tell ourselves: I've only a few moments, it's not worth getting down to study. With such an attitude, we not only run the risk of not keeping our mind focused on the work before us, but we literally lose our time—which goes against the vow of poverty—and we open the door to the temptations which the devil arouses precisely in times of idleness.

Requirement of the apostolate

Shall I speak about the ignorance to which even the finest minds succumb when they do not impose upon themselves the intellectual training required by their vocation? We are no longer living in a time when the religious habit inspires respect by itself. It is respected only when worn by men who are the first to respect it. I urge you to respect and win respect for your habit by the way you present yourselves to others, primarily, of course, through your virtues, but also through your knowledge of what will help the cause of the Church and of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

II. GOAL OF OUR STUDIES

But it is not sufficient to study; we must study for a goal. For us, everything must be related to God, to Jesus Christ and to his Church.

God

First of all, to God, as he is known in the study of the preliminaries of faith; to God in his attributes, in his handiwork (creation), and in the conservation of that handiwork (Providence). Such an awareness sheds light on the sciences and relates them all to God as to their source. Besides, what is there to study except God, the universe which he made, and the laws which govern it?

Jesus Christ

Secondly, to Jesus Christ: "No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, ever at the Father's side, who has revealed him" (Jn 1:18). We should study him especially as the "author and perfecter of our faith" (Heb. 12:2). All is in Jesus Christ (Col-3:11), though in a revealed, renewed and super-naturalized state. Through him, faith unveils for us truths which reason alone cannot reach; in his doctrine we acquire the knowledge of a new world that is superior to our investigation and whose lights, gratuitously granted, are nonetheless reflected in the natural world and teach us to know and judge it, as it were, from a more divine perspective. In Jesus Christ is to be found the knowledge of God in his essence, of fallen man who has been raised,

reconciled and renewed, of the rights of God over man and the duties of man toward God. Let us study Jesus Christ in himself, in the law of which he is the end, in his truth which is no other than himself, in the truths which come from his hand and which are true only insofar as they originate in him. Let us study Jesus Christ in his power (I Cor. 1:24). And since his work seems to be more subject to attack nowadays, let us be conscious of all that we must give him to be his ministers (I Cor.4:1).

The Church

Finally, to the Church. If God manifests himself to the universe ("The heavens declare the glory of God" [Ps. 19: 2]), Jesus Christ manifests himself in the Church. Jesus Christ holds the key to the whole of human history, and this key is no other than the divine plan of the Church. The Church is a society, "God's dwelling among men" (Rev. 21:3), and everything in it is related to the elect of Jesus Christ: "All things are yours, you are Christ's and Christ is God's" (I Cor. 3:23). That is the sequence of ideas and, if you wish, the last word. Though God "made everything for himself" (Prov. 16:4), he forgot himself, as it were, and declared that he made "everything for the elect" (2 Tim 2:10). 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. Society and history have their origin in the society of the elect, the heavenly Church, which has its foundation in Jesus Christ (Eph. 2:20), who himself comes from God: "Christ is God's" (I Cor. 3:23). I do not believe that the religious of the Assumption could adopt a broader view than this one.

Undoubtedly, if a human being wants to acquire a profound knowledge of anything, he must study many ancillary subjects. Each trade has its own tools. Accordingly, you can readily understand that the subjects we must learn in order to acquire the knowledge we have spoken about must necessarily be chosen in function of the goal we have set for ourselves. For this reason and without blaming anyone, we have the right to include in our classical studies whatever will best prepare us for the ultimate goal of our religious studies. [\[18\]](#)

III. CONDITIONS FOR STUDYING

Let us not forget that the studies of a religious are subject to a certain number of conditions. If these conditions are not met, studies are useless and even dangerous.

Supernatural goal

Studies are useless if the religious is not constantly pursuing a supernatural goal. The prophet once told the Jews what might well be said of the religious who does not continually enhance his studies with the thought of God: "You have sown much, but have brought in little; you have eaten, but have not been satisfied; you have drunk, but have not been exhilarated; have clothed yourselves, but not been warmed; and he who earned wages earned them for a bag with holes in it" (Hg 1:6). Unfortunately, how many lives are busy yet useless because they are not directed toward God: "You have sown much and harvested little."

Humility

Studies are dangerous if, in the words of the Apostle, the knowledge they help us acquire "inflates us" (1 Cor. 8:1). Oh, if through study we acquired a deeper knowledge of God and of his goodness, love and perfections; if we became better acquainted with "Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2); if we understood how, in the history of the Church, the greatest obstacles to her triumph as well as the greatest dangers to her well-being came from "false brothers" (2 Cor. 11:26), that is, from unworthy priests and religious, we would tremble, humble ourselves, lower ourselves before the allness of God, the nothingness of his creatures and the weakness, if not the corruption, of the instruments he uses!

Apostolic charity

But, if knowledge inflates, "love upbuilds" (1 Cor.8:1) . 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. Let us also study out of love for our neighbor, that is, out of zeal for the salvation of the souls that will be entrusted to our care. Let us endure the dryness, the tedium and the length of our studies by remembering that they will make us laborers who, like the disciple of Saint Paul, have "no cause to be ashamed" (2 Tim.2:15). Study will increase our love, and love will increase our eagerness to study. Thus combined with knowledge, love will become its fragrance and its driving force. We will study because we love. Our study will be a form of prayer which gives greater glory to God, and to us greater skills at saving souls.

IV. SOURCES OF RELIGIOUS SCIENCE

In closing, I would like to say a few words about the sources of religious science. I have often thought that a large number of books is not necessary and is frequently useless baggage.

Basic authors

As far as I am concerned, the core of the library of our religious should be made up of the following: the Bible along with a good commentary (why not ask it of Saint Augustine or Saint Thomas?); the works of our patriarch; the two Summas of Saint Thomas; a history of the Church by Baronius, Rohrbacher or Darras, according to one's ability; Bourdaloue or Bossuet as models for sermons; Bossuet as controversialist; a few ascetical authors: Saint Bonaventure, Saint John of the Cross, Saint Francis de Sales, Saint Alphonsus Liguori and his moral theology; and a few raro modern authors who have articulated the errors of the day, in order to refute them more easily.

Canonists

If I have not mentioned a canonist, it is because Canon Law is being revised. In the words of an eminent canon lawyer, the jus was drawn up during the Middle Ages, the jus novum at the Council of Trent, but the jus novissimum is still expected. When Cardinal Berardi pointed out to me in 1855 that the Code was being revised, he was far from suspecting that the revolution would in fact force the Vatican Council to lay the foundations of the latest revisions which we do well to await. Canon Law must, therefore, be studied with these revisions in mind and must serve to attach us more and more to the papacy.

Other authors

I do not want to exclude other authors, but I am convinced that those mentioned are sufficient. I do not condemn those I have not listed, but if we wish to have our own spirit, we surely have the right to point out the doctors who can help us form that spirit in a more characteristic fashion.

CONCLUSION

Later on, in passing, I might come back on this subject of studies, but for the moment I prefer not adding to what I have said. By its brevity, this letter will have the advantage not only of being more precise but of reminding us of that broader context wherthe mind, while adhering to the truth, studies it from the triple point-of-view of reason, revelation and history, and wherein the human and the revealed sciences come together without losing their identities. Please God that these guidelines will help you to become learned religious to the degree that Jesus Christ, our guide, our light and our life, deems it useful for the extension of his kingdom!

Rest assured, my dear Brothers, of my fondest devotion.

E. d'Alzon

FIFTH CIRCULAR [\[19\]](#)

Nîmes, June 27, 18/4

For the Religious of the Assumption mental prayer is the study of divine Truth. They engage in it in order to know their obligations better and fulfill them more lovingly for the greater good of the Church.

My dear Brothers:

At the General Chapter you asked me to set down a few principles concerning mental prayer. [[20](#)]

The more I try to comply with your desire, the more uncertain I am as to what to say. So many spiritual masters have written on the topic that I hardly know what to add to what has been said.

What bothers me is not so much the subject-matter as the specific topic. Nevertheless, I shall try to furnish you with a few guidelines designed more to help shape, as it were, the spirit of our mental prayer than to cast it into a uniform mold that would eventually turn it into a mechanical operation.

I. SPIRIT OF OUR MENTAL PRAYER

Three unquestionable truths

Let me begin with three unquestionable able truths:

- 1) The goal of a life of perfection is union with God, a union which is achieved in the beatific vision in the order of glory but which begins in faith here on earth;
- 2) The Holy Spirit breathes where he wills. To unite souls to himself, he chooses his own means and nobody has the right to force any on him;
- 3) Nevertheless, there is a science of mental prayer, and consequently there is a method based on the teachings of Holy Scripture and on the doctrine and experience of the Saints.

Science of mental prayer

On the basis of these principles, allow me to touch upon various aspects of the spirit of mental prayer, as I see it applying to us, and to suggest the result I would like to achieve.

1) Method

First, a method of mental prayer is indispensable. There are several of them and I am not overly insistent on the choice. However, it may be desirable for the master of novices to suggest the method of Saint Francis de Sales, as it is described in the Introduction to the Devout Life . Sometimes, one can and should practice mental prayer in the presence of the novices in order to initiate them to- the kind of reflection with which they must become familiar. As for topics of meditation, I hope to provide you with some very shortly for every day of the year. Meanwhile, I leave you free to choose those you want.

2) Principles (St. John of the Cross and St. Francis de Sales)

Moreover, there are certain principles to be studied by those among you who wish not only to practice mental prayer but to train others in it later on. I would recommend two authors: Saint John of the Cross and Saint Francis de Sales. I am not excluding others; in fact, it would be good to consult them. But the two I suggest have been canonized. One belongs to a contemplative order; the other lived in the midst of apostolic activity and was in contact with Christians from all walks of life. The Church, by placing them on our altars, has guaranteed the purity of their doctrine. A master of novices or a confessor who has assimilated their teaching can, without fear of going astray, lead souls to the highest degree of perfection both in the cloister and in the world.

II. STEPS IN OUR MENTAL PRAYER

But I sense that is not what you expect of me. You want something with a sharper focus. You want me to describe that which I hesitate to call the spirit of our mental prayer. I will try to do it briefly, to the extent that I understand this spirit.

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

We must acquire a more perfect knowledge of God and learn to accept generously all of its practical consequences.

A. We Must Go to God

Knowledge of God

In order to go to God, we must live a life of faith: "Anyone who comes to God must believe that he exists" (Heb.11:6). How we deceive ourselves in this regard. Let the humble craftsman and the simple workwoman be content with finding their way to God with the rudiments of the catechism! In a sense, if God ever owed his creatures anything, he owed them that much. But it becomes unconscionable for a religious whose life is dedicated to study not to be primarily interested in the first of all truths and in the first of all beings! Since all men must serve God according to their calling, and since the religious of our family are called to study and to study sacred subjects, I take it for granted that we are obliged to study God in his essence according to the principles of Revelation. Let us be sincere! Why do we speak so little and so poorly of God? It is because we do not think of him. And we do not think of him either because we do not know him, or because we are lazy, or because we are afraid of knowing him too well.

Understanding his rights and our duties

Certain consequences proceed from the knowledge of God. Dreadful for the one tempted to stifle his conscience and rather unpleasant for the tepid, they can easily be repressed. All one has to do is ignore the principle from which they proceed. I am not saying that, under the pretext of knowing God better, it is necessary during mental prayer to reflect upon those curious questions which do more to inflate the mind than to build up charity.

What I am saying is that the contemplation of the being of God, of the infinite Good which is no other than God himself, of his perfection, of his power, of his justice, of his mercy, will most certainly instill in us an appreciation of his rights over us and of our duties toward him. It will teach us to adore him, to annihilate ourselves, to thank him, to detest sin, and to resist every evil in our soul. I maintain that the more we know God in whose image we are created, the more we shall burn with the desire to realize the injunction: "You must be made perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt. 5:48).

When Saint Paul spoke of God to the Athenians, he said: "In him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). Such is our relationship with God in the order of nature. What will it not be some day in the order of glory? But if we want that union to be the closest possible, we must, in the order of faith, freely but efficaciously cooperate with grace. To do this, we must study God, we must study him theologically so that we can study him practically in mental prayer and reap the fruit he wants to produce in us. I am speaking of a thorough study of the attributes of God, source of the knowledge of our relationship with him and of our duties toward him.

God is known to us perfectly only through Jesus Christ. He came down to our level in order to confer a divine imprint on all the details of our lives.

B. We must go to God through the knowledge of his Son.

God within our reach

In God, the eternal Word corresponds with divine intelligence: this "Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us" (Jn 1:14). Why? To adapt himself to our weakness, to teach us about God all we can know in this life. Meditation without Jesus Christ is useless. On the one hand, Jesus Christ is God, but God within our reach, God known as much as we can know him through his Son who reveals him (Jn 1:18). But he became flesh to teach us how to divinize our lives; that is why it is necessary that we meditate on his life. On the other hand, though Jesus Christ is man, his person is divine. That divine person raises human nature to his own dignity. Since everything that Jesus Christ did here on earth was divine, we have only to pattern ourselves on him in order to give a divine character to our feelings, thoughts, words and actions. In this way, by modeling ourselves on a man, we can restore to our souls the image of God which was destroyed by sin.

