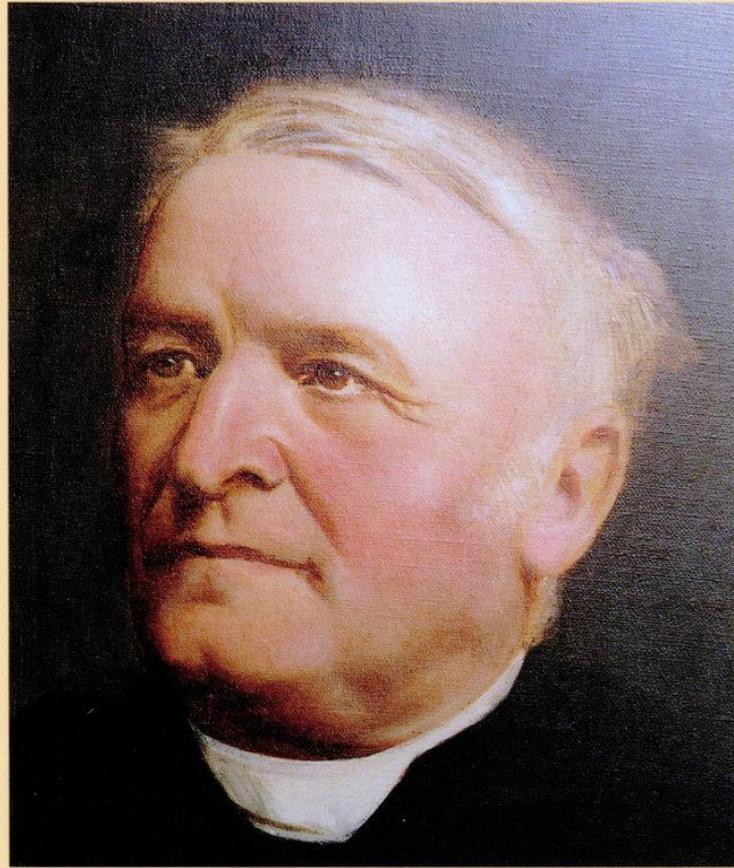


GAÉTAN BERNOVILLE

EMMANUEL D'ALZON



Gaétan Bernoville

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1810-1880

**A Champion of
the XIXth Century
Catholic Renaissance
in France**

Translated by

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and Alexis Babineau, A.A.**

Bayard, Inc.

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Preface

Gaétan Bernoville, the author of this biography of Father Emmanuel d'Alzon, founder of the Augustinians of the Assumption, was asked to write this study when the congregation was marking its centennial.

At the time, Bernoville had already published twenty-three books, including biographies of St. Thérèse of Lisieux and Bernadette Soubirous of Lourdes. Fourteen of these volumes were biographies of founders and foundresses of religious congregations, among them Father Etienne Pernet, who founded the Little Sisters of the Assumption, and another on the Religious of the Assumption, focusing on Eugénie Milleret, their foundress. These two communities are considered to be “sister” congregations of the Augustinians of the Assumption because both Father Pernet and Mother Marie Eugénie were so closely allied to Father d'Alzon, the first as an Assumptionist himself, and the second as a lifelong correspondent and close friend. Our readers will find them both mentioned more than once in the pages which follow. In 1948, and again in 1950, Gaétan Bernoville was honored by the Academie française for his writings.

In a very succinct *Foreword* to the French edition, Bernoville expressed his debt of gratitude to Father Siméon Vailhé, A.A., whose two-volume biography of Father d'Alzon, written over a thirty-year period, as well as his three volumes of the founder's voluminous correspondence up to 1850, are still considered to be standard reference works for any study of Father d'Alzon. In the final sentence of his *Foreword*, Gaétan Bernoville writes as follows about them: “These are the fundamental works in which

to seek further documentation; nothing would please me more than to have the present book awaken such a desire in my readers.”

Given the complexity of the Catholic Church's constantly changing status in nineteenth-century France, the translators requested of Rev. George Tavard, an Assumptionist theologian as well as a native of France, that he write a scholarly Introduction to this book. The thoroughness of Father Tavard's analysis will enable readers to “situate” Father d'Alzon in his fierce struggle against the French State for official recognition of Catholic schools, and against French prelates in his ultramontane stance against the Gallicanism widespread in the French Church of his time.

The numbered endnotes are meant to clarify certain events and give some background information on persons and places mentioned by the author and which may not always be familiar to our readers.

Bernoville's translators hope that this English version will help readers to understand the heroism of Father d'Alzon. For the Church, Emmanuel d'Alzon gave up a life of great privilege, sacrificed a goodly portion of the family's fortune and what could have been a brilliant career in any number of fields. The Catholic Church in post-revolutionary France of the nineteenth century was in dire need of men like d'Alzon, true believers willing to give up everything for the priesthood which they considered to be the noblest calling of them all. May his example spur others to follow in his footsteps.

Claire Quintal

Foreword

The State of d'Alzon Scholarship since the Publication of the Bernoville Biography

Since the appearance of the biography of Fr. d'Alzon by Gaétan Bernoville in the fifties, research on the founder of the Assumptionists has steadily advanced and matured. In this regard, it is only fitting to cite the truly authoritative works of Fr. Athanase Sage (1896-1971), considered to be the best analyst and interpreter of the writings of Fr. d'Alzon (cf. *Écrits spirituels*, 1956, and *Un Maître spirituel du XIXe siècle*, 1958). Though the years which followed marked a pause in d'Alzon scholarship, the celebration of the centennial of Fr. d'Alzon's death in 1980 gave rise to a new wave of interest and study. A colloquium held in Paris,—*Emmanuel d'Alzon dans la société du XIXe siècle* (Le Centurion, 1982)—chaired by the renowned scholars, René Remond and Emile Poulat, was complemented by the publication of its proceedings which contain articles of the highest academic quality for the most part. The centennial also inspired the completion of the publication of the known correspondence of Fr. d'Alzon, a total of 18 volumes to date. This was a monumental enterprise due to the efforts of Siméon Vailhé (3 volumes), Pierre Touveneraud (2 volumes), Désiré Deraedt (11 volumes), and Jean-Paul Périer-Muzet (2 volumes). What may be of the greatest significance has been the creation of a database, begun in 1986, on d'Alzon and Assumptionist life, which includes the inventory, scanning, and indexing of all of Fr. d'Alzon's writings — whether in his own hand or recorded by others. This has fostered a comprehensive and annotated rereading of this material. It has also made possible renewed studies such as the important volume *Documentation biographique, dossier vie et vertus du P*

d'Alzon (Rome, 1986), due to the efforts of Pierre Touveneraud, Désiré Deraedt, and Wilfrid Dufault. The extraordinary quality, detail, and depth of this work cannot be overemphasized.

Fr. George Tavadar has likewise written in-depth books on specific topics (*The Weight of God*, *Fr. d'Alzon at Vatican I*, and *La Croix de Jésus*). He recently completed two other books published by Le Cerf: *Textes spirituels* (2002) and *Foi et Royaume* (2003). Finally, Fr. Jean-Paul Pèrier-Muzet, the current archivist of the Congregation, has contributed his own historical approach which complements the spiritual biography of Fr. d'Alzon by André Sève (*Ma Vie c'est le Christ*, Le Centurion, 1980; in English, *Christ Is My Life*, New York: New City Press, 1988) with his own works, *Prier 15 jours avec Emmanuel d'Alzon* (Nouvelle Cité, #75, 2003) and *Le P. d'Alzon par lui-même: Anthologie alzonienne* (Rome, 2003).

This latest wave of scholarly activity underlines the extent to which the personality and the apostolic activity of the founder of the Assumptionists remain rich and relevant at the dawn of the third millennium, not only for the congregations he founded to serve the Church, but also for the laymen and laywomen who today share a concern for that universal mission — the coming of God's Kingdom.

Emmanuel d'Alzon: A Word from the General Archivist

What am I? What do I want to be? How will I become what I want to be? For quite some time, it is true, I have had a plan for my life. I pretty well know, or I believe I have a vague notion of what I wanted to do, but I have never entered deeply into myself, never have I tried to lay out clearly the means I wanted to use to reach my goal. Today, that's what I really want to seek. I want to know clearly what I am, what I want to be, and what means I am going to use to become what I want to be.

(*Ecrits Spirituels*/ES p. 736, 19 February 1831)

This is the questioning of a young man at the age of twenty-one, a questioning which, in fact, spans his whole life. Emmanuel d'Alzon (1810-

1880) was a son of the Cévennes Region who spent almost his entire life in Nîmes, considered to be the Rome of Southern France in the 19th century. A Southerner by birth, appearance, and temperament, thus can be described, geographically and psychologically, this man who, in 1832, linked his destiny to the life of the Church, who assumed responsibility in his diocese as vicar-general for forty years, and who brought into being two religious families — the Augustinians of the Assumption (AA) in 1845 and the Oblates of the Assumption (OA) in 1863, after having contributed energetically to the development of the Religious of the Assumption (RA).

From his Cévennes and Languedoc family ties, Emmanuel retained more than one trait characteristic of a man of the *Midi*: a quick even impetuous wit, and loyalty to the ideas, individuals, and causes he embraced. He defined himself as being blunt, Catholic above all else which, in his day, meant ultramontane [that is, “beyond the mountains” or loyal to the Church in Rome, the universal Church, as opposed to “Gallican” or “devoted” to the local Church in France]. He was quick to get involved in apostolic activity and generous in his commitments. One need only peruse his voluminous correspondence — more than 8,000 letters extant and edited, of the 40,000 he presumably wrote — to recognize from his own hand the luminous flashes of wit of a man of faith prone to action. So it was, with his typical candor, that he warned Mother Marie Eugénie, the foundress of the Religious of Assumption: “Sometimes I am afraid that my southern manner may frighten your German, I was about to say, Teutonic rationality” (Letters B 436). A few years later, maturity and experience led him to put aside such precautions in his writing, as can be seen in a letter to Fr. Picard in the midst of the crisis in France over the Papal States and the politics of the imperial government of Napoleon III: “I don’t see what our little Congregation is good for, unless it commits itself to the cause of the Church” (Letters III 1700). It is

immediately apparent that d'Alzon was a man filled with energy, passion, and principles, and that he was not willing to compromise in matters he deemed essential; he was often in a hurry, but this man described by some as rash, lightheaded, and even fickle, was uncommonly persevering (Letters B 383).

Nevertheless, this “thoroughbred” Southerner, who frequented Rome more than Paris, also transcends classifications and stereotypes that are too facile. Politically, for example, even if he proved to be — from birth to death — a visceral and unconditional “anti-liberal,”¹ he did not reject those changes which were forced upon him as well as on his times; the events of 1848 made of him a sort of *latter-day* republican, as he stated; his monarchist convictions did not prevent him, at the end of the 1860s, from anticipating the birth of democracy. An aristocrat by birth, heir to a considerable family fortune, which became his after 1860, he attached himself neither to the dominant class — the bourgeoisie — nor to its interests. He knew how to speak to the people; he wanted to engage his Congregation in serving the needs of the poor, as his speech at the closing of the General Chapter of 1868 bears out (ES pp.143-4). After his initial efforts in providing for the educational needs of the elite, he became involved in a host of other initiatives which sought to reach the masses: the orphanage of Fr. Halluin in Arras (1868); alummates for the *priesthood of the poor* (beginning in 1870); large-scale pilgrimages (beginning in 1872) and the creation, together with Frs. Vincent de Paul Bailly and François Picard, of an inexpensive press intended for the people (La Bonne Presse/Bayard Presse) to “instruct, educate, and instill morals” in those whom anticlerical, “republican” [i.e., representing the Republic] forces were bent upon snatching from the influence of the Church.

What an amazing life — that of this rich young man, accustomed to the princely estate of Lavagnac and to the salons of the upper classes, who would die poor and stripped of all possessions, clad in the humble habit of a monk-apostle, on November 21, 1880, at his college in Nîmes, besieged by government troops. Here you have the authentic itinerary of his evangelical life, diametrically opposite that of the rich young man in Matthew 19:16-22. It was a journey that broke the mold of a typical personal destiny customary for one of his class, which he redirected with *daring, generosity, and selflessness* toward more universal shores and higher stakes, in line with the Pauline motto he espoused, “For me, to live is Christ,” or also with the bold assertion he addressed to his religious in the *Directory*, “I cannot love Jesus Christ without wanting that all creatures love Him, and this is the reason which must constitute the apostolic character of my life” (II, 22).

Emmanuel d’Alzon offered to the Church the complete gift of his life. He loved to repeat his triple embeddedness in the Church or his three *spiritual births*: his baptism in St. Peter’s church at Le Vigan (September 2, 1810), which he celebrated each year as “the day of his real birth”; his priestly ordination in Rome (December 26, 1834) at the end of a trying period of suffering due to his friendship with Lamennais; and his choice of religious life (Christmas 1845), what he would call the reappearance of *the star* in the passing of time. Baptized, ordained, professed are not simply three successive periods of his life, they are the three milestones of a journey constantly relived throughout his life in the light of grace. They point to the interiority of the faith of this man of God as expressed in this summary of his thought which captures the spirit of Assumption: “To love Christ, the Virgin, and the Church, to love the whole Jesus Christ,” coupled with his entirely evangelical, albeit succinct, motto, “To hasten the coming of the Kingdom of God in us and around us.” The spirit

which impelled Fr. d'Alzon was inspired by that faith-love (cf. André Sève) which transcended every border, every diocese, every country or continent, for himself, for the battles he would wage, and for the apostolic endeavors that he would assign to his two congregations.

It was a faith-love as vast as the apostolic prayer, as universal as the Church, and as integrated as his own life.

As for me, I am trying to pray as much as possible and, surprisingly, I have proof that I am doing some good for souls when I refuse to give in to the boredom of a prayer that is dry, arid, and filled with disgust and distractions. Learning to pray has become the technique of my efforts in this regard, and I do not know how to give you any other advice than what I am applying to myself. Remain before God, stay there with Him, tell Him that you are nothing, that you have such a need of Him; ask the Holy Spirit to give us His love. It's as easy as saying, "Hello!" And it is there that I find all my strength and hope. I know of no greater goal in life than to seek God with all ones strength. In a word, I am trying to make myself as simple as possible and can only wish that you become very simple in your prayer.

To Mother Marie Eugénie (Letters XII6518)

Jean-Paul Périer-Muzet, A.A.,
Rome, May 2003

Historical Introduction

The Political and Intellectual Context of the Nineteenth Century in France

The concerns and activities of Emmanuel d'Alzon cannot be understood outside of the context of the nineteenth century in France. This context can be briefly described by reference (1) to the impact of the French Revolution and the successive political regimes of the nineteenth century, (2) to the theological influence of Lamennais and the tragedy of his condemnation, (3) to the heavy traces of Gallicanism that remained in French society and thought, whatever the political system of the day, (4) to the situation created by the Concordat, concluded between Napoleon and Pius VII in 1801, and the legal status of private schools and universities, (5) to the relations between Catholics and other Christians in Fr. d'Alzon's experience.

(1) The Impact of the French Revolution

Unlike the American Revolution, the French Revolution unleashed antagonistic forces that fought each other throughout the century. In 1789, it abolished the privileges of the clergy (the First Estate) and of the nobility (the Second Estate), so as to bring their members to the level of the people (the Third Estate). From then on there would not be Estates but citizens only ("Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen," August 26, 1789). In the years following this, the Revolution fell into social chaos as the guillotine became an instrument of government. Having changed the political order of the nation, the Revolution also decided to control the Church through a "Civil Constitution of the Clergy" (July 12, 1791),

which imposed the election of bishops and pastors by the citizens (all of them, even if not Catholic), loosened the bonds between the dioceses and Rome, abolished monasteries and convents, and required a succession of oaths of allegiance from the clergy. The bishops who were elected held a national council and began a liturgical reform that was inspired by Jansenist models, as in the Italian synod of Pistoia (1786). In November 1793, the Revolution went further and decided to replace all religion with the cult of the "Goddess Reason"; that was followed by the cult of the Supreme Being in July 1794. As a result, to the end of the nineteenth century, the popes and a number of bishops in France placed the struggle against the Revolution at the center of their concerns. So did Emmanuel d'Alzon.

Order was progressively restored by Napoleon Bonaparte, a general in the armies of the Revolution who became "First Consul" in 1799, "Consul for Life" in 1802, and "Emperor of the French" in 1804. Peace came to the Church with a Concordat that Pius VII (Pope, 1800-1823) signed with him on July 14, 1801. Among the conditions that Bonaparte insisted upon was the requirement that all bishops resign their See and that bishops then be chosen from both types of clergy, "assermented" (who had signed the required pledges of allegiance) and "insermented" (who had not). A few of the older bishops, who had been consecrated before 1789, refused to resign. They were nevertheless replaced, and they spent their remaining years in exile. In spite of this official reconciliation that came by way of authority, two orientations divided the French clergy throughout the nineteenth century. There were those who wished the *ancien régime* back and campaigned for a monarchic government eager to promote Catholicism, and those who accepted the basic principle of equality that was affirmed by the Revolution. The ideological and political struggle between these two points of view lasted

through the entire century. It was settled in principle when Leo XIII issued his letter *Au milieu des sollicitudes* [In the Midst of Concerns], in 1892, urging French Catholics to “rally to the Republic.”

Born in 1810, Emmanuel d’Alzon spent his first years under the First Empire (1804-1814) of Napoleon I. What he could remember of his early childhood, however, related to the monarchy that was restored at the fall of Napoleon in 1814, when Emmanuel was four years old. Louis XVIII, brother of King Louis XVI, who had been beheaded in 1792, reigned first, but he did not dare to be crowned because of the warnings of a visionary, Thomas Martin, who claimed to have been visited by the Archangel Michael. Since Charlemagne (742?-814), this archangel was considered to be the heavenly patron of the French monarchy. The archangel would have told Martin many times, between 1816 and 1830, that the son of Louis XVI, who was reported to have died in prison during the Terror, was still living and therefore entitled to be called Louis XVII. If this was true, there could be no other legitimate king, and his uncle, Louis XVIII, was a usurper of the throne. Politically, therefore, these alleged visions threw a doubt upon the legitimacy of the new monarchic regime. This doubt was kept alive for a couple of decades, within a small group of *survivantistes*, by several individuals claiming to be Louis XVII. A certain Charles Naundorff (d.1845), in reality a watchmaker born in Berlin, called himself duke of Normandy and had a devout following. However, when Louis XVIII died in 1824, his brother Charles X (1757-1836) ignored the *survivantiste* claims and had himself crowned in the cathedral of Rheims. In 1830, however, after the king had dissolved the Chamber of Deputies (Parliament) and suspended the freedom of the press, heavy rioting broke out in Paris and other cities, and Charles X took refuge in England. This “Revolution of 1830” ended the period known as “the Restoration”

(of the old monarchy) and with it came the downfall of the Bourbon or legitimist line of the Kings of France.

The d'Alzon family had welcomed the Restoration. Emmanuel's father had even entered politics and been elected to the Chamber of Deputies in 1816 on a legitimist platform. The regime that followed the Revolution of 1830 was, therefore, not welcomed by him. Due in part to the influence of the aging Lafayette, Louis-Philippe d'Orléans (1773-1850) was installed as "King of the French" in what is known as the "July Monarchy." Louis-Philippe's father, though a cousin of Louis XVI, had been an ardent revolutionary. Elected to the "Constituent Assembly" of the Revolution under the name of Philippe Égalité, he had even voted for the condemnation of the king to death as oppressor of the people. While this rendered the new king acceptable to some, it made him abominable to others. Louis-Philippe ruled under a new charter that tried to join together a constitutional monarchy and the revolutionary principle of the equality of all citizens, but this was not yet a Republic. In 1848, however, his government, failing to apply the logic of equality, refused to establish universal suffrage. The ensuing riots, that are known as the "Revolution of 1848," ended the reign of Louis-Philippe. The Second Republic followed. It lasted only two years.

The Revolution of 1848 was felt in most of Western Europe, and especially in Rome, where insurrectionists proclaimed the Roman Republic, and Pius IX fled to Gaeta, a small town between Rome and Naples, in what was then the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies. When the Papal States were reestablished with the help of the King of the Two Sicilies and the French Republic, Pius IX returned to Rome. But he was afraid of further revolutions, and his short exile marked a turning point in his pontificate. He gave up the liberal orientation of his first years and pursued a reactionary policy as he endeavored to preserve the temporal

sovereignty of the popes over a section of the Italian peninsula. This concern for temporal power gave an aura of ambiguity to his parallel efforts to strengthen his spiritual authority, first through a series of pronouncements against modernity that were condensed in the *Syllabus* (1864), and then, through the definition of papal infallibility at Vatican Council I (1870).

In 1850, the President of the Second Republic, who was a nephew of Napoleon I, proclaimed himself Emperor as Napoleon III. His paternalistic regime brought prosperity to the middle classes, and he was generally popular. He nevertheless abdicated when he lost the battle of Sedan during the Franco-Prussian War of 1870. The Third Republic followed. It was proclaimed in September 1870, and it received its constitution in 1875. (It would come to an end in 1940, during the Second World War.) The Third Republic quickly became the theater of a sharp struggle between “clerical” and “anti-clerical” political circles. During all this time, Fr. d’Alzon did not like either the regime of Louis-Philippe, that he found too liberal, nor that of Napoleon III, which seemed to him to exploit the Church for political purposes. At the same time, he blamed Charles X for his lack of courage when the king fled to England because of a few riots. Later, after the defeat of 1870, when there was a possibility that the monarchy might be called back, Emmanuel d’Alzon would have liked to see the Bourbon line restored. The claimant, *comte* de Chambord (1820-1883), was a devout Catholic. D’Alzon’s brother-in-law, Anatole de Puységur, knew him personally and visited him in his exile in Austria.

Meanwhile, the parties that dominated the Third Republic after it received a formal constitution (1875) were intent on reducing the political impact of the Church to a minimum. Anti-clerical measures were adopted, for which d’Alzon blamed the influence of “secret societies.” As it had been a principle of the Great Revolution that no association should stand

between the Nation and its citizens, religious communities were required to apply for an authorization to exist. Decrees “against the congregations” were promulgated in March 1880. The Jesuits were expelled from the country in June; the Assumptionists, along with other congregations, in September of the same year.

(2) The Influence of Lamennais

Had he followed his ancestral traditions, Emmanuel d'Alzon would have remained a Legitimist throughout all those times. He did not. Like the popes of the nineteenth century, he was eager to combat the Revolution and to heal the wounds it had opened. But he also looked forward to a new type of relationship between the Church and the people, a perspective he had learned in his youth from a priest, *abbé* Félicité de Lamennais (1782-1854). D'Alzon rallied to the Republic long before Leo XIII advocated this switch of allegiances, even though he feared the persecutions that democracy could bring upon the Church.

The scholastic tradition that had dominated French universities since the Middle Ages was broken when these institutions were suppressed by the Revolution. It was not restored when Napoleon reorganized higher education. Faculties of theology were indeed included in the new university system. Ten were foreseen for Catholic theology and five, for Protestant theology. The bishops, however, sent no students to them. They preferred to use the provision of the Concordat stating that they were free to establish diocesan seminaries. In the beginning, these seminaries were intellectually mediocre and quite unable to handle the problems raised by the political and social situation. The ensuing theological vacuum was soon filled by a philosophical school known as Traditionalism. This is not to be confused with the positions of Archbishop Lefebvre after Vatican Council II. It was a philosophical and religious

movement initiated by two laymen. Louis de Bonald (1754-1840) wrote about the structures of society during the Revolution while in exile in Switzerland. Joseph de Maistre (1753-1821), a citizen of the duchy of Savoy, worked as a diplomat in the service of the Kingdom of Sardinia. His theological reflections on the Pope and on the nature of religion bore the mark of his experience as ambassador to the court of the Czar in St. Petersburg.

The basic idea of Traditionalism was that the human mind would have been incapable of thinking without language, which it was unable to invent in the first place. Language was, therefore, a direct gift from God. This gift was made when the Creator revealed himself to the first humans. Priests found this theory congenial because it justified the belief that there had been a primitive revelation at the origin of humanity and that the ensuing natural religion deteriorated progressively as it fell into idolatry. In turn, the Traditionalist notions could serve in apologetics. Since belief in one Supreme God is universal, it remains from the primitive revelation, and it provides a proof of the existence of God. In addition, the practice of sacrifice in all the old religions testifies to humankind's fundamental desire to worship God. Along with the moral tenets of the natural law, these aspects of the primitive revelation were confirmed and reinterpreted by Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word of God.

Félicité de Lamennais, a priest from Brittany, was the most competent theological representative of this school of thought in France. In his main writing, *Essay on Indifference in Matters of Religion* (1818), Lamennais started from the universal belief in one God to argue that universal consensus as such is a proof of the existence of God — hence the name given to his system: the “philosophy of the common sense.” He also insisted on the necessity of belonging to a believing community in order to be a believer oneself. He, therefore, considered the Catholic

Church to be the proper home for all peoples. In order to make this a reality, he considered it necessary — given the irreversibility of the Revolution — to reconcile the Church with the central principle of the Revolution, namely, the sovereignty of the people. Being suspicious of political power, especially in the hands of hereditary kings, and convinced that ordinary citizens need to be protected from politicians, Lamennais advocated an active alliance between the Pope and the people. The Church should disavow the principle of royalty. The Pope should teach that authority must not be the privilege of a few, for it belongs to all citizens. The Pope had more freedom than the bishops to resist the pressure of political power since in France, in keeping with the Concordat, the bishops were chosen by the government. Lamennais therefore advocated the separation of Church and State. In this he parted with the popes, who used concordats in Europe as a means to ensure the freedom of the Church. At the same time, Lamennais wanted the clergy to be much better educated than they were in the seminaries that the bishops had opened after the Revolution.

Emmanuel d'Alzon was all the more attracted to Traditionalism as Louis de Bonald was his mother's cousin. He himself met Lamennais in 1829 while he was studying law in Paris. Emmanuel having asked him for a program of studies, Lamennais told him to read the Fathers of the Church, which he did, before deciding that he should become a priest. When d'Alzon became dissatisfied with the seminary of Montpellier and moved to Rome, Lamennais provided him with introductions to prominent ecclesiastics, whose thinking agreed more or less with his own. Though one gathers from d'Alzon's letters that his father liked Lamennais's philosophy, his mother did not trust the priest from Brittany. She regretted his influence on her son. And she insisted that he must not study theology in Paris where Lamennais was a frequent visitor.

In 1832, however, Pope Gregory XVI condemned Lamennais's doctrine (Encyclical *Mirari vos*), largely because he understood Lamennais to be placing the Church at the service of a political system: the "liberalism" that followed the Revolution and was disapproved by the Church. In 1834, Lamennais published his defense, *Paroles d'un croyant* [Words of a Believer], a book which profoundly displeased Gregory XVI. Following this publication, the Pope accused the priest of not keeping his promise of submission and excommunicated him (Encyclical *Singulari nos*, 1834).

Emmanuel d'Alzon, who was preparing for ordination at the time, was denounced to the Pope as a follower of Lamennais, and Gregory XVI personally demanded acceptance of the condemnation as a condition for being ordained. With a heavy heart, and without truly understanding the reasons for the Pope's decision, Emmanuel d'Alzon accepted the condemnation of the priest he admired.

His debt to Lamennais remained considerable. He never abandoned the conviction that the situation before the Revolution could never be restored. Rather, one needed to look to the future, in which the Church would be guided by the Holy Spirit. It was Lamennais's trust that the Pope could lead the people in spite of their governments that made d'Alzon decidedly "ultramontane." Furthermore, when, as the vicar-general of Nîmes, he decided to form a new religious order, d'Alzon adopted some basic features of a community that Lamennais had started, the "Congregation of St. Peter," notably the idea that it should be founded on the principle of liberty. It was also Lamennais's advice to read the Fathers of the Church that had oriented d'Alzon to read St. Thomas Aquinas also and thus to anticipate Leo XIII's advocacy of Thomism as the theological system that should be taught to future priests.

(3) Gallicans and Ultramontanes

A feature of the nineteenth century was precisely the division of French Catholics, and chiefly of the clergy, between ultramontanes (those who looked for guidance beyond the mountains, that is, beyond the Alps to Rome) and Gallicans (those who affirmed the rights and privileges of Gaul and the Church of France). The Gallican tradition went back to the Pragmatic Sanction of Charles VII (King, 1422-1461), by which the king restricted the disciplinary authority of the Pope in the Kingdom of France. Bossuet had supported this principle in the seventeenth century. It had been adopted in 1682 by the Convocation of the Clergy. And it was added by Napoleon to the Concordat in the form of four "Organic Articles." As the Gallicans affirmed the relative independence of the Church in France, they protected the rights and the rites of local or regional churches. Some Gallicans, though not all, also professed the thesis of late medieval Conciliarism that General Councils are superior to the bishop of Rome with regard to doctrine. Outside of France, similar ideas flourished in Febronianism (from the pen-name, Febronius, of Johann von Hontheim, an auxiliary bishop of Trèves [Trier] in the eighteenth century), and in Josephism (from Joseph II, Emperor of Austria from 1764 to 1790), both of which endorsed the principle that a Catholic State must be able to control the Church in its territory.

In opposition to this, the ultramontanes, fearful of the manipulation of local churches by political authorities, affirmed the universal jurisdiction of the bishop of Rome. As they turned their thought to liturgy, some of them argued for the disappearance of local customs in favor of the universal practice of the Roman Rite. They generally supported the project of Pius IX to define papal infallibility officially, a move that Gallicans considered unnecessary and, in the long run, detrimental to the Church. While they did not deny the Roman primacy, the Gallicans

rejected the extreme views of papal authority that the ultramontanes defended.

