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## **Emmanuel d'Alzon, Fighter for God**

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Emmanuel d'Alzon could very easily have become a spoiled brat and, later, a playboy. He was a rich, handsome, impulsive nobleman with a doting mother. Yet by God's grace he overcame drawbacks and temptations and became a fiery defender of God's rights to man's love and a tireless builder of Christ's Body, the Church, in a France where Christian life had been destroyed or was dormant, partly as a result of the French Revolution.

Emmanuel was the oldest of four children born to Viscount Henri Daude d'Alzon and his wife, Jeanne-Clemence de Faventine Montredon. He was born in Vigan, in the Cevennes Mountains, Department of Gard, on August 30, 1810. He had two sisters, Augustine and Marie, and a brother who died in infancy. The d'Alzon family was one branch of the Daude family which since 1580 had distinguished itself in the struggle against the Huguenots. Viscount Henri d'Alzon was a somewhat timid man, given to study and meditation rather than to action. He was imperturbably calm, not easily given to the expression of his emotions. The Viscountess presented a strong contrast to her husband; she was extremely intelligent, vivacious, somewhat proud, prompt to attack or react. She was strong where he tended to be less firm. She was jealous of her authority and would brook no contradiction. Both parents were deeply religious; in fact the Viscount had at one time considered entering the priesthood. From his mother, Emmanuel would inherit a deep concern for charitable works.

Most of his childhood Emmanuel spent at the ancestral chateau of Lavagnac, where he was taught by a private tutor. Later in life he would warn against bringing up children in a "hot house" atmosphere as he had been. Like all of us, Emmanuel had qualities and faults: he was honest, open, cheerful, generous, constantly active, impulsive, witty, with a tendency to be domineering. Occasionally his tutor, Father Bonnet, had a hard time handling his young charge. Once Emmanuel stuffed into the tutor's bed a whole nestful of small owls that started scratching the poor man's legs and sent him screaming down the hallways of the chateau. On another occasion, Emmanuel, who liked to play at being a priest, was "officiating" at a marriage ceremony between two playmates and, in the presence of his tutor, preached a lengthy sermon, encouraging the married couple, should the Lord give them children, to educate them themselves rather than entrust them to a tutor.

When Emmanuel was thirteen, his father was elected to the Chamber of Deputies and the family went to live in Paris where Emmanuel was enrolled as a day-hop in the College St. Louis, as approximately the equivalent of a high-school junior. As a student he was very uneven; his teachers even called him lazy, and he ranked just above the middle of his class. But as studies began to require less memory and more reasoning, his application increased. In 1824, he switched to College Stanislas where he would stay three years, again as a day-hop. Biographers have wondered if an impetuous lad like Emmanuel might not have benefited from the give-and-take of a boarding school, where emulation among pupils might also have spurred him to make even greater progress in studies. Personal study can become too lackadaisical or capricious. Moreover, Paris, then as now, was tempting, and Emmanuel wrote that if he had not been given the strength to confess often he would indeed have become a rascal, "because I'm built in such a way that a mere nothing moves me and unless I constantly place my heart ever higher I am beside myself."

At this time Viscount d'Alzon wanted his son to study law in order to become a diplomat or a

judge. In 1826 however Emmanuel expressed a desire to become a soldier; he wanted to enter St. Cyr, the French equivalent of West Point. For centuries the d'Alzons had had a strong soldierly tradition and Henri d'Alzon was the first viscount of the family not to bear arms. He persuaded his son to postpone a decision and meanwhile to continue his literary studies. In order not to grieve his parents, Emmanuel abandoned all idea of becoming a soldier.

On April 11, 1828, Emmanuel attended a lecture on deism, given by a Breton priest-liberal who was to play an important role in the young man's life, Father Felicite de Lamennais. Viscount d'Alzon, who had read many of Lamennais' works, encouraged his son to get to know Felicite better. In August, 1828, Emmanuel obtained his bachelor's degree from College Stanislas. Between 1828–30, Emmanuel studied law at the Sorbonne but never took the required law examinations. Because his law studies occupied him only about three hours every day, he often sat in on lectures on history and literature. He attended daily Mass, made weekly visits to hospital patients to whom he would occasionally give catechism lessons. In 1830 he started to correspond with Lamennais from whom he requested a program of studies that would enable him to realize his life-plan. He was in effect asking Lamennais to become his intellectual guide, and upon Lamennais' advice he started to study German, history, Church history, philosophy, and the Bible. Gradually, as revealed in letters to his intimate friend, Count Luglien d'Esgrigny, dated January 21 and 24, 1830, the priesthood seemed to be his way of realizing his life-plan. Father Simeon Vailhe, A. A., the best biographer of Emmanuel d'Alzon, in commenting on the appearance of d'Alzon's priestly vocation, writes that Emmanuel saw the Church of his day attacked from all sides, saw it poorly defended doctrinally, and saw that it was as a priest that he could best defend the Church in this struggle. D'Alzon himself, in a letter to his sister Augustine, dated somewhat later, in 1833, states, "If I ever spoke to you of my vocation, I believe I told you it was born in me from a great desire to consecrate myself to the defense of religion." Three priests, including his confessor and a seminary rector, encouraged his vocation but suggested that he defer for the moment. Emmanuel's parents at that time knew nothing about the new direction that their son's life was taking.

The Chamber of Deputies was dissolved by royal decree in May, 1830, and in August, King Charles X abdicated. Emmanuel was far removed from these political events because he spent the years 1830–32 in a sort of studious retreat at Lavagnac. He wrote, on May 8, 1830, to d'Esgrigny, describing his daily schedule. He would rise at six, then prayed and meditated. At seven, he studied Sacred Scriptures and at eight, whenever possible, attended Mass. Until ten he went hunting—he loved hunting. From eleven A.M. until five P. M. he studied and in the evening put in another couple hours of study until he retired at eleven. All in all, a pretty full day for a twenty-year-old.

For at least two years he continued this intense, disciplined, personal study. Then in September or October of 1831, he finally told his parents that he wished to enter the priesthood. His

parents were at first somewhat surprised, but they put no real obstacles in his way. His mother, not sure that she could control her emotions, asked only that Emmanuel not tell them exactly when he would be leaving them. Consequently, he left for the seminary at Montpellier on March 14, 1832, without notifying them in advance.

There were many aspects of seminary life that displeased Emmanuel. The schedule did not favor personal work; the day was too broken up by various exercises. Seminarians spent their class hours “splitting theological hairs.” Courses seemed incredibly weak; he had already been warned of this by Lamennais. D’Alzon added so much personal work that he eventually became ill and had to return to Lavagnac briefly to rest. Yet, seminary discipline was good for him because it helped him curb his impulsiveness and taught him, who had previously regulated his own life, to become more obedient. Emmanuel was reluctant to return for a second seminary year at Montpellier, but he did go and in June, 1833 received the four minor orders.

Emmanuel found the idea of parish ministry alien to him and letters from this period indicate that he was already thinking in terms of religious life. On a small paper dated October 21–26, he wrote: “I have resolved, whenever I may do so without being noticed, to start a sort of austere monastic life and to do everything in my power to chastise myself before the Lord. Fight against Pride.” During the summer of 1833 Lamennais tried to recruit him for his Congregation of St. Peter, and Dom Gueranger wanted him to enter Solesmes, but Emmanuel rejected both invitations and decided to pursue his studies in Rome.

