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The Spiritual Legacy of Emmanuel d'Alzon

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Milton, Massachusetts

1988

This little book is an attempt to fill an urgent need of the English speaking Assumptionist family, the need for an outline of Fr. d'Alzon's thought. The present outline rests on a limited anthology of the major texts. Whenever possible they are quoted from the English versions now available. For most quotations and extracts, references are given within the text. Other useful information is given in notes at the end of each chapter. It is hoped that the reading of the selections presented here will encourage the more extensive reading required for an adequate acquaintance with our Founder's spiritual legacy.

Several brother Assumptionists, most of all Father Provincial, kindly read the manuscript and offered not only encouragement but helpful suggestions. Also, with much patience and kindness Father Richard Richards in Milton and Sister Bernadette Blanchard s.j.a. in Quebec wrote onto

the computer the intermediate and the final drafts respectively. For this invaluable assistance, I am deeply grateful.

Wilfrid J. Dufault

PREFACE

The author of this book and the man he writes about understand one very important thing about the spiritual life: it is not built on heartfelt sentiment or pious practice, but rather on one or just a few basic, simple truths, so rich and so deep that they nourish without fail during a whole lifetime and in some cases for centuries. In his book Father Wilfrid explores the spiritual teaching of Emmanuel d'Alzon and explains that it rests on two fundamental principles or insights. The first is the central importance of God's Kingdom for the individual and for all of creation. The second is the essential role of the love of Jesus Christ as a driving force in the spiritual life.

You might expect that a book on spirituality would deal with "practical" issues: how to live the life of a disciple. Not a book on Assumptionist spirituality! D'Alzon was convinced that the biggest problem was not a moral problem. "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." [\[1\]](#) For d'Alzon the world suffers most from an intellectual crisis, and the best remedy is a good dose of truth, of sound doctrinal teaching. Such truth most effectively inspires right living. You will find d'Alzon's fundamental insights clearly and substantially set forth in Father Wilfrid's study. But you will find more as well.

"Humanity needs to be taught, but first we need to give humanity a heart of flesh..." [\[2\]](#) Instruction is important, but we need to be led to embrace the truth. One effective way of doing this is to be exposed to attractive models whose lives have been fashioned according to the Gospel. "We baptized Christians belong to the race of saints," d'Alzon wrote.

[\[3\]](#) And it behooves us, he continued, to study their lives in order to acquire healthy, vigorous ways

of thinking, a strong moral sense, an openness to heroic sacrifice, true notions of greatness and of beauty, a love of spiritual realities, and a deep preoccupation with things pertaining to God. In other words, by seeing the beauty in the lives of these disciples, we ourselves will be led to fall in love with holiness.

One of the most impressive things about the book you have in hand is the passionate conviction of the author that Emmanuel d'Alzon is one of those people who today can show us what it means to be Christ for our world. Readers will be enlightened by the teaching that is laid out for their consideration but they will also learn from the beauty of that teaching and the passion with which it has been set forth by the author.

Richard E. Lamoureux, A.A.

Provincial Superior

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ABBREVIATIONS FOR FREQUENT REFERENCES

A.C.R. = Archives of the Augustinians of the Assumption, Rome.

C.L. = Circular Letters, written by Father d'Alzon to the Augustinians of the Assumption.
English translation. Worcester, MA., 1981.

D.A. = Dossier sur la vie et les vertus du Serviteur de Dieu Emmanuel d'Alzon. Rome 1986.

E.S. = Ecrits Spirituels, a selection of Emmanuel d'Alzon's writings. Rome, 1956.

F.D. = Foundational Documents, Father d'Alzon's chief pronouncements (other than the Directory)
addressed to the Augustinians of the Assumption. English translation. Milton, MA., 1985.

M.S. = Un Maître Spirituel du dix-neuvième siècle, by Father Athanase Sage. Rome, 1958.

P.C. = Premières Constitutions. Rome, 1966. An English translation of the First Constitutions is given in
Foundational Documents

T.D. = Textes déposés, i.e. the collection of d'Alzon's writings deposited at the Congregation for Causes of Saints (copies at the Assumptionist headquarters in Rome.)

V.L. = Letters of Emmanuel d'Alzon until 1850, edited by Father Siméon Vailhé in 3 volumes, Paris, 1923, 1925, 1926. Roman numeral indicate volume; Arabic numerals indicate the page.

T.L. = Letters of Emmanuel d'Alzon, 1851-1858, edited by Fr. Pierre Touveneraud in 2 volumes. Rome, 1978.

V.V. = Siméon Vailhé, Vie du Père d'Alzon, 2 volumes. Paris, 1926 and 1934.

For Scripture texts the translation is taken from the New American Bible - unless otherwise indicated.

INTRODUCTION

Emmanuel d'Alzon's spiritual thought developed in two major phases. In the first phase beginning at the time of his ordination, he came to see that the overall purpose of his entire life and work was to further the Reign of God. The motto

Adveniat Regnum tuum

(Thy Kingdom Come) was the appropriate expression for the purpose he pursued throughout his life and assigned to his sons in the

First Constitutions

(completed in 1855.

F.D.

p. 5 ff).

In the second phase, beginning in 1854, Father d'Alzon dwelt on the ultimate motive of his priestly religious life and of the apostolic efforts that consumed his existence, namely the love of Jesus Christ as God in the Holy Trinity, and as man, embracing, as Fr. d'Alzon insists, what Christ loved above all: Mary, his mother, and the Church, his spouse. Father d'Alzon developed this second theme principally in the

Directory

(1859-1864).

Both themes together form the spirit of the Assumption expressed principally in Fr. d'Alzon's address closing the General Chapter of 1868 (F.D. pp. 75-93). Supplementary clarifications were evolved by Fr. d'Alzon in his later years, i.e. from 1865 on. Repeatedly he confessed that, not knowing how many years he would live, he felt the grave duty and the urgency of adding important complements to the spiritual doctrine already taking shape and that he was to leave to his sons and daughters. [\[4\]](#)

As Fr. George Tavard points out: "The heart of Emmanuel d'Alzon's spirituality belongs to the perennial Catholic tradition. It reflects the belief and the confidence that the Christian's interior life should and can become an experience of the very life of God as Three Persons. For this

reason, d'Alzon wants both prayer and action to be patterned on the theology of the Trinity. As such, his doctrine belongs to no school and no religious order. It is virtually universal, for the mystery on which it is based is the hidden, yet real, communication of the Trinity to all Christian souls." [\[5\]](#)

The spiritual teaching of Fr. d'Alzon, that he himself termed the spirit of Assumption, is fully in line with the Gospel and with Catholic tradition; it is "Catholic" in the sense of universal. Nonetheless, paradoxically, it has a clear originality. [\[6\]](#)

Fr. d'Alzon is exceptionally concerned with truth, especially theological truth as the basis of religious practice and spiritual life. He insists on the need of study in order to rest on and to propose nothing but the truth in preaching, teaching, and in the media.

At the same time, he is not attracted to purely speculative research. His teaching inspires a fervent piety. It focuses on the theological virtues, seeking in them a proper rationale for the moral virtues. His desire is to learn truths of faith, to meditate them in depth so that they may be the foundation of Christian life. Hence his interest in the Church Fathers, especially in St. Augustine (See E.S. index under the word *vérité*).

Throughout a life totally dedicated to Christ and his Church, Emmanuel d'Alzon persevered in prayer, in a contemplation that inspired and guided his intense apostolic action, giving us an example that is part of his spiritual legacy to his sons and daughters.

PART I

FOR THE COMING

OF

THE KINGDOM

CHAPTER ONE

THE CALL TO THE PRIESTHOOD

Young Emmanuel d'Alzon was richly blessed, with parents who were noble by birth and by the quality of their soul. They initiated him to a Christian faith that would lead to an early love of God, to a kindness open to all, and to a characteristic selflessness.

From childhood, he was deeply and vividly aware of God's presence, power and love, of man's absolute dependence upon God for existence and salvation. In adolescence, he became conscious of his faults, of the redemption obtained by a loving Savior's passion and death, and of the added blessing of having Jesus' mother as our own.

Young d'Alzon attended schools in Paris for secondary education and the beginning of his higher education. He belonged to a circle of friends of solid faith and noble generosity. They shared a disposition to serve God and his Church, a sense of loyalty to the Pope, in reaction to the Gallicanism that prevailed in France. [\[7\]](#)

In this atmosphere, young Emmanuel matured his notion of God's sovereignty, of the right that is God's to be revered by his creatures. God being the one infinite source of all being, it follows not only that the creature depends on him for its very existence at every moment but also that the creature exists and lives for no other ultimate purpose than God, whose pleasure is to make the creatures happy. "For no one of us lives and equally no one of us dies for himself alone. If we live, we live for the Lord; if we die, we die for the Lord. Whether therefore we live or die, we belong to the lord. This is why Christ died and came to life again, to establish his lordship over dead and living." (Rom 14: 7-9).

In the world of his day, Emmanuel d'Alzon found much faith, reverence for God, trust and hope in Him, justice, kindness, and generosity. However, the society of his time was far from being altogether Christian. The ideas of the Enlightenment continued to inspire what d'Alzon called the Revolution, i.e. a widespread and increasingly concerted rejection of God and Church, spearheaded by society's leaders and free-thinkers. This rejection they gradually imposed on people, being helped by widespread ignorance, by the decline in morality that resulted partly from the French Revolution and partly from the growing industrialization. Moreover, the Church was weakened by internal deficiencies, by unworthy sons, by political ambitions, and by Gallicanism. From ignorance and unawareness of God, people went to breaking his law, to questioning his authority and his rights, and then to denying his existence. Many people resented the Church that preached the sovereign rights of God, his authority on mankind, even his love. They felt that all this preaching and ruling by Church authority threatened their freedom and the newly proclaimed rights of man.

During his adolescence Emmanuel d'Alzon noted with sorrow how the Church was losing ground in numbers and effectiveness under attacks from Protestantism and the Revolution. In the face of enemies bent on destroying the Church, her own sons were too often indifferent or pessimistic, with a depressing sense of inferiority.

During his entire lifetime, Emmanuel d'Alzon witnessed persistent attacks upon the Church. Its enemies strove to destroy its influence upon the masses and particularly to deprive it of the means and authority to educate the young.

As young d'Alzon grew in the awareness of God's love and of man's ungrateful rejection of that love, he became increasingly loyal and loving toward God. He was deeply convinced that God should be better revered and obeyed. He felt that God and his Church should be defended from atheistic propaganda and the iniquitous legislation that strove to destroy religion. He believed it imperative that he personally be a defender of God.

At first he thought that such a defense could be best achieved in government service. But he soon came to feel that the priesthood would be for him the most effective means of serving the cause of God and his Church. (See E.S. pp. 733-4; 749-50; and V.L. I, pp. 306-310; 380-386; 413-415; 472-476). This became more evident to Emmanuel as he realized that man also needed to learn about God and the Church as much as God and the Church needed to be defended. The call which he heard and answered was a call to apostleship, a call to tell mankind the oft-repeated message of God's love, and to urge people to respond with loving obedience.

Seeking the truth through intense study, and proclaiming the truth to people: such were the primary functions of the apostle that d'Alzon aimed to become. (See below, p. 52, the emphasis on truth in Fr. d'Alzon's apostolate). His preparation for the priesthood would need to include a quality of intellectual training unusual in seminaries of the time.

Following his schooling in Paris, he formed a plan of personal studies that he deemed necessary for his mission. For some two years he studied by himself at home in the château of Lavagnac. Then in 1832 he entered the seminary at Montpellier in order to prepare more immediately for the priesthood. However, Montpellier could not provide the training that d'Alzon would need for his difficult mission. After fifteen months he arranged to complete his theological training in Rome where he benefited from the guidance of outstanding tutors.

Did Emmanuel d'Alzon feel that his function should be more that of a scholar and lecturer than that of a priest? Certainly not. While at Montpellier, he perceived that his would be a special calling. He wrote to his sister Augustine,

“Just as I believe that two and two are four, as firmly do I believe that God calls me in the ecclesiastical state. I believe that he does not call me to the practice of ministry. I believe, judging from his past action in my regard, that, barring any obstacle from myself, he will at the right moment reveal where he will have me be” (D.A. II, p. 94).

D'Alzon, perceiving his mission to be priestly, understood that he would not only be telling people about God, but would more importantly help people go to God and love him. To a close friend, he confides,

Our mission is great and we can believe that God wants us to be placed like a torch to teach the world. (V.L. I, p. 486).

Preparing for Holy Orders, he writes to his friend d'Esgrigny,

I will strive...to be the kind of priest that is needed today. I will ask of God that ardent love of his glory, that love for people, that limitless compassion for their wretchedness, that resolve to do the utmost to heal them, and the absolute selflessness which is basic to the priestly character... The priest who rises above the day's passions and intrigues, who perceives the need to develop liberty, who does not oppose peoples' action, but rather purifies it by forever injecting into the masses the great principles of order, justice and charity, that priest appears to me similar to those great intelligent beings who are mandated to look after the outside world; they hover over creation, incessantly pouring upon it new seeds, new principles of existence. Seen in this light, the priest's role seems to me to be above anything we can imagine on earth. On the other hand, however, what grief, what secret torments, what bitterness as one considers what good could be done and is not done...

My (own) misfortune consists in wanting too much and too little. I do not manage to focus on the proper action of which I am capable, I still have much to do in that regard. (D.A. II, p. 129).

Writing to another friend soon after ordination, he seems even more convinced that the priest needs only to teach the truths of the faith if he wants to renew society and instill spiritual energy in the people.

As I continue to study religion, I discover in the depths of Catholic doctrine...a vitality so powerful...that I cannot conceive how a priest wishing to renovate society can seek resources other than those he finds in truth itself. On the other hand, as I see it, the best, the only way to restore to minds their lost vigor, and to heal the moral exhaustion which everyone deplores, is to project upon them the light that shines upon every person coming into the world and to bring them warmth from the rays of the Eternal Word... The priest must do all he can to establish the reign of Jesus Christ. (Letter to A. de Vignamont, March 28, 1835, D.A. p. 24)

For young d'Alzon, the Cause of God that he felt called to espouse is perceived in a lofty faith-vision, which he described for himself and his fellow-seminarians at Montpellier when, in May of 1833, at his suggestion, they join him in consecrating their lives to Jesus. Here are excerpts from this text:

It is written in the Book of Revelation that St. John saw, in the midst of the throne of God, a Lamb, sacrificed as it were, and the Elders around the throne, and also the angels that served him, who were prostrate and who proclaimed in a loud voice: 'Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power, divinity, wisdom and strength, honor, glory, and praise.' To this Lamb, immolated from the origin of the world, we resolve to consecrate ourselves, so as to render to the One seated on the throne, as well as to the Lamb, the praise, the honor, the glory, and the power for ever and ever. Amen.

The means to attain this goal we will find by imitating as perfectly as depends upon us his state of Victim. Like St. Paul, we will want to know but one thing: Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ crucified. Such will be our motto. Often we will come to contemplate this model who... teaches us what we are to be in order that we may honor him fittingly. As Jesus Christ offered himself willingly to his Father, we will likewise unceasingly offer ourselves to God. As Jesus Christ on the cross desired only the salvation of men, we also, loving the cross, will seek nothing but our salvation and that of our brothers. As Jesus Christ lifted on the cross attracted all to himself, we too will make every effort, in a spirit of penance, to elevate ourselves on the cross, so as to draw as much as possible toward heaven the multitude of people whose gaze is retained by the earth.

Striving to be of one mind with our divine model and joining in the excellent sacrifice that the spotless Lamb ever offers to God his Father, we take an oath solemn and sealed with our blood to immolate ourselves like him and with him:

- 1) Throughout our seminary years we will strive to perfect in us the spirit of dedication, of generosity, of absolute poverty, of which the Heart of our Jesus is the source...

- 2) We will consecrate all the acts of our life to salvation of souls...with the ardent love that has ever burned in the heart of this amiable Savior.

3) We will immolate ourselves daily with him during the celebration of the Holy Sacrifice. (E.S. pp. 750- 754).

To sum up, young Emmanuel d'Alzon is vividly aware of God's sovereignty and love for his creatures. During his adolescence and particularly beginning with his years of schooling in Paris, he is grieved to see God and his Church offended, rejected, ignored, even attacked. He hears the call to be a defender of God and, in a positive manner, a herald of God and of his Church.

CHAPTER TWO

PRIORITY TO GOD AND HIS KINGDOM

In the mind of Emmanuel d'Alzon, the basic reason why it is proper and necessary to "defend" God and religion is that the Creator, being the source of all that is the creature and of its continued existence, has the right to exercise his Providence in governing creation and to be obeyed by rational creatures. To Emmanuel d'Alzon this truth appears as evident as it is important. Hence at the beginning of his circular on social questions (C.L. p. 37-46) he is content with one quotation from Scripture:

God is the sovereign Lord of all. "The Lord's are the earth and its fullness; the world and those who dwell in it." (Ps 24:1) [\[8\]](#)

After recognizing God's right of dominion over His creatures, Father d'Alzon points out that the God-man, having died for us, earned that right.

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' (C.L. p. 39 ; Ps 2: 8-9; see Col 1: 16)?

In a note on "The eternal principles of rights" that were to guide the teaching of law at the proposed Université Saint-Augustin. (T.D. 47, p. 23) Fr. d'Alzon writes:

God renders and causes to be rendered to Himself whatever is due Him. And, in this respect, men will never properly understand what they owe one another except when they understand clearly what they owe to God. This is little understood and yet it is basic. Men's rights rest on God's rights. Christian society provides a firm guarantee to the rights of natural society.

It should be noted that d'Alzon does not oppose the rights of God to the rights of man. What he will not tolerate is that the rights of man be vindicated by denying the rights of God. He himself engages in the defense of human rights when they are threatened by the government, going so far as to publish a periodical for that purpose ("La liberté pour tous" - in 1848) (M.S. p. 98).

What then are the rights of God? [\[9\]](#)

God has the right to be acknowledged by his creatures as their maker, to be adored, to be appreciated and trusted as an almighty, loving Providence; the right to be obeyed and to be loved. These acts, adoration, gratitude, trust, obedience, and love pay homage to God, not because he needs them, but rather because it is the creatures themselves that need to adore, obey, and love in order to reach the happiness that God alone can give them. He will not impose it upon them but will grant it only to those who acknowledge and accept their dependence upon him (About those who reject him see Lk 19: 11 and E.S. p. 136). If God, in return for loving us, has to command our love in return, it is because selfishness stifles in us a love which should be spontaneous.

Ways to grow in awareness of God's rights

Father d'Alzon offers many suggestions to help us realize God's rights and to react as befits

creatures.

...the contemplation of the being of God ...will most certainly instill in us an appreciation of his rights over us and of our duties toward him (C.L. pp. 29-30). Prayerful adoration should reveal to us the rights of God (E.S. p.424)

In a meditation on the spirit of the Assumption, after explaining that the rights of God are actually rooted in his infinite perfections, Fr. d'Alzon concludes:

I must remain constantly under the eye of God, contemplate his infinite attributes, realize the infinity of his being, and my nothingness...beholding the divine perfections will be for me eternal life and bliss. God, infinite being, supremely good, absolute truth, power, justice, mercy, wisdom, love, they are all present in the Being to a degree that my mind can never comprehend, enough to fill me with rapture and a profound awareness of my dependence (E.S. pp. 618-9).

In a circular letter on study, especially the study of Jesus Christ, Fr. d'Alzon notes that "in Jesus Christ is to be found the knowledge of the rights of God over man and the duties of man toward God" (C.L. p. 20). That knowledge Jesus Christ makes manifest to the soul as it makes itself purer (F.D. p. 100).

In 1862, speaking to the Adoratrices about prayer of contemplation, Fr. d'Alzon comments on our realizing the presence, the majesty, the being of God:

We are not sufficiently aware of it... God is essentially power, light, and love. The power of God fills the universe, he is everything, he is everywhere, we are in him, we live in him, we breathe in him as in an ocean. We are in God even more than our bodies are in the air, than the fish are in the sea. If, habitually, we are so surrounded by the divinity that we cannot act outside it (and yet not lose any of our freedom) , are we not immersed in it to a particular degree whenever we separate ourselves from outside objects, in order to enter his presence? It is then that his presence should instill in us a profound feeling of dependence, which would give our prayer and our adoration an intensity which they do not have. If we realized the full extent of God's sovereign domain over us, all our caprices would vanish... We don't treat God with sufficient respect. We don't take God seriously. We give ourselves, then we take ourselves back... in a

word, we forget that God is our sovereign maker, that we are in God, that we live in him, that he knows all our thoughts of independence and all our revolts... We seem to say to him, 'Agreed Lord, I am willing to be yours, but you must grant me this, and that.'

Whether we realize it or not, God's rights are very real; that infinite power surrounding us on all sides will surely lead us where he wishes us to go. So why not let ourselves be led by him? Let us fully acknowledge the sovereign domain of God over us, and be ready for any sacrifices he may require as his right... (E.S. pp. 1274-1275).

Fr. d'Alzon accepts the notion of the rights of God all the more readily since he sees them summed up in the right to be loved, the right to our love. To Blessed Marie-Eugénie he writes in 1876,

I am much concerned to grow in the friendship of Our Lord. Does that thought agree with you who are preoccupied with the rights of God? How can one satisfy rights that are so terrible in their immensity? I thought I had better go the way of love (17 October 1876). [\[10\]](#)

Throughout his life Fr. d'Alzon remained most sensitive to the rights of God. Time and again, he dwells on the importance of adoration and of obedience to God. He is pained by the violation of the rights of God and by their being denied. He is forever eager to respect and observe these rights, i.e. to adore, to obey, and to love God. He takes every opportunity to proclaim the rights of God, calling attention insistently to the evil brought on as a result of godlessness. Obviously he feels the immensity of God's sovereignty, that he calls the weight of God. [\[11\]](#)

However it must be noted that, in observing and proclaiming God's rights, Emmanuel d'Alzon is motivated not alone by a reverent fear, but by a deep concern for justice toward God and by love. (M.S. p. 143) [\[12\]](#) He considers it the primary duty of the Assumptionists to proclaim the rights of God and his sovereignty.

No one wants God anymore! His existence is denied. Independent morality is in vogue. Divine Providence is rejected. All this has shaken society. Our first task is to proclaim the rights of God and his sovereign dominion over all creation. (F.D. p. 108)

Our major preoccupation is to proclaim everywhere in the world the rights of God, of Jesus Christ and of his Church. (C.L. p. 43)

The zeal that we should have for God's rights and the salvation of souls is the essential embodiment of our charity. (F.D. p. 87)

The ideal purpose of education, it seems to me, is to transmit the following: a knowledge of Jesus Christ...; a love of Jesus Christ...; 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 (C.L. p. 48).

The right of God to reign

For Emmanuel d'Alzon it was evident that God, being the source of all that exists, could well demand that His will be done as Jesus teaches us to ask; in other words that creatures, owing God their existence at every moment, obey Him and fulfill His purpose, namely that they find their happiness in loving Him; in other words again that God is entitled to reign on earth as he reigns in heaven. Had not Jesus seen his mission as that of announcing "the good news of the reign of God?" (Lk 4:43)

The Kingdom of God within us is the most absolute dependence of our being and all our faculties on the intimate action of God. God is the master, we are the subjects. I am your servant, the son of your handmaid (Ps 116:16). If God is our king and has the right to command us to the extent of his power, his intelligence and his love for us, we are here to obey him...(F.D. p. 101)

God being the sole source of all being and goodness, who can deny him the right to create as he wishes, to pursue and achieve his purpose in creating, namely to share his life and happiness with his creatures? This means the right to govern his creatures, to command them, to be revered and obeyed and loved. In the language of human institutions this all means the right to reign over his creatures. Such is the language of Scripture. [\[13\]](#)

In fact the theme of the kingdom of God and Jesus Christ is central to the Gospel, particularly that of Matthew. The reign identifies with the mission and person of Jesus. Christ announced on the one hand that the kingdom is upon us, on the other hand that it will reach its full development only at the end of time. Hence the Lord's Prayer asking for the advent of the Kingdom. God wants this to happen by means of the Passion and Death of his Son. Our Savior's sacrifice enables mankind to live and work effectively for the Reign. That is why Christ invites all men to follow him and sends all to instruct and convert one another. (Mt 28:19-20; Vatican II decree on Apostolate of the laity 3). After his death the Kingdom remains the major concern and the central theme of the preaching of the Gospel, even with St. Paul. [\[14\]](#)

Reign of God, Reign of Christ

D'Alzon does not overlook the fact that the reign of God is essentially the reign of the three divine persons. (F.D. pp. 107-108). At the same time he observes that the reign is entrusted to Jesus Christ. "Has not Jesus Christ purchased mankind by his blood? Has not God, sovereign master of all beings, declared to His Son: 'Ask of me and I will give you the nations for an inheritance'?" (Ps 2:8) (E.S. p. 227).

This reign can first be considered from the point of view of the kingship of Jesus Christ. Ask of me and I will give you the nations for an inheritance
. (Ps 2:8) The psalms, the prophets, the Apocalypse are full of this kingship of Christ. You know the words:...
he was given a crown. He rode forth victorious, to conquer yet again
. (Rev 6 2)
A name was written on the part of the cloak that covered his thigh: King of kings and lord of lords
. (Rev 19:16)...Of old Jesus Christ was the King of peoples.. .when they were Christians; He is no longer that... it seems there is a plot in the world to abolish that kingship of Jesus Christ.
We will not have this man rule over us
(Lk 19: 14) (E.S. p. 662).

Emmanuel d'Alzon and the Reign of God

Teaching us to pray, Jesus includes the wish "Your kingdom come," meaning "make your reign

come about.” Obviously the advent of the reign of God can be assured by him alone; in that sense we pray that the reign inaugurated by Jesus may soon be recognized everywhere. However the reign that God wishes to come about on earth, He will not impose upon mankind, because it would mean compelling people to love him, and love can only be free. The advent of the Reign in man’s life is impossible without man’s free acceptance.

As early as 1835, Emmanuel, recently ordained, felt very deeply that in order to forestall the rejection of God and of divine Truth, “what is left for the priest to do is to work all he can for the establishment of the reign of Christ. His king is Jesus of Nazareth; his rostrum is Calvary; his emblem, the Cross... My most intimate conviction is that the world, if it is to avoid dissolution, needs to be permeated by a Christian idea...” (Letter to Vignamont, 28 March, 1835. D.A. pp. 241-242).

As Emmanuel was to realize within a few years, people needed to be reminded above all of an “idea” already taught by Christ: to ask God that He reign over us.

Young Mother Marie-Eugénie had had the same concern for the coming of the Kingdom as far back as 1836 when she was attending Fr. Lacordaire’s preaching at Notre-Dame in Paris, “where earlier I had acquired the absolute resolve to overcome (every obstacle) in order to labor for the extension of the reign of Christ... I begged him to keep me in that loving disposition toward his reign on earth” (Letter of February 7, 1843 to Fr. d’Alzon).

CHAPTER THREE

THE CALL TO BE A FOUNDER

Events and thoughts leading to the foundation

(D.A. II p 301 ff.)

Having seen how Emmanuel d'Alzon made the extension of the reign of God a life's goal for himself, let us see how he was led to become a religious and to found the Augustinians of the Assumption as apostles of the Reign.

