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## **Emmanuel d'Alzon to Educators at Assumption**

*In memory of the 19th-century educators at Assumption College in Nîmes (France), this book is dedicated to Assumption educators, lay and religious, who today collaborate at Assumption College in Worcester (USA) and all over the world.*

From the original publication ©1988 *D'Alzon: To Educators at Assumption, Some Writings of Emmanuel d'Alzon on Education*

, Selected and Presented by Richard E. Lamoureux, A.A., Milton, MA.

TWENTY-THIRD PUBLICATIONS

A Division of Bayard

One Montauk Avenue, Suite 200

New London, CT 06320 •

(860) 437-3012 or (800) 321-0411

[www.23rdpublications.com](http://www.23rdpublications.com)

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ISBN 978-1-58595-784-2

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 2009940227

Printed in the U.S.A.

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## **Preface**

On the occasion of the 200th anniversary of the birth of Emmanuel d'Alzon on 30 August 1810, Assumption College has decided to republish a modest collection of his essays, talks, and letters on the topic of education. The preface that I wrote in that first edition, in 1988, includes some information that is worth repeating here.

Emmanuel d'Alzon was born of a well-to-do family in Southern France in the years immediately following upon the French Revolution. He received the baccalaureate degree at Collège Stanislas in Paris in 1828. For two years he studied law at the Sorbonne, while developing an avid interest in the philosophical and religious questions being hotly debated in the circle of Félicité de la Mennais, whom the young d'Alzon took as a mentor. By January of 1830 d'Alzon had decided that the best way to renew society according to Christian principle was to be ordained a priest in order to proclaim the truth of the Gospel.

The weak academic program of the seminaries left him cold, first at the seminary at Montpellier, then in Rome. His own study was intense, and he sought out the best theologians as his personal tutors.

After his ordination in Rome in 1834, he was given major leadership responsibilities by his Bishop, who nonetheless discouraged him from pursuing his early personal plans to work with the Protestants of southern France (to “convert” them by debate, to use his language) and to found a Catholic secondary school. But only ten years later, in 1844, d'Alzon seized upon the opportunity to purchase the failing “Collège de l'Assomption” in Nîmes and dreamed that it might become a model Catholic school and the champion of “free” or independent education in a France at that time hostile to the idea. In 1845 d'Alzon realized another project that had matured gradually over the years: to profess religious vows and to found the lay/religious “Association de l'Assomption” and a new religious Order, one of whose primary concerns would

be education.

D'Alzon wrote a great deal about education. Much of it is colored by the 19th-century context within which he wrote and by the specific audience or issue that concerned him at the given moment. Father d'Alzon's "style" is not our own, but it would be a mistake to dismiss what we read because it is dated in its style. Not only does d'Alzon differ from us in style, but at times in the content of what he writes as well. And it is precisely for that reason that we stand to learn something from him.

He tells us, for example, that there is such a thing as truth, which can be found if pursued seriously. He is convinced that the Gospel can help us in this search; in fact, the Gospel may well provide us with the truth itself. Even what we today refer to as "institutionalized religion," i.e., the Church, can guide us along the way. He does not advocate a pious religion that seeks refuge in a church pew, but professes instead that the truth of the Gospel is precisely what is needed to humanize society. As for teaching itself, his advice is full of common sense. Be a serious student yourself, be energetic in your search for truth and your efforts to lead a good life, and you will be a good teacher. Treat your students with love and respect above all.

You may think that this advice was good for an earlier, simpler day. But think back on the context in which d'Alzon lived. He himself says the Church is in disarray, public and private instruction is deficient, scholarly endeavors have lost all perspective and sense of direction, the clergy is in decline, and government is in crisis. D'Alzon knew that his society was passing through major institutional and intellectual crises and was confident that he had found some important ways to address the problem.

The documents included here are varied in genre and content. Most are by d'Alzon himself, but for two letters by one of his friends. Other writings by his collaborators, lay and religious, could have been included. They have been grouped under various headings: an early reference to d'Alzon's thoughts about education, texts that help us appreciate the intimate link between education and Assumptionist religious life, thoughts on the relation between learning and social issues, two letters on the importance of ideas, reflections on education specifically, examples of d'Alzon's polemic in favor of "free" education in France, specific recommendations for teachers, and finally a reference to the importance of Augustine for d'Alzon.

Education was a great cause for Emmanuel d'Alzon, something to give his life for. Its goal is to make men and women fully human, "to restore all things in Christ." D'Alzon would tolerate

nothing less. His passion was born of such an ambition. We should be so blessed with such a "holy intolerance," as he called it.

Fr. Richard E. Lamoureux, a.a.

Superior General Rome,

1 July 2009

## **I. D'Alzon's Dream**

### **D'Alzon's Dream of a Catholic University**

LETTER FROM E. D'ALZON TO LUCIEN D'ESGRIGNY

(OCTOBER 1, 1834)

*“For a long time I’ve been thinking about a Catholic university” says the youthful d’Alzon (24 years old) in this tender and spirited letter to his friend d’Esgrigny. Writing from Rome, where he was studying theology, d’Alzon describes some of the problems the Church and humanity at large were facing: we love too little, and our knowledge is so deficient. He knew that education and a Catholic university would be major preoccupation during his life. He also understood that only God can open our hearts to truth.*

---

To Mr. Luglien de Jouenne d’Esgrigny

rue Ferme des Mathurins, 22

Paris, France

Rome, October 1, 1834

My dear friend, your letter arrived here a while ago, but I received it only yesterday when I

returned from an excursion to Bologna, with stops in Loreto, Ancona, Rimini, Ravenna, and Faenza, and a visit in Florence. I'd love to return to those last two cities with you. So let's plan a trip to Italy. For many reasons I was ecstatic with everything I saw, but I also suffered a great deal. The Marche region is infected; one smells revolution all over. The burden of the Austrian yoke has intensified the exasperation of the people, which leads them to complaints that, I have to admit, seem absurd even if in many ways well founded, the tricolor ribbon on the caps of French soldiers in Ancona is a sorry sight. I can't help worry about the future of this country when I see the way the government is so easily unsettled, how unable it is to guide people effectively—which otherwise would be so useful for eliminating serious problems—how willing it seems to remain perfectly inactive, and then how everyone seems to hate it whenever anyone in authority attempts to do something.

Thank you a thousand times for sympathizing with my sadness and for everything you say to encourage me. It's true that I'm sad, but I'm not discouraged. I see evil around me, a great deal of it, so much in fact that I expect it will inevitably lead to catastrophic consequences. But through all of that corruption, I've noticed seeds of healthy, vigorous life, which I hope will overcome every obstacle and will develop later. How can you be joyful, for example, when you see the sad state of the clergy? It's a lie and a scandal. You, my friend, have less reason to be troubled than I; you're not part of this clergy, that could do so much good. You will not be a priest some day. I'm not disenchanted, or if I am in some ways, that's been to my advantage. Yes, I have suffered quite a bit, but I've found God in the face of human weakness.

What you then say in your letter is on target and well put. If I had been by your side when you wrote it, I would have embraced you. At times you grasp things with an enviable accuracy. You know that it's extremely difficult to separate neatly reality from imagination? I try to do it each day, though I don't claim to have succeeded. Yes, dear friend, we often give to people the qualities for which we praise them. I couldn't help but laugh in seeing your observation confirmed in a fine story from the *Contes de Maman Gateau*.

The trip I just went on was good for me physically, even if it didn't give me a constitution of steel. My head is clear, and I will be happy if I can preserve the capacity for work that I have right now. Though I have not written much, I thought a great deal during those long days on the road, when there's little else that's better to do. I reread parts of Tacitus. Do you know him well?

I'm not sure why, but I keep re-reading your letter. "Roman soldiers haven't always been in Rome," you say. Now that's an astonishingly true thought, as Mr. de Maistre might have said. It explains many things. No. The legions are fighting in Gaul. But what has become of Caesar? "The papacy is not strong because of Roman faith," you add, "but because of the faith of other

peoples.” Can you tell me, friend, what peoples you are talking about? I travelled from Florence to here with two French republicans. Do you think they were wrong when they said: “The only weapon being used today to attack religion is indifference?” “And also ignorance,” I added. Indifference and ignorance imply a total lack of faith, and you know how deeply humanity is wounded by both.

De la Mennais writes to me about the state France is in: “There couldn’t be less thought about Rome than if it didn’t exist. Neither resentment, nor anger, nor even scorn—scorn would at least be something—but instead the most absolute and the coldest indifference.” You can eliminate from this sentence what de la Mennais’ personal feeling might have added, and it remains terribly true. Do not think I am so discouraged that I have no more hope. But I can say with the prophet: “Is there no balm in Gilead, no physician there? Why has no new skin grown over their wound?” (Jeremiah 8:22). One feeling growing in me is love for my fellow man. I can’t see an unbeliever or even a corrupt man without being attracted to him like a doctor to his sick friend. I know, I’m not yet a doctor, and yet I have given it a few tries. I’ve been successful a few times. And don’t think, dear friend, that I’m unaware of the power of hope. But the stronger mine is, the more it is obliged to stretch the limits of its desire.

Humanity in our day sins in two ways: we love too little, and our knowledge is so deficient. Humanity needs to be taught, but first we need to give humanity a heart of flesh, as Scripture says, to replace the one becoming like stone in its chest. On that score, my thoughts are confused. My projects and plans grind to a halt. The heart is the hearth, the center of warmth and of life. Only God can supply these when they are lacking. For that reason I am convinced we will need to suffer great evils before our minds are compelled to return and find their rest in truth. For the moment, political movements engross everyone’s thinking. God has to hit very hard for us to seek refuge in a place of rest. Good God! Look at me, telling Providence how to handle the situation. I don’t really know what I’m saying by all of this.

Tell me what you think about young people today, what you expect of them, what thoughts they have, if you think they are sincere. These are important questions for me. What do you think of the clergy in Paris? My future depends on my bishop. I’d like to be a priest in the Church of the Holy Trinity. I’d return to France, study a few more years, then work as my superiors ask. For a long time I’ve been thinking about a Catholic university, which I know would be successful given the approach I’d take.

Let me conclude with the beginning of your letter. You were answering one of my letters that seems to have troubled you because of something I said. I must have been too sharp in my words, but don’t hold that against me. On the contrary, you should love me even more. It’s no

crime if my friendship for you leads me to speak energetically about everything that concerns you. Thank you for answering my letter so promptly; I hope you will persevere.

Bye for now, dear friend. When will I see you again? Why not come to see me? When will you come to tell me not to be sad? Come here to see the ruins before they disappear completely. They are still beautiful in their collapsed state. Please come. We'll talk about so many things that I'm sure we'll be able to do each other a lot of good. Really, now, what are you doing? Don't you love God enough to give Him a little of your time? No matter what I do, I'm sad, but I'm not complaining. I try to purify my thoughts as much as possible and put myself in God's hands. You too can pray for me, and do love me. The thought that I have a friend like you is a great consolation and strengthens me more than you could believe.

Adieu, adieu! Be happy and good.

Emmanuel

ORIGINAL EDITION: *Letters*, B.P., Paris, 1923. Siméon Vailhé Vol. 1, pp. 690-694.

TRANSLATION: Editor.

## **II. The Educational Mission and the Assumptionists**

## **The World Needs Assumption**

LETTER FROM MARIE-EUGÉNIE DE JÉSUS TO E. D'ALZON

(AUGUST 5, 1844)

*Mother Marie-Eugénie de Jésus was the foundress of the Religious Sisters of the Assumption and one of d'Alzon's closest friends and collaborators. In 1844, having already established her own community, Mother Marie-Eugénie writes to her friend and advises him to pursue his inspiration to found a men's religious Congregation that would embody the same spirit they had both come to embrace. She is convinced that "the spirit of Assumption" is unique and is a real blessing for the world. It is a spirit in touch with the forces" of their own day, deeply rooted in the Gospel, and convinced of the central importance of education, the development of ones intelligence and ones character. In her letter to d'Alzon, she struggles to articulate her understanding of the unique approach to education and study that Assumption men and women might adopt.*

---

August 5, 1844

Feast of Our Lady of the Snows

Dearest Father



Finally, I have a morning to talk with you about the thing that has concerned me the most for a while even though I haven't had a chance to talk to you about it at all. I mean, what you wrote to me about horn Turin concerning your renewed interest in founding a religious Order. I have to admit that while I'm eager to say many things about the project, I'm having a hard time writing because I can't choose among the thoughts and feelings I have on the subject. Also, it's hard to know which of these come from God...

Since we started our own project and especially since I have discovered through contacts that our spirit is different from that of all other religious, men and women, I have desired ever more intensely that it would please God to raise up in the Church Orders of men with a similar spirit and organization. These could offer to young Christian men and especially young priests a character that is more open, more intelligent, in one sense more Christian, and in another especially more noble and more free. I have to say very frankly that I did not think you understood things well enough (to make such a foundation). I thought you were a bit lost in your own notions of perfection. I have a hard time identifying what it was in you that discouraged me, and today I suspect that it might well have been the obstinacy of my own spirit. What is certain is that I had said to myself, he does not understand things well, and that I had let the matter drop. However, before you wrote to me from Turin, I was already beginning to change my mind, in this sense that I realized that after all you understood more than the well-known intellects I had been put in contact with, that you were more friendly, simpler and less inclined to lose yourself in a branch of Catholicism and to forget the trunk, or to think that the whole thing was in the branch. I stress this defect because it's what ruins Fr. Lacordaire for me, who is entirely and above everything else a Dominican, and Fr. de Cazales, a mystic, and the followers of Fr. Bautain.

Why do I tell you all of this? To make you understand that it is probably a very natural enthusiasm that draws me so completely to your project to found a religious association, if it is in the spirit of what I have been praying for so much. You haven't told me, and you know that if it is something else like preaching or mission work, I'll be interested in it because I'm interested in everything you do for the glory of God, but it wouldn't be the same for me.

I would have wanted you to explain the wonderful plan you have developed while I awaited a more supernatural disposition, but since you have been silent, let me tell you what my reason and my feelings have to say on the matter...

What is evidently missing in France today for men is religious Orders in touch with the people,

the minds and, I would even say, the physical forces of our time. If men called to religious life are lacking in this, then the action of the Orders will be no less lacking in the various works in which they are involved, but above all and especially in education. Between you and me, and without excusing impassioned and false accusations, is it not extraordinarily odd for Catholics in the midst of our struggle today to want the world to accept the Jesuits, whom most of us do not ourselves feel obliged to accept? If it were not a point of honor that rallied us around them (a point of honor that I find especially idiotic since it contradicts our real sentiments), if that point of honor did not exist, wouldn't these men quickly become the cause of division among Christians? If they existed, if they had full power, wouldn't we think it necessary to ask God to reverse the situation? Why is it that, when we set God aside because of them, we do not feel at once obliged to raise another banner as followers of the Cross? You might say that it wouldn't be allowed: and I say, yes, it would. It would be allowed if the leader of such an organization were in France, if the Constitutions were marked by learning and frankness, and if the members were willing to acquire degrees and were worthy themselves.

There's more. I am convinced that what hurts the Jesuits most in the eyes of people in the modern world (for worldly people love them) is what hurts them in my eyes: the lack of a gospel spirit in even regard and an inferior formation, the causes of which I would like to be able to explain to you in a long conversation. We both well understand that *formation* is not the quantity of things one has learned; it's rather, if I may say so, the expansion of the intelligence and of the character thanks to the truth one acquires through learning. I'll use awkward expressions because I don't have the time to find better ones. What expands one's character and intelligence in study? What orders everything we learn, provides a goal, a link, a rationale? In a word, a philosophy does all of that. More broadly speaking, it's a passion. But what passion to communicate to a religious? The passion of faith, of love, of living by the law of Christ, etc. Unified but diverse, these have characterized the major Orders: love for St. Francis of Assisi, faith for St. Dominic, etc. They all had a philosophy. Note well that most of the major Orders in their own study took as a starting point what I call passion. St. Francis of Assisi said to his brothers: Instead of trying to find out if God exists, express your love of his existence. For me that sums up the philosophical principle of St. Bonaventure and of the entire Order. The Dominican studies to find the truth, to systematize it, to defend it; faith is his philosophy. However little you have read Fr. de Berulle, you will understand that he gave birth to a Mallebranche. I know no one who attains principles at a higher level or truths more divine in order to teach things that are so simple.

The Jesuits, you understand, kill these two or this double faculty that lives on air, on light, on some other motive for study than the Superiors will. Because of them spirituality is full of notions that seem very strange in this regard. It would seem foolhardy and arrogant to want to raise each person that God sends to us to the highest possible sphere of intelligence and love, to be attached solely to God; or to allow the greatest freedom in the pursuit of God, exercising no other authority except to keep a person from returning to a lower level of existence, to a narrowly human perspective, to a pursuit of immediate realities.

Where am I in my thoughts? I wanted to say that I was convinced that we would not achieve the true superiority in learning that Catholics need today if they are to win the day, except by a superiority of character found in both professors and students, of passion that spurs them on, and of philosophy that guides them. And this is precisely what usually gets stifled in religious education. I have to admit that secular education, which retains these three elements though it be in a narrowly human context, has an intellectual advantage over an education that destroys them. But it would evidently and surely be inferior to an educational approach that would retain these elements in a religious context. I'm not sure I'm being clear. I simply want to say that someone formed according to notions of human and worldly honor is better off than someone broken and without form at all. Intellectual growth is more advanced by an enthusiasm guided by human passions and the torch of a weak philosophy than by a total lack of passion in the soul or by study that's concerned only with a multitude of facts. But wouldn't it be the best education of all that took these three vital elements at their true source rather than at broken cisterns, to use the prophet's expression. Why not form people with the power of the Gospel? Why not excite people with the truth of God and for His reign? Why not take the wisdom revealed by the Son of God himself and an understanding of how all beings are related to him as our philosophy, as the principle and the end of all study?

But this is precisely what no one seems to be worried about. Bishops are beginning to think about getting priests to take degrees, but clerical garb will only cloak secular learning. If only God would send us someone concerned with learning and Christian education, with linking these two together and letting them sustain each other. You'll probably say: I'm not that "someone." Dear father, my response is the clever one my mother used for my father during the fifteen year period when he was an unsuccessful candidate for office. She would say to those supporting other candidates: When the liberals win, my husband will surrender his place, but for as long as rebuffs are being handed out, he'll be on the barricades and will continue to present himself as the most worthy candidate. Her words have often encouraged me. The beginnings of a foundation, care for those who join, material preoccupations, the struggle against obstacles—it's a shame to burden leaders with all of this. But God will provide if we prepare the nest. He'll help others walk along the roads that we humble laborers have opened up. I can think of no better encouragement for a sincere heart that loves God and the Church. I think that for now it's less important to find a learned man than someone who allows and even makes people study and who leads them along the lines that I've suggested. The only fatal error would be a spiritual teaching that breaks people; on that score you should evaluate self. M. Vernières may have encouraged you in that direction, and because of this problem M. Bautain is absolutely powerless at present. Apart from this, you're the right age and have the right position, funding and even experience that few others have. It's up to you now to see before God whether or not this secret instinct you have that is not yet clearly developed and this feeling of guilt for not having acted yet may be telling you that God is pushing you in the direction of His work. I say deliberately *His* work. I think that it is presently the most important thing for His glory and for that of the Church....

A thousand times yours, in Jesus and in Mary,

Sr. Marie Eugénie de Jésus

ORIGINAL EDITION: *Lettres de Mère Marie-Eugénie de Jésus*. Paris, 1984. Vol. VIII, number 1627.

TRANSLATION: Editor.

### **Assumption's Mission in Education**

A DESCRIPTION OF THE NEW RELIGIOUS ORDER BY MARIE-EUGÉNIE DE JÉSUS (1849)

*By 1849 Mother Marie-Eugénie de Jésus had already established a community for her sisters in England. She wanted to encourage d'Alzon and his fledgling foundation and to urge him to seek new members across the Channel. In a letter dated 23 June 1849, she asked him for an account of his project that she could have translated and sent on to her English community. Lacking an immediate response from d'Alzon, she drafted a text herself and had it translated. What follows is her text, done in the mid-19th century probably by a French translator. The*

*present translation retains many expressions of the 19th-century version with only minor changes.*

*Her description of the new religious Order, eventually to be known as the Assumptionists, tries to articulate its goal, one that is broader than moral conversion. Its purpose is to educate the human person as fully as possible. When God, the principle and end of human life, is excluded from education, learning de-humanizes. An integral education "is precisely the end sought by the founders of this new Order."*

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## **1. The Rechristianization of Learning and Teaching**

The guiding thought of this foundation has been that the task of our age might be the Christianization of learning and consequently of teaching at every level.

### **The Point of View of Learning**

It seems almost unnecessary to insist on the necessity of pursuing this work. Many famous minds have thought this and expressed it. On the one hand, you need only contemplate the developments of the human intellect in all branches of learning outside the range of revealed truths, and to believe firmly, on the other, in the truth of God in Revelation and in the presence and ever active assistance of God's Spirit in all that the Church has taught and accomplished here below. You need also to have a mind logical enough to conceive that no individual truth can be foreign to infinite truth, powerful and thorough enough not to content itself with isolated truths and fragments of knowledge without any center of unity, to feel acutely the need to connect all truths acquired in the human sciences with the sole truth, which reigns supreme in our intelligence with a certitude that God Himself has guaranteed.

## **The Point of View of the Apostolate**

But it is not merely from an intellectual point of view that this need is most forcibly felt. The zeal of those who have been redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ but separated from him by the thousands each day by the teachings of learning divorced from faith has power enough over men and women of generosity and faith to urge them on to consecrate themselves to an endeavor that by its scope has need of every good will and by its diversity can easily call upon every aptitude.

## **Disastrous Results of an Education without Jesus Christ**

Why is there especially today so little divine charity and so little of the true spirit of Christianity in people? Why is it that so many people who start off generous and well-intentioned wander far from God, led away by error and passion? Is it not because all those who have received some education have received it apart from Jesus Christ, uninfluenced by his truth, or even in contradiction to it, and that from the bare elements of language to the highest branches of learning nothing has been taught to them that could shed his Light on their minds and become the principle of his life within them?

The best served acquire some Christian sense, not in the course of their studies, but thanks to the generosity of a priest. But a false learning comes to contradict or neutralize this influence, which in itself is unable to shape ones whole being. To deal with ones passions and fallen nature, a person needs all the resources of an intelligence and a heart transformed by Christianity.

Perhaps until the present time this need has been less felt, for there exist many Orders consecrated to the conversion of souls, while there is not one whose aim is precisely to Christianize a person in all his faculties.

## **Greatness and Beauty of a Thoroughly Christian Education**

It is wonderful to work for a person's conversion and to render him worthy of divine mercy, even

if we are unable to change the past or restore the original freshness of the faculties which passions have withered. But is it not greater still and more glorious to Jesus Christ to take a person fresh from the baptismal font, and to nourish him so abundantly with the truth of Christ that he may attain in Him the fullness of humanity? Then, freed by truth from error and from evil, strengthened, and enlightened by a learning that has God for principle and for end, a person can begin a life of service for the cause of God with unblemished faculties, whose peace, whose joy and whose force lie in the serenity of the Divine Light, beaming on them and penetrating them to the full measure of their development and extent.