By choice Fr. d'Alzon was among the ultramontanes. Nevertheless, he was not especially enthusiastic, at first, about the project of having papal infallibility officially defined. When he arrived in Rome in December 1869 to assist the bishop of Nîmes in the coming General Council (Vatican I), he hoped that the Council would settle three questions: the exemption of religious orders from the authority of bishops, the status of Catholic schools at all levels, and the organization of missions in non-Christian lands. In these three areas, he wanted to increase the authority of the Pope and diminish that of the bishops. The definition of papal infallibility, however, he regarded at first as purely formal and therefore superfluous. He became a supporter and advocate of it only when he realized that Pius IX was eager to obtain it from the Council and that the leader of the Gallicans, Felix Dupanloup (1802-1878), bishop of Orleans since 1849 — who, as the former rector of a seminary in Paris, had written on education and had also criticized the monopoly of the State — was arguing that such a definition was inopportune. D'Alzon cared little, however, about the exact formulation of the definition.²

(4) The Legal Status of Private Schools

Fr. d'Alzon's activities regarding education were closely connected with the political situation in France. The reform of education by Napoleon had given a new status to "Public Instruction" — all schools at all levels were regulated by the Minister of Public Instruction. This amounted at the same time to an extreme centralization and to a monopoly of education. The recognition of "private schools" — seminaries excepted — depended entirely upon the minister.

In 1843, Emmanuel d'Alzon, then vicar-general of Nîmes, bought the *Pensionnat de l'Assomption*, a small boarding school, from its founder. He

made himself the director, renamed it *Collège de l'Assomption* (a *collège* being a school of secondary education), and devoted a great deal of energy to making it the best school in the South of France. He largely succeeded. In December 1848, the Minister of Public Instruction of the Second Republic granted it full recognition, with a charter that gave it the same rights and responsibilities as a State school. Only a handful of private or Catholic institutions enjoyed this status. In order to obtain the privilege, Fr. d'Alzon had traveled to Paris and met the minister in person. Rather than campaign to have Catholic schools recognized generally as applying a particular system of education, he opted for the strategy of developing some excellent schools that would obtain the charter.

D'Alzon's success in education had two consequences. On the one hand, he was appointed, in 1850, to the first "High Council of Public Instruction," a consultative board that was expected to supervise all of education in the country. One of the other appointees was the bishop of Orléans, Felix Dupanloup. D'Alzon considered him an adversary, for they agreed on very few things, and they differed on the best way to break the State monopoly on education and promote Catholic schools. In any case, the meetings of the Council lasted several weeks at a time and required lengthy sojourns in the capital. Because the vicar-general of Nîmes was not eager to spend so much time far from his diocese, he missed several meetings. He was not reappointed to the Council.

On the other hand, d'Alzon entertained the thought that the strategy he had used to obtain a charter of full exercise for the *Collège de l'Assomption* could also be effective at the university level. He hired new professors and inaugurated university-level courses with the idea that, in due time, and with the proper contacts, he would obtain a university charter. No such charter existed, but he was confident enough to ignore this simple fact. An official Faculty of Catholic Theology, part of the

University system, was functioning at Aix-en-Provence, a short distance to the east. This, however, could only urge him to go ahead with his project, for that school was on the other side of the Rhone River and a traditional rivalry existed between the two sides. The bishops in any case did not trust theological institutions that were not controlled by the Church. Leading an outspoken campaign against the monopoly of the University of France, d'Alzon adopted the motto, *Delenda Carthago*, which the Romans had used in the military campaign that led to the destruction of Carthage. He kept up a verbal assault on the heart of the system of Public Instruction started by Napoleon I and which had received only minor modifications under subsequent political regimes.³

In this campaign, however, Emmanuel d'Alzon antagonized too many personalities to obtain the support he needed for his own project of higher education. Not only was he not granted a university charter by the government, but he was also mostly abandoned by the bishops. In July 1875, the Third Republic authorized the formation of private institutes of higher learning that could prepare students for university diplomas, but could not grant any themselves. The bishops, however, chose not to establish such an institute in Nîmes. At first they placed one up the Rhone River in Lyons and another, two years later, in 1877, in Toulouse, some distance to the west.

(5) Relations between Catholics and other Christians

Lamennais intended his system to be entirely Catholic. D'Alzon's readings in the Church Fathers gave him a profound sense of the catholicity of the Church. His personal understanding of catholicity was influenced, however, by the negative judgment on Protestantism that he had acquired in his childhood. The small town where he spent his first sixteen years, Le Vigan, in South-Central France, was in an area of the Cévennes Mountains where the Huguenots had taken refuge when they

were being persecuted after the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes by Louis XIV (1685).

Jews had been emancipated by King Louis XVI. Protestants were emancipated only by the Revolution. There were many of them among the peasantry of the Cévennes. There was also a Protestant bourgeoisie in Nîmes, and several Protestants became prominent in the government of the Third Republic. While there are hardly any references to contemporary Judaism in the writings and activities of Emmanuel d'Alzon, the references to Protestantism are innumerable, and they are universally hostile.

Emmanuel d'Alzon retained from his early years a view of Protestantism as an inferior form of Christianity that he associated with ignorance. One of his tasks as an adolescent had been to teach catechism to his parents' employees and their children. Likewise, as an adult, he considered it his duty to do all he could to bring about the conversion of Protestants. When he became vicar-general of the diocese of Nîmes, he therefore preached, lectured, and wrote about Protestantism. Like Bossuet in his *History of the Variations of the Protestant Churches* (1688), d'Alzon emphasized what he identified as the doctrinal chaos of Protestantism, and he liked to prophesy its imminent disintegration. By the same token, he remained unable to see the positive aspects of the Reformed Churches of France, or even of any Christian Church that is separated from Rome. He founded an association for the conversion of Protestants. He accused the *Collège Royal* of Nîmes of spreading confusion in the minds of its students because it had a Protestant as well as a Catholic chaplain. He had no direct acquaintance with the writings of Luther or Calvin, and, like the popes of his time, he believed that Martin Luther was ultimately responsible for the Revolution, for irreligious freemasonry, for socialism, and for the spread of revolutionary ideas.

When d'Alzon, who could read English, German, and Italian, as well as Latin and Greek, studied the Oxford Movement, he saw it as the herald of the reconversion of England to the Roman fold. And it is significant that he had some correspondence with the archbishop of Westminster, Cardinal Manning, who was one of the leaders of the "infallibilist" party at Vatican I and an extremist in his understanding of infallibility, while he did not relate to the less "papalist" John Henry Newman who, nevertheless, was made a cardinal by Leo XIII.

In 1861 and 1862, Fr. d'Alzon developed an eagerness to assist the Churches of the Byzantine Rite in Eastern Europe and the Near East. A Maronite seminary in Lebanon drew his attention, and soon afterwards the Christians of Bulgaria. As he approached these new areas of concern, about which he had no direct information, d'Alzon naturally transferred what he felt about "schism and heresy" to the situation of Orthodoxy. Thanks to the publication of the fifteen volumes of d'Alzon's letters, however, we know more today than was available to Gaétan Bernoville when he wrote about Emmanuel d'Alzon. These volumes are based on a thorough knowledge of the documents that are preserved in the Assumptionist Archives in Rome. They allow us today to detect a fundamental ambiguity in the attention that Fr. d'Alzon paid to Orthodoxy, starting in 1862.

It has been repeated to all generations of Assumptionist novices that Pope Pius IX himself gave the founder a mission when he blessed his works "in the East and the West." This would have happened in a papal audience on June 3, 1862. A footnote in vol. IV of the letters of Fr. d'Alzon, however, mentions that on June 24, 1863, Cardinal Barnabo told Fr. Vincent de Paul Bailly that Pius IX denied having done such a thing. The Pope would have said: "I do not know what this is; I have not authorized him to say that I gave him such a mission, and one has

misrepresented words, a conversation, to say that I have blessed his works of East and West.”⁴ The occasion for this papal denial was a report that d’Alzon composed for the Holy See, in 1863, on the state of the Eastern Churches, after spending some three months in Constantinople. In this report, d’Alzon expressed an extremely critical judgment on the Byzantine clergy. Ignoring the tragic history of the relations between Greeks and Latins in Constantinople, he even recommended the restoration of the Latin patriarchate of Constantinople and a progressive elimination of the Eastern liturgies! This report was badly received in Rome since it contradicted the traditional policy of the Holy See toward the Oriental Churches. Although on numerous previous occasions Pius IX had shown great esteem for the vicar-general of Nîmes, this report was not welcomed by him. It was precisely after taking cognizance of it that Pius IX denied having given d’Alzon a mission to the East.

Clearly there was a misunderstanding. First, several ideas that were not expressed clearly in the report loomed large in its background. In a patriotic perspective that he shared with many among French politicians, d’Alzon believed that France was entrusted with a providential mission in that part of the world. This could hardly have been appreciated by the largely Italian Roman Curia. Secondly, d’Alzon felt a growing conviction, presumably after talking with some Polish priests, that the “conversion” of the Orthodox to Rome should start with the Church of Russia, “the Slavic schismatics,” not with the Church of Greece. Politically, however, it was important in Rome to maintain good relations with the Ottoman Empire, within which so many Christians lived, and Russia was considered a traditional enemy of “the Sublime Gate” (the Court of the Ottoman Sultans in Istanbul). Thirdly, one cannot reconstruct what really happened on June 3, 1862, between Pius IX and the vicar-general who was also the founder and superior of a religious community that intended to be

missionary in scope. It is known, however, that Pius IX was often spontaneous and humorous in conversation. Fr. d'Alzon may well have taken too seriously something that the Pope had said partly in jest. Vincent de Paul Bailly, in any case, never reported to d'Alzon what Cardinal Barnabo had told him. And we know from the *Journal* of Fr. Galabert,⁵ the first Assumptionist priest who was sent to Bulgaria, that it was Galabert himself, with a great love for the Byzantine liturgy and a profound respect for the Orthodox hierarchs, who gave a truly ecumenical orientation to the mission to the East dear to d'Alzon.

Conclusion

Along with many of his contemporaries in France, ultramontanes and Gallicans alike, d'Alzon wanted to preserve the temporal power of the popes over the Papal States. When this was threatened by the *Risorgimento* of Italian nationalism, he encouraged young men to join the *Zouaves pontificaux*, a corps of volunteers, chiefly from France and Belgium, who placed themselves at the disposal of the papal army. His own nephew, Jean de Puységur, was a captain in the papal army under the command of a French general, Louis de Lamoricière (1806-1865), when it was defeated in the battle of Castelfidardo (September 18, 1860). However, the withdrawal of the French corps at the start of the Franco-Prussian War of 1870 ensured the Italian victory at the same time that the hasty departure of the bishops of the nations at war brought about the suspension of Vatican Council I. On September 20, 1870, a young cousin of Fr. d'Alzon, Maurice de Giry, who had enlisted in 1866 in the *Zouaves pontificaux*, was even killed at the battle of the *Porta Pia*, vainly trying to stop the soldiers of Italy from entering the Eternal City.

Once the cause of the temporal power of the popes was clearly lost, Fr. d'Alzon wasted no time shedding tears over it. He reacted positively, by focusing attention on the means to reinforce the spiritual authority of

the Church. It was essentially with this in mind that he encouraged the development of a Catholic press in France and wrote many articles for the publications that were soon launched by Vincent de Paul Bailly, that he fostered vocations to the priesthood through the multiplication of the minor seminaries which he called Alumnates, and that he welcomed the pastoral initiatives of his followers, notably the work of pilgrimages initiated by François Picard and the foundation of the Little Sisters of the Assumption by Etienne Pernet.

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I - The Child and the Student (1810-1830)

D'Alzon. The name rings clear with an indescribable liveliness — as though it were about to take wing — so like the *Midi*, Frances South.

Le Vigan, feudal domain of the Daudé d'Alzon family, is located in the Gard Department⁶ in the Cévennes⁷ region of France. The village is scattered in a delightfully fanciful way across the valley of the Arre River; the immediate countryside is bucolic, filled with gurgling fountains. But, beyond the town, the mountains form a series of sharp ridges, and it is this mountainous terrain which has given the family its dominant characteristic, a combination of energy and fighting spirit.

Of ancient nobility, the family entered history at the time of the Wars of Religion.⁸ Jean Daudé de la Coste, military leader of the parish of Saint-Andre de Majencoules, who sired the lineage, was killed by the Huguenots⁹ in 1580, and his descendants continued to cross swords with the Protestants until the region was pacified by Louis XIII and Cardinal Richelieu, his chief minister, some fifty years later. When the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes¹⁰ [1685] instigated the War of the Camisards,¹¹ Jacques Daudé rose to the occasion, as Jean Daudé had done. The same destiny awaited him also for, after having magnificently organized and led the defense, he was killed in ambush by the Camisards.

Such great and valuable service earned for his sons, Jean IV and Etienne, letters patent issued by Louis XV which lavished praise upon their father. Their titles of nobility were confirmed, and they were authorized to bear the ancient coat of arms of the family. It was at that time that Jean IV Daudé had his lands recognized as the Viscounty of

Alzon — after the name of a sizable market town near Le Vigan. All in all, the Daudé d'Alzon family asserted its right both to the dignity of noble rank as well as to moral greatness. Henri d'Alzon, Emmanuel's father, was the heir of this past, marked by an unalterable and militant Catholic faith.

The Arre, which is torrential in the mountains, becomes a tranquil stream as it passes through Le Vigan. Through the centuries, most of the Daudés had been sons of the torrent; Henri Daudé d'Alzon, though, was a scion of the placid waters. Born in 1774, he had begun his schooling at Chailland in the Mayenne¹² in the care of Father Conil, his father's friend. The Revolution of 1789 had caught him there by surprise. He got through it, deeply horrified and distressed, but unobtrusive, forgotten, on the fringe of any political or military action. And yet, he was living quite close to the Vendée¹³ Region at the time of the great uprising of 1793. The armed partisans from the Vendée even passed twice through Chailland. It is easy to imagine how the Daudés of the Camisard era would have rushed enthusiastically on their heels or at least joined forces with Monsieur de Charette.¹⁴ Despite being twenty years of age, Henri d'Alzon did not make a move.

Strength of character was doubtless not lacking in him, but it chose not to assert itself at the warrior level. He would surely have become a martyr if perchance the Jacobins¹⁵ had invited him to renounce his faith. But these rebels paid no heed to this quiet and solitary young man.

The revolutionaries of the Gard had also left his parents in peace, and he found them safe and sound in August 1796. But since they were then in extremely straitened circumstances, he did not go to live with them but with Clément de Faventine who had married a d'Alzon, the sister of Henri's father. For some unknown reason, in 1766 the d'Alzons had sold their estates to the Faventines, who were extremely rich and who already owned an enormous amount of property, especially in the plain of the

Hérault River, showcased by the beautiful château of Lavagnac, slated to play an important role in the life of Emmanuel d'Alzon. The childless household of Clément de Faventine had taken in and later, in 1802, legally adopted their fifteen-year-old niece, Jeanne Clémence, daughter of Clément's brother. Henri d'Alzon and Jeanne Clémence de Faventine lived side by side for ten years in the same family atmosphere, enveloped by equal affection, right up to the day in May 1806 when they were married in the church of Saint Pierre in Le Vigan. By then, Clément had been dead for several years. His widow joined him in the tomb in 1812, followed, shortly thereafter, by Henri's father. Henri and his young wife inherited the Faventine family fortune and, along with it, the former lands of the d'Alzons. He was thirty-two; she, nineteen.

Emmanuel was born of this union on August 30, 1810. Awaiting the imminent birth, Viscount d'Alzon meditated while pacing the chestnut-bordered drive on his grounds at Le Vigan. Notified that the birth had taken place, he hastened to his wife's chamber and was soon holding in his outstretched arms the newborn infant. Raising the child up as if in a gesture of offering, he gravely spoke with that touch of solemnity which always characterized his speech: "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord." He had waited four years for this child, destined to perpetuate his lineage. On September 2, Emmanuel Joseph Marie Maurice d'Alzon was baptized in the church of Saint Pierre in Le Vigan by his uncle, Canon Liron d'Airolles.

Two sisters shared Emmanuel's infancy: Augustine, born March 21, 1813, and Marie Françoise, born May 18, 1819. A second boy, Jules, born in between, survived for only two years. Monsieur and Madame d'Alzon were for their children, each in his and her own quite different way, educators in the full sense of the word. First of all by example: cast vigorously in the same mold, they were profoundly Christian, imbued

with an intense Catholic faith, proven virtue, and strict observance. Monsieur d'Alzon added to this a touch of fastidious austerity, to the point of scrupulosity bordering on Jansenism. Stiff and cold in appearance, fire, nonetheless, smoldered beneath the ice, for he had a tender heart, but his sensitivity revealed itself only in rare flashes which he regretted as if he had committed an error. There was, furthermore, a great deal of timidity in his stiffness. He was respected and esteemed by everyone for his flawless virtue, the nobility of his character, and the firmness of his principles. Well-educated, thoroughly versed in Latin and Greek, he was truly a man of the past who had assimilated the best it had to offer; he was resistant to anything new from wherever it arose, from whatever direction it came. If Emmanuel, born the same year as Alfred de Musset,¹⁶ had ever needed to be preserved from Romanticism,¹⁷ his father, the viscount, would quite effectively have taken on the task of exorcising him of its fantasies.

Between Monsieur and Madame d'Alzon what similarities and what contrasts! The similarities arose from a common concept and practice of life which included imparting a Christian education to their children. In all other respects, she was diametrically his opposite. He was calm; she was as effervescent as a fountain. He was timid; she was proud, of a pride which could go so far as to fire off a cutting remark. Though he wielded authority mainly as a matter of principle, she was naturally authoritarian. While legitimately proud of his lineage, his manner was as unpretentious as that of a monk; on the other hand, Madame d'Alzon was stately in demeanor from head to toe, concerned with outward dignity, to the point of grand formality. She was, in addition, intelligent and brilliant, charming when she was not being crossed, good and charitable, totally frank, sometimes to the point of harshness, and uncompromising when it came to the service of God.

As he grew up, Emmanuel manifested many traits resembling those of his mother. Quite early on, he displayed a strong personality, a temperament which was ebullient, warm, outgoing, and an impetuous, dominating disposition. He had a most lively mind, was inquisitive of people and things, readily disposed to mischievousness which he expressed in amusing witticisms, but which sometimes knocked the wind out of people, even in that Languedoc region where remarks burst out and gush forth without much regard for the feelings of others. His good humor was unfailing, and he was strongly inclined to playing pranks. He was of an affectionate, even tender nature, and yet harsh in many ways. He relished life and its pleasures without a sign of indolence, even displaying a precocious and pugnacious energy by engaging in violent and dangerous games. In truth, he could not stand still. One of his cousins would later say of him: "When we were on the grounds, he ran with great speed, jumped from terrace to terrace as if they were simply steps in a staircase; at other times, he flew from tree to tree like a bird and enjoyed looking down, unseen, on those who passed below."

What about his studies amid all this? His father was keeping a watchful eye: priestly tutors succeeded one another at his side. They had a hard time keeping his nose to the grindstone and were sometimes even the butt of his rambunctious behavior and pranks, especially a certain Father Bonnet who, one night on going to bed, had his legs disagreeably tickled by a nest of young owls that Emmanuel had put there. All of this had surely nothing to do with the *De viris* and grammar! But here again, Emmanuel found in his very gifted and multifaceted temperament what it took to achieve a certain balance. If his early childhood was marked by very little interest in study, he had such stunning ability that it compensated for his lack of application, so much so that at thirteen he

was ready to go on to a higher level. This corresponded to a normal degree of progress for his age.

There remains the fact that his education was not an easy matter. Nor in this regard can we fail to recognize the merit of Monsieur and Madame d'Alzon. Though they never showed any weakness, though they always advisedly utilized tried and true punishments, including the switch which Madame d'Alzon did not use sparingly, it was especially by other, far more effective means, that they attempted to form this child who carried within himself all that was needed to be saved or lost. They had noticed how open Emmanuel was in avowing his little faults, how promptly he obeyed, and the propensity already present in him to be generous and chivalrous. They noted his piety, his taste for liturgical ceremonies; they admired how only prayer succeeded in focusing and silencing the boy who was so lively and so loquacious. These were the innate tendencies which they took pains to enhance in him. In his own sententious way, the viscount put Emmanuel on guard against his too-keen propensity for enjoying himself. He reminded the youngster that a person passes without realizing it from permissible pleasures to those which are not. He often repeated the words of Blanche of Castille¹⁸ to Saint Louis: "My son, I love you very much, but I would prefer to see you die than to see you offend God by committing a mortal sin." Madame d'Alzon, for her part, knew how to teach her son that the best way to master his nature was to outdo himself by performing lofty deeds.

This childhood, so luminous and replete with all that one could desire, was first played out in Le Vigan. In 1816, when Emmanuel was six years old, the family moved to the château of Lavagnac, whose restoration had just been completed. They would henceforth appear only very rarely in Le Vigan. That would be the case until 1823 when the d'Alzons moved to Paris, to the Crapelet mansion in the Faubourg St.

Germain. For, in the interval, the viscount, having been elected a deputy to the legislature, representing the Hérault Department, and finding himself obliged to remain frequently, and for long periods of time, in the capital, his wife and children had not wanted to be separated from him any longer. Monsieur d'Alzon thought also that Emmanuel would benefit from an education at a Paris school.

Emmanuel was now thirteen. There is a portrait of him at that age. Nature had evidently been lavish in his regard. He already appears to be both vigorous and slender. He is elegantly dressed with a touch of refinement in the style of the Restoration,¹⁹ proof of his mother's taste for what was indicative of social rank. The eyes are magnificent and their gaze expressive below well-delineated eyebrows; the somewhat aquiline nose complements the pure and elongated oval of the face; the brow, fringed with very black locks, is broad and high. He is holding a little perch topped by a bird preserved by a taxidermist. This should not be seen as a romantic touch, for the bird is quite simply the first victim of the impassioned hunter Emmanuel would become. It is one of those blue-winged, raucous jays which haunted the chestnut trees of Lavagnac.

In October 1824, Emmanuel enrolled as a day student at the Collège Saint-Louis which was frequented at the time by the nobility. La Tour du Pin, d'Eckmül, de Brezé, de La Bouillèrie, de Cayla, and de Torcy²⁰ were the first companions of Emmanuel, and many of them would remain his great friends.

The time for his first communion was drawing near. He attended catechism classes, not at Saint Sulpice, although it was his parish, but at Saint Thomas d'Aquin, which was more aristocratic. That was what his parents wanted. The catechist at Saint Thomas was a priest filled with the spirit of God — Father de La Bourdonnais. Monsieur d'Alzon, for his part, exhorted his son to fully appreciate the great religious act he was about

to engage in. This he did by mail for, shortly after his arrival in Paris, the Chamber of Deputies had been dissolved, obliging him to return to the *Midi* and to campaign once again — unsuccessfully as it turned out — for the seat of Lodève.²¹ His letters reveal, not only a truly moving paternal solicitude, but also the sound view that he had of what is required of a Christian. The care he, as well as his wife, took to maintain Emmanuel in his social milieu, to have him observe its rituals, must not mislead us. God alone counted. “Your entire life,” he wrote to his son, “all of your actions must be dedicated to his service, and not to your self-love, nor to gaining the esteem or the love of the world.”

Detained at Lavagnac, he was not able to attend Emmanuel’s first communion which took place July 1, 1824, nor his confirmation by the Most Reverend Louis de Quélen, Archbishop of Paris, but with his whole soul, both serious and pious, he had contributed to preparing his son for these sacraments.

After the 1824 vacation, Emmanuel did not return to Saint-Louis, but entered Stanislas College, founded twenty years before. Directed and staffed by priests, it guaranteed a better religious formation. No more than at Saint-Louis was he the student who captured the highest honors. He was willing enough, nor was he lacking in willpower; it was simply that his lively and brilliant intelligence, teeming with ideas but fragmented, did not lend itself easily to diligent application within the setting of a systematic program. It dazzled, now here, now there, in both timely and untimely fashion, refusing to be channeled. That seems to be what Pontmartin, his classmate at Saint-Louis, wanted to express in his Memoirs, when he wrote that Emmanuel as a student was “not middling so much as uneven and somewhat impulsive...”

Emmanuel read a great deal. Whether in Paris or at Lavagnac, where his affairs often called him, Monsieur d’Alzon guided his choice of books.

He advised his son to consult him before attempting to read any work whatsoever. Emmanuel complied. His father was for him, and would remain so for a long time to come, at once a sort of spiritual director and an intellectual mentor. This was another one of the fascinating contrasts in his character that, though he was of such an independent cast of mind, he nevertheless submitted willingly, out of respect, affection, and trust, to strict filial deference. Heaven knows how cautious were the viscount's counsels! "Son, watch out on the left! Son, be careful to the right! Beware of Monsieur de Barante,²² who is very talented, but whose judgment is not always sound.... Be wary of *Les Martyrs* of Monsieur de Chateaubriand,"²³ not because of his Romanticism, for he was not fearful that his son would be affected by the movement, but because, while recognizing the author as "one of our foremost writers," he did not find *Les Martyrs* "refined enough in its style." Be careful of Casimir Delavigne²⁴ whose "opinions are too liberal." The *Pensées* of Pascal,²⁵ fine! But steer clear of the notes, whose anonymous author is none other than Voltaire!²⁶ A plague on Montesquieu,²⁷ at least for the moment. "*L'Esprit des Lois* in the hands of a student! You're quite right in saying that you need to have me come to your rescue."

In 1826, a warning about his future! Emmanuel, who was then sixteen, was thinking of preparing the entrance exams for Saint-Cyr [Frances West Point] and confided this to his father. Was it the blood of the Daudés, who had quelled the Camisard rebellion, stirring in his veins? Whatever the case may be, this alarmed the viscount. He envisioned the dangers that military life could occasion to the soul. This well-beloved son, whose Christian piety and purity were dear to him above all else, would he not be risking his faith and his morals in such a career? ... That is what he told Emmanuel who, this time, rebelled somewhat. "Mother," he wrote to his father at the beginning of 1827, "try as she may to scold me

regarding Saint-Cyr, I am thinking about it a great deal.” But the parents would carry the day. Certainly not because their pressure became abusive; it remained affectionate and delicate. The fact is, Emmanuel would never commit himself to a way of life frowned upon by those he loved so much. By May 1827, the military option had been put aside.

In October, he began his philosophy courses. He became excited about the writings of Monsieur de Bonald,²⁸ a relative of the d'Alzons. He wrote to his father: “I am impressed by Monsieur de Bonald’s system; his book is admirable, his philosophy is altogether divine, his way of proceeding is perfection itself...” But his intellect, always on the lookout for new paths, pounced also on Demosthenes, on Racine,²⁹ memorizing a hundred verses of the latter’s *Andromaque* in less than three-quarters of an hour. How did he manage to find the time to absorb the philosophy program and such a huge amount of reading? Listen to him describing to his father how he was spending his days: “I rise at six o’clock. At 6:30, work until 8:15. I use that time to study Greek for one hour and French for three-quarters of an hour, mornings being the best time for memorizing. Between two classes, I work either on philosophy or various things. From seven o’clock to 10:30 in the evening, I attend to philosophy and from 10:30 to 11:30 to reading of some sort, like *Anacharsis*³⁰ and *L’Esprit de l’Histoire*, or to preparing the Greek which I will have to learn the next day. I’m always in bed a few minutes before midnight.” Rare, undoubtedly, were the non-resident students who tied themselves down to such a program. One of Emmanuel’s dominant traits — energy — asserted itself in that fashion. He was a natural-born enemy of indolence and daydreaming: “I still have some trouble overcoming sleep,” he added, “but I hope to manage that.” In August 1828, he was awarded the official French baccalaureate diploma.

However, far more important events than completing his secondary education had taken place in his life. On June 19 of that same year, he had joined the Association for the Defense of the Catholic Religion which had just been founded on May 28 by Father de Salinis;³¹ he had already enrolled in the *Conférence religieuse* instituted by the same priest and directed by Father de Scorbiac, at that time general chaplain of the university.

The success of the Association was as rapid as it was impressive for it had very quickly brought together all those who counted in the world of French Catholicism. It proposed both to initiate and circulate any and all writings that could serve the cause of religion, to reply to objections, calumnies, and attacks that questioned the faith and those who represented it, priests or lay persons. Very timely as to its goal, its value derived especially from its combative and generous spirit and from the exceptional intellectual and moral qualities of those who led it. In Emmanuel's life, it made a decisive contribution, nothing less in truth than influencing the major orientation of his destiny. On the one hand, he became aware, in that first third of the nineteenth century, of what threatened the Church; still more, he opted to join in defending the institution. On the other hand, it brought him into contact with those eminent men who were giving to the cause of religion its emphasis and its impetus, as well as with certain young men of his own age who would make a name for themselves and would become his emulators or his confidants. To name some at random, they were, along with de Salinis and de Scorbiac: Gerbet, Combalot, Léon and Eugène Boré, Bonnetty, Gouraud, La Gournerie, Du Lac, d'Esgrigny, Cazalès, Carné.³²

The *Conférence religieuse*, where more or less the same persons could be found, organized each week debates on matters of religion or philosophy. Students of the upper divisions of the "college" were

admitted to them, and this was how Emmanuel had been able to attend them before he left Stanislas. It was there, on that memorable April 11, 1828, that he first met Félicité de Lamennais.³³ Of the two pied pipers who at that time “towed all hearts in their wake,” Chateaubriand and Lamennais, it is the latter who would make a conquest of the young d'Alzon.

Lamennais was then at the height of his influence, his prominence, his unique genius. Ten years earlier, he had published the first portions of the *Essai sur l'indifférence en matière de religion* [Essay on Indifference in the Matter of Religion], which Joseph de Maistre³⁴ had called “a thunderclap under a leaden sky.” The tide of religious Romanticism which he had unleashed had caused a deep upheaval in the Church of France. Three years before Emmanuel met him, Lamennais had published: *De la religion considérée dans ses rapports avec l'ordre politique et civil* [On Religion Considered in its Relations with the Political and Civil Order]. From the “common sense” upon which he founded religion, Lamennais had now drawn its consequence: a Christian society, in which even the political order would be universally subject to the Pope. This caused agitation among the Gallicans,³⁵ irritation among the liberals, division within the episcopacy, alarm at [the royal] Court, and anxiety at the Vatican which dreaded dangerous controversies.... For or against Lamennais, all the minds in France, Catholic or not, had reached that point by the day, April 11, 1828, on which Lamennais took part in the debate of the *Conférence religieuse*.