By Easter, 1834, Emmanuel had ceased attending lectures at the Roman College (Gregorian) because once again he found the courses unsatisfactory. He was disappointed and felt that he was losing his time. He replaced formal courses by personal study with some of the most learned churchmen then residing in Rome. All of these incidentally were partisans or friends of Lamennais. They included the Capuchin cardinal Micara; Fr. Olivieri, who for some months was the Master General of the Dominicans; Fr. Ventura, ex-Superior-General of the Theatines; Fr. Mazzetti, a Carmelite consultant to six Roman congregations; the future Cardinal Wiseman who was at the time rector of the English Seminary.

It was while Emmanuel was thus studying that the Lamennaisian crisis came to a head. It is beyond the scope of this brief work to enter in details of the struggle, but we can say that the fight was more noticeable in Rome than back in France. By January, 1834 Lamennais no longer believed in the divine origin of the Church and had ceased to act as a priest. On June 25, 1834, Pope Gregory XVI signed the encyclical *Singular! Nos* which condemned as indifferentist and rationalistic many tenets of Lamennais as expressed in his book *Words of a Believer*

. Reacting to these events, d'Alzon wrote in a letter, "If you want to know the results of these events upon me personally ... it made me suffer greatly but purified my faith, made it rest more upon God, wanting only the good of his Church." In a letter to Fr. Fabre, a former seminary professor of his, commenting upon the encyclical, he expressed himself in a very characteristic way, saying that he had learned that one must "always work for Rome, sometimes without Rome, never against Rome."

In November, 1834, Emmanuel suddenly decided to receive major orders. It is thought that possibly Cardinal Micara might have suggested this in order to get Emmanuel's mind off the Lamennaisian problem. D'Alzon made a month-long retreat at the Jesuit parish of St. Eusebius, preparing for the subdiaconate. Then he was put to a final test: two days before his ordination to the subdiaconate, he was required to swear adherence to the doctrine of *Singulari Nos*. He sighed right away and the document was immediately brought to the Pope who expressed his satisfaction "with the promptness of your submission." Later Emmanuel said, "It is quite annoying to attract the satisfaction of the Pope in such a fashion." In any case, he was ordained sub-deacon on December 14, 1834; he received the diaconate in the Basilica of St. John Lateran on December 20, and on December 26 was ordained a priest by Cardinal Odescalchi in the prelate's private chapel. The following day he said his first Mass in the crypt of St. Peter's Basilica. In their three centuries of struggling to defend religion, the d'Alzons had never had a priest. Emmanuel was the first, and was destined to be the last.

Father d'Alzon, as he could now be called, continued studying throughout the spring term: Canon Law, English, German, Church history, and Sacred Scriptures. Increasingly he questioned himself about what ministry he might be assigned to by Bishop Chaffoy of Nîmes. He still felt no inclination toward ordinary parish ministry. Maybe he could study another couple of years? Canon Law? Scriptures? Qualify himself to work for the conversion of the Huguenots?

## **EARLY PRIESTHOOD**

Fr. d'Alzon left Rome in May, 1835 and by July he was in Nîmes; but even after an initial interview with his bishop on July 5 he had no inkling of the work he was to do. Finding appropriate ministry for the young priest indeed created a problem for Bishop Chaffoy who often asked, "What shall I do with him?" D'alzon's friends, not wanting him to waste his talents in Nîmes urged him to come to Paris, but he refused. The diocese already had two vicars-general and the diocesan Chapter was complete; but nonetheless on November 8, 1835, the bishop named d'Alzon honorary canon and honorary vicar-general, with the right to attend meetings of the diocesan Council and with practically the same powers as the titular vicars-general. It was about time, for the very next day Bishop Chaffoy was stricken by a paralysis which would incapacitate him physically for the rest of his life, even preventing him from celebrating Mass.

Father d'Alzon had conceived three projects he would like to undertake: the conversion, by scientific debate, of the Protestants, who, he felt, were in France more of a political party than a religion; the foundation of a college and of a Carmelite convent. The first project he abandoned, by order of his bishop, even before his arrival at Mimes. The other two were deferred because someone else founded a college (1838) and because the bishop was not favorable to the Carmelite foundation. In 1837, Fr. d'Alzon became titular vicar-general of the diocese, a post he would hold, under four bishops, until his death. Meanwhile he was working very hard at the sanctification of youth, especially by means of the catechism of perseverance, i.e, further catechetical study by youngsters who had already made their First Communion and who needed such help to persevere in their faith during their teens. To this end he started the Society of St. Aloysius Gonzaga for children of the nobility and upper class.

Later he would take over the Society of St. Stanislas, aimed primarily at the children of the working class. By 1847, both societies were to be united in the Youth Apostolate, which seems to have much in common with today's Catholic Youth Organization. To the doctrinal aspect Fr. d'Alzon added a recreational approach: he obtained billiard tables, sponsored wrestling matches, and even took part in fencing bouts. Such activities, in what we might call his "waiting years," were extremely useful. Fr. d'Alzon was constantly seeking among his pupils and associates bright, upstanding young men and women upon whom he could later call as teachers or for some other help. By 1837, Fr. d'Alzon was in effect working with most of the Catholic youth of Nîmes.

From his grand-uncle, the aged Canon Liron d'Airolles, he took over the direction of the Ladies of Mercy. These were wealthy aristocrats in Nîmes who helped impoverished people find employment, supplemented meager pay checks, and helped each other practice Christian virtues. At first Fr. d'Alzon was uneasy with them and said that his first talk to them was like "swallowing thorns." Soon he felt more at ease and remained associated with these women during most of his life, drawing from their number religious vocations and precious helpers.

Obviously, priestly ministry as such occupied much of his time. Diocesan administration, including supervision of the examinations for young priests, was time consuming. He preached so much that Bishop Chaffoy called him a "predicomaniac." It must be said that at that time his sermons were not all that they could have been. On one sheet of sermon notes, d'Alzon himself wrote, "Many slept, few understood." In fact, his sermons were cold, lacked the popular touch, but this would soon change. For the present he was only following every young preacher's tendency to say everything that he knew on his subject.

D'Alzon's life was not without its lighter moments. Once, in the bishop's presence he got into a mock-duel with canes, with the bishop's nephew arising from a discussion of politics. The bishop missed the humor of the situation and promptly ordered the young men out of his salon. He soon regretted his action and sent his young vicar-general a peace-offering of a finely sculptured ivory crucifix.

Despite the fact that it was for him a great penance, Fr. d'Alzon spent numerous hours each day in the confessional. He heard confessions every morning after his five o'clock Mass. Frequently he would return to the confessional during the morning, and again in the evening, sometimes until ten or eleven o'clock. He once said that he was occasionally groggy from inhaling so much human breath.

Father d'Alzon always seemed in a hurry; he would run from his residence to the cathedral, rushing up the aisle like a hurricane. The fact is that he loved punctuality; he started his Mass or any other office on the dot. And his appointments were always promptly kept. He ate sparingly and rapidly. Yet this "man in a hurry" always had time to listen to someone who needed advice or a hand-out. He gave away enormous sums, bit by bit, to people who were needy. Socks and shirts he never had enough of, because he constantly gave them away. The Viscountess chided him for giving away his new shirts rather than the used ones, and he responded that the poor needed the best ones because they rarely had a chance to get any at all. Such kindness brought people in droves to seek spiritual direction from him. As one person said of him, "Let's go to the one who shows his faith by his works."

By early 1837, a project that d'Alzon had been planning for over a year finally became a reality when the Refuge was founded. This was a home for wayward girls, victims more of weakness than of malice. At first, the bishop had opposed such a venture, but later told d'Alzon, "Go ahead, my son, all founders are fools, and you have all the earmarks." The work was entrusted to the Servants of Jesus Christ, otherwise called Sisters of Marie-Therese. Fr. d'Alzon would support the endeavor financially, and by advice and direction to the nuns and girls involved, sometimes visiting the Refuge as many as four times a day. For seven years he turned over to them his entire stipend as vicar-general.