In the "picture" he draws of himself in 1831, he resolves to model himself after Christ in the evangelical counsels (E.S. p. 743). He is attracted particularly to obedience, of which Our Lord Jesus Christ gives the example: "an obedient God, nothing less was required to erase the revolt of sin" (M.S. p. 17).

During his early years of ministry, Emmanuel d'Alzon, being very conscious of his weakness and of the need of divine assistance, turns increasingly to God. He yearns for a life of prayer that would solicit constantly the graces of light and strength he needed, a prayer also that would help him grow in faith, hope, and love, all for the purpose of serving God and fellowman with greater effectiveness. Would he develop this life more surely if he took religious vows? Religious life would also help counter the unruly desires and appetites of our fallen nature, in oneself and in fellowmen. In 1839, the young abbé, concluding a series of instructions on the evangelical counsels, insists on the need for religious life.

Consider man's desires. Essentially there are three: pride by which man relates everything to himself, the love of sensual gratification and love of riches. When these three concupiscences reach their peak in a society, that society is ruined. For this reason God condemns the three concupiscences. "You shall not covet..." (Ex 20:17). Better still, God urges the opposite sentiments. To pride opposes humility, even obedience; to love of pleasures, chastity; to love of riches, voluntary poverty (M.S. p. 18).

The thought of becoming a religious personally had come to him while he was training for the priesthood. In October, 1833, he resolved to lead secretly a "form of monastic life" (E.S. p. 758). At about the same time, he began to perceive the need for a new religious Order in the Church. On April 15, 1833, he wrote to his friend Gouraud: "I am so certain that today God wants a new [religious] Order, and that this Order will appear before long, that I cannot hear mention of an

association of that kind without being deeply moved. (V.L. I, p. 403).

In December of 1833, writing to a friend, the young seminarian points to the need of an organization of apostles with participation of both faithful and priests.

At every period of history, God has called on men to heal the wounds of his Church, whenever the wounds were so serious and intense as to weaken the faith of Christians...

Who will be the new Samuel to free the Church...?...

(Once) the movement is started, the faithful must share in it as well as the priests... Lay Catholics must understand that...to them also is entrusted an important part of the vineyard... (D.A. II pp. 119 - 120).

In order to better understand his mind, us once again read the letter written by recently ordained abbé d'Alzon in March 1835.

As I continue to study religion, I discover in the depths of Catholic doctrine, a vitality so powerful... that I cannot conceive how a priest wishing to renovate society can seek sources other than those he finds in truth itself. On the other hand, as I see it, the best, the only way to restore to minds their lost vigor, and to heal the moral exhaustion which everyone deplores, is to project upon them the light that shines upon every person coming into the world and to bring them warmth from the rays of the Eternal Word... The priest must do all he can to establish the reign of Jesus Christ (Letter to A. de Vignamont, D.A. p. 241).

I am more and more convinced that nations and kings are guilty; that...they must be chastised the ones by the others. What is left for the priest to do is to work all he can for the establishment of the reign of Christ. His king is Jesus of Nazareth, his rostrum is Calvary, his standard the cross...

My most intimate thought... is that the world, if it is to escape destruction, needs to be permeated by a Christian idea, and that this idea can come only from men who will busy themselves primarily with it, so as to present it under all forms possible. (Letter of March 28, 1835 to A. Vignamont. D.A. II pp. 241-2).

The Christian "idea" needed to revive mankind was to take shape as the advent of the reign of God. D'Alzon would be an apostle of the Reign. But how? While he became totally absorbed in a multiplicity of apostolic endeavors, he remained convinced that God had plans for him, which would be revealed in due time. In 1843, the veil was partially lifted when he found himself challenged to revive a moribund school in Nîmes and to make it a thoroughly Christian college. The thought was most appealing to d'Alzon. In his mind this college would contribute to what he saw as a predominant means of furthering the reign of Christ, by providing youth with a thorough Christian education, thus preparing a Catholic elite. The existing teaching Orders were hampered by widespread prejudice held against them. Besides, the government was preparing to suppress the largest and most efficient of them, the Society of Jesus; it was therefore necessary that new institutes be founded, and there were some instances of such foundations, institutes that could seize upon the new ideals of truthfulness and liberty that were being used to combat the Church, and turn them to her advantage. At the same time, the college would lead in the struggle for freedom of education, against a government intent on divesting the Church of its teaching function by extending a state monopoly to all levels of schooling.

During the summer vacation of 1843, Fr. d'Alzon visited the Religious of the Assumption in Paris. He preached a retreat to them, conversed with them and with Mother Marie-Eugénie principally. He suggested to them the motto *Adveniat Regnum Tuum - Thy Kingdom come*. After leaving Paris, writing to the Foundress, he commented on the Reign:

What I said to your Sisters about the triumph that I believe Our Lord should obtain in our time is something that has frequently struck me...

...Our Lord seeks refuge in the soul of those whom he loves, as if to be protected from his persecutors...then he uses them as a means of obtaining victory for his cause. Hence for his disciples the double obligation of establishing his reign in and out of themselves (D.A. II pp. 285-286).

During the summer of 1844, Fr. d'Alzon felt newly drawn to religious life. What brought back the thought was the vow he took to refuse the episcopacy, knowing as he did that he was being considered for appointment to a vacant see. In June he writes to Mother Marie-Eugénie:

Let me talk a bit about myself. First I must confess with some kind of shame, that I made here (in Turin, at the shrine of Our Lady of Consolata, where he was visiting an ailing cousin) a vow about which I don't know what to say. One evening I was deeply stirred by the deplorable state of the Church brought about by the ambition of certain people, and also by some other matter that I don't recall. I do know that as a result I renounced any thought of Church dignity and the next day at Mass I vowed to refuse every Church office.

Since that moment, an idea that I had at one time, but which was now only a memory, has returned stronger than ever; it is to devote myself to establish my own religious community. You can imagine how much I would like to converse with you; and yet what am I ever able to do? Never has my cowardice been so evident to me, my nullity, my inconstancy, my self-love. Sometimes I tell myself that so many defects should remove from my mind all such ideas; sometimes too I believe that God, showing me my faults with such evidence, merely wants to prove that if anything gets done, he will be the one to do it (Letter of June 24, 1844) (E.S. pp. 639-640).

Mother Marie-Eugénie had always desired an institute of men comparable to her own. She said as much and more in her reply dated August 5. Fr. d'Alzon takes up each one of her remarks in his letter of August 16. The following paragraphs offer valuable insights on the future Founder's view.

Nîmes, 16 August, 1844

I want to be a bit selfish today, my dear child, and will first reply to your latest letter, the one in which you speak of my future projects. I must admit that for a long time I have thought about religious life, although I never felt attracted by any existing Order. If, at this moment, I knew positively that God wants me somewhere, just as I have known that he wanted me to be a priest, I would not hesitate a single moment. But, I can assure you, I see no clear sign (of this) in myself, at least in the present state of my soul. Therefore I must await God's action as I ask him to do with me as may please him, striving to respond to his plans if ever he has any in my regard.

Father d'Alzon goes on to comment on the qualities and virtues that would be required of a founder, some he has and some that he is still lacking. Then he mentions his present commitments to discuss the demands they will make upon his time. Further on he enunciates some principles that he would consider essential for a new foundation:

The moral foundations that I would give a new Congregation would be: 1) the acceptance of all that is Catholic; 2) frankness; 3) liberty. You understand that I have nothing to say about what is required for an Order to be an Order; I merely indicate what should distinguish a modern Congregation from those already existing. I repeat: I know of nothing to kill opinionatedness and self-love like the acceptance of all that is good outside of oneself. I know of nothing that gains (the trust of) people today like frankness, and I know of nothing more powerful in the contest against the present enemies of the Church than liberty.

These thoughts can be more and better developed but I believe they are easy to grasp. As regards the doctrinal thought, if I may use the expression, it is summarized in these few words: help Jesus continue his mystical incarnation in the Church and in each of her members. For it is on that basis I believe, that Catholic truth can be affirmed to full advantage against the pantheistic and materialistic errors of our day.

...I fully agree with your way of viewing what you call the passion or the philosophy of religious Orders. For myself, my passion would be the manifestation of the Man-God and the divinisation of mankind by Jesus Christ; it would also be my philosophy (E.S. pp. 640-644).

In December 1844, another letter to the Blessed Marie-Eugénie tells of the deliberation, still hesitant and yet docile, that goes on in d'Alzon's mind and heart. Again he declares that, after the ten years of darkness that followed his ordination, he finds that the star reappeared and :

I seem to be discovering an objective toward which I must make my way. Furious repugnances sometimes arise in the depth of my heart, but it seems that the will is involved not at all or very little; I am ready for anything. At the same time some exterior happenings seem to arrange things well, making it easier to accomplish what I believe to be God's designs. One must leave God free to act. For my part, I believe I am ready for anything, whatever it costs me (E.S. 769).

In January 1845, he expresses continued concern for his defects:

...You speak to me of all the vocations that I would find for an Order, such as you dream it. However once again, do I possess what is needed? My manner of doing and acting proves to me that on the one hand I do not have the good fortune to please everyone; on the other hand, I realize quite clearly that, in the order of holiness, there is no relation between what I am and what the founders were. Before they undertook to educate others, what an arduous education they imposed upon themselves!... (E.S. p. 770).

At the same time he reveals a firm determination to proceed in blind but obedient faith, despite the criticisms and doubts expressed in his entourage about his prudence and wisdom. Writing to his friend and colleague at the college, Eugene Germer-Durand, he says:

People must be assured that I may break, but will not bend. I know to what I am exposing myself; I know that I will be alone or that I may feel alone. My present thoughts...make me consider in a sad light the future that I am preparing. Happy are those who have only to obey. The undertaking as I see it requires more than obedience, it implies solitude, the isolation of my will as opposed to contrary wills that I must bend or break. What matters if it is what God wants?

On the other hand, if God wishes me to fulfill my mission, it will pertain to me and not to anyone else, to accept its responsibility. I will have to consult, but it will be for me to decide...

Briefly, whether others agree or not, I shall try. I will succeed or fail, according as God wills it. It does not matter. The idea is in my head and in my heart; I must produce it, in spite of all human obstacles. These do not really frighten me (E.S. pp. 771 - 773).

During the summer of 1845, while he was in Paris to negotiate official recognition of his college, and consulting with Mother Marie-Eugénie, Fr. d'Alzon emitted private religious vows at the shrine of Our Lady of Victories (D.A. II p. 304). To these vows he adds a further commitment:

By vowing to devote myself to the extension of the Reign of Jesus Christ, I will dedicate myself especially to making our divine Master reign in the souls of my brothers (V.V. I p. 374. D.A. II

p.342).

During August, he writes to his bishop: For a long time my thoughts have been urging upon me the desire to establish the reign of Jesus Christ (V.L. pp. 286-287).

Shortly after his return to Nîmes - in September, 1845 - he solicited from his bishop permission to begin on a trial basis for one year (D.A. II pp. 262 - 263). At the end of September, Fr. d'Alzon concluded a retreat given to the college personnel, clerical and lay, proposing that they constitute an association "de l'Assomption" for a period of probation to last until Christmas. It would be in the nature of a Third-Order (D.A. II pp. 343 ff). During October he begins a personal Novitiate in view of taking the vow of perfection. To Mother Marie-Eugénie he writes:

I feel that God is drawing me very strongly to himself, but I have only feeble desires to do good. Yet, my daughter, your responsibility and mine are quite serious, and compel us to become saints. It makes one tremble; still it is time not to fear, but to get to work (D.A. II p. 346).

During November, having taken up residence at the college, and settled in the common infirmary, he finally accepts to occupy a personal (windowless) room. (D.A. II p. 349).

The novitiate period began on Christmas day 1845, and for the tertiaries on December 26 (D.A. II pp. 352-356;

E.S.

pp. 774-777). For various reasons the bishop's approval for a formal novitiate period was delayed until October 1849 and the first religious profession took place at midnight mass on Christmas 1850 (

D.A.

II pp. 374-381).

We conclude this report on the events and thoughts leading to the foundation with the rule that Fr. d'Alzon set for his own life, in December of 1845 when about to begin religious life with his first companions. What he writes for himself reflects the ideal he will propose to his followers (

E.S.

pp. 777-787). His most significant thoughts are expressed in these excerpts:

1) As a Christian

I am a son of Adam and of Jesus Christ.

Son of Adam, I am a sinner... (obliged) to know myself...to acquire a true contempt of myself...to learn, through knowledge of my defects and vices, to be merciful toward other people's faults. Son of Adam...condemned to earn my bread by the sweat of my brow, woe to me if I ever forget it.

Son of Jesus Christ, I must acquire love for him and let his spirit inhabit me (*"j'ai à me pénétrer de son esprit ."*)

The spirit of Jesus Christ must be for me a spirit of absolute dedication, of constant equanimity, of love for my brothers as he loved them. The spirit of Jesus Christ must be the soul of all my actions ...to do what he would do in my place, and thereby his love will urge me toward perfection in all I do, toward the holy state to which I am called. The spirit of Jesus Christ is most demanding; listening to him I run the risk of a terrifying journey. (But) the love for Jesus Christ will alleviate the harshness of the trials. For that reason I will strive to develop that love in me through devotion to the Blessed Sacrament... The spirit of Jesus Christ will help sanctify my work not as a slave, nor as a mercenary ...but as the son of a great family in which Jesus Christ my model willed to do his own share of the work.

2) As a priest

In keeping with Christ my model, I must strive to be imbued, as much as it depends upon me, with the spirit of mediator and sacrificer.

As a priest, I must practice praying for others. Hence, in reciting my Office, and in celebrating Mass, I must join in the great prayer of Jesus Christ. I must realize what purity is needed to be acting in the name of such a pontiff. Also, since the priesthood is instituted only for the Church, I will strive to acquire the deepest love for the Spouse of Jesus Christ. He won her by his blood,

he chose her to be the repository of all his graces, in her he reconciles all men with his Father.

The Church's cause will be the object of all my zeal. I shall dedicate my whole life to securing her triumph. I will be conscious of the honor that is granted me in being allowed to fight for the cause of God and of all that is dearest to him. For God loves and can love nothing more than his Church. The more I will see the Church being persecuted, the more I shall cherish her. Her humiliations will no doubt cause me grief, but they will also be the most powerful motive to surround her on earth, as my weakness allows, with all the glory possible.

3) As a religious

Holding to the thought of de Rancé [Founder of the Trappists], I will be mindful that a religious must be an angel, a martyr, an apostle.

a) Angel, by virtue of the purity of his entire being. Since I am called to the honor of speaking of God, I must know him, and only the pure of heart will see God. Angel, I must do the will of God, who sends his spirits to be his messengers (angels). I must therefore be most intent on doing anything that God wills, when he wills it and as he wills it.

b) Martyr. My persecutors are my passions [in their disorderly pressure]. As I battle against them, I must accept the resulting pain. The passions are like false gods that demand to be worshipped by my senses and by my faculties. If I am to be saved, I must mortify them and, until I do, I will be wasting my time.

A religious must be penitent, like Jesus Christ on the cross. He must suffer not only for himself but for others, just as Christ died for the salvation of mankind. If indeed my mortification extended only to what is personal to me it would reveal a very narrow notion of my vocation and my devotion would seriously risk falling into a certain selfishness, which is one of the worst threats to true piety.

Human nature being extremely weak...I must do all I can to make the life of the spirit triumph in me... This will require that I dwell as much as possible at a high level of thought and sentiment;

being careful, as I have often recommended to others, not to tread the mire of the earthly sentiments and thoughts.

[The practice of] mortification will be for me a purification, an atonement, and an education: a purification, in that it will rid me of my vices; an atonement, in that it will appease the wrath that God [may have] against me and against others; an education, in that it would fail in its purpose, if it did not make me a better [person].

c) [As an] Apostle, I must know the truth, I must study... I shall love truth, the principle of which is Jesus Christ, eternal word of God. If I have little time for study, and with frequent interruptions, I shall give it primary attention and work as much and as well as it will be possible.

[As an] apostle, I shall be mindful of the respect that is due the word of God and I shall impose on myself a penance for every lack of respect on my part. Since the apostle is committed to bear God's orders to people, he is under the obligation to express them in a manner that will help their being accepted. This truth must guide me always in my relations with people... I shall preach Jesus Christ. But Jesus was a child, a grown man, poor, king, pontiff, doctor; in a word, he went through all of life's stages; consequently, as I make him known, I must choose the facet which will help his being accepted. Hence, on my part, the most absolute obligation to study him, as much as I can, and in all that he is.

The apostle is nothing except by virtue of the one who sends him. He is all the more an apostle insofar as he fulfills what is asked of him. For that reason I shall make every effort to be an obedient apostle. Obedience, in its greatest authenticity, places the soul immediately under God's action; only insofar as that action penetrates my whole being shall I be a true apostle. The apostle loves the one who sends him; however he must [also] love the one to whom he is sent, since his mission is one of love and mercy...

Fr. d'Alzon wrote those pages during the month of foundation of the Order. He sought to determine what he should strive to be as a Christian, a priest and a religious in order to be a proper founder. Hence the further thoughts expressed in that personal rule of life on his role as superior (E. S. pp. 782-787). [\[15\]](#)

CHAPTER FOUR

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE NEW INSTITUTE

The purpose of the new institute is expressed principally in the first Constitutions that Fr. d'Alzon finished drafting in 1855. The first chapter is entitled "Purpose and Spirit of the Order". The purpose is evident in our motto

A.R.T. Adveniat regnum tuum, Thy kingdom come

.
[\[16\]](#)

Here are the opening lines of this all-important text.

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 Lord's Prayer: Adveniat Regnum Tuum

-
Thy kingdom come

.
[\[17\]](#)

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... (F.D. p. 15).

The characteristic "supernatural" applied to this spirit results from a series of virtues, led by the three theological virtues. To faith is connected obedience; to hope poverty, humility, prayer, the acceptance of apostolic trials; to charity the love of God that inspires chastity; the love of Our Lord, with love of the Virgin and of the Church; the cult of the Holy Spirit, spirit of love, of brotherly charity and of unity.

A personal note written by the founder between 1845 and 1850 contains early precisions. The institute's purpose is to be the reign of Jesus Christ. Two major objectives: in order to spread truth and charity, the religious apostles must be fully permeated with the love of Jesus Christ and of the Church, that motivates their life. The practical means are education and action upon the people.

Thus the young Assumption devotes itself to a fairly modest apostolate, but it does so in the luminous perspectives of God's Kingdom. This is what gives it from the outset a stamp of fervor, of generosity, of boldness. For Christ has conquered the world. The new world born of the Revolution cannot remain impenetrable to Christ, anymore than was the Gentile world in the early days of the Gospel (E.S. p. 644-645) (A. Sage, *Retraite* 1955 p. 2).

As Fr. d'Alzon perceives ever more clearly the nature of the new institute, there are characteristics that he deems more important and that reveal the depths of his and our spirituality. Its two major characteristics seem to us to be the emphasis on truth in spiritual life and as the central object of our apostolate, then the emphasis on theological virtues. (We shall deal with theological virtues in the next chapter.) In addition, Father d'Alzon conceived religious life and apostolate as being integrated to a degree that was not expressed by the magisterium until Vatican II (*Perfectae Caritatis* no. 8). Finally Fr. d'Alzon, from the outset seeks to associate lay people not only to the prayer life of the religious but also to their apostolate.

The emphasis on truth

From his youth Emmanuel d'Alzon was particularly sensitive to the importance of truthfulness in dealing with God, with fellowman and with oneself. His intellectual honesty made him deplore the widespread tendency to accept only the beliefs of one's own narrow circle, especially in religious matters. He noted also how the unbelievers were striving to destroy the faith of believers.

In the letter of March 28, 1835 quoted above (p. 41) , d'Alzon adds this comment on the importance of truth in saving mankind:

It is said that people are impious. I [readily] believe that without a doubt passions draw people away from what is good, but I believe above all that people are ignorant. There they must be taught and the teaching must be framed in terms that they can understand (Letter to A. Vignamont from Rome, 28 March 1835. D.A. II p. 242).

Father d'Alzon's experience in the ministry only confirmed this early observation, that not all of human errors are due to bad faith, rather that most of them, as also most human miseries, were largely due to ignorance of the truth. This was particularly evident as regards religion. Hence Fr. d'Alzon's zeal in communicating God's truth to his fellowmen by preaching, teaching and publishing. This was his primary form of apostolate. He would have his sons do likewise.

...we shall practice this virtue (of faith):... - 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... (F.D. pp. 15-16).

Father d'Alzon was deeply concerned that the truth should be respected wherever it appeared, that it should be spoken honestly, and that it should be sought and expressed in complete freedom from restraint. With that in mind, he felt - as was said earlier - that a new congregation should present three characteristics in order to meet the trends of the times: first, the acceptance of everything that is Catholic; second, the quality of frankness; and third, liberty. Considering these traits to be of particular value for the apostolate, d'Alzon writes to Mother Marie-Eugénie in August 1844:

I know of nothing that will curb selfishness and undue attachment to one's own mind other than the acceptance of all that is good outside oneself. I know of nothing that wins men in our day as much as frankness, and I know of nothing stronger than liberty to fight the present enemies of the Church (V.L. II p. 185).

Father d'Alzon returns frequently to the notion of frankness (e.g. E.S. pp. 1296-1298), and he will insist that it be a marked quality of the Assumptionists. His notion of liberty involves, as St. Augustine teaches, liberation from sin and a perfect submission to the Holy Spirit (E.S. p. 643).

In this context, when the college at Nîmes became the birthplace of the new congregation, it conferred upon the congregation a doctrinal stamp, that Fr. d'Alzon wished to extend to all of our activities. However, this doctrinal character would not confine the new congregation to an apostolate of teaching. Fr. d'Alzon's perception of his charism would not let him accept such limitations, as he had previously argued with Mother Marie-Eugénie when she suggested that he found a teaching Order. (V.V. p. 351). His intention was to launch from the college, as from a well-organized bastion, a group of endeavors that would recreate a spirit of zealous and generous dedication to the service of the Church (M.S p. 33; E. S. pp. 1289-1291).

At the same time, endeavors that would not consist in proclaiming the truth must not become the primary purpose of the Congregation. As Fr. Galabert testified in a letter to Fr. Vincent de Paul Bailly:

In (Father d'Alzon's) intention, the essential objective of our little Congregation is to develop as extensively as possible the teaching of the Catholic doctrine, principally through study, through education of the young, and through preaching. (E.S. p. 1087).

What is to be taught? Before all else, the Catholic truth, all of it, in its full majesty, its immensity, if I dare say, its infinite horizons, its powerful affirmation of the rights of almighty God, the explanation of the mysteries... (E.S. p. 475. See E.S. pp. 1002, 1032-1033).

Following Fr. d'Alzon we are urged to worship truth in the Divine Word, as we seek to know Christ in order to love him (E.S, p. 222. See Chapters 5 & 6 below).

The Son is the understanding and the truth. We must go to him first by contemplating the truth, then by applying his maxims to our behavior. Truth is moreover the wealth of God. It is through the vow of poverty that we attain that wealth, for heaven's happiness being the joy derived from truth , we on earth must empty our hearts of the created riches and seek the truth in disinterestedness (E.S. pp. 871-872).

The emphasis on theological virtues

As we have seen in Chapter two, those who believe, hope and love foster the reign of God in themselves. Hence the capital importance attached to the theological virtues by Father d'Alzon. Let us remember the place he assigns them in the first chapter of the 1855 Constitutions, as is pointed out in P.C.:

The apostolic life is rooted in faith and flourishes in charity. A major concern of Christ during the last months of his public life, in the farewell discourse after the institution of the Eucharist and of the priesthood, and during the forty days between his Resurrection and the Ascension, was to lay the foundation of the Apostles' faith and to inspire the greatest love: "Peter, do you love me more than these?" (Jn 21:15). Fr. d'Alzon had the same concern for his disciples. Without cease he reminds them that they are to be men of faith and that without a fervent love for Christ they cannot claim to be apostles "able to labor for the extension of the reign of Christ." The apostle tends toward an intimacy of love such that for him "to live is Christ" (P.C. pp. 23-24).

The second theological virtue, hope or trust in God should motivate the religious's life of prayer and his poverty.

The life of the Christian apostle must be a life of prayer. The first Assumptionists bound themselves to the public prayer of the Church. Such a practice arouses, directs, and sustains; it is a prayer by day and by night, in the secret of the heart, a prayer that is always for the advent of the Kingdom. The apostolic stamp that the Assumption gave its life of prayer is evidenced more by the choral recitation of the Roman breviary (as opposed to the liturgy that was proper to the diocese of Nîmes) rather than by the respect given the observances of the ancient Orders. At the same time, the first Constitutions, before prescribing common recitation of the Office, set the principle of silent prayer: "The life of the Assumptionist will be a life of prayer, recollection, and the presence of God" (

F.D.

p. 45). It is in that spirit that we need to rediscover the fervor of the first Assumption in its prayer-life as it took place, in community and in private (More on this subject in chapter 5 and ff.).

The life of the Assumptionist is a life of poverty, closest possible to the poverty of Christ and of

the Apostles, though less spectacular than that of the mendicants.

Sometime after taking private vows Fr. d'Alzon expresses his own ideal of poverty in a note written for himself.

I renounce the ownership of all that can belong to me, in the sense that I no longer wish to make use of them except it be for the glory of God. It will be for me to decide whether to leave my family something or nothing of my possessions, according as will be the most prudent in the eyes of those whom I will consult. I bind myself to live as a poor man as regards dress, food and living expenses. However I shall as yet do nothing that might give the impression that I have reached too final a decision. I obligate myself to waste the least possible amount of my time (E. S. p. 788).

As to the virtue of charity, we note that loving God in one's neighbor implies giving priority to those who are tied to us by the bonds of family or - for the religious - of Community. The life of the Assumptionists, like that of Jesus Christ with his apostles, is to be fraternal

. (Jn 20:17 ; Hb 2:11-12). There must be perfect equality among us; all under the same common rule, with mutual respect, sincerity, frankness, and freedom of the heart. All together form a fraternal community. God the Father is its only center, represented by the Superior (not with the monastic relation of father/son, nor with the mendicant relation of brother/ brother) but as a brother invested with authority, with a mission (conferred by the Superior General) to maintain in the community and in its members unity of minds, respect for the Rule, and apostolic fervor.

The charity of the Assumptionist must inspire his apostolic zeal. Our apostolic purpose remains that of extending the Reign of Christ, of working for the restoration of the Christian spirit (mind and heart). We must strive to gather all that tends to be distended and dispersed, and center it on Christ and His Church. We must go to those who, whether far or near, are not evangelized. We must defend the lowly and the humble against the dangers that threaten them. We must not fear to confront those who mislead the masses. In the 19th century, our Fathers undertook the task with the vehemence of Christ addressing the Scribes and the Pharisees. However, with the change of "climate" encouraged by Vatican II, we must not refuse to dialogue with men who do not share our faith but who respect it, just as we are asked to respect their free options (P.C. p. 25) (See Directory p. 60 ff.).