Way to the Father

This would surely be a vast subject for us to think about: that we seek in our knowledge of Jesus Christ the means to know God better, to resemble him more and to reconcile ourselves to him, for the great mediator between God and man is Jesus Christ in his humanity: "One is the mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (I Tim.2:5). Can the human mind plunge itself into a contemplation more sublime, more adapted to its nature, more sanctifying, more practical?

Model

As a result, all the mysteries of the Savior's life unfold before your eyes. They are the details of the life of a man. Each detail contains the teaching of a virtue in the performance of a duty carried out with greater holiness. The infinite unity of God seems too mysterious for our weakness, but here we have details, divine details. There is not an aspect of your lives which cannot be inspired by them. Jesus Christ, the perfect man, is always before your eyes. Know him ever more intimately; imitate him ever more divinely.

C. We must go to God through the knowledge of his Son in the love of the Holy Spirit.

Love of God

Knowledge is not enough. Because of its insatiable desire for good, the soul recognizes that good in God through the holy humanity of the Savior and loves it to the degree that it knows it. Once illumined, the intelligence has a vaster horizon within which to contemplate the perfections of God and aspires to be united more intimately with them. But just as the soul is unable with its own light to see God as he is known through Revelation, so the heart is unable to love God in the way it will love him with the help of grace. That is why the divine Spirit comes to the aid of our infirmity: "The Spirit helps us in our weakness" (Rom. 8:26). He is the one praying in us with "unutterable groanings." In him, we are able to pronounce, as we ought, the name of our divine Master and pray through his all-powerful intercession. Through him, prayer becomes an act of love and a prelude to our eternal union with God.

1) Role of the senses

Nevertheless, allow me an important comment. I ask you to reflect upon it and to send me your reactions. Saint Thomas points out that the heart is the principle of animal life and that, in God, love proceeds from the will. With man, however, the soul and the body are intimately linked. Accordingly, bodily impressions act upon the will, just as acts of the will influence the sense organs of the body, which Saint Thomas sees as the instruments of the soul. From that you can see that whatever belongs to the order of feelings, and therefore of the senses, is inferior to that which belongs to the order of the will. Consequently, in mental prayer we should not focus first of all on sensible impressions or feelings. Instead, although a soul can rise to God through creation, we should, upon reaching a certain degree of perfection, leave the sensory and animal orders behind because the Apostle has said: "The natural man does not accept what is taught by the Spirit of God" (I Cor. 2:14). We should submit our will to the Spirit of God and to his love so that he might draw from it the purest love that we can offer him.

2) Role of the intelligence and will

That we use our senses to go to God is almost indispensable. But a point seems obvious to me in the teaching of the saints: if we want to make our mental prayer more perfect and our love less unworthy of God, we must seek him in the nakedness of the intelligence and will. Since God is pure spirit, it is especially through these two higher faculties that we must adhere to his substance to the fullest extent possible here below.

If all this is true, it follows that, while we leave to beginners the sensible impressions which are more in harmony with their weakness, it is especially in the depths of our soul that we must go to God.

Living the implications of love

When Jesus was about to ascend Mount Calvary, he promised his apostles the Spirit of Consolation, who is at the same time the Spirit of Truth: "When he comes, he will guide you to all truth" (Jn 16:13). This can be understood of the assistance which the Holy Spirit gives the Church in its teaching as well as of the lights which he pours into the soul imbued with the truths of faith and striving to understand them better in order to live by their practical implications. We

see the truth in mental prayer and we practice it through charity: "Let us profess the truth in love" (Eph. 4:15). Mental prayer is therefore a study of divine Truth which enables us to know our duties better and to fulfill them with greater love through the grace of the Holy Spirit.

Union with God

All the thoughts and desires of our soul are renewed by divine love. Little by little, through mental prayer we eventually become, as it were, one spirit with him: "He who is united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him" (I Cor. 6:17).

Effect on the apostolate

The religious of the Assumption must pray, not just for himself, but also for others. Hence, from another point-of-view, our mental prayer must be based on a knowledge of sacred doctrine. When the Manichean heresy was overtaking the southern part of France and Italy, Innocent III said that the strongest defense against the enemies of the faith was solid instruction. But these enemies were simply the predecessors of our secret and revolutionary societies. Solid instruction is therefore as necessary today as it was at the time of the Albigenses. However, it must be digested before being communicated. Unfortunately, it is too often given with the "persuasive force of 'wise' argumentation" and not with "the convincing power of the Spirit" (I Cor. 2:4). In order to do this, it must be prepared in mental prayer. This is one of the strongest reasons we have for meditating not only on points of piety but also on dogmatic truths, for these, in final analysis are the ones which produce, if not the most sentimental, at least the most solid results in terms of true perfection. The more you ponder in mental prayer the body of revealed truths, the more adept you will be at spreading that type of dynamism which will infuse new life, first into ourselves, then into whatever we do for others.

Mental prayer should lead us progressively to an habitual awareness of the presence of God.

CONCLUSION

I would not want to conclude without speaking of that extended mental prayer which is no other

than the practice of the presence of God. Mental prayer should be habitual with us. Our spirit keeps us from tension in our prayer and from what I would call an exaggerated practice of recollection so that we can seek God with great joy, happy to be in his service. For this reason, we must live in his presence and surrender to him in utter simplicity all our thoughts, desires and actions. "Walk before me and be blameless" (Gen. 17:1). These words suppose on our part a great respect, one that is both filial and trusting. The constant thought of God helps us to recollect ourselves; it also makes us happy. It is with zeal that we must walk before him, but it is with love and tenderness that we must work for our Father and in his presence. His watchful eye must inspire us with the most delicate thoughts of purity of intention and of all purity; it must be for us an encouragement to do better each day in order to please him.

Therefore, let us develop both the spirit and the practice of mental prayer. Let us remain always in the presence of God like faithful servants ready to obey him, like disciples interested in gathering all of his teachings, like soldiers awaiting the first sound of the trumpet to take up arms on his behalf. Let us seek God, the eternal goal of our being; let us learn to know him in the light of his Son; let us be fired by his Spirit. By thus uniting us with the adorable Trinity, our mental prayer will give us a foretaste of what God is preparing for us in our heavenly homeland.

Rest assured, my dear brothers, of my fondest devotion.

E. d'Alzon

SIXTH CIRCULAR [\[21\]](#)

Nîmes, July 2, 1874

As democracy advances, politics is obtruding itself everywhere. More than ever, there is only one political stance that will allow us to bring the modern Towers of Babel under control: that of the Church.

My dear Brothers:

Social issues are presently in such a state of turmoil that the best minds seem to be losing their way in radically different directions. Opinions are at cross purposes; political systems denounce each other; we seem headed for the confusion of Babel. Yet, it is simple enough to know what road to take if only we are willing to leave aside political intrigue, party strife and personal ambition, to stand on the solid ground of religious truth and work wholeheartedly for the cause of the immortal King of the ages. Allow me to suggest a few guidelines that will always make it possible, if not easy, for you to find your way in the labyrinth of so many problems which, to the best minds, seem insoluble.

I. PRINCIPLES UNDERLYING SOCIAL ISSUES

God is the sovereign Lord of all things

God is the sovereign Lord of all of all things: "The Lord's things are the earth and its fullness, the world and those who dwell in it" (Ps. 24:1). The world and its inhabitants belong to him. The best thing these inhabitants can do is submit to his eternal Majesty. If people started from that principle to regulate their behavior, their social relationships and their politics, how many evils would be avoided! Since the Revolution is essentially a radical denial of the rights of God, does it not constitute a perpetual revolt of man against God, a revolt over which God, albeit after a patient waiting, will ultimately triumph? From this we must conclude 1) that the Revolution is committing a crime when it denies the rights of God, 2) that we have a strict obligation to defend these rights when they are attacked, 3) that it is possible for the wicked to triumph in the short run, though theirs is a triumph in which, as history so often points out, they ultimately find their providential punishment, were it only in the dissolution of the society they poisoned by their doctrines and crimes, and 4) that God will certainly triumph in the end, even if he takes his time in passing judgment on justice itself: "When I seize the appointed time, I will judge with equity" (Ps. 75:3).

Divine providence governs all things

But God not only exercises mastery over the universe; he also governs it wisely. Those who plot all kinds of more-or-less cunning schemes are too wont to forget that there a skill superior to theirs, that of Eternal Wisdom. At the sight of so many of these schemes, are we not left with the impression that people believe that divine Providence has abdicated? No, divine Providence has not abdicated. As Saint Thomas teaches, God's infinite will, moved by his infinite intelligence, has the last word whenever superior actions are concerned. Infinite will and infinite intelligence: what can anyone oppose to such power? And is it not true that those who try to judge all things from the point-of-view of the divine and the providential run better chances of understanding reality than those who, in an effort to eliminate the miraculous from the world, see no further than the material and, consequently, no further than the futile activity of men whose only goal is the satisfaction of vain and selfish interests?

Jesus Christ is master of all nations

But try as we might to eliminate the miraculous, Jesus Christ re-emerges with all his divine authority and power. The miraculous! It is found in Jesus Christ, redeemer of the human race. Are men not born with original sin? Are they not by nature children of wrath? Did God not send his Son to redeem them? Did Jesus Christ not win humanity for himself by shedding his blood? Did God, sovereign master of all things, not say to his Son: "Ask of me and I will give you the nations for an inheritance. You shall rule them with an iron rod; you shall shatter them like an earthen dish" (Ps. 2:8-9)?

Jesus Christ is therefore master of all nations. There are some which he must rule with a strong hand and shatter like earthen dishes. But the greatest miracle of all is our ongoing Redemption: God became man, first miracle; the God-made-man died on the cross to save the human race, second miracle; this God-made-man was established by his Father as master of all nations, third miracle; the God-made-man ordained all things as he pleased, calling some men into his light and leaving others in darkness, fourth miracle; this same God-made-man charged certain chosen servants to defend or extend his rule throughout the world 'and to the ends of the earth, fifth miracle. What is most surprising, however, is that these miracles, by dint of striking our eyes with their brightness, no longer surprise them.

Consequences of Christ's lordship

And yet there are conclusions to be drawn from these divine facts, miraculous and incontrovertible for Christians. First, we must judge all things, not only from the general point-of-view of Divine Providence, but also from the more particular point-of-view of the miraculously supernatural character found in Our Lord Jesus Christ. Second, we must recognize the ongoing social miracle wherever Jesus Christ decides to intervene. Finally, we must follow with absolute faith the directions given by Jesus Christ, so that when he says to us, "Lower your nets," we answer like Saint Peter, "Master we toiled all night and took nothing, but at your word I will let down the nets" (Lk 5: 4-5), and witness the most unexpected results for having obeyed the Savior's instructions.

Consequently, the miraculous cannot simply be brushed aside. One must either deny Jesus Christ and his supernatural influence over human beings or admit the miraculous permanence of his divine intervention in society. However, the miraculous is not always evident; it escapes the attention of the skeptical. When Jesus Christ appeared to his apostles after the Resurrection, many believed, but some doubted. The same situation exists today: there are doubts and denials, just as, at the sight of the risen Christ, there were doubts about his triumph over death. Is it surprising then that some doubt his victory over sin because he does not visit terrible destruction upon all sinners?

II. THE CHURCH'S POLICY IN POLITICAL MATTERS

If Jesus Christ governs the world, there is a very simple policy that should be followed: that of Christ himself. This policy asserts itself especially and unimpeachably in the society he founded and to which must rally those who are more particularly his own. I am speaking of the policy of the Church.

Its goal:

But does the Church have such a policy? The answer is an unequivocal yes. And the goals of this policy, like those of the Church, are twofold: 1) to preach the truth, and 2) to teach the moral law which comes from divine truth and which is none other than the law of God. Since the pursuit of these goals requires an authority, the policy of the Church is twofold: to preserve this authority as well as the hierarchy which proceeds from it, and to guarantee to this sacred hierarchy whatever rights it needs in order to distribute God's gifts to men.

1) Preaching the truth

Today's society does not understand the matter in this way and, like Pilate, does not want the truth to serve as its bedrock. Ever since society ceased to rest on this doctrinal foundation, we can see from the resulting turmoil already witnessed what further turmoils are to be feared. Our own policy is, above all, to defend the social truth of which the Church is the sole depository. Accordingly, it is our strict duty to re-introduce the notion of truth within a society which wants no part of it.

2) Teaching the moral law

But no less important is the defense of the law of God. It has been repudiated by human reason as an odious yoke to be broken. We must defend all that is connected with the divine law, because any human law that contradicts this superior law is evil in itself, pernicious and subversive; it leads nations to their death. If we could only establish ourselves as the relentless defenders of God's law, what evils would we ward off! How imminent and assured would be the healing of sick nations!