## **2. A New Order Consecrated to This Apostolate**

This is precisely the end sought by the founders of this new Order. They are not unaware of the difficulty of it. It is not child's play, nor the work of a day, since to attain it nothing less is required than to rebuild in Jesus Christ the whole edifice of human knowledge.

But is that not the goal toward which the human intellect must tend, ever since God revealed his design through these words of St. Paul: To restore all things in Christ? This is the truth of God and must be His will. And with that certainty, what cannot be accomplished? Shall it be said that falsehood and hatred have had the power to unite so many against Christ and His Church, but that love and faith have failed to bring others together in one common effort to re-establish the reign of God in the human intellect? Such an enterprise ought to begin like everything Christian, by what is humble and lowly. The role a religious Order should play in this is especially in terms of humility, dedication, and perseverance which for all things serve as the foundation of success, without being recognized as such.

## **Important Mission Given to Lay-People in Third Orders**

Many lay people will collaborate with the Order in this academic enterprise in roles more suited to their tastes and from which more glory may be derived. Offering to people still engaged in the world a share in the work of God will be another aspect of the apostolate and charity of the Religious of this Order. The whole concept of this foundation from the beginning has been to form a Third Order in connection with the Order, to provide a center and support for the otherwise isolated and scattered efforts of many intelligent lay persons, who feel themselves impelled today for one reason or another, some by their own personal experience of the need of such a thing, others as it were by a secret and holy impulse from God, to work with all their might to bring learning and education more in harmony with Catholic belief and under the

influence of Catholic teachings.

There has already been a successful attempt to establish a Third Order. Without severing family ties, it gives to Catholics in the world, some of the help and consolation of religious life, and imparts to them some portion of the strength therein found to work for the glory of God.

The very independence of these lay members will contribute in its way to advance the common cause, allowing them a freedom of action, control of their own time, and a freedom for studies, travels and research impossible to that extent for the Religious.

### **Advantages of Their Association with the Religious**

But while these brothers remaining in the world will be thus of considerable service in the work of learning, they will expect to receive from the religious the support of deeper commitment, an example and spirit of holiness and faith, which are to characterize the work itself. The more deeply versed they are in human learning, the more will they need from the religious, their teachers in the holy wisdom of the cross and in virtue. They will accept to be humble disciples only if they find this kind of spiritual excellence. It alone will bind them to the Order and to its goal.

### **The Humble and Supernatural Mission of the Religious**

To the Religious then, who are most involved, will fall the humblest and most difficult of the works. The first is that of education, the most promising of all for the future but also the one of them all that imposes the most continual sacrifices. But can this be a difficulty for real religious? What goal can they set for themselves, but their own sanctification and that of others? In this case, the special aim of the Order is the sanctification of human beings, even in their intelligence. Need it be said that the religious must begin this work in themselves? They could make no judgment from the point of view of faith if they had any other point of view on their vocation and the work to which it calls them.

### **3. Prospects of Success**



The work, the doubts and hesitations, the difficulties of beginning, the obstacles, the defections, the small number of those who give themselves up with utter devotion, even their inadequacy in the face of the enormous task before them, nothing that would usually repulse or discourage human nature should cause fear in the men of faith called to this vocation.

Once convinced that the goal they pursue is supremely useful to the glory of God, once resolved to take every means of attaining it, they may count on God; God will not forsake them. It was a few poor men in a shack who gave to the world the Order of St. Francis, and a few bare-footed preachers going from village to village, who were the first fruits of the learned Order of Preachers. St. Thomas and St. Bonaventure did not come first. Rather it was obedience, poverty, humility and penance that passed before and prepared them the way.

### **The Practice of Religious Virtues**

How effective these virtues are for the particular end proposed here. They powerfully assist in attaining it by removing some of the great obstacles that hinder the task.

Until now the efforts of even famous thinkers to whom God had given the longing to produce a Catholic learning have been stymied by isolation, by the difficulty of meeting like-minded people, by earthly cares, the need of funds, of a career, of reputation and finally the desire for all these things. Can anything surmount these obstacles better than religious virtues? Who does not understand the power of obedience to produce unity? Voluntary poverty delivers from self-seeking and attachment from earthly things: charity, penance and prayer purify the soul and give a deeper insight into the truths of God according to our Saviors words: Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God; humility, charity, patience and faith produce youthful enthusiasm and the true spirit of Christian teaching.

### **Apostolic Zeal**

While these virtues form the foundation on which the new Order is to be raised, it must be understood that its pervading spirit is apostolic zeal. Its aim is to Christianize learning and teaching, but not as speculative learning without application, but rather with an apostolic goal,

as a means of reaching those who from want of a really Catholic culture of the mind become lost to God later on amid the pitfalls of a merely rational intellectual development.

In such a spirit this Order turns first to young students. Its members will grow in learning themselves as they seek to educate such students in the ways of God's wisdom. While it is hoped that God may grant to some of them the ability to shed the light of Jesus Christ on more advanced intellectual levels, where the jealous guardians of human learning allow only their equals or their superiors to exercise sway, it is even more to be hoped that the grace of Jesus Christ may touch many with the desire to serve young people.

### **A Vow to Extend the Kingdom of Our Lord**

This apostolic spirit is confirmed by a vow made at the end of a second novitiate. Besides the three usual vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, the religious of Assumption will make a fourth, that of endeavoring by their whole lives to hasten the coming of the reign of Jesus Christ. In this spirit, the Order will work in the missions. Though there, as elsewhere, its principal work will be education, the religious can also carry out every aspect of ministry and undertake whatever good work may be judged conducive to the glory of God and the salvation of people.

### **Conclusion: The Beginnings of This Work at Nîmes, Under the Wise Direction of Father d'Alzon**

God has already blessed the humble beginnings of this Order. It is now some years since its first members assembled in a College in the south of France with the Vicar General of Nîmes, Father d'Alzon, to whom God has given this holy inspiration. There they have been preparing themselves silently in their holy vocation. They lead a life of poverty and work, combining the exercises of religious life with the instruction and care of students. Their plan is to acquire the experience both of their religious obligations and of the active duties education imposes, before determining the Constitutions of the Order. To put themselves under the protection of an ancient Rule they have adopted that of St. Augustine like many other Orders in the Church. Together, they pray the Divine Office, and their life is as mortified as their active duties will permit.

His Holiness Pius IX is aware of their intention and has strongly encouraged them and approved their plan through one of the Cardinals on his staff. He has especially made known the

confidence and good will he has towards the priest at the head of the little band, assuring him that whatever he asked from Rome would be granted.

But however much he desires the full and public approval of his projects by the head of the Church, Father d'Alzon wants to delay the request, following the example of St. Vincent de Paul, until such time that practical experience of the Rules will have proved and confirmed their merit.

ORIGINAL EDITION: *Pages d'Archives*, ser. 2, #8, 1958, pp. 207-213.

TRANSLATION: 19th-century French translation in *Pages d'Archives*; revised by editor.

## **The Goal and Spirit of the Order**

### FIRST CONSTITUTIONS OF THE ASSUMPTIONISTS

BY E. D'ALZON (1855)

*In the Constitutions of 1855 d'Alzon for the first time attempts a formal definition of the Assumptionists. He articulates their goal and spirit, lists their principal activities, describes their understanding of religious vows and their practice of prayer, and sketches a structure for the governance of the institution. The first chapter, reprinted below, describes the aim of the Congregation and its principal work. It is important to note that in this early major document d'Alzon already considered education to be a primary concern for Assumptionists. Pursuing truth in education, d'Alzon wanted to promote unity by addressing the subjectivism and skepticism that created what he called a "spirit of division" disrupting society.*

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The goal of our small Association is to work toward our perfection by extending the reign of Jesus Christ in souls; accordingly, our motto is found in the words of the Lords Prayer: "*Adveniat Regnum Tuum*".

The coming of the reign of Jesus Christ for ourselves and for our neighbor is what we propose before everything else.

The means of attaining this goal are: for ourselves, the practice of the religious virtues; for our neighbor, the works of zeal specified below.

The religious virtues we shall practice are:

1. **Faith.** It will open us to the supernatural order. We shall believe with all our heart whatever the Church believes and teaches. We shall view all our actions in the light of divine mysteries, so that even the least of our actions might be carried out under the watchful eye of God and be prompted by the desire to fulfill in ourselves some of the teachings of Our Lord.

Moreover, we shall practice this virtue:

- *by our complete submission*, not only to the teaching of the Church, but also to the spirit of such teaching;

- *by our filial obedience* to the Sovereign Pontiff whose every wish that we are aware of we shall readily follow;

- *by our respect for truth*, manifested in the deposit of religious dogmas, realizing more fully the importance of our vocation as defenders and soldiers of these dogmas, and consequently

as soldiers of Jesus Christ, Word of God and Eternal Truth;

- *by our spirit of obedience to the Rule and to our Superiors*, our faith enabling us to see God himself in those who are placed over us in our small Association.

**2. Hope.** We shall place our trust in God alone, never in human means. We shall try to hold all created goods in contempt, in order to attach ourselves only to those of heaven. Evangelical poverty will be the external proof of our practice of hope. We shall also draw from it a true spirit of humility, i.e., of contempt and hatred of ourselves; and a spirit of prayer in which we shall ask for the graces needed to fulfill the Law and the Counsels of God; and a deep conviction that all that is not God or is not related to Him is not worthy of us.

Such a practice of hope will inspire us with the most profound gratitude for God's gifts and remind us of the words of the Apostle who suggests that we thank God for all that happens to us: *"In omnibus gratias agentes"*

Hope will be for us the source of an absolute trust in Our Lord amid all our trials. It was precisely at the time of his Passion that He said to his Apostles: *"Non turbetur cor vestrum, neque formidet; creditis in Deum et in me credite"*

(Jn 14:1). As Our Lord pronounced these words just as he was about to fulfill the prophecy which said of Him: "He shall be surfeited with shame" (Lam 3:30), we shall have confidence that, despite whatever trials befall us, He will not abandon us if we remain faithful to Him.

Indeed, he promised us persecution along with victory;

*"Si me per secuti fuerint, et vos persequentur; in mundo pressuram habebitis sed confidite, ego vici mundum"*

(Jn 15:20 and 16:33).

Concerning all things, let the members of our family remember:

1. never to request in their prayers anything which is not directed toward the greater glory of God;

2. to ask for deliverance from the trials which God sends them only insofar as such deliverance further contributes to the extension of the reign of Jesus Christ;
  
3. while working to solve their temporal difficulties, to seek solely a greater freedom for the service of God to whom they must be completely and absolutely consecrated;
  
4. to find their happiness, their strength, and their rest in the love of the Cross, since the Lord Jesus saved the world by the Cross. Let them be deeply convinced that their trials are as nothing when compared to those of Our Lord Jesus Christ. If they love this good Master, they should forget their own afflictions in the presence of those endured by Christ and those endured daily by the Church, his heavenly Spouse. They should act like the child who, suffering from a small hurt, quickly forgets it and attends solely to his mother when she suddenly becomes seriously ill. With this loving selflessness in mind, the religious of Assumption shall offer at the Holy Sacrifice and to Our Lord present in the tabernacle their hearts and their capacity to suffer, in order to atone for all the crimes committed against God and the Church.

3. **Charity**. Its practice includes:

- the love of God whom we shall solely love;
  
- chastity, which, because it detaches us from fondness for sensual pleasure, will help us direct toward God all the aspirations of our heart;
  
- the love of Our Lord, which we will try to prove by practicing the virtues that He perfectly exemplified in his holy humanity, and by making all our actions depend on his spirit according to his injunction: *“Vos amici estis, si feceritis quae praecipio vobis”* (Jn 15:14). The practice of charity also includes love of the Blessed Virgin, the Mother of Jesus Christ and our special patroness; love of the Church, whose every interest should be ours; and devotion to the Holy Angels, especially the Guardian Angels of our brothers and of the souls entrusted to us.

Love of our neighbor shall show itself: by our gentleness in bearing whatever wrongs others inflict upon us, by our readiness to serve others as required by our vocation, by our cordiality and our spirit of frankness, and especially by our zeal in all the works we undertake for the good of souls.

Finally, charity will reveal to us that spirit of unity which Our Lord asked of his Father just after instituting the sacrament of Eucharist and before shedding his blood for the salvation of the world: "*Ut omnes unum sint... Ut dilectio qua dilexisti me in ipsis sit et ego in ipsis*" (Jn 17:21, 26). Because, in the words of St. John, God is love, and because he who lives in love lives in God, we shall continually ask the Spirit of love, who proceeds eternally from the Father and the Son, to unite us indissolubly to God, to Jesus Christ, to his Church, to our brothers, and to those entrusted to us.

Such a spirit of unity will keep us far from the struggles which all too often arise within the Church between the secular and the regular clergies. We shall scrupulously stay within our bounds so as to avoid conflict with others who, like ourselves, are engaged in working for the salvation of souls. We shall consequently not get involved in any type of work that seems more properly the prerogative of the secular clergy. We must know how to renounce doing some of the good which must be done, in order to accomplish more perfectly the one which will be more directly entrusted to us. We do this in order to strengthen, by the example of humble charity, the bonds of brotherhood which should unite all the servants of Jesus Christ, in whatever type of work they do in his vineyard.

More specifically, we shall seek to extend the reign of Our Lord by the following works:

1. *Education*, understood in the broadest sense of the term, i.e.: secondary schools, colleges, seminaries, and universities. We shall engage in primary education only if we are to dispense it free of charge. We shall diligently devote ourselves to forming Christians deeply attached to the Church and to pointing out the absolute need for a vital unity, not only in dogma but also in discipline, under the increasingly respected direction of the Sovereign Pontiff. For, if one of the greatest evils of our day is the spirit of division which tends to break the bonds uniting the intelligentsia, one of the purposes of our small Association must be to try, through education, to bring the minds and hearts of men closer to the common center which Jesus Christ gave to his Church.
2. *Publication of books* capable of helping Christian education, the calumnies against the truth, which Protestants and philosophers have built up over three centuries, make it imperative for the defenders of divine truth to dispel the darkness which has obscured modern learning.

3. *Works of charity*, by which we can prepare the children entrusted to our care to carry out their Christian duty in the world. We cannot deny the fact that the poor harbor in their hearts great hatred against the rich. This comes either from a loss of faith among the lower classes or from the scandalous use the upper classes have made of their wealth. To redress, as much as possible, such a great evil, we shall try to inculcate in the young people entrusted to us a love and a respect for the suffering members of Jesus Christ, and we shall try to instill in them the obligation they have to help the suffering, not only by their alms, but by their words, their advice, their encouragement, and their solace.

4. *Retreats*. We shall conduct them either in our own houses or on the outside, provided there are no serious drawbacks.

5. *Foreign missions* and works for the destruction of schism and heresy.

We shall undertake work outside our houses, such as preaching and confessions, only if we are certain that it is agreeable to the secular clergy, under whose direction we shall place ourselves to perform such work.

Along these same lines, we shall endeavor to inspire the young people entrusted to us with a sense of respect and affection for their pastors and an understanding of their duties as parishioners.

ORIGINAL EDITION: *Premières Constitutions des Augustins de l'Assomption 1855-1865*. Rome, 1966, pp. 37-45.

TRANSLATION: *Foundational Documents*. Translated by Richard Richards, A.A., Milton, MA, n.d., pp. 15-24. Revised by editor.



## **The Spirit and Work of the Assumptionists**

IN CLOSING ADDRESS AT THE GENERAL CHAPTER BY E. D'ALZON (SEPTEMBER 17, 1868)

*In September of 1868 d'Alzon met with a number of other Assumptionists to review the life and the work of the new Order and set policies for the upcoming five-year period. The address d'Alzon gave at the end of the session is of particular interest as a succinct statement of his Order's spiritual principles and a description of the activities that flow from them. Study and teaching are among the most important of these activities. They lead to a greater knowledge and love of Jesus Christ.*

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*"Make every effort to preserve the unity which has the Spirit as its origin and peace as its binding force" Ephesians 4:3*

Fathers, my sons, I gladly borrow these words of the Apostle, because I think they summarize our work and the valuable meetings that we conclude today: a spirit more energetically united in principles more clearly expressed; the bond of charity grown stronger, more intimate, more fruitful, thanks to the fraternal exchanges in which we tried to give to our minds and hearts the transparency of crystal, because we had nothing to hide, nothing to silence. For this we will long be grateful to the Father of light, from whom all perfect gifts flow and from whom we have received such abundant favors during these blessed days.

As we take leave of one another, I want to entrust to you, if I may put it this way, the legacy of our common thoughts and of our common sentiments, by reminding you once again, and probably for the last time, on what foundation Assumption is built, and by what means we want more than ever to develop Assumption.

I will undoubtedly reveal nothing new to you. I will tell you nothing that you haven't already thought out better than I can express it. Still, what we are now celebrating will give to my words a greater weight. Because of our imminent separation, the words will also assume a character of sadness, but an accent of confidence as well because of the bonds that unite us, for nothing so much as separation teaches brothers how much they can love one another.

## **1. The Foundation on which Assumption Is Built**

Our spiritual life, our religious substance, our *raison d'être* as Augustinians of the Assumption, is to be found in our motto, "Thy Kingdom Come": the coming of the reign of God in our souls, by the practice of the Christian virtues and of the evangelical counsels in keeping with our vocation, and the coming of the reign of God in the world by the struggle against Satan and the conquest of souls ransomed by Our Lord and yet still immersed in error and sin. What could be more simple! What could be more ordinary than this form of the love of God! If to this basic love you add the love of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of the Blessed Virgin his Mother, and of the Church his Spouse, you will know in its briefest expression the spirit of Assumption.

But what is special or characteristic about this? Don't we have here something that any true Christian would accept? What notion, beneath these basic ideas, can help distinguish us from other religious families? Do not religious and Christians repeat every day in the Lord's Prayer the words that we want to make our battle cry: "Thy Kingdom Come"? Do not all Christians and religious have to love Our Lord, the Blessed Virgin, the Church? Once again, why claim as our own that which is the legacy of all?

To begin with, we need to recognize the primary characteristic of our Institute: simplicity of means. It is often said that the least common thing in the world is common sense. Would it be a paradox to say that in the Catholic world the rarest thing is Catholic common sense? That is why we claim this for ourselves as an original trait. We are quite simply Catholic, but as Catholic as it is possible to be. We are entirely Catholic. And because today there are many half Catholics, Catholics for the time being, Catholics by compromise, Catholics who think they are Catholic, we, who are frankly Catholic, Catholic before all else, completely Catholic, we are considered by most to be men apart, perhaps even extraordinary. This is the first aspect of our character as Augustinians of the Assumption.

Our character reveals itself even more if we speak of our love of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Besieged on all sides, this Divine Lord is a fool as far as the "learned" men of our day are concerned.

Who wants Jesus Christ today? By whom is he not scorned? "This is the stone," said the Prince of the Apostles to the inhabitants of Jerusalem fifty days after the Savior's death, "this is the stone rejected by you the builders but which has become the corner-stone" (Acts 4:11). Yes, it is always the same terrible stone of which the Savior himself said, "And he who falls on this stone will be dashed to pieces; anyone it falls on will be crushed" (Mt 21:44). Well, it is this stone on which, in the example of God, we want to build because it is the foundation of our faith, "Jesus, who leads us in our faith and brings it to perfection" (Heb 12:2). For us everything is renewed in Jesus Christ. This is our only message, "Here are we preaching a crucified Christ" (1 Cor 1:23), because he is our only wisdom, "The only knowledge I claimed to have was about Jesus, and only about him as the crucified Christ" (1 Cor 2:2). Through him and only through him we go to the Father, "No one can come to the Father except through me" (Jn 14:6). And it is in him that "all the jewels of wisdom and knowledge are hidden" (Col 2:3). In him resides all the fullness of our perfection, "Because God wanted all perfection to be found in him" (Col 1:19). We have seen him full of grace and of truth: of truth, to dissipate our darkness; of grace, to free us from evil. We need listen to no other teacher. He has the words of eternal life. "Lord, to whom would we go?"

Yes, we go to Jesus Christ. We affirm Jesus Christ against those who deny him, or hate him, or abandon him. The denial of the unbeliever, the hatred of the impious, the neglect of the indifferent or of the traitor, are for us so many reasons to surround Jesus with a love that is more ardent, more active, more tender and more solemnly demonstrated. In him, we love God. And, although we are unworthy, we proclaim his divinity. We love the man, i.e. the most perfect model and tenderest of friends. We love the God-man, i.e. the peace-maker of heaven and earth, the doctor of the true law, "*finis legis Christus*" (Rom 10:4). He initiates us to the

supernatural world; and by cleansing us in his blood, he transports us by his power and his mercy into the higher spheres which no one wants today because they are the true domain of the Sovereign whom no one wants today either, precisely because of his blessings. Yes, we love him because he gives us true light and true benefits. We love him with the same kind of love as did the early Christians, because he still faces the same enemies he faced then. We love him with the love that made the Apostle say, "If anyone does not love Jesus Christ, let him be cursed" (1 Cor 16:22). This may not be very tolerant, but you know that those who love much tolerate little. Properly speaking, true love is revealed in the power of a noble and frank intolerance. In these days, with no energy left for either love or hate, men do not see that their tolerance is just another form of weakness. We are intolerant, because we draw our strength from our love of Jesus Christ. This is another trait, clearly delineated, which separates us from many people.

The love of the Son leads us to the love of the Mother. Our tenderness for the most holy Virgin knows no limits, no more than does her tenderness for us. Jesus Christ is for us the most perfect of models, but Jesus Christ is God. Mary, a mere creature, is also a model for us, but if I may say so, she is less discouraging to our weakness because she is less than absolutely perfect herself. She is a model for imitation by her adopted sons who want to follow her along the way of holiness and in all the virtues proper to sanctity. She is a model for all Christians, especially for those chosen souls compelled by the need for a more perfect, more pure, more self-sacrificing life, and who come to us for direction.

The life of Mary, beginning with the privileged beauty of her spotless conception and up to the almost divine transformation of her triumphal Assumption, shows us how high a creature can rise by humiliation, sacrifice, suffering, abandonment, and intense sufferings of the heart. This life shows us the unrelenting demands that God imposes on chosen souls. In this way, God helps us understand the perfection, the gentleness, and the trials of the supernatural order. We must then bring this teaching to all those who want to see in one soul all the kindness that God showed toward His most beloved creature.

The incomparable innocence of Mary and her no less incomparable suffering give us in their apparent contradiction the key to a mystery the world cannot understand: that of the joy of demonstrating one's love by suffering and of the power of sacrifice rooted in love. Cannot Mary, the Mother of Jesus, also be a model for us in the mystery of the Incarnation? Yes, there again, she will be a model for us by the ardor with which she inspires us and by the desire to give birth to souls for Jesus Christ and to give birth to Jesus Christ in souls: "My children! I must go through the pain of giving birth to you all over again, until Christ is formed in you" (Gal 4:19). This is the cry of apostolic anguish which for us as for Mary begins at the crib and ends only at the cross. But this kind of piety can be very far from the kind of devotion which, pretending to be tender is soft, and fearing scandal lacks energy, and whose concessions and daily betrayals

dare show the cross only surrounded with flowers and perfumes, with Calvary hidden behind vague clouds of vapor.