There is an attitude of Fr. d'Alzon which is like a touchstone proving the genuineness of his selfless love and dedication. To all his endeavors, he brought a disinterestedness which was quite exceptional, a characteristic that he strongly recommended to his sons and daughters. He repeatedly said: "We must do what others do not do, and this with disinterested respect for all other fields and forms of apostolate, avoiding undue competition" (cf.

E.S.

p. 643). Fr. d'Alzon considered this very important for the good of the Church. Always there appear new fields of labor where we do not risk affecting legitimate susceptibilities of the clergy, diocesan or religious. We are asked with particular insistence to avoid competitive attitudes of any sort. Our endeavors are complementary, and sometimes supplementary at the request of the hierarchy. The "care of souls" that is the normal domain of the secular clergy was not envisaged in our first Constitutions. If we accept it, at the express request of the bishops, it is important that we harmonize its requirements with those of our proper vocation (See

Instructions du samedi

i pp. 127-128;

D A.

I pp. 88-90# II pp. 450, 453, 455, 863).

Absence of self-interest and vanity will mark all our activities. We shall rejoice with others when they achieve the good we were not considered worthy to attempt. When others bring home God's harvest from fields to which we would seem to have a right, let us say with Moses: "If only the whole people of Yahweh were prophets" (Num 11:29) (Directory p. 61).

Integrating Apostolate and Religious Life

From the outset Fr. d'Alzon considered the Assumptionists (as later the Oblate Sisters) to be apostles as much as religious

. To a point, this was implicitly the case with most founders in the 19th century. However, Fr. d'Alzon dwelt with particular

insistence on the unity of purpose

of his congregation. He conceives the coming of the Reign in us (sought by our religious life) and around us (in our apostolate) as one single goal. He begins the first Constitutions with these words:

"The goal...is to work toward our perfection by extending the Reign of Jesus Christ in souls," and further, "The coming of the Reign of Jesus Christ for ourselves and for our neighbor is what

we propose before everything else” (F.D. p. 15).

Wherever pursuit of religious perfection on the one hand, and any mission to serve mankind on the other hand, have been seen as two distinct goals, it has proven quite difficult (particularly in modern institutes that are religious-apostolic) to avoid two opposite tendencies: first, that of viewing the demands of ministerial service as an encroachment on religious life, and second, the tendency on the part of the religious apostle to give priority to one goal over the other, seeking either the one that is less demanding or, more likely, the one that allows for more distraction. Obviously prayer life and community spirit remain forever endangered by excessive outside involvement. Fr. d'Alzon's concept of the unity of goal in our life can help avoid such deviations. It also directs us, positively, to seek in a life of prayer and community the guidance and spiritual energy needed to fulfill our mission. The Vatican decree on religious life attaches to the matter as much importance as did our Founder when it says:

In such communities the very nature of religious life requires apostolic action and services... Hence the entire religious life of the members should be penetrated by an apostolic spirit as their apostolic activities should be animated by a religious spirit (Vatican II, Decree on Religious Life , 8).

Even though the religious must first seek to establish the kingdom of Jesus Christ in themselves, for Fr. d'Alzon holiness can in no way be individualistic and centered upon itself. Zeal for the salvation of souls is connatural to it. Given the connection between the two major commandments - love for God and love for neighbor - it is impossible for anyone to be a real Christian without caring for the welfare of fellow-humans. Caring for their temporal welfare leads beyond the observance of justice to all kinds of physical assistance, once called “works of mercy.” Caring for the spiritual welfare of fellow-humans implies concern for their spiritual needs, i.e. for the truth that tells them about God, their destiny, and the way to live. In that sense all men who are privileged with the gift of faith are called not only to seek God for their own welfare but to bring God to people. All are called to be apostles.

Both priests and laymen

To achieve this lofty purpose, Fr. d'Alzon insists on inviting both priests and laymen to cooperate in his apostolic enterprises. “They (the government) do not want religious Orders,” he declared as he initiated his “Association de l'Assomption” in December, 1845.

Priests and laymen unite in a common spirit of devotion, with the purpose of achieving - God willing - what those Orders had meant to do, that is to contribute to the coming of the reign of Jesus Christ by providing youth with a Christian education... For the moment we shall begin by ourselves forming a community, a first attempt at an association of priests and laymen, the ones adopting the rules of religious life, the others endeavoring to be novices of a Third Order, all of us joining in one same exchange of charitable influence, of mutual edification... (E.S. pp. 1289-1291. See

C.L.

pp. 12-15;

E.S.

pp. 1425 ff.;

Instructions aux Tertiaires de l'Assomption, 1878-1879

;

M.S.

p. 39).

Even before he actually founded the Order, Fr. d'Alzon thought of associating lay people to it. On October 1, 1845, he writes to Mother Marie-Eugénie:

Yesterday the institution of a Third Order was decided. It will bear the name 'Association' until the Order itself exists. At Mass they offered themselves to God. Between now and Christmas we will place ourselves in a state of probation or postulancy; from Christmas on and for one year we will make our novitiate. It was all agreed upon... And so that is the laying of a first stone. From the Association there will emerge two branches: the Order and the Third Order (V.L. p. 320).

II

The time and effort that Fr. d'Alzon devoted with perseverance over the years to instructing and encouraging these lay associates, men and women, show how much he valued their religious fervor and their collaboration in the apostolate.

The perspectives of the new institute are immense but Fr. d'Alzon does not get lost in pure idealism: he aims to save the college as the principal urgency; to use the college as a means to help Catholicism radiate in southern France; to attract and enroll people of good will in order to promote educational and charitable endeavors.

In this perspective, the new institute adopts quite instinctively the motto Thy Kingdom Come (A. Sage, *Retraite* 1955, p. 2).

To the last year of his life he reflected on what he called the Spirit of the Assumption. He felt the full weight of his responsibility as a founder to say all that the Lord would inspire him in order to complete the definition of that Spirit (Sage, *Retraite* 1955, pp. 2-3). [\[18\]](#)

CHAPTER FIVE

PROMOTING THE REIGN OF GOD

The Reign and the theological virtues

In the first Constitutions, Fr. d'Alzon defines the “religious” (theological) virtues that are to be the primary means of contributing to the Reign of God, namely Faith, Hope and Charity (F.D, p. 15 ff.). The Kingdom is established in us and in others first of all by the theological virtues. It is in reference to them that we must practice the virtues of poverty, chastity and obedience according to the letter and spirit of the Gospel.

Christ reigns in whoever believes in Him, hopes in Him, loves Him, and seeks to extend in others his reign “of truth, of love and of peace” (Preface of the feast of Christ the King).

Father Sage summarizes Father d'Alzon's thought on the part played by the theological virtues for the coming of the Kingdom in both the life and apostolate of his religious.

Faith places us under the authority of the Church and of the Sovereign Pontiff, for whom Fr. d'Alzon, as opposed to the Protestants and the Gallicans, had a veritable cult. The Assumption presents itself as a new "militia" at the service of Jesus Christ, Word of God and Eternal Truth.

Hope (to which are tied poverty and humility; here, as in St. Augustine, humility teaches the very soul of poverty) is expressed particularly by prayer under a double form: prayer of petition, and the aspiring of the soul toward God, who is the principle and end of religious life, indeed of all the baptized.

Charity, the love of God, is the very root of the virtue of chastity and of the spirit of mortification. The love of Jesus Christ is expressed by imitating his virtues; love of the Blessed Virgin and love of the Church is the source of zeal for salvation of souls.

The life of the Assumptionist must be above all a practice of the theological virtues. He goes "to God by knowledge of the Son in the love of the Holy Spirit". Thus is emphasized the primacy of the supernatural, i.e. of God and his life and grace, which is a distinctive mark of our spirit (M. S. p. 200; A. Sève, *Ma vie c'est le Christ* , ch. 3).

In religious life, the three evangelical virtues of poverty, chastity, and obedience do not have priority over the theological virtues. Rather they consolidate them by means of a more total renunciation of the world, of sin and of Satan (M. S. pp. 48-49, 200-201).

Religious life dedicates us more intimately to the service of the three divine persons. Obedience submits us to the power of the Father; poverty, to the wisdom of the Son; chastity, to the love of the Holy Spirit. The evangelical counsels exercise our faith through obedience; our hope through poverty; and through chastity, our charity toward God and our neighbor.

The Reign means divine life within us

For every Christian, the practice of virtues - especially faith, hope and charity - actually is a response to God; it is the making of spiritual life. In his first letter to the master of novices (F.D. pp. 99-103) Fr. d'Alzon writes:

The Kingdom of God is within you...it is the state of intimate communication with God that we must attain... (F.D. p. 99).

At this point we can only mention where the intimate communication leads the soul: God's Reign within us, his dwelling in the soul, to the point of his being incarnate in it, so that one can say with Paul: "For to me, life means Christ" (Phil 1:21). This, the result of the Reign of Christ within us, represents the summit of Father d'Alzon's interior life and spiritual teaching. It will be dwelt upon in the chapter on the love of God (chapter 6).

The Reign of Christ in the soul is fully achieved only at the end of each one's lifetime. In the letter on its coming within us, Fr. d'Alzon goes on to describe its development in the soul. One must begin with the purification of the soul that enables Christ to take over, bringing light and energy. Progress depends upon the generosity in detachment from creatures and in serving the Lord (F.D. pp. 99-100).

Also, my very dear Brothers, I could not possibly overemphasize the need for serious reflection before you undertake this work. If you feel called to perfection, do not hesitate. But remember that once you have put your hand to the plow you must not look back... (F.D. p. 101).

At the same time, Fr. d'Alzon warns that the Reign implies our absolute dependence upon God (F.D. pp. 101-103). As a result,

...we are here to obey him to the full extent of our gratitude for his blessings, our understanding of his rights and his gifts, and all the power for action he has given us... Let us therefore seek this Kingdom of God, my very dear Brothers. Let us proclaim it with all the fullness of our freedom and love. God does not want to reign over slaves but over free souls. He wants to reign over sons whom he is able to love with paternal tenderness and whom he can place on his throne to reign with him in his Kingdom... (F.D. pp.101-102). [\[19\]](#)

Promoting the Reign around us: the dispositions required

I cannot love Jesus Christ without wishing all creatures to love Him and that is why my life should be that of an apostle (Directory p. 107).

The would-be apostle must attend to his own sanctification first and always.

Before working to make Jesus Christ reign over others, do make him reign over yourself (E.S. p. 663).

It is our whole life that must bear witness, not merely testifying that Jesus Christ is the Master of history, but showing the lordship of Jesus in our everyday life, to a point where one can say: For me, to live is Christ

... Ever mindful that Christ's reign is a reign of love, of the love that we offer our brothers, in whom Christ dwells. Father d'Alzon in the second letter on God's Kingdom around us

states what dispositions are required of one who is to spread the kingdom:

1. Consecration to the service of God:

We shall consecrate ourselves to prayer and the ministry (Acts 6:4).

2. Poverty

This freedom from preoccupations strikes us as indispensable.. as one of the conditions of all moral freedom... Apostolic poverty is for us the guarantee of greatness and dignity of character... I implore you then, my dear Brothers, to flee from the love of wealth (which is) one of the greatest degradations of our time and the destruction of all aspirations to Christian

perfection.

3. Acceptance of deceptions, persecutions and suffering.

And so they left the presence of the Sanhedrin glad to have the honor of suffering humiliation for the sake of the name (Acts 5:41) (F.D. pp. 105-106).

In this connection, Fr. d'Alzon, in one of the Nîmes lectures to the Sisters, entitled "The Crowning of Thorns", shows how Christ established his kingship by undergoing the humiliation and suffering of his Passion (E.S. p. 931 ff.).

While preaching to the Sisters and to the Fathers in 1876, Fr. d'Alzon again lists attitudes that he deems essential for fulfilling one's apostolic mission, namely:

A broad inclusive love for everyone in the kingdom of God.

Selflessness, which Fr. d'Alzon and the Chapter of 1868 gave us as a guiding principle (M.S. p.118 & F.D. pp. 85-86).

Intensity of apostolic desire.

But without wanting to do everything nor having our collaborators undertake too much (E.S. p. 692 ff.).

Toward the end Fr. d'Alzon feels the need to insist on holiness. In 1878, he writes to Fr. Picard: "I believe that our major project for the next year must consist, above all, in the sanctification of

the souls entrusted to us...we must be bent on producing saints and on urging saintly souls to help us...". Fr. d'Alzon is haunted by the need for holiness in his religious family. "Pray insistently for the sanctification of all the members of our little family; we need great saints. A few saints would accomplish more than thousands of mediocre religious" (M.S. p. 177), be it only because love cannot be silent:

We cannot not speak

, said St. Peter to the Sanhedrin, impelled by the concern to proclaim the truth and even more by a love so intense that it was ready to surrender life itself.

The means for promoting the Reign

In the first Constitutions Fr. d'Alzon, having stated (as quoted above) that the means of furthering the reign of Christ "for our neighbor" are "the works of zeal specified below", returns to this subject when speaking of love of neighbor:

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...

...Charity will reveal to us that spirit of unity which our Lord asked of his Father... (F.D. p. 18).

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

1) Education...

2) Publications...

3) Works of charity...

4) Retreats...

5) Foreign Missions (F.D. pp. 19-20).

The third letter on the coming of the Kingdom of God (F.D. pp. 107-118) deals with the means of promoting the Reign. In the judgment of Fr. Sage, this letter is of capital importance.

With eyes fixed on the motto which requires that we work for the coming of the Kingdom of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, in the face of innovators who deny the authority of God and who attack Jesus Christ and his Church, our Founder establishes, among the means of apostolate, a hierarchy of values from which we are asked not to stray. To general considerations, he adds remarks of circumstance that have lost nothing of their actuality (M.S. p.125).

Given the importance of this letter, it may be appropriate to highlight itand, first, the general considerations put forth by Fr. d'Alzon. They come as a reminder that multiple apostolates in which the small group of his religious are already engaged comes under

a broad vision which must nourish our common life and serve as a bond to bring together all our various efforts.

Our motto...gives this main idea. We want to cooperate as much as we can in any effort to extend the reign of the three persons of the Holy Trinity (F.D. p. 107).

1. **The reign of God the Father.** No one wants God anymore... Our first task is to proclaim the rights of God and his sovereign dominion over all creation.

2. **The reign of God the Son...** as man the King of a regenerated society. His reign is that of revealed truth. His kingdom is the Church... Christ lives among us in the preaching of the truth,

in the Blessed Sacrament and in his Vicar... (Hence our duties:) defense of revealed truth, cult of the Eucharist, dedication to the Holy See.

3. **The reign of the Holy Spirit**, (who) introduces...to the world of sanctity and proposes... the most perfect model in the Blessed Virgin his Spouse. (Hence) duties we must assume if we want to be faithful to our motto: proclamation of the supernatural order, the imitation of the Blessed Virgin's virtues, and the ministry to Congregations of women... The reign of God the Father in the universe, the reign of God the Son in the Church, the reign of the Holy Spirit in souls; such is, it seems to me, the central idea which must inspire the Assumptionist family (F.D. pp. 107-108).

After these general considerations, Fr. d'Alzon, looking at the position of the Church in today's world, writes:

I shall add two others, which I shall continually stress: the position which the Church must take toward disappearing societies; and the initiative of the Church toward advancing democracy (F. D. p. 109).

Perhaps the thoughts most relevant for our time are the following:

It is obvious that democracy is advancing more strongly and irresistibly each day and that it will continue to do so unless, in the plans of Divine Providence, it is crushed by some unheard of despotism. Must the Church despair of the future? No, a thousand times no. However, I cannot repeat it too often, my dear Brothers, we must be all things to all men. That is why we must make every effort to have as much contact as possible with the common people. And that is why it seems to me that we must do all we can to engage in apostolates to the common people. It is by the evangelization of the poor that the evangelization of the world began. In this respect let us be faithful to our vocation (F.D. p. 110) (See also C.L. pp. 1-5).

In the third section of that letter, Fr. d'Alzon says that the particular goal of our Order is

1. to help the Church... in her struggle against the satanic principle of the Revolution.
2. to let the old condemned societies fall...to accept freedom straightforwardly...and to point out to democracy all that Christianity has given the world from the point of view of fraternal and universal equality...

These thoughts, my very dear Brothers, must encourage you to set your sights on the highest values. You have magnificent deeds to accomplish in working to extend the Kingdom of God according to your motto (F.D. pp. 110-111).

In one of the Nîmes lectures to the Sisters of the Assumption, Fr. d'Alzon addresses again the question of the means for bringing about the kingdom in society. He suggests (and comments upon) the following:

- 1- Proclaim the rights of God between the poor and the rich...
- 2- Have an influence through adoration ...”putting oneself...under the weight of God.”...
- 3- Extend the Kingdom of Jesus Christ in society... You do not need to do so by political action...but by reforming social morals and helping people to be Christian...
- 4- Make Jesus Christ known to souls in personal contacts, as best one can...
- 5- Work for the Kingdom of Jesus Christ which is the Church. (E.S. p. 666 ff.)

In conclusion, one may read Fr. d'Alzon's thoughts on the timeliness of the Congregation, founded as it is to bring God back to society (F.D. pp. 103-104). In particular these lines.

Today, it is with the Revolution that we must deal. God has been driven out of modern society by Satan, the head of the Revolution. One can scarcely recognize God under the form of some vague notion of Providence...

...if it is true that God calls us, as we believe it is, then our vocation is admirable, both by its timeliness and the greatness of its goal...(F.D. p. 104).

What is meant here by Revolution? Before Emmanuel d'Alzon focused on the Reign of God as the goal of his life, he had long been impressed and perturbed by the spectacle of man rejecting God. That rejection had reached new heights during the Age of Enlightenment. It had been a leading incentive of the French Revolution. Consequently d'Alzon was led to call Revolution the general revolt against God that continued in his time and which would prevail throughout the century and beyond. D'Alzon's proclamation of the Reign of God was the direct reply to the "Revolution" as it is to the atheism of all ages.

In the words of Vatican II, "the goal of the messianic people is the kingdom of God, which has been begun by God himself on earth, and which is to be further extended until it is brought to perfection by Him at the end of time. Then Christ our life will appear (Col 3:40) and creation itself also will be delivered from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the sons of God (Rom 8:21) (Constitution on the Church 9; see also 5 ff.).

PART II

FOR LOVE

OF

JESUS CHRIST

CHAPTER SIX

THE WAY TO A GREATER LOVE

Trials made Father d'Alzon realize the need of a greater love

In his early forties, Fr. d'Alzon carried on with his duties as Vicar General of the diocese, conducting the college, directing his fledgling Congregation and drafting its Constitutions. But he was much troubled by the fact that the Congregation was attracting too few candidates. At the same time, the College suffered recurring deficits which repeatedly threatened its very existence.

On May 19, 1854, he fell seriously ill with what was diagnosed as cerebro-spinal meningitis. It affected his nervous system and his ability for intellectual work. At times, even a minor concern or a thunderstorm caused such headaches as to prevent him from writing, from praying the Rosary, or even from conversing. He who had labored with exceptional energy was, at the age of 44, compelled to live at a very slow pace for several years. All this gave Emmanuel d'Alzon a cruel experience of the Cross. "The dark night of faith, he writes, "appears to me like an abyss in which one must plunge while clutching the Cross and accepting all that it teaches and signifies" (E.S. p. 814). Nevertheless he remained at peace.

In January, 1852, he had written to Mother Marie-Eugénie:

I feel altogether disposed to will what God wills, but it hurts. Yet I don't complain, far from it...suffering, sadness are all for the good when they are offered to Our Lord with peace and resignation (E.S. p. 809).

And again in February, 1852,

God wants us to do his work in the midst of suffering. This morning, I placed myself as an instrument in his hands so that he may use me, break me, or leave me in a corner. It seems that I do want to be all his (E.S. p. 809).

On May 19, 1854, just before he took sick, he wrote:

It seems that Our Lord is taking possession of my heart. Is it an illusion? I seem to be receiving an abundance of graces; I am suffering a little; I am tired, at times distracted, my imagination wanders and, yet, I think I am going in God's direction. I seem to be in a condition that will prove quite valuable if I profit from it, [but] very dangerous if I do not make progress (T.L. I, pp. 428-429).

In February, 1855, he wrote:

I thank God more than I can tell you for my suffering. It seems to me that he makes me clearly feel my nothingness and the need to lean only on him (T.L. I, p. 525) (See Fr. d'Alzon's remarkable letter about the Crucifix, E.S. pp. 1229-1232).

In July, 1855, he pleaded with his parents for the sake of the College.

I spent a terrible day struggling to obtain Anglas [a family property] and that Nîmes [the College] not be closed next year. The rest is in the hands of God. If he sends pupils, he will show that he wants the school to exist; if he does not we will close (T.L. I, p. 566).

In the face of these severe trials and apparent failures, Fr. d'Alzon came to feel that the main source of difficulty in his apostolate and in that of the Congregation was a lack of the love of Christ that has to animate any apostolic endeavor. It became evident to him that if the pursuit of the kingdom was not doing well, it was due to the fact that he did not love Christ enough to be urged on to his service. And, indeed, while the **A.R.T.** [\[20\]](#) expressed his purpose, **why** should he want the coming of the Reign?

The only valid reason or motive for our wanting Christ to reign and for wanting it with enough earnestness was that we love Christ - with an effective love.

God seemed to want the Order to live and last. Quite evidently it possessed a distinguishing spirit which the religious valued. It was for fear of its being diluted that they refused offers of fusion with other young congregations. On the other hand sometimes the Order seemed to totter, perhaps because it was not sufficiently enlivened by love of Our Lord. Years later, Father d'Alzon dedicated the 4th letter to the Master of Novices to the love which urges us to work for the coming of the Kingdom (F.D. pp.112-119). Thus: "**Propter amorem Domini Nostri Jesu Christi** , " **For the love of our Lord Jesus Christ** , became our second motto.

Study and prayer in order to love

It was Fr. d'Alzon's firm conviction that in order to grow in the love of God one needed to learn about Jesus Christ through assiduous study and to contemplate him in prayer.

In the fourth Circular letter, Fr. d'Alzon declares the need of study as a means of salvation, as

protection against temptations, and as a requirement of the apostolate (C.L. pp. 18-25). In the Directory

, Part 3, chapter 8, Fr. d'Alzon points to that latter motive for study: namely, to prepare for the task of education. But in Part 1, chapter 7, he urges the study of Jesus Christ. By the fact that the object of our study is God, Jesus Christ, and the Church, we are reminded of the need of study above all to nurture our prayer and contemplation.

All this requires giving a particular focus to our studies. Fr. d'Alzon does not consider himself a scholar. He does not underestimate the importance of science nor of the scientific explanation of Catholic doctrine, but his interest lies in the diffusion of Catholic doctrine, and in putting into practice its spiritual and social applications. Hence, he focuses on the more basic truths, on those most firmly established, in order to assimilate them and make them yield fruit. It does seem that Emmanuel d'Alzon, from youth, considered it impossible for himself and at least for most people to demonstrate fully by reason the truths by which we live. This conviction led him to a clear perception of the need in the Church of a supreme authority that is infallible.

At the same time, he realized that the Church needed to intensify ecclesiastical studies (M.S. p. 127). Coincidentally with Vatican I, he himself finds new interest in the study of philosophy, especially with St. Thomas Aquinas and Aristotle (M.S.

pp. 128-129). In the wake of the Vatican Council, he valued doctrine and study more than works of the kind that his men were performing at rue François Ier. This led him to propose that they initiate, however modestly, a "free", i.e. private, university (

M.S.

p. 131).

[\[21\]](#)

Father d'Alzon therefore is very much aware that in order to love God, we need to know Him. He cherishes the thought: *We love by virtue of what we know and we strive to know more in order to love more. To know God truthfully we need to study.*" In the spirit of Augustine, Father d'Alzon tied together study and love, so that love would not be illusory and the study not a loveless encounter. "Jesus called me his friend!"

A word about the need of mental prayer or contemplation

From his youth, Fr. d'Alzon prayed constantly. At Nîmes, he proclaimed the need of prayer and

organized praying Communities: a Carmel, then Adorers of the Blessed Sacrament, and finally the Religious of the Assumption (M.S. p. 64 ff.). He established practices of adoration and Holy Hours for men and women. He practiced and preached a marked devotion to the Blessed Sacrament. He wrote chapters in the Directory, circulars, and a meditation on prayer - both of petition and contemplation. The fourth letter to the Master of Novices, speaks of love for Our Lord in a way that can facilitate the practice of mental prayer (F.D. pp. 112-118. See 119 note 1).

The saints were blessed with these dispositions, with graces of contemplation, and the Holy Spirit helped their contemplation. The greatest example is that of Mary, our Blessed Mother. Fr. d'Alzon, in his deep devotion to Mary, realized that she is for us a model of all virtues. In particular he points to her faith and her contemplation. We have a great need of the example of the Blessed Virgin in our contemplation, and we also need her assistance - for which we can pray. There lies the significance and value of the Rosary: to meditate on the mysteries, in the company of Mary, to beg her to assist us always (Directory, III, ch. 16).

In the fifth Circular, Fr. d'Alzon speaks of the spirit of "oraison" i.e. mental prayer or prayer of contemplation (C.L. pp. 26-36). As Fr. Sage points out, "For the Assumptionists 'oraison' is the study of divine Truth, so as to better know one's duties and to fulfill them, for the greater advantage of the Church and with deep love" (E. S. p. 215). Fr. d'Alzon has an original insight of the steps to be taken in contemplation of God: go to God through our faith-knowledge of Jesus Christ, and in the love of the Holy Spirit.

With all this, Fr. d'Alzon is quite conscious of the difficulty there is in loving the invisible. He is familiar with the struggles required to seek and maintain the contact. "Find your joy in placing yourself as low as possible, but as the closest to Him" (T.L. I, p. 87). He revives faith in the mysterious Presence. He writes to Mother Marie-Eugénie:

Our Lord is deep in your soul through grace; He inhabits you by faith despite your being sometimes arid and desolate. Being always God, He acts as God in your soul... I have God in me by His grace and His love; He is ready to take action in me as God with all his might on condition that I let him take over (T.L. I, p. 101).

During the General Chapter of 1876, Fr. d'Alzon gave a talk on prayer, which was subsequently called a "second circular on contemplation." He writes:

I have already spoken in a Circular (the 5th) of the spirit with which we must contemplate, "faire oraison". I will today consider by what conditions our contemplation will enter into that spirit. They are:

the habit of the presence of God, humility, silence, austerity, and devotion to the Holy Spirit (E. S. p. 291).

In the Major Meditations, Fr. d'Alzon states the conditions for a fruitful prayer, particularly for a prayer of petition. They are :

attention, humility, trust, hope, perseverance, adoration, thanksgiving (E.S. pp. 419-426).

In a Major Meditation on mental prayer, Fr. d'Alzon quotes St. Augustine's Confessions almost throughout (E.S. pp. 427-448). The points he makes are :

1- Mental prayer is the effort to unite with God here below. D'Alzon comments on St. Augustine's example: a constant and humble search for God.

2- The means to do so is to be separated from creatures and to seek lasting friendship, not here below but in God.

3- The goal is union with the Holy Trinity - Sovereign Goodness. It can happen only through love, a love that is found only in Our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Meditations on Perfection (published in 1926-1927) were drafted by Fr. d'Alzon in

1873-1877. The General Chapter had asked him to write a letter telling novices how to meditate and contemplate. He preferred to offer these meditations, drawing from a rich source of accumulated sermons and notes.