Miracle of the Church: 1) God's interventions

We have chosen Jesus Christ as our king. Not only does all mankind belong to him, but his chosen Kingdom is the Church. And since Jesus Christ is a perpetual miracle, the Church's destiny is to live by dint of miracles: the miracle of its foundation by a crucified man; the miracle of the blood shed by a God, which became the seed of its expansion; the miracle of its conquests through "the absurdity of preaching" (I Cor.1:2); the miracle of its preservation amidst the causes of all kinds of decay; the miracle of the sacraments, this ever miraculous outpouring of God's love; the miracle of the perpetuity of the promises made to the Church and of their fulfillment beyond all human understanding. After that, to deny the miraculous in the unfolding of human history is to deny not only Jesus Christ, but also the fact, as obvious as the sun, that the Church exists.

Perpetuity of the Church

Yes, from the sole point-of-view of reason, the Church is a reality at once so incontrovertible and so filled with apparent contradictions, an institution that is so different from all concepts of worldly wisdom, that to acknowledge her existence without recognizing the divine cause of her perpetuity is to accept that human nature carries within itself the greatest absurdity on a permanent and victorious basis. That is the greatest insult an evil genius could direct against our human dignity.

Espousal of the cause of the Church

I shall not develop that point; as you can readily understand, it goes beyond the scope of my topic. Besides, it is evident to you. But what should we conclude? Because the Church is eternal like the truth upon which it is founded, we must, in the midst of the birth, sickness and death of nations, espouse the great cause of the Church with its miracle of perpetuity. I insist upon the miraculous aspect because the human respect of certain Catholics has become too reprehensible to be ignored any longer. I also insist upon it because even if no other society has been promised this miracle, those societies which adhere to the Church can, without receiving a promise of their own immortality, find in the contact with this indestructible institution some of the principles of longevity which, since the advent of Christianity, can be found nowhere else. In the center of the heavenly Jerusalem, the Apostle John saw the tree of life, whose fruits are meant for the elect but whose leaves are intended for the preservation or the recovery of the health of nations: "their leaves serve as medicine for the nations" (Rev. 22:2). The fruits are for the elect, the leaves are for the nations intent on maintaining their health or on recovering it if they have been ill: "Their leaves serve as medicine for the nations." Our policy in political matters will be to gather these salutary leaves and offer them to the sick nations which are still capable of returning to health.

Viewed in this way, politics remains on the lofty level befitting religious who are coming together from all parts of the world and hurts the national pride of no one. Our major preoccupation is to proclaim everywhere in the world the rights of God, of Jesus Christ and of his Church. Those who defend these rights are our allies; those who deny them are our enemies. Wherever the Church, the agent of God, allows freedom, we respect each person's freedom. Wherever she proclaims a duty, we proclaim it with her. Wherever she condemns, we condemn. Wherever she declares war, we fight without worrying about the outcome of the battle, for we are certain that the final victory will be ours, and we know with Saint Paul that if we fight the good fight we shall receive the crown of justice from the hands of the just Judge at the appointed time.

III. TWO FINAL COMMENTS

Union between the city of God and certain earthly cities

Before concluding, I would like to offer two comments. First, even if we keep our distance in relation to purely human questions, we cannot avoid being faced with some situations in which the cause of the Church and that of certain nations seem to be very closely linked. Several examples of this can be found in the Middle Ages. Was the first emperor who took the cross as the standard of his armies to be treated with indifference by Christian people simply because he found his own advantage in the assured triumph of the Church? Since that time we have seen Church leaders calling the civil power to their aid. Can we say that the Church was wrong? And if the Church was mistaken for so long a time on so important a question as the union of Church and State, what becomes, from the human point-of-view, of the promise of divine assistance to be with us "always until the end of the world" (Mt. 28:20)? But if she was right then, why would she not be right today?

Consequently, let us remember that Jesus Christ does not forsake his Church; that the cause of the Church, being the cause of Jesus the king and therefore of God, is the cause of truth and good; and that every time we see a nation defending that cause openly and loyally, we can, with the Church, take the side of that nation.

People are judged according to the ideals they live by

My second comment is that nations are kept together either by selfish interests or by an ideal. If by selfish interests, their people are no more than merchants tending their business; we need not be concerned about their profits or losses. Do they steal? If so, we must see to it that, as far as we are concerned, they do not despoil us too much, and, as far as they are concerned, that they must not be too dishonest. But some nations live by an ideal. If the ideal is evil, it must be fought relentlessly. If it is true, the nation defending it already enjoys the blessings of God.

France had been favored in this way, but alas, what has she done with God's blessings? France! She was born the day Clovis accepted to fight for the divinity of Christ in the face of the old Roman world and of barbarism, both steeped in Arianism. She grew up on the plains of Poitiers, when Charles Martel drove back Islam which was menacing Europe. She was truly

glorious when with Charlemagne she strengthened the papacy's external power. She reached her peak when Saint Louis gave up his spirit on the shores of Africa while leading an expedition to recapture the tomb of Christ. Her mission has always been evident. Despite a few family quarrels, the eldest daughter of the Church has always known how to defend on the outside the cause of her Mother. Has she now deserted her mission which is so historically unique? From all appearances it is to be feared that she has; and if there appeared on the horizon another nation ready to take her place, it would be for us a time of deep anguish. Fortunately, our successors in this noble work have not yet appeared. Our place is still there; let us recapture it and keep it. That is the only political policy we should have as French religious. It is one with which any truly Christian person will certainly want to help us, if we accomplish our task in a disinterested way, with faith, love and respect for Jesus Christ and his Church.

Forgive me if I do not go into further detail. From the perspective I have chosen, I must allow you a certain freedom of movement, provided you remain unyielding concerning the main ideas I have outlined.

Let us not forget that we must take the miraculous into account when considering the destiny of the Church. It evidently has a direct bearing on the protection and on the reward or punishment of nations, whether they be faithful, indifferent or hostile. From these heights, we can easily foresee many sad events as well as many consoling ones. Regardless, let us remember that we are, above all, subjects of Jesus Christ our king, citizens of the Church, our homeland, and that we owe Jesus Christ and his Church our fidelity, our service, our love and our life.

Please accept, my dear Brothers, the expression of my fondest and most respectful consideration in Our Lord.

E. d'Alzon

SEVENTH CIRCULAR

Nîmes, July 13, 1874

Education remains the best way of training the laity, religious and clergy to become an elite totally dedicated to serving the needs of the Church.

My dear Brothers:

I hesitated a long time on how best to organize what I have to say about education. Should I treat the education offered in our colleges and that offered in our alummates as two separate topics, or should I simply speak of education in general and treat what is common to both? After careful consideration, I chose to start with a few principles common to both. This would allow me to address in an orderly fashion the various aspects of the basic problems of Christian and religious education.

I shall therefore treat: 1) the purpose of education, 2) the teacher, 3) the college, [\[22\]](#) 4) the first alummate, and 5) the second alummate.

I. THE PURPOSE OF EDUCATION

Formation of Jesus Christ in souls

All Christian and religious education is summed up in these words of Saint Paul to the Galatians: "You are my children, and you put me back in labor pains until Christ is formed in you" (Gal. 4:19). The formation of Jesus Christ in souls, that is indeed the sole purpose of education. In view of the fact that Jesus Christ reached perfect manhood, we will have given our students the best possible preparation for life when we will have provided them with the means of approaching the perfections of the God-Man. The ideal purpose of education, it seems to me, is to transmit the following: a knowledge of Jesus Christ which takes into account

all that he is and all that he does both as man and as God; a love of Jesus Christ based on the attractiveness of his gifts and of his theandric beauty; a dedication to Jesus Christ in keeping with the sovereign rights of our King; an awareness of the rewards to which he invites us; a desire to carry out the duties and practice the virtues stemming from our relationship with Jesus Christ seen in this perspective.

Jesus as model

In order not to go astray, it behooves us to follow Christ step by step. We understand why the Son of God did not wish, like the first Adam, to come forth perfect from the hands of his Father. He preferred to be born of a humble woman, to put up with the swaddling clothes and the sickness of childhood, to grow little by little and so reveal himself gradually to humankind. The education of children was too important for the Child-Jesus not to propose himself as its model. The Christian teacher should meditate frequently on the mystery of the holy childhood and on the circumstances which surrounded it. Though these details might seem at first sight to have little bearing on education, what lessons can be drawn from them!

II. THE TEACHER

His life must be Jesus Christ

“What I did,” said the Divine Master to his Apostles, “was to give you an example: as I have done, so you must do” (Jn 13:15). Elsewhere it is said that “Jesus did and taught” (Acts 1:1). Education is not pure speculation; it is, before all else, a practical training that takes place at every moment of every day. I fail to understand the Christian teacher who does not have in his heart rather than on his lips these words of the Apostle: “The life I live now is not my own; Christ is living in me” (Gal. 2:20). When Jesus Christ lives in a teacher, it becomes quite easy for that teacher constantly to reflect the Divine Model, especially if he is mindful of these other words: “To me, ‘life’ means Christ; hence dying is so much gain” (Phil. 1:21). The teacher for whom life means Jesus Christ bears witness to two characteristics: a supernatural spirit [\[23\]](#) and selflessness.

If his whole life is Jesus Christ, if it is hidden in God with Jesus Christ, then it necessarily rises above the difficulties of this world and assumes in God, through Jesus Christ, a divine

character. And if, for him, dying is a gain, it is because he holds to nothing here below; his reward is not on earth. Were he to seek that reward in perishable things, death could not possibly be a gain when it takes them from him. If, on the contrary, we sense in the teacher a contempt for that which passes, for fame, for marks of honor, for personal feelings, for money, for material advantages, for comfort; if no human mire stains the crystalline purity through which Christ, living in him, radiates the gentle yet strong rays of his light and warmth, then, indeed, will he be strong, productive, fit to form Jesus Christ in the souls of his pupils. For their sake, he will lovingly accept to suffer the pains of some mysterious child-birth, the result of which will be a new incarnation of Jesus Christ in souls: "until Christ is formed in you" (Gal. 4:19).

Beauty of his mission

To be sure, this means under-going difficult labor pains, but what an honor for someone to be called by Jesus Christ to cooperate in the most worthy of tasks! What is the work of the six days, in comparison with Christian education? Since theology teaches us that Redemption is far superior to Creation, what must we not conclude of the honor given us to cooperate in the salvation of mankind?

Differences between a teacher and an apostle

Some might wonder if such comments apply to anyone invested with an apostolic function or mission? They certainly do, and it is already quite glorious to be compared with the apostles: that is really what we should be. However, a few qualifications are in order. The Christian teacher is an apostle through his zeal, his virtues and his purpose, but the apostle strictly speaking operates on a broad scale, while the Christian teacher operates on a smaller one. The apostle deals with the multitudes in the hope that saints will emerge; the Christian teacher must strive, even if he is not always successful, to form individual saints. He has fewer souls to mold, but he must work more painstakingly. He is not a sculptor who hastily carves from ordinary stone a great number of rough-hewn statues destined to be seen from afar; rather he chisels in marble a work destined to embellish the temple of God, perhaps even its sanctuary. He is all the more bound to seek perfection that he is being asked, as if were, to produce fewer pieces and more masterpieces. The apostle operates on a more general level, coming back upon his work in only a few instances; the Christian teacher operates within a much narrower context. He must work with individuals on a one-to-one basis if he really wants to form Jesus Christ in the hearts of the young. He must root out the bad weeds one at a time before he can sow the seed of finest wheat, Jesus Christ, the seed of saints.

Dedication

That being said, I quite readily state that the Christian teacher must be above all an apostolic person. What prayers, what tears, what penances must not accompany his outward activity! A teacher who does not pray much, who does not suffer much for his pupils, who does not make education his overriding concern might be brilliant and distinguished, and might gather applause and success; but, in the final analysis, he will be a mediocre and commonplace teacher, bearing no fruit for God; he will be a hireling. May God preserve us from such teachers! The essential characteristic of a true teacher is summed up in a single word: dedication. One must know how to give completely of one's self: "I will most gladly spend and be spent for your souls" (2 Cor. 12:15).

III. THE COLLEGE

Patience

It would be absurd to pretend that we can turn a college into the vestibule of heaven for all who come knocking at our door. To console us, Jesus Christ shed considerable light on the subject when he said: "Did I not choose the Twelve of you myself? Yet one of you is a devil" (Jn 6:70). No matter what we do, therefore, we will have devils among our students, which should not prevent us from trying to make angels of them. Difficulties should never stop us. Did Our Lord not have to suffer much from the coarseness, the lack of intelligence, the skepticism of the Apostles themselves? At every turn, they were stupidly preoccupied about questions of precedence, dignity, ambition. Rivalry. Time and again, they failed to understand what was happening: "They understood nothing of this" (Lk 18:34). Unquestionably, the Christian teacher must be patient, though he will never have to be quite as patient as his Divine Model.

Goal: formation of "the new man"

Let it be understood from the outset that the children entrusted to our care are not perfect. If they were, why would anyone entrust them to us? To teach them a smattering of Latin, Greek, history or physics? Hired professors who teach for nothing else but money would suffice in that case.

The Creator shaped the first man from a bit of clay. Yes, college students are this blob, unfortunately viscous at times, into which the Christian teacher must, in imitation of God, blow “the breath of life” (Gen. 2:7). But to transmit this breath, one must have it. What a pity that so many teachers do not have it and are not even aware that they lack it!