What shall I say about our love for the Church? The Church is so admirable a thing that the expressions used by the sacred writers seem powerless to capture her greatness, her riches, her power, her beauty, her glory. Listen as they describe the Church as the tabernacle of God among men, column and the unshakable foundation of eternal truth; as the mystical body and the final perfection of Jesus Christ; and again, as his spotless bride, completely beautiful. For the Church, the Son of God came down earth and united himself to humanity. He wants to extend her influence. She is his city of predilection. She is the army by which he will crush his enemies. Of all these titles of the Church the most touching one for us is that of spouse. We love the Church because Jesus Christ loved her. And our love has three facets: it is supernatural, daring, and disinterested.

First of all, it is supernatural. The supernatural order fills us with admiration for the Church. Everything has been done for the elect who subsist only in the Church. If ever the struggle between good and evil, truth and error, Jerusalem and Babylon, heaven and hell, the Church and the Revolution, has been made clear, it is certainly today. Listen to man repeat after Satan, "I will not obey. I will rise to the skies and will be like the Most High" (Is 14:14). Man goes so far as to deny God, because he finds God a hindrance that imposes upon him the yoke of conscience, duty, and virtue. The only way man can break this yoke is to say, "God does not exist." Before such blasphemy, we can only say, with the leader of the heavenly hosts, "Who is like God?" Satan, in order to overthrow the Church, is trying his hand at overthrowing the entire social order. The fifty or sixty thrones that have fallen during the last century are the result of his latest efforts to overthrow the throne of the Vicar of Christ on earth, because Satan is powerless to overthrow the throne of Jesus Christ himself in heaven. "We do not want him to reign over us," cry out the infernal cohorts, and after them, the mob of unbelievers, the impious, the disordered of all kinds and the immoral. These are the slaves of the prostitute whom the Apostle (John) saw seated on the beast filled with blasphemies.

She was dressed in purple; she was holding a gold wine-cup filled with the disgusting filth of her fornication; and on the forehead was written a name: "Mystery! Babylon the Great, mother of all the filthy practices on earth" (Rev 17:3-5).

Can you find a more prophetic, more accurate picture of the Revolution? This is the great enemy of God and His Church. Our love for the Church will find its measure in the zeal we bring to combating the Revolution. We love the Church because she holds all the treasures of the supernatural order which were entrusted to her by her heavenly spouse and which the

Revolution hates. In her, we find the preaching of truth, the perfect law, and the seed of all virtue. In her, we find the true Kingdom of God on earth, the assembly of saints and disciples of Jesus Christ. In her, we contemplate stability in the midst of societies that are crumbling. Because of her, we have the divine hope of happiness unattainable by man alone. Because of her, we experience the strength to fly from this earthly exile toward heaven, our eternal and glorious home. But all this is beyond nature. All this belongs to the divine order, to which we are initiated by Christ only through His Church. It is for this reason that our love for the Church is, above all, supernatural.

Furthermore, our love for the Church is bold. When the dangers are so imminent, when the pitfalls yawn so deep at our feet, when the hopes of hell reveal themselves in the deadly cries of savage joy that we hear each day, it is more than cowardice to follow the prudent theories of the flesh, i.e., of human concerns and political schemes. It is treason; it is sacrilege. We are accused of taking too many chances, and this is to our glory. Oh prudent men! I suspect that you found Jesus Christ terribly foolhardy when he risked the life of the Church by dying on a cross. The martyrs were crazy too, and the Apostles insane, when they very courageously gave witness to the resurrection of Christ, during the persecution by Jews and pagans. In our madness, we envy the boldness of the martyrs and the audacity of the Apostles. So it is with such boldness that we claim to love the Church, to serve it with all our might, not overly concerned with the contradictory judgments of men, but mindful especially that the world was saved by the folly of preaching and the imprudent boldness of preachers.

This was the kind of love that the prince of the Apostles and the great Doctor of the nations had in common. Needless to say, so bold a love is rare today. But, by the same token, it gives us an original character. It is an added reason for us to be what we want to be.

Finally, our love is disinterested. I don't dare say chivalrous, like that of all great religious institutions at their beginnings. It is sad to see how much man hurries to make his own the little bit of good he is capable of doing, how much he aspires to be the only one doing it, and to prevent others from doing it when he cannot do it himself. My brothers, may this never be our temptation! Let us love the Church enough to rejoice about all the good her children do for her triumph. Let us exclude no form of holiness nor of charity. We cannot make them all our own. Let us love, admire, encourage in others what we ourselves are incapable of. May the general good be our sole preoccupation. Let us say like Moses, "If only the whole people of Yahweh were prophets!" (Num 11:29). The victories of the Church would be more numerous and our love for her more consoling, if we left aside mean and personal considerations and made the triumph of the Church the exclusive desire of our hearts. I cannot recommend enough such disinterested love to you. If you tell me that it is rare, I repeat that in possessing it in all its breadth and generosity we will be more easily distinguished and recognizable on the road that we wish to walk.

Let us love the Church supernaturally, boldly, and generously, and you will see what blessings here below and what rewards in heaven God has prepared for our work. And if we are not found to be very clever, the way certain people are, at least we will not have to blush because of our motives.

## **2. The Means to Develop the Work of Assumption**

Now, allow me to tell you, in a very few words, the practical conclusions to be drawn from the fundamental ideas that I have presented to you.

From our motto "Thy Kingdom Come," it evidently follows that we are an apostolic Institute. The zeal that we should have for God's rights and the salvation of souls is the essential expression of our charity. Abnegation and the forgetting of self are above all imposed upon us. We put all to good use "as long as Christ is announced." We try to take no account of the causes of internal dissensions among the children of God which, under the guise of rights or of Christian dignity, divert our useful efforts from the battle against our common enemy and cause us to waste time with struggles among brothers. When Christians and their leaders no longer want us in one country, we shall move to another. That is the precept of Our Lord which, when applied, will give us the necessary freedom that apostles need.

"I cannot desire what I don't know." To be loved, Jesus Christ must be known. We must study him especially in the inspired books. Jesus Christ will be for us the prized treasure sought under the veil of sacred studies. We shall strive to know him as God, as man, and as the author of the supernatural gifts which reconcile us with the Father. Saint Augustine, our patriarch, will be our principal guide. His treatise on the Trinity and his admirable books, which have won for him from the entire Church the title of Doctor of Grace, are the guidelines for our study on these important questions. We also add the "Letter to Volusian" in which he treats of the Incarnation; and as an introduction to true philosophy, the treatises "Against the Academicians," "On Free Will," and the "Letter to Dioscorus."

Jesus Christ known by us is the knowledge which we want above all to communicate, first, by preaching: "Here are we preaching a crucified Christ" (1 Cor 1:23). This is the distinctive characteristic that sets us apart from the empty, purely human, natural preaching, in which one hardly dares preach Christ, and especially dares not speak of his cross. Our second means is

education, teaching. If someone asks us what education means for us, we reply that education is the formation of Jesus Christ in souls, just as teaching is the enlightenment of souls by the splendor of Jesus Christ. This is the guiding principle in the schools that we establish; and if we ever found a Catholic university, we will inscribe on its facade, "May they know you, the one true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent" (Jn 17:3).

The love of Jesus and Mary, his Mother, is for us a summary of all wisdom in the mystical life. The perfection of Jesus Christ as manifested in the New Testament and the virtues of Mary which reveal themselves to the innermost soul despite their veil of humility are like two volumes where we meditate on the sanctity to which we are called.

Love of the Blessed Virgin inspires us with another love that is spread in the world by the cult of the Mother of God. I speak of the love of purity and chastity. From the very beginning, it has been one of the outstanding traits of apostolic men, and Church historians tell us that the immediate cause of the martyrdom of Peter and Paul was the constant effort of these two apostles to form virgins in pagan Rome and even in Nero's palace.

We wish to help Mary, our Queen, bring many virgins to the immortal King of the ages. The feeling for beauty found in pure and chaste souls contributes to lifting us up, as on the wings of angels, toward the throne of the spotless Lamb. And if we are chided for fostering religious vocations too much, our answer should be that our sole regret is that we have not fostered them enough.

Lastly, the love of the Church offers us, in present times, a new horizon. Cast your eyes about you. Do you not realize that the abyss is becoming deeper, the ruins are piling up, that catastrophes are on the way? In the midst of all these upheavals, the Church, stable upon its rock, sees the old world sink, as on the banks of Hippo Saint Augustine watched the Rome of the Caesars submerged by the rushing waves of barbarians.

The *City of God* is for us like a second revelation, and the more we study it, the more we may find in it by analogy the secret of the future. What sadness and discouragement came from the immense ruins brought about by the sword and the torch of an Attila or a Genseric? Somehow it was God who was sweeping away a rotten society in order to prepare a new one. The bishops of Gaul did not mistake it. Let us have the intelligence of our forefathers. They welcomed and transformed feudal barbarism; let us welcome and transform democratic barbarism. No doubt, some regrets for vanished grandeur were felt by some of the ancient Gallo-Roman pontiffs.



Nevertheless, they rebuilt France as bees rebuild a hive. Let us do the same. Without useless regret for the past, without too many illusions about the future, let us keep on with our work as God proposed. Possibly it will be even more successful with re-Christianized peoples than it was with the barbarians torn from the grossness of a savage world.

At this juncture, two questions arise. Who will be our guide? What will our work be?

Who will be our guide? The Pope. It can be said that since Philip the Fair, politics has consisted in a massive conspiracy against the papacy. Kings wanted no Pope; today no one wants kings. Where are we going with this anti-monarchic hatred? But what difference does it make? Though power is necessary, it need not be concentrated in the hands of a king. God considered it an insult when the sons of Jacob requested a king. We need not discuss the matter further, but it is a fact that we cannot deny. It is evident that the democratic tide is rising every day, and it is on the verge of spilling over into revolution. Who knows what minor incident will set the storm off? As for me, I consider the Church and what she has done in the past, and I wait.

I am neither excessively sad nor overly hopeful. The essential is to be confident in Jesus Christ, in Mary, in the Church, and to keep working. All the rest doesn't matter. But I am wrong. Who can say that our efforts will not bring joy, as long as they are intelligent efforts? And this brings me to the beginning of an answer to the second question I posed: what works should we undertake?

Beyond those I have already mentioned, our works are all those by which people can be raised up again, and instructed, and learn about leading a good life, and whereby democracy itself can be made Christian. You can already imagine what possibilities are opened up for us in our visitation of the sick, the evangelization of the poor, the direction of orphanages, the dissemination of good books, and other works that I cannot enumerate because new possibilities arise daily. But we do all this under one condition: that the material charity we dispense be the means for providing spiritual alms. We tend the bodies of people so that we might have the right to penetrate as far as their souls. The few coins we place in a poor man's hand preview the great treasures of faith that can be poured into souls that thirst after truth, and for the lack of it have forgotten their great need.

Through this work with the poor, we reach the rich. Experience has shown that they can be reached more easily and in a manner more worthy of ourselves and of Our Lord if we meet on the common ground of charity.

Love of the Church stirs up another love in our hearts. The Apostles were commissioned to preach Christ's message not only in Jerusalem but to the end of the earth. Yes, our ambition extends also to foreign missions. What providential grace has already given us so many missionaries when we are still in fact not very numerous? But besides ourselves, notice that we have called upon others to assist us. In the past, virgin women consecrated to the Lord were hidden behind the strictest cloisters. Today they are asked to travel even beyond the seas.

This has been a tremendous change, thanks to the mercy of God and the great devotion of these, his spouses, who want to sanctify themselves, as we do, by a great apostolic love for the Church. From that point of view, their spirit in a way deepens our own.

Certainly, all this is very serious. The issues that I have briefly discussed and that are intimately linked up with what is characteristic of our vocation could be very troublesome, if we did not see the head of the Church calling together the bishops from the four corners of the globe and inviting them to confront these same problems in a most solemn manner, problems that preoccupy all mankind, to which the Church alone can provide the last word.

We must wait for these important solutions; but formed by the constant teaching of the Roman Pontiff, we need not hesitate to foresee in what direction the answers to these hard questions will go. There may be annoyances that crop up, but these should not worry us too much; simply make an effort to diminish the pain by being patient and charitable. Let everyone enjoy the freedom the Church grants, but remember to defend the doctrine she teaches, the truths she defines, the laws she promulgates, the condemnations she pronounces. The Church has always acted to promote the life and happiness of people. Our glory should be in carrying out, even in our weakness, the work that the Church proposes, without worrying about obstacles that may arise, or enemies to be defeated, or the consequences to which we might be exposed because of her cause. Thus we may accentuate a bit more the position that we want to take.

Now, fathers and brothers, our work is finished. Praise God for having inspired us with a common vision, and for the forceful resolutions we now promise to develop and maintain with fervor and good judgment. Let us always have for each other the affection of true religious, based upon respect and our need to remain strongly united. We must form but one body in the sincerity of our hearts and in the steadfast honesty of our relations. May our indissoluble bond be Jesus Christ.

The Apostle said, "Though there are many of us, we form a single body, because we all have a share in this one loaf" (1 Cor 10:17). Let the altar be our center, because we find Jesus Christ there. It should also be for us the throne of our king. You have noticed that recently this most excellent offering has received even more universal homage in the sacrament of his love. This is only fitting. Is it not good that when the throne of the king's representative appears shaken, the throne of the Sovereign himself be more resplendent with our praise? It is no mean honor for us that we have been able to contribute even if only slightly to the extension of this cult of reparation. There indeed we again find Jesus, our love, giving himself to us and teaching us to give ourselves to him and to the service of the Church for him. Let us pursue our goal with joy and confidence. In that way, after our efforts to build up the Kingdom of God on earth, we will be worthy of delighting in that same Kingdom of heaven for all eternity. Amen.



ORIGINAL EDITION: *Ecrits spirituels du Serviteur de Dieu Emmanuel d'Alzon* (hereafter ES). Rome, 1956, pp. 128-146.

TRANSLATION: *Foundational Documents*, pp. 75-83. Revised by editor.

## **A Review and a Plan of Action**

CLOSING ADDRESS AT THE GENERAL CHAPTER BY E. D'ALZON (SEPTEMBER 18, 1873)

*Like the Address d'Alzon gave five years earlier to the leaders in his young Congregation, this one in 1873 reviews progress the Assumptionists had made and the challenges still ahead. His talk reflects a sensitivity to current events and the need to provide specific pastoral responses. Education remains a high priority, as well as the struggle for national legislation that would allow the creation of an independent Catholic university.*

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My very dear Brothers,

We have just had another important meeting, whereby your religious life has been enhanced, and your zeal invigorated, whereby you have become more imbued with the principles that define us, and whereby your goal appears more clearly, and the means of attaining it become more precise. Strengthened by your help, your insights, and your common vision and desires I give thanks to God that I am the father of a family, tiny to be sure, but in which purification has resulted in choice, select members, capable of an even greater good.

Now that we are about to go our separate ways and return to our various tasks, allow me to add some brief remarks to what I said to you five years ago. At that time, I spoke to you about the spirit of Assumption. Today I would like to say something about the activity to which that spirit leads, an activity that may serve as a sort of prelude to what has already taken place.

## **1. A Look at the Past**

### **A. The Church and Assumption Since 1868**

At the time of the last General Chapter, we were mostly preoccupied with the democratic movement that was taking place and that seemed to dominate everything else. At the same time the Sovereign Pontiff was convoking the bishops of the Catholic world to an Ecumenical Council. To him, the situation seemed very serious, and the troubles of the Church great, caused by infernal conspiracies cleverly hatched by avowed enemies or disloyal brethren. It seemed urgent to him that the fullness of truth stand up against the absolute denials, by which the Revolution, in all its forms, seeks to crush the affirmations of our faith. Already, preoccupied by this democratic invasion, you had found it useful to participate in what is basically a popular work, the orphanage at Arras. Its director, in joining us, brought with him the wealth of his experience, of his work, and of his initiative. He showed us how, by paternal affection, uncouth dispositions can be polished, rough characters can be rendered more manageable, and the most rebellious souls be sanctified. This was only a beginning, but a beginning that already indicates the long road to be followed, the royal way of love for the little ones, the poor, and all the neglected.

Meanwhile the bishops made their way to Rome, and I had the honor of following my bishop. Like other leaders of young Congregations, I felt I had to go in order to find out what the Council would decide concerning their Congregations' existence. Events did not allow the Council to

consider questions dealing with religious families. Yet it was easy to see that Roman wisdom, no matter what was said, did not want to jeopardize rights that had been acquired. Rather, the Council favored an approach like the one used in war time, whereby leaders modify or improve their tactics and weapons and the discipline of their armies, and make a science of their art of waging war. However, the analogous policy of the Church arose from its experience in struggling against enemies who were becoming increasingly stubborn, ferocious, and clever. If the forces of evil were more numerous and better prepared, the Church wanted to have battalions that were more steadfast, more intelligent, more energetic. Consequently the newly organized recruits would surely be of help to the older monastic legions.

I was soon reassured and became concerned solely with the great question regarding the Pope. What a source of emotions and anguish! What subtleties, more or less theological! What diplomatic strategies, what threats, what fear in timorous hearts! If, as Pius IX said, a Council has three phases: the human stage, the stage of Satan, and the stage of God, you can believe that some feared that man and Satan were apparently about to have the upper hand. God was not about to appear, or so it seemed to our impatience. We have no idea how the Holy Spirit acts to turn the conscience of a true bishop, particularly when his natural inclination would be to worldly views and overly human decisions. Finally, your father had the immense joy of attending that solemn session during which were proclaimed and commented on, in all their richness, the words of the Savior: "You are Peter. I have prayed for you. Feed my sheep." At that moment he also saw the storm darken the dome and the vaults of St. Peter's. He heard the thunder that some likened to that of Mt. Sinai. These were the portent of easily foreseeable troubles which God permitted, after the great Councils, as if to strengthen their decrees by the trial of temptation. In the past, every covenant required sacrifices. Each Ecumenical Council, which is a new covenant in truth between man's spirit and God's spirit, always claimed victims. Two months later, the Vatican Council had its mysterious immolation, and Assumption had the glory of offering the blood of one of its best sons.

Let us not forget it. Rome was a prisoner because France was vanquished. Assumption saw fit to show its fighting spirit by furnishing to this sad war as many military chaplains as we could, and then some. Sedan, Metz, Mainz, Paris saw you devoting yourselves on the battle-fields, in the sorrows of captivity, in the horrors of sieges, exposed to the assaults of the enemies of France and, sad to say, to the bullets of her children. You knew how to prove that you had religious courage. Still, under the bullets of the Prussians and of the army of Versailles, concerned Catholics asked themselves whether revolutionary plots might not be resisted and thwarted by a Catholic League.

## **B. Sketch of Assumption's Work Since 1870**

The notion of a Catholic League, inspired by the bloody slaughter of the Commune, grew with astonishing rapidity. The Catholic Committee of Paris saw similar committees spring up throughout France. The Christian sap rose again very actively, a sure sign of the powerful vitality of the tree and of the merciful dispensation of Providence even in the midst of our most painful humiliation.

Part of the evil that poisons us undoubtedly comes from education. We tried in *Revue de l'Enseignement Chrétien*, by crying out, "Carthage must be destroyed"; we tried to make people realize the urgent need for a prompt remedy. Despite the hesitations of a possibly too human prudence, we were able to hold an Educational Congress. The second Congress has not yet been held; but when it is held, we want to lay an even stronger foundation for the First developments of our future freedom. Because of the political preoccupations of the moment, we were unable to do this to the extent that we wanted and that such an important question rightly demands.

While we tried, within our limits, to fight with the pen, we were also concerned with other Catholic projects: workers' clubs, social centers, youth centers. Did we do everything we could? Evidently not. We were too few, yet many among you shared their experience and the result of their work at the impressive meetings in which the membership of the Congress of Workers' Associations rose from sixty to three hundred, and from three hundred, to one thousand.

We needed financial resources in order to help some of the workers' projects that were starting. We also needed prayer to allay God's wrath. Expiation by prayer, expiation by intelligent almsgiving— two ideas blended into one, which was at the origin of Our Lady of Salvation. The Association organized public prayer, so necessary for France, and revived a number of other projects that had languished for of lack of funds. From its inception, the Association gave impetus to pilgrimages, which touched the heart of God. The Mother of God was, so to speak, forced to renew her miracles. The pilgrimages also made popular those public acts of faith that were no longer in style, or so we were told. My brothers, this is only a very brief outline of what you have accomplished, of the projects in which you have been involved more or less directly for five years. You haven't been the only ones involved in these enterprises, but your cooperation, modest though it may have been, at least revealed your intention, determined your orientation, and characterized your spirit.

## **2. A Plan of Action**



What are these first attempts compared to what is still left for you to do? "The journey will be long for you," I say to you as the angel did to Elijah (1 Kings 19:7). What vast horizons open up before us! Let us try to provide some glimpses, some kind of initial plan. We summarize everything when we say that our goal is the restoration of Catholic mores by faith in Christian principles.

### **A. External Action: The Restoration of Christian Moral Attitudes**

Christian mores! They have tended to disappear. Voltaire's sarcasm, the press and its obscenities, the pride of learning, impatience with the weight of God and any other kind of burden, the need to believe in nothing in order to affirm the right to do anything: Such are the basic principles upon which the new social order has pretended to build, To mock everything: gold, pleasure, power; by robbery, orgy, and revolutions. To proceed by hate, lying, and violence. Is this not a summary of these new rights? Either we perish or we climb out of the abyss toward which Europe seems to be rushing.

What needs to be done? Purify the air, poisoned by the miasma of immorality. To this end we commissioned steam locomotives to carry caravans of pilgrims to numerous sanctuaries. We sanctified these instruments of an often guilty industry and have used them to carry throughout France our repentance and our expiation. Such pilgrimages will obviously diminish in number, without ceasing entirely, whenever other kinds of manifestations prove more opportune. They are, after all, only immense processions, longer and more effective because they are more demanding. By these pious journeys of her children, the Church regains possession of the public domain and of the open air. We now declare ourselves in full daylight. Christians who so declare themselves are close to becoming triumphant. Troubles in France have given Catholics the privilege of needing only to show themselves in order to conquer. So we showed ourselves in Paris, Lyons, Lourdes, La Salette, Marseilles and other places too numerous to mention. We showed ourselves in Grenoble and were insulted. But let us remember that insults and contradictions are also of value to Christians.

Now, after having affirmed our faith by these purifying journeys, after having proclaimed our right to emerge from the sacristy, is it not appropriate to re-enter our sanctuaries to offer greater adoration to the God who inhabits them and gives them life? The cult of Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament, nocturnal adoration, frequent communion, are customs to which we must return, because they bring weakened and exhausted souls back to the very core of the Church, to the divine principle of its life on earth.

I have already spoken about orphanages and agricultural schools. Oh, why do we lack workers! How many poor little souls there are to be rescued, who belong to the social class into which Jesus Christ himself was born. May God send many workers to labor in this part of the vineyard. When the vineyard has been adequately cultivated, revolutions will become impossible.

Another way to counteract the force of evil is by popular meetings. A moment ago, I spoke about workers' clubs, but I now want to express certain reservations. Periodically gathering such groups of working men, without giving them strong direction, is very imprudent, in the eyes of those who do not want such groups to become simply a means of satisfying someone's ambition. Leaders soon lose their popularity, or they keep it only by using means which they sooner or later regret. Experience shows that people band together in times of social unrest. Then groups break up when they no longer need to protect themselves by uniting, or when they no longer serve some political party. It is at just such a time of group decomposition, which I think is not far off, that we must start a number of new works.