In the chapter on the love of Christ in the Trinity and on the "Triple Love," we will meet with more examples of contemplation as practiced by Fr. d'Alzon himself.

Fr. Sage reports thoughts from Fr. d'Alzon's later years that reveal the intensity of our Founder's prayer life and at the same time its patient perseverance: "Fr. d'Alzon always kept hidden under the cloak of an intense activity the secret of his interior life... But a few notes from his last years of life allow us to guess how, hidden in the presence of God by a continuous life of contemplation, he overcame the pressing troubles of his time." He sought to be ready for the final call of Jesus (M.S. p. 176).

I try to make as much mental prayer as possible. Surprisingly, it is when I have persevered through the dreariness of an arid, distracted, and unpleasant session of prayer that I find I do good to souls. All my efforts are bent on learning to pray. (ibid.)

In 1878 he wrote:

How I feel the utility of prayer. It is the principle of St. Augustine: 'God meant us to fight more with prayers than with our own strength.' How true it is that prayer achieves more than personal strength (ibid.).

In January, 1880:

I am as distracted in my prayers as anything and [yet] I believe I am never away from God (ibid.).

For study and contemplation to foster love of God, there must of course be humility and

submissiveness on the part of the creature.

For the human soul becomes like God to the extent granted by its subjecting itself to God, in order to be honored and enlightened... The further, therefore, that the soul departs from God, not in space, but in its affection and in lust for things beneath it, the more it is filled with foolishness and misery. And thus the return to God is by love, a love by which the soul strives to place itself not in contention with God but beneath Him. The more urgent and zealous the soul has been in doing this, the more blessed and sublime it will be. And its freedom will be perfect with God alone as its lord" (St. Augustine, De mor 1:11: 20-21, quoted by Robert Meagher in An Introduction to Augustine , p. 32).

Such is the love that impelled Emmanuel d'Alzon to dedicate his life to the Coming of the Reign. In the following chapter we will see how d'Alzon perceived the God that he loved.

CHAPTER SEVEN

LOVING GOD

Consider first the love with which God loves us. As St. John says, "Love...consists in this: not that we have loved God but that He has loved us and has sent his Son as an offering for our sins." (1 Jn 4:10).

God's first gift to us is that of existence. But not all people realize God's love for us as it is manifested in creation. The act of creation is ongoing. God preserves us now in existence. He also makes and keeps in existence for us, a world with an inexhaustible display of beauty in the stars, and on our earth, with oceans, mountains and plains, forests and rivers, flowers and fruits; with a "kingdom of living things all meant to be under our domination, on condition that we recognize our dependence on Him, so that He can shower on us further gifts and so that we

may put these to good use for our happiness as well as for His glory.”

No creature can fathom how much love God is constantly offering us. Saints, like Augustine and Francis of Assisi, marveled at creation, sang the praises of God and loved Him in return. Such is our common destiny. Christ brought it within our reach when, dying for us, He healed us and reconciled us with the Father.

In a meditation on love of neighbor, Fr. d'Alzon reflects on the love that God has for His creatures (*Méditations sur la Perfection religieuse*, I, p. 125):

God created souls in His likeness in order to converse with them in the earthly paradise if they remained in original justice, then to establish them in eternal bliss.

The first man, by violating his calling, brought sin onto the earth; death entered also and God loved the world to the point of giving His Son in order that through the death of this son, who was God made man, the world might be saved. *Sic Deus dilexit...*

He made himself our food so that, sustained by such a nourishment, we might conquer all the obstacles erected between heaven and us. He founded His Church in order to gather into it all the elect. He accepted that the saints be persecuted by the wicked. He accepted all sorts of insults for love of us.

Loving Christ

The most effective way for God to tell mankind about His love, and to prove it with an evidence perceptible to human minds and hearts, was the incredibly loving gesture of His becoming one of us, to reveal Himself to us and to give His life for us, that we might be touched, seek forgiveness as He offers it to us and at least accept His embrace!

Why is the Passion/Death of Christ the central object of the saints' contemplation, if not

because it is there that one most clearly realizes His love? (See E.S. p. 876).

How is man to return God's love? Father d'Alzon gives us the answer in the Directory which he bequeathed to his sons as the most important document after the Constitutions (of 1855).

It is in the Directory that Fr. d'Alzon reveals his inspiration regarding the love of God. Its publication in 1859 marks the beginning of the second phase in the development of our spirituality. Fr. Sage mentions two factors that prepared Fr. d'Alzon for this second phase; first the severe trials endured from 1854 to 1859 (see chapter 6 above), then his growing awareness - in the very midst of his suffering - of the need for generous souls to take on the likeness of Christ in the Eucharist, in order to ward off the attacks against the Church and to work for the advent of Christ's reign. He aims to inculcate in them an interior life that will direct them equally toward personal saintliness and toward an apostolic zeal for the triumph of the Church. His dream for the Order is that it be fired with a new generosity and love for Our Lord. Such is the atmosphere that gave birth to the Directory (Retreat of 1955, p. 3).

In the first part of the Directory, our love is addressed to Our Lord Jesus Christ, first as God in whose life we are called to participate (chap. 2); then as man, since His humanity reflects the infinite perfection of God. We are to live in awareness of His presence (chap. 6), reflecting on His teaching, His mysteries and His actions (chap. 7), with a particular devotion to the Blessed Sacrament (chap. 2, #4; see also Sage, Commentaire, pp. 44-47).

Our love of Jesus Christ reaches Jesus' own greatest loves, that of Mary, His mother, and that of the Church, His Spouse (Directory, chapters 3 & 4). This "triple love" as it has been designated is presented by Fr. d'Alzon as a characteristic of the spirit of the Congregation (Directory, chap. 1). Father Fulbert Cayré writes:

"These three loves would contain nothing characteristic unless they were made profoundly real and in some way given value by a powerful interior spirit, which Father borrows from his masters, especially St. Augustine. The basis of this spirit is an intense theological love centered on Christ living in the Church. The motto *Adveniat Regnum Tuum* means as much." [\[22\]](#)

It may appear strange that the Directory speaks first of the love of Jesus Christ, of the Blessed Virgin, and of the Church, while the love of God is addressed only in the second part (chap. 7). However, Fr. d'Alzon is mindful of the fact that the Law of love transmitted by Moses had been a heavy burden until God's love showed itself in Christ and elicited our love in return. "Come to me," says Jesus, "all ye who are weary and find life burdensome and I will refresh you" (Mt 11:28 & see Sage Commentaire, pp. 24-25). Besides, for Fr. d'Alzon, as for all Christians, the way to know and love God is to know and love Jesus Christ.

Yet, whereas the general inclination, especially in our day, is to dwell first and principally on the humanity of Christ, Fr. d'Alzon gives priority to the divinity. "Philip, ... who sees me sees the Father" (Jn 14:9). When in the Directory (chap. 2) he begins to talk of the love of Jesus Christ, he immediately goes to the love of the Blessed Trinity. For him an initial acquaintance with Christ leads one immediately to God.

If we are deeply touched by the Savior's kindness in our regard, it is inasmuch as this kindness emanates from the heart of God. His most sacred Humanity reaches the depths of our being because it is the Humanity of the Word of God. In Christ, it is the Word of God that we love (cf. Sage, Commentaire, p. 34; & Tavad, Weight of God, p. 45). "He is God," exclaims Fr d'Alzon, "and so it will be as God that He will be ever present in my mind and heart" (Directory, chap. 6).

Now, when a simple creature is elevated to the intimacy and love of God, its responding love has to be one of adoration, a most absolute adoration of God. Adoration marks the advent of God's reign in and around us. It appears as the beginning of the world's regeneration. Fr. d'Alzon was deeply stirred by the fact that "the great crime of modern times is that God is not sufficiently adored, is not sufficiently acknowledged as the Sovereign Master of all things" (E.S. p. 1260). Consequently, our mission is to adore God and help Him be adored. For adoration is the greatest, the most fervent love possible in the human heart (Sage, Commentaire, p.35). In a meditation on the Eucharist, he writes: "Jesus is my God, Eternal Word. Although he took the form of a slave, and reduced Himself to nothing in the midst of the humiliations of Calvary and the admirable helplessness of the tabernacle, He remains forever the splendor of the Father and eternal God, worthy of my adoration" (E.S. p. 948).

By reacting against the spirit of revolt, Fr. d'Alzon insisted repeatedly on the spirit of adoration. Adoration of the Blessed Trinity and of the Blessed Sacrament is one of the basic traits of our spirituality. Preaching to the "Adoratrices" in 1862, Fr. d'Alzon develops the theme: God is power, God is light, God is love (E.S. pp. 1274-1281). Elsewhere he dwells on the Divine attributes and on the Blessed Trinity (E.S. pp. 864-874). It is partly in the spirit of adoration of the Blessed Trinity that Fr. d'Alzon found the most profound and most original of his ideas on prayer, education, modern apostolate and Eucharistic devotion.

From Christ to the Blessed Trinity

The fact of seeing the Godhead in Christ first and above all leads Fr. d'Alzon to a strongly trinitarian spirituality. "When shall I go to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, through Christ?" (Directory, p. 7). Therefore, to love the "whole Jesus Christ means in the first place to love through Him the mystery of the Three. That is what specifies Christianity, even if it has all too little significance for the Christian masses" (Sève, Ma vie c'est le Christ, p. 107).

The love between the Father and the Son is God Himself, and it is through this love who is the Holy Spirit that I am enabled to love God, 'because the love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit which has been given us' (Rm 5:5). God the Father has given me His Son, who in turn has given me both Himself and the Love between Him and His Father; He has made my heart a temple, a holy place, in which is enshrined the Love who is God. What then must my heart be? Could it ever harbor any thought which cannot be set ablaze with the love of God? (Directory, p. 6).

In the third letter to the Master of Novices (F.D. p 107), Fr. d'Alzon explains that the reign we want to further as much as we can is that of the Three Persons of the Holy Trinity. Thereupon he describes his understanding of the reign of the Three Persons. He also indicates which Assumptionist activities would help extend the reign of each divine person. Then, pointing to the condition of society and of the Church of his time, he suggests what attitude and what concrete form the Assumptionist apostolate should adopt for the years ahead. Fr. d'Alzon's reasoning can help succeeding generations discern the desirable orientations of Assumptionist apostolate.

Knowing Jesus Christ in his humanity

As Father d'Alzon writes:

However important the contemplation of Jesus as the Second Person may be, we know His divine life only through the Incarnation, when the Word became the God-man. This approach to the mystery of Jesus dwells on the contemplation of Christ's humanity. This is the key to history: when the fullness of time was come...the Word took flesh. All who lived before contributed to the preparation of the Incarnation; all those who live after are in a world radically altered by that event. 'The foundation of the world is Jesus Christ; no other one is possible (D'Alzon, *Instructions du même*, p. 52). It is the key to the history of each and every soul: through Jesus, who revealed God in his humanity, a way has been opened for each one of us to reach our final end in God (Tavard, *Weight of God*, p.56).

Hence a further chapter in the Directory, in which Fr. d'Alzon shows how the knowledge of Christ the Man reveals God.

Before I can love Jesus Christ, I must know Him, study His perfections in the Sacred Scriptures, consider in particular the things He taught, the mysteries which surround His divine nature and His actions here on earth (Directory, chap. 7).

Fr. d'Alzon in his later writings develops each of these three topics: the teaching or doctrine of Jesus, His mysteries, and His actions.

Because the love of Our Lord is a fundamental characteristic of our Congregation, it is important to inspire you with it by the most effective means. I do not know of anything more powerful than the meditation of all he did for us during His earthly life" (F.D. p. 112 ff.).

Apart from being the most perfect model for the religious, Jesus gives us in every detail of His wonderful life the proof of His love, the best reasons to love Him in return with an undivided

love. In his fourth letter to the Master of Novices, Fr. d'Alzon exemplifies the love of Jesus for us in the mysteries of the Annunciation, the Visitation, and the Nativity.

The Passion of Our Lord

Fr. d'Alzon liked to meditate and preach on the mysteries of the life of Our Lord. Witness the many meditations and sermons on these topics in *Ecrits Spirituels*. But he spent the most time meditating on the Passion. He gave several retreats on this subject. He spoke on it to the students at Nîmes and to the Tertiaries. He devoted to it ten of the fifty-three conferences of 1870-1871 (Two of these are included in E. S. pp. 931-938; pp. 1238-1242).

Here are two passages where Fr. d'Alzon points explicitly to the supreme proof of love as it appears in the Passion and Death of Our Lord:

1 - In a short meditation on the Cross and the Death of Our Lord, after telling of the last moments of Jesus, Fr. d'Alzon says:

What more do you want? Has Jesus loved mankind? Did their salvation cost Him enough? What will men do for Him now? Many will ignore Him; others will reject Him. He will be persecuted in His Church, in His most cherished disciples. It is proper that it be thus and will continue until the end, the struggle between the hate of hell and the mercy of heaven. However, woe to the one who knows not the meaning of the Savior's love and inexhaustible gifts! But blessed whoever profits from it, who receives in his heart the blood that flows from the transfixed heart of the Master! Blessed the one who lives in contemplation of these sorrowful mysteries and applies to himself their vivifying fruits for eternity! (E.S. pp. 929-930).

2 - Reflecting on the Passion as a proof of love, he writes:

What should Jesus Christ have done that He did not do? Die? He did die. And amidst what accompanying tortures! Before Calvary they press upon Him and they continue to torment Him

to His last breath! It is of no use to call in great sinners; rather I address what I presume to be the holiest among the people of God. Apart from original sin, could you really certify that in your past there never was any grave sin? Behold the love of the Father of the prodigal son. You were dead; he welcomes you back to life, but at the cost of dying Himself for you. Your hatred, manifested by grave sin, seems to have goaded His love anew... . What love! How not to cry out, 'Who would not love in return Him who loved us so much'? How not prove our love by accepting whatever suffering it may please Him to send? (E.S. p. 940).

Jesus gives the ultimate proof of His love when he accepts to suffer and die for the sake of the Father and for our sake: "There is no greater love than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends" (Jn 15:13). There lies the mystery of the connection between love and suffering. Why are suffering and death necessary? It must be to prove by their acceptance our good will toward One whom we had rejected. Jesus does this toward the Father, in our name. Jesus does this toward us by the fact that He accepts suffering and death from us, whom He loves and forgives.

The price Our Lord "pays" for souls urges us to join Him in winning their salvation.

Father d'Alzon confesses in a letter:

The fact of meditating on the value of souls and on the love that Our Lord has for them...urges me on the road to conversion. When I think of all Our Lord did for them and what He would do further, if He were left free to act in the depths of certain hearts, I would like, it seems to me, to use all my energy in order to help our good Master in His endeavor (E.S. p. 811). [\[23\]](#)

If we want to know Jesus, Fr. d'Alzon insists, we must go not only to the Gospel but to the supreme manifestations of Christ's love: the Cross and the Eucharist. Meditate, he adds, not only in order to love but much more to understand that you are loved. Behold Him on the Cross. As He breathes His last, He asks us: Have I loved you enough? How can we not love one who loves us that much? We are more accustomed to say "My God I love you" than to let sink into our consciousness the incredible revelation that we are loved. A better acquaintance with Jesus makes us feel loved and makes us want to love (See Directory, pp. 22-25, and E.S. pp 165 ff. 875 ff.).

The Eucharist

In the Eucharist, Fr. d'Alzon sees “the memorial of all the wonders that come from God: of the Creation by the transubstantiation; of the Incarnation by the manner in which Jesus Christ appears under the consecrated species; of the Redemption by the double consecration of the Body and the Blood; of the Resurrection by the pledge that is given there” (E.S. p. 448). “The soul, loving Jesus Christ...but unable yet to ascend to the eternal, goes to the Eucharist, which is a guarantee of it” (E.S. p. 324).

When he deals with the Eucharist, Father d'Alzon does not delve into subtle theological aspects of faith, as for example the manner of transubstantiation. He humbly accepts the mysteries of the Eucharist. In no way would he doubt that the Creator of the universe can do things that surpass our understanding. Such things are for him an occasion to admire, to adore, and to love a God who wishes, by means of these marvels of his might, to make of himself an ineffable gift to his creature. With the Church Fathers and the major spiritual authors he sees in the Eucharist a luminous proof of God's love for us.

The Eucharist gives us the “total” Jesus Christ as he is in the Blessed Trinity, in the Gospel, in the Church (See *Les Cahiers d'Alzon, Eucharistie Lumière de Vie*, pp. 18-30; and *Sève*, op. cit. pp. 134-138: a beautiful tableau, of which we can give here only an inkling).

“In Jesus-Eucharist I encounter your Son, therefore you love me. Perform in me a miracle of transformation; I encounter the Word, God, ocean of wisdom, make me see things as you see them; I encounter the Spirit [saying] ‘I loved you with eternal love’ (Jer 31:3).”

In the Gospel: To love Jesus-Host is not always easy. One needs to hear a voice, to see a face. In the texts of the liturgy, Fr. d'Alzon finds occasion to relive the Gospel and bring people closer to Jesus, who is there alive.

In the Church: For Father d'Alzon, in addition to living in each of us by virtue of holy communion, Jesus is the Church being built. Jesus gathers the members of His Body, He feeds them with the one bread: receive my body in order to be my body. “Because there is one loaf, we, many as we are, are one body; for it is one loaf of which we all partake” (1 Cor 10:17).

For Father d'Alzon, the Mass is essentially the sacrifice of Christ and a school of sacrifice. "When you go to Mass," he says, "ascend the hill of Calvary." The sacrifice transcends time and space: Calvary comes to us. "The Mass places us near Mary, with Mary's sentiments giving us Jesus anew at the peak moment of the history of the world in His most intense act of redemptive love" (Sève, op.cit. p.140, See Directory, pp.74-75).

At times there was in Fr. d'Alzon's life more suffering than (visible) success. He was then led to dwell more on the Passion of the Lord and emphasized the sacrificial aspect of the Eucharist. As he joined his sufferings to those of Christ, he found strength to bear them. It is from experience that he suggests joining Christ's non-bloody immolation at Mass, offering our own daily immolation.

When you attend the Sacrifice of Calvary, repeated on the altar, go also to the Cross, consider the marvel of a God who is nailed there on our behalf, see the nails that keep His sacred limbs fixed to the instrument of torture and ask yourselves what you can do to nail yourself to the Cross. It will be done by renouncing a certain freedom of action, by accepting the slavery of suffering, by doing all that will make you a willing slave of the Cross (E.S. pp. 1020-1021).

The more one unites with Jesus Christ in the Eucharist (communion), the more one must be one with Him in His sacrifice. That sacrifice constantly renewed must be the model of my own sacrifice. "But if I am not totally dedicated to His service, if I make calculated reservations, if I am unwilling to take on even the most difficult tasks assigned to me, then I am not worthy of my divine Master" (Directory, p. 52 and 59). In his correspondence, Fr. d'Alzon speaks very frequently of his sentiments at Mass, of the graces he sought there, of the significance of the sacrifice offered, of the Precious Blood and of the "Bread of Angels."

Evidently the Eucharist plays a most important role in the spiritual life and apostolate of Emmanuel d'Alzon. He preached on it abundantly and wrote about it extensively. Although he did not draft the chapter on the Eucharist that he meant to include in the Directory, he touches on the Eucharist in eight other chapters as it relates to the Church, to the spirit of sacrifice, etc. In the Ecrits
Spirituels
, over fifty pages deal directly with the Eucharist (pp. 448-455; 948-988). In another fifty pages the mysteries of faith and spiritual life are related to the Eucharist (pp. 1224-1281).

Assiduously, Fr. d'Alzon exhorted people to attend Mass and receive communion (contrary to

the Jansenistic prejudice of the time. See Directory, pp. 74-75; E.S. p. 985). Repeatedly he urged people to visit and adore the Blessed Sacrament. He organized groups dedicated to perpetual adoration, among both the religious and the lay people. He was most convinced of the need of Eucharistic prayer as a support for all apostolic activity.

It is no wonder that he requires of anyone wishing to join "our little family" the resolution to bear witness to his love for Our Lord by a very special devotion to the Blessed Sacrament. (Première s Constitutions , p. 110).

[\[24\]](#)

The mystical incarnation

As Emmanuel d'Alzon grew in knowledge of Christ, he gave more thought to the inhabitation of God in the soul, as St. John describes it. According to Father Sage, "the incarnation, the formation of Christ in our souls is one of the major themes of the spirituality of Fr. d'Alzon. Constantly he would adapt it to priests, to religious men and women, to tertiaries, to Children of Mary, to lay Christians" (E.S. p. 906. Pages 907-918 offer two instructions of d'Alzon on the mystical incarnation. See also M.S. pp. 41-42; 107; 119; 138; 191). The notion of the mystical incarnation, or the divinization of man, a theme that corresponds more precisely to Fr. d'Alzon's mind (M.S. p. 42) would appear to describe the final result of the reign of Christ in mankind.

As Fr. d'Alzon teaches,

the birth of Jesus Christ comes about in two ways, in the manger and in the soul. In fact the Word became flesh in Mary, He manifested Himself in Bethlehem, He manifests Himself every day in us. 'Where,' asks Saint Ambrose, 'is Christ born with greater reason than in your heart?'...

Jesus Christ is incarnate in us

- 1) to make of us a new man,

- 2) to make of us a child of God (E.S. pp. 887-888).

I consider the mystery of a God forming himself in the chaste womb of Mary and I try to discern in it what is applicable to me (E.S. p. 883).

If Mary becomes the real Mother of God, at an immense distance the mystery of the Incarnation can be fulfilled in us, in the sense that the Apostle hopes that Jesus Christ inhabits us by Christian faith: 'to dwell in your hearts through faith.' (Eph 3:17). Let us study the incarnation of Jesus in Mary, so as to learn what the incarnation of Jesus must be in us; 'The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.' (Jn 1:14) (E.S. p. 907).

'The Lord is with you,' (declared the Angel to Mary)... To form Jesus Christ in me as perfectly as possible; is not this the whole mystery of religious life? What is the time spent in novitiate, if not a period of time similar to that during which Jesus was being formed in Mary's womb? (F.D. p. 113).

Jesus, Mary, the Church...Mary, his Mother, gives her most pure blood to form the humanity of Jesus; and the Church, the bride of Jesus Christ, is completely one with her Spouse. And this is what I must work at unceasingly: to form Jesus Christ in me, to form Jesus Christ in the Church This is what is asked of me, just as Gabriel asked it of Mary (F.D. p. 115).

Just as the angel puts Mary in touch with the three Persons of the Trinity, so I enter, if I will it, in relation with the three adorable Persons... This is the goal of religious life: to form Jesus Christ in oneself. '...My children,' said St. Paul, 'you put me back in labor pains until Christ is formed in you' (Gal 4:19). To conceive Jesus Christ in oneself, that is interior life; to engender Jesus Christ in others by one's own life, to make Him manifest by one's own words, actions, and virtues, that is interior life as we must practice it, so that of us it can be said, 'The Lord is with you' (Lk 1:28) (E.S. p. 908).

I will let the Holy Trinity form Jesus Christ in me, as the Holy Trinity formed Jesus Christ in

Mary. The more I shall be docile, obedient, surrendered, the more perfect will be this image of Jesus Christ. What a marvel! When will I lose myself altogether in it? But for how long? As long as the reign of Christ. This reign will have no end: 'and his reign will be without end.' (Lk 1:33). Lord! may this sway over me never end... and may I be able to contribute in spreading it far and wide... repeating everywhere 'Thy Kingdom Come.' However, it is your will that your grace not accomplish everything. You want my will to concur. I must examine [how I can do so]. What does Mary reply [to the angel]? 'I am the servant of the Lord. Let it be done to me as you say' (Lk 1:38) (E.S. pp. 909-910).

Fr. d'Alzon dwells at some length on our cooperation in the forming of Jesus Christ in ourselves (E.S. pp. 910-913); essentially one has but to obey and remain totally available, consecrated "to the glory of God." He concludes :

We have only to let Jesus Christ operate in our souls and let him form himself there as he sees fit... Let us take Mary's virtues as a model for our own, in obedience, in humility, in contemplation, in love...to insure the triumph of Jesus Christ... We will be devoted to the triumph of the Church, to which Jesus Christ gave birth on Calvary and that he purchased with his blood.

In short, let us remember that, as the Son became incarnate in Mary by the operation of the Holy Spirit, in the shadow of the Father's power, so must we in faith form Jesus Christ in us by God's omnipotence. May it be so, and may the adorable Trinity, all three Persons operating in our soul, be pleased to abide there, so that we may deserve to dwell in it forever (E.S. pp. 912-913).

Fr. d'Alzon is very much concerned that the "complete life of Our Lord, lovingly reproduced by the Christians who seek perfection," be manifest in the life of the daughters and sons of the Assumption. As he remarks to Mother Marie-Eugénie in 1850:

...I must speak to you further about the need of having Our Lord's spirit impregnate this modest little society of the Assumption. In fact what are we doing when we allow our own spirit to grow in it? That is to say our defects, our miseries, our all too human ideas. Is it for this that people made us responsible for their salvation and sanctification? Alas! For years we have had this responsibility , and what good do we see being accomplished? ...through it all, where is the total life of our Lord being reproduced lovingly by Christians seeking perfection? It all causes me grave concern, I assure you... You and I must, as much as possible, begin to work seriously

toward our goal, which is that Jesus be known and glorified in souls... (E.S. pp. 805-806). [\[25\]](#)

The final result or divine achievement of the reign of Christ is the Incarnation of Jesus Christ in the soul. This is a major topic in Father d'Alzon's spiritual thinking (E.S. pp. 906-918). From the outset he believed that the new Institute must arise to help Jesus Christ be mystically incarnate in souls. In his early discussions with Mother Marie-Eugénie de Jésus, as they sought to discern and define their apostolic aspirations, Father d'Alzon had written her:

My passion would be the manifestation of the Man-God and the divinisation of mankind through Jesus Christ (M.S. pp. 41-42).

At that time there had taken hold in Fr. d'Alzon the first vision of our purpose and the adoption of the motto **Adveniat regnum tuum** (A. Sage, *Retraite* 1955, p. 50). That motto is expressed in the opening paragraph of the First Constitutions (

F.D.

p. 15). However, by 1865, when Father d'Alzon revises the Constitutions, he adds a second motto thus:

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 Lord's Prayer: **Adveniat Regnum Tuum,**

and in these words of the Divine Office

For love of our Lord Jesus Christ

(

P.C.

p. 107; see

M. S.

p. 96).

Knowing God's gifts, knowing his Son, Jesus Christ, in his life, in his Passion and death, in the Eucharist, all lead to loving Christ and letting him be incarnate in us. Let us conclude with two statements wherein Fr. d'Alzon proclaims his love for Christ. First, at the General Chapter of 1868, he gave sublime expression to the love that his sons are to have for Jesus Christ. One must read his own words (F.D. pp. 80-81).