That body's administrators, especially Gerbet, the mild yet tenacious partisan of Mennaisian *fidéisme*,³⁶ was already won over to Lamennais. But Emmanuel had other reasons for fervently acclaiming the arrival of this prophet of a new age — Viscount d'Alzon was an admirer and faithful reader of Lamennais, the protagonist at that time of the cause of the

Church and unity. In 1826, he had even, through his sister, Madame Rodier, invited Lamennais to come and rest at Lavagnac for a few weeks. Lamennais had transmitted to Monsieur d'Alzon his regrets at not being able to accept his invitation in terms that demonstrated his excellent ties with the viscount's sister and brother-in-law.

As it turned out, Lamennais did not shine at that session of April 11. D'Esgrigny, a classmate and close friend of Emmanuel, embarrassed him with a logical and reasonable objection which effectively demolished Lamennais's thesis on "common sense." The "Master of La Chesnaie"³⁷ avoided a direct answer, giving instead an inconsistent explanation. Disputation was not his strong suit; it was not in debate that he shone. His seductive appeal lay elsewhere: in the new horizons that he opened up, in the generous audacity of his thinking, in his religious sensitivity, in his prophetic bearing. Even his tormented countenance, as if scorched by the burning gaze of his dark eyes, added to his prestige.

In November 1828, Emmanuel enrolled in law school. Why law? No one knows. The young man had no definite career in sight ever since he had been obliged by his father to give up on Saint-Cyr. Indeed, he felt no inclination for his new studies: "My God! Law is excruciatingly boring!" he wrote to his friend La Gournerie a few months later. But he got down to it with his typical conscientiousness. All the while, his true intellectual life was being fed by the *Conférence religieuse* of Salinis, and above all by the *Société littéraire*, also known as *Bonnes Études*, whose president was Bailly.³⁸ It was a friendly gathering place where young men were invited to discuss topics of philosophy, history, literature, and jurisprudence, following a presentation by one or another of them, and in so doing to practice expressing themselves in public. An upright, honest man and a fervent Catholic, Bailly was a superb leader. In addition to the lectures, he gathered at his house, in a more exclusive circle, several young men,

including d'Alzon, who met up again there with Melchior Du Lac, d'Esgrigny, La Cioumerie, and others.

Just as at Stanislas, Emmanuel, the law student, retained his fundamental freshness, his intrinsic purity. So young and so handsome, so spontaneous, so cheerful, it is easy to imagine the tender feminine glances that must have come his way. But he was steadfast in protecting his virtue. It was most certainly not without interior struggle, of which we have a few discreet hints: he himself alluded to the "hothouse upbringing" which he had received at Lavagnac and which hardly prepared him to confront the lures of Paris to which his fiery temperament made him dangerously susceptible. In a letter he wrote at the age of twenty, to a friend seduced by the life of pleasure, he confessed: "There was a time when I was like you. There was a certain person, though I had never said a word to her, and of whom I could never get more than a side view, and not even all the time, who made me miserable for a long time, three times a week, for an hour or two, at catechism class. It passed because I did not see her. When I meet her now, it doesn't affect me." He did not make a secret of his vulnerability. "I'm so built that a mere nothing moves me and, if I don't continually set my heart on a higher plane, I am beside myself."

He added: "If I had not received the strength to confess myself often, I would be a great scoundrel." That truly is how he remained the master of his senses. He was protected by daily Mass, frequent confession, prayer, not of a routine and passive nature, but one that was virile, personal, and based upon conviction. As early as 1826, while still at Stanislas, he had been attending the Sunday meetings of the famous *Congrégation*³⁹ in which anticlericals saw a dark political machination on the part of the Jesuits, but which was simply an efficacious means of Christian formation. In 1828, Emmanuel was visiting the sick at the Hôtel-

Dieu⁴⁰ at least once or twice a week; he was a member of the *Société des Bonnes Oeuvres* [Society for Charitable Works], a wing of the *Congrégation*. Also, as we have seen him state above: “If I don’t set my heart on a higher plane...,” Emmanuel had never ceased seeking an ever-higher level for himself; that is how he was saved from the Siren song. A noble passion was growing within him and raising him up, one whose origin has to be seen in the first contact he had made with Salinis’s Association and which undoubtedly had a decisive impact on him. The defense of the Catholic religion — that was the point on which converged henceforth his capacity for enthusiasm and his readiness to do battle, his natural generosity, his chivalrous spirit, and the avid nature of his intellect, friend of books and ideas. From this would spring his vocation.

Those close to him suspected that he was not called to an ordinary destiny — especially Father Combalot, that exceptional and unusual missionary within France itself, a wide-ranging and resounding orator, whose popularity and success counterbalanced those of Lacordaire,⁴¹ who was as prolific in noteworthy ideas and beneficent undertakings as in deplorable blunders, a man both providential and extravagant. He intended to push Emmanuel into the arms of Lamennais who, at La Chesnaie and Malestroit, was gathering an elite group of young men into the Congregation of Saint Peter,⁴² which he wanted to turn into “an Order at once mobile and strong which would devote itself to all kinds of works, without being dependent on any one of them.” The group already included Maurice de Guérin,⁴³ Gerbet, Eugène Boré. Why not Emmanuel d’Alzon? was Combalot’s thinking. Combalot’s distinctive feature, when he hit upon an idea, was to go forward with it at once and to involve others without consulting them. In this case, he did that very thing, and so it was that on January 12, 1830, he triumphantly announced to Emmanuel that Lamennais expected him in September of that same year.

Emmanuel had not been notified of the initiative, but he was fired up by it, nonetheless. That very day, he wrote to Lamennais: "Just a few minutes ago, Father Combalot read me a passage from a letter you wrote to him and in which you speak of me. It made me so happy that I did not want to delay any longer the pleasure of expressing my gratitude. You await me, you say, with open heart and arms; I, for my part, Father, throw myself into them confidently and unconditionally, persuaded as I am that the heart of a Catholic priest must be large enough to gather in all the Church's children who ask that they be given bread."

Exactly what did Emmanuel intend? To enroll in September in the Congregation of Saint Peter and settle at La Chesnaie or Malestroit? It doesn't seem so when one reads the following which contemplates nothing but a visit: "Quite certainly I will go to seek your counsel, and the invitation you are extending to me is all the more agreeable to me since Father Combalot, without notifying me, had asked you to receive me." The wording is rather vague as to his intention. What is certain is that from that day forward, Emmanuel accepted Lamennais as his intellectual guide. Ever since his first meeting with him, at the Salinis Conference, he had seen him again and upon his advice had studied the question of certitude and that of the infallibility of the Pope. He now requested a plan of studies so as to occupy his time in a worthwhile manner until September. Lamennais advised him to learn German; he directed him also to study the history of philosophy and history itself. The tone of his reply was very affectionate: "Since Providence appears to want to establish between us a close and long-lasting relationship, I wish to give you, my dear child, the name which corresponds best to the feelings which even now I feel for you and to which time will only add a new strength and a new sweetness..."

Yet, it is not to Lamennais, but to d'Esgrigny that Emmanuel revealed, for the first time, the great idea which for some time now had been maturing in his heart. Ten days after writing to Lamennais, he informed his friend that he had decided to dedicate himself, as an ecclesiastic, to the defense of the Catholic religion.

What a revelation for d'Esgrigny! What is more, that excellent young man, however sharp a mind he might have had in other respects, was ill-prepared to receive it, according to the testimony of Emmanuel himself. He was what we would call today a jet-setter, this man-about-town who flitted about at the surface of things. He did not take Emmanuel's intention seriously. He saw in it a vague impulse that a more regular contact with the world would quickly dissipate. That led Emmanuel to clarify his views. Two letters which he wrote to d'Esgrigny on the 24th and the 28th of January throw full light on his successive states of mind.

His decision, far from being a hasty one, had taken root in his childhood, he wrote, "First of all, up to the age of ten or twelve this idea held a remarkable attraction for me. I abandoned it for a while, and the career that appealed to me most was a military one. I gave that up, however, after several remarks by my parents, but from about the same period, I decided to dedicate myself to the defense of religion, and that thought developed in me in a surprising manner." So, it was that moment in his youth that Emmanuel d'Alzon identified — never to deviate from it — as the turning point on which his entire life would depend.

But, initially, he thought that he could best defend religion from the podium of the Chamber of Deputies. Later considerations, imbued with the disinterestedness which was one of the major features of his character, turned him away from the parliamentary approach. Even as a layman, his intention was to serve God and not himself. "I realized," he added, "that in an ailing society, one could not exert any influence except

by separating oneself totally from it and bringing to bear on it the weight of all those rights which were not in its power to give."

And so, the thought of the priesthood took hold once again: "I saw with pleasure, in the far distance of my career, the possibility of consecrating myself to God." Why in the far distance? It's that an Emmanuel d'Alzon needed to be swept off to what he desired by a great inner force. The ardor he brought to his physical exercises at Lavagnac was also a need of his soul. He had "almost no longer any attachment to the world," but, he added, "do you know what frightened me at that time? It was my lack of enthusiasm." That would last only a rather short time. "Finally, that enthusiasm arrived," he could write.... "It came and always increased each time that I went to receive communion. It took possession of me, drew me away from my many misdemeanors, and made me long greatly for the moment of liberty, because one is truly set free only insofar as one enters into a more perfect order."

It is now clear by what sequence of serious and profound reflections Emmanuel arrived at choosing the priesthood. But d'Esgrigny was not convinced. Emmanuel stepped up his efforts; he reminded his friend that, contrary to what he persisted in thinking, his ideas about leaving the world did not grow out of his first communion. "They dated from before that event and were gone by that time, and their return does not date from then either. You believe," he continued, "that I began by despising the world. You saw how that contempt came about. For a long time I held the world in high regard, and I still do, but I don't believe that I should stay in it, that's all." And because d'Esgrigny had asked him: "How do you know that God approves what you are doing?" Emmanuel informed him that a priest "whom he sees almost every day," another one who is the director of the major seminary, and finally his confessor are, all three, equally in favor of his becoming a priest. "So, in this connection, I am very

sure that if they tell me to move forward, I won't be doing anything rash. What they command, I will do, and in so doing, I believe I will be submitting to the will of God."

His frame of mind, as he began the year 1830, can be summarized thus: "Now, my only desire is the will of God. I am in no hurry, even though I wish to enter his service as soon as possible, but I am calm, I am leaving matters to him."

In the meantime, storm clouds were gathering on the horizon. Polignac⁴⁴ was in trouble in the Chamber of Deputies and was getting ready to stand up to his enemies. Dissolution of the Chamber was imminent. Viscount d'Alzon needed to get quickly back to his constituency. An intense agitation of minds, paving the way for the July Revolution, aggravated the political situation. As a consequence of all this, the whole d'Alzon family, Emmanuel included, withdrew to Lavagnac.

II - From Lavagnac to the Seminary of Montpellier and on to Rome (1830-1833)

Emmanuel returned to Lavagnac on May 8. He would remain there longer than he had anticipated.

The Ordinances of May 16 declared the Chamber dissolved and scheduled new elections for the months of June and July, depending upon the regions. At Montpellier, they took place on July 6. Viscount d'Alzon was elected, but he would not get to exercise his mandate — the elections having been unfavorable to the existing government by an overwhelming majority, Minister Polignac had them annulled on July 25. The change in regime following the July Revolution persuaded Viscount d'Alzon, who was a monarchist of the strict observance, to abandon politics for good. Serve Charles X, yes; Louis-Philippe,⁴⁵ never. He would not even leave his property ever again.

However, he left Emmanuel free to return to Paris if he so desired. Paris meant seeing Lamennais whom he was supposed to join in September. Lamennais, in fact, had left La Chesnaie around mid-September to found *L'Aveir*,⁴⁶ at the insistence of Gerbet. Emmanuel, however, did not join him for, after some hesitation, he decided to stay with his parents. The revolutionary days did not pass without leaving disquieting consequences in the South of France. They aroused the fear of violent reactions, of reprisals against the people faithful to the defunct regime. Given the situation, Emmanuel wanted to assure his family of the reinforcement lent by his supportive presence.

That is what can be gathered from his letters to friends. He doesn't say so, but it is likely that the recent resolve of Lamennais was not extraneous to his decision. Lamennais was flinging himself forward, launching his ideas into the political struggle. Where would that lead him? In Emmanuel's frame of mind, could these actions not have caused a certain anxiety? Whatever the case may be, he communicated his resolution to Lamennais, who wrote to him on October 31: "I can only answer you with these few words, my dear child, only so that you will not think that I am forgetting you. Do for the defense of God whatever he himself will inspire you to do. Oh! If only it be among his purposes to reunite us some day!" He then recommended once again to Emmanuel that he study history and German: "Exercise and develop your mind and your talent," he added, "and enhance it by your zeal, by that spirit of sacrifice which obtains everything and achieves everything." His tone was affectionate; it nevertheless seemed that in the eyes of Lamennais the prospect of having Emmanuel with him, elbow to elbow in a shared endeavor, was sinking into the uncertainty of a distant future.

The year 1831 distanced the master and the disciple even more so. The clash between *Le Correspondent*⁴⁷ and *L'Avenir* was a sharp one. But *Le Correspondent* belonged to Bailly, its founder, and before his departure from Paris, Emmanuel had contributed to its establishment with his personal funds. For that reason, he was led to give up the thought of the sojourn he had counted on making in Paris in the course of the spring. On May 16, he wrote to Henri Gouraud: "I believe I am doing the right thing by not going to Paris because I would have to choose between *Le Correspondant* and *L'Avenir*, and I prefer to postpone my choice." In the final analysis, from November 1830 to November 1831, that is, for an entire year, there is no trace of any correspondence whatsoever between Lamennais and Emmanuel.

Those years at Lavagnac, far from being empty ones, were, in point of fact, a vigil of arms. Emmanuel was preparing himself intensively for the great task in which he wanted to engage his entire being, his whole life. His driving principle was that the defense of religion, of the Church, must rest upon a strong cultural base. Emmanuel had therefore assigned himself a Spartan course of study. Up at six, in bed by eleven, he worked ten to eleven hours each day, partly in his room, partly on the grounds. Following the fruitful counsel of Lamennais, he devoted an hour and a half each day to reading and meditating on Sacred Scripture, which would no longer hold any secrets for him and which would be his essential nourishment throughout his career. He confided to his friend Gouraud that this reading was not easy for him at first, that he did not fix his mind on it except with difficulty. "But," he added, "when I get well into my subject, when it seems to me that I am discovering, that I recognize the truth somewhat more, I cant tell you what a flood of happiness inundates my entire being."

After the word of God, the writings of men. What did he not read? His impetuous eagerness threw him into all the fields of knowledge. Here is a random sampling of his reading: many books of history; Dante, Joseph de Maistre, who was a favorite, Don Quixote, Malebranche⁴⁸; he went from Montaigne⁴⁹ to Saint John of the Cross, from Saint Teresa of Avila to Madame de Sévigné,⁵⁰ from Bonald to Saint-Simon.⁵¹ Greek and Latin authors figured heavily in his readings, the classical writers as well as the Christian ones: Tacitus, but also Tertullian and Lactantius; Saint John Chrysostom and Origen, along with Plato and Demosthenes whom he translated almost entirely. He studied German and Italian, without neglecting the magazines and newspapers sent to him from Paris.

All this might appear uncoordinated, not accomplished according to any predetermined plan and, indeed, so it was. But we must beware of

attributing it merely to youthfulness or whim. That exuberance, which led him to take on everything at the same time, corresponded to an essential need of his being; though fatal to others, it was advantageous to him because it was adapted to his nature which was to extend in many directions at once according to the impetuous outpouring of his internal richness. He was so constituted that were he to be compartmentalized or channeled, it would result in his being impoverished. Besides, his readings, far from being superficial and rapid, were studies in the full sense of the word. "I don't read a single work," he wrote to d'Esgrigny, "without taking notes. They become even longer when the more the work I am annotating is contrary to my way of thinking."

Remarkable was the freedom of thought — rare in a disciple so young — that he maintained with regard to Lamennais. Of this author's works he commented that they appeared to him to be hardly scholarly, and he applied himself to preserve his own style from a certain bombast which he recognized as due to the influence of the Mennaisian style, whose sustained solemnity was well-known.

It should not be imagined that Emmanuel was dedicated to books only. From six in the morning to eleven at night, the day was a long one. Emmanuel devoted a good part of it to physical exercise, a vital need of his vigorous constitution, an outlet also for his youthful ardor. From eight to ten o'clock he hunted. His reputation as a marksman was well established in the region. Over the meadows or through the woods, on the slopes of the hills, he rode as he breathed in deeply the invigorating air of the scrubland. He could cover kilometer after kilometer without once leaving the contiguous properties which comprised Lavagnac. But even the enclosure of the château alone was paradise for him. The beautiful château! Its majestic and sober facade, flanked by two slim, pointed turrets, is aligned to face the Hérault River. Its park has walkways

lined with old chestnut trees, groves trimmed in too French a manner for Emmanuel's liking but with dense foliage. On beautiful summer evenings, when the day seemed to take fire before flowing into darkness, Emmanuel would head for the river with his dogs, call the boatman, and while the skiff glided over the calm iridescent waters, he recited Lamartine's *Méditations*.⁵²

Once again, not that he was a Romantic, despite the age he lived in, nor even a dreamer, except on occasion, but nature was truly his friend; it spoke to him, and he knew how to describe its secret call in his charming and impulsive way: "The countryside," he wrote to Gouraud in May 1830, "is lovely when it rains. And it is raining. Therefore, the countryside is ravishing. You have a decided taste for autumn, given the greater ease for dreaming that one feels at the falling of leaves. But I don't doubt that those dreams would come to you in droves if, as you strolled through groves full of nightingales, a gentle breeze caused the leaves of a white rose to fall on your hair, along with a few drops of rain. There is no denying this or that, the country in springtime is all that one could ask for: it lends itself to every feeling of the soul, it seems to help bring forth those feelings; instead of falling leaves, it has falling flowers which, when you come to think of it, is quite as fine." He was twenty!

He was totally attached to his family, with tender and joyful affection, touched with veneration in the case of Monsieur and Madame d'Alzon. He did not belong to the period when parents had become just old fogies. If they happened to come into a room when he was seated, he rose to his feet. Thus did he acknowledge in them a noble past made young again in his own blood, and also all that they were, all that he owed them. He had and always would have a sense of productive continuities, of magnificent heredities of race and spirit. His parents were great lords. From instinct as well as will, he was assuring their succession.

His two sisters provided him with pleasant companionship. Augustine, the elder, was seventeen in 1830. Armand de Pontmartin, speaking of her, recalls “that gentle look of a saint lost in the world, that smile of a good fairy, that pleasant countenance, that exquisite soul, that captivating spirit, that indescribable mixture of grace, piety, virginal purity, delicacy, and innocent mischief.” Pontmartin mentioned Eugénie de Guérin⁵³ in connection with Augustine; in fact, between one and the other there were many shared characteristics, especially the artistic and sentimental note not pointed out by Pontmartin. Very well educated, moreover, knowing many languages, Augustine was a choice partner for Emmanuel.... As for Marie-Françoise, she was still a child of eleven in 1830. Emmanuel helped her to do her homework and transmitted to her something of his frank and energetic nature.

However full were his days at Lavagnac, Emmanuel grew bored after a while. He missed his friends; his heart, which needed to pour itself out, felt cramped within the sole circle of family affections. With the young men who had been his classmates or whom he had gotten to know at Bailly's or at the Salinis-Gouraud lectures — d'Esgrigny, de La Gournerie, Du Lac — he was united by age, memories, major concerns, and tastes; like him, they carried the future within themselves. Emmanuel made up for the distance by a prolific correspondence. With his letters one could put together a beautiful handbook of Christian amity, an anthology based solely on friendship. Still, letters couldn't be for him anything but a last resource. Nothing could replace a warm presence and conversation where thoughts and feelings could respond instantly to another's or confront them face to face, accompanied by the irreplaceable modulation of the other's voice. The relentless study Emmanuel was pursuing lacked intellectual contact, the exchange of ideas. In that respect, Lavagnac offered no help. He could, of course, converse with his father who had a

broad humanistic culture. But, between them there was a generation gap, in addition to the fact that Viscount d'Alzons thinking revolved around his garden.

All this, however, did not translate into a lasting and debilitating melancholy in Emmanuel. His energetic nature was too resilient; it was also too joyous, too much in love with the healthy delights of life, to sink into despondency. Listen to him writing to d'Esgrigny: "Assuredly, dear friend, the most beautiful ball at the Opera is not equal to the one which took place this evening, the day before Mardi gras, here in the servants' dining room. For a musician, we had only a mountain man with his recorder, but we had legs for dancing, and we used them to the best advantage. My father was entertaining the prominent persons of Lavagnac that evening, that is, the shepherd, the head valet, the gardener, and so forth.... We laughed, we drank — in moderation, however — and then I came and started off the dancing. Long live merrymaking!" On the night of August 30, 1831, since his coming of age was being celebrated with bonfires, he jumped over the flames, so much and so often that his hair, eyebrows, and sideburns were scorched. That is what he wrote to d'Esgrigny that very evening before going to bed. Yes, but he added: "My God! How much I have grown, how I am advancing toward death! Of those years which are ending, what is left to me? ...less even than to the joyful fire that we jumped over this evening, and which is smoking in the front yard. Tomorrow, there will be ashes, but what will remain for me of time past? ..."

His boredom was so pronounced that his parents noticed it; to cure him of it, they organized for him, around the second fortnight of August, an excursion into the Cévennes Mountains. But what he needed was a quite different remedy. There was in Emmanuel that call to the priesthood which was secretly tormenting him.

Where was he at in this regard? Throughout the whole of 1830 and into the summer of 1831, he had remained the true Catholic, faithful to his God, that he had been at Stanislas and in law school. But, through meditation of Sacred Scripture, his interior life had deepened, been enriched. In him the apostle had been born. In December 1830, he could write to d'Esgrigny: "Every day here I teach classes to the farm hands. I instill a bit of truth into twenty or thirty minds. I believe I am doing some good. I have become attached to this work which, in any case, I cannot do except during the winter between supper and the prayer of these good people. It seems to me that I am serving religion in the neighborhood by my relationships with the pastors and by a certain influence that my age enables me to have..."

He felt great concern for the soul of his friends.⁵⁴ Thus, in April 1831, writing to d'Esgrigny: "Why is it you never speak to me of God? Why do you never say what you are doing for him?" In June he became more insistent: "Dance, laugh, waste your time! But you must know for certain that there will be someone who will have tears in his eyes and sad anger in his soul every time he will think that his friend, who has an admirable heart and a solid and brilliant mind, lowers himself, gets rusty, wastes his time in folly, and, in the end, aspires to be nothing more than a pretty boy." At about the same time, he questioned Henri Gouraud: "How do you love God, gentle friend? Because that is what we must always come back to. Well! Yes, indeed, how do you love him? Have you asked him for a disciplined mind, a spirit of fortitude?"

Around the middle of 1830, however, a cloud had passed over him, an internal crisis though short-lived, since it lasted only a few days, but whose components are unknown to us. What is certain, from the testimony of Emmanuel d'Alzon himself, is that on August 20, 1830 — a date that would remain memorable to him all his life — he would feel as

though delivered, renewed, changed. He utilized a very strong term to describe it all: “A sort of conversion.”

His personal reflections, noted in 1831, reveal the outline of the great spiritual person he was becoming.⁵⁵ Even his letters, without losing any of their liveliness and always full of amusing stories, told with witty eloquence, signal a deepening of his interior life. One of them, that of August 7, 1831, is revealing in this regard. A weakening in d’Esgrigny’s moral life — *felix culpa!* [O happy fault!] — has made us privy to this. The following is revelatory about his state of mind: “My friend, your condition pains me. I won’t tell you: ‘Go to confession’; you know very well that you must, without being told. I will only make this comment that the earlier you confess yourself, the greater courage you will show. Do pray to the Blessed Virgin who is the mother of all purity.”

Emmanuel then confided to his friend a few notes on some impressions he had felt: “What you are going to read,” he specified, “was not supposed to be written. I believe there are certain thoughts that one should not write down even for oneself. However, it may be that I will do you some good; maybe I will refresh your soul by trying to instill in it what I have experienced. God does not want us to repeat to others what we have told him unless we are seeking another person’s welfare.”

Here is what he shared confidentially:

Yesterday, around nine in the evening, after I had done a hundred foolish things, I jumped through the window of the billiard room onto the terrace, saying just for fun that I was going off to dream. I went down the stairway on the side of the great hall and returned below by the second terrace. It was on my mind to brighten the mood of the evening and to come right back up by the other staircase, when suddenly I stopped. “Oh God,” I said to myself, “don’t I have every reason to dream?” And I leaned against the urn of an orange tree, saying: “My God, have pity on me! Last Saturday, I promised to be disciplined, to be gentle, to be fervent. I have been neither disciplined, nor gentle, nor fervent, and yet, I am supposed to receive communion tomorrow. Receive communion tomorrow, isn’t that a habit?”

When I lifted my eyes, I spied a light. It was the chapel window. Cut off

from the château, situated on the right of the facade, this chapel is connected to the garden by a mound which I had myself ordered rearranged this past winter. The window above the door could be seen through the plane trees. I took a few steps, leaned up against one of these trees and gazed at that window for a long time. "My God, pretty soon I'm going to go to sleep; and you, Lord, what are you going to do? While I sleep, you will wait for me. If, at least, I went to see you when I'm awake. If, at least, I went often to tell you that I love you. I truly love you, my God, at least so it seems to me, but I love you as if I were not in love with you. And yet, for me, to wait for me, you are to spend this night alone with that lamp whose light reminds me that you are my guest; as for me, I won't think any more about it in a few moments, and how many nights have I spent without thinking about it at all? Why, then, do you come? Why do you delight in being with the children of men? Do I contribute to your delight?"

My God, I would like to spend a night alone with you and, while some men perhaps spend sinful nights, spend a holy night, meditating only on these words, like Saint Francis Xavier: *Noverim te! Noverim me!* [That I may know you! That I may know me!]⁵⁶ But no, I am only a bad lot, and I know that my place is to be lowly, very lowly, far from you, if one is far from you when one prays and one desires to love you. Oh! God of my heart."

I was a little happier, and I returned to the house in an earnest state of mind.

Emmanuel's soul was now too full of God to put off any longer telling his parents his private thoughts about his vocation. He did so, it would seem, shortly after this letter, in the course of September 1831. What was the reaction of Monsieur and Madame d'Alzon? All we know is this, from a letter of Emmanuel dated November 2: "I opened up to my parents who voice nothing but reasonable objections to my wishes. They want me to travel, and since travel, by testing me, can do me nothing but much good, I have made up my mind to do so."

In the meantime, he went to Digne in October, to his friend Du Lac, whose father was in charge of the Lower Alps region for the French government. He had a memorable encounter there with Montalembert,⁵⁷ who was on a publicity tour in the South of France on behalf of the newspaper *L'Avenir*. He described his first impression of the man to

d'Esgrigny: "His is a soul that I saw only for a few days; it appears to me to be quite a beautiful one, even though developed in one direction only. One element seems to be lacking, a sense of control. I may be mistaken." That was a keen observation for a first contact. However that may be, a liking — which would develop into a strong and durable friendship — was touched off immediately between these elite souls. Emmanuel accompanied Montalembert to Marseille, and they made plans for a trip together to Italy and Germany.

Emmanuel might have thought later that Montalembert was forgetful. Or so it seems from a letter to d'Esgrigny indicative, incidentally, of the frankness of expression that would always characterize the future Father d'Alzon. "It is possible that Montalembert forgot the voyage that he had talked to me about.... Besides, don't be too vexed with that young fellow whom I sincerely admire. He has been told so often that he is illustrious, famous, a genius, a prodigy; his travel companion repeated that to him so often when others kept silent; he has given so many interviews, attended so many dinners that it is no wonder that he has a nose somewhat dented by all the thurible swinging that has gone on before him."

As a matter of fact, on his return to Paris, Montalembert had been diverted from the project by many other cares. Under violent attack from Catholic circles, the directors of *L'Avenir* had decided to suspend publication on November 15 and travel to Rome, "as pilgrims of God and liberty," to beg the Pope to render judgment. The three pilgrims would be Lamennais, Lacordaire, and Montalembert himself. The question arose to have Emmanuel join them. Wisely, Monsieur and Madame d'Alzon were opposed. Besides the uneasiness that they were beginning to experience over *L'Avenir's* orientation and, more specifically over Lamennais, they were offended by the noisy publicity which the "pilgrims" generated

before their "pilgrimage." Lamennais could not stir without creating an apocalyptic commotion that misunderstood the Roman approach which was muted and discreet. Viscount d'Alzon would not stand to have his son involved in an adventure that he foresaw as disastrous. Emmanuel reported this to d'Esgrigny in the following terms: "I won't go to Rome because Father Lamennais is going. My parents think like you, and on this matter I don't quite think like them."

The result was an additional winter at Lavagnac. But Emmanuel used the time to choose a seminary. His parents diverted him from Rome because Lamennais was still there, and they feared his influence. They favored Saint Sulpice; Emmanuel was so inclined as well, but then he changed his mind; Saint Sulpice was Paris, and Paris meant his friends, especially d'Esgrigny. He did not intend to water down his sacrifice; he did not want to offer God a divided heart. The conception he had of the sublimity of the priesthood forbade it. "The truth is," he wrote on February 11 to d'Esgrigny, "my heart expands in order to love with a universal love; I have come to the realization of the immensity of the heart of a priest, and it seems that mine has begun to achieve that. Ah! dear fellow, you do not know what it's like to give birth to Christians, as did Saint Paul, until Jesus Christ be formed in them." But he invested in friendship a sensitivity so intense and so deep that he saw in that a possible obstacle to the fullness of his gift to God: "If it weren't for you," he added, "I would perhaps choose Paris. But you make me afraid of that. I would not think of God enough if I were close to you, and someone other than he would preoccupy my heart far too much with the desire to see him. My friend, I am weak, and I would not be able to love you with moderation." So, neither Rome nor Paris. Emmanuel chose the seminary of Montpellier.