Bishop Chaffoy died in September, 1837. His successor, Bishop Cart, named in July, 1838, was a timid, fearful, hesitant man, extremely irresolute. He kept on his predecessor's vicars-general; but when the senior vicar died, he hesitated almost six months before presenting to King Louis-Philippe the name of d'Alzon for approval. It was only in March, 1839 that d'Alzon was definitively installed. Such indecision and procrastination were to bother d'Alzon in other endeavors, as we shall see. The official relations between the bishop and his vicar were initially

quite chilly, to the point where d'Alzon considered resigning. He stayed on once he was convinced that the coldness was a characteristic of the bishop and was nothing personal against himself. Together the two men worked hard to supply the diocese with priests, and they were helped providentially by the advent to Nîmes of some seventy Spanish priests whom political events in their country had exiled. At this time, d'Alzon also encouraged the Sisters of Charity to develop adult education courses for working women and uneducated servant girls. The venture was so popular that very soon some two hundred were enrolled.

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The Religious of the Assumption were a congregation of nuns devoted to the education of the upper class. They had been founded, 1838–9, by Father Combalot and Mother Marie-Eugenie of Jesus (Eugenie Milleret). As Combalot was somewhat tyrannical and quite disorganized, he proved to be a stumbling block for the new foundation. Mother Marie-Eugenie obtained his permission to seek spiritual direction from Fr. d'Alzon. Shortly after, Combalot abandoned the congregation. Recounting the origins of their institute, the Religious of the Assumption wrote that Fr. d'Alzon then helped and guided the foundress, "He was the Father of our Mother." Never did any of them ever consider d'Alzon their founder. But because he and Mother Marie-Eugenie saw eye to eye on so many points, he indeed helped create the spirit of the Congregation and labored with the foundress to write their Constitutions.

## **PURCHASE OF ASSUMPTION COLLEGE**

Since Napoleon, higher and secondary education in France had been a State monopoly. The Bourbon Restoration and subsequent governments had extended this even to primary schools. The Charter of the Monarchy of 1830 had promised "free exercise" in education, but King Louis Philippe and his ministers opposed it throughout his reign. One of the greatest struggles of Father d'Alzon's life was to break this stranglehold and obtain equal rights for private and religious schools, in order to combat the anti-religious action of the State system.

In early July, 1843, while he was on a brief holiday with his bishop, Fr. d'Alzon received a letter from a priest-friend, Fr. Goubier, which would change his whole life. Father Goubier wrote that he had just purchased in the name of both of them, Assumption College in Nîmes. (So that the term "college" will not be misleading to Americans, let us here immediately indicate that it referred to a school that comprised the junior high and senior high school as well as the first two years of college). The College had been started by a Father Vermot in 1838. He had recruited about one hundred and fifty boys, but by 1841 the student body had dwindled to twenty and the school was in financial straits. With their purchase, FF. Goubier and d'Alzon had meant to spare



the Catholics a humiliation. Their initial idea was not for a school but rather for a Carmelite convent, once the lease had expired in 1849.

His vacation ended, Fr. d'Alzon hurried to Aix-en-Provence to make arrangements with the Carmelites. In December, 1843, the Carmelites arrived in Nîmes and were temporarily lodged in a boarding school across the street from Assumption College. They would later acquire permanent quarters elsewhere. Shamed into it by the arrival of the Carmelites, the lease-holder suddenly surrendered his lease before its expiration. Father d'Alzon, unwilling to send away the pupils who had already started their classes, found himself, in January, 1844, the co-owner and one of the administrators of a boarding school. Fr. Paul Tissot, who was already assistant director of the school, remained in fact and by right the head of the school for the remainder of the academic year. Neither Fr. Goubier nor Fr. d'Alzon was yet in residence.

Father d'Alzon started thinking big; he wanted to imitate College Stanislas in Paris, where he had himself studied, and which had freedom of exercise in education, provided it accepted University supervision and employed only State-certified professors. Fr. d'Alzon wanted to go even beyond this. He would employ as teachers deeply Christian laymen, all University graduates, who would prepare students for the State baccalaureate examinations, for the Polytechnical School, and for other specialized schools. Religious instruction and intramural discipline would be entrusted to priests.

On May 26, 1844, Fr. d'Alzon left Nîmes hurriedly for Turin, where his brother-in-law, the Count of Puysegur, was seriously ill. He stayed there during the recuperation of the Count, and one day, while saying Mass before the famed image of the Virgin Mary in the Consolata church, he made the vow of serving God as simple priest, refusing all ecclesiastical rank or honors, unless specifically ordered to accept by the Pope. Immediately he felt impelled, by some heavenly inspiration, to found a religious congregation. This institute would have as its objective "to help Jesus continue his mystical incarnation in the Church and in each of the members of the Church." He still had serious reservations about a congregation dedicated exclusively to teaching.

By July, 1844, his Assumption College had only ten pupils, of which he sent seven packing. He spent the summer of 1844 negotiating for a school staff. He hired Jules Monnier as academic dean, and hired University professor Eugene Germer-Durand, who would remain on the staff until his death in 1880. (His son would become one of d'Alzon's first religious and his widow would become an Oblate of the Assumption, and, even though she would then be sixty, leave for the Bulgarian missions).

In the spring of 1845, Fr. d'Alzon spent some months in Paris, fighting for “freedom of exercise” for his school. He had two meetings with the Minister of Education, Salvandy, and surprisingly was granted some concessions. Ironically this was at a time when the Jesuits were being forced to close some of their schools in France.

In June or July, amid the turmoil of his concern for his new college, Fr. d'Alzon made private religious vows in Our Lady of Victories church, in Paris. In September he arrived in Nîmes, clad in a white monastic habit with cowl, similar to that of the Dominicans. As he no longer had a residence in Nîmes, he slept, the first night, in his school's infirmary.

## **THE ASSUMPTIONISTS**

The history of Father d'Alzon's Assumption College and the founding of the Assumptionists were almost inextricably intertwined. The name of the congregation came from the College. Fr. d'Alzon had originally counted on recruiting vocations among the teachers at the school, and the daily life of the religious was necessarily enmeshed in the activity of the College. In the interests of clarity, we shall try to separate the two topics and deal first with what was the dominant idea of d'Alzon at the time, his congregation. Then we shall pass briefly to the growth of Assumption College.

In September, 1845, a few days after his return to Nîmes, d'Alzon had a meeting with Bishop Cart during which he presented his plan to found a congregation. The bishop, ever timid and hesitant, authorized him to try it for a year. Emmanuel's parents, to whom he had also revealed his desire, were a bit more opposed to the idea, because of the legal and financial complications. Eventually, in a true Christian spirit, they gave their approval. The Viscountess once admitted that the family had at first been displeased also by his purchase of Assumption College but that they had later agreed to help Emmanuel in his venture. Fr. d'Alzon was by now deeply in debt because of his College, but as he was assured of an annuity and an inheritance of a portion of the d'Alzon estates, he did not worry about the debt—yet.

Obviously, personnel for the congregation was his earliest concern. He enlisted a number of the masters at the College. As at the outset he thought of starting both a congregation and a Third Order, he placed the married laymen in one group; the clerics, some already ordained, were gathered in another group which would form the nucleus of the Assumptionist congregation. Meetings, formats of prayer, meditations, conferences suitable to each of the groups were immediately started. D'Alzon wanted to start a novitiate by Christmas, with five priests, including

himself, and one layman.