Secondly, two years before his death, writing meditations that were part of his legacy, he let this hymn of love burst forth:

Who is better than Jesus Christ? Who is more beautiful? Consider the divine perfections; they are all in Jesus Christ. Or the created perfections; they are all in Jesus Christ... If I am impressed by the solution of a scientific problem, by the reading of a literary masterpiece, or by viewing nature's spectacles: vast plains, high mountains, immense oceans, what effect will the contemplation of Jesus Christ have upon me? And when this beautiful One loves us, gives Himself to us, descends into our nothingness to offer it an evermore intense life, what is there to do except plunge into the recesses of His heart? None but the damned can know Him and not love Him, To love Jesus Christ as He is better known every day, that is life. 'For to me, ' declares St. Paul, 'life means Christ; hence dying is so much gain' (Phil 1:21) (E.S. pp. 322-324).

We can well apply to Fr. d'Alzon these words of the Apostle:

I have come to rate all as loss in the light of the surpassing knowledge of my Lord Jesus Christ. For his sake I have forfeited everything; I have accounted all else rubbish so that Christ may be my wealth and I may be in him, not having any justice of my own based on observance of the law. The justice I possess is that which comes through faith in Christ. It has its origins in God and is based on faith. I wish to know Christ and the power flowing from his resurrection; likewise to know how to share in his sufferings by being formed into the pattern of his death. Thus do I hope that I may arrive at the resurrection from the dead. It is not that I have reached it yet, or have already finished my course; but I am racing to grasp the prize if possible, since I have been grasped by Christ. Brothers, I do not think of myself as having reached the finish line. I give no thought to what lies behind but push on to what is ahead (Phil 3:7-13).

More about the Triple Love

Let us dwell briefly on the theme of the "triple love" and its place in Fr. d'Alzon's spirituality. It was only in middle-age that he perceived the significance and importance of the fact that love for Christ must lead to love of Mary and the Church. To be sure, from his early years as a priest he had observed repeatedly that loving our brothers and sisters, particularly loving the Blessed Virgin and the Church, was a way of loving Christ himself. The Constitutions of 1855 alluded to that connection when they stated: "The Brothers shall remember that their dearest love, after Jesus Christ, the Blessed Virgin, the Church and the Holy Father, is for our little Congregation" (

F.D.
p. 51).

However, it was only following the cruelest trials of the mid 1850's, during the long weeks of suffering and inaction at Lavagnac and Auteuil, and when he was most totally absorbed in prayer, that our Founder perceived the profound unity of the "triple love."

He searched for a wording that would express it clearly and comprehensively. The triple love was to become an essential element of our spiritual heritage, hence the importance he attached to its formulation. It is only gradually that he arrived at the final expression. In 1854 he revealed a first insight when he confessed: "I need to love Jesus Christ much and all that he loves solely because he loves it" (E.S. p. 813).

On August 24, 1855, he restates for the women Tertiaries the basic idea of the Association des Adoratrices :

We dearly love Our Lord; we love what he loves and our sentiments become ever more similar to his own. Therefore we dearly love his Mother, we shall be happy to be considered as the children of her glory. We shall dearly love his Church, which is his spouse, born on the cross from his open side (M.S. p. 73).

In 1856, Fr. d'Alzon writes to François Picard who was being ordained:

As you know, when Our Lord entrusted the Church to St. Peter, he put to him this one question, 'Do you love me more than these?' The essential thing is that you love Our Lord very much and all that he loved, that is to say, the Blessed Virgin and the Church (E.S. p. 772).

By September 1858, when he sends Father Picard to be superior in Rethel, he tells him:

Remember that the spirit of the Assumption is the love of Our Lord, of the Blessed Virgin, his

Mother, and of the Church, his spouse.

Thus appears for the first time a formula, simple and clear, following the proper order and giving the reason for that order (M.S. pp. 72-73).

If I love Christ, it is impossible not to acquire something of his fraternal love; it is impossible not to be impelled by him toward those he loves, for whom he came and suffered and who are now a part of him in the Church-body. For Fr. d'Alzon, Jesus always leads to the Church, to men gathered to be saved and to save: "Who," he asks, "inspired the saints dedicated to the sick, to education, to the poor? The charity of Christ" (E.S. p. 559).

Let us constantly appeal to the Spirit of love, who proceeds eternally from the Father and the Son, to unite us in a perpetual bond to God, to Jesus Christ, to His Church, to our brethren and to all those entrusted to us (Directory, pp. 48-49).

Fr. d'Alzon sees our other loves as being within our love for Jesus Christ. They are enlightened, purified, and transformed by that love. True, the triple love is common to all institutes, but with a difference. No spiritual family in the Church can do without the triple love. But the triple love takes on nuances, particular shades and colorings according to the special purpose of each family. Our purpose from the outset is the defense of the Church; it is to help Christ in his mystical incarnation in souls, an ideal that inspired the notion of the coming of the Reign of Christ in souls, hence also the love of Jesus Christ and of the Church (Sage, *Retraite* 1955, p. 50 ff. See E.S. pp.1186-1187).

The three loves of Our Lord, of the Blessed Virgin and of the Church were mentioned in the first Constitutions; but henceforth they are fused into a single love, within the fullness of the love of Our Lord, with a fervor that reflects spontaneously on the love of the Virgin and of the Church. The Assumption now possesses a most felicitous expression of its spirit... To the motto that states our goal - **Thy Kingdom Come** - is now added a second motto, that reminds us of our spirit:
For the love of Our Lord Jesus Christ (Sage, *Retraite* 1955, p.4).

In the context of the triple love and in the light of the approaching First Vatican Council, Fr. d'Alzon reflected on the particular character that must be that of the Assumption. He writes:

The thought of the Council gives me a little more each day the desire to become a saint according to the spirit of the Assumption. I think that at no time the love of Our Lord, of the Blessed Virgin and of the Church has been more necessary and more apt to render souls fruitful than today (M.S. p. 129).

CHAPTER EIGHT

LOVING MARY [\[26\]](#)

Mary is the mother of God. This is her function and destiny in God's plan. It accounts for the other privileges of Mary, beginning with her being conceived without sin and culminating in her Assumption

Christ made Mary our Mother. We put our trust in her and pray to her. Mary is also a model for us. She shows us what virtue Christ's redemption makes it possible for a mere creature to achieve (Directory, Part 1, chapter 3).

The Immaculate Conception

Fr. d'Alzon recognizes the full significance and tremendous importance of Mary's Immaculate Conception in God's plan for the salvation of mankind. In a doctrinal instruction addressed to the students at Nîmes in 1877 (E.S. pp. 989-1001) , he comments on the ongoing combat between Satan and Mary Immaculate. Here are the main thoughts expressed by Fr. d'Alzon:

“I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your offspring and hers” (Gen 3:15).

...Let us examine the characters who begin this struggle, the characteristics of their respective offspring and the final results of a war which will go on through the centuries.

I. Satan and his breed

Henceforth Satan, in the shape of a serpent is the enemy of man. And what is his purpose? Be not mistaken, it is to lessen the glory of God, to kill his creature... and since he cannot fulfill these designs against God, he will, insofar as it depends upon him, fulfill them against God's creatures. So it is that, from the beginning of creation, he vents his rage against the human race, confirming the word of the Savior “He brought death to man from the beginning” (Jn 8:44). He was ever a murderer... Witness the long series of human generations bent under his yoke. By whom has death entered into the world? By sin. And who is the great instigator of sin, if not Satan? Behold the great murderer of Adam's race. He was a murderer from the beginning.

However, it isn't only one angel, be he the chief of angels, who will fight against the woman and her race; the race of the serpent (will join in the battle), that is first the race of the rebellious angels who fell with Satan, those of whom it is said to the damned that they will go to the eternal fire prepared for Satan and his angels (Mt 25:41). But I wish to speak of another race and to examine its characteristics.

1) A race of rebels like Satan...who say to God: Depart from us for we have no wish to learn your ways (Job 21:14). Is that not what is observed everywhere?

What is the disease of the world, if not rebellion against God and the reign of man? Philosophy, politics, morals all conspire and declare to God: Away with you, we want to know neither your ways nor your laws...

2) Moreover, Satan's race is murderous like its father... Sometimes, the conspiracy against the

baptized is organized on a grand scale, sometimes they attack their victims one by one. Provided they can obtain a great number, they give it much time; the stench of death stirs their appetite. They have their infernal propaganda and are ready for anything. Don't tell them it is evil: it is precisely evil that they want to produce, evil and much evil, that is what makes their "joy". To destroy social authority ...to destroy the authority of the family of which they break the sacred bonds; to destroy above all religious authority, since behind it they hope to strike at God himself... If only they could, beyond all other murders, inflict death on God himself, as they once did to his Son in the flesh! If being unable to reach God, they could at least destroy the cult of God so that people would no longer think of him... (even) refuse to be in touch with him!

3) Of Satan, the Savior of mankind said: ..."The truth is not in him." Satan began with a lie when he stated: "I will scale the heavens... I will be like the Most High!" (Is 14:13-14). He continued with a lie when he tricked our first parents saying: "You will be like gods" (Gen 3:5). From that day there is always the lie. As to Satan's race, it is recognizable by that mark, the lie... Voltaire said to his disciples: "Lie, lie, there always remains something of it."... Lying is ever on the agenda among God's enemies: the impudent lie, the hypocritical lie, the idolatrous lie, the politicians' lie, the diplomats' lie, the lies of the ambitious, of the scientists, of the philosophers, of the profligate...

II. The Immaculate and her race

1) The Immaculate. Admire the providential plan. The woman was the first to be attacked: a woman will by virtue of an incomparable grace...be preserved from every stain; she is the only one to be raised to this privilege of an immaculate beauty. "You are all-beautiful, my beloved, and there is no blemish in you" (Song 4: 7). Absolute destruction of sin, not the shadow of a stain in Mary: all is beauty, perfection, light. With this beauty she will proceed like her Son... and reign. "With thy comeliness and thy beauty, set out, proceed prosperously and reign" (Vulgate Ps 44:5). It is her humility that is her beauty, her humility that casts out pride, the source of all defilement: "for he has looked upon his servant in her lowliness; all ages to come shall call me blessed" (Lk 1:48). Satan reaped horrendous and eternal suffering as the fruit and punishment of his pride; Mary finds in her humility everlasting and ineffable joy...

Satan thought that serving God was unworthy of an angel; Mary, Queen of the Angels, aspires only to serve God. Mother of Him who will be obedient unto death, it is by a supreme act of obedience that she wishes to introduce him into her chaste womb. "I am the servant of the Lord. Let it be done to me as you say" (Lk 1:38).

2) Mother of mankind. Being unable to kill God, Satan dreams of nothing but the death of mankind. Mary will be the veritable mother of life, Jesus is the resurrection and the life, and Mary is his mother. Mary by the most incomparable act of love will give her Son for the life of the human race that is saved through his death. Satan brings hate to the world, Mary brings love and the most efficacious love... What can the hate of man's enemy do against so great a love? The love that she not only possesses but communicates - "I am the mother of fair love" - and restores to the heart of her children: and of fear, and of knowledge and of holy hope" (Eccl 24:24 in Vulgate). There she is, the true mother, with a love that among creatures only a mother can have for her children. Mary loves God, she loves her Son, she loves all human beings. She fears for them, she loves to recognize them and to reveal herself to them and to give them anew the hope of heaven...

3) Mother of the Word Eternal, of the Truth infinite that became man, Mary loves the Truth as her Son and as her God who comes to reside for a time in her chaste womb. Mary loves the Truth as no (other) creature can love it; it is in this that she pursues the father of lies; this is the reason for the words that the Church addressed to her: "Rejoice, O Virgin Mary, you alone have put down all heresies in the universe." Which is the reason why apostles of truth love Mary. The Church calls her the Queen of apostles. Where is the source of the wisdom and of all the truths for which Wisdom inspires love and understanding? Within that divine throne that is the heart of Mary:
Seat of Wisdom...

What shall I say now of the struggle between the offspring of the serpent and the offspring of the woman ?

Consider that woman, queen of angels, of patriarchs, of prophets, of apostles, of martyrs, of confessors, of virgins; that queen whose posterity comprises all the saints. Who will narrate the obedience of the saints, their charity, their purity: "Oh how fair is the chaste generation in its glory" (cf. Wis 4:1)? The world does not understand it but Mary encourages it, and supports it as it proceeds in obedience, love and truth, fulfilling its mission, a damning witness for the serpent's offspring. That is why Satan pursues Mary's offspring with so intense a hatred... He would destroy it through revolt, murder, lying, by all the means worthy of hell. But he will not succeed; the foot of the woman is there to crush his head. In spite of all his snares, his head must be crushed: "She will crush your head" (cf. Gen 3:14).

Mary our Model in responding to God's gifts

Our sin consists essentially in loving above all ourselves in the place of God. The way to recover from the consequences of sin is to renounce selfishness and self-centeredness, to love God as He commands us to do and to love Him in our fellowmen. Also we need to recognize our powerlessness and turn to God in order to regain happiness. Because man, once he has rejected God as he did, cannot, by himself, return to Him.

Christ made it possible for those who join him to accept dependence on God, to obey Him, and to love Him. How? By himself living among us as one of us, by submitting to his heavenly Father, by obeying unto death, trusting Him and loving Him. Christ did all this as a human being, as one of us. It took his death to obtain for us the ability to accept God's love.

Mary is preserved from any trace of sin, whereas other humans have in themselves a trace of the original revolt. But Christ offers them deliverance. Now God's gifts require a response from the Creator. Mary gives a supreme example of a creature's total submission to her Creator, an example of absolute availability in love. Just as we must recognize our sinfulness before we can be forgiven, healed and reconciled, so we must recognize that we can do nothing by ourselves unless God helps us. In order for Mary to be hailed as being full of grace, is it not obvious that she had to be absolutely devoid of any pretense of being something by herself, without God? This means a humility that does not deny God's gifts in oneself but professes to be nothing without God. Thus Mary is our model very particularly in her humble acceptance of God's bountiful gifts. First, her humility is the honest clear recognition that by herself she would be nothing. It is the opposite of man's attitude that cut him off from God. God will not give his light and strength to creatures unless they renounce their self-conceit. Secondly, Mary's love of God is the opposite of the selfishness that is the other facet of original sin. God grants his gifts to those who turn them not to their selfish ends but to his glory.

Like Mary we need to be profoundly persuaded of our inherent weakness and of the loving solicitude of our heavenly Father for us. Otherwise we limit God's gifts. We need to remember that the gifts of knowledge and love that comprise our happiness cannot be imposed from without. They must arise and grow within our hearts. Jesus does this when He sends His Spirit. We know that we are weak; but we also know that God is almighty and loving, eager to help us provided we open our minds and our hearts to His gifts. This removes our pretenses, our pride whose bloating would occupy the "space" where God's graces could otherwise come.

Fr. d'Alzon begs us to study throughout life the admirable progress of the Blessed Virgin as a disciple of Jesus. She listens to His word; she shares in each of His mysteries; she contemplates the smallest detail in the life of her divine Son. The Annunciation can be for us a useful example. God reveals that He is showering graces upon Mary to the point of her

becoming the Mother of her Savior and God. The prior condition to this is that Mary lay no claim to being anything on her own, without God. That condition is one that we too must recognize, in order to make way for God's gifts (See F.D. p. 113 ff.). [\[27\]](#)

Mary's Compassion

The Compassion, together with the Annunciation, was a favorite topic of Father d'Alzon's meditation and preaching. "I have a deep devotion to the Compassion of the Blessed Virgin," he would say (E.S. p. 988).

From the time of the Annunciation, Mary thought of the meaning of the name she was to give Jesus and the prophecy of Simeon about her heart being pierced one day. During the trials of the early life including the loss of Jesus in Jerusalem, through the public life when he was to leave her aside for His mission, the mission of the Bridegroom, all along Mary was preparing for the day when the Bride would, without wrinkle or blemish, come forth "with water and blood" from the pierced side of the Savior.

On Calvary his disciples were absent, those whom he called friends and not mere servants. John had quickly returned but his faith in Christ's mission was under the shock of apparent failure. The Virgin alone kept a solid faith, unshaken by the show of the devil's victory. She remains standing in faith and hope, in motherly love, indefectible, fully associated with Jesus, more in the purpose and effect of His sacrifice than in His sufferings that are nonetheless hers too (See E.S. pp. 1009-1011; 1264-1266; 1013-1024).

Who may comprehend the sufferings of Mary when they culminated at the foot of the Cross? Saint Bernard comments on these sufferings in a sermon found in the Office of Readings for the feast of Our Lady of Sorrows, September 15:

Truly, O Blessed Mother, a sword has pierced your heart. For only in passing through your heart could the sword enter the flesh of your Son... Indeed, after your Jesus...gave up His life...the cruel spear...(that) tore open His side...could not harm Him, but it did pierce your heart...

Do not be surprised, brothers, that Mary is said to be a martyr in spirit. Perhaps someone will say 'Had she not known before that He would die? Undoubtedly. Did she not expect Him to rise again at once? Surely. And still she grieved over her crucified son? Intensely... For if her son could die in body, could she not die with Him in spirit? He died in body through a love greater than anyone had known. She died in spirit through a love unlike any other since His.

As Father d'Alzon remarks:

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 (F.D. p. 82).

It is by virtue of her Compassion that Mary became our Mother and our model in apostleship.

Mary our Mother

(Directory p. 11)

The Church Fathers, particularly Saint Augustine, insist that the Blessed Virgin conceived Christ "*prius mente quam carne*," first in her mind and then in the flesh. She believed and it is for that reason that God produced in her and with her such marvelous things. The young Fr. d'Alzon, in one of his early sermons, echoed the tradition when he said:

Do not be surprised if I declare that the greatest act of faith ever was that of Mary when, being hailed as the Mother of God, she replied, 'Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to your word.' If Christ dwells in our hearts by faith, it was in the heart of Mary that He first established His home. As a result, what an admirable exchange there must have followed between Mary conceiving Jesus in her womb and the Son of God taking possession of her heart and enriching it with the purest rays of His divine perfections. This continued through Mary's earthly life; Mary in all humility and abnegation served Jesus; Jesus was being born and growing in her virginal heart with the splendor of these virtues before God and before men (M. S.

p

. 15;
T.D.
42, pp. 5-20).

As Jesus on the cross gave her to us and us to her, Mary is now our mother precisely because she has imitated Jesus most faithfully, because she followed Him to the extreme limits of His self-denial, of His dedication for us. So dearly did Our Lord love her that He associated her in a privileged manner to the essential work for which He took flesh in her virginal womb. From Him there was no greater mark of love toward Mary.

Mary has earned the title of Mother of the Church, her Son's Spouse. In a sense it is an added grief for her that we should be substituted for her Son as her children. Besides, essentially it is through pain and sorrow that she becomes our Mother. After having given birth to the Son of God made man, she will henceforth help her Son to be born in us, in the Church.

Mary, in the name of her maternal right, can give consent to the mysterious union of Christ with the Church. Mary can accept as her own son John, representing the entire Church which is henceforth but one flesh with her beloved Son. "*Ecce filius tuus. Ecce mater tua.*"

The Blessed Virgin is the mother of our Christian life, of the mystical incarnation in our souls. As she watched over Christ being born and growing to manhood, she takes care of the great family of God and of each of His children individually. All the graces granted to mankind from the time of the patriarchs down to the last inhabitant of this earth are in a sense recapitulated in Mary. Mary, being in perfect dependence upon the Savior, by virtue of merits she acquired on Calvary as a perfect application of the merits of Jesus Christ, communicates to us every grace, maternally vigilant of the birth and growth to full maturity of Christ mystically incarnate in the Church.

Mary our Model in the Apostolate

Cannot Mary, the Mother of Jesus, also be a model for us in the mystery of the Incarnation? asks Fr. d'Alzon. 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) (F.D, p.82).

On April 12, 1851, Fr. d'Alzon wrote to Blessed Mother Marie-Eugénie: "Today on the feast of the Compassion, I prayed to the Blessed Virgin with rather pain-filled fervor. I begged her to teach me how to beget souls as she was enabled to do with the title Mother of Christians" (E.S. p. 808). On September 17, 1851, he wrote, "I ask Our Lady of Sorrows to teach us both to remain at the foot of the cross of her Son with resignation, obedience and love" (ibid.). And on September 13, 1853, he again asks the Blessed Mother for that pain-filled fecundity that her Son granted her on Calvary. We must "will to suffer even without begetting if such be the will of God" (E.S. p. 812). There is no fruitful apostolate without labor pains.

On March 31, 1871, Fr. d'Alzon delivered to the Oblate Sisters of the Assumption in Nîmes a sermon on the Compassion of the Blessed Mother, model of mothers and Queen of Virgins (E.S. p. 1013 ff.). It was a devotion that he wished to inspire to the woman chosen to be the Foundress of the Oblate Sisters of the Assumption. He gave her the name of Mother Marie-Emmanuel de la Compassion. This devotion brought Fr. d'Alzon deep insights on the need for a spirit of sacrifice, on the value of mortification and suffering (Sage, Retreat 1955, p. 26).

As religious, we not only need to study and contemplate Mary; we need also to pray to her in order to obtain the holiness to which we are called, and to obtain her support in our apostolate. (E.S. pp. 1015-1024).

We wish to extend the Kingdom of Our Lord Jesus Christ. If that ambition is real enough to carry into our life as it did for Mary, we must not be surprised at the sacrifices that may be asked of us. They are the sign and the price of a fruitful apostolate. Here again, Mary is with us, as our Model and our Mother, full of tenderness and power to comfort us, and to obtain that our apostolic efforts and prayers make Christ be born and grow in numerous souls.

The Assumption

At the close of a retreat given to his religious (around 1877 - see M.S. p. 273) Fr. d'Alzon dwelt on the Mystery of the Assumption (E.S.

pp. 1024-1028). We conclude our chapter on Mary with the principal thoughts that Fr. d'Alzon offered his sons on that occasion.

At the end of this retreat...nothing appears more opportune to me than to speak to you of the mystery under whose inspiration our Congregation happens to be placed. We did not choose it; it imposed itself, so to speak. The stone set above the main door of our house was carved many years before we came to take possession of the cradle of our religious family. One can say that we were not the ones to choose Mary triumphant in heaven to be our protectress; it is Mary herself who from heaven seems to have said: This house was given to me and in turn I give it to you; grow in those thoughts that my glory must inspire you and be true sons of my victories, of my triumph, of my crowning.

And so, my brothers, I exhort you to absorb day by day increasingly the great and fruitful lessons taught us by Mary in her Assumption...

First let us realize what God can do for his humble servant. He dispensed her from the universal law, he set her pure among all the children of Adam and Eve. "You are all beautiful, my beloved, and there is no blemish in you" (Song 4:7). ...Mary was deluged with gifts, but she responded. To what degree of holiness may I not ascend if I begin the real task of sanctification?... How sincere is my desire? I see immense horizons and I well know that my resources will never be sufficient to reach their depth. But God is here; if I will it, he will give strength to my feet, indeed he will give me wings, so that, rather than walk, I will fly... .With eyes fixed on my queen in her glory, I shall realize how far she is from me; and without heeding the voices of discouragement, I shall say to Mary: "How far away you are! But I do not ask you to bend over my miseries, I ask you to draw me to you."...

...I shall better understand my duties and my relations with God, as I realize more and more the marvels accomplished in Mary. Mary, chosen from all eternity, receives in her chaste womb a God who wishes there to take our nature. Haven't I received, in holy baptism, a divine seed that I must develop in me? Have I not greeted Jesus Christ? The evangelist says: Any who did accept him he empowered to become children of God" (Jn 1:12).

Mary carried Jesus in her chaste womb for nine months. How must I carry Jesus in my heart, whenever he comes there in the Eucharist? What a transformation came about between the Virgin par excellence, in the concentration of her being around the Child-God! ...How must I likewise exchange my whole being with that of Jesus? "The life I live now is not my own; Christ is living in me" (Gal 2:20).

However, it is not only a matter of an inner secret life, but of a life that the world must come to know, albeit a condemnation of the world's slaves. Mary, in giving birth to Jesus, brings judgment to this world: "Now has judgment come upon this world." (Jn 12:31). The Christian also must manifest Jesus Christ through his entire life. Beginning with his birth up to the age of thirty, the life of Mary and that of Jesus are one; it is there that I must look for lessons. I must seek to be taught by Mary about the perfections of Jesus in his hidden life... May I not (also) follow Mary up to the cross that concludes her Son's apostolic life? If through my life the cross remains the goal of my labors; if I work, act, preach, evangelize, suffer in order to become a worthy disciple of the Cross, will I not have the right to sometimes stand between Mary and Jesus...to learn about sacrifice and death?

Finally, when I will have learned from Mary how to live the life of Jesus, imitating insofar as I can his perfections and his virtues, may I not expect that Mary, my hope, our hope, will help me share in the crown and glory of her Son, of whom I will have been a faithful servant?

CHAPTER NINE

LOVING THE CHURCH

Fr. Emmanuel d'Alzon gave abundant proof of a profound and exceptional love for the Church. It must be made clear that Father d'Alzon's love sprang not from blind admiration but from a vivid awareness that Christ loved the Church as His Spouse, issued from His side and destined to be the mother of all believers infused with divine life. Considering the condition of the Church in his time, Emmanuel d'Alzon could in no way be attracted to embrace its cause on purely human grounds. The Church was deficient in many ways, and Emmanuel was quite aware of

this from his youth. In many countries the selection of bishops was subject to governmental interference and political pressure. There was much undue ambition and self-seeking in the pursuit of high ecclesiastical office. Training of clergy was far inferior to the level which was reached in this century. (See what Fr. d'Alzon says about the clergy, E.S. pp. 1292-1294). Liturgy was in a deplorable state of formalistic routine. Pulpit preaching was inflated, stilted, remote from the problems of the day, and over the heads of the people. Catechetics were at a low ebb. Jansenism deprived the faithful of the treasured grace of the sacraments and resulted in a largely dried-up, empty practice of religion. Religious practice was very spotty, and even with it there remained unchristian behavior in matters of justice and morals.

Emmanuel d'Alzon was aware of these faults. If he so loved the Church, it had to be in spite of these blemishes. Let us first examine the fact of Fr. d'Alzon's love for the Church. Then we will dwell on the central reason that he sees for our love, namely the fact that Christ himself loves the Church.

The signs of Father d'Alzon's love for the Church

Emmanuel d'Alzon's choice of career was inspired and motivated by the desire to serve God by promoting His Church. At the age of twenty, love of the Church was his passion after the example of Christ, his Master. In the wake of St. Paul and of the Church Fathers, among them Saint Augustine, he realized that the Church, being divine as well as human, is to be loved and served as the Cause of God among men. He was drawn to Lamennais because Lamennais nurtured the hope that the Church could be liberated from the political powers that paralyzed it. When Lamennais came to despair of the Church's future, d'Alzon's love for the Church guided his own course. His correspondence with and about Lamennais reveals something of his faith-inspired love for and immovable loyalty to the Church (V.L. I, pp. 156-182; also D.A. II, pp. 149-246).

While a student in Rome preparing for the priesthood, he mentions the problems of the Church and wonders how they can be remedied.

In all periods of history, God raised up for his Church men entrusted with healing her wounds, just when their depth and their number could shake the faith of Christians.

The particular ailing of the Church must, it seems to me, help us to discover from what direction will come those who can help her. These deficiencies appear to have multiplied to a degree that is heartbreaking. The most salient seem to be an absolute lack of faith and, consequently, a lack of conviction: in the laity, a great distrust which to some extent is justified; in the clergy, it must be confessed, a dejection, a listlessness that is frightening (V.L. I, pp. 473-475).