Now the hour had come. The sacrifice of their son that Monsieur and Madame d'Alzon were about to make weighed heavily upon them. These Christians had never wavered, never would do so, when the will of God spoke out. But this separation which was so close, no matter how generously they had agreed to it, intensified the human heartbreak. Madame d'Alzon wept all the day long. So great was her sorrow that she asked Emmanuel to keep hidden from her, as well as his father, the day and the hour of his departure. That moment when suffering presses its sharp point upon the heart most cruelly, that tearing apart, those footsteps receding down the drive...she could not bear to live through it all.

So Emmanuel went about preparing his departure as discreetly as he could. He would leave the night of March 14 to 15. He wrote to Lamennais. He had already — thus breaking the mutual silence of almost a year — announced to him in November 1831 his decision to enter the ecclesiastical state, and he had received a very cordial reply in return. This time he announced his entrance in the Montpellier seminary.

At six o'clock in the evening of March 14, the d'Alzon family assembled for dinner. The atmosphere was somber. Although nobody knew, except the coachman of Lavagnac, that in an hour or two Emmanuel would no longer be there, everyone had sensed that his departure was imminent. After dinner Emmanuel spent a few moments in the salon, then went up to his room and did not reappear; everyone understood. Monsieur and Madame d'Alzon silently retired to their rooms. Augustine and Marie broke into sobs. The parting had taken place.

The family coach was indeed waiting for Emmanuel at a spot in the park remote from the château. All the way to the end, he had remained in control of himself, but as he would later confide to d'Esgrigny, internally he was experiencing "an inconceivable upheaval." He jumped into the

carriage which left immediately, bringing him to Montagnac, the closest stopping place of the stagecoach. When the latter announced its approach by its loud clatter, the elderly servant of the family who especially loved Emmanuel couldn't contain his emotions. The crazy idea came to him, in his grief, to prevent the departure. He refused to transfer the trunk onto the stagecoach. Emmanuel had to take care of that. Such were the regrets, the devotion, the grieving hearts that he was leaving in his wake.

The very next day, March 15, Emmanuel crossed the threshold of the Montpellier seminary. The ordeal would not be an easy one. This young man of wide open spaces would come to know the restrictions of a cell and a cloister where one walked with measured steps. By tradition a man of breeding and proud by nature, he would be sharing the company of young men, most of whom had unpolished manners if any at all. Relentless worker, though one who had up to now managed his work in complete freedom, he would have to adjust to laboring in common with others and with a method imposed upon him. In short, though little made for confinement, he would now find himself to be in such a situation, and it would make him suffer greatly. However, this highly sensitive man was also an energetic person who, from this suffering, would create a means of interior reform, particularly in the matter of pride which he straightforwardly recognized in himself. "Pride," he wrote, "is the essential feature of my character."

Moreover, he immediately found himself in conflict with a method of instruction which he judged outdated and mediocre. He was quick to write to d'Esgrigny: "I know all too well that Montpellier — referring to the seminary — though very good in certain respects, has some very great disadvantages, and, if I were to look at things only from one point of view, the time I will spend here will be almost entirely wasted from an

academic standpoint.... One cannot help but be struck by how antiquated theological science, as it is stubbornly taught here, has become! ... When, after a few months spent in studying this totally verbal science, one gets back to studying the science of things and facts, it is very easy to judge the difference, I assure you.”

That he was exaggerating and disregarding — a youthful sin — the necessary nuances, there is no doubt. But it was an accurate consideration which came, in essence, from Lamennais. The Mennaisian Movement in its early stage was salutary and justified in that it advocated the intellectual reform of the clergy. At the beginning of the Restoration, “scripture courses were only a sideline; Church history, a reading for the refectory. Theology departments were skeletons without souls where warring against the philosophy of the previous century, without taking any notice of German philosophy and exegesis, had become routine.”⁵⁸ That system, that sclerosis had lingered under the July Monarchy. Even the orthodoxy of the teaching itself was not satisfactory. Which theses — Emmanuel *dixit* — held sway at the seminary of Montpellier, if not those of the Gallican Bailly, which in 1852 would be placed on the Index?

Considerations of that sort were what bound Emmanuel and so many young men of his time to Lamennais. When his remarks concerning this priest from Brittany are scrutinized, it is evident that he attached little importance to the Mennaisian philosophy, contrary to Gerbet. What attracted and swept him along were the fresh breath and rejuvenating spirit which Lamennais was able to bring to French Catholicism which had become anemic, dehydrated, and formalists. It was the protest against the allegiance of the Church to the State which, under the Empire and the Restoration, had become very disquieting. It was a struggle against rationalism and Gallicanism, a rallying to the Holy See, an exaltation of unity, the claiming of an effective religious liberty which would permit the

spiritual development of the Church, and finally it was the renewal of ecclesiastical studies. Such were the general themes, and those only, which drew Emmanuel into the orbit of Lamennais and which would be compromised by his downfall, so close at that moment, but which nothing as yet made it possible to foresee.

It was at the seminary that Emmanuel received the reply, dated April 10, from Lamennais, then in Rome, to the letter he had written on the eve of his departure from Lavagnac. "I do not doubt that God will bless the decision you have made and in which you have had no one in mind but him. If you lose something from the point of view of your studies, you will regain it later when Providence permits it, as I hope it will, that we will reunite under less trying circumstances." Hope thus persisted in Lamennais that he would meet up again with his disciple and bind him definitively to himself this time around.

Such a hope, such a desire, were they as pronounced on Emmanuel's side? It does not seem so. When, after being tonsured on June 16, he returned to Lavagnac for his vacation, he immediately thought of choosing a different seminary to return to than that of Montpellier. On September 19, in a letter unfortunately lost, he made Lamennais aware of his perplexity. Did he propose joining the Congregation of Saint Peter? Nothing supports this idea, and everything seems to invalidate such a hypothesis. Everything had taken place up to that point as if Emmanuel experienced greater reluctance than attraction for that eventuality. Every time an occasion had arisen to act upon this idea, he had always backed away from it in one fashion or another.

Whatever the case may be, the September 26 answer from Lamennais swept away that prospect. After having written that all the seminaries of France resembled one another in the incompetence of their instruction, Lamennais added: "I don't know where you might find what

you feel you need. It is equally true, or at least highly probable, that your bishop would refuse you ordination if you came here to join us. Consequently, I can see no possibility for this choice unless you were firmly resolved to enter our society and share our endeavors, disposed, like many of our young men, to wait patiently for Providence to banish the obstacles which we are facing today.”

Astonishment! “Your bishop would refuse you ordination if you came to join us.” What did that mean? Emmanuel was still ignorant of the event which marked the tragic turning point in the life of Lamennais. The encyclical *Mirari vos* had condemned Lamennais and his friends, who declared their submission on September 10. How did that news, already known in Paris on September 6, take so long to reach Lavagnac? Nobody knows, but it is a fact.

After consulting and hesitating, Emmanuel decided to return to the seminary at Montpellier. There he spent the entire new school year — a fine year. Emmanuel was in training amid trial and joy. Love of the priesthood increased in him. His soul grew deeper, richer. Although community life remained trying, he also gained from it, and he became conscious of its benefit. Even though he had suffered from continual cohabitation with people who were outwardly so little refined, he now perceived in a number of them, beyond their peasant appearance, the beauty and delicacy of souls which so greatly outweigh many hollow advantages. Only the weakness of the programs of study still distressed him. A noteworthy feature of the period was the strongly ascetic turn which his interior life began to take. On a loose-leaf sheet, he jotted down this comment: “October 21-26 [1833] at the age of 23. I have taken the resolution to begin a sort of monastic and austere life when I will be able to do so unnoticed, and to do all I can to chasten myself before the Lord. Struggle against pride.”

Note the words: “monastic life.” When examined simultaneously with certain excerpts from his letters of the time, they take on even more meaning. Having learned that Father Bautain was gathering around himself a few young priests, he wrote to Henri Gouraud on April 15: “What is their goal? I am so certain that God at this time wants a new Order and that such an Order will soon appear, that I cannot get word of such an association without being strongly moved.” And he added the following which heralds the apostle: “I need to keep up to date on all that is being prepared for the glory of God and the triumph of the faith.” There were additional indications of the prospect of a new congregation. In his reply to a letter of Emmanuel which has been lost, Father Bautain, the restorer of [the Benedictine Abbey of] Solesmes, along with Dom Guéranger,⁵⁹ wrote: “I did not have time to wait for the new Order which you spoke to me about, which will regenerate society.... You, my dear friend, must await the hour when Providence will peal forth.”

On June 1, 1833, Emmanuel received all four minor orders before returning to Lavagnac. Once again the debate arose which had occupied his preceding vacation. When classes resumed, where would he finish his ecclesiastical studies? He did not want to return to Montpellier. It wasn't so much Montpellier itself that was being questioned, but seminaries in general: “Return to a seminary?” he wrote to d'Esgrigny. “I am positive I would be wasting my time and my health.” Several times he had been urged by Salinis himself to enroll at the College of Juilly that he was directing. Certain persons had strongly recommended against it for reasons unknown to us. He was still being advised against doing so, and he definitively abandoned the idea. Solesmes, where Dom Guèranger beckoned? Lamennais on August 10 dissuaded him from that — as well as from Juilly — “The only advantage that place would offer you in comparison with the seminary would be more spare time and perhaps

more books. However, that is far from being enough, whether you applied yourself to special research or tried to extend and broaden the circle of your knowledge.”

There remained only Lamennais himself or rather the group which, after being forced to abandon Malestroit by the issuance of the encyclical *Mirari vos*, had retreated to Paris where they were directed by Father Gerbet under the guidance of Lamennais. In that same letter of August 10, Lamennais clearly invited Emmanuel to join him there. Nothing, he said, was equal to Paris, that unique observatory of people — who teach one more than books do — and events, that incomparable hub of libraries, public lectures, etc. “Besides, nothing would prevent you from leading in Paris as ecclesiastical a life as you would in the province. All that it requires is to fix upon a rule of conduct. If you choose that option, it will depend entirely upon you to reside with Monsieur Gerbet, who would be useful to you for your theological studies, and with a few young men who are close to him.”

Exactly what could Lamennais bring to Emmanuel except Paris whose advantages were evident? Certainly not the new Order he dreamed of. Lamennais retained only the debris of his newborn society, struck down by indirection. That very summer he had had to resign as superior-general. On the other hand, although his influence remained considerable, he had become a disquieting and menaced personality. The chivalrous spirit of Emmanuel was surely as inaccessible to such a feeling as the fear of compromising himself. But would he not at least have taken into account that his future apostolate could not risk being ruined? That consideration seems never to have crossed his mind. What is more, the feelings expressed by Lamennais at the end of his letter were well crafted to reassure him. Lamennais could only see in his own situation intrigues and calumny which had upset the Pope. He informed Emmanuel that he

had just written to Gregory XVI to reiterate his profession of filial obedience and complete submission. He ended by stating that “it is not in the absence of tribulations that one must look for one’s peace, but in the patience to bear ones cross.” That could hardly have left Emmanuel unmoved. Had the decision depended solely on him, his choice would have been made. He would take Paris and Gerbet.

However, Monsieur and Madame d’Alzon were opposed. They took great care to remove their son from Lamennais’s influence. They urged him to go to Rome. Emmanuel was convinced that, as far as studies were concerned, Rome would be worth no more than Montpellier. His idea of them was exactly what Lamennais would write to him on October 8: “Theological teaching there is the same as in France, as it is everywhere; and as far as other areas of knowledge are concerned, what you will encounter is perfect, absolute incompetence.” Emmanuel, however, bowed to the desire of his parents. On his part, it was a matter of pure self-sacrifice.

Lamennais gave him letters of introduction to his friends in Rome. The case was not yet closed in the matter of their relationship. But as far as their project — so often spoken of and abandoned — of collaborating side by side as master and disciple, that was now out of the question. What prevailed, in the final analysis, were the independence and originality of spirit of Emmanuel d’Alzon. In that same summer of 1833, had he not written to d’Esgrigny: “Strictly speaking, I do not strongly feel the need of a director constantly looking over my shoulder; not that I don’t need any counsels, but because I believe that I know the kind of work to which I am destined and because I have laid out for myself a plan of study analogous to the career that I intend to pursue”?

Such was his frame of mind. So, on November 20, he boarded a ship at Marseilles for Rome.

III - The Years in Rome (1833-1835)

Emmanuel left for Rome without knowing at which institution he would continue his training. In the absence of any seminary constituted as such, only the College of the Nobles offered him a possibility, but he did not want to study there. Only two young men of his age were enrolled, the rest being only fifteen or sixteen years of age. The real reason was different, however: the atmosphere of this college, run by the Jesuits, was decidedly antimennaisian. That is what Emmanuel wrote on December 9 to d'Esgrigny. He feared that if he entered into discussions, he would find himself in an open and permanent state of conflict, and to remain silent would have been an intolerable constraint. "The Jesuits," he added, "attack Monsieur de Lamennais excessively." Given those conditions, and since, on the other hand, his parents wanted him in a community where he could lead a regulated religious life, he chose the convent of the Minims. He boarded there, but he was, as he himself made clear, absolutely free.

He enrolled in courses at the Roman College where the Jesuits taught, but he was disappointed in their teaching. Writing to his father on December 19, he summarized the opening address as follows: "Concerning eloquence, I am going to speak to you about painting; and on the subject of painting, about Raphaël, whose body was found several months ago. 'First part: an examination of the vices and virtues of Raphaël. Second part: an examination of the works of Raphaël. Conclusion: the relationship between painting and eloquence.' Fairly closely copied on the scene in *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* [Molière's *The*

Would-Be Gentleman), in which the dance master proves that all the men in government should know how to dance, because then they would never make a faux pas.

Such was the mischievous remark, habitual to Emmanuel — the student's sally. But there was also something that struck more deeply. "The Jesuits," added Emmanuel in the same letter, "seem to have assumed the task of criticizing all development; a theology as narrow as possible; as to the idea of development, none...." The same thought can be found in a letter to his sister Augustine on December 24: "I don't see much difference between these courses and those at Montpellier.... The form is always the same. And yet, if we want to do any good today, we must absolutely follow a completely new path. I chatted yesterday for two hours with a young German rationalist. It's ridiculous and a waste of time to expect to convert people with the same arguments used 200 years ago on their fathers."

In the bristling of Emmanuel toward the Jesuits and in his criticism of the theology of the times, we should recognize, once again, an obsession of Lamennais and one of his phobias. In any case, it was an influence Emmanuel admitted: "I don't believe I am mistaken," he wrote to his father on December 21, "when I say that the Jesuits have many things for which to reproach themselves. Monsieur de Lamennais was not able to speak with impunity of their inadequacy for the present age." In the evaluations that Emmanuel put forth on the Society of Jesus, one encounters pell-mell the prejudices of Lamennais and the rectifications that Emmanuel's upright and straightforward nature brought to them. In this vein, he added: "The Jesuits are detested heartily, yet I believe the biases are often unjust. For instance, the Jesuits have some very holy people in their organization, but I believe that the whole Society is headed in the wrong direction." Likewise, in a letter to his sister

Augustine on March 1, 1834: "When I look at the Jesuits, I am impressed by their singular holiness, but at the same time I am revolted by their way of wanting that all good come only from them and by their animus against anything which offends them, by their obstinacy in ignoring where the trouble lies in such situations, finally, by their incapacity to do good."

In order to account for such excessive language, one must not overlook any of the pertinent factors in this case: first of all, his youth: Emmanuel was twenty-three, his fiery impulsiveness of temperament, and once again the fact that the Jesuits were the active and effective adversaries of Lamennais, resulting, in the student that he was, in a sentimental reflex from which his generally clear judgment suffered.⁶⁰ We find it difficult today to understand fully what a person like Lamennais could mean to the Catholic youth of his time, to what extent he was for them a sign of hope, the prophet of a religious revival in the triumph of unity, to say nothing of his extraordinary spellbinding power. Moreover, he was the first and the only leader that Emmanuel had ever encountered. Last, but not least of these explanations, is the fact that Emmanuel's favorite, if not exclusive, circle as a young student in Rome was a milieu saturated with Mennaisianism.

In a way, Emmanuel had constituted himself its prisoner of his own accord. On November 25, 1833, a few days after his arrival in Rome, he wrote to d'Esgrigny: "I am annoyed because the letters of recommendation which were given to me when I left France happen to be all or mostly all for some Jesuits or friends of Jesuits." Moreover, he did not utilize them, but only those which Lamennais had written.

He thus found himself introduced to highly placed persons, all friends and supporters of Lamennais, who acted as his guarantors: Cardinal Micara, a Capuchin; Father Olivieri, steward of the Holy See and soon to become master-general of the Dominicans; Father Ventura, former

superior-general of the Theatines; Father Mazzetti, a Discalced Carmelite, consultant to the Roman congregations; [Nicholas] Wiseman, at that time rector of the English seminary and future cardinal; and Charles MacCarthy, protagonist at a lesser level, but Wiseman's cousin and Lamennais's active informant.

Emmanuel's statements in his correspondence transcribed or reflected their opinions concerning not only the Jesuits, but also, generally, the case of Lamennais. In a letter of March 10, 1834, to his father, he wrote: "Some day I will explain to you what political intrigue brought about the encyclical, but you cannot more clearly see that Rome cannot condemn Father de Lamennais, because his principles can be found in Saint Thomas." He was only repeating here a previous statement of his — in a letter to d'Esgrigny of the preceding February 24 — concerning what Cardinal Micara had told him about the Breton philosopher: "As for his principles, he cannot be condemned without condemning Saint Thomas, which will never happen." Regarding the political intrigue mentioned by Emmanuel, this refers again to some information, from the same cardinal, concerning the steps taken by Austria, Prussia, and Russia with the Holy See to obtain the condemnation of Lamennais who was an adversary of monarchical power. From all of this, odd though it may seem, it appears that in the solitude of Lavagnac, and even in Paris, Emmanuel had affirmed, with regard to Mennaisianism, an intellectual attitude that was much freer, more independent and critical than he would in Rome, for here, his strong personality was subject to influences which affected it, for a while at least.

These were not minor influences; several of these Mennaisians were distinguished for their intelligence and culture, especially three of them: Cardinal Micara and Fathers Olivieri and Ventura. Emmanuel admired them for these attributes, but notice how the great promoter that he

would become was already emerging, for he reproached them for not articulating their thought based on action. "I have seen," he wrote to d'Esgrigny on January 11, 1834, "Father Ventura...; he embraces the Lamennais movement, but interpreted in his own way; yet the good Father lacks what Lamennais has too much of, the power to stir things up. I have seen Cardinal Micara, an extraordinary man, who conceives thoughts with marvelous freedom, but within his monastery; Father Olivieri, a man who is a deep well of theology, whose visits are dissertations, who converses in chapters, and does not permit one to say four words before he has drawn the conclusion from his lengthy premises. Those three men, with the flaws that prevent them from acting, are valuable mines to exploit. Their ideas are sound, new, and applicable. However, it is hard to understand that they do not want to do so. It's too bad. And then, take the others; they understand that a movement is required, and that's all. But that is not enough."

"Valuable mines to exploit..." Emmanuel proceeded to do so. Indeed, it was in proximity to these men, in the light of their science, and under their guidance, that he pursued his philosophical and theological studies. From that moment on, he seems to have doubted the need to attend public lectures whose inadequacy, in any case, nauseated him. By Easter 1834, he had stopped going to the Gregorian College and had retired to his cell, encouraged by Father Ventura to devote himself to that solitary, autonomous study to which he seemed irresistibly drawn. Such a decision could have been dangerous for his intellectual formation if he had remained without masters, but it was fruitful because, while he benefited from this freedom of action that he needed, he found, through painstakingly prepared consultations with Reverends Ventura, Olivieri, Micara, and Wiseman, in addition to the greatest treasures of religious science, the method, organization, and concentration which had been

lacking in his feverish studying at Lavagnac and which, at the seminary of Montpellier, had been too intermingled with monotony and routine. On the other hand, he was learning Italian and German and, from MacCarthy, enough English to be able to read it.

Emmanuel gave little time to visiting Rome. Work absorbed him eight to ten hours a day, as did conversations, which he did not limit to partisans of Lamennais. Even if his visits were rare to those who were openly antagonistic to Mennaisianism — like the Jesuit Father Rozaven to whom he had been recommended — he was too curious of men and the life of ideas not to expand the circle of his relationships. All of this did not give him much time to spend on monuments, works of art, and landscapes. However, during the course of the two years, or almost, that he spent in Rome, he visited Naples and its environs; on two occasions he took advantage of a visit to Italy by his friend, La Gournerie, to spend several weeks visiting Rome in depth as well as a few famous cities. With Reverend MacCarthy, he spent a fortnight traveling up and down the Roman countryside, the region of the Castelli. He was enchanted by, and marveled at, all that he saw. Without being, properly speaking, an artist, he had a feel for the beautiful and was sensitive to it in his always intense manner. But in him, the passion for ideas and a taste for action would always prevail. All in all, monumental Rome and Italian landscapes were only diversions for him. His Roman period was deeply marked by the painful trial which his mind and heart would now have to endure, for the tragic shadow of Lamennais spread increasingly over the year 1834.

Several days after arriving in Rome, on December 8, 1833, Emmanuel had written to his father on the subject of Lamennais: “It seems that the Pope is quite unhappy with him.” In fact, in spite of the declaration of submission of September 10, 1832, Lamennais’s attitude had given rise to legitimate misgivings. Although urged by many bishops, headed by Bishop

d'Astros, to censure some of Lamennais's propositions, the Pope preferred to procrastinate. He limited himself to sending Bishop d'Astros the papal brief *Litteras* of May 8, 1833, in which, basing himself on certain texts which he knew, he stated that he doubted the sincerity of the Lamennais submission. The brief was supposed to remain secret; however, *L'Ami de la Religion* published it on July 20. Lamennais, pressed by his friends, drew up a new formula of submission on August 4, 1833. It was very vague, as a matter of fact, and did not satisfy the Pope. A new papal brief followed, addressed this time to the bishop of Rennes in Brittany; Gregory XVI required a declaration from Lamennais that he would abide solely and absolutely by the doctrine expressed in the encyclical and that he would neither write nor approve anything contrary to it. On November 2, the bishop of Rennes withdrew from the Breton priest all ecclesiastical powers in his diocese.

To all appearances, Lamennais complied on November 5. He again asserted his submission without reservation to the acts of the Holy See. But his text contained this statement: "If, in the religious sphere, the Christian can only listen and obey with respect to the spiritual power, he remains entirely free in his opinions, words, and acts in the purely temporal order." Where is the spiritual, where the temporal, when the mingling of the two is often subtle? Lamennais took care not to state the distinction, thereby taking back the independence he had seemed to be giving up, and officially, so to speak, entering a vortex in which he would lose himself.

At this precise stage in the Mennaisian evolution, what did Emmanuel think? The previously quoted letter to his father gives us a good idea of where he stood. "While I am perfectly disposed," he wrote, "to condemn all of his opinions which the Pope will reject, I do not see why I should not retain those on which he will allow freedom. But I notice

that the Pope rejects only certain political exaggerations on which I was far from sharing the views of the founders of *L'Avenir*." He added that Gregory XVI, although quite annoyed, had not condemned Lamennais.

Hardly had that letter been sent, when Lamennais, on December 11, signed for Rome's benefit a text in which he declared that he accepted solely and absolutely the doctrine of the encyclical and promised neither to write anything nor to approve anything contrary to it. In a papal brief of December 28, the Pope heartily congratulated and praised Lamennais for his submission which this time appeared total. "Euphoria reigns," Emmanuel wrote to Viscount d'Alzon on January 1, 1834. "The Pope told someone, from whom I learned about it, that he was quite happy with Monsieur de Lamennais."

Yes, but on that same January 1, Lamennais wrote to Montalembert: "Leaving aside the question of truth which had preoccupied me until this moment, I see nothing more in this dismal affair but a question of peace at any price, and I made up my mind to sign not only what I was being asked to, but also anything they wanted me to, without exception, whether it even be the affirmation that the Pope is God, the great God of heaven and earth, and that he alone must be adored. But at the same time I had decided to abstain, as of that moment, from any priestly function, which I have done." Already, on May 8 of the preceding year, Lamennais had written to Father Ventura that he no longer shared the latter's "faith in the Holy See and in the dazzling privileges of the papacy." And he added: "The doctrines which were mine, which I defended with sincere and complete conviction, for which I have suffered and would have wanted to suffer even more, those doctrines today are long gone from me." The original Lamennais, the one for whom the finest young men of the time had become fired up, no longer existed.

Did Emmanuel realize this? When we read his correspondence, everything points to the fact that he had had no knowledge of either the letter to Father Ventura, whom he nevertheless frequently saw, nor of Lamennais's alarming statement in the letter to Montalembert. The latter let him know on February 12 of his interior agony and that of Lamennais, but from one end to the other of Montalembert's lengthy letter to Emmanuel, there cannot be found a single word leading one to think that Lamennais had abandoned his previous convictions.

However, a letter from Emmanuel to Lamennais on January 15, 1834,⁶¹ reveals both a greatness of soul out of the ordinary as well as a very clear realization of a change in the Mennaisian attitude. His concern is evident. Recalling his pilgrimage to the tomb of Saint Gregory VII, he wrote: "I requested for you that love of justice, that hatred of evil which had caused such great things to be achieved by Saint Gregory. I most of all asked for perseverance similar to his, a perseverance stronger than the persecutions under the weight of which Providence seems to want to crush you; also I confess to you with the simplicity of the most absolute devotion that I was grieved to see my prayers so badly answered when, upon my return to Rome, I saw in your letter to Charles MacCarthy that you were totally abandoning your first mission. Dare I ask you to explain to me what I cannot explain to myself? Perhaps there is boldness in my request. I beseech you to see in it only an ardent love for the glory of God for which you seem to me to have tired of working toward.

"It seemed to me that the more Providence made you suffer, the more it expected great things of you. Has all your strength been exhausted? Or rather, is it the better to prepare for the triumph of truth that you are going to take a new road? Allow me to make you an offer which will enable you to understand what motive drives me, a young man of twenty-three, to speak to you with such freedom. If it be true that the

chalice presented to you seems to be too bitter, ask God to divert part of it to me; I would be most happy to fulfill for you the role of Simon the Cyrenian. All the time that you will be fighting, I will suffer in your place according to my weakness. Oh, that I might thereby restore to you your former courage! I pray that you will examine my offer before God; it is at the foot of the cross that I make it. If you believe that it might contribute to the glory of God, accept it; otherwise consider it a childish action, but consider me finally as that one of your children who loves you the most.”

In his response to Emmanuel on March 5, Lamennais made the most confused and nebulous remarks possible. Some disturbing words can be found there, but which do not allow us to infer that Lamennais had lost his faith in the Church; he stated that he did not believe in the present effectiveness of work and struggle and that it must be left up to God to accomplish his work. “That immense enterprise requires many things we are not aware of, changes hard to calculate, profound modifications in what exists and cannot continue to exist in the same guise.”

Until early April 1834, Emmanuel was left in essence with this understanding: Lamennais had submitted without reservation, and the Pope was satisfied with that. In his mind, the case was closed. For that matter, it was so for the Pope as well who seized the opportunity to let it be known that he did not want the matter reopened. But on March 29, Lamennais, in a new letter to Emmanuel, reeled off some considerations that were far more than merely worrisome: “In Rome, especially, no one has the slightest idea of the state of things in the human spirit.... The clergy is a sort of administrative machinery like any other. But, outside of that, no one is concerned with Catholicism and the Church. They arouse neither hatred nor love. They are considered dead. There is in France no conviction more widespread, nor held more deeply. Only, should they reappear on the political scene, with one kick they would be relegated to

the tomb. Catholicism, to be sure, remains the driving power behind the current social transformation, but it will itself undergo transformation. What will the nature of that development be? No one knows, but people the world over are convinced that it is incompatible with the present institutional Catholicism which, they say, contains an evident and radical antinomy whose solution can be achieved only by a new institution.”

Were not these statements enough to alarm Emmanuel? His reply has unfortunately been lost, but from the way Lamennais alludes to it in a letter of May 8, it doesn't seem to indicate that the young man had questioned Lamennais's Catholic faith. Emmanuel was used to the extreme and apocalyptic language customary to Lamennais since he had begun to write. He had surely understood those statements to mean the interior reform of the clergy and a renewal in the Church for which Lamennais had always proclaimed the need. He would have been even more inclined to such an interpretation since his correspondent had added: “The first thing that the Church will have to do to live again will be to convince men that it exists and has life, thought, and movement. We have not reached that stage.” *“We have not reached that stage”* but we must strive to attain it would have been Emmanuel's interpretation.

Be that as it may, Emmanuel certainly was not aware at that date of Lamennais's already consummated apostasy. Besides, it is worthy of note that he who was frank to the point of brutality with Montalembert, e.g., in his letter of January 1, 1834, blurred in his correspondence with Emmanuel any expression which touched upon his interior life. Even the remarks which we have just read were presented by Lamennais as “the prevailing ideas.” In a certain sense, he buried his own case in an expose on the general situation of the French intelligentsia. Perhaps we should theorize that, respectful of a young vocation, just then coming to fruition, and as if animated by the reflex of the priest he would remain for

eternity, he did not want to blight in this proud, pure, and trusting young man the priestly ideal which animated and sustained Emmanuel. Otherwise, why would he not have acknowledged what he had confided to Montalembert in such clear-cut terms? *Mutatis mutandis*, an analogous viewpoint must have led to the discretion of Father Ventura who was much more aware than Emmanuel of the stage at which Lamennais had arrived.