The first rule of the Assumptionists was very short and had the following introduction which set forth the purpose and character of the new institute: "Our tiny Association proposes to sanctify itself by extending the kingdom of Jesus Christ in souls. Our distinctive spirit is based on an ardent love of Our Lord Jesus Christ and of his Holy Mother, our special patroness, a very great zeal for the Church, and an inviolable attachment to the Holy See. Our life must be one of faith, dedication, sacrifice, prayer, apostolic spirit, and frankness. "We propose to extend Our Lord's reign more especially by the following means:

1. Teaching
2. Publication of books useful in teaching.
3. Charitable works, by which we can prepare children to fulfill their Christian obligations in the world and to reconcile the poor and the rich classes,
4. Retreats, in our houses or outside them, whenever they would not create serious inconvenience.
5. Foreign missions and works for the destruction of schism and heresy.

"We will undertake ministry, such as preaching and confessions, only when this seems agreeable to the secular clergy, under whose jurisdiction we would be in such matters. For the same purpose we will try to inspire in the children entrusted to us feelings of respect and affection toward their pastors and an understanding of their duties as parishioners."

The reference in 5. deals with ecumenical efforts, as they were then understood, to convert Anglicans and other protestants. It did not yet deal with the Orthodox churches. It is only in 1862 that d'Alzon will consider working in Turkey, at the suggestion of Pope Pius IX. 3. is broadly enough stated to subsume a whole variety of social works that the Assumptionists would undertake.

Father d'Alzon started on Christmas, 1845, with five disciples, a novitiate that would indeed prove long—five years. Of the original five followers, not a one would be among those taking vows in 1850, although Fr. Tissot would pronounce vows later, in 1852. Among the original group, some were priests of the Nîmes diocese, and as the novitiate dragged on, they dropped out. A few replacements were found, but they soon proved so unsatisfactory that Fr. d'Alzon asked them to leave. Fresh arrivals who stayed included Francois-Victor Cardenne, in May, 1846, and Hippolyte Saugrain, a young man of 24, of whom Fr. d'Alzon once said, "With six men like Hippolyte at the College, I could leave for Peking without qualms."

Repeatedly Fr. d'Alzon requested episcopal authorization to make public vows. The bishop's inertia was paralyzing the foundation and at one time d'Alzon was tempted to seek papal approval instead. But he decided not to bypass the bishop, to wait patiently. By the Fall of 1848, d'Alzon had only three novices: Tissot, Cardenne, and Saugrain. He started to ask himself what might be the cause of this dearth of vocations. Various factors, probably contributed: the lack of adequate, separate living quarters that would make possible religious training; lack of a distinctive religious garb that could serve as a sign and a safeguard; austerity of the original daily schedule which added to the regular teaching or administrative duties a number of conferences, meditations, and chapters; the recitation of choral office. It had reached a point where only six hours of sleep were possible.

Nevertheless, in 1849–50 three new recruits arrived: Fr. Henri Brun; Brother Etienne Pernet, who was destined to be the founder of the Little Sisters of the Assumption; and Francois Picard, who was only 19 and had been an Assumption College student for six years. In October, 1849 Bishop Cart authorized a trial novitiate of one year and then suddenly, on Christmas Eve, 1850 authorized public religious vows for one year. In the chapel of Assumption College, after Christmas Matins, in the presence of the professors and students who had gathered for midnight Mass, Fr. d'Alzon pronounced the usual three religious vows to which he added a fourth vow to dedicate himself to the education of youth and the extension of Christ's kingdom. He then received the annual vows of Fr. Brun and of Brothers Saugrain, Cardenne, and Pernet. Exactly one year later d'Alzon, Saugrain, Brun, and Pernet made perpetual vows, while Brother Francois Picard made annual vows. Henceforth they would all appear in Nîmes clad in their distinctive habit: a black cassock, black cowl, and black woolen cincture.

Father Paul Tissot, who had started his novitiate way back in 1845, made vows in March, 1852 along with Fr. Charles Laurent, who had left the congregation and then had returned. But sadly, shortly before his confreres made their final vows, Brother Victor Cardenne had died, a peaceful death after a long, painful illness. Even the joy of the founding of the Assumptionists was mingled with sadness.

While these events were happening, Assumption College was developing. The enrollment in 1845 was 95; by 1852, it was 200. 1847 was a tough year troubled by financial difficulties, personnel clashes between the teachers and the volunteer housekeepers. Fr. d'Alzon became run-down, had stomach cramps, bronchitis, quinsy. Yet the school kept operating. D'Alzon, realizing that he might never be granted complete scholastic freedom as long as he was considered a competitor of the royal college at Nîmes, considered opening a house in Paris. This would have provided the added advantage, because he would have houses in two dioceses, of being at the complete mercy of neither the Bishop of Nîmes nor of Archbishop Affre

of Paris. This latter incidentally may have offered d'Alzon the directorship of a minor seminary, but whatever plans Archbishop Affre may have had were ended when he was shot to death in Paris in 1848. Another possibility lay in College Stanislas, which was financially tottering under Fr. Gratry who was a poor administrator. D'Alzon foresaw huge difficulties if he should become head of Stanislas, and before he could make up his mind about the position, someone else accepted it, thus leaving d'Alzon off the hook.

Assumption College itself was suffering financially. In 1848 it was 137,000 francs in debt, with only 44,000 francs to pay with. A squabble between the co-owner, Fr. Goubier and the college treasurer led Fr. d'Alzon to accept responsibility personally for all debts and become sole owner. Even d'Alzon's mother, at that time, would loan him money only on condition that she be reimbursed by his creditors. Of course, d'Alzon could have taken an easy way out of his troubles because in 1848 a spokesman for the Apostolic Nuncio in Paris asked d'Alzon whether he would accept the bishopric of Mende. D'Alzon, remembering his vow at the Consolata, refused. Twice again he would refuse similar requests. On March 15, 1850, the National Assembly voted the so-called Falloux law granting educational freedom to religious and private schools. For twenty years it had been promised to the Catholics, and when it came it was far from satisfying them, except as concerned primary schools, where they obtained complete freedom. Only partial freedom was granted secondary schools, and the University kept its tight hold over higher education, in the form of continued control of degree-granting programs, of examinations, and in the State monopoly of the actual conferring of degrees. It was becoming increasingly clear that eventually the Catholics would have to have their own university.

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During the summer of 1850, Fr. d'Alzon was practically "bulldozed" into becoming one of the Catholic members of the national Superior Council of Public Instruction, Reluctantly he accepted, probably because the Pope had meanwhile urged the Catholics to use the law, despite its imperfections, to the best advantage of the Church. Fr. d'Alzon was on the Council for two years, and one of the tangible effects of his membership was that minor seminaries stayed under episcopal control, supervised but not inspected by the State. Then the question of academic freedom was raised. Could the State prevent a professor from teaching, because of objectionable ideas that he had presented, for instance, in books? The State claimed it could. Father d'Alzon saw a danger if the State could act thus. He feared it might be used as a lever to oust teachers who would be teaching Christian truths. D'Alzon consulted the Nuncio to find out how he should take a position. The Nuncio consulted Pius IX before responding that as the State was the guardian of order and of public morals it had the right and duty to prevent the spread of ideas dangerous to public morals and the peace and order of society. To be sure abuses of such power might crop up, but the State still had control of academic freedom, in the sense mentioned.

Probably because of the courageous, enlightened, but unpopular views that he had presented in the Council, but also because of political “dirty work at the crossroads,” Father d’Alzon’s name was excluded from the membership list of the Council for 1853. His leaving, as well as his entering, had been unwanted on his part.