Please note the difference—all to the advantage of the Christian teacher—between the formation of the first man in Paradise and the formation of the new man in the Church. “The first man was of earth, formed from dust, the second is from heaven” (1 Cor. 15:47). No matter what meaning you give the expression “formed from dust,” yours is the task of training “men from heaven” according to your model, Jesus Christ, who is within you and before you: “Let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus Christ, the author and perfecter of our faith” (Heb. 12:2). To achieve such a noble goal, we have a lot of work to do.

Means: 1) knowledge of Jesus Christ

We must know Jesus Christ. As I mentioned elsewhere, we can speak adequately only of what we know well. We discover Jesus Christ through study and through meditation. Without these two means, it is impossible to learn enough about him to speak of him fittingly. The study of Jesus Christ is something good in itself, but admits of a certain dryness. On the other hand, meditation without formal study gets lost in a welter of false mysticism. Together, study and prayer provide fruitful results. Sadly enough, experience shows that, if Christ is so poorly formed in the hearts of children, it is because their formation has been entrusted to teachers who do not pray, or who do not study, or who all too often neither pray nor study.

2) Love of Jesus Christ

We must love Jesus Christ. This is a serious question. Why is it that, as a rule, children love Our Lord so little? The reason would indeed be painful if the answer were that they have lost their innocence and consequently can no longer bring themselves to love the one who enjoyed resting among the lilies of the field. This would constitute a sad state of affairs! Is it possible that students do not love Jesus Christ because their teachers love him so little? Since we must go to the heart of the matter in these rather intimate reflections, let us admit shamefully that this is the real reason why our students lack fervor for the Divine Master. When the Christian teacher is with his students, he should constantly keep in mind the scene wherein Jesus Christ

questioned Saint Peter just before conferring upon him the supreme magisterium of the Church: "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" (Jn 21:15). Not once but twice does the Lord entrust him with the sheep of his fold. At the third questioning, Peter is saddened and in a burst of love cried out: "Lord, you know everything. You know well that I love you" (Jn ?1:17). Christ answered him: "Feed my sheep." The measure of our love for Jesus Christ should be, and in fact will always be, the measure of our influence on souls in the Church and in school.

3) *Prayer*

Love proves itself by actions. If we succeed in forming Jesus Christ in the souls of our students, they will not only love him but pray to him. Let me confess something to you in the form of a question. Did I not set a bad example by not sufficiently encouraging you to train our students to a spirit of prayer? Could it be that we are not training them well enough because we ourselves fall so far short of being men of prayer? I beg you to think about it. Reflect upon the terrible consequences it has for our students and upon our responsibility in their regard. Because we do so little to develop in ourselves a life of prayer, it becomes practically non-existent in those around us. How then can we hope to form Jesus Christ in the souls of those entrusted to our care?

4) *Practice of the virtues*

Love proves itself by actions. These actions are no other than the practice of the virtues, each of which is a more particular imitation of the perfections of Jesus Christ. What a wealth of material with which to perfect ourselves! What an eloquent sermon for our students! It is really an opportunity for us to do as Christ did: act first, then teach!

I need not recall the specific virtues which characterize the spirit of Assumption. Since I treated the subject elsewhere, it is useless to come back upon it here. Suffice it to remind you that we should stress both for ourselves and for our students a spirit of faith, openness, sacrifice and initiative. Beyond that, I think it essential that we allow them a certain freedom in their development and that we not crush them by trying to force them into a uniform mold.

Nonetheless, let us return to the three important principles that we must constantly try to

inculcate: the love of Christ, the love of the Blessed Virgin, the guardian of their purity, and the love of the Church, that noble cause for which we must set them on fire. We can be sure that their interest in the Church's battles will see them through the boredom of certain subjects and afford them wholesome distractions from the effervescence of youth and the enticements of the world and of Satan.

Think of the vocations that would then develop almost of themselves! Think of the great number of young people who would easily become heroes once they have been fascinated by the importance and beauty of our purpose as well as by the dangers to be overcome in attaining it. Think of those who would respond to our triple motivation: the love of Jesus Christ which we would have imparted to them, the love of the Blessed Virgin and of all the virtues which she hides beneath her royal and heavenly mantle, the love of the Church in its struggles and in the persecutions to be endured for her sake! As a matter of fact, all this could be easy, though on one condition: that we ourselves first become heroes for Jesus Christ.

5) Correction of faults and the Eucharist

I neglected to speak about the need to correct faults and redress abuses. Both require constant attention and persistent work. The love of Jesus Christ is the source of all good for the people he has redeemed. It implies hating evil and uprooting it from our hearts. God himself spoke the last word on education when, in expelling Adam from Paradise, he told him that the earth would produce nothing for him but "thorns and thistles" (Gen. 3:18), that he would need bread to live on, and that he would earn it "by the sweat of his brow" (Gen. 3:19). We too need bread as do our students. It is up to us to secure it for them and, at the same time, to teach them how they must secure it for themselves later on. That bread, which is so necessary for us and for them, is that supersubstantial bread spoken of in Saint Matthew. It is our touchstone. Let us prod them toward this bread; let us give them a hunger for it. By our teaching and especially by our example, may our young people learn to earn it at the sweat of their brow, by fighting their faults, their vices, their sinful habits. Let us train them for these personal struggles. Let us show them this admirable bread, the strength of the weak, the sustenance of the strong, the true bread of angels. The young man who, prompted only by the grace of God, often goes to communion on his own, carries within himself the seeds of perfection. When he leaves, he will love us. Even if he forgets us—which matters little—our work will have been successful, for whatever is lacking in his training will be continued by Jesus Christ at communion. We will have made him a Christian; we will have formed Jesus Christ in his soul. When Jesus Christ returns to him in the Eucharist, he will take care of making him a saint.

Two recommendations: 1) Respect differences

Obviously, there are many topics I have not mentioned about education. I have said nothing about how a teacher should be attentive to what is special in each student, uproot certain vices, determine what is good in view of developing it, and mold character so as to give everyone a certain stamp, all the while respecting the individuality of each one. Jesus Christ is the epitome of all perfections; the saints, though reproducing the Divine Model in many ways, eminently possess only certain virtues. What is true of the saints is true of our students. The saints had to fight against certain innate tendencies and reject certain temptations, acquiring thereby their own special merit. The same holds true in the field of education. We must form Jesus Christ in our students, but according to the raw material at hand: gold, silver, bronze, marble, stone or wood.

All these considerations could be the object of a more careful study. At any rate, what is certain is that when a teacher, through personal dedication and holiness, has acquired the confidence of his students, the one they will imitate most faithfully and easily is the teacher himself.

2) Use models of Christian beauty

It is not my purpose here to treat the question of instruction. However, I do want to mention that the study of Jesus Christ, if well made, can be the source of many types of Christian inspiration. What is there more beautiful, more admirable than God coming close to us by becoming one of us? What could be greater than the reflection of his Divine Beauty in the different forms of human beauty, nobility and moral sensitivity which are found in the saints? Because we have no choice but to study these models, I wonder if we have the time to study the pagan ones as well. This could even be the final answer to a famous controversy. [\[24\]](#)

We do not proscribe all non-Christian literature; we concede that it contains what some of its adepts say it does. But the Christian lodes to be exploited are so rich, the mine so inexhaustible, that we do not have the time to spend on anything else. When we will have entirely explored the world of supernatural beauty, when we will have assimilated this admirable order, which Revelation places no doubt beneath the heavenly but well above the terrestrial, we can then consider the esthetics of naturalism as understood by the pagan world. In the mean time, we will forego that study simply because it would be an unprofitable use of our time.

The concept of Christian beauty, studied from its noblest perspective, is obviously a powerful

means of education. Once the soul falls in love with truth and experiences emotions of a purer order, it purifies itself, improves itself and discovers that it has less taste and drive for inferior emotions. It would be too long to explain here the relationships between Being, Truth, Good and Beauty as they refer to the substance of God and become manifest in Jesus Christ. Yet, we can find in these brief considerations whatever we need to develop a literature which is wholesome, invigorating, outstanding, and which can serve as a precious vehicle for the kind of education we would like to provide. I beg you, my dear Brothers, to think of “teaching” in these terms; you will be surprised by the results.

IV. THE FIRST ALUMNATE

Purpose of alumnates

What I have said so far referred only to education in our colleges. Needless to add that the core of what I said applies also to our alumnates. However, I find it useful to specify a little more that which applies to this special institution. [\[25\]](#)

In establishing the alumnates, our purpose was to educate youngsters destined for the priesthood in either the secular or regular clergy. We reached out to those families which, given their modest means, cannot pay the boarding school expenses of their children. We have left to the minor seminaries the youngsters whose parents can afford these expenses.

But, is it not dangerous to accept youngsters who, precisely because of their poverty, may not possess a certain nobility of soul? Our first reply to this objection was that Jesus Christ, our model, set up the first seminary, of which he was the Superior, with very poor and uncouth artisans. We then pointed out that the education we intended to give in the alumnates was geared precisely at obviating the problem which had been raised and which, unfortunately, is all too real in the major and minor seminaries.

Distinctive characteristics

Made up of youngsters who want to become priests and even religious but who are poor, the

alumnate must have distinctive characteristics:

- 1) Piety must be practiced with great simplicity and sincerity;
- 2) The life-style must be austere and rugged, as befits youngsters brought up in poverty;
- 3) Christian studies must figure almost exclusively in the program, especially the study of Latin and Greek, the two languages of the Church;
- 4) Manual labor must prepare future missionaries for their work;
- 5) The liturgical celebrations of the Church shall be its principal occasions of rejoicing. As a famous bishop once said, the youngsters must be men of the Church, especially by the ecclesiastical way in which they live;
- 6) The Superiors of the alumnates must return to their families those youngsters who cannot reasonably acquire the spirit of the institution or submit to the common rule: "Do you not know that a little yeast has its effect all through the dough?" (I Cor. 5:6);
- 7) In order to qualify for the alumnate, the youngsters must be endowed with a certain intellectual ability, hence the importance of the entrance examinations. To be admitted they must, in addition to supplying the documents required on the application form, be in good health, possess an above-average intelligence and have a pliable character. Above all, they must be frank and very convinced of the greatness of their vocation. They must also demonstrate a sustained perseverance, a certain joy in serving the Lord, a promptness to obey, a fondness for the schedule, an open but serious mind, and, as is said in our Constitutions, a willingness to give of themselves unsparingly. If, after the first alumnate, [\[26\]](#) the youngsters proceed to the second in possession of these qualities, there is every reason to hope that they will continue to improve and that their strengthened vocation will prepare them to become fervent and serviceable priests as well as holy religious, in a word, truly apostolic men.

V. THE SECOND ALUMNATE

Aptitude of students

There is no need to discuss here the academic proficiency required to pass from the first to the second aluminate. The question is whether every student should automatically be transferred from one aluminate to the other without some sort of personal evaluation. The Superiors should be very attuned to this question. A youngster who moves up to the second aluminate rises to a new world; he must therefore be evaluated very carefully. It is the duty of the Superior of the establishment to ascertain most diligently:

- 1) What is the personality of the newcomer? What are his inclinations: What battles has he waged against his faults? What defeats has he suffered? What victories has he won? What virtues are beginning not only to take root but to grow in his soul?

- 2) What intellectual disciplines does he prefer: literature, history, philosophy, the sacred, mathematical or natural sciences? What is his ability to write and to speak? What is his intellectual capacity, his perseverance at work, his determination when confronted by obstacles?

- 3) What degree of piety has he reached? How often does he frequent the sacraments? What benefit does he derive from spiritual reading? How willing is he to practice mortification? What does he deny himself? How regularly does he visit the Blessed Sacrament? How disposed is he to a life of sacrifice?

- 4) Now is the time to instill in him the love of Our Lord, of the Blessed Virgin and of the Church. His heart at prayer should already be burning with love for all that has a bearing upon the affairs of God. The locale and the number of teachers permitting, this is the moment to start training him to a life of prayer by encouraging him to make a few occasional retreats. It is also the time to make him more consciously aware of the beauty of his vocation, the importance of the goal he is giving his life, of the goodness of God who is willing to make use of such an insignificant instrument as him, of the profound conviction of his own nothingness, and, above all, of the boundless zeal he must develop for the service of God;

5) the years spent at the second aluminate parallel those of the awakening of the passions. It is not surprising that the youngsters, who have now become young men, begin to experience at times a rebellion of the senses. In some instances, the rebellions will lead to painful departures; in others, they will become occasions, through wise direction, to draw good out of what might be considered an inevitable trial. During this critical period, important responsibilities rest upon the religious entrusted with these souls who are condemned to a crisis which can lead to so many disasters. Devotion to the Blessed Virgin, frequenting the sacraments, certain penitential practices, more intense studies can all become powerful means for achieving self-mastery. What is needed during this period is a boundless compassion, an understanding and fatherly heart, tenderness and firmness, prudence and daring, but, most of all, an intimacy with Our Lord and a deep purity of heart. It is the hour of the childbirth spoken of in the Scriptures. This formation will undoubtedly continue during the novitiate. But, for the novices educated in our aluminate, I am certain that their novitiate will be much easier and its outcome more assured, no matter what path they choose in the sight of Our Lord. Regardless of where they serve, they will always have the same spirit and, when the occasion presents itself, will always be identifiable.