The reorganization of the army creates new obligations for the clergy. Each young generation must pass through the barracks. What evil or what good will come from such a situation, if we are faithful to our vocation!

Those among you who have heard the confessions of from eight to ten thousand prisoners of war, on the average, know that the soldier can be reached by the priest who knows how to speak to him in words that a soldier can understand, and that are especially worthy of God. I repeat that we are too few to say that such a ministry will be ours. But the sympathy that you have inspired among those admirable officers who want to have not only a military command but also an apostolate will enable you to accomplish even more than you are able to do personally. As you know, an Assumptionist religious should be dissatisfied with himself unless he has accomplished a hundred times more than he can. His rest must consist of trying to find out how to do a thousand times more. I urge novices to ponder this basic maxim of our Association. Thus, being fewer than fifty, we might count as if we were one thousand.

Besides the military circles, to which I draw all your attention, I would like to see the creation of guilds, in order, sooner or later, that they might replace the workers clubs. Are there any among you who have not heard about those admirable families of workers that, under the protection of a patron saint or of a great mystery, formed guilds? From apprentice to master craftsman, everyone found a place and encouragement in such guilds. I know there were abuses. I know about their despotism, imposed upon them by royal legislation that was too oppressive. Still, workers' guilds must have had something excellent about them, because they became the prime targets of revolutionary destroyers.

Why not restore them? Learning from past mistakes, avoiding abuses, adapting them to present requirements, why not permeate them with the divine element of faith, which cries out to God, "My Father!"; of hope, which counts above all on heavenly riches; of charity, which unites hearts in the face of social animosity, of which Paris still witnesses the devastation?

One of us once mentioned that there are some things that we can do and others that we can only suggest. We will form such guilds when we can. Advice may seem to be something very small indeed; but dropped upon an active soul, it can be a very fruitful seed.

The action I suggest to you is based on certain ideas: the principles of faith. I know that today such principles are excluded from society, and I need furnish no further proof than the shameful treatment of the Sovereign Pontiff. Jesus Christ, in the person of Pius IX, is a prisoner of the Revolution. Kings do not want to admit that, since the preaching of the Gospel, their rights rest upon divine justice. And the teaching of this truth, in its loftiest expression, is entrusted to the Apostolic See. The effort to which I invite you is based on a number of Christian ideas, on a doctrine that only yesterday was the object of a great decision, which Prussia, unable to destroy it even after having vanquished France, has tried to persecute. Despite derision, despite persecution in the press, despite the bullets of the Commune, this doctrine seems to have grown because God seems to have said, "The hour of your triumph has come."

Such ideas must be disseminated and made available to everyone. To accomplish this, suitable means are necessary. One of us has successfully tried to give courses for workers. More should be given, by ourselves or by our friends. After the workers come the members of the middle class. Despite their greater vanity, they are no less ignorant of their religion. The workers were brought up by teaching brothers; the bourgeois were educated in one state-run school or another. We know well enough what the chaplains were able to teach them and what the professors then proceeded to unteach them. Therefore, if possible, you will begin classes for the middle class. Who knows? The fear they still have may cause them to rally round your word.

What can I say about education except that, more than ever, we must hold fast to the principles of Assumption and very carefully ward off any misguided spirit that would refuse to accept our point of departure, our plans, and our objective.

I might say the same about the publications that some of us have become involved in. Let us

admit that the *Revue de l'Enseignement Chrétien* did not accomplish everything that it could have. I blame myself first, in order to have the right to blame others. Such a situation must cease, and for my part, I promise to do everything that I can. After all, there were some marvelous results. To the *Revue* we owe the first Congress, which posited some very Catholic principles, despite the liberal moderation of many. We hope that a second Congress will soon be held, possibly within a year. We will prepare it as well as we can. If the religious movement corresponds to other movements, perhaps we can expect that its results will repay us for the troubles caused by a longer wait. When will the day come when these efforts result in a Catholic University? True, the obstacles are many, and the opposition is strong. Yet it seems to me that we have overcome more than that since the beginning of the century.

In 1801, the Church was captive. Suddenly there arose a man destined to crush the Revolution, although later he became its slave. But he reopened our churches and delivered religion from a thousand problems. Since then the Church of God has continually won greater freedom, has cast off many shackles, and it will cast off many more if only we will it.

I have not yet mentioned our foreign missions. Although Australia is temporarily set aside because certain contractual obligations have not been met, great good is being done in Bulgaria. There is an association of employers and apprentices, and a school with two hundred boys enrolled. Both have had lasting success. Our Oblate Sisters have helped us very effectively in a hospital, a clinic, a boarding school and other schools. All this is in its opening stage, but it is a valuable outpost against Greek and Russian schism. We will be accused of rashness. How puny are compared to the giant that we are attacking!

The Church today has three enemies: the Revolution, Prussia, and Russia. And Russia is not the least formidable of them. Yet, what an immense field of activity it opened for us! What Jesus said to his unsophisticated disciples I say to you: "The harvest is rich" (Mt 9:37). The disciples became apostles and conquered the world. Decide, my brothers, whether want to conquer Russia and bring its vast harvest into the granary of the Father. I tremble as I speak thus to you. Yet something within me cries out that, if Assumption wants to, it can reap the harvest, with God's help.

## **B. Internal Action: A More Definitive Organization of the Institute**

I have just been speaking about external action and how we must prepare for it. But what

preparation do we ourselves need? Like me, you have thought that the main objective of the Chapter was the establishment of an aristocracy of talent, knowledge, and virtue, placed at the head of our religious family. It takes a lot of nerve to speak in such a way, when one is presiding a group like this one. But I do not speak of what exists, but rather of what must come to be.

Another point: the preparation of the members of the Congregation, accepted, if possible, already as youngsters. This thought, which was that of the Council of Trent when dealing with the question of the transformation of the clergy in those unhappy days, is obviously supported by such a precedent. We will receive in our minor seminaries, from earliest youth, all those young people whom our efforts and the charity of the faithful will allow us to welcome. How numerous these chosen ones would be, if only financial resources were as abundant as are the vocations!

Counting on Divine Providence we have already begun. God has blessed us. Our initial success invites us to continue. We will continue and thus be able to add our present students to those who, from various locations and age groups, will knock at our door, asking for a place in our home. With the care appropriate for each one, we will introduce them to our house of discernment: first, those who, before coming to us, gave themselves up to the occasionally bitter joy of experiencing storm or shipwreck; and then those who, solicitous to be a bit more like the younger brothers of the angels, did not believe that they had to stain their spotless robe in the world, at the risk of tasting later the tearful bread of repentance.

With every passing day, the formation of both types will become stronger, more consistent, more attentive, more rigorous. Experience has warned us, and we want to learn from its sad lessons. Today we are a family; tomorrow we will be a people. Such a transformation requires very energetic supervision. We have no doubt that the transformation will be a happy one, but it will be so only if it takes place the way all truly religious growth does.

I have spoken of the need to revive Christian moral attitudes with the help of the great principles of faith. Therefore, we need saints, but saints enlightened by Catholic learning. Consequently, after novitiate, for those who have already completed their classical studies, we require many years of study of Sacred Scripture, of philosophy, and of theology, with frequent examinations. This will produce, we hope, men whom learning will not intoxicate, as sometimes happens, because they will have placed their study in the context of religious holiness.

## **Conclusions**

I have summarized almost everything that we have done since the last Chapter; I have also indicated what we would like to do, which is practically infinite. Before I finish, let me give you three pieces of advice.

In a way, the first springs from the present situation. Christianity is in full crisis. We have already suffered much, and now we see victory at hand. Let us take advantage of it and not drive away those who wish to join our ranks. I know some people who are so convinced of the perfection of their own way of doing things that they condemn everything that does not conform to it. This is a kind of modern Puritanism which, by a process of exclusion, will become egocentric, like a clique. As for us, we should attract rather than become small by our lack of trust. May trust be one of our principal means of bringing about the victory of truth. We are not owners of truth, only its servants. Isn't the cause of truth God's cause? And the cause of God is His alone.

My second piece of advice is not to count too much on success. Open your history books. What do you see, if not victorious peoples quickly falling into ruin? As things are now, we can count on some immediate success. And I fear. Let us be watchful and remain always in the true light: "While you still have the light, believe in the light, and you will become sons of light" (Jn 12:36). The great evil of our day is darkness, lies. Let us remain in truth. Let us serve truth, witness to it, spread it. Then we will have done our job and will not have succumbed to illusion.

My third piece of advice is that you shed the kind of prudence that is often a disguise for shameful laziness. "Prudent" sometimes means fainthearted. Now more than ever is the time to repeat with Bossuet, "Faith is daring." Our faith must be bold, though some might call us foolhardy. Real prudence is the queen of the moral virtues; and a queen commands, acts, and, if necessary, fights. Some have transformed prudence into a frightened old woman. Such prudence wears bed slippers and a dressing gown, has a cold and coughs a lot. Conventional prudence, I do not want! You must not heed such prudence. As far as I am concerned, I will always trust totally in God's Providence, even if that makes me die in a hospital, abandoned by all.

My young brothers, I do not want to end these remarks without saying a few words to you. From what Assumption has already done, you can tell that, with God's grace, she can do still more. But that depends on you. Your elders have given you the example; you have to follow it. Why not do what they have done? To be sure, they have more experience than you in doing good. But why not imitate their ardor? They will share their experience with you. Your ardor, placed at their disposition, will increase their strength and yours tenfold. Is there anything in this world

more noble, more beautiful, more grand than the life-work to which they invite you? I continue to look, but I find nothing greater.

So follow in their footsteps. If you outrun them, they will not be jealous. They have borne troubles that you seem destined not to experience. So what? God will reward us all. No matter how many the crowns, they will always be more than we can expect. God will make them beautiful and glorious, not in proportion to our merits, but to his mercy and his love.

ORIGINAL EDITION: ES, pp. 174-190

TRANSLATION: *Foundational Documents*, pp. 121-137

### **III. Education and Society**

#### **Education and Social Responsibility**

SIXTH LETTER TO THE CONGREGATION BY E. D'ALZON (JULY 2, 1874)

*D'Alzon's sixth letter to all Assumptionists does not deal with education, but with a number of principles to be followed by Christians in addressing basic social questions: what is the source of authority<sup>7</sup>. What is the relation between human political action and divine intervention<sup>7</sup> What is the role of the Church in politics*

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*etc. For d'Alzon society should be governed by truth, which he believed education should help us discover. By understanding this approach to political matters, we can better appreciate the broad and ambitious goal that d'Alzon assigned to education and teaching.*

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Nîmes, July 2, 1874

My dear Brothers:

Society is now 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.

## **1. Principles Underlying Social Issues**

God is the sovereign Lord of all things: "The Lords 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, after a patient wait, 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).

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 inclined to forget that there exists 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 spiritual activity is 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 people whose only goal is the satisfaction of vain and selfish interests?

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 that 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

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 of 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?

## **2. The Church's Approach to Politics**

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.

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.

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 what further troubles 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 that wants no part of it.

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 not ward off! How imminent and assured would be the healing of sick nations!

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 God, which became the seed of its expansion the miracle of its conquests through "the absurdity of preaching" (1 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. Alter 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.

Yes, from the sole point of view of reason, the Church is a reality at once so incontrovertible and yet 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 a great absurdity that is both permanent and triumphant. No greater insult could be directed against our human dignity.

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 face of the birth, sickness and death of nations, espouse the great cause of the Church with its miracle of perpetuity. I come back to this miraculous aspect because the pride 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 a higher level more appropriate for religious who come 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 will receive the crown of justice from the hands of the just Judge at the appointed time.

### **3. Two Final Comments**

Before concluding, I would like to make 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 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.

My second comment is that nations are kept together either by selfish interests or by an idea. 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 (ought 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 Aryanism. 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. It has always been clear what her mission was. Despite a few family quarrels, the eldest daughter of the Church has always known how to defend publicly the cause of her Mother. Has she now deserted her mission, which is 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 stance we should take as French religious. It is one that any truly Christian person will certainly want to help us with, 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, 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 are 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

ORIGINAL EDITION: ES, pp. 225-234.

TRANSLATION: *Circular Letters 1874 – 1875*. Translated by Robert Fortin, A.A., Worcester, MA, 1981, pp. 37-46. Revised by editor.

#### **IV. The Importance of Ideas**

##### **A Christian Idea**

LETTER FROM E. D'ALZON TO ALPHONSE DE VIGNAMONT (MARCH 28, 1835)

*Truth is what will change society! That is the conviction that the young d'Alzon energetically expresses in this letter to a friend, written at the height of his involvement in the circle of Félicité de la Mennais. By March of 1835 d'Alzon had rejected de la Mennais notion that only political activity could cure social ills: "I on the contrary believe that everything must be resolved at the level of religion" (letter to his father on the same date). "The world needs to be penetrated through and through by a Christian idea!" D'Alzon frequently repeats this thought (see chapters "Education and Social Responsibility" and "On Education" in the present volume). The Christian idea to which he refers is nothing less than the Gospel and the demands of God's Kingdom.*

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To Mr. Alphonse de Vignamont

Toulouse

Rome, 28 March 1835

Dear friend,

I wonder if, when I have the pleasure of seeing you again, you will find that I have changed. I frankly think that a revolution is going on inside me, not from evil to good, but in the sense that I'm seeing things from a different point of view. As I study religion, I discover, in the depths of Catholic dogma, such a great wealth, such a rich vein, a life so powerful that, on the one hand, I do not see how a priest who wants to renew society can find a better way than the truth itself and, on the other hand. I think the only way to strengthen flagging spirits or heat the moral fatigue that everyone laments today is to expose society to the brilliant light that guides all people coming into this world, to warm them all with the rays of the eternal Word.

Also, the more I look at the world from this point of view, the more I am disgusted with politics, which I consider to be a dead end. There is no life there, only death convulsions, powerless attempts to organize, vain efforts, unless Catholic thought penetrates it with charity, justice, and the spirit of Christian liberty, which regardless of what they say is completely suffocated in our day. I have made up my mind, and it is confirmed each day as I read the second psalm, which I urge you to meditate. I am convinced that both the people and the kings are at fault; let them chasten each other. It is clear to me that what the priest must do is work with whatever strength he has to establish the reign of Christ without getting lost in useless arguments. His king is Jesus of Nazareth; his tribunal, Calvary; his flag, the cross. Attach no color to this flag; the cross that Jesus hung upon, the one that appeared to Constantine was neither red nor white, and yet the former saved the world, and the latter conquered it. The most intimate thought of my soul is that the world needs to be penetrated through and through by a Christian idea; otherwise it will fall apart. And the world will not receive this idea but from men who will be taken up with it before all else in order to proclaim it in every form that it might assume. They say the world is evil. No doubt, passion turns it away from what is good. But I believe most of all that the world is ignorant. Therefore we need to teach it and to do so in words it can understand.

ORIGINAL EDITION: Letters, Rome, Périer-Muzet edition, Vol. XIV, p. 63



TRANSLATION: Editor.

## **The World Is Governed by Ideas**

LETTER FROM E. D'ALZON TO THE ASSUMPTIONISTS AT NIMES (APRIL 11, 1870)

*Two decades after founding the Assumptionists, d'Alzon continues to insist (in this letter to his confreres at Assumption College in Nîmes) that "the special aim of our Institute is teaching. If anything, he seems even more convinced of its importance given the intellectual crisis that the world and the Church were undergoing at the time. In a brief letter d'Alzon is able to touch upon a number of major issues: the central importance of theology and philosophy for all intellectual pursuits; some practical ways of addressing the crisis of the day; the relation between prayer and study, faith and reason; the effect of right thinking on social ills; and the role of the Church in the intellectual life.*

To the religious at Nîmes

Rome, April 11, 1870

During the Easter season, you will be enjoying some leisure time. Let me say a few things about that.

1. Remember that the special aim of our Institute is teaching at every level. Cardinal Reisach used to say to a friend of ours that the most powerful effect of the Council would be to revive ecclesiastical studies. That is true, but for it to be successful two things are necessary: men and time. As for time, see whether or not you are losing any. And then see if you are working in view of studies that will be useful. Make no illusions, academic work all over is disastrously mediocre. This is due in large measure to the discredit into which theology has fallen, based as it is on current philosophy. Theology, the queen of the disciplines, has fallen drastically; the other disciplines as well, except for the physical sciences. But even these have lost a sense of their divine origin.

What should you do? Try to restore true wisdom by the demanding and serious study of the disciplines and seek to enlighten the learning that has created things as its object and is the aim of the lower reason, with higher reason, which has wisdom as its aim, i.e., a knowledge of divine things. You will reach this goal in two ways: through intellectual work and through prayer. A good indication that we are not praying well is provided when, if after having prayed, we obtain so few results. The conclusion is that our prayers and our studies are routine and mechanical. If we really apply to both the effort of our intellect and of our heart, we will achieve results that are superior from every point of view.

It is important that you be convinced of this truth, since then as religious you can make your spiritual growth and your intellectual growth advance together.

2. It is crucial that you be convinced of the truth that the world, even in a decadent state, is governed by ideas. After the Council, religious who are sowers of ideas, provided they be true and fruitful ideas, will be the true renewers of society. You ought therefore also to fill yourself with true ideas and great principles. Where are these to be found if not in the treasury of divine learning, entrusted to the Church, whose mission it is to communicate it to the world? I suffer from the fact that I express this all so badly because what is at stake is the salvation of those who are led astray by false ideas, whose power to mislead is so disturbing to those who love the reign of God and the triumph of Our Lord in the people.

3. We should not hide from ourselves the fact that after the definition of infallibility the church will find herself in an extraordinary situation. The Pope will be like the General of a huge army, whose regiments are led by Colonels in revolt. The General has to pass over these in order to reach the Captains and the soldiers. The Colonels in revolt are the Gallican Bishops. In part the Pope will have to rely on the priests and the laity. This will be the beginning of his ordinary and immediate jurisdiction over the dioceses. But he will also need his own troops that will have to be quartered among the regiments of the Colonels who are trying to involve their own men in the revolution. These more personal troops of the Pope are the religious Congregations. For that reason, therefore, their privileges and exemption will grow rather than diminish.

I will probably develop all of this in a letter or a more detailed study. For the time being I am explaining only what Father Laurent or Father Emmanuel may not be able to make you understand. These ideas constitute one of the most important points of view from which we can appraise the Council.

Good-bye, dear Brothers.

Yours in Christ,

Emmanuel d'Alzon

ORIGINAL EDITION: ES, pp. 1084-1087, and *Letters*, Rome, Désiré Deraedt edition, vol. VIII, p. 314.

TRANSLATION: Editor.

## **V. D'Alzon on Education On Education**

SEVENTH LETTER TO THE CONGREGATION BY E. D'ALZON (JULY 13, 1874)

*In this letter to the Assumptionists, d'Alzon specifically discusses the purpose of Christian education and some of the means most appropriate for the pursuit of this goal. This purpose is none other than "to form Jesus Christ in souls!" This is considered in neither narrowly religious nor purely academic terms. What's more, if that is the goal, then the teacher does not simply train in a particular discipline, but is in fact an "apostle," requiring learning and a life that reflect this lofty goal. D'Alzon also gives a good deal of more specific advice in this letter: study, prayer, respect for the particular student, the investigation of Christian literature and beauty — all these will help a teacher achieve the goal.*

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Nîmes, July 13, 1874

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 "alumnates" [\[1\]](#) 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 consider: 1) the purpose of education, 2) the teacher, 3) the college, 4) the first aluminate, and 5) the second aluminate. (Editors Note: Only the first three topics are included here. The rest may be found in *Circular Letters*, pp. 58-66.)

## **1. The Purpose of education**

All Christian and religious education is summed up in these words of Saint Paul to the Galatians: "My dear children, once again, just like a mother in childbirth, I feel the same kind of pain for you 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 that 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 beauty at once human and divine; 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.

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 that surrounded it. Though these details might seem at first sight to have little bearing on education, what lessons can be drawn from them?

## **2. The Teacher**

“What I did,” said the divine Teacher to his Apostles, “was to give you an example: as I have done, so you must do” (Jn 13:15). Acts recounts everything that “Jesus did and taught” (Acts 1:1). Education is not pure speculation; it is, before all else, a practical training for 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 that teaching of Paul: “To me, ‘life means Christ; hence dying is so much gain’” (Phil 1:21). The teacher for whom life means Christ is characterized by two things: a supernatural spirit 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 on 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, he will 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 childbirth, the result of which will be a new incarnation of Jesus Christ in souls: "until Christ is formed in you" (Gal 4:19).

To be sure, this means undergoing 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 the act of redemption is far superior to the act of creation, what must we not conclude of the honor given us to cooperate in the salvation of mankind?

You might wonder if such comments apply to everyone with an apostolic function or mission? They certainly do, and it is already a source of glory to be compared with the apostles; which is what we really should be. However, a few qualifications are in order. The Christian teacher is an apostle by reason of his zeal, his virtues and his goal, but the apostle strictly speaking has a broader field of action, while the Christian teacher is more narrowly focused. The apostle deals with the multitudes in the hope that saints will emerge; the Christian teacher strives, even though not always successfully, to form individual saints. He has fewer characters to mold, but he needs to 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 work for perfection inasmuch as he is being asked to produce fewer pieces and more masterpieces. The apostle works in broader strokes, coming back on his work in only a few instances; the Christian teacher operates within a much narrower context. He works with individuals one-on-one in order 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.

That being said, I quite readily agree that the Christian teacher must be above all an apostle. 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 win 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 oneself completely: "I will most gladly spend and be spent for your souls" (2 Cor 12:15).

### **3. The College**

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, but that should not prevent us from trying to make angels of them. Difficulties should not stand in our way. 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 with 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.

Let it be understood from the outset that the students 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 human being from a bit of clay. Yes, college students are this unformed mass, 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.

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, though it can be dry at times. On the other hand, meditation without formal study gets lost in a cloud 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 youths, 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.

We must love Jesus Christ. This is a serious matter. Why is it that, as a rule, students love Our Lord so little? The reason would indeed be hard to take 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 should force ourselves to get to the heart of the matter in these reflections meant just for us, 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 keep in mind at all times that scene when Jesus Christ questioned Saint Peter just before conferring upon him supreme teaching authority in 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 21:17). 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) Love proves itself by deeds. If we succeed in forming Jesus Christ in 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 educate 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? Please think about this. Reflect on the terrible consequences this has for our students and on 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 those entrusted to our care?

4) Love proves itself by deeds. These deeds are nothing other than the practice of the virtues, each of which is a particular imitation of the perfections of Jesus Christ. What a wealth of perfections on which to model 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 wrote on the subject elsewhere, I need not come back upon it here. Suffice it to remind you that we should emphasize both for ourselves and for our students a spirit of faith, frankness, sacrifice and initiative. Beyond that, we should allow them a certain freedom in their development and not crush them by trying to force them into a uniform mold.

At any rate, let us return to the three important principles that we must constantly try to inculcate in our students: love of Christ, love of the Blessed Virgin, the guardian of their purity, and love of the Church, that noble cause for which we must set them on fire. We can be confident that their interest in the Church's struggles 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 emerge almost on their own! Think of the great number of young people who will easily become heroes once they have been seduced by the greatness and beauty of our goal, as well as by the dangers to be overcome in attaining it. Think of those who would respond to our three-fold motivation: the love of Jesus Christ which we will have imparted to them, the love of the Blessed Virgin and of all the virtues that she conceals 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, but only on one condition: that we ourselves first become heroes for Jesus Christ.