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The congregation of the Assumptionists grew slowly. From 1850 until 1864 when it received approbation from Rome, 50 investitures took place but only 24 finally took perpetual vows. Between 1865 and 1880, date of Fr. d’Alzon’s death, of 103 investitures, 61 took perpetual vows. It is not our purpose to write even a brief history of the Assumptionists as such, but we might single out a few of the earliest collaborators of Fr. d’Alzon. Victorin Galabert was a professor of natural history and of internal medicine at Assumption College, preparing his doctorate in medicine. He was a short, chunky man, so pale and bald that Pius IX used to call him “the pale pumpkin.” On May 17, 1854 Galabert obtained his M. D. degree and the following day entered the Assumptionist novitiate. He later became a doctor of Canon Law. Two Bailly brothers, sons of one of the founders of the St. Vincent de Paul Conferences, became Assumptionists. Emmanuel entered at Easter, 1861. In 1903 he would succeed Fr. Picard as the Superior General of the congregation. His older brother, Vincent de Paul, would later become the head of *La Croix*, the Catholic magazine that became under his guidance the national Catholic daily newspaper of France. In 1863, Fr. d’Alzon accepted into the congregation the son of the academic dean of Assumption College, the young Joseph Germer-Durand, who would become an expert numismatist, epigraphist, paleographer, and archeologist. He also supervised the construction of the immense Assumptionist hostel in Jerusalem, Notre-Dame de France, and he discovered the ancient sanctuary of St. Peter-at-the-Cock-Crow, the spot where Jesus spent the awful night before his crucifixion. Germer-Durand was a fine musician also, and helped spread the Benedictine reform of plain-chant.

Among the early houses of the congregation, we might mention the college established in 1851 in the St. Honore section of Paris. In 1853, it was moved to Clichy in what had been a hunting lodge of Henry IV. It lasted nine years before it became a victim of insufficient funds and possibly of excessively severe entrance requirements. In 1856, Fr. d’Alzon opened a novitiate in the Auteuil section of Paris, but had to close it for lack of vocations. D’Alzon was not always

successful. Even though the Assumptionists still had no house of their own in Rome, some theology students were sent there in 1850. Their sojourn helped Fr. d'Alzon in a variety of ways, including the greater facility in obtaining the Papal Decree of Approbation of the Assumptionists, in 1864.

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We must now mention d'Alzon's efforts to start a Free University, The regional Council of bishops, at Avignon, had asked the Holy See to authorize a Theology Faculty which would grant baccalaureate and licentiate degrees. Rome refused, not because it was opposed to the idea or mistrusted the orthodoxy of the French hierarchy and professors, but rather because it did not want to jeopardize the existence of the theology departments of the French universities, where churchmen were the teachers. Still, Catholics clung to their desire for a theology faculty which would help destroy the remaining traces of Gallicanism. Father d'Alzon was in the vanguard of the movement. He therefore got in touch with the Nuncio, asking for help in the form of a couple of Canon Law and Church History professors. The Nuncio promised aid but gave none; nor did the other Orders or Congregations. On his own, Fr. d'Alzon started a School of Higher Studies and a School of Theology. He had eight literature professors and four science professors, all having State certification, and many holding doctorates. Yet except for the Assumptionist theology students there were discouragingly few students and the venture to create a Catholic intellectual center ended after four or five years.

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The *Christian Education Review*, first published in November, 1851, was founded by Fr. d'Alzon to spread Christian ideas in teaching. It contained articles on education, religion, philosophy, literature and language, law, and fine arts. It was through this R  
*review*

that d'Alzon became involved in the so-called "quarrel of the classics," a debate about the role and use in the classroom of some Christian authors rather than exclusively pagan authors. On this point, Fr. d'Alzon was more liberal than some of his collaborators; he advocated the use of Christian authors in the lower grades but believed that in the upper ones the pagan Greek and Latin authors should indeed be studied.

Between 1871–76, Fr. d'Alzon will again fight for additional freedom in higher education, by means of a resurrected *Christian Education Review*. In a law voted by the Assembly in 1875, he

won a significant but only partial success. Later even these gains would be lost, but by then Catholic Universities had been founded in Paris, Lille, Lyons, Angers, Toulouse.

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Amid so many occupations, Fr. d'Alzon continued his intense preaching activity. Sometimes he preached three or four times a day. It has been calculated that between 1851 and 1880 he preached about 5,000 times, including at least 98 retreats (some a week long). The very frequency of his talks prevented him from writing most of them down, and we often have today only notes, references, or outlines. The ordinary people loved his preaching, which by now had greatly improved. Those of the upper class who knew him well forgave him a certain familiarity of expression, but others were offended by his forthright language and judged him harshly. In the pulpit, d'Alzon cut a fine figure; he was at ease, graceful without being theatrical. His gestures were expressive and unhurried. He was natural; his voice was vibrant and his diction, pure. His success as a preacher might be summed up in these words of Bp. Pie, of Poitiers who had heard him in 1863: "Gentlemen, up to now I have heard the knightly eloquence of the gentleman, the ardent eloquence of the tribune, the unctuous eloquence of the sacred orator, the simple eloquence of the apostle, the masterful eloquence of the bishop, but these days I have heard them all at once..."

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Between 1851–60 one of the main apostolic efforts of Fr. d'Alzon concerned the Protestants, who in Southern France were numerous and powerful. His plans called for a center in Nîmes staffed by women Tertiaries, where Protestants could drop in for study or prayer, in view of their conversion.

Every Monday, in the cathedral of Nîmes he would speak on Protestantism, learned, carefully researched talks that dealt even with the most controversial issues. Numerous priests attended, and at times there were more than 500 Protestants among his listeners. He also wanted to establish two "orphanages" (not really restricted to orphans), where would come youngsters whom their parents allowed to live as Catholics. The boys' home already existed at Mireman, near Nîmes, and by 1854 fifteen non-Catholic boys lived there. The girls' home was started in 1854 and helped financially by Fr. d'Alzon. It thrived and eventually was taken over by the Sisters of Charity. Father d'Alzon's other projects, such as a Reformation Study Center near Geneva, or a group of missionaries to preach to Protestants in rural areas of Southern France,



were never started.

## **SOCIAL CHRISTIANITY**

By now it must be clear that Fr. d'Alzon's works, successful or not, always had an apostolic Christian spirit, never a purely humanitarian one. It is in this context that we can now speak of his social works. In order to offset the terrible effects of offensive and often immoral literature, Fr. d'Alzon developed parish libraries. These were established in 236 of the 249 parishes of the Nîmes diocese, and soon the idea spread until in four neighboring dioceses there were 903 such libraries, out of a possible 1069. The *Parish Library Review* was started, a monthly magazine with bibliographies, reviews, list of new publications. It was initially financed almost completely by Fr. d'Alzon. The propagation of good books was evidently one of his great concerns, and included distribution of such books to prisons, hospitals, soldiers, workers and peasants. The hawking of objectionable books had become a national plague, and to counteract it Fr. d'Alzon organized teams of salesmen who for many years sold good books door-to-door.

Meanwhile some of the older students at Assumption College would spend much of their free time tutoring soldiers from the local garrison who, for the most part, were illiterate. The Tertiaries of the Assumption held what we today would call Christian Doctrine classes for the soldiers, with surprising results. Before the 39th Line Regiment left for the Crimean War, 108 men were confirmed and 38 made their First Communion.

In 1850, d'Alzon started the Apostolate of St. Martha. Its primary aim was to give temporary help to servant girls without a job or money. At the monthly meetings, after a few initial prayers, the girls could exchange information about available jobs. Everything was free, including short-term lodgings. It was not an employment agency, but a non-profit mutual-help organization.