Goals to be achieved

I would now like to describe, not so much the schoolboy leaving the hands of his first teachers and passing rather naturally from the preparatory program of his classical studies to the theological studies of the seminary, but rather the young man as he is supposed to have been trained by the true aluminate superiors. I can best sum up that ideal by saying that he should be a splendid rough-sketch of Jesus Christ, ready to receive in the seminary or the novitiate features that are more clear, noble, delicate and characteristic. The desire for perfection should be apparent at first sight: a certain freshness of virtue, of eagerness to give of one's self, of passion for self-sacrifice, of generous dispositions which the novitiate will render more fruitful by regulating them. We must be able to say of the young man who has completed his aluminate what, in the Book of Job, the Holy Spirit says of the horse: "At every blast he cries, 'Aha!' Even from afar he scents the battle" (Job 39:25).

Do not think, dear Brothers, that I am engaging in flights of poetic fancy. The young man, who is about to enter the novitiate but who does not have the sacred flame of the love of Our Lord nor an enthusiasm for the struggles of the Church, might well become a good-enough priest, pious and steady, but undistinguished, ordinary and common. He will never become a true son of Assumption. It is not that I expect him to have already attained perfection, but I want him to have acquired the means of attaining it. How can he transmit the flame to others if he does not have it himself? How can he urge to action if he is asleep? How can he inspire the more

important actions to be taken for the defense of the Church if he does not understand the less important ones? How can he lead others to sanctity when he is not a saint himself or, at least at this early stage in his life, capable of becoming one in the near future?

If God in his mercy blesses our efforts in setting up the alummates, we can be confident about the future. The Congregation will be able to turn to the Directors of these nurseries of religious vocations and say to them: "Your children shall be like olive plants around your table" (Ps. 128:3). The vigorous offshoots of these plants will belong not just to themselves but to our entire family.

Duties incumbent upon us all

This work, however, imposes duties upon us all. We must:

- 1) Be convinced that, by a providential turn of events, God has determined that the future of the Congregation lies in the alummates. We were not thinking of it three or four years ago. The idea was sown like an extraneous seed by a stray bird. But, thanks be to God, it has borne fruit. We should thank God for having made the seed so productive.

- 2) Pray a great deal for the Superiors of the alummates. Their task and their responsibility are enormous. If what I have just stated is true, the fervor or decadence, the growth or death of the Congregation depend on them.

- 3) Pray and have others pray for the students of the alummates. They are worthy of our concern and affection. The alummates are like the nests of our spiritual family. It is there that are fledged the generations destined to receive our heritage. We must constantly commend them to God during mental prayer, Office and Mass, as well as by our penances, our work, and our good deeds. Once again, whoever has trained well at the alummate will find the novitiate easy. Progress in religious virtue will come about almost of itself on the strength of the initial impetus which, if well given, will prolong itself well into the final trial years of the young religious.

- 4) Finally, obtain for our alummates—because man needs bread, even if he does not live

on bread alone—the material resources they need, while simultaneously avoiding excessive worry and exercising the type of prudence which even abandonment to the will of God does not exclude. We do not seem to be lacking these resources. Every day Divine Providence opens a more generous hand to our beloved houses. Let us not be too greedy, but as we think of these poor youngsters who are counting on us, let us say on occasion: “Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?” (Jn 6:5). The youngsters need a roof over their heads, clothing and food. Let us ask God: “Where shall we buy?” Let us always place our confidence in Divine Providence and ask for help. God will do the rest as long as, in a spirit of religious poverty, we say with faith: “Give us this day our daily bread” (Lk 11:3)

CONCLUSION

If I have been lengthy, my dear Brothers, do not reproach me too much for it. Is there anything more satisfying than to prepare souls for the perfection of the sanctuary or the cloister? Is it rash to think that, if the secular clergy is not all that it could be, the fault lies with the minor seminaries? Will we be fortunate enough to contribute to a reform which is indispensable if the salt of the earth is to stop losing its savor? Will the model of education we give in the alumnates have a positive influence on the renewal of the first years of ecclesiastical training?

But this concerns us only indirectly. What really matters is the renewal of our religious spirit.

Because we have a duty to prepare a generation of saints, we have the duty to strive for greater personal sanctity. Since the example of the older religious is a factor in the training of the young, we must edify the students by providing them with more numerous examples of virtue. May Our Lord, whom they will know through us, reach into your hearts and minds so that whatever they see of you may serve as a constant formation of Jesus Christ in the very depths of their being.

Please accept, my dear Brothers, the expression of my most respectful affection in Our Lord.

E. d'Alzon

EIGHTH CIRCULAR [\[27\]](#)

Nîmes, November 8, 1874

My dear Brothers:

I am broaching here one of the most important topics we could discuss, possibly the most important, inasmuch as all the fervor, even the life of our family depend on it. I would like to talk to you about the novitiate. I will divide the discussion into four main points:

- 1) the novitiate in general
- 2) the Master of Novices
- 3) the novices
- 4) the formation of souls at the novitiate

I. THE NOVITIATE

Concern for the novitiate

From now on, the novitiate should be considered as the nest of the Congregation. All the religious should be happy to return to it as the place of their religious formation. They should see to it that it prospers by either finding recruits or helping to provide the resources it needs.

Kindly think about whether we should have endowed novitiates or leave it up to Divine Providence. If the novitiates are not endowed, income-producing properties will not be necessary.

It is important to know if we should multiply the novitiates. It might be better to have only one, especially at the outset. This would help foster a spirit of unity, which we could do less easily if we had several novitiates. The only advantage to having several novitiates is being able to move a candidate from one to another to test him anew. Experience tells us, however, that when a candidate fails in one place, he is not too likely to succeed elsewhere . [\[28\]](#)

The older religious in particular should have a special fondness for the novitiate. Without getting involved in its government, they should be seriously concerned about the suppression of any incipient abuses and about the development of both the fervor and spirit of the Congregation. To avoid gossip, however, they should limit themselves to advising the Superior General of whatever they pick up. [\[29\]](#) After verifying their information he will use it with appropriate prudence at the opportune time. It is most desirable that the novitiate be so located that the Superior General can visit often in order to know personally what is best for the novices who live there as well as for the Congregation which has such a great need of young religious who are fervent and intelligent. The period of the novitiate should be given over to a very serious formation to religious life. Also, as soon as we can have the two-year novitiate stipulated by the Constitutions, we must impose it on the novices.

Focus of the novitiate

The novitiate should be a place where the following are scrupulously observed:

- 1) Silence and recollection. Without habitual silence, there can never be any interior life nor, for that matter, a life separated from the world, as befits a religious whose conversation should be in heaven;

- 2) Prayer. Though novices should also be assigned other occupations, their most important one is to learn how to pray. They must be able to find in prayer the light and strength they will need later on when, as religious, they are confronted with the difficulties of the apostolic life to which they are called;

- 3) Obedience. The bigger the Congregation will become, the more necessary will be the bond of obedience. What is now done out of affection for the superiors will have to be done more out of faith, the basis of true obedience, and in a spirit of supernatural charity sometimes devoid of any tenderness. When they leave the novitiate, the young religious should have a will so trained that their only interest is to do God's will as manifested by their superiors;

- 4) Poverty of the most absolute kind, according to the spirit of the Rule;

- 5) Reformation of character. No doubt, this is the work of a lifetime. But we can be aware that if it is vigorously pursued during the novitiate, it will be easier later on to apply these efforts to the details of life;

- 6) Religious practices. Each Order, each Congregation has its own. We are beginning to develop ours, though we certainly need to change and improve them. It will be necessary to draw up particular rules. Even if I am not including them in this letter, I do want to state here the need for them;

- 7) A life of sacrifice and of rejection of all inordinate self-love. What is most odious is self-centeredness. We must try to discover it, pursue it, and break it through humility. Whenever we do not succeed, the question should first be referred to the Superior General, then the candidate mercilessly dismissed from the novitiate;

- 8) A cordial affection among the novices and a respect for the older religious. We should

love and respect each other a great deal. Our Lord strongly urged his apostles to develop this spirit;

9) Finally, the apprenticeship of perfection according to the spirit of Assumption. This says it all. Needless to say that we were founded for a specific reason and that it would be very dangerous if the novices were not trained according to the principles which presided over that foundation. We must never permit ourselves to stray, for whatever reasons, from these characteristic principles; without them we are nothing as a Congregation.

II. THE MASTER OF NOVICES

Relationship with the Superior General

At the novitiate, the Master of Novices is the right-hand man of the Superior General. Ultimately, though, it is the Superior General who is responsible for the novitiate, for it is he who decides, even after the vote of the two committees required by the Holy See, whether or not to accept postulants and novices. [\[30\]](#) That is why the Master of Novices must keep him scrupulously informed about whatever details can help him become acquainted with the subjects.

Responsibilities

The responsibilities of the Master of Novices are as follows:

- 1) He must draw up frequent and detailed reports on the novitiate and the novices, according to the specifications given below;

- 2) He must train to the highest perfection possible the young men entrusted to his care;

3) He must be most discerning and sincere in giving the reasons why a candidate should be admitted. These reports must be submitted to the Superior General who will transmit them to the Voting Commissions at the beginning and at the end of the novitiate.

Virtues

The Master of Novices must be the living rule of the novitiate. Yet he must understand that each young man has his own character which must be molded not slavishly on his own but on Our Lord Jesus Christ of whom he should be a reasonable likeness. He must permit others to imitate different traits of Jesus Christ, though always in the overall context of the spirit of the Congregation.

Reports

On a quarterly basis, he must send the Superior General a report on the novitiate and another on each novice, following a grid yet to be drawn up. In the meantime, he can be guided by the three main points mentioned above in the section on the novitiate in general and by those mentioned in the section below.

The reports sent to the members of the Commissions shall be detailed and accompanied by the required documents. The Master of Novices, using the questions determined in the Constitutions, shall examine very conscientiously each young man who presents himself. He shall apprise the Commission Members about which requirements have or have not been satisfied, and he shall specify those which have not been.

Principle duties

If a serious problem arises, he must notify the proper authority. However, unless there is a danger of imminent scandal, he shall not expel anyone from the novitiate without notifying the Superior General. On his own authority, he does have the right to dismiss a postulant, who has not yet been accepted for the novitiate. As for novices wanting to leave on their own, he should prudently examine whether they are unsuited for religious life or simply undergoing a passing

temptation. He should react appropriately either by encouraging them to leave or by affectionately urging them to persevere.

Allowing himself very few exceptions, he should preside over the common exercises; he should always preside over the Chapter of Faults; he should almost always preside over the recreations. His instructions should be frequent and his comments numerous regarding infractions to the Rule, the Constitutions and the regulations of the novitiate; regarding the virtues, the spirit and the manners of a good religious; and regarding the fervor and holiness which should permeate the life and every action of a man called to perfection.

He should make every effort to win over the heart of each novice, not by any doting affection, but by an abundance of charity, drawn from the source of love which Our Lord has for all souls and especially for his disciples.

He should live from the supernatural life and act only according to thoughts and motives inspired by faith. To put it simply, his model should be Jesus Christ living in the midst of his apostles and forming them to the evangelical life.

As much as possible, he should receive the help he needs according to the number of novices he has.

Question: In a large novitiate, would it be wise to have, in addition to the Master of Novices, a Superior who would be more particularly responsible for external affairs? [\[31\]](#)

III. THE NOVICES

Recruitment

It is to the advantage of all of us to find and prepare the 'spiritual heirs of our work. Some founders of Orders or Congregations preferred to wait for those that Divine Providence would

send them. As for us, we should remember that the Council of Trent enjoined the Bishops to prepare ecclesiastical vocations and gave them general rules to attain that goal. We should also recall that Our Lord called his first disciples and said to them: "It was not you who chose me, it was I who chose you" (Jn 15:16). On the basis of these two authoritative sources, a general Council and Our Lord's own injunction, we should make every effort to understand just how zealous and prudent we ought to be in seeking out, preparing and finally accepting religious vocations. We find them outside the novitiate; we prepare them during the novitiate; we choose them at the end of the novitiate. It is true that the fostering of vocations in our colleges and alumnates and through the spiritual direction given young people in the world is an excellent apostolate. However, we must strive to make the right choices. In this regard, we cannot be too careful, too prudent or too motivated by a spirit of faith.