5) I neglected to speak about the faults to be corrected and the abuses to be reformed. Both require constant attention and persistent effort. 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 will have to secure it later on for themselves. That bread, which is so necessary for us and for them, is that most substantial bread that Saint Matthew speaks of. It is our touchstone. Let us push 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 by the sweat of their brow, by struggling against 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.

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, identify what is good in view of developing it, and mold character so as to give everyone a certain stamp, while respecting the individuality of each one. Jesus Christ is the epitome of all perfection; the saints, though reflecting the divine model in many ways, possess only certain virtues to an eminent degree. 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 thorough 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.

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 done, can be the source of much Christian inspiration. What is more beautiful or more admirable than God approaching us closely 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 to be found in the saints? Because we absolutely must study these models, I wonder if we will have the time to study the pagan ones as well. This could even be the final answer to that famous controversy.

We do not proscribe all non-Christian literature; we admit that it has the value that some of its supporters claim. But the Christian treasures to be exploited are so rich, the mine so inexhaustible, that we do not have the time to spend on anything else. When we have exhausted the world of supernatural beauty and when we have assimilated this wonderful order, which admittedly revelation situates beneath the heavenly realm but well above the terrestrial, we can then consider the beauty of nature as understood by the pagan world. But until we have reached that point, we will forego that study simply because it would be an unprofitable use of our time.

The notion of Christian beauty, studied in its highest form, is obviously a powerful means of education. Once someone falls in love with truth and experiences emotions of a purer order, he becomes more pure himself, is improved, and discovers that he has less taste and drive for lower desires. It would take too long to explain here the relationship between Being, Truth, Good and Beauty as they constitute the substance of God and are revealed in Jesus Christ. Yet, we get a taste in these brief considerations of what is developed at great length in a

literature that is wholesome, invigorating, superior, 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.

ORIGINAL EDITION: ES, pp. 234-253

TRANSLATION: *Circular Letters 1874-1875*, pp. 47-58. Revised by editor.

## **The Meaning of Christian Education**

AN ADDRESS TO THE FACULTY AT ASSUMPTION COLLEGE, NIMES (FEBRUARY 1, 1846)

*In 1843 d'Alzon assumed direction of Assumption College in Nîmes and saw it as an opportunity to pursue the work of Christian education to which he attached so much importance. From the beginning, he attracted others to collaborate with him in the project and with them hammered out the principles that would guide their work. In this early address to the faculty at the College, d'Alzon tries to articulate the spirit of Christian education and the particular demands it places on those engaged in this work.*

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We must steep ourselves thoroughly in Christian thought by the strength, faith and love that derive from a knowledge of God and His Church. Wherever we go, we must spread this Christian thought in the minds and hearts of young people and influence them thoroughly, never getting discouraged by their seeming ignorance and superficiality.

How can we fill our students with this strength, faith and love? How will these things grow in the student?

The Christian enters into communication with God, connects himself with God. His soul now becomes like a battery: to be charged and vitalized with what only God can give. In God the Father he finds his strength and in the Son, understanding. And the more truth he discovers, the more attracted he becomes to truth; the more he pursues the truth, the more he loves it. Then the Spirit of God comes to him, takes hold of him, and lifts him up. Without this threefold influence of God, his spiritual life will be incomplete. Without it he will never acquire the perfection of his destiny. So the Christian must allow God to act within him. He must welcome and give free access to this divine life which flows into his soul from the God who is both one and three.

## **We Need Strength**

Were in great need of strength from on high! Look into your own heart; what do you discover there? A broken will, torn one way and the other. Original sin has broken our spirit and neutralized our efforts.

What with this personal weakness, how can we hope to manifest God? And what can be done to make up for this weakness? We must reinforce our feeble nature with God's own almighty power. The more we become powerful, the more clearly will we reveal his power, not ours. As long as we rely on our own puny strength, we will be ineffectual; we will convey no spiritual life to the minds and hearts of others.

So, abandon your weakness, discard it. Raise your eyes on high. Learn to appreciate the spiritual resources God offers you, to lift you up and restore your dignity, to strengthen you and enable you to overcome.

This is how God acts and reveals Himself in the world. He creates and restores. We must endeavor to imitate God in His redeeming action, and so we will reveal in ourselves His strength. We must mend the little world inside us, then turn our efforts to the little world around us. God will use us in this work of redemption and wants us to cooperate with Him in a joint effort.

So why tremble? Why hesitate? Fortified by God's own strength, placing our own feeble resources under His supreme command, we forge ahead. We communicate to our young people the strength in which they are sadly lacking, but it is strength we now possess, since God has transmitted it to us.

We need such strength in order to fight against the multiple obstacles we come across in our students: their obstinacy, evil, and every influence of the power of darkness. The strength we require is superhuman, but we find it in God, and God will fight on our side.

Prayer, perseverance and good example! And thus we conform to our divine model, our Lord Jesus Christ who "began to do and to teach" (Acts 1:1).

## **We Need Understanding**

A powerful means of communicating the power and strength of God lies in the hands of the teacher. It is by teaching, in the classroom, that we make the truth known.

But, alas, our vision is obscured. How difficult it is to banish the darkness. We need to know ourselves and the contradictions of our heart, as well as the world and its true value. We need to dispossess ourselves of a will so weak that it does what is evil even though it knows what is good. The light of faith shows us up in all our wretchedness. Stripped of pride, of lies, and of illusions, we will at last be disposed to welcome truth, the truth to which we must henceforth be willingly and courageously crucified.

It is this truth that will set us free (Jn 8:32), free from the slavery of our own perverse will. It will make us long to escape from the confusion in which we find ourselves entangled and draw us to herself and to her brilliance.

And once the truth has become a part of us, once we have well and truly assimilated it, then we need have no fear of whether we will be able to put it across to our listeners. Our mouth speaks from the abundance of our heart. The truth which has taken possession of our hearts will erupt from us. We will find ourselves urging our young people towards God, delivering them from what is false, raising them to the level of truth, transforming them into vessels of truth, convincing them that nothing but truth is real or good. Our love for them will render us ingenious in the conquest of their souls. We will present the truth to them in all its forms and discover hidden in characters that are disordered flammable matter that lacks only a spark to be set afire.

## **With the Love of God**

Christian truth is not only to be systematized or reflected on. It is especially something to love. When the person who searches for truth and longs for it, when he finds it, it becomes his consuming passion.

Where will we find this truth, except in God himself, by delving into the very depths of God, by

assimilating that true life which is the life of God, who is to be found in the Church?

If we ourselves love the truth, we will spare no efforts in teaching our students to love it too. We will fight with all our might against whatever evil influences prey upon their weakness, against whatever evil tendencies lurk in their hearts. We will be ardent in our endeavor to save them and set them free. We will lead them up to the heights of truth. Truth will become their friend and the whole purpose of their lives.

ORIGINAL EDITION: ES, pp. 1329-1332

TRANSLATION: Stephen Raynor, A.A.; revised by editor.

## **VI. D'Alzon, an Advocate for a Catholic University**

### **Excerpts from Revue de l'Enseignement Chrétien**

*For two periods between 1851 and 1871 d'Alzon and the staff at Assumption College-Nîmes published the Revue de l'Enseignement Chrétien to provide, as he writes in the first issue, a communications network among Christian educators in France. It is clear that the Review was meant to play a major role in some of the most critical issues facing higher education in France in the 19th century. In his contributions to the Revue, d'Alzon argues with spirited language for laws that would allow the establishment of independent institutions of higher learning. He was also involved in a variety of efforts to change*



*public policy in France in this regard.*

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## **Importance of a Good Education**

Leibniz, who more deeply than many probed a number of moral issues, once said: "The primary foundation for human happiness is good education in ones youth... It is shameful to see how badly the time of young people is used, or how much is wasted learning useless things, or how badly or indirectly they learn what's important to know and what should be learned promptly by direct means." I could not agree more.

From Volume 1, 1851, p. 5

## **Why Publish This Review?**

...Whatever the value of the new law on teaching, it is clear that a competition has begun between independent educational institutions and what has come to be called public instruction. It is a competition in which friends of freedom will participate in ever growing numbers.

Everyone wants to improve teaching. It is our conviction that the cause of Catholic teaching would do well to have a means at its disposal (such as this Review) that could be a channel of communication among teachers in various Christian institutions who believe they can best pursue their common endeavor by a free exchange of useful thoughts.

From Volume 1, 1851, p. 6

### **The Crisis Facing Contemporary Education**

Everyone who, like us, is involved in education knows the difficulties encountered when one deals with students and parents in order to approach as seriously as possible something as important as a person's whole future. I do not mean here the shortcomings of young people; these are part of human nature. I refer instead to problems particular to our own day. For example, among many families, there is a kind of scorn for education, a sort of precise reckoning of the amount of instruction that is "required" for success, a calculating mentality that tries to figure out just how much knowledge can be crammed into a young person's head. Others seem to think a teacher should be honored to have such students entrusted to his care. And all too often (a conviction easily passed from parents to children), there is today a lowered respect for teachers and their moral influence, otherwise so necessary for durable and fruitful results.

From Volume 1, 1851, p. 6

### **Good Books and Good Teachers**

To fight the anti-Christian spirit that seems to be growing each day, there seems to be no other way than by trying to inculcate in students the true spirit of Christianity. No method or opportunity at our disposal would be superfluous.

We will certainly offer no apology for the University, but we are honest enough to admit that it had reason to respond when its instruction was challenged: "What are you accusing me of? Of spreading godlessness? Look for yourselves at the sources I draw from. Most of the books I

place in students' hands are the very same ones that for three centuries you have been giving to the young people in your care. When the scepter of education was taken from you, did I not draw from your store-house? Is it my fault that they were infected with the plague that you accuse me of spreading?"

We know well what our answer can be. Would anyone deny that the best book, taught by a skeptical teacher, can corrupt? We cannot concern ourselves with the way the University has used the classics, which have reigned in almost all schools since the Renaissance. If it is true that the best book, badly presented, can become poisonous; and if it is also true that a dangerous book is less dangerous when presented by a Christian teacher, then does it not follow that it is necessary to have both good teachers and good books?

Toward the end of his life, Saint Augustine, former rhetorician in Carthage and in Rome, was asked by one of his friends, Dioscorus, about the aim of studies. Note well in his answer how painfully sad it was for him to witness the amount of time people wasted in their studies pursuing things other than the truth and the kinds of motives they had for accumulating useless knowledge. He would say, "I want you never to teach what you will have to unlearn in order to teach the truth" (Letter 118).

Unfortunately, we are perhaps not adequately convinced of the respect we owe the truth and of the cult to the truth that it is fitting for a teacher to exhibit from the podium in exchange for the honor of being truths minister and interpreter at such moments.

From Volume 1, 1851, pp. 8-9.

### **A France Crippled by Tolerance**

In the past the French spirit was a military and knightly spirit. We have replaced that with a spirit that is utilitarian, mercenary, egoistic, and materialist. Formerly our spirit rested on dedication, and dedication itself on the strong convictions of faith and everlasting hope. We knew how to sacrifice ourselves, to suffer, to die even with joy, because we could count on a better world. In this regard, where are our spirits and especially our hearts to be found now? With few exceptions, like in small groups still made up of believers or in a few organizations made up of members who will risk anything because their only hope is in anarchy, could France be in a

greater state of collapse? Whom can we call the really honest people, especially in the big cities? All of them have been paralyzed by personal interest; vital inspiration has been lacking.

The harsh lesson that divine Providence has inflicted upon France should make us understand that education is not only a way to acquire certain skills necessary for someone preparing for a career; we need to give teaching a higher goal, moral formation based on firm principles, helped by those great truths that rest on religious truth, by which the great truths can ennoble us by teaching us about our relationship with God and everyone like us under the watchful eye of God. In the name of tolerance, we have tragically downgraded the sublime mission of teaching. With the pretext of making allowances for a variety of beliefs, all beliefs have been set aside. Such a singular system, which in the name of respect for individual convictions, produces indifference and scorn for all convictions!

Well, if there is one clear fact today, it is the great hatred against Rome that is due especially to the fact that Rome never colluded with these revolutionary compromises, of the tolerant or liberal sort. Rome has always proclaimed the rights of truth, and she has not been forgiven for that.

When you understand the chasm into which the tolerance and liberalism of the University have plunged us, you would be blind if you refused to see the need for a radical reform that society needs in its educational system. The first act of that reform will be the destruction of the University.

We should not delude ourselves; Catholics must choose. A war unto death is declared between the Church and the University. I could even say between the University and France. Do we want the Catholic Church? Then eliminate the University. Allow it to continue, and soon France, without conviction, without faith, without a truth with which to oppose the appetites of the Commune understood in the most frightening but most logical sense of the word, will capsize in the storm. Therefore, radical educational reform in France by the destruction of the University and its teaching of skepticism!

From Volume 1 (New Series), May 1871, pp. 60-61

## **Destroy the University**

Pagan Rome's worst enemy was Carthage. The Senate found no rest until this apparently invincible rival was reduced to ashes.

For us, the great enemy of Christian Rome, the Church, is the University. That is why our battle-cry is: *Delenda Carthago*...

*Delenda Carthago.* We have been and continue to be subjected to University professors who, still within the law, vomit in the newspapers what we Catholics brand as impiety. But how much longer will the University have the right to impose such professors on our young people?

For sixty years this institution has successively heaped praise and damnation on every regime; can it be anything other than a school of social unbelief? Can any government trust an institution with such a spirit? Is it not better, since that seems to be the best we can do right now, to claim freedom of instruction for the Catholic majority in France? A vital question we must address from every angle.

To reach our goal, we need a program. The program is easy to articulate: we have none other than the doctrine of the Church on theological, moral and social issues...

If we are firm as to the sure principles of the faith, we encourage the greatest amount of freedom in the discussion on methods of instruction at all levels, with the guidance and in the spirit of the Church our Mother. As for older methods to be preserved or new methods to be invented, we plan to stimulate discussions that are as thorough and probing as possible.

From Volume 1 (New Series), May 1871, pp. 5-8

## **Freedom in Education**

You might ask what would I put in place of the state-run University? Good God! Something that the University boasts of a great deal but produces little of: freedom. I am well aware of the problems that absolute freedom can entail. But we have a choice. The first alternative would be for the State to become once again Christian and take Catholic doctrine as the foundation of its teaching. Then it would consider it a duty and an honor to protect the freedom of the Church, which claims the right, given by Christ, to form and teach young people. I do not mean by this that only members of the clergy or of teaching congregations would be called to carry out this sensitive mission, but the Church would herself insure that the deposit of faith and ethical standards would be preserved in their integrity, and that other teaching would not be in contradiction with these immortal principles. Such an ideal is very far from where we are now.

The second alternative would be for the State, without being atheist and without being indifferent to the affirmation or denial of God, to take Moses' decalogue as fundamental principles for society but stop short of declaring itself regarding the various confessions and strike a balance between the unchanging creed and the varying beliefs of the distinct sects. In this case, laws would protect young people, and government, if it wants to stay in power, would not deliver them to the murderous business of the education merchants, any more than they would deliver them to the murderous designs of anti-social parties.

To repeat, what is most urgent is that the State not teach by itself, because it has no principle of education, having officially no religious principle.

From Volume 1 (New Series), June 1871, p. 117

### **The Academic Program of a Catholic University**

We might study for a moment how Catholic universities could be organized.

A Catholic university should have a Catholic foundation. We would start with a theology faculty and consequently seek the guidance of the Bishops and our Holy Father. A refusal to collaborate, however, is not to be feared; that can only stimulate initiative. I will not dwell on that here.

The University is a Christian republic in which the various academic pursuits are the provinces, all recognizing theology as their sovereign. Rationalism has stirred revolution in this empire; but right is unchanging, and the university can be restored only if all disciplines submit to divine learning, acquired by revelation. Philosophy, moral and political science, mathematical and physical sciences, literature and fine arts, every area explored by human thought, in all its forms, acknowledge a center that gives light and to which they pay tribute.

Religion provides history with its principal data, its unity and its life, whereas history offers theology, in archives from the past, verification of its claims and the testimony on which it rests.

Theology can animate the study of human language. Hut such study, in comparing languages, painstakingly explores rich veins and plumbs wonderful depths for the benefit of theology, by confirming the teachings on the unity of the species and the origin of societies.

Theology presents religious and revealed truths, held by the Church, in a rationally ordered system. But the Church is a visible society, with laws, to which the laws of civil societies correspond. Civil and canon law are therefore united by important links; these should be ordered in such a way that the Church can freely exercise its spiritual sovereignty. In this way it can be seen that the study of law flows from theology, and that theology can benefit from this study.

Since all learning leads to God and to man, the science of bodies in a certain sense leads to the human body. We refer here to medicine, perhaps the faculty most in need of theology. It is reasonable enough to say that medicine as a science is sicker than its clients and that theology has the best remedies to heal it. Some doctors and professors of medicine, failing to touch the soul with their scalpel, have boldly denied its existence since they were unable to determine its location. Materialism has invaded the schools of medicine in the University. The State, through our great University faculties, teaches our young that everything is flesh and that nothing survives the corruption of the body. Having allowed Catholics some liberty in secondary education, the State seems to have reserved to itself the right to destroy what the Church has done in the schools still under its influence, by establishing chairs of atheism, from which our young people are forced to hear lectures that leave them prey to the passions, in cities that seek to satisfy their every appetite. Is it not high time that theology be allowed to investigate this revolted vassal?

Theology will therefore be set as the foundation of our university. Then, all the sciences will

group themselves around her in search of a new life and new insights, just as she will seek from them an invaluable aid and essential data.

From Volume 1 (New Series), August 1871, pp. 210-212

### **Address at Awards Ceremony**

**(Given at Assumption College, July 30, 1872)**

Your Excellency, Guests,

When you look closely at contemporary society, you cant help but be struck by two facts: the first is the ever more powerful organization of the Revolution; the second is the ever more violent effort of this Revolution to eliminate God from every sphere, and especially from teaching.

Allow me to offer a few reflections on these two issues, which after all, come down to one only: hatred for God and the hope of moving beyond Him as soon as possible. However, since it is important not only to point to an evil but also to suggest a remedy, I will force myself to suggest one that I think is appropriate in the context of this assembly.

You cannot deny that the Revolution has a goal that is being pursued with implacable determination. It is no less certain that, thanks to resources ever more threatening, the Revolution can look forward to victory in the very near future. You need only read certain contemporary writings to be convinced that to achieve this goal every notion of justice and law, of good and evil, of vice and virtue is being overturned. The human spirit has rebelled against the Church first of all, then the Gospel, and finally against God Himself. There are three major stages: heresy, purely natural religion, and atheism at first disguised but then openly professed are to be seen in every branch of learning, in philosophy, in socialist errors, in every place where after excluding Jesus Christ people say about God Himself: we do not want Him to rule over us.



There is reason to think that God will not be universally banished without some resistance. As Christians, we can count on His help in the war that He accords us the honor to wage for His rights. But we must fight, and fight on the field where we are under attack.

From what I observe, two conclusions are to be drawn. The first is that before anything else we must restore the thought of God in teaching. Every thought must support this fundamental idea. Rather, more precisely, all knowledge must draw light, power, and fruitfulness from this universal principle. If God is the first of beings, the origin of all others; if truth is the affirmation of being; if the first truth is the affirmation of God—then nothing should be affirmed that does not go back to God or draw its reason for being from Him, and nothing should be explained apart from the notion of God.

The more violently this idea is attacked, for reasons that are not only scholarly I might add, the more abundantly and cogently should the knowledge of God be communicated to young students. The more God is removed from education, the more we must speak about Him, refer to Him in our lectures, elucidate His attributes in the metaphysical order, and especially show the need for his all-powerful role in the moral order, which founds and nurtures all human relations.

But this is not yet enough. Confronted by the war against God, which has been so powerfully organized, Christians need to mobilize. Many things are being done that I need not elaborate on here. I limit myself to an examination of what Christian teachers must do and of the relation they can establish with their students for this common cause.

We are embarking on a new phase in society; new duties have been created by a very abnormal situation. We can no longer expect to continue an easy voyage on a calm sea, with good winds to our back. A violent storm has been unleashed. Everyone must be on alert to avoid a shipwreck that our opponents confidently expect. We have a great deal to do. All of us!

In addition to the education we provide during the college years, we Christian teachers should maintain contact with our graduates. This is an important obligation of ours, for all of us in France working with Catholic youth. Such contact may be one of the best means at our disposal to save our society. It is in fact a privilege of ours, to extend our influence well beyond the years students spend in school. The secret of our influence is that we love our students, that they feel

loved by us. That's hardly the case elsewhere. Generally elsewhere, Greek, Latin, mathematics, and even gymnastics are taught in more or less large doses; but they are given without affection and received in the same way.

From Volume 6, August 1872, pp. 203-209

ORIGINAL EDITION: *Revue de l'Enseignement Chrétien, 1851-1872*

TRANSLATION: Editor

## **VII. D'Alzon on Teaching**

### **On Teaching**

NINETEENTH MEDITATION BY E. D'ALZON (1878)

*Two years before his death no longer able to preach a great deal d'Alzon commits to paper his most seasoned reflections on a great variety of topics (over forty different ones were treated). The nineteenth of these "meditations" deals with teaching. His concern is with what goes on in the classroom: some of the problems in the students themselves that need to be addressed, some of the basic questions that must be raised, and the way in which the Christian teacher should approach the work. D'Alzon's considerations are practical and lofty at the same time, always deeply and explicitly Christian.*

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*"Go, therefore, and teach all nations." Matthew 28:19*

When Our Lord Jesus Christ commissioned the Apostles to go and teach all nations, he thereby commissioned their successors and whomever these successors might delegate for this important function. The office of teaching belongs by right to our bishops who hand it over, retaining the responsibility thereof to men and women whom they judge competent: priests, religious and Christian lay people.

Teaching is organized on a diocesan basis, subject to episcopal control, just as in the universal Church bishops are charged with teaching the faith under the jurisdiction of the Pope. The Church is one in doctrine because it comes under one supreme teacher to whom its other teachers submit.

However, I am not going to discuss the subject of teaching from this broad perspective. My present concern is with those who actually preside over the classroom, in particular with our teaching religious. I would like to deal with three questions:

1. What must our students unlearn?
2. What must they be taught?
3. How?

### **1. What Must Our Students Unlearn?**

Our classroom is like a garden. Before planting the good seed we must tear out the weeds. There are so many nowadays that we are daunted by the task of having to remove it and replace it by truth in the young minds confided to our care. Let us consider what we have to remove.

#### **a. False Ideas, Home-Grown**

Take a look at the families some of these boys come from. You have no idea of the false notions they can pick up at home. There are the scattered remnants of Voltairian philosophy from a father who studied at the State University. He may not have taken such philosophy too seriously and may not be what we would call a "free thinker, " but...