Thus, in May 1834, Emmanuel still moved on the periphery of this drama. Not that he wasn't aware of it, but he did not realize its definitive and deplorable repercussion on Lamennais's soul. He situated the dilemma at the point of collision of a will for renewal, for transformation, for progress, which Lamennais embodied in his eyes, and the supposed fossilization and conformity of the Roman Church. This was enough to precipitate a crisis of soul in him. Echoes of this are noticeable in his correspondence during the first five months of 1834. It is discernible in a February 24 letter to d'Esgrigny: "To me Rome is a mystery which I will not soon solve, a mixture of faith and abuses, of virtues and decadence, of strength and weakness, of the politics of fear and love of the good, all of these amalgamated and blurred together. One is on one's own to sort it all out! The busiest minds waste themselves on unimportant matters and leave aside the vital questions." On the preceding January 11, he had already written to the same person: "The more I see of Rome, the more I can see what is killing it, and also the more I realize that the evil in France, though very extensive, offers greater resources.... Ah! Rome is very sick!... I believe I am doing the right thing by staying here for two years, even though I must agree that very few people in this city have an inner sense of movement." In other respects, Emmanuel seemed overcome by the Mennaisian pessimism to the point of concluding that "all human

medicine is powerless to cure the Church's ailments." The rough draft of a March 5 letter testifies to this.

This crisis of soul was made worse by emotional attachment. Lamennais was suffering, and Emmanuel, like all his other friends, wanted to rally round and comfort him. He noted that, in wanting to isolate and condemn him, certain people in France and Rome were relentless, their harshness springing from motives that were not pure. The Pope seemed almost obsessed by a concern to spare Lamennais, inasmuch as this was possible, in order to preserve that great strength for the Church. But, in this affair, so many heeded only partisan political passion! Emmanuel was indignant at this. His affection and admiration for Lamennais were fired up by the situation; the chivalry of friendship flared within him.

But events started to move more quickly. In his letter of May 8, Lamennais mentioned a "small work which had just appeared" and which Emmanuel might already have heard of. That small work was *Paroles d'un Croyant* [Words of a Believer]. It had an overwhelming effect. "Father Lamennais's book is creating a great sensation here," Emmanuel wrote to his father on June 5. "It is frightening even his friends.... I cannot yet tell you what I think, because I am troubled by it. Does the book contain errors? I even ask myself whether it is harmful for the book to appear at this time since it could be an occasion to settle certain questions." But, he added, "What I know of it makes me regret that he attacks kings only. The people are not any less guilty, and it may be because of them that kings are bad." He had already written to Monsieur d'Alzon on May 20: "It seems to me that his error lies in attacking power in general; if he had attacked only the kings of our time, he would have been tolerated." Emmanuel did not think, however, that the book would be condemned. He stated as much to his family and then to Lamennais himself on June 12. Again on June 24 he declared to d'Esgrigny: "It is almost certain that

the book will not be talked about, at least not to condemn it." The following day, June 25, lightning struck in the guise of the encyclical *Singulari vos*.

Emmanuel's immediate reaction was expressed in a letter to his sister Marie on June 30: "Because I am entirely submissive, I am unconcerned on my own account, but I tremble regarding the repercussions, and I am not alone in this regard.... In spite of that, I am somewhat annoyed, but I won't do anything stupid. Just yesterday, I went again to kiss the feet of Saint Peter and to ask him for courage for myself and those who need it."

He was being decidedly himself in his spontaneous outpouring. But, from July to the summer's end, especially the last days of August, the general mood had its effect on him, that atmosphere so typical of the days that follow encyclicals. Submission of course, but the hunt is on for what is condemned, and what is not; lines of demarcation are drawn up; shades of thought are expressed, interpretations abound, texts are questioned in different ways.... Those who had hoped for so much from Lamennais were at a loss; hearts were bleeding. The barely restrained joy of certain adversaries of Lamennais was hurtful, irritating. Emmanuel's correspondence faithfully reflected these alternating feelings. In a rage at this, he wrote to Lamennais on July 19: "This blow was a surprise to all of us; no one expected it. I am too worked up and too full of indignation to be able to write two words in a row...." On August 25, writing to his father, he recalled the words of the condemned Fénelon:⁶² "I submit, but in tears." Emmanuel expressed an analogous feeling, not in the manner of the "Swan of Cambrai" [a name by which Fénelon, the Archbishop of Cambrai, was known] which was mild and pliant, but in his own way, which was leonine: "My submission was very easy since I recognized that Monsieur de Lamennais had brought condemnation upon himself; it's the

blow itself which I found cruel, and I could say that I have submitted while roaring loudly." (To think that the d'Alzons had sent their son to Rome in order to exorcise the Mennaisian incantations!)

Such was the first impulse, that of compassion. Second, and closely related to it, was the concern of being useful to Lamennais. As he had been doing before the condemnation, Emmanuel passed on to Lamennais all the information which reached him. In reality, he did not take enough care to filter it all, to verify its validity. He repeated the news as he heard it. On the strength of what was told him at the French embassy, he wrote to Lamennais on July 21: "The two forceful notes that came from Saint Petersburg and Austria are what motivated the issuance of the encyclical." The fact is, that although the sovereigns of Russia, Austria, and even Prussia wanted to see Lamennais hanged because he was so contemptuous of absolute power and had communicated this to their ambassadors in Rome, it was not that, but the defense of the faith which had decided Gregory XVI to promulgate the encyclical. Already, on July 5, Emmanuel had written to Lamennais: "MacCarthy saw a religious yesterday who assured him that a large number of theologians considered the encyclical to be nothing more than the personal opinion of Mauro Capellari."

Mauro Capellari being Gregory XVI's name before becoming Pope, one can see the tendentious nature of this information. Turning over such remarks to Lamennais at random and without qualification, was certainly not likely to bring him back into the bosom of the Church. In such manifest imprudence, one should see the outburst of a young heart, frantic with anxious friendship and ignorant of the abyss into which Lamennais had already fallen.

One cannot emphasize too greatly, besides, that Emmanuel never approved of these remarks; he simply reported them. Cardinal Micara

says... Father Ventura believes... Father Olivieri vouches for... Emmanuel's comments on the encyclical reflect the same influences. And when he thought, on the one hand, that Lamennais must make his submission, and on the other, that he should, to the contrary, remain silent and submit only in the silence of his heart — because a public retraction risked requiring of him more than they had the right to ask of him — these fluctuations echoed the seesawing and perplexity of his Roman friends.

This interior crisis would last for several months, abating gradually, but with sudden flare-ups. It gave way bit by bit as he continued to reflect upon the question with persevering effort. Comparing the Mennaisian system with the encyclical, Emmanuel honestly looked for what was censured in the former and what was not. Over and above the important reservations he had always formulated on Lamennais's system, he now began to discern more and more clearly Lamennais's fundamental errors.

That was noticeable by the month of August, so much so that on the 16th he was able to write to his sister Augustine: "I condemn *Paroles d'un Croyant* for the same reason that the Sovereign Pontiff condemns it; I disapprove of Monsieur de Lamennais's philosophical system in the same way the Pope does, although I believe I would have the right, while remaining an excellent ultramontane,⁶³ to ask for explanations on this score. I believe the encyclical was opportune, even while I despise — more than I can find words for — the mean political passions which motivated certain [royal] courts to request that condemnation. I bow to the philosophical censure all the more willingly since my ideas have, for some time now, undergone modifications."

The appeasement of his heart followed upon the carefully thought-out adherence of his mind. Consideration of the glory of God and the paramount interests of the Church had certainly never ceased to dominate his interior storm, but it now acted upon him with commanding

power, freeing him from what was contingent to focus him at the level of eternal values. It thrust him into humility; it restored him to confidence. He wrote on August 25 to one of his correspondents, Father Fabre: "If you want to know the effect that these events have had upon me personally, they made me suffer greatly, but they purified my faith, made it rest more and more upon God and to want nothing but the welfare of his Church. Oh, how small, feeble, and illusory everything is outside of that! Pray God, I implore you, that from all that passes before my eyes I will draw lessons of humility and hope. I sometimes have great difficulty holding my soul in check; I am sometimes quite downcast. However, once calm has been restored, one finds oneself weaker, more broken, more flexible, more in the hands of God, and that is what is needed."

Thus, the crisis of conscience through which Emmanuel had just passed, far from weakening his fidelity to the Roman Church, had strengthened it. Even in the midst of that crisis, hardly three weeks after the promulgation of the encyclical, he had conceived the great idea which would govern his life, that of Catholic action expressly at the service of the Church and free from the parties, the politics, and the heavy hand of the State. Writing to his father on July 13, he had reminded him that Monsieur de Maistre, in his *Soirées de Saint Pétersbourg* [Saint Petersburg Evenings], had foreseen the formation of a Catholic League. "A vision of the future," he wrote, "which causes me rapturous joy. Such a League, which seems no longer to exist today, gives me the impression, on the contrary, of being able to assume a very powerful expansion. With Father de Lamennais no longer having a school, each person will freely participate in the work of Providence, without cliquishness and free of bias; it will be a great boon."

When all is said and done, his deepest feeling had always been, much more than he himself had thought, exactly the opposite of the

Mennaisian evolution. Toward the end of the summer of 1834, he had come to a better realization of this, but he was too noble of temperament and faithful of heart to turn his back forever on the fallen priest. The spell had been broken, but the friendship remained. When Emmanuel's correspondence with Lamennais ended in October, it was for a reason quite foreign to the state of their relationship. In fact, on October 14, 1839, Félicité de Lamennais conveyed the following to Montalembert: "I have written to Rome requesting that since all my letters are being opened, they no longer forward them to me; as a result, I do not know what is going on there, and I am not troubled by it." There had been indiscretions on the part of the Roman police, violations of the integrity of the mail. Due to whom? No one knows. But it should be noted that the last "Roman" letter of Emmanuel to Lamennais, dated October 4, had visibly been unsealed.

From that moment on, Emmanuel was taken up with his coming ordinations. They were indeed close. On November 15, he wrote to the seminarians at Montpellier: "My good friends, if ever we were supposed to pray for one another, I think I have the right to ask all of you for your prayers, because in a short space of time I shall receive the subdiaconate, the diaconate, and the priesthood. Certain persons, whose advice I had to follow, urged me to take advantage of Rome's benefits and enter the priesthood almost all at once."

The decision had been reached suddenly. Must we assume that certain friends, well enlightened on the matter, had wanted to free Emmanuel from the hothouse atmosphere in which the Mennaisian debate was being interminably argued, and in which he found himself much too hemmed-in, in order to focus him more intently on his interior formation for the priesthood? It would seem that a passage from a letter to Madame d'Alzon on November 18 could thus be interpreted: "I am

making ready to take holy orders even earlier than I had at first thought. I have been told that by taking them one right after the other, I could give my whole attention for a while to piety which seems to me an advantage.”

So Emmanuel decided to make a retreat. He wrote to the seminarians of Montpellier: “I am going to a retreat house and putting myself in the hands of an old Jesuit, and I will get myself soaped, scrubbed, and laundered by him for a month; after which, if I am not spotless, it’s because I am very dirty.”

Yes, that’s right, he was placing himself in the hands of the Jesuits whom he had criticized so vehemently. His Roman friends were dumbfounded. Emmanuel would later — on December 26 — give Monsieur d’Alzon the reason for this choice: “I had heard so much about the Jesuits, and in every which way, that I wanted to judge them for myself.” Besides, he had always professed his admiration for the personal holiness of the Society’s members. His month-long retreat, though it did not dispel for all that his prejudice against the Society of Jesus, confirmed him in “the conviction that, in general, the Jesuits are holy people.” For the present, when it was a case, as he put it, of laundering his soul and preparing it for the priesthood, that was sufficient.

At the moment that he entered the Jesuit residence at Saint Eusèbe, what were his intimate feelings about the priesthood? “I see that great day coming,” he wrote to his mother, “with joy, astonishingly surprised, but not with enough apprehension. It’s undoubtedly because God wants to veil some of the trouble and crosses which await me.” Likewise, in a November 18 letter to d’Esgrigny: “Pray for me, my good friend. I have a great need of prayers. For several years, the desire to be a priest has hidden from me, I am afraid, all the distress and pain which that state entails. I expect much suffering, and I know not whether I have correctly

calculated my strength. It's not that I don't feel called, it's that I have not prepared myself sufficiently."

Emmanuel entered Saint Eusèbe on November 29. Of that month which he lived in total meditation, all is hidden in the intimacy of God except two events which were both trials for him. No doubt to purge him of all Mennaisianism, he was urged to make his general confession, not in the hands of Father Lamarche, the Dominican who was his regular confessor, but in those of Father Rozaven, Lamennais's intractable adversary. He refused. He would later write to his father that other annoyances of the same ilk were inflicted upon him. He added that Cardinal Micara to whom he recounted these aggravating things, "was tearing his beard out with indignation." Glaring blunders, to be sure, which tell us to what degree the Mennaisian Affair had overheated minds in some religious circles.

He had to undergo another trial of the same type, but much more painful because it fell upon him from a higher level. The Pope required that Emmanuel, before becoming a subdeacon, sign a formal declaration of submission to the encyclical. The Cardinal-Vicar Odescalchi presented the form to him on December 12.

What was behind all this? The cause of this exceptional requirement could have been nothing other than a letter from Emmanuel to Lamennais of November 26, 1834.⁶⁴ It did nothing more, truth be told, than inform Lamennais, like his other preceding letters, of the comments of certain Roman notables. But it testified to his loyalty to the recluse of La Chesnaie, which would have alarmed the Vatican. In it, Emmanuel stated particularly that the General of the Jesuits was very unhappy with the encyclical; he informed his correspondent that Cardinal Micara had counseled him to make "no offer of submission because certain things would be required of him which he had the right to refuse" and that

Fathers Ventura and Olivieri were of the same opinion. Emmanuel added that these three important persons still persisted in saying “that, in the encyclical, it is not a question of Lamennais, or at least it does not concern anything he may have written on the *common sense*.”⁶⁵ All in all, except for a slight shade of meaning on a point of detail, Emmanuel did not express his own view; he appeared only as the go-between of very prominent personalities whose position did not permit them to write in their own name.

The summons to sign an act of submission implied nothing less than an unpleasant doubt as to the purity of Emmanuel’s Catholic faith and the integrity of his obedience. In a letter to his father on December 26, Emmanuel narrated his interview with the Cardinal: “He asked me what I thought of Monsieur de Lamennais. I replied that I was completely submissive to the encyclical, that I had disapproved of *Paroles d’un Croquant* before its condemnation had been issued, and that, as regards his philosophy, my ideas had greatly changed, except that I did not understand what the Pope meant by the philosophical system he disapproved of. The Cardinal replied that the Pope wanted to censure in a general way the system by which Monsieur de Lamennais wanted to place religion within liberty and unite these two together, that the Pope did not intend to condemn all the opinions of Monsieur de Lamennais, that he knew many people who had been converted by the author’s *first* book, that the Pope had recently told him that he would be pleased if what Monsieur de Lamennais had written about the Holy See were reprinted. Then, in the name of the Pope, he proposed that I sign a formula according to which I adhered to the encyclical and did not agree with the opinion of those who say that it does not condemn a certain philosophical system. He offered to give me time to think it over. But I answered that I did not want any and signed on the spot.” No trace in this

letter of the least bitterness. Only that, having learned from the Cardinal that the Pope was very happy with the promptness of this submission, Emmanuel remarked: "It is rather distressing to attract the satisfaction of the Pope in such a manner."

Two days later, on December 14, in Cardinal Odescalchi's chapel, Emmanuel was ordained a subdeacon, then a deacon on December 20, at Saint John Lateran; on December 26, he was ordained a priest, once more in the Cardinals chapel. The next day, he said his first Mass in the Crypt of Saint Peter. He found himself transported to sublime and peaceful realms. "One has to say Mass to understand what it is" he wrote to his mother. "I had no idea. For the last eight days, God has treated me like a truly spoiled child. I am happy, more than I thought possible in this world, and, of course, if it is true that humans here below cannot pretend to more than a certain measure of happiness, I will never again have the right to ask anything of Providence for the rest of my life: it has prepaid me."

Up till then, as it emerges, especially from his letters to d'Esgrigny, the priesthood had seemed to him the best means, wanted by God, for him to work for the defense of the Church. This was a generous frame of mind, but one that did not go to the very essence of the sublime state to which he aspired. Let us not forget that he had completed only one full year of seminary training, that in Rome he had led the life of an independent student, self-taught in spirituality as well as in ecclesiastical studies, and finally that his meditative powers had been much too absorbed by the Mennaisian debate. He sensed it himself with his keen intelligence of spiritual matters. In the already-quoted letter to Lamennais of November 26, 1834, he had written: "I feel that I need special help to see, without inner turmoil, all the good that one can accomplish in the Church of Jesus Christ and all the evil that is being

done. My ideas, which I think have been modified and perfected on a host of matters by my stay in Rome, need — in order not to draw me into certain excesses of despair or into too presumptuous a confidence — to be strengthened by the graces bound up with the priesthood. It seems to me that I will judge the world better and also everything in it that appears inexplicable to me when I shall consider it from the height of the altar.” From that perspective, the Mass had had a decisive impact upon him. At one fell swoop, by introducing him into the heart of the mystery of the priesthood, the Mass deepened his already very rich interior life.

The very day of his ordination, Emmanuel, who shall henceforth be called Father d’Alzon, received a letter from Montalembert who had also, and at the cost of doing himself great violence, made his definitive adherence to the encyclicals: “I am so deeply permeated, distressed, and surprised at the sight of all that Monsieur Féli [Lamennais] has done within the past year, that I am left speechless. I don’t know exactly what your opinion is on this matter, but I would like to believe that it is close to mine, on at least several points and that, like me, you wish *above all else to remain a Catholic*” Shortly thereafter, Gregory XVI received Father d’Alzon in a private audience and explained to him the import of the condemnation imposed upon Lamennais. From then on, the Mennaisian page of Father d’Alzon’s life story had been turned for good.

As a result of a friend’s indiscretion — Father de Montpellier, a Belgian, then at the College of Nobles — the text of Emmanuel’s declaration of obedience was published in the *Journal historique et littéraire de Liège* and reproduced in the February 2, 1835, issue of the great ultramontane newspaper, *L’Ami de la Religion*. So much publicity surrounding an internal drama of conscience and this betrayal by a friend were galling to Father d’Alzon, but left him master of himself: “I am convinced,” he wrote to his father on March 28, “that silence is the better

course. I do not believe that recriminations would be fitting. Besides, since we believe that our adversaries are not acting in a Christian fashion toward us, should we not show them which behavior is more consonant with charity?"

Father d'Alzon spent the five months following his ordination in Rome. He continued his studies, always fragmented, especially for lack of a particular goal on which to focus them. He was uncertain, as a matter of fact, of the ways in which his ministry would be exercised. A single fact was clear to him, yet it was entirely negative: he did not feel an aptitude for parish ministry, and, on every side, the most experienced counsels unanimously dissuaded him from following that route. In him there resulted from this situation a veritable ferment of projects: spend two more years in Rome to study Hebrew, canon law, sacred scripture; devote himself to the home missions and in so doing found a society of missionaries — in this he was of the same mind as Father Vernières, one of his former professors at Montpellier Seminary; apply himself to establishing a Catholic university; organize seminars for young people; write a history of the Reformation; dedicate himself to the conversion of Protestants.... Far from seeing confusion in so many prospects, it behooves us to recognize in them the broad lines of his future apostolic program.

What floated to the surface at the moment of his departure from Rome and which was not just a vague impulse, but a project much meditated upon, was the conversion of Protestants. Lest we forget, they constituted a substantial third of the population of Nîmes. Heredity also played its role here. Had not the ancestral line of the d'Alzons crossed swords with the *camisards* of the Cévennes? The mind had replaced the sword, but had kept all of its dynamism. And besides, was there a more essential manner of defending the Church, of extending its influence,

than to work for unity against heresy and schism? Besides, Emmanuel had always thought that Protestantism, with the premium it granted to subjectivism and free inquiry, was at the source of the errors and revolutionary disorders of his time. The Mennaisian Affair had never prevented Emmanuel from taking a very close interest in the Anglican schism. From MacCarthy and Wiseman he had passionately gathered information in abundance, and it would not be without effect on his future apostolate. In any case, he did not view the task of converting Protestants as one to undertake without serious preparation. He thus counted on asking his bishop to grant him the chance to do so by giving him a few courses to teach at the major seminary of Nîmes. That would give him time to pursue his studies with that precise objective in mind. If this were refused him, he would prepare for this apostolate, either at Lavagnac or in Germany where he would be able to observe closely the motherland of the Reformation.

But, above all, he had an unshakeable resolve to leave the matter up to his bishop: "My one and only plan," he wrote to Father Vernières on March 24, "is to go to see the bishop on arriving at Nîmes and to set forth my ideas; to follow them if he approves of them; otherwise, to do what he tells me. I may have my opinions which I will support as opinions, but I don't think there is any path more reliable than that of obedience, and it is the one I have made up my mind to follow."

He left Rome on May 19, 1835, in that fundamental frame of mind.

IV - The Vicar-General (1835-1844)

As soon as he arrived in Nîmes, on July 5, Father d'Alzon reported to Bishop de Chaffoy. He was received with affectionate benevolence, but the prelate had no intention of authorizing his proposals concerning the conversion of Protestants. Though weighed down with years, Bishop de Chaffoy combined great pastoral zeal with level-headedness and wisdom; he saw clearly in this matter as the young priest would acknowledge later.

Father d'Alzon went to Lavagnac where he would stay until November, waiting for the bishop to give him an assignment. Dying to hurl himself into the fray, he found it distressing to bide his time in this state of uncertainty, but he took pains to remain composed: "I try to throw myself blindly into the arms of Providence," he wrote to d'Esgrigny, "and to stifle certain grumblings which rise to my lips. Have pity on me, my good friend; feel sorry for me for being so weak and so impatient, so much lacking in courage for the great cause being prepared for me, so foolhardy as to believe myself good for something." From Paris, his friends beckoned to him — Montalembert, first and foremost, who wanted him to settle in the capital where they thought he would find a sphere of activity worthy of him. The bishop of Montpellier wanted him for his own diocese and sounded him out with the most attractive offers. But, being a member of the diocese of Nîmes, Father d'Alzon intended to stay there. Moreover, he had given his word to Bishop de Chaffoy, and he would not fail to keep his promise.

The truth is that the bishop was in a predicament for, young though he was, Father d'Alzon loomed large on the Nîmes horizon. His name, his fortune, his personality, highlighted by the esteem and friendship of so

many eminent Catholics, destined him to a position of choice. Moreover, the bishop of Nîmes was not unaware that his colleague of Montpellier, if Father d'Alzon had responded to his call, would have made him vicar-general and titular canon. At Nîmes, that was out of the question. The Chapter had its full complement: of the two existing vicars-general, one, Canon Liron d'Airolles, Father d'Alzon's own uncle, would willingly have accepted that his nephew be named a third vicar-general, but the other, Father Laresche, jealous of his prerogatives, would have found such a promotion galling. So, four months went by without a decision. But then came a ray of light: on November 8, Father d'Alzon was named honorary vicar-general and honorary canon. On the 14th, he moved in with his uncle Canon Liron d'Airolles in Nîmes. Meanwhile, on the 9th, Bishop de Chaffoy was stricken with paralysis; although more than eighty years of age, the prelate would survive and continue to govern the diocese, immobilized, but with a clear mind, nonetheless.

Honorary titles left Father d'Alzon cold; he accepted them as they were given him, for whatever beneficial influence they could assure him. What interested him was action. In that respect, what was being offered him? First of all, administrative duty, since to all intents and purposes he had nearly all the same powers as the titular vicars-general, and he attended diocesan council meetings. As for the rest, it consisted of the roles of assistant to his uncle d'Airolles in the chaplaincy of the Society of the Ladies of Mercy, and also to Father de Tesson in the chaplaincy of an institution called Providence House for young women who were orphans and deaf mutes. What else was there besides? Preaching. In addition, Bishop de Chaffoy thought that the young priest could, in his spare time, pursue his theological studies in the libraries of the bishop's house and the seminary.

Father d'Alzons imagination leaped far beyond all this. Two grand ideas occupied his thoughts, conceived, it would seem, at least in specific terms, during his forced inactivity at Lavagnac, when he was obliged to give up his project of converting Protestants. He believed deeply in the power of the prayer of cloistered nuns to make priestly activity fruitful. Consequently, he was thinking of instituting a Carmel, having, by his own account, "drawn from a meditated reading of the works of Saint John of the Cross, a great affection for the daughters of Saint Teresa." He dreamed also of founding a Catholic secondary school in Nîmes because the need for a Christian education had been haunting him for some time. It would take a while before he could execute both of these plans, but he would apply an unflagging perseverance in bringing them to fruition.

For the time being, a period of eight years would follow during which he would give himself readily, and with unmatched dispatch, to the most varied works, before attaining the real goal of his unusual vocation. What exactly was Nîmes, the field of his apostolate, like? The diocese, which had been abolished like so many others by the Concordat of 1801, had only been re-established in 1817 and did not obtain the bishop responsible for its renewal, Bishop de Chaffoy, until the end of 1821. Between 1821 and 1835, when Father d'Alzon appeared on the scene, Bishop de Chaffoy had accomplished a very great deal: the construction of the major seminary, the installation of the minor seminary, priestly retreats, diocesan missions, various works, including the Conference of Saint Vincent de Paul, and especially Catholic grade schools which, through the efforts of different congregations, brought together in Nîmes about three thousand children.

It was, therefore, to a diocese in the very process of being rebuilt that Father d'Alzon was about to devote himself. He wanted to establish forthwith that he was a priest of Jesus Christ according to the gospel

which made a king of the poor man. He dismissed the carriage with the family's coat of arms which his parents wanted to provide him. After a brief stay with his uncle, Canon Liron d'Airolles, he moved into a modest lodging in an unpretentious part of town, on Arc-du-Gras Street. Thus, and everyone understood this, he remained an aristocrat in bearing, manners, physical and moral make-up — these he could not do away with — but he was no longer of that world and did not want to be.

In accordance with the directives of Bishop de Chaffoy, he assisted Canon d'Airolles and Father de Tesson. In practice, he filled in for them. His uncle was very old and riddled with rheumatism. As for Father de Tesson, the humorous portrait which Father d'Alzon has left us of him does not give one the impression of his having been a dynamic person: "I would fear," wrote Father d'Alzon to a woman that he was directing, "that after seeing that holy man and starting to be amused by his infinitely long nose, the fifty-two lambskins he wears under his cassock, the stick, almost as long as he is, which he uses to protect his calves from dogs, you would find that he is worth a hundred thousand times myself." Save for the slight verbal exaggeration, which flourished easily under the Languedocian sky, it remained true that the Ladies of Mercy, pious ladies of the city who devoted themselves to visiting the poor and orphan girls, could, from then on, consider Father d'Alzon as their spiritual director.

It was not in Father d'Alzon's nature to confine himself to beaten paths. He needed to break ground, to build, to create. It did not take long for this to be noticed by the people of Nîmes. This young priest, who took to young people spontaneously, as well as in a thoughtful manner, not content to donate a large portion of his time to the teaching of the catechism of perseverance, also established, as early as 1835, a young men's society dedicated to Saint Aloysius of Gonzaga for the children of well-to-do families, which duplicated the one for children of more modest

means dedicated to Saint Stanislas and directed by Father Daudét, a relative of the great author.⁶⁶

It was thus that he, who claimed to have no liking for the functions of a curate, fulfilled them with a vengeance, but in his own always very personal way. When he arrived, the Association of the Ladies of Mercy was composed almost exclusively of women of more than canonical age and of thin-skinned respectability. They were somewhat startled by his forceful speech, his caustic turn of mind, but the confessor, the director of conscience already asserting itself in him, quickly won over their souls and just as quickly rejuvenated the association's framework, making it more lively and prosperous. He wanted it to manifest the tried and true marks of the evangelical spirit. His vision was a broad one; he generated gusto, gaiety, and liveliness, but he did not joke on the score of what touched the teaching of the Gospel. To a lady who wanted to organize a charity ball, he said flatly: "Jesus Christ does not like to receive alms from the devils hand."

Likewise, at Saint Aloysius of Gonzaga, the young men's club, he was himself, d'Alzon, a person like no other. An alumnus of the club, who became the banker Peyries, would one day describe him as he appeared habitually: "Father d'Alzon bought a great many games for us from his own funds. One day he treated us to a billiard table which was rarely idle. He took part in billiard games, placing himself at our level, practicing fencing and wrestling like one of us. *We were crazy about him.* One day, lounging on the billiard table and speaking unaffectedly with us, he even related incidents of his youth: he spoke humbly and freely about things to his detriment, among others that he had once had the weakness or the stupidity to spend two hours putting on his necktie." That was how he won their hearts. Their souls were no less won over. "He gave us," added Peyries, "advice that was so practical, so simple, and which sank in so well

that we gained more from them for our whole life than from many a sermon.”

As he visited the sick, Father d'Alzon discovered, beyond their material distress, their moral misery. The plight of girls who had fallen by the wayside disturbed him, and since every strong feeling he experienced moved him to action, he would not rest until he had opened a refuge for them. It was a huge project which would require a great deal of money. And so, Bishop de Chaffoy hesitated. In the end, knowing himself to be vanquished, the bishop remarked: “Go, my dear child; all founders are insane, and you fill the bill.” That was taking place in the summer of 1836. In the following January, the nuns arrived to whom the repentant girls would be entrusted. They were the Servants of Jesus Christ, known as Sisters of Marie-Thérèse, a new institute dedicated to that apostolate. In February, an old inn on the road to Beaucaire was rented to be the Refuge. In March, the first penitents arrived. With Father d'Alzon, everything moved with that sort of speed. To this new work he devoted himself intensely without neglecting his other endeavors.

In such a delicate and so complex a ministry, he gave proof of astonishing mastery. “I will have the heart of a father,” he told the assembled penitents, “for those who want to be well-behaved and an iron hand for those who won't be.” First and foremost in winning over those poor girls was his kindness. At recreation he wanted them to be joyful and relaxed; he invented games for them. On a given day, he would challenge them to a race, promising a coin to the first one who caught up with him; on another day, to the despair of the nun who did the cooking, he grabbed the sugar bowl and threw the sugar cubes into the air while the delighted girls gathered them up, each trying to outdo the other. Or else, he would ask them point blank: “Who among you believes herself to be the worst of the lot?” — “Me, Father,” one of them would reply.

“Well, my child, here is your penance,” and he would give her a silver rosary, a gift of Gregory XVI.