In the personal rule that he composed for himself when founding the Congregation, he wrote:

...since the priesthood exists only for the Church, I will make every effort to acquire the greatest love for the Spouse of Jesus Christ, that He won by His blood, that He chose to be the depository of all His graces and in whom He reconciles all men with the Father.

The cause of the Church will be the object of all my zeal. I will devote my whole life to procuring her victory. I will consider the honor granted me when I am admitted to battle for the cause of God and of what is dearest to Him, for God loves and can love nothing more than His Church. The Church will be all the dearer to me as I see her more persecuted. Her humiliations will be for me, without a doubt, a cause of suffering, but also the most powerful motive for giving her on earth, and according to my weakness, all possible glory (E.S. p. 779).

Perhaps the most sublime expression of Fr. d'Alzon's admiration and love for the Church is to be found in his address to the 1868 General Chapter (F.D. pp. 82-86).

Some of the activity and works inspired by love of the Church

Fr. d'Alzon's love for the Church led him to exhausting labor. He expended himself tirelessly and literally wore himself out in ministry and various apostolic activities, first as vicar general under four bishops, while preaching and teaching both by speech and by writing. He labored to spread the Gospel message which is the first function of the Church, to correct the Church's faults and to develop it. His founding of the college at Nîmes, his struggle for freedom of Christian education, the founding of a Refuge, of a Carmel, of the Association of St. Francis de Sales, later of alummates to recruit and train priestly vocations among the poor, his activity at Vatican I, and above all the founding of two congregations, were all done in service of the Church.

He showed a then rare concern for Church unity. Very early in his priesthood, he labored to reach the Protestants of Nîmes and the area. He was planning a foundation in the Middle East and thinking of Syria when he heeded the call of Pius IX and went instead to Bulgaria. Our Near East Mission began in 1862 with Father Galabert. In his wake several hundred Assumptionists and Oblate Sisters of the Assumption would labor in Turkey, Bulgaria, Romania, and Yugoslavia, with churches, hospitals, schools, seminaries, and the scholarly work of a team producing the *Echos d'Orient* and later, the *Etudes Byzantines*. It was love of the Church that inspired Fr. d'Alzon's reaching out to the Slav peoples, especially Russia.

Fr. d'Alzon's concern for Church unity led to concern for the Roman primacy and a great loyalty and devotion to the Vicar of Christ. This devotion, like the love of the Church, is motivated not by a particular admiration for the Pope of his time, but because he is deeply convinced that the Church can retain its unity and fulfill its mission only by being taught and guided by the successors of the Apostles, with the Vicar that Christ placed at their head. For that reason d'Alzon, in spite of, or rather because of, the many elements of discord in the Church, professed an absolute loyalty and devotion toward the Holy See, until the end of his life. For this reason he actively supported the definition of papal infallibility. In his judgment, if Christians were to have full confidence in the visible head of the Church, they needed to know to what extent Christ guaranteed his authority.

In the last year of his life, Fr. d'Alzon had occasion to obey Pope Leo XIII in most trying circumstances. He was quite certain that the gesture demanded by the Pope, i.e. an act of submission to the French government, would fail to save the religious orders from expulsion. To a friend he confided:

The moment that the Pope wishes us to sign, there is nothing to do but sign... Some consider it an abasement. That is not the point. To the Pope belongs the responsibility; to us, the obedience, and I do not worry in the least (V.V. II, pp. 714-730; D.A. pp. 992-1002).

Contemporaries of Fr. d'Alzon testified to his exceptional love of the Pope. At the diocesan process in Nîmes, 1931-1934, Father Edmond Bouvy said:

In his spiritual life, his dominant virtue was love of the Church and, something that was perhaps a bit new in his day, love of the Pope, as the center of the spiritual life of the Church, as a

means of sanctification for souls. I do not remember that any saint, since Saint Catherine of Siena, was more devoted to the Pope than Fr. d'Alzon. It seems that he was the initiator of papal devotion.

And Fr. Mathieu Lombard:

The point on which he insisted the most was obedience to Rome. Obviously, Father d'Alzon believed the Sovereign Pontiff to be invested by Christ with an authority of which the Church is in terrible need (D.A. I, p. 68).

In 1866, Bishop Plantier of Nîmes paid a singular homage to Fr. d'Alzon when he wrote:

Assumption [the college] is a monument that testifies to your generous devotion for the sake of the Church... [that devotion] made you spend your youth, your strength, your fortune to undertake [the school] and support it. Whoever acts with such magnanimity and selflessness is entitled to the affection, publicly expressed, of his bishop, even and especially when he ends up in tribulations (May 29, 1856. A.C.R., DZ 70).

Why love the Church? Essentially because Christ loves it

"We love the Church because Christ loved it," declares Fr. d'Alzon at the General Chapter of 1868 (F.D. p. 83). In his teaching on the triple love, he points out that he who loves Christ also loves what Christ loved, namely Mary, His Mother, and the Church, His Spouse.

In the Directory, by virtue of the same principle, our Founder recalls Christ's love for the Church and concludes: "If I love Jesus, must I not love what He loved most?" (p. 12). "Do I love the Church because I love Jesus?" (p. 13).

To give an idea of Christ's own love for the Church, Fr. d'Alzon comments:

I can see the extent of His love for the Church when I consider all He has done for her. For the Church, His Mystical Body, He came down from heaven and became man, was born in a stable, and spent thirty years working obscurely as a poor man; He was slandered, persecuted and insulted and, after suffering most atrociously, died on a cross (Directory, p. 12).

On the extent of Christ's love for the Church. Fr. Athanase Sage develops the thought of the Founder:

In a way, Christ loved the Church more than he loved himself. He could have attained the glory of the Son of God without suffering, without death on the cross. Instead he sacrificed himself in order to attain that glory that was his with his Father before the world existed. He did so not for his own sake but, just as the grain fallen to earth is multiplied, he died for the benefit of a multitude of brothers... He gave a life that was most precious in order to gain it and to love himself to the utmost in the Church, his Body. In that body, after he left the world, he incarnates himself anew to remain with us on earth to the end of the ages.

By loving the Church to the extreme of the annihilation on the Cross, Christ rendered unimpeachable public testimony of his love's perfection... God so loved the world that He gave His only Son. It is that love of the Father that the Son was sent to reveal to the world through the Church... Thus his extreme love for the Church bears witness to his love for the Father and, at the same time, of the Father's, of the Holy Trinity's love for the lowliest and the most unworthy of all creatures (Retraite 1955 p. 27).

We are reminded that Christ's love knows no limit. The Gospel says, "unto the end," to the extreme limits of love. "There is no greater love than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends" (Jn 15:13). Christ loved the Church to the last drop of His blood, to His last heartbeat. As St. John reveals, the soldier's lance opened His heart and from it was born the Church, His Spouse (Jn 19:34-35). So it is for the love of Christ that Fr. d'Alzon loves the Church. He sees her as the cherished one for whom Jesus came among us, took our nature, lived a life like ours and yielded that life in sacrifice for her.

Christ loves the Church for all she means to Him, for all the gifts He showers upon her in making her His Spouse and the mother of the multitude of sons and daughters that she will bring to God by distributing the abundance of His gifts. Fr. d'Alzon, loving the Church because

Christ loves her, was led to find her lovable precisely for what Christ made her to be: the “radiant Bride” and our mother who gives birth to us children of God (Directory, p. 13).

Christ's love goes to the extent of identifying himself with the Church. St. Paul speaks of that as he does of the identification with the individual believer. In a lecture describing the sources of mystical theology, namely Scripture, Jesus Christ and the Church (E.S. pp. 853-864), Fr. d'Alzon expresses the profound unity of the Church with Jesus Christ:

Jesus Christ united man with God in his incarnation. He also incarnates himself mystically in the human race. (God) made him head over the entire Church. The Church is his body and his fullness. The Church is one with Jesus Christ and in a way completes him. This leads St. Anselm to say: God loved nothing more in this world than the freedom of his Church (E.S. p. 860).

For Father d'Alzon, observes Father Cayré (“L'idée mère du P. d'Alzon,” in *L'année théologique*, 1941, pp. 265-276), “Christ is inseparable from the Church,” to the point where, as Cayré notes elsewhere, (*Mélanges d'Alzon*, Hal, 1951, p. 92), he does not see the Church as all-important by itself, rather he sees “Christ living in the Church.” This thought echoes that of the Mystical Incarnation or the divinization of humanity, which the Founder made his goal when he first thought of founding a new congregation. Fr. d'Alzon writes:

In his Incarnation Jesus Christ united man to God. He is also mystically incarnate in the human race... The Church is one with Christ and in a way completes Him. ... By the grace and the truth that the Church provides, Jesus Christ is with us to the end of the ages; He is with the teaching Church and with those being taught; He is with the pastoral body for the teaching of the faithful and of the saints (E.S. pp. 860-861).

Fr. d'Alzon's concept of the Church gives his apostolate its proper mark. His pedagogy aims to form Christ in souls, to train people of quality for the service of the great causes that must attract a Christian.

Father d'Alzon asks us to love the Church

In an early draft of the Constitutions, Fr. d'Alzon requires of candidates to the Order that they "have no other love on earth but the love of the Church's cause... and [that they] be ready to run any risk for the salvation of souls (A.C.R. KJ 10).

In the first Constitutions , he details the consequences of the love of God and of the Kingdom, therefore of the Church, as he describes the practice of the virtues of faith, hope, and charity (F.D.

pp. 15-20). To love of the Church he dedicates a chapter in the Directory

(pp. 12-16) , and several pages of his speech at the General Chapter of 1868 (F.D.

pp. 82-93). To Fr. Picard he declares:

I do not know what our little Congregation is good for if it does not expose itself for the cause of the Church (E.S. p. 1066).

Describing the ideal of the Assumptionist, he writes:

Love of the Church, the defense of her rights, the study of her teachings, the holiness of her members, the further extension of her borders, that is my goal; for in consecrating myself to the Church, I consecrate myself to Jesus Christ's greatest work (E.S. p. 622).

Fr. d'Alzon means to extend this mandate beyond his religious to the lay associates of the Assumption:

Since the spirit of the Assumption is a great love of Jesus Christ and of the Church, we shall possess it the more as we are more dedicated... (A.C.R. DJ 1).

Such is the love that Fr. d'Alzon feels we must have for the Church. In the words of Father Sage,

Christ makes it our duty to love the Church as He loved her. It is His commandment. 'Love one another as I have loved you.' Love of the Church, that brotherly love of which He gives us the example, is the plenitude of the law... By loving the Church as Jesus loved her, we love our neighbor... The charity of Christ urges us to prove our love through our actions. We don't see God, nor Christ, nor the Virgin, but the Church is given us and if, in her, we love one another... God and Christ and the Virgin dwell in us... (Retraite 1955, p. 28).

But our love for the Church entails duties in her regard. Our duties toward the Church are described by Fr. d'Alzon on several occasions. Essentially, loving the Church means loving people: the Holy Father, the bishops, the clergy, the religious, the faithful, those now in the course of the present life, and those already in the Church triumphant. They are to be loved because Christ loved them. As St. Paul teaches, they all form the Body of which Christ is the head. Or, referring to the other Pauline image (and reality), the Church is the Spouse of Christ, to be loved by mankind as He loves her.

Further Fr. d'Alzon senses that we are called to help the Church accomplish its mission.

The radiant Bride of Christ calls on all favored souls to fall in love with Him too, and in the fire of the Holy Spirit invites me to complete that union between Creator and creature that surpasses all understanding... Our Lord does not wish to work alone at the task of drawing men toward Him so that they may become saints. That is why He instituted the priesthood. But He also encouraged all Christians, according to their position and the grace they have received, to cooperate in this labor of love (Directory, p. 13).

Our love of the Church, when it is translated into action must possess three qualities :

Our love has a triple characteristic: it is supernatural, daring, and unselfish (F.D. p. 83).

Fr. d'Alzon comments on each of these notes, particularly regarding the "Revolution", i.e. the enemies of God and the Church that continue to be active in the world and against whom we must battle (F.D. pp.83-93).

Treating of mystical theology (E.S. p. 860 ff.) and after commenting on the nature of the Church, Fr. d'Alzon speaks of our duties towards her (E.S. pp. 862-864).

Our duties toward the Church are all the more important as the Church is a perfect society, the body and the spouse of Jesus Christ, our mother and our homeland.

First duty: Filial love. Too many priests consider the Church an establishment; they impose upon it their own personality; which, together with the absence of zeal, is an element of destruction. Priests and religious who are not zealous ruin the Church. Let us be devoted sons of the Church, mindful that, since the Church leads to God, we cannot have too much love for her.

Second duty: Study. The Church is a gathering of minds, and the food of minds is the truth. We have a serious obligation to study...the natural truths and even more the supernatural truths brought to the world by Jesus Christ...

Unfortunately too many priests care little about that; and what studies they undertake soon become a mechanical exercise. As a result preaching is treated God knows how; it becomes 'trading on the word of God' (2 Co 2:17)... As this condition is prolonged, there follows a multitude of faults, a most damaging ignorance, as well as a scandal for which we are responsible before God... And yet have we not been confirmed; have we not received the spirit of wisdom and intelligence? But having lost the spirit of fear of God, we study with a purely 'natural' disposition (i.e. without a live faith), 'rendering service for appearance only' (Eph 6:6). We do not study bearing in mind Jesus Christ: 'Christ is the end of the law. Through him justice comes to everyone who believes.' (Rm 10:4). And so we fall into a state of lukewarmth and lethargy, which precedes death and sometimes is death itself.

Third duty: Spirit of holiness. The purpose for which God gives his grace is our sanctification. 'It is God's will that you grow in holiness' (1 Th 4: 3)... In wishing to give oneself to God, there is a thought of becoming a saint. What happens to that idea? It isn't entertained, we lie to ourselves and to the Holy Spirit...; we destroy our own vocation and that of others. We use lying as a means of perverting people. Better to be a good Christian in the world than to...become a coward in the army of Gospel workers, fulfilling the prophet's words: 'The sons of my mother have fought against me.' (Song 1:5 Vulgate).

The fourth and fifth duties listed by Fr. d'Alzon, which he terms the spirit of "propaganda" (i.e. propagating the Gospel) and the spirit of initiative, point to the obligation of forgetting ourselves and of truly serving our brothers and sisters in the Church and in the world.

We love ourselves so much that we don't find the time to love others. Let us be concerned less with ourselves and a little more with people (E.S. p. 864).

Loving the Church as Jesus loved it, observes Fr. Sage, means dedicating oneself entirely to her service... The Church needs our services and will forever do so. Even perfect as she comes from the side of Our Lord, and as she appeared to the seer of Patmos, decked out as a young bride, with the virtues, the sacraments, the teachings of Our Lord, the holiness of the Apostles and of the first martyrs, she must, through the care of her children, grow to the adult age of Christ in order that she may be worthy to be presented, like the immaculate Virgin in the splendors of the saints. The Church needs men and women: every Christian, if he is faithful to his baptism, contributes to this undertaking; but God...deigns to choose people to be exclusively at the service of the Church. Such is our mission. It demands, as Fr. d'Alzon sees it, a deep supernatural sense, daring, and generosity (Retraite 1955, p. 30).

The Assumptionists' Love for the Church

At the General Chapter of 1868, Father d'Alzon rejoiced over the love of the Church which he found in the young congregation. When he described the characteristic traits of that love, he implied that already they were manifest in the endeavors of his religious .

Fr. Picard and his companions, especially Fr. Pernet and Fr. Vincent de Paul Bailly, gave proof of a profound conviction that God was to be served in faith, that people should turn to Him in absolute trust and fervent prayer, that the enemies of God and His Church were to be denounced and resisted. This shines out in the apostolate of pilgrimages, in that of the press, in their dedicated efforts for the training of priestly vocations and the development of the Near East missions. Such is the meaning of "supernatural" in their lives. Much courage was needed to vindicate the rights of the Church in the days of Fr. d'Alzon. Because he and his sons had this courage, they earned the hatred of the enemies of the Church. They were also criticized by many Catholics for their imprudence. Already in 1868, Father d'Alzon warned against this false prudence:

When the perils are so pressing, when the pitfalls yawn so deep at our feet, when the hopes of Hell reveal themselves by 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 (F.D. pp. 84-85).

In their daring, the early Assumptionists made mistakes, particularly in their judgment of the Dreyfus case. But overall, their bold initiatives accomplished great things for the Cause of God and the Church. This too was recognized and earned the admiration and appreciation of the majority.

Let us recall the disinterestedness of which Fr. d'Alzon gave an eminent example throughout his career, by leaving to others whatever ministries or endeavors they handled adequately or wished to retain and by planning the alumnates so that they would foster vocations to the Church generally. He insisted that his sons avoid all competition with the secular clergy

The Assumptionists were faithful in practicing that disinterestedness, as is evident if we consider, in concluding, the proofs they have given of their love for the Church. Was it not this love which sustained them when they withstood persecution rather than obey government decrees aiming to dissolve religious orders? Was it not love for the Church that gave Fr. Vincent de Paul Bailly and Fr. Picard the courage to abandon La Croix in obedience to Leo XIII?

The Circular Letters of Fr. Picard and of Fr. Emmanuel Bailly certainly give evidence of this devoted attachment. Generations of Assumptionist missionaries in the Near East, in North and South Americas, and in Africa labored for the growth of the Church. Our scholars in Byzantine studies showed love for the Church particularly in their research on the history of the Eastern Church, in Oriental theology, etc. I believe we can say that the choice and orientation of the various endeavors of the Assumptionists remain under the inspiration of their love for the Church.

By way of conclusion we might ask what is the feeling and attitude of modern Assumptionists. An inquiry was conducted in the Congregation in the early 1970's on the charism of the Assumption. It gave broad evidence that a deep love for Christ and the Church and attachment to the Holy Father remain a trait of the Assumption. In reporting this, Fr. Charpentier, our Superior General of that time, commented:

No doubt we must make allowance for history: the struggles of the Church today are not those of the last century. We are no longer defending the temporal power of the Pope as a guarantee of his spiritual independence. This is not the era of the Syllabus. The political and social contract has undergone a profound change. Recognizing this, the general result of our inquiry bears strong witness of a love for the Church today. It is the Church of Vatican II that we are called to serve. Assumption does not waste time in sterile regrets. She is of today's Church, not of yesterday's.

Fr d'Alzon spoke in the same vein in 1868. The Church we serve is a Church in the world, not a ghetto. Assumption means to be faithful to the Pope and to the hierarchy. This is asserted clearly in the answers to the inquiry, both in regard to orthodox teaching and to an apostolic involvement which follows the Church's directives. This docility is not blind but intelligent obedience, leaving us a freedom of action in practical matters. It is a matter of leading the battle of the Church and of the Gospel, today, with the same ardor that Fr. d'Alzon displayed, although in a different context, being attentive to the signs of the times, to discern new forms of apostolate, to discern what evolution Christ wishes His Church to undergo, but loving it as He does even now.

CHAPTER TEN

THE SPIRIT OF THE ASSUMPTION

From 1844 to 1855, Fr. d'Alzon adopted the motto **Thy Kingdom Come**, as the sole basis of our spirituality: in the first

Constitutions

(F.D. p. 15) he states that the purpose of the Congregation is to live and work for the coming of the Kingdom. From 1855 to 1865, concerned that the apostolate may be too purely external, he moves to the doctrine of the triple love, which he expresses in the

Directory

, calling it, at the time, the spirit of the Assumption. This has been explained in the previous chapters. Beginning in 1866 the theme of the Kingdom reappears, but now enriched by the

mystical inspiration of the
Directory
(
M.S.
p. 107).

At this point let us see how Father d'Alzon understood the intimate connection between those two poles revealing the profound unity of the spiritual doctrine by which he lived and which he would bequeath to the Assumption family, considering it as the complete expression of the spirit of the Assumption.

The synthesis: Love of Christ leads to extending his Reign

In that most important address given at the General Chapter of 1868 (F.D. p. 77 ff) , Fr. d'Alzon reaffirms with new precision the principles of our spirituality and apostolate (M.S. pp. 118-123). The Directory had been conceived in the light of the triple love, which in 1859 represented a new approach. It left aside the theme of the Kingdom. But the Founder points out in the preface to the Directory that it "should be nothing more than a practical commentary of the Rule; any deviation from the Rule would be contrary to what we proposed" (Directory , p. IX).

Thus at the General Chapter of 1868, Father d'Alzon gives a broader definition of the spirit of the Assumption: it comprises primarily the love for God that inspires a desire to help make Him reign in us and around us. To this "principal love" we need only to add the triple love in order to obtain a comprehensive expression of the spirit of the Assumption. The all-important paragraph in which our Founder sums up our spiritual life is as follows:

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, the coming of the reign of God in the world by the fight against Satan and the conquest of the souls ransomed by Our Lord and yet still buried in the depths of error and sin, what could be more simple! What could be more ordinary than this form of the love of God! 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. (

F.D.

p. 78).

In this essential text we see that love of God, as the “principal” love, is placed before the triple love and the formula defining the spirit of the Assumption at the beginning of the Directory is slightly modified, rather it is completed.

Recognizing the priority of the principal love does not mean a change in d'Alzon's teaching. Already in the Directory it is God who is the principal object of our love: “It will be as God that He (Christ) will be ever present in my mind and heart” (Directory, p. 19). The theme of the triple love had come forth in the late 1850s when illness imposed quasi-total inactivity on Fr. d'Alzon; his understanding of it was deepened by meditation on the mysteries of Christ and of the Blessed Virgin. The theme of the Kingdom reappeared when he had recovered his strength and resumed his apostolic activity.

Thus the themes of the Kingdom and of the triple love are interrelated. It is for the love of God that we dedicate ourselves to the advent of his Kingdom and mean to establish it first in ourselves and then around us. Our personal sanctification has to be our first concern but we must consider it only in the perspective of the coming of the Kingdom (Fr. d'Alzon would have his followers avoid a piety that is individualistic, self-centered.) (M.S. p. 195).

Fr. d'Alzon sees our spirit as simple and apparently commonplace. But at the same time when the liberalism of Catholics was spreading and threatening the interests of the Kingdom, nothing was less common than a return, loyal and frank, to the essence of Christian doctrine. Fr. d'Alzon and his men recognized what was of value in the new trends, but they would not let them be imposed upon them; they would use discernment in the light of the Gospels and of the Church's doctrine under the direction of the infallible magisterium of Peter.

Fr. d'Alzon would have liked our purpose to be confirmed by a juridical commitment: he wanted the Assumptionists to take a fourth vow, that of extending the reign of Jesus Christ in souls.

Rome did not authorize it. But that desire and other ideas and projects that remained unfulfilled reveal the intense preoccupation of Fr. d'Alzon to adapt his congregation, in keeping with its spirit and purpose, to the most actual and most urgent needs of the Church.

Some insights into Father d'Alzon's breadth of soul

On the eve of the Vatican Council, Fr. d'Alzon is concerned first about the new and more doctrinal direction that the modern religious institutes would be taking; and secondly about the more particular characteristic or stamp that must be given to the Assumption (E.S. p. 1069). He will inspire the launching of the remarkable apostolic activity - his own and that of his disciples - during the last ten years of his earthly life. To his sons and daughters he points out the new universality of the Council, where for the first time there will be bishops from the five continents.

...In that regard... it follows that the questions of individual countries will have to stand aside in the presence of universal matters, of matters that are truly Catholic... (E.S. p. 1070).

He states the need of communicating, with the support of a truly scientific knowledge, the superabundance of divine truths and adds:

Hence the need of a teaching that is extensively developed, but above all that is imbued, in all its branches, with Catholic truth. Hence also the need of reaching out into all areas of teaching, from the first elements to the highest levels; therefore the need of (Catholic) universities and schools (E.S. p. 1071).

Then Fr. d'Alzon goes on to touch on the need of unity:

On the other hand, the more the society dissolves, the more we must gather around the center of unity. ... I do not wish to address here the question of infallibility. What I do want is to consider the Pope as a center of unity for action. Around the Pope, the bishops converge...

Fr. d'Alzon would hope that they maintain frequent relations with the Holy See. He adds:

However, the Pope has other means of acting upon the world, through his spiritual troops, who are the religious institutes. ... The religious are the special instruments for the Pope's direct action in defending and extending the Church... Hence the religious must gather around the Pope, to defend the Church, not letting anyone separate them from him, drawing their strength from him (E.S. pp. 1071-1072).

Fr. d'Alzon writes further on the Spirit of the Assumption on various occasions (cf. E.S. pp. 698-724).

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With all that, Fr. d'Alzon remained to the last year of his life concerned with providing solid spiritual bases for the congregations he had founded. He writes to Mother Emmanuel-Marie de la Compassion, co-foundress of the Oblate Sisters:

24 January, 1870.

...I wonder what would be left of our labors, if you and I came to die? What principles would we have established? What cohesion would we have given to that family? I well know that it is quite young, but I believe it very important that we begin to set the foundation stones with an eye to endurance.

I have some ideas on the matter. I will tell you about them in my letters... (meanwhile) be persuaded that you must ask yourself in your daily evening ex-amen: "What have I done today to consolidate my institute?" (E.S. p. 1077).

1st February, 1870.

...I intend to present to the next General Chapter the following constitution, in those

approximate words: 'The religious of the Assumption will make every day, morning and evening, an examination: in the first they will examine what they mean to do to destroy the reign of Satan in their heart and on earth, to increase the reign of Our Lord both in their heart and in the world; the second will review what was done for this purpose during the day.'

In this connection, a word about Father d'Alzon's love for the entire Assumption family. Fr. d'Alzon considers that the Congregations of the Assumption, men and women, while remaining distinct and autonomous, have much to gain by remaining in friendly contact with one another. This is quite apparent from the early years of his association with Blessed Mother Marie-Eugénie. Both show a constant concern and desire that their community of spirit will remain a characteristic of the two congregations (M.S. p. 109). In December, 1868, Fr. d'Alzon writes to Mother Marie-Eugénie:

The more I think of it, the more I wish to press on, before I die, the 'work' of the Assumption... What I immensely desire is that we continue to work together at our common endeavor, bringing to it all possible understanding and love (M.S. p. 109).

Let us address Fr. d'Alzon's last word on his and our religious life. Nearing the end of his earthly life Fr. d'Alzon wrote - under the title "Novissima Verba" - short reflections that in his mind were important final thoughts (E.S. pp. 302-305).

1st March, 1877,

The month of St. Joseph begins and we have recited the first vespers of the feast of the Holy Shroud.

An ideal moment to think about death, death which St. Joseph renders sweet to his clients. When the hour comes to think of the tomb, how appropriate to meditate on the shroud in which Jesus Christ wished his dead body to be wrapped!

Not knowing the time that is accorded me to prepare for my judgment, I ask myself what I should be doing during those days that will swiftly pass.

I remember the motto of the Assumption: **Thy Kingdom Come!** and, in order to remain faithful to it, I intend to use three principal means:

1) work at restoring Christian higher education based on the principles of St. Augustine and St. Thomas;

2) combat the Church's enemies enrolled in secret societies, under the banner of the Revolution;

3) fight for Church unity by devoting myself to the extinction of schism. For me, henceforth, nothing else matters.

1st June 1878.