Father d'Alzon was a strong supporter of Fr. Everlange's "watchers" movement which provided spiritual and material help to the sick-poor in their homes. The "watchers" were generally people of the working class who after their daily work would spend the night at the bedside of the sick and the dying. It has been suggested that this charitable work may have inspired Father Etienne Pernet's idea to found the Little Sisters of the Assumption, nurses of the poor in their homes.

Boys' clubs were another work encouraged by Fr. d'Alzon, especially for boys who worked all week but could spend Sunday at such clubs. After Mass, they were tutored by some

Assumption College students, played games, and in short were kept off the street corners and out of cafes.

The Association of St. Francis of Sales was the result of an idea which three girls of the Sisters of St. Maur later communicated to Fr. d'Alzon. They worked with him to set up the Association which became a sort of Propagation of the Faith to French Protestants. In 1855, Fr. d'Alzon became one of the Association's most ardent promoters, but in 1857 Msgr. Segur, in Paris, became its head. When the Councils of this and similar organizations were suppressed by the government, under pretext that they were secret political societies, Fr. d'Alzon's name was eliminated from the membership list of the Central Council, in order to spare him trouble with the government. But he remained interested in the movement and stayed friendly with its officers and members.

Such ceaseless apostolic activities had undermined Fr. d'Alzon's health. He should have had absolute rest, but he would only consent to take a couple of weeks off now and then. To his work as vicar-general, superior of a congregation, director of a college of some 200 students, he added countless hours of confessions and spiritual direction. Usually he would meet with people for about ten hours daily. Throat abscesses, persistent colds, neuralgia exhausted him. The failure of some houses he had started, the project refusals by diocesan officials, and staggering debts both at Nîmes and at Clichy upset him further. Finally, in May, 1854, he suffered a cerebral congestion. In 1855, a specialist diagnosed cerebro-spinal meningitis and ordered long rest periods. Consequently, Fr. d'Alzon would often stay at Lavagnac or go to the baths at Vichy or Lamalou. Even during such "vacations," he would write many letters of spiritual direction, and once he wrote the Assumptionists' *Directory*, presenting their characteristic spirituality. In December, 1854 and again a year later, he suffered relapses. By then the direction of Assumption College had been taken over by a recently ordained priest, Fr. de Cabrieres, and Fr. d'Alzon would appear in Nîmes only infrequently.

The financial situation left Fr. d'Alzon no respite. This is very ironic, given the fact that d'Alzon stood to inherit a very considerable fortune from his parents. The sale of some of the buildings and land of the College was considered. Never did Fr. d'Alzon suffer more than during these trying times. To his physical pain was added the moral suffering of possibly having to dissolve his congregation, disperse its members, and sell his college. But just as the college was on the point of being auctioned off, a stock-holding company was formed which raised approximately half the required sum. Friends, alumni, the mayor of Nîmes, and many influential people bought shares. The Bishop was opposed to the idea because he feared to lose his vicar-general if the college were sold. The d'Alzon family furnished the remaining sum needed, provided Emmanuel would henceforth have nothing to do with the college's finances and provided there be a Treasurer answerable to the stockholders. Thus the College and the Congregation were saved; and Father d'Alzon was freed from financial worries and could continue to be the intellectual

and moral director of the work while someone else handled the day-by-day running of the school.

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Through the years, attempts were made to unite or fuse the Assumptionists with various religious institutes, such as the Fathers of the Holy Cross, headed by Father Moreau; the Resurrectionists, Polish priests who wanted to work for the conversion of the Orthodox; the Hermits of St. Augustine. Fr. d'Alzon felt he had a providential mission, that his congregation had a special spirit and character, and he did not want it to be simply swallowed up. He was ready to make concessions, but others yielded only on external matters and he was unsatisfied. Often he was persuaded against fusion by his religious, including his young negotiator, Francois Picard who was only 25, and the young religious in Rome who were actually living with some of these communities and who saw that the objectives and spirit of the groups were so different that a successful union was impossible. We might mention here that some time prior to 1854 Fr. d'Alzon started calling his congregation the Augustinians of the Assumption (hence the initials A.A. after their name), because he was using the Rule of St. Augustine, because of his devotion for the bishop of Hippo, and because he dreamed of someday having his institute included among the major monastic Orders. The Augustinians for their part would have wanted the Assumptionists as a sort of French province within their Order, because they had had no religious in France since the Revolution. The closest the two institutes came to fusion was a loose affiliation in 1866, by which the Assumptionists shared in the spiritual benefits of the Augustinian Order.

In 1856, Fr. d'Alzon requested papal approval of his congregation. The bureaucrat in Rome who examined the Assumptionist dossier recommended a decree "of praise" but argued that the institute should mature more and present more developed Constitutions before obtaining approbation. On November 26, 1864, the Assumptionists were given papal approbation, but their Constitutions were not yet accepted, nor was their fourth vow.

During the 1859–60 battle to preserve the independence of the Papal States, Fr. d'Alzon was a staunch defender of the papal cause and a hard worker for the Peter's Pence contribution which helped finance the papal troops. The Viscountess d'Alzon, by now totally blind, had died on October 12, 1860. Father d'Alzon could not give her the last rites because the bishop of Montpellier had withdrawn his diocesan faculties because of d'Alzon's "excess of zeal" for Peter's Pence.

## **NEAR EASTERN MISSIONS**

In Syria, many Christians had been massacred by Moslem Arabs during 1860. Responding to a call to help Christians, Fr. d'Alzon had accepted at Assumption College eight young men who after their education would be returned to Jerusalem as the nucleus of a Maronite seminary that Fr. d'Alzon wanted to start, staffed by Assumptionists. The Cenacle was for sale, at a reasonable price; d'Alzon had ample funds, inherited from his mother. Why was the seminary project abandoned? The simple truth is that there was a plot, even among the papal entourage, to obtain d'Alzon's money, not for Jerusalem, but for Bulgaria.

Pope Pius IX wanted very badly the erection of a seminary in Bulgaria. It is not surprising that when d'Alzon arrived in Rome with a pilgrimage of priests from Nîmes the Pope sent word to d'Alzon that the Assumptionists and the Resurrectionists should jointly undertake missions in the Near East. It is in this context that we must interpret the Pope's words to d'Alzon during a public audience on June 4, 1862, "We bless your apostolate in the East and in the West." The Pope's words have often been misinterpreted as an order given to d'Alzon to launch his congregation into the Near East. The fact is that d'Alzon had already thought along these lines, that his action was being re-oriented by Roman prelates, and that the Pope's words are a blessing, not a command. Such a public statement, however, made it practically impossible for d'Alzon to withdraw from the Bulgarian seminary project, even if he had wished. In a private audience granted to Fr. d'Alzon on June 6, Pius IX explicitated his wish that the Assumptionists work in Bulgaria.