Requirements

The Constitutions have already spelled out the requirements for admission to the novitiate. Nevertheless, I do not hesitate to stress a few essential points:

- 1) A sense of the supernatural, or at least a willingness to acquire it. More than ever, we have to wage war against "naturalism." If we do not seek to form men capable of fighting for supernatural ideas, we are defeated before we even start since we have given up on our goals;

- 2) Sincerity. There is nothing more deplorable than the lack of sincerity which is sometimes found among aspirants to religious life. Why do they come to us? Is it a type of career which they have not sufficiently thought out? In it they see certain advantages which they would like to enjoy, but they refuse to accept certain difficult conditions which they would like to reject. This leads them to all kinds of subtle and very human schemes which they think they have concealed because they have not spoken about them. The schemes are easily detected by a trained eye and should be dealt with mercilessly because there is only a short step between the lack of sincerity and hypocrisy;

- 3) Gift of self. This gift need not be complete at the outset. However, a postulant who is calculating, contriving, laying down conditions, asking for useless exceptions and exemptions is not a promising candidate. If after a short while—two or three months at most—he has not begun to take everything in stride: privations, sacrifices, humiliations, wounded feelings caused by the Superior and the other novices, then he should be irrevocably dismissed. Either he will never understand religious life because he is incapable of it, or he lacks the courage to do so

because he is too lazy and too faint-hearted for us. We are better off getting rid of him as soon as possible;

4) I will not come back upon the entrance examinations to be administered before the novitiate. But let us determine that, henceforth in order to enter the novitiate, those who have not been educated in our schools must have the intelligence and schooling expected of our college sophomores. A transition will have to be made, but we hope it will be rapid and that exceptions in this regard will promptly cease;

5) The Master of Novices should profit by recreations and other moments when the postulants and novices are allowed to speak in order to observe carefully how they think. He must discover the warped mind, the eccentric, the undisciplinable, the argumentative, the taciturn, the stubborn, all of whom should be turned away because they are truly destructive of religious congregations;

6) He should demand above all a humble and cordial acceptance of correction, docility to the direction given, confidence in the superiors, joyous affection for the brothers, esteem for one's vocation, and a desire to acquire the deepest sense of that vocation through a love of Our Lord, the Blessed Virgin and the Church.

IV. THE FORMATION OF SOULS

Saint Paul said: "Imitate me as I imitate Christ" (I Cor.11:1). This should be the motto of the Master of Novices as he works to form religious. He must be constantly vigilant because his life is an open book for the novices.

The formation of souls at the novitiate implies:

1) A strict, intelligent and loving practice of the Rule. It must be strict, otherwise there is no religious life. It must be intelligent, drawing on a spirit of faith, otherwise the practice of the Rule becomes a mechanical operation which cannot provide the inspiration and strength needed in times of trial. It must be loving, for if we do not love religious life, why embrace it?

That would be tantamount to casting one's self wantonly into hell and running the risk, through scandal, of dragging down others who are called to wear the crown of holiness.

2) A war against one's faults. We all carry within us the seeds of certain faults, but the study of one's self, vigilance, prayer, penance, and especially humility are important ways to diminish them, if not to eliminate them entirely. The Master of Novices, who is obliged to know those entrusted to his care, should work closely with each one of them, follow the advice of the spiritual masters, help the novices with their interior struggles, support them in times of danger, pick them up when they fall, search for the reasons underlying their failures so as to treat the evil at its source, and support them, especially through trust in the goodness of God.

3) An ever greater desire for perfection. The novice's motto should be: "The love of Christ impels us" (2 Cor.5:14). Jesus Christ is his model and his love. The novitiate is a time of transformation and the novice should have only one desire: to transform himself into Jesus Christ. He should keep repeating with the Apostle: "For me, 'life' means Christ" (Phil.1:21). The Master of Novices must be perfect himself if he wants to not only ignite these flames, but also preserve and increase them constantly. He who does not have a desire to be perfect will never be a true religious. It is up to the Master of Novices to foster the growth of that desire with every means at his disposal: special instructions, a word in passing, legitimate emulation among the novices, more difficult practices which should be suggested prudently but never imposed. What is most important is that he awaken in them enthusiasm, eagerness and vitality, without which everything withers away, freezes up, falls asleep and dies.

Communion is certainly the most powerful means to develop fervor. I only mention it here in passing because I have discussed it elsewhere. [\[32\]](#) I would simply like to remind the Master of Novices about the need to prepare his students for communion, about the benefit they can derive from it, and about the permissions he is allowed to grant on a more or less frequent basis.

4) The deep conviction that, when dealing with the working classes, the proletariat and pauperism, the religious has no more powerful tool than the imitation of Our Lord who had no place to lay his head, that is to say, than the practice of poverty.

5) A great openness of heart. The novices shall be trained in it. To oblige them in spite of themselves would have serious drawbacks. But if they do not open themselves easily, if they do not learn to do so promptly, they will never acquire the spirit of the common life. They will

retain their individualism which later on can be a source of many problems and particularly of a nefarious independence of character. Susceptible people should either be broken or dismissed.

6) **Studies.** Strictly speaking, studies are not the goal of the novitiate. Nevertheless, since novices must be taught Holy Scripture, Church history, mystical theology and liturgy, the Master of Novices must try to instill in them, always according to the spirit of Assumption: a) the loftiest notions possible about divine worship, the recitation of the Office, the observance of rubrics, and sacred chant, b) a desire to know what rules of the ascetical life best apply to them so that they can make greater progress in it, and c) a correct attitude toward the study of Holy Scripture and the history of the Church. He must teach them to study like true religious, not prompted by vain curiosity nor deterred by sinful laziness but motivated by a desire to deepen their knowledge of God and his creation, of Jesus Christ, of his love for men, of what he did to prove it to them and of his action in the world. He must also teach them to discover what a religious can do for God and Our Lord Jesus Christ.

7) **Supervision by the Master of Novices.** The Master of Novices must exercise supervision in the chapel, where the behavior of the novices will reflect their interior dispositions; in the study hall, where their posture will reveal their laziness or their enthusiasm for work; in their cells, in the dormitory, where their modesty and even their morals can be judged; in the refectory, where they must be given frequent lessons in etiquette; in recreation, where the oft-forgotten rules of politeness must be taught and upheld.

8) **Training in neatness and etiquette.** This is a most important point, especially for men who perhaps have never been accustomed to them. The novices should be trained to be at once modest and well-mannered. They should be made to understand that rude and coarse manners are, on the whole, characteristic of uncivilized and uncultured people, too self-satisfied ever to do good to others. Jesus Christ, gentle and humble of heart, should be the model of those seeking to conquer souls. Nothing fosters Christian politeness like gentleness and humility.

In any case, good manners are a form of respect, and respect is too endangered in our day not to be picked up in its Christian dimension by the Religious of the Assumption. The Master of Novices should seek to give them a notion of it and to inspire them to practice it seriously during the novitiate. Forms of respect are burdensome at times; they can be difficult to submit to. Novices should become accustomed to them and turn them into a mortification, an edification, a way of attracting souls and a means of spreading the Gospel. Un-familiarity with the forms of politeness should not be mistaken, however, for a certain boorishness which almost always denotes a propensity for the crude, a relish for the vulgar, a stupid vanity and an inability to

become all things to all people, a great obstacle to winning souls for Christ.

There would be a lot more to add, but I must limit myself. Experience will undoubtedly suggest many other important considerations. It seems to me, however, that from these ideas we can develop the entire Directory for the Novitiate. Consequently, let this suffice for the time being and let it be the occasion for the novitiates to get off to a fresh start and acquire new fervor.

Grids

To provide the Master of Novices with a basic procedure, I am appending herewith four grids to be filled out as needed. The first will help him raise the right questions and dispense the proper advice in directing individuals. In this area, everything is optional. He may add or subtract as he sees fit. Nevertheless, he will find it useful to have guidelines which help him know his people and put them on the road to perfection. The second grid is meant to determine the items that the Master of Novices should touch upon in his quarterly report on the novitiate in general. The third indicates the points to be considered in the quarterly report on each novice or postulant. The fourth is an outline of the report to be submitted to the examiners on each candidate for the novitiate or for profession.

If the Master of Novices tries seriously to acquire the information necessary to answer the questions contained in these grids, it is impossible that he not end up by knowing his subjects perfectly and that he not be able to advise, as is so important, the proper authorities.

Rest assured, my dear Brothers, of my most respectful affection in Our Lord.

E. d'Alzon

I. DIRECTION OF NOVICES

Questions:

1. Does the novice continue to think that he has a religious vocation?
2. What are his temptations in this regard?
3. How does he pray? Does he observe the presence of God?
4. How attracted is he to prayer? What topic does him the most good?
5. How prayerful is he during Office and the religious exercises?
6. What are his thoughts concerning Our Lord, especially at communion time?
7. How energetic is he at work, in the study hall and elsewhere?
8. What is his attitude toward silence and recollection?
9. How does he observe the Rule?

10. Whom does he like and whom does he dislike?

11. How possessive is he?

12. His mortifications?

13. His aversions?

14. The objects of his zeal?

Comments regarding:

1. Obedience

2. Laziness at work

3. Self-love, egoism, personality

4. Humility

5. Zeal for souls

6. Defects of character

7. Infractions to the Rule

8. Faults in relations with others

9. Religious behavior, posture, manners

10. Tepidity

11. Lack of sincerity

12. Progress or regression

13. Serious problems, if any

II. QUARTERLY REPORT ON THE NOVITIATE IN GENERAL

1. What is the general spirit?

2. Has there been an increase in fervor?

3. What posture is taken at Office, mental prayer, Mass?

4. Is there an enthusiasm for study and the performance of duties?
5. How do the religious spend their recreations?
6. Is silence observed?
7. How good is the overall behavior and manners?
8. How energetic are the novices before a difficult task?
9. Are they open with the Master of Novices?
10. Are they sincere?
11. Are there little intrigues among them? Do they go looking for them?
12. Are humiliations accepted? In what spirit?
13. Have penances and austerities been requested?
14. Are the novices cordial among themselves?
15. Do they obey promptly?

16. Is the Rule observed under constraint or with joy?

17. Is there an overall enthusiasm? Does one sense a tone which is both supernatural and religious?

Special comments

III. QUARTERLY REPORT ON EACH NOVICE

1. Why does the postulant/novice want to be a religious?
2. What is his character?
3. What is his dominant fault? Is he fighting it? What success has he had?
4. Intelligence
5. Education
6. Progress in study
7. Health

8. Family situation

9. Progress in the three virtues connected with the vows

10. Piety, fervor or tepidity

11. Practice of the Rule

12. Religious behavior

13. Posture during religious exercises

14. Manners

15. Style during recreations

16. Friendships and antipathies

17. Spirit of faith

18. Is he edifying ?

19. Is he humble, mortified?

20. Is he open and sincere?

Special comments

The Master of Novices need not answer each question every quarter. If he does not know the answer, he leaves a blank. If there is nothing new to add to what has already been said, he merely writes: cf. last report.

IV. REPORT TO THE EXAMINERS

1. Has the postulant/novice been scrupulously questioned about the items specified in the Constitutions?
2. What were his answers?
3. Did he supply the requested documentation?
4. How long was his postulancy?
5. How long was his novitiate? Where did he do it?
6. Why does he want to be a religious?
7. Does he have the religious spirit?

8. What is the state of his health?
9. What is his character?
10. What is his dominant fault? Is he overcoming it?
11. How precisely does he practice the Rule?
12. What is his particular interest?
13. How intelligent is he?
14. What education has he received?
15. How successful have been his studies since he entered?
16. Is he made for community life?
17. Is he generous, willing to sacrifice?
18. Does he accept the fundamental principles of the Congregation?

19. What is his posture during the religious exercises?

20. Has he learned good manners in his relationships with others?

21. Does he love the Congregation? Does he manage to be liked?

22. His practice of the virtues connected with the vows?

23. How easily does he render account of himself?

24. Is he sincere?

Special comments:

NINTH CIRCULAR [\[33\]](#)

Duties of Superiors

toward individuals

and toward the community as a whole

July 1875

My dear Brothers:

The unfortunate events which have just filled us with sadness have prompted me to reflect and wonder about my own share of responsibility for what happened.

Whatever my responsibility for the past, it is now my strict obligation before God to examine the matter with you and to point out your duties as superiors. You must be all the more exact in carrying them out now that you can measure the consequences of neglecting them. Several among you failed to observe these consequences because of certain illusions regarding the outside apostolate. You can now readily understand how dreadful they are in light of the facts which we are so unfortunately lamenting.

Allow me then to set forth your duties as superiors and to entreat you to meditate upon them often, in fact very often, before God. It seems to me that your salvation depends upon it. I am obliged to burden your soul to save my own.

I reduce these duties to sixteen major points.

1) First, a sense of your own responsibility. —Since you cannot do everything yourselves, you must make others work and see to it that they work well, so that, personally, you are in charge of nothing as much as of your community. This is the principal criterion by which you will be judged. You are damning yourselves if your community is falling into decadence and your religious are losing their souls. They will thus be lost only by your fault.

2) Love of those for whom you are more particularly fathers and brothers.—You must live in their midst as did Jesus Christ in the midst of his apostles. For your consolation, there was a Judas among the twelve, though even he was the object of great love on the part of Jesus Christ. “The good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep” (Jn 10:11). Do you have for your religious that same tender, loving, persevering concern which watches over them day and night, as did Jacob over Laban’s flocks? Through obedience you are immediately charged with these particular souls, not with any others. What good would it do to save many of these others if outside interests keep you from properly watching over your own community.