To my successor in the Congregation whoever he may be.

It is already more than a year since the preceding page was written. It summarizes my thought very well on the purpose of our Order. I write it anew in order to emphasize its vital importance.

I recall the motto of the Assumption: **Thy Kingdom come!** and, in order to remain faithful to it, I intend to use three principal means:

1) work for the restoration of Christian higher education based on the principles of St. Augustine and St. Thomas. This as regards doctrine.

2) combat the Church's enemies enrolled in secret societies, under the banner of the Revolution. This for the social order.

3) fight for Church unity, devoting ourselves to the destruction of the schism. Those are the three great means that we must resolve to use in order to carry out our motto.

25 May, 1879.

Anniversary of the death of Bishop Plantier.

On the feast of St. Gregory VII, I would like to obtain for all the religious of the Assumption, the most ardent love for the Church and the resolution to offer themselves as perfect victims for the good of souls and the reign of Our Lord.

The more I read Saint Augustine, the more I am impressed by the truth of the statement that religious life rests on the practice of the counsels, the counsels rest on charity, charity rests on God; that charity unites us to God and that religious life is the means to unite us most perfectly to God through charity...

A Corollary: the Specificity of the Assumption

Is the spirit of the Assumption really distinct from other "spirits" or spiritualities? What characterizes the Assumption congregations? What distinguishes them from other institutes? What was the reason for founding them when there were and are many institutes that provide similar services to the Church?

These questions were reflected upon repeatedly and received an adequate answer in the past, but the answers were not read or they have been forgotten. [\[29\]](#)

First it is clear that religious institutes are not usually distinguished by the nature of their work or apostolate. An Order can be instituted to engage in the same ministries and apostolates as those already performed by existing Orders. There are never enough ministers and apostles to answer the needs of the Church and of mankind. What is to be avoided is a duplication of services that are already adequate. Fr. d'Alzon insists repeatedly that his sons avoid competition and indeed, that they take up the tasks and services that no one else provides.

Still each institute, even when it is engaged in an activity similar to that of other institutes, has its individuality. It should be distinguished by what has been called its spirit. A spirit is a particular concept of religious truth or of religious life and apostolate that is insisted upon by an institute and that characterizes that institute. The spirit can be described as a group of characteristics that, taken in its entirety, gives a distinctive picture of an institute, even though each characteristic taken separately, is possessed by other institutes.

The spirit of the Assumption was clearly defined by our Founder, as was seen in the present chapter. In previous chapters we discussed traits that characterize Father d'Alzon's concept of religious life and apostolate, namely the emphasis on truth and the desire for solid doctrinal foundations to our spiritual life and to our apostolic activities, as also the preference for those forms of apostolate that communicate the truth; the emphasis on theological virtues, the exceptional disinterestedness shown by our Founder and prescribed to his sons; the insistence on the unity of purpose in our religious-apostolic congregation (see above pp. 65-67). Later we noted how strongly Fr. d'Alzon's devotion centered on Jesus Christ, within the Blessed Trinity, then on the unity underlying the triple love; we saw the depth of his devotion to the Blessed Virgin and his fervent dedication to the Church because Jesus loved it.

In setting for himself and for his sons and daughters a goal so lofty and universal, Fr. d'Alzon was prompted solely by what he saw as an essential need of the Church. However, when he gave this goal its clearest definition at the close of the 1868 General Chapter (F.D. p. 77 ff.), he recognized that its very
universality
and earnestness constituted a
distinctive characteristic
of his Order.

First of all, we must recognize the first trait of our institute, the 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 seek to appropriate it to ourselves as an original trait. We are quite simply Catholic, but as Catholic as it is possible to be. We are Catholics all of one piece. And because in our time there are a lot of half Catholics, Catholics of their time, Catholics by accommodation, Catholics who think they are Catholics, we, who are frankly Catholics, Catholics before all else, completely Catholics, we pass, in the eyes of the crowd, for men set apart, perhaps even extraordinary. This is the first trait of our character as Augustinians of the Assumption (F.D. p. 79). [\[30\]](#)

A contemporary who was himself the founder of a Congregation declared as much to Fr. d'Alzon himself:

Your points of view are near the heights of the Church; ours are at the modest elevation of an episcopal see. In a word, you are Catholic, and we are diocesan. Hence, your main advantages and our inferiority. I say your main and not all your advantages, because, to be fair, it would be unjust not to recognize that you have given your work a personal stamp which recalls the true religious legislators; whereas our pious founder lost himself amid details, and replaced the vows by articles.” [\[31\]](#)

It seems quite evident that our institute is clearly defined and distinguished from other institutes by its spirit and by a group of traits that stem from that spirit.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

ACTION AND CONTEMPLATION

Fr. d'Alzon once indicated what personal dispositions the apostle needed to bring to the accomplishment of his mission. We will first see what these are. Then we will reflect on the need of contemplation to maintain these dispositions and achieve balance, harmony and unity in our life of prayer and action.

What dispositions the apostle needs to have

In 1876, in the course of a series of retreat lectures that he gave first to Chapter members of the Sisters at Auteuil, then to his own religious, Fr. d'Alzon explained what conditions he deemed "essential to their mission" (E.S. pp. 692-697). Here are the main passages of this lecture:

Preach the gospel to every creature

The Assumption (Family) considered as a whole is an apostolic endeavor. However if each religious (man or woman) has to perform an apostolate, the superiors must consider themselves as directors of the apostles. In this regard, here are the conditions that appear to me to be essential to their mission.

- 1) An all-embracing love of God's kingdom, especially of all the souls entrusted to them.

- 2) An absolute disinterestedness or detachment from any personal satisfaction in the work for God.

- 3) The immensity of holy desires for doing or having done all that is possible.

- 4) The prudent limitation of personal activity as also of the community's activity.

1. An all embracing love for God's kingdom.

You dedicated yourselves to extend the kingdom of Jesus Christ in souls. But is it Jesus Christ's kingdom that you wish to extend and is it not your empire? The kingdom of Jesus Christ is the worthiest of all causes. Alas! what obstacles militate against it: prudence, laziness, fatigue, aversion...

At every moment, you find yourself facing persons who do not understand when you do, who do not love when you do, or who love in their own way. Minds and hearts need to be broadened as regards the cause of God; horizons need to be opened for the nearsighted. Fires must be lit for those who seek only foot-warmers and are afraid to catch cold from excessive heat...

...Imagine a superior that loves Jesus Christ whole-heartedly, as also the Church, body and kingdom of Jesus Christ, and thinks: 'I have ten, twenty, thirty people who can be with me instruments for the development of this beautiful kingdom, I have thirty, sixty, a hundred students, on whom I must act, by whom I can reach as many families. I have Children of Mary and Third Order members who can help me in my work; well, just as I seek to be inflamed in the heart of Jesus Christ, so must I project those flames into the heart of my charges.'

2. Personal disinterestedness

"When you have done all you have been commanded to do, say, 'We are useless servants. We have done no more than our duty'" (Lk 17:10). Realize first that you are capable of nothing in the supernatural order, that if you perform a supernatural good (too) naturally, you acquire no merit and consequently lose any reward (due it) ; secondly that the good accomplished supernaturally, if it turns into self-love, is extremely dangerous since pride feeds on it and makes you similar to Satan who takes pleasure in himself; finally, that (thereby) you lose a splendid chance to comfort Jesus Christ and to provide Him with a work that endures, erected by your hands and consolidated by your humility.

To be disinterested in the service of Jesus Christ is the rarest of things. Why do so many religious, having lost their vocation, let themselves fall shamefully? Because one can say about them what St. Paul said of certain priests of the Church's early days: They "seek what is their own, not what belongs to Jesus Christ" (Phil 2:21).

3. The immensity of holy desires

We will never do for God all that we wish to do, but the desire is a valuable disposition. Daniel was a man of desires and because of that was pleasing to the Lord. In the Lord's Prayer Jesus Christ taught us to be men of desires. Limit your own desires to those of the Lord's Prayer and St. Theresa will prove to you that nothing further is needed to reach the heights of contemplative life. It is the same in apostolic life. The glory of God, the advent of his reign, the absolute accomplishment of his will, what more to you want?

So we need to focus not on the object of desires but on their intensity. Now it is only prayer that makes desires grow in fervor. Observe St. Peter as he proposes the institution of deacons: "This will permit us to concentrate on prayer and the ministry of the word" (Acts 6:4). To pray and to speak, such is their function, but first to pray.

To pray for the community as a whole, for the needs of each religious, of each pupil, of all those to whom we relate. To pray for the sinners, for the saints, for the perfection of the works entrusted to us; for those that we may cause to suffer in any manner...

4. The limits of personal action

In order to do things properly, it is necessary to avoid doing too much, as also having too much done by others. Remember your purpose...(and) your spirit; stay with it.

...See how little Our Lord did. He took on suffering and death; but his exterior action, as the Gospel relates it, amounts to little. He trained the apostles and sent them across the world...

May God make you apostles of holiness by rendering you holy yourselves! Begin by doing, then teach, as did Our Lord, of whom it is said: He began to do and to teach (Acts 1:1). May your most effective preaching be your example. Then your apostolate will be as fruitful as God expects it to be (E.S. pp. 692-697).

About contemplation

Here are some thoughts on the importance of contemplation, and on the need to insure its practice in order to guarantee worth and fruitfulness to our action, as also in order to have a foretaste of our eternal bliss (See Sage, *Retraite de 1955*, pp. 44-49).

Your main object, Fr. d'Alzon told Mother Marie-Eugénie, must be union with God; the rest is but a matter of means. The essential thing is to be much concerned with God... to turn your thought and your heart toward God (V.L. III, p. 314). We are called to be intimately united with God. Contemplation is merely a means of achieving that union (E.S. p. 1160).

Neglect of prayer, of meditation, of contemplation leads to activism. One gets involved and absorbed in a multiplicity of occupations; and these are motivated less and less by love of God and more and more by the enjoyment of an activity that is purely superficial and thoughtless, motivated by vain glory or even pride and ambition. Gradually one loses the spiritual energy required to maintain personal discipline, and the healthy fear manifested by St. Paul lest he lose his own soul despite his successful preaching.

The truly religious person is not attracted by work itself, but by its fruit, namely, joy and repose in God. "Only with those who, lured by the Spirit, have let themselves be drawn to the terrifying sight of their nothingness and the absolute power of Grace can the Lord work in strength and miracles, for these souls are no longer running the risk of mistaking themselves for God" (Th. Rey. Mermet, *In the strength of her vision, a life of Blessed Anne Marie Rivier*, p. 175).

However, before one reaches that state of mind where the one aim is to see God, one needs to go through years of labor and many tribulations. The active life must pursue and complete our purification. For the vision of God is promised only to pure hearts. The active life, truly spending itself in the service of others, gradually forges our souls, reshaping them in the likeness of the God of mercies who said "Be compassionate as your Father is compassionate" (Lk 6:36).

Contemplative life appears to be sterile. Yet it is rich with the true and authentic wisdom. Contemplative life is not selfish; it is a service, providing the one indispensable good of the

whole Church. Those apostolic men and women who have reached a harmonious balance of contemplation and action are marvelously blessed by God. They achieve the best results. They also produce works of great beauty in their writings, like the Gospel of St. John, the Confession of Augustine, the writings of John of the Cross and of Teresa of Avila.

St. Augustine describes his own experience of being torn between love of contemplation and the call to service. And such is the ideal that he proposes to all his disciples. He expressed it strikingly in the City of God, Bk. 19, ch. 19: "Love of truth seeks sanctified leisure; the compulsion of love undertakes righteous engagement in affairs." Really a permanent tension between two poles. St. Augustine is primarily attracted to contemplation, but he will sacrifice it in favor of charitable ministry.

When Emmanuel d'Alzon dedicated his life to God, he sensed the urgency of defending the Church and of extending the reign of God. Nevertheless, while responding with great generosity to the call of Christ, he realized that contemplation is and remains just as necessary as apostolic activity, and even more so. For the apostolate bears fruit only because of the merits, prayers and graces of contemplation. From the very outset his plan of apostolate included the foundation of a Carmel. All his life, he sought to arouse contemplative souls. Despite the multiplicity of his activities and endeavors, he set the example of a life of contemplation and of recollection in the presence of God. He managed to reserve hours and days of retreat and study. He was not content with an annual retreat; in the last six months of his life, he made three long retreats, preparing to meet God (See E.S. p. 833).

"When you have done all you have been commanded to do, say 'We are useless servants. We have done no more than our duty'" (Lk 17:10). With those words, Christ reminds us of our total dependence on God. It does not mean that we have done nothing. However, we must realize how little and how deficient it all is, humanly speaking, whereas, thanks to Christ's concurrent support, whatever we do gains eternal value. Our absolute dependence on God means we need to pray constantly, as Christ did. We pray in order not to get so involved in activities that we lose sight of prayer, which is at once indispensable on the way and is to be our final goal.

Contemplation cannot be selfish. Like action, it is a service, the primary service, the service of the whole Church. Our contemplation is meant to inspire our apostolic action. Knowing and loving God, Christ, Mary, and the Church cannot be confined to our personal benefit. Our love, our triple love is not genuine unless it makes us desire the glory of God and the good of our neighbor, desire them effectively, do something about it, and really work at extending the Reign.

Whereas in heaven, for Fr. d'Alzon, the love of Our Lord will dilate in the vision of God, on earth it leads to and dilates in devotion and dedication to the Church. Remember his exclamation about the fire that must burn brightly instead of being a mere foot-warmer (E.S. p. 693). Our apostolate is to be motivated by love. Apostolate and love are both fed by prayer and contemplation; otherwise there is laziness or just activism. Hence contemplation must be maintained together with apostolic activity, sometimes continuing during the activity. Would that we were so attracted by contemplation as to be reluctant to go out and preach, yet not refusing to do so.

The Christian ideal proposed to us by Jesus is to be pursued by uniting Peter and John, i.e. combining in ourselves the attitude of Peter who labored devotedly for the Church and the coming of Our Lord and the attitude of John who remained constantly on the alert to greet Our Lord's coming. Peter is first in the order of dedication and the perspectives of the Church militant. John is first in the order of friendship and love and in the perspective of the Church triumphant.

Fr. d'Alzon insists on apostolic zeal as the greatest proof of love we can give Our Lord. At the same time he insists on prayer and "oraison" to keep our love faithful and fervent, nourishing our zeal. He appeared at times to fluctuate between these seemingly opposed concerns. Actually his life unfolded on a lofty plane in perfect harmony between action and contemplation. He too could say: "For to me life is Christ and death a gain" (Phil 1:21). So it was that he would alternately and with the same ardor take to contemplation and to myriad apostolic activities. While contemplating he remained at the ready for labors of asceticism and apostolate. In time of action, he tended toward the intimate joys and peace of contemplation. All in the truly harmonious living that is possible in the service of God.

Fr. d'Alzon asks his disciples to strive for a similar harmonious blend of action and contemplation. He constantly exhorts his religious to serve the Church with a devotion that is supernatural, bold and disinterested.

But with equal insistence he reminds them of the exigencies of a life of prayer and meditation in the presence of God. We have a very particular need of such a life, all the more since it was Fr. D'Alzon's intention that his sons be involved preferably as animators of lay apostles, of elites, of deeply convinced Christians whom they would enlist for the Church's battles. Just as the Apostles left to others certain services, d'Alzon meant his sons to devote themselves above all to prayer and to the preaching of the Word of God.

It is a fact that Fr. d'Alzon, in founding the Order, always intended it to radiate largely through the Third Order. Father Sage wonders whether there has not been an unfortunate deviation of the Spirit of the Assumption in that we let ourselves become so involved and absorbed by various ministries that we forget the ministry of prayer and consequently an authentic diffusion of the Word of God. We are busy, but we must ever seek the apostolic zeal that, in Father d'Alzon's dream, is to burn in our hearts, a zeal that we are ever concerned to nurture in the most fervent love of Our Lord. Unceasingly Fr. d'Alzon reminded religious of their duty:

Our contemplation and action have a single purpose: to serve to extend the Reign of Jesus Christ.

To sum up and conclude, the Assumption Family has its proper doctrine about action and contemplation. It is in line with the Augustinian doctrine, but with a particular insistence on apostolic zeal, as the present needs of the Church demand. That teaching is impregnated with the spirit of the triple love. Triple love dictates a life that is revealed to be under a tension between the solicitations of Jesus and the tasks rendered urgent by our love for His Spouse, the Church, a tension that leaves one in harmony of spirit.

The Blessed Virgin was the first to lead this life ideally, in so profound a union with her divine Son that she too offered herself in sacrifice for the Church that He came to establish on earth.

LEADING EVENTS IN THE LIFE OF EMMANUEL D'ALZON

1810 August 30 - Birth at Le Vigan (Gard)

1824-1830 Secondary and higher education, in Paris.

1824 First Communion and Confirmation.

1828 Meets Lamennais.

1828-1830 Studies law.

Decides to be a priest.

1830-1835 Studies for priesthood at Lavagnac, Montpellier and Rome.

1834 December 26 - Ordination in Rome.

1835 Begins ministry in the diocese of Nîmes;

Appointed Vicar General honorary.

1839 Appointed Vicar General under Bishop Cart. In Paris, Eugénie Milleret begins, with companions, to lead the religious life.

1840 Investiture by Archbishop Affre of Mother Marie-Eugénie de Jésus and companions - marks the beginning of the Congregation of the Religious of Assumption.

1841 Fr. d'Alzon becomes spiritual director of Mother Marie-Eugénie.

1843 December 20 - Founds a Carmelite convent in Nîmes.

1844 January - In Nîmes, takes possession, with Abbé Goubier, of the "pensionnat de l'Assomption" which he will reorganize and "make into a pioneer Catholic college."

June - In Turin, vows to refuse episcopacy.

December 25 - In Paris, receives the perpetual vows of Mother Marie-Eugénie de Jésus and three companions .

1845 June or July - At Notre-Dame des Victoires in Paris, takes private religious vows.

September 21 - As a religious, takes up residence at the college.

September 29-30 - Initiates the Association de l'Assomption: a postulancy with nine members, four of them lay persons. Reads to them the rule which will later be the rule of the Third-Order.

December - Fr. d'Alzon drafts a rule of life for himself (E.S. p. 777 ff. - See above chapter 4).

December 25 - Beginning of the novitiate for religious with five members joining Fr. d'Alzon.

December 26 - Beginning of the novitiate for the Third-Order of men with four members.

1846 April 24 - In Paris, Mother Marie-Eugénie de Jésus vows obedience to Fr. d'Alzon.

August - Founds in Nîmes the Third-Order of women.

September 8 - Vows to devote himself to the sanctification of Mother Marie-Eugénie de Jésus.

1848 Publication in Nîmes of a weekly *La Liberté pour tous*.

December 30 - Refuses to become the Bishop of Mende.

1849 October 18 - Blesses the new chapel of the college.

1850 December 25 - In the chapel of the college, first public vows of religion of Fr. d'Alzon and four disciples: Fr. Henri Brun, Bros. Victor Cardenne, Hippolyte Saugrain and Etienne Pernet.

1851 August 24 - First community in Paris, rue Faubourg Saint-Honoré.

November - Initiates the *Revue de l'Enseignement Chrétien* (1851-1855).

December 25 - Perpetual vows in the college chapel at Nîmes, with his first disciples. Annual vows of Bro. François Picard.

1854 May 19 - Stricken with cerebrospinal meningitis, occasioned by overwork and preoccupations.

October 15 - Finds an orphanage for Protestant girls.

1854 September-October - Avoids the Nuncio who wishes him to accept the See of Nîmes (V.L. I, pp. 468, 474).

1855 January - In Nîmes beginning of the Association de Saint François de Sales to foster prayers and alms for the conversion of Protestants.

Completes the first Constitutions of the Augustinians of the Assumption.

October 21 - Opening in Nîmes of a convent of the Religious of the Assumption.

December 14 - Retires to Lavagnac, threatened with paralysis.

1857 Year of "resurrection." Resumes extensive activity.

May 1 - The Holy See grants the Decree of praise. The Congregation is henceforth under pontifical authority.

May 31 - Fr. d'Alzon establishes at the convent of the Religious of the Assumption the Association des Ado-

-

ratrices du Saint Sacrement.

June 29 - Unable to save the college in its recurring financial difficulty, he leaves Nîmes for Paris. However, the college will be saved thanks to friends together with his parents.

1865 (See
Directory of the A.A.
pp. V - VIII).

April - First vows of Oblate Sisters and departure of first Oblates for the Near-East.

1868-1869 Letters to the Novitiate (F.D. pp. 95-119).

1869-1870 Fr. d'Alzon is in Rome for the Vatican Council, as his bishop's theologian.

1870-1871 To Religious of the Assumption from Paris gathered at Nîmes (Franco-Prussian War), Fr. d'Alzon gives fifty-three lectures on the spirit and virtues of the Assumption.

1871 Second series of the Revue de l'Enseignement Chrétien (1871-1877).

May 27 - Father d'Alzon refuses a third offer of a bishopric.

1872 Foundation in Paris of the Association de Notre-Dame de Salut (Press and Pilgrimages).

August 28 - Opens the first Aluminate ("Notre-Dame des Châteaux" in Savoie).

1873 1874 Foundation of the weekly Le Pèlerin

1874 Writes the Circular Letters.

Writes the *Méditations sur la perfection religieuse*.

1875 Gives to the students of his college the *Instructions du Samedi*.

1878 Resignation from office of Vicar general is accepted by Bishop Besson.

1879 Writes the *Méditations aux Augustins de l'Assomption* (E.S. pp. 306-613).

1880 Beginning of the monthly *La Croix*.

August 26 - Signs the Declaration of the religious' submission to the French government in compliance with the wish of Pope Leo XIII.

November 21 - Death at Nîmes.

(from S. Vailhé, *Chronologie de la Vie du Père Emmanuel d'Alzon 1810-1880*.)

BIBLIOGRAPHY

This bibliography, without being exhaustive , offers the information needed for a proper initiation to d'Alzon's life and works. - A complete bibliography listing the writings of Father d'Alzon and

the studies made of his life and teachings is that of

Pierre Touveneraud,

Emmanuel d'Alzon, Bibliographie, Sources et Travaux, Rome 1979, 78 pages.

I

WRITINGS OF FATHER D'ALZON

Shortly after the diocesan process for the Beatification of Emmanuel d'Alzon (1931-1934) all his writings were transcribed and presented to the Holy See. They included twelve volumes that were already published at the time and forty volumes of as yet unpublished material. These fifty-two volumes are referred to as the "Corpus Causae" or the "Textes déposés."

The complete writings of Father d'Alzon are being (1938) "transcribed" onto a computer. Copies of disks or cassettes will then be available for use anywhere. At the same time the thesaurus or vocabulary needed to facilitate the indexation and consultation of the writings should be completed by the early 1990's.

A. The more significant writings - (other than the letters) were published in

1. *Ecrits spirituels du Serviteur de Dieu Emmanuel d'Alzon* edited by Athanase Sage, Rome 1956. 1500 pages (designated by the initials E.S.
) . An English translation of this book was done by Father Stephen Raynor, A.A.

Not included in this book because they were already in print are:

Méditations sur la perfection religieuse, 2 tomes, Paris 1925 & 1927.

Instructions aux tertiaires de l'Assomption, Paris 1930. 196 pages.

Instructions du samedi (given to students at Nîmes on the Blessed Virgin and on Christian education) Paris 1932. 338 pages.

2. Premières Constitutions des Augustins de l'Assomption 1855-1865.

Edited by Athanase Sage and Pierre Touveneraud, Rome 1966. 243 pages including introductions, notes and comments -(designated by initials P.C.). The Constitutions of 1855 are included in Foundational Documents.

During the 1950's Father Herbland Bisson published a number of Father d'Alzon's writings in a series of twenty-one volumes called Cahiers d'Alzon. He presented these writings under new titles meant to interest and attract modern readers.

In 1948 at Nîmes, Father Bisson also produced , with a team of helpers, an index of the works of Father d'Alzon that had been published at that time:

Table analytique des Ecrits du Père d'Alzon, 357 pages (type-written).

B. The Basic Writings

(as proposed by P. Touveneraud and the General Council of the Congregation.)

N.B. The English version of these texts is available in the following:

Directory of the Augustinians of the Assumption, 1969, translated by Patrick Croghan.

Foundational Documents, translated by Richard Richards, Milton, MA. Referred to as F.D.

Circular Letters 1874-1875, translated by Robert J. Fortin, Worcester, MA, 1981. Referred to as C.L.

In the following list, references are given both to the French and to the English editions.

in French in English

1. Constitutions of 1855 P.C. 31-90 F.D. 5-72

2. Directoire Directory

3. Address to General

Chapter of 1868 E.S. 129-146 F.D. 75-93

4. Four Letters to the

Master of Novices E.S. 147-172 F.D. 95-119

5. Address to General

Chapter of 1873 E.S. 174-190 F.D. 121-137

6. Circular Letters

1874-1875 E.S. 193-289 C.L.

7. The final moments

of Fr. d'Alzon E.S.1461-1464 F.D.139-143

C. Chronological Presentation of Father d'Alzon's writings (other than his letters) for the study of his thoughts and his works devised by Pierre Touveneraud in "Approches et recherches", Rome 1968. Translated and published in A.N.A., November 11, 1984.

N.B. A "Chronologie des écrits du Père d'Alzon" is included by Athanase Sage in his "Un Maître spirituel du dix-neuvième siècle," Rome 1958, pages 205-225.