So much impulsiveness and playfulness in him must not mislead us. He brought to matters of the soul a profound seriousness. The penitents knew the difference. One of them, whom he had led well along on the road to repentance and atonement, so far that she was thinking of becoming a nun, suddenly changed her behavior and decided to leave. Nothing could stop her. The nuns appealed to Father d’Alzon. And he, in a slow and penetrating voice, said to her: “My child, look at your Father before leaving him.” But she answered: “No, Father, I will not look at you, because if I did, I would never leave.”

In the difficult shepherding of those souls, he displayed that rigorous asceticism which, under a cheerful appearance, was already characteristic of his virtue. A striking proof of this has been related. The superior of the Refuge, Mother Séraphine, having become very seriously ill, he suggested to an eighteen-year-old penitent that she offer her own life to God in exchange for the superior’s. The young girl accepted. A few days later, she died. Mother Séraphine recovered. One cannot help but shudder at this incident or at least murmur in protest. Wasn’t that disproportionate? Undoubtedly, although the regions of holiness are peopled with such excesses.

This ascendancy over souls, which he would exert at the Refuge for twelve years, manifested itself also in the city of Nîmes, sometimes in a dazzling fashion in the case of exceptional souls whose position placed them in the public eye. Thus, in 1836 and 1837, he led [Professors] Germain, Germer-Durand, and Monnier through the profoundly intense experience of a return to God and the Catholic faith. All three were graduates of the prestigious and atheistic state-run *École normale supérieure* for the training of university-level professors, and all three in

succession would become professors of advanced-level students at the [Catholic] Royal College of Nîmes. These university scholars were well positioned to understand Father d'Alzon and he, to be understood by them. Their shared love of ideas united them. The old friend of Salinis, Gerbet, and Lamennais; the disciple of Ventura, Olivieri, and Micara; the student of Lavagnac, Paris, and Rome had not left his former self behind — he was the same man. Though Father d'Alzon functioned joyfully as a curate, it was his influence on minds, the apostolate of intellectuals, which absorbed his best capabilities. During those early years in Nîmes, he proved as much when he inaugurated, in the winter of 1836-37, seminars on philosophy and religion modeled on the Salinis Conferences and the *Bonnes Etudes* reading and discussion series of Bailly. Canon Sibour, the future archbishop of Paris, was his collaborator on literary questions. Many young people attended those lectures assiduously, among them the poet Jean Reboul,⁶⁷ one of the first “cicadas” to have sung in the olive grove of the future Provencal poets. In the course of these cordial reunions, there sometimes passed the more and more melancholic shadow of Lamennais. The group read *Les Affaires de Rome*, and Father d'Alzon demonstrated “how that man had been led to the point where he was at by exaggerating his own doctrines, which all contained, nevertheless, a grain of truth.”

So matters went until Bishop de Chaffoy died on September 26, 1837. A third attack of paralysis had finally brought down this old man of eighty-six. So great was the prestige of Father d'Alzon that he was approached, in spite of his youth, about taking the position of capitular vicar. He refused and Canon Sibour was named instead. Father d'Alzon nonetheless exercised a strong and beneficial influence during the long vacancy — almost nine months — of the See of Nîmes. For instance, part of the clergy being in sharp conflict with the Vicar-General Laresche, he

intervened with such tact that, of his own accord, Father Laresche resigned and left the diocese.

Early in July 1838, the newly appointed Bishop Cart arrived. He was only thirty-eight, but already endowed with the prudence, circumspection, and avoidance of snap decisions characteristic of an elderly man. There was general agreement about his virtues, but Bishop Cart was a timid person. His uncertainty, his continual perplexity, derived from this character trait. Moreover, like all shy people, he was misleading as to his own feelings. He appeared cold and distant, whereas, in private, he showed himself to be affectionate and confiding. Since he saw himself just as he was, the energetic and resolute nature of Father d'Alzon quickly appeared to him as a necessary complement to his own temperament. Canon Liron d'Airolles having died soon after the bishop's arrival in Nîmes, he decided to make Father d'Alzon the titular vicar-general. "He will push me," he stated at the time, "and I will restrain him."

The first years of collaboration, however, were marked by the effects of the clear-cut contrast between such opposite temperaments. A d'Alzon could thrive only in a relaxed, euphoric atmosphere. He could not bear any tenseness in human relationships, all the more so since his first impulse was always to hold nothing back. The apparent coldness of Bishop Cart toward him weighed upon him so much that he thought of resigning. But, in the end, he realized the true nature of his bishop: a loving heart which did not know how to open up easily and who suffered because of it. One day, in that direct way of his, Father d'Alzon revealed the feelings through which he had passed. The bishop was quite moved, and from that day forward all tension between them disappeared.

Toward the end of the summer of 1838, Father Combalot — without advance notice, as was his wont — came to see Father d'Alzon, who was in Lavagnac at that moment. What could be agitating this magnificent and

formidable missionary once again? Father d'Alzon quickly found out. Since 1825, Father Combalot had been dreaming of founding a congregation of women, under the banner of the Assumption and dedicated to the instruction and formation of upper-class young women. Since then, while he traveled from one diocese to another, from one pulpit to another, that idea had galloped right along with him. He would be the founder; he had been looking for a foundress. And he had located her. She was Eugénie Milleret who, at that moment, was doing her novitiate at the convent of the Visitation Order at Cote-Saint-Andre, where he had sent her. He praised her profusely to Father d'Alzon. The vicar-general knew Combalot through and through. The account he would give of that conversation attests to his warm-hearted irony, on guard as always where Father Combalot was concerned: "Father Combalot told me he had found a person of superior intelligence; in three months time she had learned Latin, was translating Virgil with amazing ease, and had written a remarkable treatise on education; there certainly was no woman in Europe comparable to her. 'I will show her to you,' he was telling me, because he already considered her to be his own property."

Although Father d'Alzon was well aware of the exaggerations and the quickly dying bursts of enthusiasm of Father Combalot, he also knew the priest to be capable of inspired intuitions and astonishing finds; so he paid attention. Since Father Combalot urged him to write to Miss Milleret to encourage her to persevere, Father d'Alzon did so, without hesitation, on September 3. Eugénie Milleret was somewhat taken aback at this unexpected intrusion into her interior life by a priest she had never met. It is probable also that in his letter, which has unfortunately been lost, Father d'Alzon had used that trenchant tone which often grated on those who did not know him. The fact remains that she wrote to Father Combalot: "I will willingly show my gratitude to him for the care he took

in drawing up a line of conduct for me, even though between you and me, it somewhat offended me at first....”

Even so, Father Combalot could not stand still until he obtained an Eugénie Milleret-Emmanuel d’Alzon meeting. It occurred at the end of October 1838. On his property at Chatenay, which is close to the Côte-Saint-André, the future *Père* d’Alzon saw the future *Mère* Marie-Eugénie for the first time. The impression she made on him was both solemn and profound. In a missive to the Religious of the Assumption, which he would later write, he stated: “I had several very serious conversations with her which gave me the ever-greater conviction that there was in her the makings of a foundress.” Yes, but the founder? “Father Combalot,” he added, “told me about all his plans and how everything had to move briskly and in a straightforward manner. I must admit that I was then stricken with the utmost terror with respect to your poor Mother and, turning to Father Combalot, I told him that I knew of only one drawback to this enterprise. ‘Which one?’ he asked. ‘You, yourself, my dear friend.’”

The sharply pointed remark had been made — there was no taking it back. That Father d’Alzon’s arrow had been accurately aimed was given immediate proof in the conversation with Father Combalot which followed. “I knew,” he would add in his letter to the sisters, “how important it was, especially at the outset of such an undertaking, that its director be there for many years. I told that to Father Combalot who said to me, ‘But I won’t be leaving Paris for at least four years.’ — ‘As for me,’ I told him, ‘I am going to Valence to preach the Lenten series; do you want to come along?’ — ‘Of course, I will go,’ he replied. — ‘Well, now, you who were not supposed to leave Paris for four years, you are already ready to do so.’ Judge for yourselves the feeling of insecurity this gave me for the future of your congregation.”

However, being a born recruiter and one who had a very reliable flair for discovering great souls, Father Combalot had provided Eugénie Milleret with three companions of the highest quality, and on April 30, 1839, the small community had begun its religious life. But, on September 18 of that same year, Mother Marie-Eugénie, in the first letter she wrote to Father d'Alzon, expressed her concern about the way Father Combalot was directing the group. Always the same characteristics: authoritarianism, disorder, lack of method. Father d'Alzon was not surprised, but he remained non-committal. He was not one of those who impulsively set their hooks on souls. He also did not want to encroach upon the spiritual guidance which belonged to another person. A year went by. The foundress could not stand it any longer. This superior woman, capable, moreover, as she had already proven, of the patience possessed only by saints, was not allowing herself to act upon petty motives, but because of her clear vision of things. She recognized better than anyone the eminent qualities of Father Combalot, but, as she has written: "Wisdom, patience, consistency, the feeling for order and hierarchy were diametrically opposed to his character, and, moreover, the fact that he lacked all of these qualities was recognized by all in the Church of France."

In the fall of 1840, she obtained an unexpected victory from Father Combalot: permission to consult another priest, but he insisted that it be none other than Father d'Alzon who, for his part, was of the opinion that it did not behoove him to rupture the bonds which linked the Society of the Assumption with its founder. Given where matters stood, he was confident that Father Combalot would not take long to sever them himself. Several months later, when Archbishop Affre of Paris made known his intention of appointing a superior for the Religious of the Assumption, to place them under the jurisdiction of the Ordinary, Father

Combalot protested that as long as he lived his daughters would have no superior other than himself. He decided to ship them all off to Brittany and, since Marie Eugénie could not but show her disapproval for such a preposterous plan, to send them off without her. The religious, of course, made common cause with their mother superior. The rupture was complete. Father Combalot's stomping feet could be heard receding into the distance.

There is no doubt that, had Father d'Alzon not been so far away from Paris, Mother Marie Eugénie would immediately have turned to him to become Father Combalot's replacement. There is also no doubt that Father d'Alzon could easily have left Nîmes for Paris where he was wanted in high places, but he maintained that God and his bishop, who expressed for him the will of God, wanted him in Nîmes. Mother Marie Eugénie turned then to Lacordaire, Salinis, Gerbet, and Father Rauzan, but in vain. Officially, there would remain for her as ecclesiastical superior, only Bishop Gros, delegated by Archbishop Affre. Mother Marie Eugénie begged Father d'Alzon at least to become her spiritual director. He accepted on July 16, 1841.

The matter was to go much further than it appeared at first. Though it is true that Father d'Alzon never exceeded the rights over her conscience accorded him by Mother Marie Eugénie — prompted in this matter quite as much by his respect for the freedom of souls as by the awareness he had of her remarkable abilities as a foundress and superior-general — there nonetheless developed between them, in matters pertaining to the interior life, as well as at the level of action, one of the most beautiful spiritual friendships, one of the most fertile collaborations that the history of the Church affords us. There was such an affinity between them on general points of view that they shared them more and more, relying on reciprocal advice to such an extent that it would no

longer be possible, in such an in-depth exchange, to know who was the giver and who, the receiver.

One of the seminal ideas, among so many others which engrossed these two great minds, was education transformed by Catholic principles. What is more, this notion was steeped in the powerful current which was carrying the Church of France along in its battle for freedom of education. On September 26, 1842, Montalembert urged his friend d'Alzon to accept the episcopacy without hesitation if, as it appeared quite certain, he was approached to that effect. For what reason? Montalembert explains this clearly: "I say this, not as you can imagine for your particular benefit, nor even for the general good which you could accomplish as a bishop, but in the special interest of freedom of education...this question on which *everything* depends." He added, "I have had too many opportunities to convince myself that the controversy will never be resolved except by the active intervention of the bishops. Once you have become a *bishop*, then you will have to act, and a single one of your acts will have more power and effect than twenty years of effort in which you might wear yourself out today, just as I and many others have already exhausted ourselves." Father d'Alzon would never accept to become a bishop. But he remained firmly concentrated upon the work of Catholic education as an essential goal of his apostolic life.

In the meantime, he came and went from one project to another with that same rapid pace, as though borne along by its own momentum, which became legendary in Nîmes. The kindly Canon de Tessen, whose own gait was a cautious one, affirmed that Father d'Alzon, as he entered the church, walked so fast that he knocked over the chairs as he passed by. Even if we consider this to be an exaggeration, the fact is that the young boy who used to jump over the terraces at Lavagnac rather than use the stairs, lived on in the vicar-general. Moreover, Father d'Alzon,

who took great pains to be punctual, hurried this way so as not to be late. Finally, he did not want to steal from God's service even a few minutes of his life.... What was he not doing! To the major good works we have already described, he added many others — notably, he participated actively in the Saint Vincent de Paul Conference, which his converted friend, Jules Monnier, had revived in 1840, and in the organization of a library for working-class people in 1852. With Monnier he founded an orphanage for boys in 1841. He instigated the opening, at the Sisters of Charity, of early morning adult classes for working girls and household servants.... Certain undertakings, like the Refuge, he closely oversaw himself and would continue to do so for many long years; while others, having brought them to life and launched them, he turned over to the capable hands of others without ever losing interest in them. He used to say: "I do just like hens; as soon as the chicks have grown, they peck at them to force them to move on, and then the hens turn to others."

Upon his arrival in the diocese of Nîmes, he had taken care to extend throughout the diocese the good works and associations which were then operating only in the city of Nîmes. He presided at the installation of a great number of pastors. Everywhere, at each important event, he collaborated closely with his bishops activities. He was a model vicar-general, and he would be viewed as such by four successive bishops.

And he also preached — prodigiously, as a matter of fact. He would always maintain that preaching was one of the most powerful means of acting on souls. Did he do this well? In his early days, it was thought that he did so with too much solemnity, in too studied a fashion. But these are the defects of a beginner still caught up in the classical notions of oratorical art and distrustful of his first steps. It was a style that was absolutely foreign to his nature. Very quickly, he came round to his own natural impulse, and his eloquence, which was real, reflected the man

himself with his contrasting sides. We have on that score an observation of great value, that of Bishop Besson, the last bishop of Nîmes whom Father d'Alzon knew: "His speech, according to the subject, took on the most vivid colors. In his lectures and homilies he was by turns firm and precise, rich and prolific, daring and restrained, mingling the most noble sentiments with the loftiest reflections, uneven and sometimes too informal, but always able to regain his footing quick as a flash." Hollow words never passed his lips, nor merely oratorical phrases, empty of meaning. He was effusive, but, with the richness of his knowledge, he lavished a substantive nourishment on his listeners. That corresponded in him to a concern for effectiveness, as is brought out in a letter of June 23, 1840, to his sister Augustine: "I would like to know what you think about the ideas to put into a sermon; whether it is better that there be only a few, well drawn out, or a greater, somewhat crowded, number of them. I believe that in these times one has to sow, and for that reason one must throw many thoughts into minds, leaving them the care of making the seed germinate; on the other hand, it is beyond all question that there exists a deep ignorance of religion which obliges us to give lengthy explanations of the most simple things if we want to be understood."

The orator in him was enhanced by the imposing countenance of the man. Father d'Alzon was tall and powerfully built. Of his head, which he held high, the good people of Nîmes used to say: "He carries it like the Blessed Sacrament." He was no longer the "Child with bird" of the painting at Lavagnac, still bearing the soft contours of adolescence. His thirties, by accentuating his features, had etched in him a face like that of a Roman proconsul illuminated by the unforgettable gaze of brown eyes under black and well-arched eyebrows.

It was the look of a leader, but there was no harshness in it. His gaze was unblinking and penetrating, but it was also enveloping and

captivating. And, above all, from his whole person there emanated refinement, that imponderable and sovereign adornment. Wherever the vicar-general went, the aristocrat in him was present also. Father d'Alzon seems to have feared that this might be prejudicial to his apostolate; in fact, toward the end of 1837, he wrote to d'Esgrigny: "I have only one misfortune, that of being reproached for not having enough of a working-class style."

He added, "It's true that they also find I have made great progress since last year." Perhaps. But he was undoubtedly deceiving himself. He had the bearing of a great lord as naturally as another has that of the working man. This was so not only in looks, but also in a sort of casualness native to him that he would never rid himself of and which showed up even in his quips, although these could also have been due to mischievousness, a trait typical of persons from the South of France. Of the great lord, he also had the prodigality and to what an extent! He could not conceive of money other than to be spent.

However, all those advantages, which might have made of him a d'Esgrigny, had been turned upside down by him, his roots turned toward heaven. Henceforth, only one greatness mattered for him: that of the soul. He had not chosen honors, but honor. The suzerain, to whom he now rendered the knightly acts of pomp, love, and faith, was God. And it was for the sole service of God that he would be prodigal to the end. In his heart he practiced poverty; his lifestyle was unpretentious in the extreme — the basic necessities and nothing more. And yet the Viscountess d'Alzon, his mother, could truthfully say: "My son costs me more than a wastrel." With his yearly stipend as vicar-general, which amounted to three thousand francs, and the annual allowance of six thousand francs which his parents gave him, Father d'Alzon had more than enough for his needs. But his works, to which he gave without

counting the cost, required large sums. That is why he bombarded his mother with requests for money; the amounts he received were all advances on the considerable fortune he would inherit some day. Hardly was the money in his hands, than it had disappeared. All that came to him went to others, not to himself. One thought obsessed him also. Might not the inheritance which would be coming to him have been increased in the course of time by some lack of social equity? He felt himself to be accountable for this to the poor.

His detachment from what his birth entitled him to, that is what seems like an almost imperial over-abundance of privilege — name, fortune, brilliant gifts, and even his male handsomeness — stamped him from that time on with an evangelical seal that was manifest to all. And then there was his purity. On that score, all other commentary must be put aside in favor of the one which Mother Marie Eugénie related later: “What a love for purity was in that soul!... It was the lever he used to develop a great many vocations! It seemed to me that he loved souls in proportion to their purity. He undoubtedly gave himself to all, but I never knew him to have a friendship with any person except those who were above suspicion. He had many enemies; he was attacked in every which way, but never on that point could a single doubt be raised. Despite all the works which put him in contact with so many persons, he was never the target of a single suspicion, nor of a single attack.... One sensed...in him a deep contempt for what was lax, base, human, clinging affections, inferior feelings. If a naive remark can be added here, I will relate that one day, wanting, because of his great politeness, to pick up something I had let fall and was picking up myself, the tips of his fingers touched my hand, and he snatched them away as if he had burnt them. I then said to him: ‘But, Father, why then must you remember that you are a man? For me, you are not a man, you are an angel, you are the angel of God.’ ‘That’s all

well and good for you,' he replied, 'but everyone does not have the same graces.'"

To get to that point, whatever may have been his natural inclination towards purity, he had had to conquer his instincts day after day. Indeed, day by day also, the ascetic was being formed in him. He mortified himself mercilessly. He practiced the use of instruments of penance — the iron-tipped discipline and others — on a regular basis and enough to substantially bloody his undershirts. He worked unrelentingly at reducing the time he spent sleeping. He was up by five o'clock in the morning. Every moment of the day that was not taken up by his various works, his preaching, hearing confessions, he dedicated to study, for he continued without respite to enrich his mind. He worked late into the night while the rest of humanity slept.

That style of existence would quickly have led men other than Father d'Alzon to a rapid and premature wear and tear. He was saved by an exceptionally strong constitution. But his nervous system, hypersensitive and irritable, tested him severely, magnifying to the highest level of pain those physical miseries from which the healthiest person is not exempt, forcing him to keep to his bed for days on end. His scorn of physical comforts played nasty tricks on him; that is how, having slept without thinking on damp sheets, he was struck with an attack of rheumatoid arthritis which immobilized him for three whole months in 1840. But that was just an accident. All his life, he would have to deal with nothing other than his nerves.

This nervous temperament explains to a great extent the outbursts which he would never master. They were the cause of enmity toward him for they offended some people. Once, as he was feeling bored in a rectory, he wrote to a friend: "Come and entertain me, the pastor leaves me all day long face to (ace with his portrait; I have quite enough of the

original!" The pastor in question, had he heard this quip, would not have been amused. Likewise, a young curate who had just preached about the Passion and had asked Father d'Alzon for his opinion, heard this reply: "My dear friend, there was more than one passion there: there was the historical passion narrated in your own way; there was also your own passion, for you seemed quite bothered by it all; then there was the audience's passion since you were terribly lengthy. Finally, you see, the whole thing deserved compassion." If truth be told, he himself often lacked moderation in his judgments of men. But if, once the biting remark had been made, he noticed that he had hurt someone, he atoned for it in his royal manner, acknowledging his faults with the simplicity of true humility.

What is more, though his mordant tone was feared, everyone was aware of his goodness which was so great that it sometimes erred through an excess of trust. And his numerous friends knew the incomparable quality of his friendship. "When I think of our absent friends," he wrote to Germer-Durand one day in 1841, "I ask myself why we don't have wings." Such was indeed the cry of his heart. Lamennais experienced right to the end the loyalty of his young friend. Having learned that Félicité's health had been affected by his imprisonment at Sainte-Pélagie,⁶⁸ Father d'Alzon urged him to come find rest at Lavagnac. On January 20, 1842, Lamennais answered him, declining the invitation, but allowing to pierce through, the emotion aroused in him by being remembered with such steadfastness: "I am no longer in the season of life for traveling, and the weight of sixty winters keeps me where I am. Believe me, though, that beneath this head of hair which is turning white, there is a heart which is and always will be affectionately devoted to you."

Such was Father d'Alzon at the threshold of the year 1844, at a time when the two great dreams which had been stirring within him since his arrival in Nîmes were taking shape. Never had he abandoned the project of establishing a Carmel. He had tried four or five times, but in vain, to obtain Bishop Cart's authorization. And then, towards the middle of 1843, the bishop had given in. On November 20, seven daughters of Saint Teresa, from Aix-en-Provence, settled in Nîmes, in premises leased for six years. From then on, there existed a fortress constituted by prayer and immolated lives which was to be beneficial to Father d'Alzon's apostolate in a mysterious way.

It was as though only this mystical sign had been lacking, for an outwardly unfortunate event was going to allow Father d'Alzon to become directly involved in the great work of Catholic education. In 1838, Father Vermot, a priest of the Besançon diocese, who had come to Nîmes at the request of his compatriot, Vicar-General Laresche, had founded a Catholic boarding school in the city under the patronage of the Assumption. From that day forward, Father d'Alzon, seeing his idea being realized by another, had ceased to be preoccupied by that thought. During the first three years, the operation of the boarding school seemed to be going along satisfactorily, at least regarding the number of pupils — about 150. But, in 1841, the institution began to go downhill, due to a lack of authority on the part of Father Tissot, the assistant-principal, who was also the person designated as responsible to the Ministry of Public Instruction, the almost continual absence of the titular director, Father Vermot, and the disruptive intrusions of the principal lease-holder of the school, Father Reboul, into the operations of the establishment. The situation was so bad at the opening of the 1843 school year that only twenty students showed up. Total failure seemed to be in the offing. Father d'Alzon's hour had come.

Indirectly, he had already been involved in this matter for several months. The pastor of Sainte-Perpétue of Nîmes, Father Goubier, whose cooperation in the foundation of the Refuge had been invaluable to Father d'Alzon, had, during the absence of the latter and without consulting him, purchased *in both their names*, the school itself with its outbuildings. Truly, a rather surprising presumption on Father Goubier's part, aggravated besides by his total lack of money.

Father d'Alzon had taken this *fait accompli* in stride, but at that moment he wasn't thinking of reviving the boarding school, nor was Father Goubier. The intention of both men was to close it and install the Carmelites in the building. Various material difficulties, due to the lease held by Father Reboul and which he did not want to nullify, obliged them to remodel another house into a Carmel. In the meantime, the opening of the 1843 school year took place, and the number of students was still skeletal in nature. Fathers Tissot and Reboul, to whom Father Vermot had passed the reins, refused to go any further.

As a result, Father d'Alzon was now about to enter into the fullness and originality of his destiny.

V – Foundation of the Congregation of the Assumption (1844-1851)

As early as the end of the year 1843, Father d'Alzon had decided to put the school back on its feet. To have to liquidate it by his own hand — under the eye of a triumphant University which would exult over the closing of an establishment of Catholic education — grated on the character of this proud apostle. That is how the designated liquidator became a builder instead, and, since his enterprises were always on a grand scale, this undertaking would be on a par with previous ones.

On January 22, 1844, Fathers d'Alzon and Goubier took possession of the building, not only as its proprietors, but as the administrators of the boarding school. The quick mind of Father d'Alzon had soon formulated a plan. Up to the end of the academic year, the school would be run as before, under the actual direction of Father Tissot. The reorganization would go into effect at the October 1844 reopening. The changes would consist mainly of the following: teaching would be turned over to Catholic laymen, to professors holding advanced degrees from the State-run University, and religious instruction, general discipline, and Christian formation, would be entrusted to priests.

Here Father d'Alzon certainly had in mind Stanislas College where the same division of labor existed. But his formula was new in the sense that the professors whom he planned to hire, unlike those at Stanislas, would have to leave the University and devote themselves exclusively to his school. This would require them to abandon their official status, and a future that was stable and full of promise, for a position whose prospects were uncertain at best. Complicating the difficulty still further, Father d'Alzon had decided upon two men who were heads of households, his

friends Monnier and Germer-Durand, whose family obligations required them to ensure the security of their dependents.

This was a daring but humanly disconcerting decision on the part of Father d'Alzon when viewed from a pragmatic viewpoint, but he situated it at the supernatural level. Monnier agreed at once, as he made clear in his November 28, 1843, letter in which he informed Germer-Durand of Father d'Alzon's proposal. "Is God calling us elsewhere than in the University? Does he want to take us to fight against the evil teaching of its philosophy? Is he offering us a chance to fight for him? Let us pray that he will enlighten us and that his will only be done, nothing but his will." But Germer-Durand found the proposition unreasonable: "To leave the University means running too many risks; it's playing a very uncertain game. It's a great role, no doubt, but to take a chance on it, one would have to be single." For several months, both of them would stand by their early positions. Father d'Alzon retained his confidence. He knew to whom he had appealed.

But a new preoccupation was about to absorb him. Toward the end of May 1844, he was called to Turin where his brother-in-law, the Count of Puységur, had become seriously ill while traveling in Italy. He would stay with the sick man until his recovery, practically a whole month's time. An unforgettable hour marked his stay there. One evening in June, he had been pondering, with particular intensity, on the deplorable state in which the ambition of many ecclesiastics was placing the Church. His personal detachment from honors was already exemplary. But, because he always aimed higher, he wanted to make of this disinterestedness a sacred law for himself. The next day, during Mass in the sanctuary of the Consolata, before the miraculous portrait of the Virgin, he vowed to renounce all ecclesiastical dignity, any and all office, in the same spirit as did the Jesuits.

“Since then,” he wrote on June 24 to Mother Marie Eugénie, “an idea, which I had once had and which had remained with me only in the form of a memory, came back to me stronger than ever — it was to devote myself to forming a religious community.” This thought, which had resurfaced, was the one that had occupied his thoughts at the Montpellier Seminary: “A new order which would regenerate society.” He was expressing at the same time his desire to lead “a type of monastic and austere life.” Having become vicar-general, he happened to say in passing at a gathering that he had once had a vague desire to join the Carthusians. Upon hearing this, the pastor of Notre-Dame-de-Beaucaire, who happened to be present, burst out: “You, a Carthusian? A locomotive in a cell!” A Carthusian d’Alzon was assuredly inconceivable; the fact remains that the religious life had been one of the first dreams of his early years as a priest and that certain aspects of a truly monastic life had retained a durable hold on him. Above all, it seemed that for him the religious vocation took on its full meaning only with regard to forming a new congregation.

In such a dynamic person, this resurgent thought could only be brought swiftly to its conclusion. In close agreement with Mother Marie Eugénie, he endeavored to clarify it, to get to the core of it. She had for a long time wanted a congregation of men which, under the common aegis of the Assumption, would work in fraternal collaboration with hers. She suffered from the dearth in France of religious orders in touch with the characteristics and the minds of her time. She wrote as much in July in a letter of great beauty, expressing strikingly virile views. In her eyes, this new order had to be a teaching one, like her own, because nothing takes precedence over the formation of youth. In Father d’Alzon she saw the most eminently qualified priest to be the founder of such a congregation.

Encouraged by her answer, because he set any advice from Mother Marie Eugénie on a very high plane, Father d'Alzon replied on August 16. He envisioned the spiritual basis of the new congregation as follows: "To help Jesus to continue his mystical incarnation in the Church and in every one of its members. ..." The moral basis which would differentiate the congregation from those which already existed would be: "1. The acceptance of all that is Catholic; 2. Straightforwardness; 3. Freedom." And he went on to explain, "I know of nothing better able to kill self-love and pride than the acceptance of everything that is good outside of one's self; I know of nothing which wins over men of our times more than a straightforward approach, and I know nothing stronger with which to fight against the present enemies of the Church than freedom."

In October, Mother Marie Eugénie, who was absorbed with establishing the definitive text of her constitutions, went to Nîmes to obtain the advice of Father d'Alzon directly on that matter. She stayed from October 14 to November 2. This sojourn was marked by relentless labor: five hours of working together each day. It can be said to have sealed an intimacy of mind and soul whose importance in the life of Father d'Alzon cannot be overestimated. For Mother Marie Eugénie, he was the director of her soul, he was the spiritual father, the counselor of her congregation, marvelously present, lucid, and active, but also too delicate, too respectful of the freedom of souls, ever to encroach upon the rights of the foundress and superior-general, which Mother Marie Eugénie had no wish to surrender in the least. Between them, there was complete harmony, and they did nothing, nor would they ever do anything, without consulting and supporting each other. As if to properly underline the character and mystical significance of this incomparable friendship, the new foundress, on the eve of her departure, renewed her religious vows in the hands of Father d'Alzon. The following December 25,

she would make her perpetual profession with her first three companions.