3) Example—The duties of a superior dispense him from many community exercises. He cannot supervise usefully if the religious know exactly when and where he is occupied. Nevertheless, the members of the community must be able to say before all else: our Father doe’, what he can, even more, to be our superior and to fulfill the obligations of his office. When, in a religious community, the superior merits such praise, his task has become quite easy. He is the living image of the one of whom it is said that he began doing before teaching.

4) Prayer.—The gospel presents Our Lord spending entire nights in prayer: “All night he continued in prayer to God” (Lk 6:12). Why? To prepare for the selection of his apostles. He did so not because his human nature needed enlightenment—he is the very source of all light—but because he wanted to teach superiors one of their strictest obligations. If they want to act according to and in the spirit of Our Lord, they must meditate at the foot of the crucifix or before the Blessed Sacrament whatever remarks they are to make or steps they are to take.

5) General remarks.—Nothing is so easily forgotten as that which constitutes the essence of religious life. The principle of union with God, the bonds of charity, the spirit of self-denial, of sacrifice, of obedience, the supernatural regard for perfection, the holy desire—essential to religious life—to progress even further, all of this is quickly forgotten if it is not repeated constantly and on all occasions: in the refectory, during recreations, at obedience, and at the chapter [of faults]. Did the Apostle not say: “Preach the word whether convenient or inconvenient” (2 Tim 4:2)? We must speak, warn and repeat these admonitions without ceasing.

6) Personal remarks.—Some people profit more from general remarks simply because the comments seem to be less directly aimed at them. Others, however, need personal remarks. They never take for themselves what is addressed to everyone. It is necessary to go to them and say, as Nathan to David: “You are the man” (2 Sam 12:7). Moreover, there are often wounds which need to be dressed discreetly. Pride sometimes revolts against a public disclosure of faults. Although it is not always necessary to take into account the touchiness of those who easily balk at everything, it is nevertheless true that gentleness can produce results

which the chapter [of faults] cannot achieve because of its public character. It is up to the superiors to determine what is appropriate under the circumstances. But whether they do it publicly or privately according to the dictates of prudence, they remain duty-bound to warn people.

7) Overseeing everything and everyone.—We can become squeamish about this obligation which is hated by inferiors; they like to call it spying. Beware of the religious who speaks against spies; he more than others needs to be watched. How tiring it is to be ever watchful and how much easier it is to let things and people slip toward decadence! But why has the Church given her pontiffs the name of bishops (overseers), if not because the first duty of those in charge is to oversee? Does not Saint Peter call Our Lord himself the “overseer of our souls” (1 Pt 2:25)?

8) Strict maintenance of regularity in the religious exercises.—From a certain point-of-view, religious exercises are nothing in themselves. By and large, they are a matter of routine. However, this routine keeps people fit and alert, and it furnishes the superior with the occasion—to take only this aspect — to observe the fervor and perseverance of his religious. But the number difficulties involved! A superior cannot be everywhere. For that reason, he needs an assistant to report infractions. If, in some communities, one is not enough, then he needs several. Moreover, it is possible to maintain the greatest regularity even amid certain apparent irregularities. For instance, in our colleges, the monitors and professors must necessarily absent themselves from certain exercises, but regularity is no less real because maintained through schedules particular to the various functions, as well as through the granting of whatever dispensations are necessary for the greater good of the college. One can apply here the comparison Saint Paul made between the body and the Church.

9) Persistence in getting others to work hard.—This is our spirit and one of our important safeguards. As the Constitutions point out, we do not require any severe austerities, but we do insist on hard work. Woe to the lazy religious! God’s curse is upon him. Woe to the superior who does not demand a great deal of work! Each religious must be considered as a talent entrusted to him by the Father of the family; through the work he imposes, he must not only double it but increase it a hundredfold. Naturally, it would be wrong for him to crush anyone but his duty is to make everyone work to his full capacity. And since a laborer’s capacity increases with proper direction, no one can say, on the one hand, how much work will be accomplished if the superior puts his mind to it, and on the other hand, what dangers will be avoided, what temptations overcome, what sins omitted, what virtues increased, what merits acquired by a supernatural thought in the midst of constant work. I am not saying that a little rest is not necessary; it is, provided it too is supervised by the superior.

10) But what is the value of work if it is not motivated by the thought of God? Thus a new duty for the superior, that of maintaining zeal according to the spirit of the Congregation. When does a religious family begin to decline? When routine sets in. People come and go, but mechanically. If the sacred fire is not extinct, it only smolders beneath the ashes. It is up to the superior to keep feeding it, either by finding new apostolates or by rekindling interest in old ones. He must watch this constantly. It does not suffice to deplore the progression of decadence. We must root out its causes; we must revive the spirit of God; we must throw wood on the fire. The superiors who complain about the lack of zeal of their inferiors without trying to break them of their routine are perhaps the least zealous of the community. I admit that this requires a certain gift of inventiveness, but I would like to add that the superior must focus his own attention first on his religious before extending it to outsiders. I shall not enumerate here the means at our disposal for maintaining fervor; the Constitutions are sufficiently clear on the subject. But I want to respect initiative, in the sense that everyone's talents are different and that it would be dangerous to crush the superiors under the weight of too much uniformity.

11) We have perhaps not sufficiently determined the degree to which the local superiors must account to the Superior General for their communities
. This topic will be examined at the next Chapter. At the present time, some superiors are perfectly responsible on this point, others think about it very little, and still others not at all. Until we establish a definite policy, all I can do is offer you now a general comment. Holding a local superior accountable in this way obviously forces him to reflect upon the authority entrusted to him and upon the manner in which he exercises it. Consequently, it obliges him to use it prudently, intelligently, actively and successfully.

12) For a while, I am sure that the regrettable incidents which provoked this circular will continue to serve as a powerful incentive. But if we do not pay close attention to the precautions to be taken
, how long will our present attention, revived under trying circumstances, be able to continue? It is not wrong for superiors to entertain suspicions, even poorly grounded ones, provided they are inspired by charity. One must undoubtedly curb a constantly suspicious mind, for repeated suspicions engender distrust and eventually destroy one's influence. But the facts are there. Evidently, if very serious faults were committed, it is because there was not enough supervision. This time we noticed it, but on how many other occasions has proper supervision gone wanting! We did not see the evil because we did not take the necessary precautions to discover it. It is understood that we can never know all of the problems, not even all of the serious disorders that exist. But we must also be honest with ourselves. Is our supervision adequate and do we conscientiously try to eliminate all occasions of sin? Alas, who among us, starting with myself, is above reproach?

13) Inspire supernatural concern in order to divert attention from certain temptations.—This

is difficult, yet how many evils could be avoided if the superiors knew how to provide their religious with constant matter of a pious nature. At times, the means will be found monotonous, for it is impossible to invent new ones every day. But let us not get discouraged. Rather, let us be attentive to the many occasions offered by Divine Providence; let us have foresight and good will. I am convinced that Providence will provide us with numerous ways to keep the religious constantly alert.

14) **Courage to give timely warnings.**—The world is full of people chained down by human respect. Superiors are not always free from these chains; they do not always dare speak up. It takes real strength to say to someone: “My friend, you are going off the deep end. Your backsliding is about to hurt you badly. You fall, you pick yourself up, but only to fall again. You are harming your soul. Be careful, lest the entire community be made to suffer the after-effects of your unedifying conduct.” If a superior does not have the courage to warn in this fashion when circumstances warrant it, why is he superior? I realize that this sort of reproach unfortunately always applies to the same religious. Already affected with gangrene, they find such observations insulting, unjust and slanderous. Very often the results are nil. Nevertheless, we must speak up anyway: “Cry aloud, spare not, lift up your voice like a trumpet” (Is 58:1). Spoken to the prophet, these words also apply to superiors.

15) **Firmness in punishing minor misdeeds in order to avoid greater ones.**—There is nothing more annoying than having to punish constantly. Why do the old paintings of Saint Benedict always portray him rod in hand, if not to suggest the duty of a real superior? Religious are like a team of horses. A good driver who corrects the small mistakes of his animals avoids the bigger ones. He constantly holds a tight rein on the horses and does not have to strike them too often because at the least mistake they feel the touch of the whip on their backs. The comparison is humiliating but, admittedly, sadly appropriate! It helps us understand—experience tells us so—how we could ‘prevent the more serious misdeeds by punishing the lesser ones, thereby attacking the evil in its roots.

16) **Finally, even with all the severity I have indicated, the superior will accomplish little if the religious do not sense in him a cordiality which encourages openness.** Voluntary admission cures three-quarters of all misdeeds. However, when the latter are allowed to remain hidden, they develop in darkness until, having become incurable, they break out into scandals which are all-too-often contagious.

Therefore, my dear Brothers, I beg you to use the means I am suggesting with great love and fatherly concern. Be vigilant, but lovingly. Think of your responsibility. Using the word in its original meaning, I repeat with Saint Paul: “Look to yourselves and to the whole flock of which

the Holy Spirit has made you overseers” (Acts 20:28). Be overseers, but overseers established by the Holy Spirit, that is, in the love that springs from the heart of the Divine Master.

Please accept, my dear Brothers, the assurance of my deepest affection in Our Lord.

E. d'Alzon

P.S. I am taking the liberty of sending this circular only to the local Superiors. Because I received so few comments on my previous circulars, I am afraid they have received too little attention. Nevertheless, they are, as it were, the agenda of the next Chapter. If they are not studied, the Chapter will not produce all the results we are entitled to expect from it.

TENTH CIRCULAR [\[34\]](#)

Four Questions To Be Studied

August 1, 1875

My dear Brothers:

If we love God, everything will turn to our advantage. That is why, in the wake of the unfortunate incidents that have recently taken place, I am proposing four questions for your

consideration. They should be placed at the end of our Constitutions:

1. How can we render more effective the supervision to which each local Superior is strictly held if he wants to save his soul?
2. How can we increase the authority and influence of the Superior without becoming arbitrary?
3. How can we prevent certain disorders?
4. What sanction foreseen in our legislation is most useful to the Congregation?

I. IMPROVING SUPERVISION

How can we render more effective the supervision to which the local Superior is held if he wants to save his soul?—It seems to me that the Master of Novices holds the key to facilitating the supervision. He has two principal duties.

Formation of consciences

The first is to speak unceasingly of the need for an upright conscience. It is easy to see how many erroneous consciences there are in the world. Corrupt education, bad example, accepted underhandedness, those are the stumbling blocks for consciences in formation. If the Master of Novices is merciless in combating every appearance of contempt for truth, if he refuses to admit any postulant or novice who is not truthful, if he instills a profound loathing for falsehood and for all that in any way smacks of hypocrisy, he will have accomplished a great deal. But he must especially make his charges understand how much they need to strengthen their conscience. What makes a man is principally his character, and what is character without conscience? All the more must the one striving for perfection develop a conscience which is pure, straightforward, delicate and strong. Once a religious has been trained according to these

principles, he hardly needs supervision. His best supervisor is his conscience. The Superior will learn from him all he wants to know; he need only ask.

Use of all the means foreseen in the Rule

But can we expect all of the newly professed to have such favorable dispositions when they present themselves to their local Superiors? Unfortunately, no. Let us admit that we have too often believed in the conscientiousness of certain people, when in fact they were only acting out of fear. It is up to the Superior to study the character of his religious and to treat some of them with more confidence and others with more severity. Then, if the religious are generally convinced that the Superior should be aware of everything, those who remain closed in the presence of authority will come to understand that the openness of their brothers will inevitably expose them. Moreover, they will learn to halt their evil conversations, if only to avoid running the risk of being quoted.

The Master of Novices (and for that matter any Superior) must go further. He will, of course, avoid the spy system. But by the frequency of his personal interviews with the religious; by his supervision of the parlors, the mail and the social calls, in short, of all personal relationships on the outside; by his oft-repeated prohibition to visit each other's rooms; by his strict enforcement of the practice of major and minor silence; by his frequent inspection of rooms, he will necessarily come to know much more than superiors ordinarily do. And even if he does not know everything, he will always know enough to surmise many abuses and to prevent them, often through the simple fear people have of getting caught.

II. INCREASING THE AUTHORITY AND INFLUENCE OF THE SUPERIOR

How can we increase the authority and influence of the Superior without becoming arbitrary?

Authority of Superior: 1) Requires a knowledge of the Constitutions

Leadership is a gift which cannot be acquired. Those who lack it think they can compensate by the generous use of punishments. As will be mentioned later on, the Superior must certainly

know how to punish but he must also know how to lead. At times, a look suffices. Here, there is nothing arbitrary; it is the moral authority of the Superior which comes into play. But to avoid all forms of arbitrariness, the Superior must know the Constitutions by heart and be so imbued with their spirit that the religious sense in everything he orders, prescribes or prohibits that he is simply applying the rule.

2) Rests upon that of Superior General

If his interpretations are not accepted as lawful, appeal can always be made to the major superiors. But if the local Superior shows that he does not have to fear an interpretation contrary to his own, and if he knows how to proceed vigorously when necessary, as well as compassionately and mercifully when he notices in the guilty more weakness than malice, he will be extremely helpful to the religious under his care. Still, he must not forget that at times weakness can be very culpable. In any case, this general attitude will strengthen his authority.