Cardinal Barnabo, head of the Propaganda, was opposed to the seminary, but Pius IX told d'Alzon to proceed despite Barnabo. This small detail is mentioned only to indicate how opposite forces were at work and how complicated the whole Near East mission venture soon became. The Byzantine ways became truly labyrinthine when the Resurrectionists entered the picture. They realized that because of the political agitation of some of their associates they were not very popular in Vatican circles, and they saw in the Bulgarian mission a way to improve their image. So they pushed, a bit too hard. They negotiated in Rome as if they were alone involved and they decided that the Resurrectionists would take the Slav mission while the Assumptionists would take the Greeks and the Rumanians. Fr. d'Alzon saw through their maneuver and exclaimed, "It was to me, not to the Poles, that the Pope entrusted the Bulgarian mission." By 1862, all thought of union between the institutes was forgotten and all efforts at cooperation in missions were doomed. The Resurrectionists moved into Bulgaria in strength and Father d'Alzon let it happen because by then he was considering a more intellectual, broader approach in his battle to win over the Orthodox. He had by then decided to give up, if need be, the direct apostolate to the Bulgarians, in favor of study and refutation of the Greek schism. He believed that the spread of Russian influence could be stopped by strengthening Turkey and obtaining the return to Rome of its Christian subjects. Events of World War I make

such an approach seem strange today, but at that time the alliance of Western Christianity and Islam against Russia seemed advantageous for the West. So Fr. d'Alzon sailed for Turkey and Bulgaria. He wrote just before his departure, "My God, what kind of hornet's nest am I getting into! But one must be a bit of a fool for God." Fr. Galabert had already been in Constantinople some three months, studying the situation, when Fr. d'Alzon arrived. It was difficult for d'Alzon to find out precisely the feelings of the Bulgarian people. Often all he had to go on was the word of politicians or revolutionaries. He concluded that help from the West was sought more for personal, political reasons than for deep, sincere religious reasons. Fr. Galabert's study of the regions around Adrianople (today's Edirne) and Philippopolis (today's Plovdiv) led to the conclusion that the local clergy were not to be counted on and that the only real hope for the future lay in schools where the future generation could be educated as Catholics.

Fr. d'Alzon wanted his seminary, located over the ruins of ancient Chalcedon, to be open to Latins, Greeks, and Bulgarians, each according to his rite. The purchase of the land fell through and d'Alzon became somewhat disenchanted with the project. In April, 1863, he arrived in Rome from Constantinople and gave the Pope and the Propaganda a report of his trip. But Pius IX was ill and did not read the report immediately. He still clung to his desire for a seminary, while the Prefect of the Propaganda still preferred schools. When d'Alzon's report was finally read at a plenary session of the Propaganda, neither the Pope nor Cardinal Barnabo was satisfied. For some thirty years, no action would be taken.

Still, at Philippopolis, St. Andrew's elementary school, had been started by Father Galabert, helped by Brothers Gallois and Chilier. For 45 years the Assumptionists would subsidize this school, which was a simple parochial school. D'Alzon had great dreams of the reunion of the Eastern churches to Rome, but his religious were conscious of their small number and chose to do what was more urgent or more manageable. Later on they would undertake more ambitious projects, such as a College at Philippopolis. And in time we would see Assumptionists in Jerusalem, Belgrade, Athens, Constantinople, and in Rumania, Bulgaria, Turkey, and Russia.

## **THE OBLATE SISTERS**

In connection with the work of the Assumptionists in the Near East, we must mention the founding of the Oblate Sisters of the Assumption. Originally Fr. d'Alzon would have been pleased to have the Religious of the Assumption working alongside his missionaries. But twice the sisters refused, possibly as the result of a rather pessimistic picture of the situation presented to them by the Resurrectionists. D'Alzon was disappointed and sought help from three other congregations, without result. He knew that schools were essential if any inroads were to be made upon Orthodoxy; and he began to consider the founding of a second congregation which would share the apostolate, teaching in the village schools and serving in hospitals and clinics. At first he wanted them to be a branch of the Religious of the Assumption,

but this did not materialize. The woman he had planned on as foundress joined the Religious of the Assumption instead, and Fr. d'Alzon had to seek another foundress. Meanwhile at Vigan he gathered six postulants, initially trained by Fr. Saugrain. On July 25, 1865, arrived from the Religious of the Assumption Mother Mary Magdalen, who was to be a sort of model of religious training and life for the Oblates. Fr. d'Alzon himself was acting as superior. Of the first 11 postulants, 9 were invested in August 1865, and their number increased to 19 very shortly. They still had no foundress. Fr. d'Alzon was considering Marie Correnson for the role. At 25, she was the eldest of ten children, very well-educated, strong-willed to the point of entering the Oblates over parental objections. On April 7, 1867 she received the religious habit under the name of Sister Emmanuel-Marie of the Compassion. She would start wearing the habit on June 27, in her capacity as foundress. On April 18, 1868, Mother Correnson made perpetual vows; fittingly she was the first of the Oblates to do so. The following day, after three years of novitiate, five other Oblates also made profession. By September of 1869 the congregation had sixteen professed nuns and an even greater number of novices. By that time five Oblates had already sailed for the Near East, where their arrival at Adrianople was triumphal. Fr. Galabert and the staff of the French consulate had come out on horseback to greet them, and a procession through the streets was formed. By May 24, 1868 the sisters had already opened a small school in Kafes-Kapou. Within two years they had a second school at Kaik. To the local public school they added a dispensary. They were aided in this by Fr. Galabert who was, as we have seen, a physician, and by Fr. Barthelemy Lampre, who was also a pharmacist,

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When the Assumptionist college at Clichy closed in 1860, some Assumptionists returned to Nîmes, Fr. Tissot went to Australia, and others stayed with Fr. Picard in Paris. A residence was needed, and a fine spot for it was found on Francis I Street. A small residence and tiny chapel were ready by December, 1861. Here a small group of Assumptionists worked, without noise or publicity, laying the groundwork for the notable works of the future. Besides Fr. Picard and Laurent, there was Fr. Etienne Pernet who in the Spring of 1865 founded the Little Sisters of the Assumption, to nurse the sick-poor in their homes, absolutely free.

Another member of the Francis I Street community was an Irishman, Father Edmond O'Donnell, who had been a missionary in the United States, had become an American citizen, and as such could be considered the first American Assumptionist. He had been associated with the college at Clichy where his knowledge of English, French, and Italian had been useful. He published numerous books, including translations of the *Divine Comedy*, Chateaubriand's *Genius of Christianity*, an abbreviated *Summa Theologica*, and two volumes of Sermons on the Gospels of Sundays and major feasts. The Empress

Eugenie herself helped finance their publication.

## **AT VATICAN COUNCIL**

At the time of the Vatican Council I, Fr. d'Alzon stayed almost nine months in Rome, from November 6, 1869 to July 18, 1870. Bishop Plantier who was now bishop of Nîmes had brought him as his theologian. When Plantier was forced to return to Nîmes because of ill health, he left d'Alzon as his replacement at the Council. D'Alzon could have taken part in ceremonial and working sessions of the Council, but he chose not to attend even the opening session. His role at the Council was great but behind-the-scenes, wholly outside official meetings. He was associated, as Planner's deputy, with what was known as the Committee of Five (Plantier, Mermillod, Manning, Dechamps, Pie) in pre-conciliar meetings dealing especially with the question of papal infallibility.

D'Alzon was briefed almost daily on all council working sessions by Fr. Galabert who attended them as translator for a number of Near Eastern bishops who did not understand Latin. In early February, 1870, with the approval of the Council Presidents, Fr. d'Alzon became one of the organizers of the International Press Bureau. Already some diplomats had bribed Vatican employees, had pilfered secret documents from the Vatican press, and had published them, with the result that misunderstandings and confusion abounded. As the bishops were sworn to secrecy concerning the meetings, they decided, with papal approval, to commission a selected few from among themselves (such as Manning, Mermillod) to release authentic, accurate information. It was through the Press Bureau, i.e. through d'Alzon and others, that such material was then released to the Catholic press throughout the world. In this sense d'Alzon was one of the public information sources of Vatican I. He was also very active in efforts to obtain priority consideration by the Council of the document dealing with papal infallibility. It was a great personal pleasure and triumph for him as he attended, for the only time, the session where the doctrine of infallibility was overwhelmingly voted by the Council. D'Alzon considered his work at the Council finished and left Rome the same day, July 18, 1870.