The care which he had taken of the affairs of the foundress since his return from Italy had not turned Father d'Alzon aside from his plans for the boarding school at Nîmes. When he found himself once more in Nîmes, on July 19, the institution had only ten students. Father d'Alzon began by expelling a few. One August day, as the students were eating their lunch, the tall stature of Father d'Alzon loomed in the frame of the abruptly opened door of the refectory. He stated peremptorily: "Gentlemen, this house belongs to me. Right now I have the honor of having you dine at my place. Please gather your belongings, return to your families, and don't come back, except the three of you to whom I will speak privately." Among the survivors was the future Cardinal de Cabrières.

This *coup d'état*, which eliminated the mediocre and the unruly, having taken place, Father d'Alzon, who expected the salvation of the boarding school to come only from God, turned to his dear Carmelites and asked them to make a novena. On the last day of the novena, Jules Monnier came to Father d'Alzon; he had made his sacrifice — he would leave the Royal College and teach at the boarding school. Germer-Durand, even though he had applied for a position as a University inspector, followed his example.

Father d'Alzon had at hand two teachers and only five or six students. Nevertheless, he aimed at full independence for his institution, to remove it from the University's grip, and he was also projecting the establishment of a Catholic teacher-training school. From it he expected to obtain trained teachers, not only for his own institution, but also to satisfy the needs of other dioceses in this regard. This last project was never to see the light of day. As for the school's capacity to determine its

own programs, for the intention of which Du Lac, the great friend of Father d'Alzon, and several others, had already begun negotiations as early as the summer of 1844, that would be achieved only four years later.

For the time being, Father d'Alzon set about organizing the opening of the 1844-1845 school year. This was carried out, still under the direction of Father Tissot, with fifty-five students, of which twenty-six were boarders; thirteen, half-boarders; and sixteen, day students. Father d'Alzon did not live at the school, but he kept a close eye on its operation. He was its soul, its inspiration, its guide. Every Thursday, he presided over the staff meeting. Regulations were set in place, projects proliferated, hope spread its wings. Those reunions vibrated with the fervor which marks beginnings.

On April 19, 1845, Father d'Alzon was in Paris. Expecting to be there for only a few days, he would remain in the city for five months. What could have kept him there for so long? First of all, his intention to bring about the self-determination of his school, in a well-fought battle if need be. The matter was under the jurisdiction of the Minister of Public Instruction, who was then Monsieur de Salvandy. Father d'Alzon would not get a hearing until the beginning of June. Meanwhile, in the offices of the ministry, everyone tried in every which way to discourage him. Exemption from State control granted to a non-State school in a city which already had a royal college was unthinkable! Father d'Alzon was not to be deterred.

The day of the hearing having arrived, de Salvandy received him pleasantly, even deferentially, but the minister would not hear of self-regulation. The most he was willing to concede was exemption from state-controlled exams up to the junior year exclusively. And he wasn't committing himself even to that. On August 21, Father d'Alzon returned

to the attack at the ministry. It needs to be stated that in official circles the privilege of State control of education was jealously guarded. However, Father d'Alzon managed to obtain a limited freedom. Though the students of advanced classes would be required to follow the programs of the Royal College, at least up to the junior year, they would receive a fully Catholic education. And Father d'Alzon was quite resolved to fight year after year, if need be, until he obtained total satisfaction on that score.

During this sojourn in Paris, Father d'Alzon said Mass almost every day for the Religious of the Assumption; from May 23 to 31, he preached a retreat for them and held numerous conversations with Mother Marie Eugénie. These centered mainly on the congregation to be founded, whose governing principles were being more and more clarified, and particularly the institution of a Third Order composed of lay professors which would reinforce the congregation of priests who themselves would be dedicated to education. The idea came from Monnier who had proposed it to Father d'Alzon as early as 1842, but it took definitive shape during these months. In his religious vocation, in his destiny as a founder, Father d'Alzon was now engaged for good. The trajectory on which he was now launched had left him still quite hesitant in 1844 when he analyzed himself; at that time, he had written to Mother Marie Eugénie: "What am I able to do? Never have I seen more clearly my cowardice, my insignificance, my lack of constancy, my self-love...." Every hesitation was now swept away. If, on the one hand, there still weighed the humble feeling of his insufficiencies, there was, on the other, the greater weight of his trust in God. Furthermore, he wanted, as of that very summer, to establish between himself and God the bond of a promise. At the feet of the Virgin, in the church of Notre-Dame-des-Victoires, he pronounced his religious vows in private.

At the Bailly home — the dear old Bailly of his student days — he met his host's son: Vincent de Paul who would later bring renown to the Assumptionists. In any case, he did nothing in Paris that was not in some sense connected to the future of his apostolic action. He made friends with two Englishmen, Allies and Marriot, professors at Oxford and friends of [Cardinal] Newman. His conversations with them enlightened him regarding the work being done in favor of Catholicism within the Anglican elite. He saw Veuillot⁶⁹ and attended his wedding. He saw Montalembert, Du Lac, Lacordaire. His connections in Paris were already numerous. Many others were born of his savoir-faire and his ability to mix with people. The Affair of the Jesuits, whose expulsion was voted by the Chamber of Deputies on May 2, gave him the opportunity to intervene discreetly, to take useful steps. The prejudices which he had nourished in Rome against the Society remained: "You know my lack of enthusiasm for the Jesuits" he wrote to Bishop Cart on June 27. But his sense of the Church universal, his generosity and right-mindedness always prevailed. "I have seen here many persons in the Catholic world who love them no more than I do, and all of them, except Carne and Father Lacordaire, believe that the Jesuits must resist." He, too, thought as much and defended the Jesuits with his usual vigor. When it became evident that they could not do otherwise but give in, he took it upon himself to arm Catholic leaders, especially Montalembert, against discouragement. He advocated unity of purpose based upon a double formula: liberty of the Church and liberty of education, which was the real key to the problem.

By September 15, he had returned to Nîmes. On the 25th, he took up residence at the boarding school. What lodgings! First, a cell in the infirmary, shared with three lay teachers, and then a little windowless room. He pushed religious deprivation of material goods to an extreme, down to the smallest detail. He wanted in the most rigorous fashion to be

poor in reality as well as in spirit, and this included his personal needs. But he was also thinking of the needs of his establishments and those of his school, which were crushing. In October, he went to Lavagnac to settle his financial situation. The family council decided that, over and above the annual allowance of six thousand francs that were allocated to him, he would be able to draw upon a portion of the revenues from his future inheritance, and that certain lands attributed to him could be sold in a case of emergency. But, who were to be the judges of such an emergency? His parents, who reserved to themselves the ownership and administration of the estates which he would inherit some day, would assume that role. Wise precaution, because every amount of money put into the hands of Father d'Alzon slipped through his fingers. This solution would oblige him to have continual recourse to his family, something which he found irksome. Though he remained one of the richest heirs in France, for many years to come, it would only be bit by bit, and only after long discussions, that he would be able to obtain from the Viscountess d'Alzon the advances from his future inheritance necessitated by the ravenous needs of his works.

It had also been legally agreed upon that the château of Lavagnac and its immediate outbuildings would not be part of his share. He wrote about this to Mother Marie Eugénie on October 15 in a few lines tinged with noble melancholy: "I went to fulfill my first act of dispossession.... It seems to me that I had to make my sacrifice with a full knowledge of what I was giving up, because never before had all of it appeared to me to be so fine. It looked to me as if the family had come to an agreement against me. It was one of those beautiful autumn days that I have seen nowhere but here, where the lovely and peaceful light of our sun seems to be giving life back to the trees and the plants exhausted by the heat of summer. But, good God, what's the use of ideas of this sort? I assure you

that I find it very sad to be able to be content with so little, when I think that I have so much else awaiting me, beyond a fortune of a few ecus as well as beyond the most beautiful autumn days to be found in France.”

Father d'Alzon never allowed dreams to suspend action. On October 3, he had presided over the opening of the school year at the boarding school. It was in the midst of school life, of the great work of Catholic education, that he would lay the foundations of his congregation. From September 26 to October 1, he preached a retreat to the professors. They numbered eight: three priests, Fathers Tissot, Surrel, and Henri; one deacon, Reverend d'Everlange; four laymen: Cusse, Germer-Durand, Monnier, and Cardenne. So great was the influence of Father d'Alzon that all of them, won over to his program, decided to constitute the Assumption Association, from which would emerge, in the mind of the founder, the Order itself as well as a Third Order. On October 26, the association grew by five new recruits: two priests and three laymen. The length of the postulancy was settled at three months and subjected to a daily schedule, no doubt too demanding for men dedicated to the exhausting task of teaching and leaving too little time for refreshing sleep, but full of an intense religious vitality.

Father d'Alzon had crafted for himself a rule of life. One would like to reproduce that memorable document in its entirety. Here are, at least, a few excerpts from it: “As a son of Jesus Christ, I must acquire his love and steep myself in his spirit... The spirit of Jesus Christ must be for me a spirit of absolute dedication, of immutable equanimity, of love for my brothers, just as He himself loved them.” After these considerations as a Catholic, Father d'Alzon turned his gaze on himself as a priest: “Because the priesthood is instituted only for the Church, I will exert myself to become filled with the greatest love for this spouse of Jesus Christ which he gained through his blood...and in which he reconciles all men to his

Father. The cause of the Church will be the object of all my zeal, and it is to achieve its triumph that I will consecrate my entire existence.”

As a religious, he believed with Monsieur de Rancé⁷⁰ that he must be an angel, a martyr, and an apostle. An angel: “By the purity of my entire being.” A martyr: “My passions are my persecutors, and, in order to combat them, I must accept the suffering that will come from the struggle.... Mortification will be for me a purification, an atonement, an education.” An apostle: “I must make the truth known, I must study it.... I will love the truth whose principle is Jesus Christ, the eternal word of God, God himself.... The apostle is nothing except through the one who sends him, but he must love the one to whom he is sent, since his is a mission of love, of mercy.”

As the superior of his community, the model he proposed for himself was Jesus Christ among his apostles. In order to eliminate from himself anything which could harm his relations with his brothers, he wanted to work at acquiring, as he wrote, “the evenness of temper which I have so little of,” to do away “inasmuch as I can, with that rigidity and harshness of character which people so rightfully reproach me of having.” — “Straightforwardness and openheartedness together constituting the characteristics of our undertaking, and being the most powerful weapons which can serve us, I will preach that straightforwardness and openness by example.” — “Union exists only where there is trust. I will show a great deal of it to them.” And finally, to crown the whole of it: “Men are needed for the work, and not the undertaking for the sake of starting something. The work itself, in all its parts, must be summarized in Jesus Christ.”

It was in this spirit that the act itself would be carried out and from which the foundation of the Assumptionist Congregation must be dated. On Christmas Day 1845, a layman, Monsieur Cusse; five priests, Fathers

Henri, Laurent, Tissot, Surrel, and Father d'Alzon himself, began their novitiate. The novitiate of the Third Order was started on December 27 with Fathers Blanchet and d'Everlange and two laymen, Cardenne and Monnier. The others remained postulants. No investiture of a habit took place; only he who became Père d'Alzon wore within the house, and only at certain hours, the white robe with hood and cape which had been made by the Religious of the Assumption. No public vows were pronounced, and the Ordinary's approval would not yet be solicited; prudence required that haste be avoided with regard to both the bishop and the government.

But, although the members of the Congregation appeared to the public eye as individuals, they were, nonetheless, true religious who were living according to one rule, or rather two rules, one for the congregation itself, composed of choir religious and lay brothers, the other for the Assumptionist Association.

At the end of 1845, the first rule was still quite rudimentary. What should be remembered of it is the listing of the goals of the Congregation. The purpose was to extend the reign of Jesus Christ: 1) through teaching; 2) through the publication of books which could serve education; 3) through works of charity by means of which children could be prepared to fulfill their duties as Christians in this world and in order to work at reconciling the social classes, the poor with the rich; 4) through retreats given either in the Congregation 's locales or elsewhere; 5) through foreign missions and toiling for the elimination of schism and heresy.... As can be seen, even though education held first place, it would be considerably outstripped by the apostolic activity of the new Institute. In what it stated regarding schism and heresy — Father d'Alzon had in mind the Anglican schism and the Protestant heresy — can be recognized the

original idea of the founder: the defense of the Church and therefore of its unity.⁷¹

For Father d'Alzon, what did the Associates represent? Men living in the world "who would take upon themselves the acceptable severities of religious life and, united in a shared idea, would devote themselves to various works of apostolate; who would be pioneers for the clergy, its assistants on all permissible occasions; and who would form a new militia in the service of the cause of Christ." Is that not, except for the dispositions proper to religious life, the definition of today's Catholic Action? ... With the exception, of course, of the functions which belonged to the priestly ministry, the goals of the Association were those of the Congregation. The three simple annual vows were optional, but those who made profession were thus also bound by obedience to the directors of the works they engaged in, by poverty of spirit and, to the extent compatible with their state in life — some of them being married — by chastity. When widowed, they committed themselves not to remarry except by permission of their directors.

Such were the broad lines of the rule meant to support the undertaking. How worthy were the first laborers? On those who then made up the Congregation, we have Father d'Alzon's own assessment. Writing to Mother Marie Eugénie, he remarked: "Among these six, there is not one who has half, nor even a quarter, of Monnier's intelligence, for example. Now, when I speak of intelligence, I mean supernatural intelligence, such as is so rarely encountered among people who have a fine intellect, and please note that I am hardly dealing with eagles." In his evaluation of men, Father d'Alzon was naturally prone to being terse and brusque. There was room here, as experience would prove, to revise this judgment somewhat, and on a more positive note, in favor of one or another of these persons. However, it must be recognized that the

religious who would measure up fully to the founder's expectations would not come to him until later.

Father d'Alzon even feared that the enthusiasm of the beginning would turn out to be a flash in the pan for some of them. He was not mistaken. The absence of Father d'Alzon for two months — March and April 1846 when he preached in Paris — was sufficient for the edifice, which was only taking shape, to totter on its foundation. Father Surrel left the Congregation and the school. Fathers Henri and Laurent stayed at the school as professors, but abandoned the novitiate. The latter, however, would return to the Congregation five years later. The frame of mind of the bishop of Nîmes was not extraneous to the departure of the three. It was unfavorable to the young society. Bishop Cart had even declared to the three hesitant priests, when they had consulted him in March, that he would not authorize vows.

In conversation with the bishop, first on June 30, and then in a very detailed report on July 12, Father d'Alzon attempted to bring him around to his views. He did not succeed. The reasons? Besides the fact that Bishop Cart was the personification of hesitancy, he found Fathers plan to be "quite vague and quite elastic," certainly too much so for him to be able to approve it. He also feared, according to his own words, that Father d'Alzon undertook too many things and that some of them could cause harm to the others. That was what he let him know in a letter dated August 16. In short, the bishop would accept what existed, but would go no further.

Father d'Alzon did not lose hope for all that. He would prolong the novitiate as many years as it would take — until 1849, he thought. The arrival, the preceding May, of two choice recruits, Cardenne and Saugrain, had put him in a euphoric frame of mind. Other postulants presented themselves, bringing the society's membership to ten. On the

surface, that was a good thing; in fact, it was too much, because the quantity did not always make up for quality. Father d'Alzon acknowledged as much later. "Generally, we were perhaps too ready to take someone in." By the same token, he was not misled as to the worth of most of his novices: Monsieur Blanchet, "who is a lightweight or rather whose mind lacks follow-through, who has no order and lacks standards, is terribly disappointing"; Monsieur Cusse, "who grows more uncouth each day.... It's liturgy performed in a childish fashion; it's a caricature of Dom Guéranger." And so forth. Father d'Alzon would have to reject a great many candidates, others left of their own accord. So many did so that by the end of the school year 1848, there would remain with Father d'Alzon only three novices: Father Tissot and Brothers Victor Cardenne and Hippolyte Saugrain.

On May 21, 1847, an indult from the Congregation of Rites granted to the young Institute the right to use the Proper of Rome and the Roman Breviary. This was more than a slight favor for an Institute still devoid of any canonical basis. Informed by Father d'Alzon's Roman friends and undoubtedly also by the Nuncio at Paris, Bishop Fornari, whose esteem Father d'Alzon had won while in Paris, Pius IX had even had this to say upon signing the indult: "I know this worthy priest. It is with all my heart that I grant him this favor. Get word to him that he will always find me well disposed to back his pious desires and labors. Let him ask, and he will receive." An instantaneous recognition of the Institute by Rome, truly an appealing temptation! A person other than Father d'Alzon might have seized such an opportunity to bypass the procrastinations of Bishop Cart which were a serious obstacle to the foundation. However, though very quick to undertake, Father d'Alzon also had the wisdom to know when patience was necessary. Sound were the reasons that made him write to

Mother Marie Eugénie on June 4 of that same year: "Such encouragement is very good indeed; yet I believe that I must not hurry."

The attention Father d'Alzon accorded to his Congregation did not lead him to forget that he had not yet managed to acquire unrestricted control from the State for his boarding school. By January 15, 1848, he was in Paris. On February 17, he saw Guizot, the Council president [i.e., the equivalent of the Prime Minister], who promised him full freedom within eight days. But exactly eight days later, his promise was swept away by the wind of Revolution. Louis-Philippe [who had reigned since 1830] was dethroned, and the Republic proclaimed. In the speeches of the protagonists of the new regime, at least in those of the sincere idealists, Father d'Alzon perceived accents he had already heard. It was the spirit of the early Lamennais which inspired Lamartine [who had become Minister of Foreign Affairs]. But, just as he had never allowed himself to be carried away by the Mennaisian excesses and errors, he kept a cold eye and a clear head amid the general turmoil. He helped subsidize the launching of *L'Ere Nouvelle* founded by Lacordaire, but he would stop there and would even only inquire from afar and sporadically regarding the adventurous destiny of that short-lived paper. His friend, Du Lac, who knew the score, wrote to him on May 17, about the editors of *L'Ere Nouvelle*: "I cannot believe...that you think them to be right. You have two qualities: You know your catechism, and you have common sense, two things which, in my opinion, they completely lack."

Father d'Alzon, that headstrong citizen of Nîmes, gave some thought to the repercussions of these political events on the city to which he returned on March 17. In the troubled days he had just lived through, what had left a profound impression on him was his contact with the plight of the working class. His social conscience, in the sense that we understand it today, was born during that time. Nîmes had a working-

class population to which he now turned his attention. By March 21 he had started a newspaper, *La liberté pour tous*, that Germer-Durand had been dreaming of for some time. It was a poorly chosen title which could lead someone to believe that error had as many rights as did truth. That interpretation, however, was miles away from his thinking. Liberty, that magic word which resounded at every crossroad in France, he saw first of all from the point of view of religious liberty and, especially, of that liberty of education which had been restricted with such deceitful perseverance by the government of the July Monarchy [1830-1848].

In his newspaper, Father d'Alzon proclaimed himself to be a "Catholic Republican," i.e., a Catholic in favor of the Republic. It was a long-standing conviction of his, as he explained in writing, that the movement toward democracy was inevitable and that, moreover, democracy was "the most rigorous application of Catholic principles." There was no opportunism in that affirmation, but although Father d'Alzon sincerely believed — he was incapable of thinking otherwise — that such was the theory, he could not delude himself about the facts. For, at the same time, he was writing to Germer-Durand: "Don't be fooled. The present Republicans dream of only one thing: centralize everything and then destroy all freedom; that is why we must fight against them by demanding liberty as in the United States." The bishop, like many citizens of Nîmes, wanted him to stand for election as a deputy, but he declared "that he was resolved not to accept to do so unless on the bishop's formal order," which, in any case, never came.

Compromising his religious mission by entering politics was evidently repugnant to him. Besides, he was not the paper's director, neither in title, nor in fact. Likewise, during the riots which broke out in Nîmes between Catholics and Protestants when the elections took place, he intervened on the side of pacification, unity, and charity. What is more,

the turn taken by events led him to withdraw his subsidies from the paper which ceased to appear toward the end of 1848. His foray into journalism and politics turned out to be nothing more than a quickly extinguished flare. "We have," he wrote to Mother Marie Eugénie on May 28, "an inner enterprise to construct, one that is much more important than the agitation of [political] parties for whom, after all, we cannot do any good except through prayer." Such was his dominant feeling and one which quickly placed him back on his own path.

What is more, he was assailed by other harrowing concerns. He suffered what he called "the martyrdom of gold coins." It was a martyrdom which was and would always be familiar to this tireless founder who was also lavish in his generosity, multiplying loans and gifts. But the crisis reached its peak in that year 1848. The general deplorable financial situation in France was the major cause of the problem. It was practically impossible to obtain money, which was being hidden away, awaiting less troubled times.

To top it all off, the boarding school was faring badly. Among the children, feelings were at fever pitch over the events of the day, resulting in intense excitement and disorder. Adding to all this was the extreme position taken by Father d'Alzon which alarmed some families who supported the legitimist faction, i.e., the Bourbons, the elder branch of the monarchy, and who withdrew their children from the school. Hounded by his increasingly heavy financial obligations, badgered by the urgent requests of the bursar, Father d'Alzon did not know which way to turn because the Viscountess d'Alzon was turning a deaf ear to the anguished pleas of her son. She considered him a money sieve and believed that it was rendering him a disservice to consent to advances which the school, a bottomless cask, would swallow up, with nothing to

show for it. As the year drew to a close, the founder had to consider closing Assumption.⁷²

“My parents,” he wrote on December 9 to Mother Marie Eugénie, “no longer want to sign for me, and I don’t know what will become of me. I may be reduced to having to close my school. This morning, I wrote to my mother to ask for her final decision. I await her answer.”

When the answer came at last, it was a favorable one. He would be able to take care of the most pressing needs. What was most admirable throughout those months of excruciating financial hardship — made more onerous by intrigues which tended to discredit him — was how he maintained his soul above the fray, at arm’s length from the daily grind. He was able to write to Mother Marie Eugénie on November 18: “I feel that this torture will end by doing me some good, because I have come to love it for the love of God.” These material difficulties left him chastened for the glory of God. He came to cherish them. And he took care that no honor would come to assuage the privation he took delight in. On December 30, 1848, his friend Du Lac asked him, on behalf of the Nuncio, whether he would accept the bishopric of Mende. The nobleman of God remembered the vow made at the Consolata of Turin. By return mail, he answered: *NO*.

The end of the year 1848, which liberated him, for the time being, from the worst of his financial concerns, also brought him the full control he had so long solicited for his school. He expected that from this would come the development of the boarding school and the balancing of the school budget. Now also, and more than ever, he felt the need for a separate building for the novices. Lacking an authentic novitiate — which could only be established with the authorization of Bishop Cart — he had undertaken, when the school reopened in 1848, to shield them, as well as himself, from the life of the boarding school, at least during those hours

of the day when they were not required for classes. Henceforth, in a house across the street from the school, he would be able to lead a true religious life with Father Tissot and Brothers Cardenne and Saugrain.

Three years after the foundation, they still numbered only four, including the founder. Of all the trials suffered by Father d'Alzon, the most cruel to his apostle's heart was this lack of vocations. "I am horrified," he wrote, "to see that the power of proselytism has passed into other hands; hell has apostles, and Jesus Christ is abandoned by his own!" However, in June 1849, Father Henri Brun, the school's prefect of discipline, requested admittance into the Congregation, and, in the same month, there arrived Stéphane Pernet, a young man of twenty-five, sent by Mother Marie-Eugénie.

Six recruits, that wasn't much as yet, but they were of excellent quality. Deeply pious, very stable, Father Tissot was a true religious, without brilliance, rather self-effacing, but of an unflinching steadfastness. Of Brother Cardenne, who had come to Assumption after a stormy adolescence, Father d'Alzon could write to Mother Marie Eugénie: "He advances every day in admirable holiness; he also works with a perseverance worthy of every praise. He will be a beautiful pillar of the Order. Had we ten like him, with the same zeal and a bit more breadth of mind, I would be sure of success." Brother Saugrain was industrious, patient, devoted, moreover, an excellent proctor whom the children loved and minded. Common sense, piety, and dedication characterized Father Brun.

Of Stéphane Pernet, Mother Marie Eugénie had written to Father d'Alzon on May 19, 1849: "He impresses me as being open, intelligent, active.... He studied at the minor seminary of Besançon; this was followed by two years of philosophy and one year of theology at the major seminary. As to the particular vocation for teaching or the missions, he

told me that every morning he would say to God: 'Here I am. What do you want me to do?'; that he would not choose to dedicate himself to teaching were it merely a human profession, finding it too arduous, but for God and to dispense a Christian education, he would engage in it willingly. This young man seems to have enough fervor. He appears to me sincere in his desire to belong to God and, if it were up to me, I would take him...." Mother Marie Eugénie, excellent judge that she was, had seen Pernet only once; it is not surprising, therefore, that her evaluation, although basically accurate, was several pegs below reality. Moreover, Pernet was one of those gentle, humble persons without dazzling powers who do not immediately reveal their deep potentialities. Father d'Alzon himself would not for a long time realize the true measure of the man.

Recruitment had reached that stage when Bishop Cart, finally putting aside his reservations, but still very cautiously, allowed a trial novitiate. What had been merely tolerated was now authorized. There was in this fact more than just a nicety: it was a first step toward canonical recognition, and the novices could now *officially* have their own lodgings. A year would, nonetheless, pass before a new aspirant enrolled. But what a recruit! This young man of nineteen who — having finished his studies at the boarding school of the Assumption — obtained admission to the Congregation in September 1850, was François Picard. He would be Father d'Alzon's successor.

What is more, at the end of that same year, 1850, the Congregation was going to pass through its decisive stages. From September 22 to 25, Fathers d'Alzon and Brun and Brothers Saugrain and Pernet held the first General Chapter — in the absence of Father Tissot, held up in Lyon, and Brother Cardenne, absent because of sickness, but who had declared beforehand that he subscribed to the decisions that would be reached. What a magnificent act of confidence this Chapter was on the part of

religious without vows, without a habit, and not yet approved by the bishop! The work of this assembly consisted of: keeping the name Religious of the Assumption, choral recitation of the breviary — two votes to the contrary — the mitigation of certain excessive mortifications, and instructions relative to the three religious vows.

However, Bishop Cart remained as circumspect as before. He would hear nothing of vows, even temporary ones. Father Brun and Brothers Cardenne, Saugrain, and Pernet then decided to commit themselves to Father d'Alzon by formal written promise. Intentionally worded rather solemnly, the formula was signed on December 13. Basing himself on this charter, Father d'Alzon agreed with his disciples that on Christmas Day they would pronounce private vows into his hands, while waiting to be able to do better. Then came a dramatic turn of events! On Christmas Eve, the bishop authorized them to make public vows for one year. Father d'Alzon was exultant. Before midnight Mass, he pronounced his religious vows and then received those of his disciples. After which the *Te Deum* streamed forth as from the great fountains of Versailles. The Catholic Church had officially blessed the foundation of 1845 and Father d'Alzon, its own intrepid knight.

Meanwhile, on March 15, 1850, the National Assembly had voted the law on the Freedom of Education. However surprising it might appear, Father d'Alzon had not participated in any way in the famous quarrels which divided Catholics as the law was being worked out. Was he for Montalembert, or was he for Veillot, adversaries in this instance, but both his friends? His own correspondence, always so vigorous, spontaneous, ebullient, bears no trace of this question. However, when the time came to designate representatives of private education to the Board of Public Education, in conformity with the new law, his name immediately emerged, despite his unwillingness. This clearly revealed

how much his prestige had extended beyond the southern Languedoc region and compelled recognition in Paris itself! Montalembert urged him to accept; he failed to answer. Since he happened to be in Paris in July 1850, Parieu, the Minister of Public Education, offered to meet with him; Father d'Alzon refused any and all candidacy for himself and suggested Germer-Durand as a candidate instead. Parieu, biased against Father d'Alzon who had been described to him as a Monarchist loyal to the Bourbon branch, was inclined to choose Germer-Durand, but Thiers,⁷³ who wanted an outstanding personality, was opposed. Montalembert carried the day in favor of Father d'Alzon. Through a friendly subterfuge, he presented him with a *fait accompli*, a signed nomination. Father d'Alzon was forced to accept under pain of displeasing Paris, and even Rome, which was pressuring Catholics to take utmost advantage of the law.

In the course of the sessions of the Board in 1851, Father d'Alzon actively intervened in many a debate, especially on the inspection of minor seminaries, on the scope of the responsibilities of inspectors, on the reform of the programs in secondary schools, on the *baccalauréat* itself [rigorous university entrance exams administered by the State].... The Law of 1850 could give rise to arbitrary interpretations. Father d'Alzon's interventions were always directed toward defending the rights of God and the Church, and also of high-level culture. They stand out for the exactness of his information, his brilliant argumentation, and unbeatable common sense. He was often made ill at ease by the silence, on certain questions, of the four bishops, members, like him, of the Board, but more conformist or more timid than he. He had no illusions concerning the results of his efforts in practice, within an organization where his colleagues were men like Thiers, Victor Cousin⁷⁴ Saint-Marc Girardin,⁷⁵ whose powerful influence within the State, was bent upon

getting around, reducing, or even doing away with certain liberal tendencies of the Law of 1850. Nevertheless, he obtained appreciable results.

His experience on the Board made him deplore more than ever the absence, within the episcopacy, as well as among Catholics generally, of a studied, common, concerted action, the only means capable of guaranteeing that the Law of 1850, even with all its lacunae, would have the beneficial effects that could be expected of it. He would have wanted to federate all Catholic secondary schools in a single association. That wish predated the present-day alliance of Christian educational institutions which would come about only after his death. In order to serve that cause, he founded the *Revue de l'Enseignement chrétien*, a periodical whose first issue appeared in November 1851. The philosophy underpinning it was the restoration of the reign of Jesus Christ in all course work on a general basis.

He was haunted by the need — which seemed to him to be of paramount importance — for freedom of higher education, independent from the strictures of State-imposed laws. The Second Republic had named a twenty-two-member commission under the presidency of Bishop Parisis to study the question. Father d'Alzon thought the moment had arrived to preach through example by creating at Nîmes, in addition to the *Collège de l'Assomption*, a Catholic university on a small scale, a house of advanced literary and scientific studies for the formation of professors. Beyond all this, he envisaged, again in Nîmes, an *Ecole supérieure* of theology and a school to prepare advanced students for the prestigious State-run, university-level *Ecoles supérieures*. He obtained the approval and support of Bishop Cart, submitted his ideas to the Nuncio, Bishop Fornari, who also approved, and went into action. The new institution began to take shape at the opening of the 1851 school year.