What about the mother? She may well be pious and have exerted enough influence to have her son sent to a good Christian school, but during the summer holidays pressure will be brought to bear on the young man to free himself from the clerical yoke, by the declaration of misleading and dangerous theories. It is during these days of pleasurable relaxation that his father may decide to take him in hand, telling him this, that and the other about what he thinks he ought to know—undermining the efforts his teachers have made to instill faith into an innocent young heart. And if the father is inclined to be cynical about religion, he may well be successful. And what can the mother do if she is weak, and he the kind of son who invariably contradicts her?

## **b. Books and Newspapers**

What about the million and one ideas that have found their way into print? Many a young person has been led astray by what he picked off of his father's book-shelf or by the romantic novels that were mothers' delight. We know the kind of books being published nowadays: downright indecent books that deprive young people of their faith by destroying their innocence. And as for newspapers, we know the harm they do, especially to ignorant people by exciting their curiosity. How many pious novels have paved the way for rotten ones! How many cheap magazines have introduced their young readers to what can best be described as poisonous filth!

You have no idea of the harm done by books and newspapers that claim to be neutral, and never mention God, Our Lord, the Virgin, or the Saints, which leave out all reference to whoever and whatever ought to furnish the imagination of Christian children. Christian concepts and Christian illustrations are carefully omitted so as to convey the impression that all these children need become is good citizens.

## **c. Other Schools**

We must make a big effort to assist a student transferring from an establishment that is hardly Christian to one that claims to be totally Christian. We have to remove those false notions of autonomy, permissiveness and skepticism that have already taken root. What absurdities, let alone blasphemies, must we not expect him to utter? We have to stop him at least from corrupting his new classmates if there is any hope of bringing him round to better attitudes. If not, then we must not hesitate to send him back where he came from—to those teachers who made such a mess of his formative years by leading him astray as soon as he was old enough

to think for himself.

#### **d. Modern Trends**

The air we breathe has now become polluted, the moral atmosphere as much as, according to certain doctors, the physical atmosphere. The consequence is that young people are being exposed to all kinds of unhealthy influences. Not even the strictest supervision can prevent it, because half the time we don't even notice what's going on.

We cannot protect our students by wrapping them up in cotton wool. We must fortify their intellects, and I am going to endeavor to show you how.

## **2. What Must Be Taught?**

First and foremost the Catholic faith—the whole of it—in all its majesty, immensity and infinity, in its emphatic assertion of God's prerogatives, in its explanation of mysteries that become clearer and clearer to young minds, as they grow.

Catholic doctrine is one, and this unity must be felt, no matter from which angle we propound it. We can talk about God's Word (and that is how we ought to begin) or we can review the various dogmas of our faith. What we believe can be summed up in our fundamental belief of three persons in one God: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, the Father who created us, the Son who redeemed us, and the Holy Spirit who sanctifies us. What we must do is likewise summed up in the three theological virtues: faith, hope and charity— charity, according to Saint Augustine, being the living expression of the other two.

We must teach these basic truths, and those that flow from them: God's power, his authority, and his right to reward or punish us. It is regarded as tactful not to mention hell too often, but why should we surrender to this weakness? We are doing people a favor by putting the fear of God into them. So many are in need of it!

Catholic truth must be taught with examples. How wrong it is to neglect the lives of the saints: their self-sacrifice, their zeal, their love of God and their neighbor! It is of paramount importance to recount the great deeds of our spiritual ancestors. The Church has its Honor Role, the record of its children's triumph in their warfare against the power of evil.

There is nothing like reading the lives of the saints to make you want to imitate them, nothing so uplifting as the account of their virtues. They give us courage. We ask ourselves like Saint Augustine: "What these men and women did, why can't I?" It is the very best way to deal with a young person in need of conversion. Show him what a servant of God can do once he has made up his mind to do it.

To be beneficial, religious teaching must be both direct and indirect at the same time.

Direct religious teaching means that it must take place at regular periods in the curriculum, and the students must be expected to take it at least as seriously as any other subject. We ourselves must take special care in the preparation of our religion classes. A teacher who neglects this responsibility is as guilty as a chef who neglects the main course. Such insufficient preparation deserves the reproach of the prophet Jeremiah: "Your children asked for bread, but there was no one to break it for them" (Lam 4:4).

Teaching must also be indirect. Let me explain what this means. We cannot turn every class into a religion class. What we can and ought to do, no matter what subject we are teaching, is to take Christianity into account. This is the spirit in which we ought to teach, and it requires special preparation on our part.

What I call indirect teaching lasts the whole day long. It shapes and guides students all the time, revealing God's presence, His power, His commandments, His justice, His goodness and His mercy. Mind you, it takes some Christian endurance to keep this up! We are teaching more than docility and good behavior. Teach sanctity. Show students how important it is to repent, to make allowances where allowances are due, to render service to everyone as Saint Paul demands. Everything begs to be taught. And we must keep on teaching it. Once we loosen our grip we are in for a more than unpleasant surprise; the spiritual edifice we have taken so much time and trouble to build up will come tumbling down.

Need I say this must be a team effort on our part? How many teachers there are who by thoughtlessness, by disdain, if not by deliberate opposition, seem bent on destroying the good work of their colleagues! It happens not once in a while but often. They take delight in demolishing what others have built up. I've met the type. Their influence in Christian institutions is disastrous: for the teachers whose efforts they paralyze; and for the students, whose faith they try to drag down to their own level, which I can assure you was not very high.

### **3. How Must We Teach?**

We must teach with respect. Beware of a teacher whose teaching is frivolous. This doesn't exclude a note of enthusiasm or a spark of humor that will endear the students to us. Distinguish inappropriate lightness from a lively presentation.

We must also respect our pupils. We shouldn't impose some ridiculous notion on the pretext that its a mystery they are not supposed to understand. Require faith where the Church would. Go as far as the Church, but where the Church does not wish to impose a burden, we must not only permit but encourage individual liberty. Such liberty in non-essentials disposes us to obey all the more promptly when it comes to essentials. Instead of trying to force a person to believe, why not indicate the various options the Church would be prepared to admit in given circumstances? Take the definition of Our Lady's Immaculate Conception or that of papal infallibility. Was it so difficult to foresee these definitions inspired by the Holy Spirit? Evidently not. We were not obliged to make an act of faith, but we could have guessed that one day the Church would make a decision.

We must teach with conviction. The teacher who his pupils sense is unconvinced is the worst of all teachers. His words do incalculable harm. He is like those scribes and Pharisees Our Lord mentions as sitting on the throne of Moses, who do not practice what they preach.

For them, teaching is just a job. They are being paid to say certain things whether or not they are true. They are mercenaries, and one senses it. You cannot deceive young people. Their unerring instinct informs them whether they are sitting in the presence of a believer or a cynic. I personally regard unconvinced teachers as a plague to be got rid of immediately.

How different are those admirable individuals whose deep convictions burst out and are



revealed in every word, in every gesture, in their very appearance and mode of life! How carefully they treasure what has been confided to them. It is the greatest of treasures, and they know it, and their students become as convinced of it as they are. No wonder these young intellects flourish in the face of a message spoken with such conviction by lips dedicated to the cause of truth! They find no difficulty in accepting what their teacher so passionately believes in. Their youthful spirit is rich and fertile soil; if the good seed doesn't sink in, it won't be the fault of the sower.

We must teach with love. It is easy to understand such love: for example Saint Jerome's for Cicero; Saint Augustine's for Virgil and the Platonists. The story goes that Saint Jerome was scourged by an angel for being too fond of beautiful pagan literature. Saint Augustine in his Confessions reproaches himself for having loved books other than the Bible. Without exaggeration, we must admit that there is much there to be admired, but nowadays we do come across foolish admiration, which can make people look foolish.

But between loving the noblest products of human genius and loving the truth, goodness and beauty of God Himself there is a big difference. Allow me to emphasize that there is nothing in the whole of creation so worthy of our admiration and love as divine perfection and its manifestation in God's dealings with His creatures. What and who is so admirable as to compare with our God, our creator, our redeemer, our sanctifier? What and who is there for us to be enthusiastic about, if we cannot be enthusiastic about Him?

We must love truth. We must love those to whom we communicate the truth. And we must love the various means whereby truth is communicated. When our hearts are aflame with this fire of love, our students will feel it, and they will come to warm themselves.

We must teach with the spirit of the apostles and martyrs, and with the spirit of Saint John the Baptist. We too have been sent to bear witness to the light. So we must respect the light. Since our vocation is to reflect His light and echo His voice, we must pray not to be too unworthy of such a noble mission.

This sums it up. Satan knows only too well what he is doing when he tries to suppress Christian teaching by closing Christian schools. Evil is powerful; all the more reason for us to fight it by teaching and preaching "in and out of season; for the time will come when people will grow tired of sound doctrine and lend their ears to fables instead" (2 Tim 4:3).

It is up to us never to lose heart. If they suppress our educational institutions, then we'll- go underground, in the catacombs. The word of God cannot be held captive (2 Tim 2:9).

I remember visiting, just over a year ago, the crypt where Saint Peter used to baptize. There isn't much room down there yet it is the birth-place of Roman faith. It is very dark there, yet see what light issued from such obscurity! Light issuing from the very depth of darkness, from these narrow passages cluttered with Christian bones (chiefly those of slaves emancipated by the emperor Claudius). It is from here of all places, that Christian feet set out to carry the good tidings to the ends of the earth.

ORIGINAL EDITION: ES, pp. 472-480

TRANSLATION: Stephen Raynor, A.A.; revised by editor

## **VIII. Some Advice to Teachers**

### **Address to the Faculty**

ASSUMPTION COLLEGE, NIMES (1845-1867)

*D'Alzon insisted on the importance of continuing education for the staff at his school, much of it to be provided by him! Frequently enough early in the morning, the faculty would gather together to hear the director of the school reflect out loud on an issue related to Catholic education. Many of these talks, preserved in auditors' notes, deal with matters that continue to be important for Christian educators: collaboration in the work of Christian education, relations with students, faith and reason, the importance of love in a good education, etc.*

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**“Collaboration of Religious and Laity” (December 27, 1845)**

### **Our Aim**

We already know what our goal is. Today the Church is deprived of the influence of its religious Orders, in the area of education. But the Church cannot renounce its legitimate rights in such an important field. The Church may have to give way to public prejudice by disbanding certain of its

religious Orders, against which there is widespread and invincible, albeit unfounded, antipathy. But the Church cannot surrender that deposit of faith entrusted to her keeping, that deposit of faith which would soon be whittled away in the hands of those who wish to take schools away from the Church. 'The faith must be safeguarded and preserved at all costs for the generations now being prepared.

Since religious Orders are no longer wanted, the clergy and laity are pulling together, with united determination, to do, God willing, the work formerly undertaken by these religious Orders. The goal is to bring about Christ's Kingdom by the education of youth.

We are working at this united effort; will it succeed? We need not worry about the future. Carry on in a spirit of faith, of hard work, of holiness, and of prayer. Be patient and prudent, and then, with God's help, we will grow and flourish.

Meanwhile, we should start by setting ourselves up as a community, a first attempt at common life between priests and lay people. The former will embrace the rules of religious life; the latter will try themselves out as a third Order. Both will work together to edify one another and spread the beneficial influence of lives dedicated to God.

In our Association, we must maintain this distinction between priests and lay people, precisely because we are a religious foundation. The distinction does not separate us; it unites us. It brings us more closely together because we are praying for one another and giving one another a good example. No need for mutual criticism or supervision; let us just become closer and more devoted friends, helping one another by our kindness, knit together by our practice of every Christian virtue. Let charity be our rule, and charity our duty, a charity which strengthens rather than relaxes the bond between us. Charity will surmount all the difficulties in this new form of common life, lived though it be in two ways. Amid the diversity of our various situations, charity will draw us together and make us one.

Our unity, thus maintained and fortified, the Association will spread its wings and advance. In what direction? Its goal is entirely in view of the extension of Christ's Kingdom on earth. We must be frank and open-hearted, because these virtues win souls and are inspired by love. We must acquire the knowledge needed to instruct others and let truth shine in their minds. Above all, we must have zeal, faith, and the enthusiasm that accepts every sacrifice and makes light of every obstacle. Let poverty, obedience and other virtues come to our aid in this difficult and trying form of apostolate.

Poverty wisely limits our activities, yet thereby intensifies their effect and keeps us from being overly ambitious. Poverty will make us content with small beginnings, doing as best we can under modest circumstances.

Our obedience is not to one or another, but to Christ himself. We must be obedient as he himself proved himself obedient: always, everywhere, and in whatever we do. We must promote obedience in our students, just as we seek to promote it in our own lives with regard to our Rule. It must be an obedience in the light of faith. It must discipline both intellect and will, neither extinguishing the former, nor weakening the latter. It must be a free and spontaneous obedience, because thereby we obey God, and him alone. It must elevate our behavior to the realm of the Spirit. What we do, we do by faith, by spiritual conviction. This will strengthen our will, thus freed from pride by humility. It will deepen our piety. Our growth will be free, constant and conscientious, with our intellect voluntarily ordered and freely submissive.

### **“Ourselves and Our Students” (February 8, 1846)**

We must reflect, in the light of faith, on the nature of the human soul. What a wonderful thing the human soul is! It confers a dignity on the Christian such as not even the angels enjoy. When God chose to manifest Himself, he chose to do so in human nature, as a member of Adams race.

This dignity is initially imparted to us by baptism, but this is only a beginning that needs to be pursued. And the best way to do so is through education.

### **The Task to Be Accomplished**

The soul is like a piece of metal, from which a medallion is cast. It is like a block of marble out of which a statue is made. God gives it its initial shape. We stamp the relief on the metal or design the contours of the statue. God provides the model, which is none other than Himself. We reproduce it.

So we are workers charged with the task of reproduction. God puts the tools in our hands. We are given strength to perform the task, and God Himself works alongside. He prepares the marble like the soul of each young person, ready to be shaped, molded, carved by the skill of the artist.

And we start to work, but is it according to God's plans or our own? The sculptor entrusts the block of marble to one of his assistants, who begins by cutting it into the approximate shape. Then the assistant is provided with a pattern: chisels, compasses, and all the rest. Will the sculptor be pleased if the assistant does not follow his directions, but rather his own? If he is unfaithful to the master's idea, the work will be a failure; the skill of the technician will have replaced the inspiration of the genius.

And so it is with education. We must model and mould our statues on Jesus Christ if we want them to succeed. For this we must imbue ourselves more and more with the thought of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Our efforts must be in harmony with his in the work of salvation. He entrusts us with a specific function to perform. Consequently, we must seek his will, his intentions, his plans, his designs for each particular soul. Then we will be sure our task is being properly accomplished.

## **The Basics of Education**

Let us remind ourselves of them. There is the human soul to be fashioned. There is a model to imitate. There are tools to work with. And there is the strength we need in order to reproduce the model.

## **The Soul of a Young Person**

It is comparable to a block of marble; so we must know something about marble. Some marble is harder to work on than others; how deeply must we drive the chisel? Marble differs from granite, and granite from plaster. In other words, we must treat each one differently.

And it is not sufficient to know the nature of the marble we are working on. We must think of it

with Jesus Christ in mind. Carving a statue calls for a different procedure than, say, building a house. We must study the folds of a persons garments and the way they drape, since they will be captured permanently in marble. The general contours of the human figure, these too will have to be fixed. Above all, we must study the features and the facial expression, at times capturing faith, or at others purity, or humility.

## **The Divine Model**

The dominant features must be those of Jesus Christ. But since there is nobody exactly like him (Eccles. 44:20), this physiognomy will have to be reproduced in as many millions of different ways as there are human faces.

So take a good look at Jesus Christ, because you will have to reproduce him on the marble of each individual human soul. We will never be able to reproduce all the purity and the loveliness of the model. We must, nonetheless, endeavor to find something that we can faithfully transmit to the work in hand.

Are we working on gold or in bronze? If we are working on silver, will the resulting expression be in any way weak because of the material? But perhaps it would look better in bronze? So we must acquire a thorough knowledge of metallurgy and choose the material in function of the model, to capture most faithfully the features and the expression. This knowledge of our divine model is acquired by meditation on Jesus Christ. The better we know him, the better we will be able to transmit his likeness to those under our care.

## **The Strength We Need**

Another condition is needed if we are to succeed in our task We need strength. It s no use handing tools to a corpse; the corpse won't be able to *do* anything with them.

We need fire with which to melt the metal. We need muscle. It takes a strong man to smooth and polish it, So, over and above what strength nature has given us, we need "super-strength," and this is unobtainable except by prayer. Like Moses on the mountain (Ex 19:3) we must learn

to converse with God.

And in these intimate communications with the divinity, we must listen carefully to what Our Blessed Lord has to say (Ps 84:8). Our eyes must assimilate those vast horizons on which he bids us gaze. We must open the flood-gates of our heart to those abundant waters of life which flow from his pierced side (Jn 19:34). In other words, we must go to Our Blessed Lord. Let him fill us with his goodness, let him brighten us with his light, let him warm us with his love.

### **The Imitation of Christ**

Yes, we must learn to imitate Christ. In the light of his divinity, we shall clearly see how we can imitate Our Lord in his dealings with us: "And in thy light we shall see the light" (Ps 35:10).

We shall clearly see how to deal with our young people. Faith must inspire us here, because our dealings with them are the same as Our Lord's dealings with souls. Jesus loves souls; Jesus gave his life for souls. We too must give our lives for these young people. And we must give ourselves completely. "Love is as strong as death" (Canticle 8:6).

To love souls as Jesus Christ loved souls, to give ourselves and all we have, to sacrifice our very lives for the love of souls—we may not all be called to this supreme and sublime selflessness. But such is the ideal, and we must never lose sight of it. Meanwhile we must offer ourselves up for these young souls day by day. Is not our blood well worth shedding for the sake of one single soul? To save them required every drop of Our Lords own precious blood. Would we be prepared to shed every drop of ours? If God so urged us, what right would we have to hesitate and calculate? We would have to immolate ourselves, just as Christ immolated himself to save them.

There are, moreover, many degrees of suffering to endure before we reach that of complete self-immolation. What matters is that we should be prepared to endure the lot! The blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ which washes us clean from sin (1 Jn 1:7), was not that blood itching to be shed for our salvation (Mt 26:28)?



## **Loving Our Pupils**

This is the kind of love we must have for these young souls, the love of an apostle. A love communicated by God. A love communicated by us, and through us, because we have become God's ambassadors to these pupils of ours. Ours is an apostolate founded on truth, a truly saving apostolate, the illumination of souls to whom we communicate God's love. And these young people will, in turn, enlighten and enliven us.

Saint Thomas Aquinas transports us into the angelic realm, and there he shows us how the river of truth flows down through all the grades of the celestial hierarchy. Down, down it flows, this waterfall of divine truth! Down, down it cascades, through us, and we send it, overflowing into those youthful minds and hearts who are there to absorb what we have to say.

Remember that we carry these treasures in earthenware vessels (2 Cor 4:7). And the emptier our earthen vessel be, the more room will there be in it, room into which God can pour the treasures of His truth. And the more of it has been poured into us, the more of it we will be able to pour into our pupils.

We ought to have a veritable passion for teaching. We can never be worthy enough to exercise this form of apostolate. Be we priests, be we laymen, we have been entrusted with communicating God's truth and God's love to the younger generation.

We must think about being good educators. We must desire to be good educators..., and we must work very hard to become good educators.

### **“New Things and Old” (October 1867)**

As I thought about the plan I would follow in the series of talks I want to give you, these words of our divine Master struck me forcibly: “Go and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” (Mt 28:19). “...Baptizing them. What is Christian education after all, if not a real baptism? It's a genuine purification by which we bring about the birth of Jesus Christ in our students.

Our Lord said: "the Kingdom of heaven must be like a wise and wealthy man who knows how to exhibit from among his family treasures things both new and old" (Mt 13:52).

"Every scribe, " that is to say, every teacher, every expert steeped in the knowledge of things pertaining to the spirit. Christian education must always aim at raising minds and hearts to heaven. I will return to the theme of what it means to be an "expert" in heavenly matters.

Allow me to begin by commenting on this phrase: "New things and old from among his treasures."

Every Christian teacher must have treasures to exhibit. He may have picked up these treasures from others in the course of his own studies, but he must add to them out of his own mind and heart if they are truly to become "his" treasures, belonging to him.

May he keep these treasures for his own personal use and enjoyment? No, rather they are his to communicate. He must, says our divine Savior, draw from them things both new and old.

The Christian teacher should not fear that he is impoverishing his personality by sharing his knowledge with others. On the contrary, what he knows it becomes his duty to communicate; what he has received it becomes his duty to pass on. Everybody else is entitled to draw from the wealth of his knowledge.

And this, gentlemen, is our privilege as teachers, the magnificent privilege of giving whatever we receive, and as soon as we receive it. If we kept all our knowledge to ourselves, we would not be like that wise father Our Lord speaks about. "Every teacher, " he tells us, "must be like such a wise family man." We would, otherwise, be like those University professors who lecture only with an eye on their salary. And if we are really like a father, our only interest will be that of our students, not a vile, self-centered interest, limited to pay and promotion.

There is, however, another kind of interest that is very difficult to rid ourselves of altogether. I

mean the pursuit of our own self-interest rather than that of our students. Is it ourselves we are admiring while we teach, rather than concentrating on our students? "I speak eloquently. I've got a sharp wit. I rattle off quotations, one after another. In other words, I'm a great teacher."

No, this is not how a genuine Christian teacher speaks or behaves, one who is knowledgeable in the things of heaven. The genuine Christian teacher knows the value of the Kingdom of heaven and of those who are confided to his care. He may be learned, and possessed of a ready wit, but the words that issue from his lips are not for his own honor and glory. He is the father of a family, with a big heart, concerned for the good of his children. He has meditated on these words from Vespers: "Happy the one who showers his wealth on the poor" (Ps 111:8). Yes, he has scattered his wealth far and wide; he has given his wealth away to those who had none. I would even say: he has squandered his wealth. But it was for the sake of the poor, for the sake of these young intellects who so needed it. And the wealth he has so generously distributed is the wealth of truth. He has opened his treasure-store, and brought forth "things new and old."

Yes, the teacher must teach "new things," things the students have never heard before. Hence the necessity for the teacher to prepare well, and to make sure the students have properly understood what has already been taught. Hence the necessity for the teacher to draw from his own reserves, to teach something original.

The word "new" is a condemnation of the dull teacher who keeps on dishing up the same old material. So let the teacher avoid using hackneyed expressions. Let him shed a new light, and give a new perspective on what they already know. For heavens sake, use your imagination and say something fresh!

But this isn't enough. The Christian teacher must know how to draw forth the old treasures too. He must be well acquainted with the ancient authors, and know how to present them. He must read them carefully and not be satisfied with a quick preparation just before entering the classroom.

"Old things": this covers every branch of knowledge, but especially the treasures of Christian truth. The ageless character of revealed truth: this is something that a teacher who is really learned about the Kingdom of God will endeavor to communicate to his students. He knows only too well where his essential duty lies. He knows how precious are these young people entrusted to his care. The religious canvas he paints will be impervious to the wear and tear of

years, for he will have painted them with the very blood of our Jesus Christ.

So he will not be thinking about the sumptuous salary he is being paid, nor about the personal prestige he is acquiring. He is working for God.

There he stands: truly a father worthy of administering that baptism of Christian education we talked about earlier. He is not greedy with his treasure; he scatters it far and wide. He “showers his wealth on the poor,” because he knows that such is his duty in justice, a “justice which will endure for ever.” “And his banner will be lifted up in glory” (Ps 111). The light he sheds to illumine the minds of others will one day redound to his glory.