In the post-Commune period of 1871, Fr. d'Alzon conceived the idea of a League to defend the rights of the Church. By prayers, alms, and action it would be a program for complete Catholic Action, an implementation of Vatican I, a reconstruction of society on truly Christian principles, claiming God's rights to man's love and service. The projected League was so broad in scope that it was never realized. Yet the idea for the League prompted the creation, in Paris, of the Association of Our Lady of Salvation, which proposed to foster public prayer and to work for the moralization of the working class. From this Association would spring the apostolate of pilgrimages, of the press, and of social action. We have already mentioned Fr. d'Alzon's activities in the social action sphere, and shall here limit ourselves to mentioning that during the last ten years of his life he was increasingly interested in the problems of the workingmen and in

their solution. Fr. d'Alzon encouraged public manifestations of faith and organized pilgrimages to Paray-le-Monial, Rome, and Lourdes. It was at this time that the annual national pilgrimages of the sick and the invalid started to go to Lourdes, led by Assumptionists. Such national pilgrimages still take place yearly.

## ALUMNATES

By 1871, Fr. d'Alzon was increasingly concerned with the problem of vocations. The Assumptionists still numbered only forty, including lay brothers and many not yet ordained. A partial solution was found in the alumnates (the word is found in no dictionary), a special kind of minor seminary. Father d'Alzon was offered some land, a run-down house, and an abandoned chapel dedicated to Our Lady of the Chateaux, on a mountainside in Savoy. He accepted the gift and set about finding vocations among the youngsters of the poorer class who could rarely finance the studies required for the priesthood. House and chapel were rapidly repaired and a first Mass was celebrated on August 28, 1871. Five students were present, plus a sixth little fellow who wandered in just for the Mass. Fr. d'Alzon in his homily seized upon the number six to compare the first alumnists to the six jugs of Cana, As yet they held little of any value but the Lord would fill them with treasures of knowledge and virtue. The image of the "six jugs" became legendary in the history of the institution. To the regular program of studies, the alumnists would add the recitation of Prime and Compline and the chanting of daily Vespers. Liturgy and plain-chant classes were also included. Each student was expected to help in kitchen and household chores. Manual labor would be fine training for their labors as future missionaries of the Gospel. Fr. d'Alzon insisted that the alumnists be characterized by a spirit of faith, frankness, sacrifice, and initiative. The aluminate atmosphere was to be that of a loving family. We would also like to emphasize here that the alumnists were chosen exclusively from among the poorer youngsters who could not pay for such schooling, yet they were given complete freedom of choice. They could become diocesan priests, religious of any Order or Congregation, even Assumptionists. Additional alumnates were opened in Nice, Arras, Vigan, and Clairmarais. Statistics on vocations from alumnates are hard to come by, but Clairmarais alone furnished one archbishop, one bishop, and almost 430 priests, regular or secular.

The last decade of his life Father d'Alzon spent especially on the spiritual formation of his religious, men and women. He had already finished his *Directory* which complemented the Rule of St. Augustine and the Constitutions of each institute. In a series of *Circular Letters*

, written between 1874 and 1878, he exposed the principles and guidelines that should direct his religious. They discuss, among other things, education in colleges and alumnates, apostolate, need for constant study, methods and spirit of mental prayer, and solutions to various problems. He also condensed his spiritual legacy in his *Meditations for a Retreat*

, which deal with the most important aspects of religious and priestly life. He was forced to leave unfinished a second series of meditations on the cycle of the liturgical year.



The spirituality which Father d'Alzon wanted for his Assumptionist families includes the following traits: it is above all else apostolic, based on a spirit of faith, preoccupied with publicly affirming the supernatural order. Besides education, the religious were to use as means the popular press, pilgrimages, social work, and ecumenical work. The influence of St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas is very present in this spirituality which is essentially doctrinal, energetic, and optimistic as it tries to realize in the world the motto that d'Alzon gave his religious, *Adveniat Regnum Tuum*

(Thy Kingdom Come). It is for the rights of God's Kingdom that d'Alzon fought throughout his life. Students of Assumptionists were to be characterized, according to Fr. d'Alzon, by a sense of duty, loyalty, frankness, acceptance of sacrifice, disinterestedness, and a deep supernatural spirit.

The Assumptionist apostolate was to be disinterested, open to all noble undertakings, and adaptable. Fr. d'Alzon said, "Let us not exclude any form of sanctity or of charity. We cannot take them all for ourselves; let us love and encourage in others what we ourselves are incapable of." He believed that the Church constantly renews itself; to each age corresponds new needs, new apostolic endeavors, and the zeal of the apostle must be adapted to the needs of his contemporaries. "It was given only to the word of Christ to be of all times and of all situations; only the Gospel will always have the answers which satisfy all the needs of the soul."

## **APOSTOLATE OF THE PRESS**

Since 1877, Fr. Vincent de Paul Bailly had been publishing in Paris a lively, illustrated weekly magazine, *Le Pelerin*, which by 1878 had a circulation of 60,000. Fr. d'Alzon, with some misgivings about the tone of the magazine, encouraged Fr. Bailly to continue. In early 1880, Fr. Bailly started a weekly review and in it launched, as a trial balloon, the idea of a daily newspaper. In reaction to the violently anti-religious forces that were tearing the crucifix from the classroom walls and stopping crosses from being placed as gravestones, Fr. d'Alzon proudly placed the crucifix as the colophon of the monthly magazine. This review,

*La Croix*

, was to safeguard the gravely menaced freedom of the Church.

*La Croix*

was also to be Fr. d'Alzon's last undertaking. He contributed articles to each edition. "Each of these articles," wrote Cardinal de Cabrieres, "poured from his heart like the river of molten metal from the furnace, devouring day by day his vital reserves, burnt up as he was by ceaseless sorrow." All this activity was taking place amid renewed attacks by the government against schools run by religious, unless they had specifically been authorized by the State. Convinced that in unity lies strength and opposed to capitulating to the State, the representatives of numerous teaching orders, including the Jesuits, Dominicans, Oratorians, Carmelites, and Assumptionists unanimously refused to request such authorization. The government retaliated

by starting to expel some of these Orders.

Fr. d'Alzon was exhausted by this new fight for freedom of education. He nonetheless continued to write for *Le Pelerin* and *La Croix*, and supervised the formation of Assumptionist novices. As he had by this time been relieved from his burden as vicar-general of the diocese, at his repeated request, he now had a slight bit more time for other activities. In September, 1880 he made a week-long retreat at the Carthusian monastery of Valbonne. Afterwards, as he foresaw that the expulsion of his religious from France was imminent, he started planning their dispersion to Spain and England. His weakness and illness increased to the point that after October 11 he no longer could celebrate Mass. Fr. Germer-Durand's sudden death on October 16 was a crushing blow to d'Alzon. On October 21 he named Fr. Francois Picard as his vicar-general of the Assumptionists, and on November 5 he received the Last Rites. In Paris on the very same day, police were literally chopping down the door of the Assumptionist house of Francis I Street, forcing the religious to evacuate, and placing official seals upon the premises. Such action was expected momentarily at Assumption College in Nîmes, but the intervention of influential people succeeded in staving off the attack until after Fr. d'Alzon's death. After a long agony, Father Emmanuel d'Alzon died serenely on November 21, 1880.

Msgr. Vitte, bishop of Anastasiopolis, summed up his life thus: "He was a valiant soldier, ... always ready for combat...he energetically opposed everything false, dishonest, or disloyal...he admitted no compromise with error or weakness...he was a true soldier of God, a knight of the Holy Church."