A. First intuition on his vocation (1830-1835)

On friendship (June 1829-

November 1830) E.S. pp. 728-736

My portrait

(Feb. 19, 1831) E.S. pp. 736-744

A plan for study

(Feb.1831) E.S. pp. 745-750

Consecration to Jesus

Christ (May 3, 1833) E.S. pp. 750-754

A plan for study

(Oct. 9,1833) E.S. pp. 754-758

Apostolic concern

(April 1834)(not Dec. 1833) P.C. p. 177

(July 28, 1834) E.S. p. 758

(November 18, 1834) P.C. p. 178

Retreat begun at Saint-

Eusèbe (Nov. 29, 1834) E.S. pp. 760-768

His soul's most intimate

thought (March 28, 1835) P.C. p. 178

B. First formulation of his religious order (1845-1850)

The star appears once again

(1844-1845) P.C. p. 177

The vow in Turin and the

religious project E.S. pp. 639-644

Irrevocable decision and

beginnings of Assumption E.S. pp. 771-777 [\[32\]](#)

Personal rule of life E.S. pp. 777-788

Rule of the Third Order

of professors E.S. pp.1283-1291

The Church, structured

people of God, and

Assumption E.S. pp.1292-1296

Apostolate of truth in

Jesus Christ as intended

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New Series, no.8 (May, 1958, 207-213) [\[33\]](#)

Notes on the goal and

spirit of the Order

(1855-1850)

E.S. pp.644, 645,

647- 648

C. First Constitutions of the Augustinians of the Assumption (1855-1865)

General summary

P.C. pp. 31-34

Constitutions of 1855:

I. Common rules

P.C. pp. 37-82

II. Organization of the

Society

P.C. pp. 83-90

Constitutions of 1865:

I. Common rules

P.C. pp. 107-126 [\[34\]](#)

Directory of the Augustinians

of the Assumption P.C. pp. 127-163 [\[35\]](#)

II. Organization of the Society P.C. pp. 165-171

D. The Society before the Test of Time (1865-1880)

1. Necessary presence to the Church and to the world.

Address to the General Chapter

of 1868 E.S. pp. 129-146

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Vatican Council E.S. pp. 1069,

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Address to the General

Chapter of 1873 E.S. pp. 174-190 [\[36\]](#)

2. Indispensable formation of the religious

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The course in mystical theology E.S. pp. 849-873 [\[37\]](#)

3. Permanent affirmation of one and the same spirit [\[38\]](#)

a. Eleven circular letters in preparation for the General Chapter of 1876 E.S. pp. 193-289

Five instructions during the Chapter of 1876:

On prayer E.S. pp. 290-296

On the vows E.S. pp. 687-691

On the apostolate E.S. pp. 692-697

On the spirit of Assumption E.S. pp. 711-714

On study (Unedited text)

b. Three series of meditations intended for the Augustinians of the Assumption:

On knowledge of Our Lord E.S. pp. 875-905

On religious perfection (1874) Bonne Presse [\[39\]](#)

The "Great Meditations"

(1879-1880) E.S. pp. 310-612

E. The Apostolic Testament and the Encounter with God (1880)

The Apostolic Testament

or Novissima Verba E.S. pp. 303-305 [\[40\]](#)

The encounter with God E.S. pp. 839-845

p. 305

The last moments and the

last recommendation

E.S, pp. 1461-1464

D. Letters.

In the Congregation's Archives at Rome, there are the original manuscripts of more than 7800 letters of Emmanuel d'Alzon. Among the writings of Emmanuel d'Alzon that were typed in the 1930's for the *Corpus Causae*, the letters are contained in volumes 16 to 40. The few letters discovered subsequently were those written in the 1830's to F. de Lamennais and Montalembert. Several volumes of this correspondence are already published

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Lettres du P. Emmanuel d'Alzon (1822-1850), 3 volumes, Paris, 1923-1926 (728 letters), edited by Fr. Siméon Vailhé.

Lettres du Père d'Alzon à Mère Emmanuel-Marie de la Compassion et aux premières Oblates de l'Assomption. Paris, 1933, 290 pages. (250 picked from the 573 letters mentioned in the *Corpus*, and edited by Fr. Gervais Quenard.)

Lettres du Père Emmanuel d'Alzon. Les Années d'épreuve 1851-1858. 2 volumes edited by Pierre Touveneraud, A.A. Rome 1978.

Vailhé's edition and Touveneraud's edition are provided with valuable notes that help understand d'Alzon's letters. Father Désiré Deraedt has been preparing in similar fashion the letters of 1859 and following. It is hoped that further volumes will be published in the years

ahead.

II

BOOKS ABOUT FATHER D ALZON

his life and works, his spiritual thinking

A. Biographies.

Emmanuel Bailly, A.A.

Notes et Documents pour servir à l'histoire du T.R.P. d'Alzon et de ses oeuvres, 5 tomes, Paris, B.P. no date. Covers d'Alzon's life up to 1853.

Siméon Vailhé, a.a.

Vie du P. Emmanuel d'Alzon, vicaire général de Nîmes, fondateur des Augustins de l'Assomption (1810-1880) 2 volumes B.P. 1926, 1934.

(The basic work. Special recognition by the French Academy. Low-keyed objectivity.)

Polyeucte Guissard, a.a.

Le Père Emmanuel d'Alzon, fondateur des Augustins de l'Assomption (1810-1880)

Bruxelles - Paris, B.P. 1935.

Shows the supernatural stamp of d'Alzon's widespread activity.

Adrien Pépin, A.A.

Le Père d'Alzon (1810-1880) , l'âme d' un grand apôtre. Paris, B.P. 1950. A psychological and hagiographical approach.

Gaetan Bernoville,

Un Promoteur de la Renaissance catholique au XIXe siècle:Emmanuel d'Alzon (1810-1880).
Collection "Les grands Ordres monastiques et Instituts religieux". Paris, Grasset 1950.
Bernoville, the biographer of Blessed Marie-Eugénie, and of Father Pernet, was already well acquainted with the Assumption family.

Angelôme Cleux, A.A.

Emmanuel d'Alzon, homme d'Eglise. Saint-Gérard (Belgium) 1961.

Malachy Carroll,

Man of fire: Father Emmanuel d'Alzon and the Oblates of the Assumption. The Mercier Press Ltd., Cork 1955.

Richard Richards, A.A.

D'Alzon Fighter for God. Assumptionist Provincial House, New York 1974.

Henri-Dieudonné Galeran,

Croquis du P. d'Alzon. Paris, B.P. 1924. Showing Father in the simplicity of family relations and his sense of humor. Translated and published by Richard Richards, A.A., with the title Sketches

Works produced by the Postulators for the Beatification of Father d'Alzon.

L'âme du Père Emmanuel d'Alzon. Rome 1954. Fr. Aubain Colette assembled in a single volume extracts from Notes et Documents and from Vailhé's biography .

Le P. Emmanuel d'Alzon.

A. Hommages à son oeuvre apostolique.

B. Témoignages sur sa sainteté.

By Aubain Colette, in Pages d'Archives, 2e série, no. 8, mai 1958.

Le Serviteur de Dieu Emmanuel d'Alzon 1810-1880. Paris, Maison-mère des Oblates de l'Assomption, 1961.

By Aubain Colette in order to make known the reputation for holiness of Father d'Alzon.

Emmanuel d'Alzon - Dossier sur la Vie et les Vertus. Rome 1986.

Produced by Pierre Touveneraud, A.A., Wilfrid J. Dufault, A.A. and Désiré Deraedt, A.A., under the guidance of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints (Msgr. Fabian Veraja and Yvon Beaudoin, O.M.I.)

Vol. I:Sommaire de la Vie et des Vertus.

Vol. II Tomes I & II:Documentation Biographique.

Collected Essays on d'Alzon and his work.

L'Assomption et ses oeuvres. Paris, B.P. 1893. Published following the 50th anniversary of the college at Nîmes.

Mélanges Emmanuel d'Alzon. Lectures given at Hal (Belgium) following the centenary of the foundation of the Assumptionists. Saint-Gérard (Belgium) 1952.

Emmanuel d'Alzon dans la société et l'Eglise du XIXe siècle. Colloque d'histoire sous la

direction de René Rémond et Emile Poulat. Paris, Le Centurion. December 1980

Chronology.

Siméon Vailhé,

Chronologie de la vie du P. Emmanuel d'Alzon. Paris, no date. III pages.

B. On the religious institutes founded by Emmanuel d'Alzon.

Gervais Quenard, A.A.

Les Augustins de l'Assomption: Origine, esprit, organisation et oeuvres. Paris, B.P. 1928.

Jean Monval,

Les Assomptionnistes. Collection "Les Grands Ordres monastiques et Instituts religieux." Paris, Grasset 1939.

Adrien Pépin, A.A.

Les Religieux de l'Assomption. Paris, B.P. 1963.

M. Michel Cornillie, A.A.

L'Oblate de l'Assomption aux sources de sa vie spirituelle. Paris 1951.

Maria de Crisenoy,

Les Oblates de l'Assomption, de l'Orient désolé et des chrétientés d'Occident à l'essor des Eglises noires 1865-1954. Collection, «Les grands Ordres monastiques et Instituts. » Paris, Grasset 1955.

C. On d'Alzon's Spirituality.

1. With Augustinian inspiration

Fulbert Cayré, A.A.

Vers l'action avec saint Augustin, la spiritualité du P. Emmanuel d'Alzon. Paris, Lethielleux, 1950.

F. J. Thonnard, A.A.

Traité de vie spirituelle à l'école de saint Augustin. Paris, B.P. 1959. Requested by the Congregation for the instruction of the Assumptionists.

Athanase Sage, A.A.

La Règle de saint Augustin, traduction et commentaires. Paris, La Vie Augustinienne 1969-1971. Written for the Assumption

Family.

Athanase Sage

La Vie spirituelle selon saint Augustin. Paris, "La Vie Augustinienne" 1972.

2. The Assumptionist spirituality,

F. Cayré,

La spiritualité des Augustins de l'Assomption, 1931. (See Mélanges d'Alzon for other essays by Cayré.)

A. Sage,

Retraite aux Supérieurs majeurs sur l'Esprit de l'Assomption. Rome 1955. Unpublished.

A. Sage,

La Spiritualité de l'Assomption. Rome 1986. Retreat given in America in 1958.

Athanase Sage,

Un Maître spirituel du XIXe siècle, les étapes de la pensée du P. d'Alzon. Rome 1956. Notwithstanding its poor printing, this book "remains presently the normal starting point for any serious study of Fr. d'Alzon's spirituality." (Touveneraud)

A. Sage,

Commentaire du Guide spirituel de vie intérieure, in the collection "Cahiers d'Alzon". Bar-le-Duc, 1959. "Guide spirituel" is the name given to our Directory in that collection.

A. Sage and P. Touveneraud, Premières Constitutions (1855-1865), mentioned above among d'Alzon's writings, is mentioned here because of its notes and comments on d'Alzon's spirituality.

Approches et Recherches, Esprit de l'Assomption. Rome 1968. Collected essays produced in preparation for the General Chapter of 1969, an effort to illustrate d'Alzon's thought and its relevance for our time.

André Sève,

Ma vie c'est le Christ - Emmanuel d'Alzon.

Paris, Centurion, 1980.

Notes

[1] Letter from E. D'Alzon to Alphonse de Vignamont, March 28, 1835 in D'Alzon: To Educators at Assumption (Milton, 1988), p. 66.

[2] Letter from E. d'Alzon to Lucien d'Esgrigny, October 1, 1834 in D'Alzon: To Educators at Assumption, p. 5.

[3] Revue de l'Enseignement chrétien, vol. 9^{ns} (May #49, 1875), p. 69.

[4] The essential writings of Fr. d'Alzon that express his spiritual doctrine are contained in *Écrits Spirituels* and in *Premières Constitutions 1855-1865*, The essential documents available in English translation are: the *Directory*, *Foundational Documents* (including the Constitutions of 1855, the addresses to the General Chapters of 1868 and 1873, and the Letters to the Master of Novices, bearing on the Kingdom), the *Circular Letters*, and the *Meditations for the Augustinians of the Assumption*, (the last expression that Fr. d'Alzon gave to his spiritual legacy). See the Bibliography page

[5] George Tavard, *The Weight of God*, p. 112.

[6] A. Sage, *Commentaire du Guide Spirituel*, pp. 8-10, 13-16. The *Guide Spirituel de vie intérieure* is the title given to the Directory by Fr. H. Bisson when, in 1952, he published it for general use in the collection *Cahiers d'Alzon*. The commentary of the Directory written by Fr. Athanase Sage was thus entitled *Commentaire du Guide Spirituel*.

[7] Gallicanism is the doctrine and practical attitude of those who, since the Middle Ages, have insisted on the right of the local Church (national and diocesan) to a greater independence vis-à-vis the Holy See.

[8] Here are just a few of the many occasions where the Sacred writers proclaim the sovereignty of the Creator and His right to the creatures' praise and submission:

* By the word of the Lord the heavens were made. (Ps 33:6)

* For the world and all that is in it are mine. (Ps 50:12)

* Through him (the Word) all things came into being, and apart from him nothing came to be. (Jn 1:3)

* Paul to the Athenians:

The God who made the world and all that is in it, the Lord of heaven and earth ...nor does he receive man's service as if he were in need of it. Rather, it is he who gives to all life and breath and everything else. (Acts 17:24)

* Isaiah chides those who refuse to recognize and accept their dependence on God:

“Your perversity is as though the potter were taken to be the clay; as though what is made should say of its maker, ‘He made us not!’ Or the vessel should say of the potter, ‘He does not understand.’ (Is 29:16)

[9] The notion of the rights of God has meaning only for people who, being still conscious that God is Creator, realize that other beings exist only through Him, that they find fulfillment and happiness only in Him, and that creatures endowed with freedom need His guidance to reach their destiny. As a consequence man is entitled by right to everything that allows him to live, in obedience to God’s will, together with fellowman, in pursuit of happiness present and eternal.

In contrast with this traditional Christian doctrine, those thinkers who, since the Renaissance, gradually did away with God, taught that man must look nowhere else but in himself for an explanation of his origin or his destiny. In this picture man has a right to anything he or she wants for his self-interest as he or she sees it, as long as it does not interfere with an equal right of fellowman. “The old commandment that we love our brothers made impossible demands on us, demands against nature, while doing nothing to provide for real needs. What is required is not brotherly love or faith, but self-interested rational labor...a new kind of morality solidly grounded in self-interest” (Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind*, pp. 165-166).

These views came to be held even by (nominal) Christians in d’Alzon’s time. In this century they have progressed so far as to dechristianize to a great extent societies and states. Nevertheless the traditional Christian doctrine has continued to be held in d’Alzon’s time and in ours...especially by the Church.

[10] Here is the reply of Blessed Marie Eugénie, “...I reprove myself for not having rendered to the infinite goodness the homage of trust and of love. Of all the rights, is it not the one we should most honor? You see that I agree with your feeling and strive to profit by your words.” In a chapter instruction, she says to her sisters, “Sometimes it is said that the rights of God are crushing. I never could understand it. It seems on the contrary that each of the rights that God exercises over us is of love and mercy” (M.S. pp. 182-4). To which Father Sève remarks: “Therefore it is really a matter of rights, but the rights of someone who loves us, the rights of love

. So why not drop the unpleasant word and simply go by love? No doubt, but what love? To say ‘God loves us’ and ‘I love God’ are enormous statements. God is God. When Fr. d’Alzon points

out that he goes by way of love, one must not forget his teaching on adoration. Like all authentic people of prayer, he is haunted by the immensity of the being and of the mystery of the One with whom we dare to meet. "I seek you, I adore you. I love you - but who are you?" (Sève, *Ma vie c'est le Christ*

, p. 91) See also -Meditation on prayer,

E. S.

pp. 326-447, where Fr. d'Alzon comments on St. Augustine's Confessions 1:4 & 5)

[11] Fr. Georges Tavard chose that expression to be the title of his study on the Trinitarian character of d'Alzon's spirituality.

[12] A word about the zealous vigor that characterized the style of Fr. d'Alzon when he denounced attacks against God. The vehemence of Fr. d'Alzon's denunciations was appropriate for his time. Given the hostility and even the hatred of the enemies of God and Church, they could not be addressed merely with the peaceful and friendly attitude that we value today as being more conformable with the proclamation of a God who is love. The reason for Fr. d'Alzon's attitude of energetic denunciation and militant language was not that he forgot to love God's enemies. It was rather that his love for God and Church was greater and that he had the grace and courage to take up that most noble cause.

It is true that our century has witnessed a change of attitude especially in preaching the word of God. The change corresponded to a realization that people were not always so hostile as had been thought. It corresponded also to the rise of the ecumenical movement. There is much genuine love in today's attitudes. But there is also, in certain areas, not so much an increase of love as a show of tolerance or of broadmindedness that in fact reflects an indifference in regards to truth and to the interests or rights of God. This attitude is due partly to the relativism that has characterized secular thought for more than two centuries and gradually has detached people from truth since truth is no longer believed to be attainable (See Allan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind*

.) On that count, we can only admire Fr. d'Alzon's attitudes, his loyalty, his love for the rights of God. It is noteworthy that his love of truth and his love for souls attracted the sympathy of Protestants when he gave a series of lectures for them in the Nîmes cathedral.

[13] For example:

I am the Lord your Holy One, the creator of Israel your King. (Is 43:15 also 44:6 - 52:7)

The Lord, the Most High, the awesome, is the great king over all the earth. (Ps 47:3)

(Psalms 93-96-99, all praise this Divine King)

In Isaiah, chapters 35-53-54-55-60-61-63-65-66 prophesy the Messianic Kingdom.

Jesus fulfills those prophecies. (Mt 4:10; 11:12; 16:28; 24:14; Lk 16:16; Col 1:12-20)

Joël LeBras, a.a. "Royaume de Dieu, Royaume de Jésus-Christ" in *Approches et Recherches*, pp. 109-116. For a longer spiritual study cf. Gervais Quenard, *L'Évangile du Royaume*

[14] For a reminder of the importance of the Kingdom or the reign of God in Jesus teaching and mission see e.g.: The Jerome Biblical Commentary, 78:93-108; also Schnackenburg, *God's Rule and Kingdom*, New York, Herder, 1963. For the wording used here see F.D., p. 21.

[15] Father d'Alzon founded two religious institutes: The Augustinians of the Assumption in 1845 and the Oblate Sisters of the Assumption in 1865. The present chapter seeks to describe how the vocation of founder gradually took shape in d'Alzon's mind and heart. Later it dwells on the major characteristics of the men's Order. However, Father d'Alzon meant his spiritual doctrine to help not only the Assumptionists but also the Oblates of the Assumption. It was Father d'Alzon's apostolic zeal intent on fostering Church Unity that led him to found our Oblate Sisters of the Assumption (

V.V.

Il chap. XVI). It was his concern for them (also for the daughters of Blessed Marie-Eugénie as well as for us) that led him to address to them his spiritual thoughts in preaching innumerable sermons and retreats, in offering spiritual direction in the confessional as also through a very extensive correspondence.

[16] Fr. d'Alzon completed our first Constitutions in 1855. They contain the authentic basic principles of Assumption life. To be sure, as Fr. Sage points out (M.S. p. 91), those Constitutions were, in the mind of the Founder, left open for further developments. He himself would replace them with other texts in 1863 and 1865. But these later modifications would concern particularly the organization of the Institute and the practice of virtues. The basic principles - especially the purpose of the Order (the A.R.T.) - represented the charism of the Founder; they are definitive.

One day in 1870, Fr. d'Alzon, speaking to the Religious of the Assumption made this comment:

Observe, my daughters, that in our devotions and our principles we are simply Catholic. Let us leave to others the attractive systems...it will always be necessary to return to the Our Father. We take these few words Thy Kingdom come. We were not the ones to discover nor to invent them; they are as old as the Gospel . But we aim to derive from them the conclusions applicable to our present time, in order to foster a return to divine adoration” (

E. S.

p. 661. See also

F.D.

pp. 78-79).

As regards the detail of practical rules, Fr. d'Alzon was quite concerned that the spirit (issuing from the basic truths and principles that we were to live by) not be lost by becoming enmeshed in a multitude of minute regulations (M.S. p. 63). He was sensitive to the danger of excessive minuteness in religious legislation.

We insist on bringing a generous heart to obedience, he once stated, that is an obedience from which one is not constantly attempting to escape, nor one that has no spiritual justification, nor again one that is enmeshed in complicated rules and practices. Rather, it is an obedience that is generously willing, offered in appreciation of the wisdom of the rule, always out of love for Christ (P.C. p. 24).

[17] The coming of the Kingdom (or better “Reign”) is the subject of Fr. d'Alzon's Letters to the Master of Novices written in 1868 to “summarize the spirit of the Congregation” (F.D. p. 97). These letters treat of the coming of the Reign “within us” (

F.D.

pp. 99-103) and “around us” (

F.D.

pp. 103-106); a third letter discusses ways of extending the Reign particularly through various apostolic activities (

F.D.

pp. 107-111). Fr. d'Alzon touched frequently upon this topic, which is central to his spirituality, particularly in the series of lectures he gave to the Sisters of the Assumption in Nîmes in 1870-71. Excerpts of these talks are given in

E.S.

pp. 658-686.

Although Fr. d'Alzon's terminology is little used today, his message remains relevant: mankind always does need to be saved, to be guided away from untruth, to be forgiven and healed, which is all possible thanks to our being redeemed by Christ.

[\[18\]](#) A word about the name **Augustinians of the Assumption**.

When the Abbé d'Alzon acquired, in 1843, the little school that he resolved to launch anew, this school was already under the patronage of the Assumption. Hence the name he first used to designate the society he was founding, "Association de l'Assomption." However he later considered a change of name (V.V. I p. 531). The matter was discussed at the General Chapter of 1850.

The decision was to retain the name religious of the Assumption. No doubt the founder was tempted to designate his Institute with a name that would better express the bonds that were to unite it to Jesus Christ...this all the more given the desire to obligate ourselves by a special vow to extend the reign of Our Lord and given our adopting for a motto the prayer contained in the Our Father: **Thy Kingdom Come**.

On the other hand, the visible protection by the Blessed Virgin of the house at Nîmes as also of the new congregation, the fact that the name of the Assumption had been given to the College before the latter became the birthplace (cradle) of the institute; the fact that the same name was borne by the religious (sisters) of Paris, who had the same spirit and almost the same rule, everything concurred to show this name as being indicated by Providence. Therefore the religious continued to be called by the same name as heretofore (V.V. I pp. 531-532).

At the same time the adoption of the name Assumption testifies to Father d'Alzon's personal devotion to Mary, and to his desire that the Blessed Virgin be "our special patroness" as he wrote in the early draft of our rule. (*Aperçu général*, in E.S. p. 648). His wish is that she be loved as Jesus loved her; that she be model and mother for the children that she adopted through her Compassion at Calvary (see chapter 7).

However it must be noted that the congregations founded by Fr. d'Alzon are not properly Marian in their purpose (See F. Cayré in *Mélanges d'Alzon* pp. 93-94).

Having found in St. Augustine the greatest understanding of Christian faith, Fr. d'Alzon adopted him as a guide to the type of religious life he was called to create. He adopted the Rule of St. Augustine. His sons would be Augustinians, associated as "Third Order regular" members of the ancient Augustinian Order. For our understanding of the world as the field of our apostolate, d'Alzon was in the habit of looking to Augustine. He considered 'The City of God' as a basic guide for his sons.

[19] On the creature's duties resulting from dependence upon God, see Father d'Alzon's remarks to the Sisters of the Assumption E.S. p. 663 ff.

[20] To the sons of Fr. d'Alzon, the first letters of the words **Adveniat Regnum Tuum, Thy Kingdom Come** , remain a meaningful monogram.

[21] It was from their community of "rue François Ier" that the Assumptionists launched new apostolic endeavors, particularly the Association Notre-Dame de Salut and the Bonne Presse.

[22] F. Cayré, "L'originalité du P. d'Alzon en spiritualité" in *Mélanges d'Alzon* Hal, 1951, p. 99.

[23] For further thoughts from Fr. d'Alzon, on knowing Our Lord Jesus Christ in order to love Him, see E.S. pp. 856-860 and 874-905.

[24] Suggested readings on the Eucharist and Fr. d'Alzon (in addition to his own writings mentioned above, including the Cahier d'Alzon dedicated to the Eucharist):

“La Sainte Eucharistie chez le Père d'Alzon,” by Landoald Sibum. *Mélanges Emmanuel d'Alzon*, St. Gérard, 1952, pp. 135-162;

André Sève, op. cit. chapter 11 (excellent treatment in today's language);

Georges Tavard, *Weight of God*, pp. 63-72.

[25] Bd. Marie Eugénie and Fr. d'Alzon cooperated at every step in the process of founding and developing their respective institutes. Fr. Sage speaks of the “union of the two Assumptions” (M.S. pp. 39-42).

[26] Father d'Alzon's principal writings on Mary :

- The Directory, Part I, chapter 3.

Part II, chapter 15 (Rosary).

- *Méditations sur la Perfection Religieuse* Paris, 1925.

Vol. I contains 32 meditations for a month of Mary (pages 343-488). Also published in *Cahiers d'Alzon*, 1954. Fr. d'Alzon presented these meditations to Fr. Picard as the commentary of our devotion to Mary (E.S. p. 988).

- In the *Ecrits Spirituels* a section entitled "Love of the Blessed Virgin" (pages 989-1028) comprises sermons and short talks on the principal mysteries of the Holy Virgin, meant for various groups of faithful. The Annunciation and the Compassion were more frequent topics of Fr. d'Alzon's Marian preaching (Fr. Sage, E.S. p. 988).

Instructions du Samedi, Paris 1932, is a collection of talks and outlines of talks given by Fr. d'Alzon to the students of the College at Nîmes in 1868, 1876 and 1877. They include thirteen talks on the Blessed Mother given during May 1876. Fr. Sage reports on these talks in M.S. pp. 177-178.

[27] The meditations on the knowledge of Jesus Christ found in E.S.p.875 ff. reveal the richness of Father d'Alzon's meditation on the mysteries of the Rosary. As do also the short meditations of the Month of Mary (in *Méditations sur la Perfection religieuse*).

Note the importance of the Rosary in the mind of Fr. d'Alzon. He devotes a chapter to it in the *Directorium*

. Nearing the end of his life he says:

The older I become, the more I pray the Rosary. There are days when I say four, five or six of them. The Rosary illustrates all the virtues (M.S. p. 100).

[28] A comprehensive summary of his theological and spiritual doctrine is offered by Fr. Sage in M.S. p. 199-204.

[29] See the Superior General's circular no. 43 (November 5, 1964) and the more thorough study to be found in circular no. 51 (March 19, 1968).

[30] When Fr. d'Alzon sought to define the goal of the institute he was to found, he appeared to Blessed Marie-Eugénie to embrace too much, to lack specificity. Fr. d'Alzon replied that he sought to be universal in vision but that, when planning concrete activities, he meant to focus on what was needed and possible (See D. A. II pp. 335-339).

[31] Letter from Father Caussette to Father d'Alzon, from Toulouse, June 14, 1858. Father Caussette was superior of the Fathers of the Calvary.

[32] See also letter to Bishop Cart, *Lettres du P. Emmanuel d'Alzon*, Vol III, pp. 76-82, and Bishop Cart's answer, pp. 646-647.

[33] To be used rather than the text and presentation as found in *Lettres du P. Emmanuel d'Alzon*, Vol. III, pp. 713-720.

[34] It must be noted that the Constitutions of 1865, if they no longer begin with the General Summary, are preceded by the Rule of Saint Augustine.

[35] To understand the Directory, see the "Examen raisonné" (rational examination) of the Adorers of the Blessed Sacrament, E.S. pp. 1249-1263.

[36] To understand these partially dated texts, see P.C. pp. 219-231, and Athanase Sage, A. A., *Un Maître Spirituel du dix-neuvième siècle* (Rome: Maison Généralice, 1958), pp. 116-123 and 153-154.

From the same period are an 1869 conference on the spirit of unity (E.S. pp. 699-710); the 52 conferences to the Religious of the Assumption in the winter of 1870-1871, a few extracts of which are to be found in E.S. pp. 658-686; and the Rule of the Third Order of Priests of 1874-1875 (E.S. pp. 1428-1432).

[37] See Sage, *Un Maître Spirituel*, pp. 123-126 and 142-147.

[38] See P.C. p. 219, and *Un Maître Spirituel*, pp. 155-160 and 161-171. These are two considerable groups of texts, especially the second, but it is in these texts that, before his religious and with them before God, Father d'Alzon says and repeats that the spirit of Assumption, for him and for them, is the radical gift of oneself to the Lord for his mission.

[39] Emmanuel d'Alzon, *Méditations sur la perfection religieuse pour les Augustins de l'Assomption* (2 vols.; Paris: La Bonne Presse, 1925-1927).

[40] For a presentation see Pierre Touveneraud, A. A. *Le Testament apostolique du P. d'Alzon* (text prepared for the General Chapter of 1964).