### **“Faith and Knowledge” (October 1867)**

Last time we assembled, we discussed these words from chapter one of the Acts of the Apostles: “Jesus began to do and to teach” (Acts 1:1). Today we will consider what the divine Teacher has to say; we will listen to the actual words he preaches. For though a Christian teacher should preach primarily by his life, by his actions, and by his example, he must also preach by words. And for these words to produce results in students, they must be inspired by faith, knowledge, and love.

### **Faith**

Not so long ago they told me that Fr. Berryer, who is one of the finest orators of our time, had these words painted on the wall of his chapel: “I believed, and this is why I spoke” (Ps 115:1).

It's the same with all orators; even among the pagans, those who are truly eloquent believe in something! For example, they believe in their political system. With no faith, with no personal conviction, you could string together sentences like those of Socrates, but the words would never carry weight. I am aware that sometimes passion or self-interest replaces faith, but that is another matter.

What I do wish to impress upon you is that Christian education worthy of the name can only be provided by someone who believes. Every Christian teacher should be able to say honestly: "I believed, and this is why I spoke." Faith and enthusiasm are both necessary. Without enthusiasm you put your listeners to sleep. It is this conviction and this enthusiasm that give life and results to our Christian education. Would you like to become pedantic? Or perhaps to bore your pupils to tears? I am speaking to you today in these terms in the hope that you have no intention of ever sinking to such a level.

## **Human Knowledge**

The words of a Christian teacher must also be inspired by knowledge. And here we must distinguish between divine knowledge and human knowledge. And nowadays more than ever, divine knowledge has to be cloaked in human knowledge if it is to get a hearing.

So the Christian teacher needs to possess such human knowledge, and that entails preparation. Without this kind of knowledge, the most brilliant intellect and the greatest natural gifts will get you nowhere. You can dress a dummy up in the most exquisite garments; it remains a dummy.

Human knowledge is a debt we owe our students. Yes, we are their debtors, and when we examine our consciences, we would do well to ask ourselves whether we have paid our debts, and to their full extent. And it is not a mere question of one particular lecture we might have botched. We must examine every aspect of our duty. I implore you not to become like those teachers who are forever looking at their watches, longing for the end of a period during which they couldn't teach enough because they didn't know enough.

Such knowledge can be acquired only at the cost of much hard work. But are we not all obliged to earn our bread at the sweat of our brow? De la Mennais says these words apply to writers more than to anyone else! Do they not apply still more to Christian teachers?

Let me say this, bluntly and in total sincerity (for it would be a waste of time for you to gather here at seven o'clock in the morning to be fed on nothing but compliments): if some stupid Minister of Education had the weird notion of entrusting the education of girls to a group of lay University professors, it was simply because he found the instruction provided by Christian

teachers sadly deficient in more than one respect. Yes, let's face it: we are too often found to be dull and lazy teachers. Some because they are lazy, others because they are in a bad mood are neglecting the serious intellectual work which it is their duty, as Christian teachers, to perform.

This is a serious matter! Genuine education, that is to say Christian education, can be totally and dangerously compromised by our own negligence. I am talking here about the very future of the intellectual pursuit.

So, I repeat, if Mr. Duruy has had the weird notion, the mad notion-and may I add, the criminal notion, for that's what it is—of thus perverting the education of our young women, is it not because he thinks education has already been perverted in its very source? And this is at least partly due to so-called Catholic teachers who couldn't care less!

Let us work, then, and work hard, to acquire that fund of human knowledge, which we are duty-bound to impart to our students. And what is more, it is through this human knowledge that we are still more duty-bound to impart the knowledge of things which are divine.

### **Divine Knowledge**

But, you may say, the task of imparting divine knowledge is, surely, that of the priest. True, the priest is particularly dedicated to the spreading of God's message, but can he not call for the assistance of lay-teachers? And what is more beautiful than to collaborate in such a venture? No doubt, priests have a particular and special role in expounding the holy Scriptures. But it would be grossly erroneous to maintain that Catholic teachers who are not priests have no business studying the Bible! On the contrary, the pulpit in our Church is complemented by the teachers desk (including that of the lay-teacher) from which divine as well as human knowledge is imparted. Human knowledge provides the shape, and divine knowledge the content.

You must not regard this alliance between priest and lay-teacher as what Saint Paul calls "adulterating the word of God" (II Cor. 2:17). It is, on the contrary, a happy combination, and in fact the principal goal of our teaching. And it is no novelty, this call of the Church for priesthood and laity to collaborate. The famous school of Alexandria in the third century was at the beginning staffed mainly by learned laity, though some of them were later ordained to the priesthood. Ammonius Saccas (although Monsieur Germer-Durand claimed the contrary) was a

Christian lay-teacher. Origen, so renowned throughout the churches of Asia and Africa, also began his career as a layman. It may be the duty of the priest, and still more that of the bishop, to lead in the work of evangelization. It is nonetheless the duty of all, lay people included, to evangelize with all possible zeal.

So let us ask ourselves whether we have always done our duty in this respect, whether we have been zealous enough in distributing the bread of truth to those who are hungry. When our blessed Lord tells us about “the sower going forth to sow his seed” (Mt 13:4), he describes the poor quality of the soil. He has nothing to say about the poor quality of the seed, nor about the poor quality of the wheat. We should ask ourselves whether the seed may not have been partly spoiled by our clumsy handling of it, whether we are not partly to blame for the paucity of the harvest.

I will return to this important question of human and divine knowledge on some future occasion.

What about the question of love? I haven't time to talk about it now. We will discuss it next Tuesday.

### **“Teaching with Love” (October 1867)**

At our last gathering I spoke about the faith and the knowledge a Christian teacher must possess. I had no time for a third consideration, that of love.

Love is very important for us: the love of learning; the love of those whom we teach; and last but not least, the love of God, in whose name we teach. These are the three forms our love must take.

### **The Love of Learning**

Let me distinguish between “fundamental” knowledge and “instrumental” knowledge. There is

really only one kind of fundamental knowledge, and that is religious knowledge, the knowledge of God. Saint Thomas Aquinas declares that all other branches of knowledge must be subject to theology. He likens theology to the parable of the strong woman in the Gospel, who “calls her handmaids and sends them to the citadel.”

Is it not a privilege for the Christian teacher to become the instrument of one of the branches of knowledge that serve divine wisdom and truth? And does he not deprive his words of all their force and energy if he utters them without the love of what he is teaching?

And this love of knowledge entails, as I have told you time and time again, much serious preparation. For if we love the knowledge it is our task to impart, we will work hard to present it in its most attractive light.

When Queen Esther decided to present herself before King Ahasuerus (Es 5:1), she began by dressing herself in her most sumptuous apparel. The Christian teacher must do likewise. He must furnish himself with knowledge, in such a way as to make it delightful to his pupils.

So you must prepare your lectures. But supposing you've got it all at your fingertips, so you don't need any preparation. Well, let me repeat what I've said before. You are running the risk of boring them to tears. And this is no way of interesting them in knowledge!

## **The Love of Students**

To this love of what we teach, we must add the love of those whom we teach. The human soul was created “to the image and likeness of God” (Gen 1:27). So how can we possibly fail to love fellow human-beings? It's beyond my comprehension!

So every teacher (whatever he is teaching) can, within the two hours of his lecture, pronounce at least one word of faith, one word that can do some good. About twenty years ago a mathematics teacher asked me: “What connection can there possibly be between the square of the hypotenuse of a right-angled triangle and theology?”



“Figure it out for yourself, ” I replied. “What do the Fathers of the Church say? They tell us that divine wisdom is based on numbers, and that, therefore, it is not impossible to raise the mind to God through mathematics, which is the study of numbers.”

So whatever branch of knowledge you teach, you can always, by means of your teaching, inculcate a greater knowledge of God. A certain Canon once remarked to the Bishop of Digne: “The more I study, the more astonished I become that God has chosen to share with us the joys and delights of learning, so much so that they give us a foretaste of the beatific vision.” And, believe it or not, this Canon was one of the leading lights of his day, as well as one of the most humble o French intellectuals.

So the teacher of mathematics and the philosophy professor can and ought to arrive at a similar conclusion in their teaching.

Likewise the Greek professor. Greek is useful in allowing us to read the decrees of many a Council and to savor the exquisite beauty of many a Father of the Church. The Latin teacher still more so. As for the professor of Hebrew, thanks to him we can study the Bible in the original.

I am very much aware that I am considering all this from a practical point of view. The professor of modern languages might wonder how he can help lead the student to divine truth. The answer is simple. The study of English and German authors can open our minds to fresh considerations, as we confront the rationalists of our day. I myself deeply regret never having learned German when I was young. I would have been able to study first-hand not the exegesis of the rationalists, but that of the Catholics. If I were not already fifty-seven years old, I would beg Monsieur Trotmann to teach me German.

## **The Love of God**

And above all, the Christian teacher must love the God of all truth, the truth for which our students long.

Do you know why so many Christian teachers, so many Catholic teachers, succeed in conveying so little truth to the younger generation? Why their instruction is so often no more than so much “cats soup”, if you will pardon the expression? It’s because they themselves are not “interior” men, men of prayer. (I will probably deal with this subject next Tuesday.) We do not give ourselves sufficiently to meditation on the Word of God; this is why we succeed so badly in making it enter into the hearts of our pupils, by way of their ears. As Saint Paul puts it: “Faith comes through hearing” (Rom 10:17), and he adds, “and hearing comes through the word of Christ.” So we can create faith in the souls of our students, by teaching them, and this creation sets them free from both ignorance and sin. We enlighten them and set them ablaze with the love of God.

And if you remember what I told you about Christian education, that it is an imprinting of the Blessed Trinity on souls, then you will understand that we can produce on ourselves too this impression of the Blessed Trinity. “Because he spoke, and it was made.” Teaching is, indeed, a creation. It gives human beings a new birth by immersing them into the riches of everlasting truth. The Christian teacher imitates God the Father: “He spoke, and it was made.” Teaching is also redemption, since thereby we free souls from the double yoke of ignorance and sin, In this we are imitating God the Son: “He commanded, and it was accomplished.” Your instruction illuminates the souls of men, warms them, and sets them on fire. And in this you are imitating God the Holy Spirit. You are thus the imitators and instruments of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. What you can imitate in yourselves and reproduce in others is nothing less than the Blessed Trinity, more wonderful, more beautiful and more glorious than anything in the world!

Ask yourselves how, up to now, you have imprinted God on yourselves and on those you teach? Can you “look forward with blessed hope” to the day when these three persons in one God will reward you for having extended their Kingdom?

ORIGINAL EDITION: Es, 1289-1291, 1332-1336, 1336-1340, 1352-1355, 1356-1359

TRANSLATION; Stephen, Raynor, A.A.; revised by editor.

## **Epilogue**

### **In the Tradition of St. Augustine**

LETTER FROM E. D'ALZON TO MARIE-EUGÉNIE DE JÉSUS (JANUARY 2, 1879)

*One of d'Alzon's greatest gifts to Christian educators was to refer them to the writings and the example of Saint Augustine. Few thinkers have more insightfully addressed the fundamental issues related to Christian education and to the importance of the intellect for faith. In this letter written to his friend Mother Marie-Eugénie at the very end of his life, d'Alzon conjures up the authority of Augustine to underline the crucial importance of an education that promotes sound teaching and holiness of life. It may have been d'Alzon's way of saying "What I could not say about education you will find clearly and convincingly expressed in Augustine; turn to him."*

Have no doubts, dearest daughter, that yesterday I prayed so that the new year (1879) would be full of grace for you.

I realize more and more each day how concerned Saint Augustine was for education. He never ordained a priest who had not made a vow of charity and poverty. The common life was his main emphasis. He sent disciples all over Europe to found institutions modeled after his own. Popes specifically asked him to send men he had formed, and the great bishops of Gaul, who came after him, had been trained in his spirit and imparted it in turn to their episcopal schools just as the abbots gave it to their monastic schools.

Alexandria may have prepared Hippo, but Hippo brought the work to perfection. I say all of this to remind you that Augustinian men and women religious should carry on this tradition, providing an education that is thoroughly Christian. Saint Augustine built his school despite the barbarian invasions, which destroyed it. After his death, the school left Hippo, but the Bishops expelled by the Vandals brought it to Sardegna, and the Popes transplanted it in Rome, in particular at St. John Lateran and St. Peter in Chains.

We are in an analogous situation. What St. Augustine did despite the Barbarians, we must also do despite the revolutionaries. Your effort might seem to falter, but we should persevere in this work, which will eventually be blessed at the opportune moment.

The seminary of Hippo together with the convent that housed it prepared the way for the great schools of the Gauls in the fifth century when the Franks and Gauls were united. In our own day, once the revolutionary tide has ebbed, schools in the tradition of St. Augustine must put doctrine and holiness back in the place of free thinking and morality-without-principle, both of which are less powerful than Genseric the Barbarian, even though these pretend to have destroyed forever the truth and holiness of the Catholic faith.

Finally, the sun has returned; this should allow me to visit a few people, but I did want to explain my very special and long-standing hopes for Assumption in the line of Saint Augustine.

Adieu, daughter. Yours in the Lord.

E. d'Alzon

ORIGINAL EDITION: *Letters*, Rome, Désiré Deraedt edition, Vol XII, p. 7

TRANSLATION: Editor.

## **Education and Civic Responsibility**

ASSUMPTION COLLEGE (JANUARY 18, 2008)

During our school years, in a variety of ways, we've learned something about what it means to be citizens and to exercise a certain measure of civic responsibility. None of us, I would guess, would agree with one of my first art history professors, at Boston University, who after waxing eloquently over the esthetic merits of the painting under consideration declared with some relief: "I love art history because it has absolutely nothing to do with life!" I was astonished at the statement, especially considering the painting we were studying, the 19th-century canvas by Jacques-Louis David entitled *The Death of Marat*.

Education and educational institutions have everything to do with life. At least that was the conviction of the teachers and staff at the Booker T. Washington Institute in Kakata, Liberia, during the turmoil in that country in 2003. This is how the *New York Times* reporter described the situation:

“We have stood guard—administrators, principals and staff— 24 hours a day,” said Alfred S. Walker, 58, the institute’s elegant but bone-tired vice principal for instruction. “And we are still here. We realized the importance of our responsibility to the culture of Liberia. We put our necks on the chopping block, if I may say so, to save this place.” [\[2\]](#)

### The question

Educational institutions may have a great deal to do with life, but *what* precisely do they have to do with life? What is their responsibility vis-à-vis the “real” (as my students used to refer to the world beyond the walls of the College)? The answer is not simple. Plato built his Academy outside the walls of Athens (where the cemeteries were also located), because students should not be encouraged to play a direct role in the life of the city. Even in designing his “academical village” in Charlottesville, Virginia, Thomas Jefferson kept this in mind and situated the campus in an idyllic country setting. Assumption campus is not much different.

Our question deserves more time than we can give it today, and all I can hope to do is communicate a few thoughts, specifically regarding Father Emmanuel d’Alzon and his approach to education, and then I’ll leave the rest to you (in the work you do in small groups, and in what you do in the days and weeks ahead). Even the modest task that I’ve assigned to myself is not particularly easy, for the simple reason that d’Alzon didn’t write a book on education and civic responsibility or address it directly in his other writings. Consequently, on the basis of some information regarding his life and his educational practice, I’ll try to suggest how he thought education should prepare students for a responsible life as citizens.

### D’Alzon’s vocation

First, you should know that Father d’Alzon’s overarching concern or vocation in life was not to preach the Gospel as a priest or religious—although that clearly absorbed a good part of his life and much of his energy. Also, his intention was not to spend his life teaching students in an academic institution—although he spent a great deal of time doing just that (from about 1842 until his death in 1880). As we will see, his overarching concern was to “transform society,” to use his own language, [\[3\]](#) an expression that conveys the depth of the renewal of a society that he considered to be seriously ill and of the passion with which he pursued this “great cause” as he called it. Consequently, he had a very strong sense of civic responsibility, a conviction that

he had a role to play in caring for and shaping the common good.

## 1. D'Alzon's Early Inspiration

This social consciousness of his may be less surprising if you situate *d'Alzon in place and time*. He was born in France in 1810, when the memory of the French Revolution and its effects were still very fresh; at a time when the Industrial Revolution, new ideologies, technology and science were challenging old habits of thought and ways of acting; and when the Church was regrouping after considerable internal turmoil (and often regrouping according to a nationalist model, the so-called "Gallicans" vs. the "ultramontanists", who looked rather beyond the Alps to Rome and the Pope) and struggling to confront new social and philosophical models.

To sum it up in one sentence: D'Alzon lived through two major revolutions (1830 and 1848), six different political regimes, and within the Church some four different bishops (his immediate bosses) with very different political and theological convictions.

We understand this social consciousness more easily if we are aware of *d'Alzon's family* background. Son of an aristocratic, wealthy and politically-connected family (his father served as a deputy in the French Legislature), he spent his early years at the lavish family estate (the chateau of Lavagnac), where his mother had established a refuge for the area poor. Even as a young adolescent, d'Alzon himself gave classes in reading and writing and religious doctrine to the servants at the estate. He no doubt listened in on the many conversations that took place with visiting dignitaries: government figures, Cardinals, etc.

His *early education* in Paris (1823-28) likewise reflects this interest in public affairs. After education in the humanities at the prestigious College Saint Stanislas, d'Alzon would have preferred preparing for a military career, but that was not to the liking of his parents, who instead oriented him to legal studies (which was not much to his liking). His choice, however, would have allowed d'Alzon to remain very much involved in the affairs of the country. While in Paris, d'Alzon was an active member in a number of student societies (e.g. the *Société littéraire*, the

*Association pour la défense de la religion catholique*)

, which introduced him to current debates on political, social and Church reform and some of the more influential and activist Catholic thinkers, among them Félicité de Lamennais, later condemned by Papal decree. These student years were also the opportunity for him to begin a

life-long study of the life and writings of Saint Augustine (especially the *City of God*, which he later told his first Assumptionist confreres was for Christians like a “second Revelation”).

Even *his decision to be a priest* was taken with a certain social objective in mind. He made his decision in 1830, and though he chose an ecclesiastical career, it was because he thought that in post-revolutionary France this was the best way to have an impact on society. In a letter to his friend Luglien d'Esgrigny (24 January 1830), he explained that his first choice was for a military career, but his parents objected; then he oriented himself toward law and elective office, to try to bring some order to society. But “neither the law nor government has sufficient authority to restore order to a ‘sick society’” (“une société ainsi malade”) “From that time on, my enthusiasm for elective office disappeared entirely, and I considered government in France to be nothing but a decrepit machine, not worth repairing.”

Five years later, after his ordination, this early orientation of his remains clear. “As I study religion, I discover, in the depths of Catholic teaching, such a great wealth, a strain of thought so rich, a life so powerful that, on the one hand, I do not see how a priest who wants to renew society can find a better way than the truth itself...” “The most intimate thought of my soul is that the world needs to be penetrated through and through by a Christian idea.... Therefore we need to teach it and to do so in words that it can understand” (Letter to Alphonse de Vignamont, 18 March 1835).

D'Alzon's Gospel inspiration was clear, and his social consciousness no less strong. And from his early adult life, he was very much concerned about the question we are asking ourselves today: How can we best renew the world in which we live, by politics or by another means, perhaps by education?

## **2. His Early Work**

His early work manifests this social preoccupation very clearly.

Early on, Father d'Alzon assumed a number of *leadership* positions. As second-in-charge in his diocese of Nîmes (“Vicar General”), he was very directly involved in Church reform and



remained in this position for almost his entire life (from 1835 almost until his death). He exercised this leadership in a variety of activities: reform of seminary training, preaching, retreat work, even ecumenical activity. He displayed likewise a great sensitivity to the poor of the region and some of the Church's neglect in this regard.

We want nothing to do with a Bishop, who in his horse-drawn carriage cries out to the poor peasants standing along the street frozen to the bone: 'Blessed are the poor in spirit.' If these good people know their Gospel, they'll no doubt know that his Excellency has abandoned the path to heaven. (Letter to an unidentified friend, December 1833)

He "institutionalized" this concern for the poor in a number of ways: by founding the "Ladies of Mercy" (*Dames de la Miséricorde*), a group of upper-class women volunteers who worked with the poor, finding them jobs and visiting their families; he opened a residence for battered and abused women (1836), an adult education center for workers and uneducated servants (1840); a boys' orphanage (1840); a popular lending library (1842)...

And early on he recognized the importance of education. To work to improve the education of the clergy, he created study groups and "ecumenical" dialogues, and especially invested a great deal of energy (and his mother's money) in the purchase and running of the *Collège de l'Assomption*, a secondary school in Nîmes that was on the verge of being closed. From 1843 until his death, he lived and worked in this academic institution. During his lifetime, he likewise made plans on three different occasions to found a Catholic university, but failed each time.

During this period of his life, he was also involved politically. He was a member of the National Council on Public Education (from 1850) and worked hard to defend freedom for private education in a country where education at every level was tightly controlled by the State. He campaigned vigorously at various times to influence local elections in his region to assure some measure of peace among Catholic and Protestant citizens. It is this involvement that led him to a significant turning point in 1848.

### 3. The Turning Point of 1848

Father d'Alzon's reflection on the events in France in 1848 led him to a firmer and clearer conviction regarding the "utility" of education in the new, democratic landscape.

The Revolution of 1848 (so-called "February Revolution") had overthrown the monarchy of Louis Philippe and established the Second Republic in France. The reasons were numerous, not the least of which was the destitution of the working class. D'Alzon himself, in Paris at the time of the Revolution, was particularly moved by the plight of the poor. On his return to Nîmes in March, he witnessed once again violent worker demonstrations. His letters of the period reveal his sensitivity to their situation (see those to Mother Marie Eugénie de Jésus, the foundress of the Sisters of the Assumption, on 19 March and 3 September).

During his stay in Paris, he had lent his support to the publication of *Ère nouvelle*, a left-leaning democratic journal, but after his return to Nîmes he withdrew his support in favor of a review published by his friend and colleague at Collège de l'Assumption, Eugène Germer-Durand, called *Démocratique catholique* (later re-baptized *Liberté pour tous*).

The purpose of the new review was to promote "freedom like that in the United States." D'Alzon wrote eleven articles for the review. He argued for peace and unity in the country, and pleaded with his readers to assure liberty for all. In particular, he urged Catholics to unite with Protestants in resolving France's social problems and to put their sectarian strife aside for the well-being of all. "The people should defend themselves against scorn for their own rights by respecting the rights of others." (April 11, 1848) He pleaded with his fellow-citizens of Nîmes to understand that "toleration for an opinion or a belief that is different or even hostile to one's own is the necessary exercise of freedom, the sacrifice which is its price." (April 27, 1848)

The result of his efforts was more than disappointing to him. When Catholic electors in the city rejected all but Catholic candidates in the elections at the end of April in 1848, the Protestants responded with violence. D'Alzon bemoaned the violence, but vigorously condemned the sectarianism of the Catholic majority. He addressed an article to the Protestant citizens of Nîmes on May 9, 1848:

Liberty for all. The very title of our review suggests the idea of a neutral terrain, on which we could meet one day, to unite finally. Were we wrong?...To attain the goal, we had to carve out an independent position at the risk of offending certain respectable parties... We've been misunderstood by both sides, but we're not complaining... Here is the basis of the peace we are proposing: that modern societies, by developing principles of great breadth, should nurture new relations among citizens within the country..., a greater respect for the opinions of others, the rights of all more solemnly recognized...