Through experience, we know that there are religious who deny that of which they are guilty. They should be given a choice: either they tell us all they know, in which case we will treat them in a fatherly fashion, or they admit nothing and we proceed with the full force of the law. Very often they accept the fatherly procedure and public scandal is thereby avoided. But, in these circumstances, it is important to advise the Superior General of all that has transpired, for if clemency is proper once or twice, it can later give rise to serious problems for which the local Superior does not have the right to assume responsibility.

As for the information the religious are obliged to divulge, information which must always reach the Superior General, we must remember that there is nothing worse than seeing the religious prefer the particular good over the general good and decide for themselves what should or should not be said. It is always possible for a local Superior, acting on the spur of the moment, to react too harshly. But there is a remedy for this, that of referring the matter to the Superior General, unless, of course, there is serious scandal requiring immediate measures.

III. PREVENTING DISORDERS

We can prevent disorders by checking abuses at the outset, by not treating anything light-heartedly, by punishing minor infractions so as to avoid having to punish serious ones. It is

not that we must always tell our inferiors of the fears we have in their regard. There are certain disorders which take on importance only because we give them an importance which they do not deserve. Nevertheless, the Superior must always keep his eyes open.

This having been said, the local Superior must love his community. Only love will give him those tender apprehensions which enable him to sense sickness ahead of time and prompt him to search for the means to combat it before it becomes incurable.

Superiors must therefore be vigilant; they must give close attention to any inklings of disorder, decadence or downfall. They must have a somewhat maternal love which does not exclude severity but which knows how to punish whenever necessary and temper whenever appropriate. At the same time and for the common good, they must know when to advise the higher authorities, who have the overall responsibility of the Institute.

IV. SANCTIONS

What sanction foreseen in our legislation is most useful to the Congregation?

For the novices

I need not speak here of the novices. My circular on the novitiate says enough on this point. Besides, with the novices, it is not just a question of punishing them for their shortcomings but of studying their faults to determine whether or not they can be corrected.

For the professed

But the professed religious are an entirely different matter. They have made a commitment for life and that commitment deserves respect. Yet, with our modern civil legislation, we have only one final sanction: expulsion. We must therefore place ourselves within the context of this ultimate measure.

Without going into details, I would ask you to study the following for the next Chapter;

1. The cases of expulsion reserved to Rome;
2. Those reserved to the General Chapter;
3. Those requiring a prompt decision on the part of the Superior General;
4. Those where the Superior General must obtain permission from Rome;
5. Those where he must leave the religious himself request his dispensation from vows;
6. The offenses whose punishment requires the consultation of the Superior General;
7. Those for which the authority of the local Superior suffices.

I am asking you to give these topics serious reflection, so that in a year's time you can discuss them knowledgeably.

I pray that Our Lord will enlighten you in their regard. Our future may depend on them.

After your decisions, may we be able to say: "Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other" (Ps 85:11). May God grant us peace in mercy, truth and righteousness!

Rest assured, my dear Brothers, of my respectful attachment in Our Lord.

E. d'Alzon

ELEVENTH CIRCULAR

Nîmes, September 15, 1875

My dear Brothers:

This is the last circular I intend to send you before the General Chapter convenes in September, 1876.

In my preceding circulars, I indicated the outline of your future deliberations. You should add to it two questions which do not require any preparation on my part.

Accordingly, you will be asked to study the following topics:

1. Ways of combating the Secret Societies and the Revolution;

2. Prerequisites for being a good Chapter member;
3. Concrete improvements in our prayer life;
4. Third-Orders;
5. Policy regarding politics;
6. Studies;
7. Alummates;
8. Novitiates;
9. Duties of Superiors;
10. Ordinary sanctions and expulsions.

I. FINANCIAL QUESTIONS

Father Hippolyte has asked to be relieved of his duties as General Treasurer. I have asked him to stay on for a year not only to give him the opportunity to submit to the Chapter a detailed report of his administration but to press him for suggestions as to how the General Treasury should be permanently set up. I especially urge the professed of Paris to study this question

with Father Hippolyte to learn from his experience and to offer him their comments. It would please me if, during the course of the year, Fathers Hippolyte, Picard and Vincent-de-Paul Bailly were able to lay the groundwork for a complete study of this important topic.

Finally, it is indispensable that each local Superior submit a report which gives an overall view as well as specific details of the financial situation of his house.

During the year, God willing, I hope to regularize the entire situation of the houses at Nîmes. From then on, everything should proceed normally.

God seems to be protecting us quite ostensibly. We should thank him, without tempting him any further.

II. SPIRITUAL PREPARATION FOR THE COMING CHAPTER

Allow me to express all the joy with which I anticipate this coming meeting. If, since the last Chapter, we have suffered a lot, we have also received consolations in superabundance.

May the coming Chapter be for us an occasion of renewal. To make that possible, let us prepare for it by renewing our fervor.

Consequently, upon receiving this circular and until September 1, 1876:

1. The professed religious and the novices will recite daily the Veni Creator and the Memorare for the members of the Chapter;
2. They will impose upon themselves each day some small mortification and forgo dessert once a week;

3. During the year they will say at least six Masses or, if they are not priests, receive twelve communions, asking for the guidance of the Holy Spirit;

4. During Lent of 1876, they will ask the friends of the Congregation to increase their prayers, penances and communions for the success of the Chapter;

5. During this same Lent, in all the houses of the Congregation, we will recite daily the Miserere to ask forgiveness for the offenses committed in the Congregation and for the scandal they caused.

My dear Brothers, may Our Lord grant you abundant light so that the Chapter I am here officially announcing may become for each one of us the occasion to reform our lives.

Rest assured of my fondest affection in Our Lord.

E. d'Alzon

[1] This circular has been referred to in various ways; it could be entitled: "Our Special Goal: the Defense of the Church."

[2] At this time, Father d'Alzon was writing his Meditations on Religious Perfection.

[3] The expressions "free thinking" and "liberal ethics" must be understood in the context of nineteenth-century liberalism which was a movement away from religious dogma and religious moral teaching, both considered as shackles placed on the freedom of the human person.

[4] For Father d'Alzon, the word "piety" had no negative connotations. He understood it as a loving reverence of God.

[5] Father d'Alzon had just finished giving the Oblate Sisters and the Assumptionist novices a course on mystical theology that had been well liked.

[6] This circular was outlined in 1874 on the famous poster entitled "Our Goal" and reproduced in translation on the following page.

[7] Poster drawn up in 1874 outlining Father d'Alzon's first circular letter.

[8] Cf. First Circular, note 4.

[9] In 19th-Century France, the apostolate called for a measure of spiritual warfare, so fierce were the attacks of the enemies of God and the Church.

[10] In his correspondence, Father d'Alzon himself entitled this second circular "Assumptionist Aristocracy." The members of the General Chapter, a self-perpetuating body, were appointed for life. In between Chapters, they served, together with the Assistants General, as an able group of Con-suitors to the Superior General.

[11] The religious in question was Father Charles Laurent.

[12] This criticism had been leveled against the nascent institute, especially in Paris, rather Pirard thought that the studies of the religious needed greater control. Father d'Alzon preferred putting the question off until later, though, in broad terms, he did come back upon it in his fourth circular.

[13] Father d'Alzon had promised Father Picard a circular letter "that would give more details concerning the goal of the Congregation: teaching, preaching, direction of souls, Third-Orders, seminars for the directors of worker apostolates, and popular teaching. To me," he added, "all this seems to hold together." In complete conformity with their distant beginnings, the new Assumptionist Third-Orders were to dedicate themselves to the defense of the Church.

[14] As a matter of fact, Father d'Alzon did accomplish a great deal through his religious and tertiaries: cf. ES, p. 1425.

[15] The Secret Societies, particularly free-masonry, were engaged in open warfare on the Church and on Christians: cf. ES, pp. 1433-4.

[16] Two documents accompanied this circular: 1) the draft of a "Rule of the Third-Order of the Augustinians of the Assumption" (ES, pp. 1425-8), and 2) the "Rule of the Third Order of the Priests of the Assumption" (ES, pp. 1428-32).

[17] To put an end to the criticism that Assumptionists did not study, Father d'Alzon, who had just given the novitiate a strong impetus, exhorts his religious with lofty considerations on studies to become scholarly men capable of effectively defending the Church and extending the Kingdom of God in souls.

[18] Taking part in the controversy of his time, Father d'Alzon thought that the Christian authors, particularly the Fathers of the Church, should be included among the classical authors studied.

[19] After giving it long thought, Father d'Alzon wrote this circular all at once. Its inspiration, quite traditional and very noble, makes for a spirituality that is original and characteristic. In our spiritual life, we must be primarily concerned with contemplating God, not in order to transmit the fruit of our contemplation to others as do the Dominicans—*aliis contemplata tradere*, says their motto—but in order to develop an intimate relationship with God as a prelude to heaven. If we ourselves are attracted to God, we will very naturally and instinctively attract others to him.

[20] Father d'Alzon used the term "oraison," which, for want of an exact English equivalent, is rendered here by mental prayer.

[21] In the light of Revelation, of the teaching of Saint Augustine in the City of God, and of the doctrine of Vatican I on the mystery of the Church, Father d'Alzon outlines in this circular letter a short but suggestive theology of history in order to give his religious a sense of purpose in the battles they were waging for the defense of the Church.

[22] The French term "colleqe" combines the U.S. equivalent of high school and the first two years of college.

[23] By supernatural spirit, Father d'Alzon meant that attitude which believes deeply in the supernatural and lives by it.

[24] A debate raged in Father d'Alzon's time about the respective merits of the ancient Christian authors as opposed to the pagan authors in the school curriculum.

[25] Both the term and the concept of the alummates are attributable to Father d'Alzon. Conducted by the Assumptionists, these minor seminaries: a) recruited youngsters from among the poor, and b) allowed the students to opt for the priesthood either in the diocesan or religious clergy. Over 4,000 priests received their early training in the alummates most of them for various dioceses of Western Europe as well as for various religious and missionary orders.

[26] The first alummate corresponded to the four years of high school in the U.S. The second alummate comprised two years called the humanities and corresponded to the first two years of college in the U.S.

[27] The formation of the young religious had become an important issue. A good number of recruits had passed through the novitiate at Le Vigan like streaks of lightning, and several young professed had left the Congregation. Father Hippolyte Saugrain obviously had too much

work: he was concurrently General Treasurer, Master of Novices and Superior of the Oblates at Le Vigan and, at the same time, was spending himself in many ministries on the outside. The alumnae were about to send their first precious contingents which must not be ruined by a hasty formation. It was time to organize the very foundations of the Institute.

Father d'Alzon called a meeting that was to be held in Nîmes on October 26-28, 1874. Four people would attend: Fathers d'Alzon, Francois Picard, Hippolyte Saugrain and Emmanuel Bailly. To guide their discussions, Father d'Alzon wrote this eighth circular letter at Lavaqnac at the beginning of that same month of October. After the meeting, he sent it to the other members of the General Chapters.

[\[28\]](#) The Minutes of the meeting of October 26, 1874, state that “the question of having one or several novitiates is tabled until such a time as the Congregation is divided into provinces. Nevertheless, in terms of personnel and spirit, the Committee stressed the advantages of having only one novitiate.”

[\[29\]](#) The same meeting reminded the religious of the principle concerning the strict separation of the novices: the professed may not visit the novitiate without special permission. Father d'Alzon personally added: “Except in emergencies, this permission must be obtained from the Superior General.”

[\[30\]](#) Cf. *Collectanea* (MCMXX), p. 6: “Rescriptum de Constitutione Novitiatus” (Dec. 11, 1857).

[\[31\]](#) During these meetings, Father d'Alzon asked Father Picard to become the Master of Novices. The choice underlined the importance Father d'Alzon was attaching to this responsibility. Because of the appointment, the novitiate was moved from Le Vigan to Paris.

[\[32\]](#) &Cf. the meditations on Our Lord in the Eucharist, for the season of Corpus Christi (Father d'Alzon's own note).

[\[33\]](#) In June 1875t a young religious who was teaching at the college in Nimes was expelled.

On this occasion, Father d'Alzon discovered that regrettable events, unknown to the Superiors, had happened at the novitiate of Le Vigan some time before. Deeply upset, he wrote a circular letter which was sent to only a few religious. Father Hippolyte, against whom it was especially directed, accepted it very humbly. Father Picard liked the ideas but candidly suggested that the tone be changed; he feared that—contrary to the spirit of Assumption—“vigilance could be mistaken for inquisition, charity for weakness, frankness for the right to say and do anything and the duty to hide everything when one is not in charge.” Father d'Alzon took these remarks into consideration. On July 18 he wrote: “I have rewritten the circular. It will be a little sweeter but may not accomplish its purpose.” This ninth circular, addressed to all the superiors, is therefore a second edition. The first edition was set aside after having been heavily annotated by Father Picard.

[\[34\]](#) Still reeling from the after effects of the regrettable events which took place at Le Vigan, Father d'Alzon is searching for some practical means of avoiding such disorders in the future.