So, full liberty for all. We will remain Catholic, you will remain Protestant; for, we respect you enough to believe that you are what you claim to be...

Freedom of conscience is less an immutable dogma than it is the consequence, as well as the principle, of a certain social transformation. It is the consequence in the sense that, after so much turmoil, after the violent confrontation of a million different opinions, no one has the right to say: I am imposing my belief. Freedom of conscience is also a principle, because it alone can enlighten peaceful discussions, after which sincere minds, impelled by the desire to unite, will be able to come together in the same charity, while waiting to meet in the same faith. We want liberty for you so that we will have it more surely for ourselves... What we are proposing is peace, peace founded on freedom (*liberté*) of the most honest kind, the most absolute sort of equality (*égalité*). May we believe that one day these will give birth in our hearts to genuine fraternity (*fraternité*).

### **The Consequences of This “Revolution” of 1848**

The “February Revolution” sparked a kind of “intellectual revolution” for d’Alzon. I can identify two ways in which d’Alzon’s thinking seemed to change subsequent to the disillusionment that he suffered in 1848.

**A first lesson:** D’Alzon seemed to conclude that the problems confronting contemporary society could not be resolved simply by changed social structures and by partisan politics. These problems arose from more fundamental issues that needed to be examined intellectually and philosophically. D’Alzon says as much in a letter to Mère Marie-Eugénie de Jésus of 9 July 1848. This approach, he concluded, would be a more effective way of addressing these fundamental issues and bringing about greater unity and peace in French society. From that time on, d’Alzon became less and less involved in partisan politics and insisted more and more on education and the cause of freedom for educational institutions in France. He invested himself substantially in an effort to found a Catholic University and launched the publication of a review that he entitled “The Journal of Christian Education” In d’Alzon’s assessment, the State University, which exercised a monopoly on higher education, did not allow the freedom necessary to take certain questions seriously, specifically questions having to do with faith. In a Catholic University as he conceived it, d’Alzon was convinced that such freedom would be encouraged and that the long and rich Christian heritage of thought and authors could shed considerable light on the academic venture.

**A second lesson:** Given his family background, d'Alzon was not always sympathetic to the cause of democracy, but this clearly changed over the course of his lifetime. He understood some of the limits of democracy, but also recognized its merits. The appreciative comment regarding "freedom in the United States" suggests that much. But the emergence of democracy in France made it imperative to "educate" not only the governing classes, but also the broader population. Consequently, d'Alzon now turned his attention to the establishment of schools for the lower classes, to journalism and to publishing (*Le Pèlerin illustré*, the *Bulletin des oeuvres ouvrières*, etc.), as well as to popular social works.

**But WHAT KIND OF EDUCATION did d'Alzon think would bring about real social awareness on the part of his students?**

I will try to answer this question with references to d'Alzon's actual practice at Assumption College in Nîmes. I've organized my thoughts under two headings: his practices regarding faculty and his practices regarding teaching and student life.

Before doing so, however, it is useful to be aware of d'Alzon overall "style" as an educator, if I may call it that. One of his former students reports: "In his educational practice, he was original to say the least. He himself admitted it. ...And he wanted to have disciples with the same spirit. In that sense, you could say he founded a Congregation of originals."

## **Faculty**

With regard to faculty, he considered it important to

**hire** faculty from the best schools, and all of his first colleagues at the College de l'Assomption were highly competent graduates of the State system;

**constitute a faculty** made up of lay, clerical and religious members. It should be said that this was an unusual practice for the period.

**gather them regularly** (once or twice a week) to talk about educational policy and plan the academic program. The group elected its own president and made decision by vote. They recognized the importance of being educated themselves in “the spirit of the Assumption’ and requested that father d’Alzon provide regular teaching sessions for them on academic and spiritual matters.

What **qualities** did father d’Alzon look for in an Assumption educator? He wanted them

**to be “original”**, presumably in their own study and in their pedagogical method. He chided them in one conference he gave: “A little bit of originality would be advisable, don’t you think?”

**to teach with conviction and love**, in other words to have strong personal convictions while taking seriously the search for understanding and truth and to have a genuine love for their students;

**to give themselves totally** for the well-being of the students. “A teacher who doesn’t know how to suffer for the student, work hard at teaching, maybe brilliant, distinguished, highly regarded, but will be a mediocre teacher..., a mercenary. God save us from that type of teacher.”

**to be flexible** and adjust their teaching to the different age-levels and needs of the students;

**to avoid getting discouraged**, to be patient, never to complain about the students. “Some students develop slowly, and these sometimes provides the most surprising and satisfactory results... If you want examples of unpromising types, look at Jesus’ twelve disciples.”

**to combine firmness with benevolence.** “Cultivate a mixture of firmness and goodness; know a great deal, but remain modest; and above all, students should recognize your charity and love.”

**to look beyond the formal academic program,** beyond the examinations. A good teacher helps students to think, educates their intelligence.

**“Its not enough to teach. You also have to know how to educate.”**

This distinction is key in terms of understanding why d'Alzon thought that students should learn to be good citizens during their years in school.

**to be committed to continuing their own education.** “You need to keep up a certain level of intellectual culture; I am unforgiving on this question.”

## Teaching and Student Life

D'Alzon thought that you could instill a certain consciousness in students by getting them to *read good authors,*

who can help them to reflect on these questions. His own experience is enlightening in this regard, especially in terms of his reading of authors like Saint Augustine.

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The academic program should also help students *think critically* and to *express themselves clearly.*

He invented two methods to help in this regard: evening debates and student lectures. Regarding evening debates among students, one of the Assumptionist teachers at the school had this to say in a Commencement address:

Let's hope the [official State accreditors] won't consider it a crime that from time to time we move beyond the official program of instruction so that our students can be kept up to date on

major social questions, be acquainted with the important trends of the day so that they can judge for themselves what is good and what is less good, and in this way prepare themselves for their role in the future as Christians and as French citizens.” (Fr. Charles Laurent, 1875, Commencement address)

And with regard to lectures students themselves gave on literature, history, philosophy, theology, we read the following:

The teachers attended [the lectures] to help the students develop their critical ability, keep discussions on track, and deepen their appreciation of especially difficult questions... The conviction that learning and faith could work together inspired in the participants at these conferences a good deal of enthusiasm that is rare to find in other institutions.

Students were likewise expected to be involved in *social projects* outside of the school: in orphanages, in schools, in Church-related activities, etc.

And finally, this social consciousness was formed through the *rich spiritual and liturgical life* that was part of the educational program. This was not based on pious practices, but on the Bible, the teaching of the Fathers of the Church, and the liturgy of the Roman Catholic Church (as opposed to the local and regional liturgical practices that had developed). But in all of this, a good deal of freedom was encouraged. The story is told of one professor who visited the chapel regularly, but he did so with some hesitation because he did not want to encourage a kind of external conformity in the students in religious matters. Students were also encouraged to worship in local parishes and not just at school, because it is in their local Church that they should be involved after graduation.

## **Conclusion**

Given these principles and practices, what can we say fueled d'Alzon's conviction regarding the need to educate students so that they would become responsible citizens? He was inspired in a number of ways, and each of these could be developed at length. I will simply provide a brief list

of what I sense was important for him.

- The Gospel was of course the primary inspiration. Schools are places neither for politics or proselytizing, but d'Alzon was convinced that institutions that exposed students to the light of Gospel teaching would help open them to the gift of faith as well.
- He was also inspired by the conviction that to be Christian is nothing other than to be fully human. I am reminded of something the then Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger wrote (in Joseph Ratzinger, *The Yes of Jesus Christ*, 1989, p. 3): "... being a Christian does not mean some special skill alongside other skills but simply the correct living out of being human..."
- He also believed that to be fully human is to live in a fully human society, i.e. a society that is organized and lives according to certain laws inherent in human nature. In other words, he considered the human person to be a fundamentally political being, in the broadest sense of that term.
- He was likewise convinced of the dignity of every human person and hence the necessity for dialogue with men and women in search of the truth regarding human life. He was a believer and an educator at the same time. With respect for the truth and for his students and colleagues, he took the common search seriously, considering his faith as light for the journey.
- He truly believed that ideas had consequences ("It is crucial that you be convinced of the truth that the world, even in a decadent state, is governed by ideas" Letter to the Assumptionists in Nîmes, 11 April 1870), and that ideas had very practical, concrete implications.
- He had a certain understanding of study, which he did not consider an end in itself, but in view of wisdom, in view of good living as a human being and in a human society



- Finally, he had the greatest respect for the freedom of the student. His school was not rule-driven, but sought to educate students not to license but to genuine freedom. This even led to the creation of student government structures.

Emmanuel d'Alzon lived in a time very different from our own, but his experience, his thoughts, his practice can inspire us still today. That will require some serious thinking and conversation on our part. Given what I have said, **what can you learn from this** that will be useful to you here at Assumption College?

Richard E. Lamoureux, a.a.,

Superior General

Augustinians of the Assumption

## **Father d'Alzon and Education**

TALK GIVEN TO THE MEMBERS OF THE

ASSUMPTIONIST COMMUNITY OF FLORENCE

ROME (SEPTEMBER 15, 2008)

1. This topic is not new at Assumption. Several Assumptionists [\[4\]](#) have written articles and even a few books on this subject. The following come to mind: Father d'Alzon's own texts

[\[5\]](#)

, the

*Cahiers Bisson*

[\[6\]](#)

,

articles in

*L'Assomption et ses Œuvres*,

and, more recently, a chapter in the

*D'Alzonian Anthology*,

"Father d'Alzon, Schoolmaster." Also, Jean-Michel Brochec has just written

*Enseigner et éduquer selon l'esprit de l'Assomption (Teaching and Education in the spirit of Assumption)*.

2. Admittedly, the Assumptionists have been *practitioners* of education in the broad sense of the term (formation, schools, colleges, universities, alumnates, and orphanages) more than *thinkers*

or

*theoreticians*,

undoubtedly because they felt that, by and large, all they had to do was to follow the ideas, methods and examples left by their Founder. With the passing of time, this led to a certain waning of interest in

*classroom teaching and education on the part of the*

Assumptionists,

at least in certain provinces, particularly in France where, as a result of 20th-century government legislation, there was what must be crudely called a withdrawal, a forsaking, or an abandonment at the end of the 1960s. However, at the present time, there is a certain renewed interest in this

*apostolic service on the part of the Assumptionists*,

particularly in Africa, Madagascar, Chile and Colombia, it being still too early to speak about what awaits the congregation in Manila and Vietnam.

Within our French context, the situation is different when it comes to the Province of our Oblate Sisters who today sponsor College Ste Anne in Bouscat (Gironde), the Lycée and the d'Alzon Institute in Nîmes (Gard), the St. Anne Institution of Bourg-Chevreau in Segre (Maine-et-Loire), the St. Elizabeth Institution in Paris' 15th district on rue de Lourmel, and the Sacred Heart

Institution in La Ville-du-Bois (Essonne).

3. But I would like to begin my talk with an important remark about the term *education* as understood by Fr. d'Alzon. The choice of this word in French is not indifferent. The word education is not restricted to the formative aspect of *teaching*,

especially to its school dimension and to school-age children. I just mentioned above the *apostolic service of education*.

It was this global, non-compartmentalized perspective that inspired the projects, objectives, and actions of the Founder:

- He was a Catholic Action *militant* who fought for freedom of education. In other words, he concretely fought *against* the State and its monopolistic pretensions in favor of the right of families to give their children an education in conformity with their values: the right to transmit to them a culture imbued with religious faith as well as programs that emphasized the Christian heritage of Western culture, that prepared young people to face the future with a solid personal faith, and that opened them up to the possibilities of a personal church involvement: a religious and/or priestly vocation, a lay commitment in society, the defense of church institutions (the Pontifical Zouaves, the press, a public affirmation of the faith through pilgrimages, Catholic committees, and worker unions). The Assumptionist colleges of yesteryear were ideal breeding grounds or fishponds for training committed laymen.

- He was a *creator*, not just a *reformer*, when he took over Assumption College in Nîmes in 1844, when he founded the college in Paris and the one in Clichy in 1851, when in 1863 he supported Father Galaberts Ecole Saint-André in Plovdiv-Philippopolis (the birthplace of the future Collège St. Augustin), when he devised the new formula of the alummates in 1871, and when, on two occasions, he founded a specialized review, the *Revue de l'Enseignement Chrétien*.

He had to bear the brunt of the work when he participated in the *Conseil Supérieur de l'Instruction publique*

(1851-1852); when in 1848

he obtained

*complete freedom*

for his college, reaping in the process the first fruits of the Falloux Law of 1850 that granted legal status to independent secondary schools in France; and when in 1875 he fought for the passage of the Laboulaye Law which granted freedom to institutions of higher education and paved the way for the creation of Catholic Institutes, the French counterparts of Catholic universities. These facts illustrate outstanding aspects not only of his actions but also

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his basic inspiration.

4. And now let us turn to *Father d'Alzon's ideas on education*. His ideas come together perfectly in his Christian view of anthropology. Human beings, regardless of age, sex, size, color or social milieu, are creatures with a divine origin whose specificity is

*spiritual*

and whose destiny is

*supernatural*.

Everything that allows them to come closer to and to enhance this dimension on earth is meant to give them or to restore their dignity as

*children of God*,

a dignity tarnished by original sin. And so, for Father d'Alzon, to educate is tantamount

*to evangelizing, to transmitting the faith, to educating in the faith, to helping students become adults in the faith*.

As the director of a school, or more precisely as the director of a college (a secondary school), Father d'Alzon gave education its

*stamp of excellence*,

i.e. to say, its civic, moral, philosophical and religious references taken from the Christian faith.

For him, to form the person is to form the citizen, to form

*a responsible and free adult, as understood by Saint Paul, a strong and social Christian who stands in solidarity with others*,

just the opposite of the ambient social model of individuals who were seen as bourgeois, self-interested, careerists, loners (in the style of the French hymn

*Je nai quune ame quil faut sauver/I have but one soul that must be saved!*,

or even on the model of a believer who is Christian in the sacristy but an independent liberal when it comes to doctrine and solidarity in one's public and professional life).

D'Alzon insisted on several occasions on revitalizing the *catechetical teaching* taking place in his college by composing himself guidelines or courses of religious instruction, by directing *spiritual retreats*

for the teachers and students (intense sessions in Valbonne, Rochefort-du-Gard), by giving talks to his students on Saturdays which he entitled

*les Instructions du Samedi*,

and by inviting them to participate in

*sacramental liturgies*

(weekly but not daily Mass, preparation for confession, for first communion, for confirmation, and for the solemnized Christian feasts: Corpus Christi, the Immaculate Conception,

processions, illuminations), and by enrolling them in charitable or militant associations: Propagation of the Faith, Œuvre de Saint-François de Sales (Work of St. Francis de Sales), Conférences Saint-Vincent de Paul (Conferences of St. Vincent de Paul), Comités catholiques (Catholic Committees), Congrès des Œuvres ouvrières (Congress of Labor Organizations), supporting vocations (Notre-Dame des Vocations), Association Notre-Dame de Salut/Association of Our Lady of Salvation (pilgrimages, press, public prayers), Œuvre des Zouaves Pontificaux (the Association of Pontifical Zouaves), Œuvre du denier de Saint-Pierre (Peters Pence), etc.

5. Next, let us turn to *Fr. d'Alzon's educational and pedagogical practices*. He who had been educated in excellent colleges in Paris knew how to draw inspiration from their best features:

- He underlined the value of various aspects of collective—rather than “hothouse”—education: the spirit of competition and of emulation, honor rolls and prizes, ongoing relations with parents, fewer sanctions/punishments (especially group punishments), and the principles of freedom and responsibility: self-discipline, community-based endeavors: feasts, Holy Innocents, sharing times of recreation, etc.

- He created a *faculty* of excellent teachers and gave them a *team spirit*: qualified teachers very close to each other through bonds of friendship and of spiritual association (Assumptions Third Order); he encouraged the development of internal bulletins and of a college review with a national perspective

(*Revue de l'Enseignement Chrétien*);

he obtained full authority to give the school “its own” characteristic Assumptionist spirit (disinterestedness, faith, daring, a supernatural spirit, a love of the Church); he created upper-level preparatory courses in view

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the University; he prepared the students to pass the State examinations, all the while discouraging them from developing a cramming mentality; he had them wear a uniform and proper dress (by equalizing their external dress, he wanted to discourage the classification of people according to their social class); he accepted non-French candidates (Spaniards, Englishmen, Syrians), thereby showing great openness and becoming an example for others.

- In the field of education, *Fr. d'Alzon's pedagogical methods* in his college were not those of the State colleges and lycées which, in fact, operated like military barracks (discipline and drums, with supervision and sanctions within their walls but laissez-faire on the outside).

Instead, he developed

a

*family atmosphere*

where what counted were the values of trust and of openness of heart and conscience, accompanied by a desire to develop a sense of responsibility and of personal growth toward mature adulthood.

- What is rather remarkable for the period is Fr. d'Alzon's system of controlled freedom, along with this desire to train people to become personally responsible and to live a Christian life according to Christian values.

- To be sure, Fr. d'Alzon did not transcend certain practices or certain mentalities of his time: secondary education and teaching in 19th century remained elitist and directed toward the upper and well-to-do classes of society of that time. Since education had to be paid for, it therefore automatically excluded the children of the working classes. However, at the end of the 1860s, the Assumptionists added a *more social dimension* to their apostolic spirit: the alummates, the press, pilgrimages, and the Association of Our Lady of Salvation.

In conclusion, it can be said that for Fr. d'Alzon, education, as an apostolic service, was raised to the level of a **vocation** and of **a spirituality**. To educate is to form the entire human being, body, mind and soul, or more precisely, to direct all the activity of a human being toward its final end, the life of the spirit according to the faith. Consequently, we can understand why his orientation was thwarted by the secularizing political evolution of the end of the 19th century that wanted to make teaching a national service that was free-of-charge, obligatory and secular (in the sense of a secularity that was combative, non-church-related, and non-religious, when it wasn't anti-religious), and that also wanted to shield adult citizens from all forms of religious/church influence and from all types of religious formation according to the godless ideology of progress promoted by the Enlightenment. From this point-of-view, Fr. d'Alzon shared the counter-revolutionary mentality of those who eventually denounced the influence of the three evolutions that were taking place as a result of the Reformation (16th century), the Enlightenment (18th century), and the French Revolution (end of 18th century and beginning of the 19th century). Today, this view of history is often inverted, for the new version tends to consider these same periods as privileged moments during which a secular humanism was introduced, one that is nevertheless imbued with the gospel ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity.

This same concern for a complete Christian formation of the spiritual life of adults led Fr.

d'Alzon to devise ambitious apostolic initiatives that had the same spirit, viz., a deep, well-informed and committed faith, willing to get involved with associations, movements, committees, the press, and pilgrimages; in other words, with everything that allows Christians to affirm themselves as Christians, or as “uncompromisingly Catholic” (*catholique tout d'une pièce*), not just in their personal life of faith, but also in the public arena, openly, in favor of the rights of God and of the Church, all of which was in direct opposition to the liberal positions of the period which seemed to relegate the life of faith only to pious religious practices.

What can we retain for today from the symbolic and exemplary figure of the Founder in terms of education? At least three things:

a) First and foremost, the fact that having an *apostolic contact between a religious congregation and the world of young people* is not a banal or secondary aspect but a priority issue. Fr. d'Alzon and the first Assumptionists spent their entire life in contact with young people, immersed in their invigorating, demanding yet exciting world. To be sure, Fr. d'Alzon did not make this his *only objective*. Over the years, and because of the temperaments, requests and apostolic aptitudes of his sons, he learned how to extend the boundaries and tear down the barriers of a sole academic environment. But he also wanted to give his congregations the opportunity to benefit from this priority by giving all of their activities a *doctrinal* dimension. The word d'Alzonian implies *broadmindedness*. It would be a sad day if the word Assumptionist ever came to mean narrow, exclusive or particular! A congregation that would cease to play the role of foster parent regarding the world of young people (teaching, catechesis, chaplaincies, social services, etc.) would not be far from signing its own death warrant.

b) *The formation objective* underlying Fr. d'Alzon's main texts as well as, after him, the recommendations and directives of the leaders of the Congregation (chapters, superiors), share in this original Assumptionist way-of-thinking: formation of young people, formation of vocations, formation of laypeople, formation in the faith, ongoing formation of the religious. The term must be understood and used wherever and whenever aspects of the life of the Assumptionists are involved. We cannot boast about a heritage without proving that we too can be creative throughout subsequent decades and centuries, and without running the risk of developing

sclerosis, becoming weak, or losing our identity.

c) In this field of *education understood in its broadest sense possible*, what is at stake is not only of a doctrinal but also of a social and ecclesial nature. A religious congregation cannot live closed-in upon itself, or content itself with simply increasing its numbers or developing its property and finances. By opening itself to other cultures, it must try to enter the hearts of these societies and to serve the Church's twofold dimension: its

*transcendent dimension*

(announcing the gospel, worshiping the God of Jesus Christ) and its

*incarnate dimension*

(the service of humankind). I do not pretend that Assumptions apostolic service is easier to live and develop than that of other religious congregations, but I do maintain that these two dimensions are essential to its being true to itself and to its existence and development.

© Fr. Jean-Paul Périer-Muzet, A.A.

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[1] The term d'Alzon used for seminaries he founded for secondary school students.

[2] Tim Weiner, "Kakata Journal; An Army of Educators Saves a Liberian College," *New York Times*, September 1, 2003.

[3] See, for example, in two articles published in *Liberté pour tous*: #21, 2 May 1848, p. 1 and #24, 9 May 1848, pp. 1-2.

[4] For example: Aubain COLETTE, *L'idéal pédagogique du P. d'Alzon*; François-Joseph THONNARD, *Le P. d'Alzon et l'enseignement*; Timothée FALGUEYRETTE, *Le P. d'Alzon éducateur chrétien*; Pierre-Emmanuel ROSPIDE, *L'éducation chez le P. d'Alzon*; Louis SECONDY, research on *L'enseignement libre dans l'Académie de Montpellier* and lecture at the d'Alzon Colloquium of 1980; Fr. Richard Lamoureux, *Teaching and Education in the Spirit of Assumption*, 2008, etc.

[5] *Instructions du samedi*, Paris, B.P., 1932, part 2 on "Christian Education," pp. 73-138. The titles of the chapters are a program in themselves: I. The ideal to be sought, II. Reforming the memory, III. Reforming the intelligence, IV Reforming the will, V. Reforming the passions, VI. Reforming the character, VII. Reforming a Christian through faith, hope and charity, VIII. Jesus Christ our model, IX. Jesus Christ and disinterestedness, X. Purity.

*Circulaires du P. d'Alzon*, Paris, B.P., 1912: No. 16: 7th Circular on "Education and teaching," pp. 128-154; No. 17: 8th Circular on "Education in our colleges and alummates," pp. 155-176.

[6] CA 4, *Aspects de pédagogie chrétienne I*, 1954, 160. CA 1, *Aspects de pédagogie chrétienne II*, 1963, p. 192.