Such were the wide-ranging essential features of Father d'Alzon's life from 1844 to 1851. But, over and above all this, what did Father d'Alzon not do! Besides the demands resulting from the supervision of his staff — to whom he had also, since 1847, been teaching the history of the Church — he had founded in 1846 a Third Order for women, of whom five had pronounced their vows by 1849; he had also started an orphanage in 1847; in 1845 he had succeeded in installing at his dear Refuge, some *Madeleines*, penitent women who, the better to atone for the error of their previous ways, wanted to become religious; in 1849 he created three Conferences of Saint Vincent de Paul for the students of the boarding school; he preached often in Nîmes, Paris, Alès, and Beaucaire, gave retreats to nuns, and in May 1850, he lectured to four thousand men of Nîmes, at the rate of two per week. He was everywhere.

Such prodigious and many-sided activity is dizzying, and, during his lifetime, it earned him the reproach of trying to do too many things at once, of unreasonably accumulating foundations and enterprises. But it is important to situate the action of Father d'Alzon in his own time, for in that first half of the nineteenth century — when everything needed to be restored in the Church of France dislocated by the Revolution — nobody saw better than he, and at all levels, what was lacking and, consequently, what needed to be done. He spent his own energies and money in proportion to the needs, which were enormous. It should also be noted that this seemingly limitless activity was not merely required by his own nature, nor did it exceed his personal exceptional capabilities. The momentum of the apostle was sustained by his intellectual gifts, as brilliant as they were well balanced, and by an incredible capacity for work. A close examination of the great questions on which he took a position results in awe at the sureness and the extent of his knowledge. Even if he was sometimes too hasty in undertaking so much, never was it

done without sufficient preparation, and even where he did not succeed, he sowed with a sure hand the seed of the future.

It remains, however, that an existence constantly carried on at the extreme limit of human strength, was occasionally felled by a seemingly insuperable fatigue, in spite of his robust constitution. Seven times in those eight years, the body faltered. Moreover, he was spared neither trials nor losses: in 1847, Madame Rodier, his father's sister, who had been so tenderly attentive to him in his youth, passed away; in 1851, the Count de Puységur, his brother-in-law, also died. And then, on December 14 of that same year, Victor Cardenne, one of the great hopes of the Congregation — who had risen so high on his way to perfection in only a few short years — died at Fontainebleau, where he had been sent in an attempt to stop the devastating progress of tuberculosis.

Was this a loss? Was this a gain? Sainly deaths result in abundant graces. Ten days after Cardenne's death, on December 25, 1851, at midnight Mass, the founder, as well as Father Brun and Brothers Saugrain and Pernet, pronounced their perpetual vows in the college chapel in the presence of teachers and students, while Brother Picard joined in, making his first annual profession. And there they were, the newly professed, henceforth clothed in a religious habit, now universally recognized in the Church: the black cassock, like that of secular priests, but also a cord of black wool with a tassel at each end, and especially, that monastic hood hanging from the cowl, by which Father d'Alzon wanted to signify to his sons the alliance in them of certain traits of monastic life with the requirements of an active apostolate.

On those few men, Father d'Alzon was founding both the present and the future. He never accomplished anything which did not appear to him to be guaranteed by a team of religious, determined to do everything for the coming of the Kingdom of God. Nor would he ever accomplish

anything that was not based upon prayer and adoration. The peaceful and fixed axis for this human whirlwind of works and pursuits was constituted by the hours, whether by day or by night, which Father d'Alzon spent in a tête-à-tête with God. It was in 1846, in the very heart of the fray, that he wrote the following: "I found myself moved to give my body to Jesus Christ, so that he would make of it the kind of instrument of penance or holiness that he wanted. I have been sometimes unfaithful to that inclination. I will attempt to get back into it, because the thought returned to me often during Mass, at communion time. I am most easily recollected at prayer, without great thoughts, but in a state of absolute oblation of all my being to God."

Such was the call from the depths of his being, which, at the height of his titanic activity, Father d'Alzon never failed to hear and to heed.

VI – The Great Trial in the Heat of Action (1851-1857)

The Congregation and the college were inherently linked in Father d’Alzon’s mind. His solicitude for each of them was fundamentally the same. It was for the school, first of all, that he had founded the Congregation, and it was through the school that the Congregation was achieving one of its essential goals: the Catholic education of youth. The number of students would never be very large: about 200, and, for many years to come, that number would not be exceeded. The remarkable thing about the school would not be its success in terms of numbers, but the spirit animating the institution which bore the very personal stamp of Father d’Alzon.

Christian formation, as he understood it, was based on energy. Father d’Alzon did not like wimps. Throughout the daily life of the school, he stalked spinelessness which he regarded as the worst enemy. Nearly every year, he brought the students to the Carthusian monastery of Valbonne, one of his preferred sites, where they spent several days making a retreat, sometimes even voluntarily sacrificing their Easter holiday to do so. Every year also, sometimes twice a year, he led them on a pilgrimage to Notre-Dame-de-Rochefort: a twenty-two-kilometer walk in the first leg at a good clip. That was the lot of the better souls, but Father d’Alzon formed everyone in the practice of a manly, serious piety — centered on the adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, Eucharistic life, a love of liturgy and public worship which enjoyed favor in the school — a piety wide open to charity, particularly the Saint Vincent de Paul Societies. It was a piety steeped in pride of the name Christian and the

meaning of service, the service of Jesus Christ and his Church; it was a Roman piety in its orientation, eminently Catholic and, through the care of Father d'Alzon, it was constantly kept in contact with the great religious currents of the time; finally, it was a piety founded on a spirit of faith.

Father d'Alzon attached great value to the natural virtues, especially forthrightness, loyalty, a sense of duty, honor, responsibility. He innovated along these lines by creating an elite division, made up of twelve to twenty-four students of rhetoric or philosophy [second through fourth years of college], who by their example and training took upon themselves the task of elevating the moral tone of the school to its highest degree. For them there were no proctors. They could rise earlier than at the official hour, to work or pray if they were so inclined. Father d'Alzon treated them and spoke to them man to man. Half a century before any one else, certain basic elements of educational philosophy are recognizable here, notably the approach used at the contemporary *École des Roches*, the renowned creation of Demolins, Paul de Rousiers, and Georges Bertier, as well as the idea of the *Responsables*, the mainspring of contemporary [1950s], specialized Catholic movements.

Father d'Alzon considered advanced studies to be the main element of his Congregation. This sort of preoccupation was to be found at the Nîmes college, according to the capacity of the students. It was expressed by the choice of professors and in the ambience created by the very lively literary society of the "Twenty-Four," composed of professors and students, and it included well-directed readings, lectures, discussions organized and oriented toward lofty topics, besides free-wheeling conversations with Father d'Alzon which created a fitting emulation.... Occasionally some famous personalities came by. One day the college welcomed Louis Veillot. On another memorable day in 1859, Mistral,

Aubanel, Jean Reboul of Nîmes, and Roumanille⁷⁶ came to dine in celebration of *Mireille*, which was just off the press. From the lips of Mistral flowed the song of Magali laden with the perfumed aromas of Provence.

While he was unremitting in working to keep the college afloat financially, it was the soul of the college that Father d'Alzon wanted to save. He knew how precarious was the respite he had obtained at the end of 1851. Several times he asked himself whether the Congregation should migrate to Paris. Pressing offers, supported by his best friends, were made to him, especially by Archbishop Affre...whose difficult conquest he had succeeded in making...to take up the direction of a college there. Leave Nîmes? He found the prospect distasteful to the very fiber of his being, in his very roots. In Nîmes, he was king — uncontested, loved, venerated by the entire population — and because of it, enjoying cooperation and support which could not be equaled elsewhere. Moreover, if anyone were a partisan of decentralization, it was certainly he, and he intended to prove his conviction through his actions. Nîmes *or* Paris? He thrust the dilemma aside. He would choose Nîmes *and* Paris.

For a long time now, Mother Marie Eugénie, who wished to activate the bond that united the two Assumptions, had urged him to establish a foothold in the capital. As early as October 8, Fr. d'Alzon had sent Father Tissot to be the chaplain of the Religious of the Assumption with the mission of preparing in Paris a foundation which he hoped would become an institution for education and recruitment. Indeed, on October 11, 1851, a small college was opened on Faubourg Saint-Honoré Street, near the church of Saint Philippe-du-Roule. The superior, Father Laurent, was assisted by two Assumptionists, some clergymen, and several laymen, two of whom were outstanding: Frédéric Poulin, recommended by Montalembert, and Clément Gourju, recommended by Ozanam.⁷⁷ It had a

modest beginning with a dozen students. But Father Laurent was a skillful man — articulate, distinguished, jovial, knowing how to deal with people, all of a joyous confidence in God. The second year ended with thirty boarders, the premises had already become too small for them all.

They looked for another one and found it in Clichy on the banks of the Seine. The word building was no longer appropriate, for it was a château, embellished by some twelve acres of parkland, a kitchen-garden, an orchard, and a meadow along the river. On April 16, 1853, the entire estate was purchased, Father d'Alzon never found a better way to pay off his debts than by contracting new ones. The following autumn the Saint-Honoré college moved to Clichy. To all appearances, many were fascinated by the new establishment for a few years, during which time the number of students increased. But, beneath it all, the budget was wobbly; failure loomed.

Was Father d'Alzon more successful in Nîmes with his house of higher studies? Wisely, he had set it up on a modest footing, as regarded its day-to-day organization. The courses were held in the quarters of the boarding school itself, thus serving Father d'Alzon's purpose which was to form teachers for independent secondary schools; it facilitated attendance at these courses by a few of the more advanced students who might in turn be attracted to a teaching career.

Father d'Alzon, with the approval of Bishop Cart, added a School of Theology to courses in advanced level literary and scientific studies, to which he gave the orientation of complete submission to the teachings of the Roman Church against the persistence of Gallicanism.⁷⁸ The core of the program was taught by first-class educators of such a caliber that any university, even today, could take pride in having. Among the eight professors of literature, who would soon number ten, and the four science professors, there stood out in sharp relief, besides a Germer-

Durand and a Monnier, men like Lamothe, Roux-Lavergne, d'Yzalguier, and Louis Allemand. These men were not only in possession of advanced French university degrees: *agrégation*, *licence*, *doctorat*, they were also graduates of the renowned *École Normale Supérieure* or *École Polytechnique*, as well as being outstanding personalities, and their teaching reflected their superior talents. They also taught at the school founded by Father d'Alzon in 1850 to prepare students for admittance to the government-run prestigious schools of higher education.

And yet, for all that, Father d'Alzon would fail for lack of a sufficient number of students. The responsibility for that rested with the Catholic world of his time, suffering from an intellectual lethargy which the bishops, except for a very few, were hardly suited to change, having themselves little concern for knowledge pursued beyond the secondary level. *L'École des Carmes* [in Paris] was faring no better, for the same reason. As for the School of Theology, dear to his heart, and for which Father d'Alzon harbored high hopes, he was soon to be disappointed in this as well. The 1849 Provincial Council of Avignon, in whose deliberations Father d'Alzon took part, had put forward and submitted to the Holy See its wish for a Catholic university, established canonically, in order to be able to deliver sanctioned degrees. Rome withheld its consent; five schools of theology already existed in the official [State] university, and although the degrees they awarded, subject solely to the control of the State, were not recognized by the Holy See, Rome feared that, by setting up independent schools, its already delicate relations with the French State might thereby be endangered.

But Father d'Alzon could not tolerate the idea that an initiative capable of extending the Kingdom of God was not being endorsed. Intrepidly, he went forward at his own risk, but he acted alone. The dioceses, jealously turned in on themselves, did not send him any

candidates; even his own diocese showed itself niggardly in this regard. His House of Advanced Studies would never consist of more than ten to fifteen students and, for that reason, would close its doors in four or five years time. But there would remain to Father d'Alzon the honor of having been clear-sighted and having acted accordingly, and there again, of having been ahead of his time by at least a quarter of a century.

Father d'Alzon could no longer wage his campaign for advanced studies free of State control in the *Conseil supérieur de l'Instruction Publique*. The regime born of the *coup d'état* of December 2 [1851] had so greatly reduced the favorable clauses of the Law of 1850 by a decree of March 9, 1852, that Father d'Alzon no longer saw there the possibility of effectively defending the freedom of education, the only cause which interested him in that Council. His attendance at its sessions became few and far between; then, on the advice of Bishop Parisis, he ceased to participate. On January 5, 1853, he noticed that his name no longer appeared on the membership list for that year. Why? He would state the reason later on: "The *Conseil supérieur de l'Instruction Publique*, in which I participated for two years in spite of my better judgment, and from which I was dropped for not having wanted to greet the President of the Republic, who was about to become Emperor, when he came to Nîmes...."

In his *Revue de l'Enseignement Chrétien* also, Father d'Alzon continued to argue in favor of higher culture. When the first issue appeared in November 1851, the famous quarrel brought on by Father Gaume's book, *Le ver rongeur des sociétés modernes* [The Worm Gnawing at Modern Societies], was at its height. Father Gaume⁷⁹ attributed the responsibility for the evils of the modern world to the predominance given to pagan authors in the educational system. Catholic France, including the episcopacy, was divided on the subject, and the controversy

had reached its most violent level, one that would last up to 1853! Today, one is surprised by such a brouhaha for a question of this sort. In fact, if the dispute had taken such a fierce turn, it was because it once again opposed the camp of Louis Veillot and *l'Univers* to the camp of Dupanloup,⁸⁰ *Le Correspondent* and *L'Ami de la Religion*. *Inde irae* ["The anger came from there." Juvenal - *Satires*].

Father d'Alzon took care not to allow himself to be dragged in to that extent. As to the crux of the question, he advocated giving greater consideration to Christian authors. He had not waited for the controversy, to assume that standpoint. At the *Collège de l'Assomption*, Christian authors were the only ones used in the lower classes. In the upper classes, they alternated with pagan authors in recognition of the latter's intrinsic value in upholding humanism and classical culture. This was a wise and balanced position where one recognizes Father d'Alzon's common sense. The founder of Assumption was, moreover, firmly convinced of the uselessness of that polemic in which superficial variations on theoretical points of view obscured the agreement of both sides on the main issue.

The *Revue de l'Enseignement Chrétien* supported Father d'Alzon's stand without resorting to harshness. Its pages were also more and more open to the ecclesiastical sciences, thus going beyond the first, purely pedagogical purpose of the publication. Was that one of the causes for the increasing lack of interest among its subscribers? The fact remains that, in 1855, the *Revue de l'Enseignement Chrétien* ceased publication. Had it been able to become the organ of the alliance of Catholic institutions of education, that Father d'Alzon had already worked toward with all his might, it would undoubtedly have survived.

Parallel to his activity in the field of both higher and secondary education, Father d'Alzon was bringing into being that project of his

younger years which in his heart he had never forsaken: the conversion of Protestants. Up to that time, he had had to limit himself to a very discreet, but nevertheless fruitful, effort at converting individuals.

Concerned now, to the point of anguish, by the effects of Protestant propaganda, increasingly organized and tenacious, he turned once again to his original approach in order to put it into action. In the autumn of 1852, the Mireman property, in a rural area near Nîmes, was rented. Father d'Alzon installed there, along with a novitiate for lay brothers, an agricultural colony for young people, both Catholic and Protestant. Lacking a competent superior, the undertaking did not succeed within that framework, and, in November 1853, Mireman was transformed into an orphanage for Protestant boys, the novitiate being maintained, nevertheless. Month after month, the number of children increased, but its very success led to its downfall, for all of these people needed to be cared for and fed. A year of tailed harvests in 1856, which coincided with a serious financial crisis for the Congregation, forced the institution to close its doors. On the other hand, an orphanage for little Protestant girls, which Father d'Alzon had founded in 1854 and put into the hands of the *Dames Tertiaires de l'Assomption*, fared well, both in numbers and duration.

At the same time, starting in December 1853, Father d'Alzon gave lectures on Protestantism in the cathedral of Nîmes. Bishop Cart consented to them grudgingly and avoided attending them, which greatly affected his vicar-general, although he did not show it. The bishop was aware that the announcement of these lectures had caused a great stir. Naturally restrained and inclined toward calm, besides being quite sick, the bishop was fearful of the effect they might have. But he would soon be reassured to the point of wanting to extend these lectures to the entire diocese for they were a huge success! Up to 600 Protestants,

including their pastors, came to hear Father d'Alzon during the winter of 1853-1854. Of their effect, Father was able to write: "They [the Protestants] are fairly happy with me, even though I did not spare them; little by little their anger disappears.... One woman, not knowing how to express what she wished to say, stated yesterday that she would be willing to sit on forks in order to listen to me. She was not speaking about my eloquence, but about the topics treated. Although, God knows, these topics touched upon the particularly irritable nerve centers of the Protestant conscience: the priesthood, liberty of examination of conscience, the interpretation of Scripture...."

Father d'Alzon's mind reached far beyond that initiative in Nîmes because for him the city was not a fortress in which to lock himself, but a starting point to reach out in every direction of Catholicity. He dreamed of an intellectual center for the conversion of Protestants, with a college, a residence for missionaries, and a house of studies with a specialized library. Where should such a center be located? Why, in Geneva, at the heart of Calvinism! With that purpose in mind, Father d'Alzon made a first sojourn in Geneva, in September 1854, to prepare the way for his project.

From the 6th to the 8th of the month, he made a pilgrimage to Annecy and Thonon to pray the saintly bishop of Geneva [St. Francis de Sales] to enlighten him with his spirit. This was a pilgrimage of great significance. Father d'Alzon did not bank on any success that was not supported by or obtained through prayer. For that is what he always built upon. With the aim of converting Protestants, he wanted such a prayer to be organized and extended to the greatest number of Christians. As early as 1853, he had founded in his Nîmes college — so dear to his heart — an association with that in mind. In it can be seen the origin of the Saint Francis de Sales Association, instituted on a January day in 1853 at the boarding school of the *Dames de Saint-Maur*, in which Father d'Alzon had

taken a solicitous interest. Protestant orphans were on everyone's mind at the institute, for many of them had been baptized or had abjured Protestantism in the boarding school chapel. Father d'Everlange had spoken to the students regarding the efforts of Father d'Alzon on behalf of the conversion of Protestants. Three of them had been especially moved by this endeavor. They came up with the idea of an association of prayer and almsgiving for that very purpose. The project was reported to Assumption's founder who found therein the inspiration for creating a similar group at his own school. No sooner said than done: the Association was founded under the patronage of Saint Francis de Sales, missionary of the Chablais region [of France].

Father d'Alzon wanted the Association to have a universal character, for when did this apostle ever place limits on his apostolate? It so happened that he would be given the opportunity to apprise the head of the Church in person of his proposal. In May 1855, Bishop Cart, who sensed that his end was near, delegated Father d'Alzon to Rome to give an account of the bishop's episcopal administration. Pius IX received him with assiduous kindness, which foreshadowed that very warm, very ardent affection that he would always manifest toward Assumption's founder, this knight of the Church. The pope granted him the indulgences requested, and he even repeatedly voiced the wish that the work of the Association be extended, not only to all of France, but also to England and the United States.

In the meantime, so many diocesan undertakings were beholden to Fr. d'Alzon — some, for their very foundation, others, for his inestimable support! An example of this was the creation of parish libraries, desired by the Holy Father and the subject of a proposal by the Provincial Council of Avignon which had been decreed by Bishop Cart for his diocese in July 1850. Father d'Alzon contributed financial support, editorial

collaboration, and continued impetus to the *Revue des Bibliothèques Paroissiales*, launched in November of that same year. He likewise encouraged the sale of good books, whose idea had been that of Canon Bernard of Avignon. He went out of his way to attend to the military apostolate on behalf of the soldiers garrisoned at Nîmes for which he enlisted the help of members of the Assumptionist Third Order and even the older students of his college. He also looked after the *Congrégation des Bonnes Domestiques* [the Congregation of Domestic Workers] which he founded in 1850 for the purpose of furnishing temporary lodging to jobless and penniless servants and to help them to find new employment. He supported the rural orphanage of Servas near Alès. Nor did he forget the parish youth groups, especially that of Sainte-Perpétue, sponsored by Assumption, and where the older students of the college acquired experience in social apostolate. And what else besides!...

And now this man, who saw unfulfilled needs everywhere and who gave himself to them all, because his only passion was the Kingdom of God, was felled by a stroke, in May 1854, following his lectures for the conversion of Protestants — the preparation of which had gobbled up the little time that he had been saving until then for sleeping. The entire right side of his body was paralyzed. A month at Lavagnac, followed by a month at Vichy, helped him to recover somewhat, but he remained weak. Powerless he might be, but God's power remained. He wrote at this time: "The night of faith appeared to me as an abyss into which one must hurl oneself while holding the cross and accepting all that it teaches and signifies." In December 1854, he had a relapse. His journey to Rome saved him. He was so constituted that, brought low by too much activity, activity alone could restore him to life.

That is where matters stood when, on August 13, 1855, Bishop Cart died. For a long time, the bishop had accomplished his duties only by dint

of his willpower, which he had raised to the level of heroism in his final years, somehow mustering up his last strength to meet the obligations of his office. If his timidity made innovations and daring ventures repugnant to him, his zeal and piety were admirable in the accomplishment of the day-to-day diocesan tasks. At that level, he collaborated in perfect harmony with his vicar-general. For reasons that were not at all petty, and which he sincerely thought to be wise and prudent, he had curbed, as we have seen, certain of Father d'Alzon's initiatives. For Father d'Alzon himself he felt, to the utmost degree, esteem, admiration, and affection.

Since 1854, when it became known in high places that the bishop was mortally stricken, his succession had been the object of discreet yet active consultations; it was thought, even, that he might delegate his powers, and Father d'Alzon's name quite naturally was on everybody's lips. In September 1854, Bishop Cart himself had considered with his vicar-general the prospect of resigning; together they had enumerated possible successors. To Father d'Alzon, who had sent him a list of eventual candidates, the nuncio had replied: "If I were to add another person to the priests you have named, I would put your own in first place." Father d'Alzon summarized his feelings in these few lines he addressed to Mother Marie-Eugénie on October 15: "I have told him [the nuncio], through Du Lac, that I thanked him, but that Nîmes, for me, is out of the question and that I want nothing. If the Pope were to command, I would obey, but not otherwise."

Named capitular vicar upon the death of Bishop Cart, Father d'Alzon would not remain in that office for long. As early as August 30, 1855, a ministerial decree named Father Plantier, vicar-general of Lyons and professor of Hebrew at the School of Theology of that city, to the bishopric of Nîmes. Father d'Alzon was startled at the news for, though he knew Father Plantier to be an eminent intellectual, possessed of broad

ecclesiastical science as well as being a remarkable orator, he also knew him to be a Gallican. Interior tumult was the first reaction of the very Roman d'Alzon, but he quickly overcame it. In rapid succession, on the 7th and 8th of September, he communicated to Mother Marie Eugénie the conclusions he had reached on second thought: "...What good is it to struggle against a fact, sad no doubt, but one which may work to our advantage? Father Plantier would be placed in a predicament if he wanted to withdraw from us; and if he comes to us, he may perforce do some good that an ultramontane would not have accomplished. The diocese is too Roman to be harmed for a long time to come." Above all, he cast the event, disturbing though it seemed, in God's light: "Father Plantier has again caused me a bit of a nightmare, but I am placing at the foot of the cross all the tricks that my too fertile imagination is playing on me with regard to him. We must love God's Church for the sake of Our Lord and not because we would find some small satisfaction in making our own ideas triumph."

With his incisive outspokenness, Father d'Alzon nevertheless let fly at the bishop-designate the arrow which vibrated in his well-furnished quiver. After having congratulated him upon his nomination, he wrote: "You will find a diocese in which the priests' obedience to the bishop has been made easy because the bishop gloried in preaching by example in his filial submission to the commands and all the purposes of the Supreme Pontiff." But a man like Plantier would not let himself be surpassed in magnanimity, and he had no intention of depriving himself of a man like d'Alzon. His only response was to ask him to be his vicar-general. Fearing the consequences of a possible conflict of ideas, Father d'Alzon put forward the need to devote himself to his works and declined the offer. Bishop Plantier renewed it. Puzzled as to what he should do, for he did not want his refusal to be seen as hostile, Father d'Alzon accepted,

after having consulted the papal nuncio and Cardinal Gousset [of Rheims]. It was a wise decision, for Bishop Plantier would, before long, evolve toward a position so clearly Roman that, four years later, he would become the most intrepid defender of the Holy See and for that reason would draw down on himself the wrath of the A great joy was in store for Father d'Alzon in October of that year. However brief had been his tenure as capitular vicar, he had taken advantage of it to reach a decision which Bishop Cart had resisted for six long years. He had opened at Nîmes a house for the Religious of the Assumption. The Sisters arrived on October 22, and he installed them officially on the 9th of November. That house, of which he was the ecclesiastical superior, was destined to become the Center for the Perpetual Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament which he had promoted in Nîmes with such great success as early as 1839. He wanted to make it also the hub of his specifically spiritual works, and so he entrusted his *Dames Tertiaires* to the Sisters as auxiliaries. A year later, in that same house, a boarding school for young girls was opened.

But, once again, the illness, which in 1854 had insidiously brought him low, swooped down again upon him, this time with a fearsome violence. In December 1855, the threat of paralysis became acute. He had come down with cerebro-spinal meningitis. The great fighter was forced to give in, and for two long years, 1856 and 1857, even though the formal decree of Bishop Plantier kept him as vicar-general, he would very rarely appear in Nîmes. He would have to recover his strength for a time at Lavagnac, for another at Lamalou-les-Bains, and in the vicinity of Paris as well. It is impossible to find words to describe how heavily this quasi-total inactivity weighed upon him, especially since his college, during those years, was going through yet one more financial crisis, one of such magnitude that it led everyone to believe that it would deal it a mortal blow. This man of inexhaustible energy harbored within himself an

immense capacity for personal suffering which he sublimated in a magnanimous fashion. He sought refuge in the depths of God. He inserted his interior distress into the heart of the mystery of the Cross. It was on June 21, 1857, that he wrote his famous "Letter on the Crucifix." He composed spiritual writings, he meditated, he scrutinized himself with touching humility and simplicity: "These days I invoke the souls in Purgatory a lot," he wrote in February 1856, "and like them I say without ceasing: I fully deserved it. Since the more I accept it, the more I find profit in it, I accept it with all my heart...." Also, several days later: "It seems to me that I accept everything, and then I am afraid, even before God, to accept everything too much through discouragement and a desire to throw in the sponge." Since the apostle in him could never rest, he managed to influence a few souls he came in contact with. Thus it was that, at Lamalou, some people owed their conversion to him.

Meanwhile, his physical condition had not reached the point of absolutely preventing him from taking care of his Congregation by correspondence. Since 1853, in order to extract it from its persistent anemic state, he had attempted to merge it with existing religious institutes, thinking this would invigorate its recruitment. He had first discussed the matter with the Congregation of the Holy Cross, founded by Father Basil A. Moreau in 1837, while at the same time engaging in talks with the Hermits of St. Augustine. In the latter case, negotiations seemed to be going well; Pius IX was seeking the reform of the Augustinian Order, and he would have liked to see Father d'Alzon undertake such a course of action. For his part, Father d'Alzon had adopted the Rule of Saint Augustine, along with particular constitutions which were still at a provisional stage, and in the fifties he had given his religious the name of Augustinians of the Assumption. As a result, the common characteristic was a strong one, but also the only one. For various reasons, which would

take too long and be too tedious to enter into, all of these negotiations had come to naught. Without giving up, Father d'Alzon now thought that the shortest path to the decree of commendation was the most direct one.

On April 15, 1856, he solicited from his own bishop, from the archbishop of Paris, from Cardinal Gousset [of Rheims], and from the bishop of Carcassonne, his childhood friend, Bishop de la Bouillerie, a letter of recommendation to the Holy See. The four prelates complied zealously. Bishop Plantier transmitted to the Holy See a very closely detailed report on the Congregation. He specified that the community numbered twenty-seven, of which five were choir novices and five were lay brothers. Not without difficulty, this usually being the case in such matters, the decree of approval was obtained on May 1, 1857.

This was a ray of sunshine in the darkness through which the founder was passing. On that day, he could congratulate himself also on having founded a house of studies in Rome in October 1855. To be sure, the four brothers who had been sent there resided with the Holy Cross Fathers. But at least they were present in Rome and were able to maintain a permanent liaison with the Vatican. The decree he had just obtained owed them a great deal, especially to Brother Picard whose youth — he was twenty-five — had not prevented him from negotiating in the most felicitous way with the members of the Congregation of Bishops and Regular Clergy, however steeped they were in experience, diplomacy, and circumspection. A recruit of that quality helped also to mitigate in the founder's heart the bitterness of his present condition. The expansion of the Association of Saint Francis de Sales was also of a nature to gladden his heart. In July 1856, taking advantage of an improvement in his health, Father d'Alzon went to Paris, returning there in November and staying until the following May. He was able to win over to the Association, in

spite of very strong opposition and even the reservations of his own bishop, the most eminent representatives of Catholic Action in France. March 19, 1857, was a day of triumph. Gathered around Bishop de Ségur, its illustrious blind president, what a plethora of outstanding names: Veuillot, Montalembert, Maignen, Cochin; Fathers Mermillod and Langénieux; the pastors Hamon, Deguerry, Desgenettes; Fathers de Ravignan, Pontlevoy, and Olivaint of the Society of Jesus; Father Petitot, who had just reconstituted the Oratorians; superiors-general of Congregations, and who knows who else! On that day, the Association, though not created, since it was already in existence, was constituted at the national level according to the formula established by Father d'Alzon. Either by himself or through his religious, Father d'Alzon would continue to assist this work and, with his usual abnegation, he would leave its organization and entire direction to Bishop de Ségur. Having launched such a beautiful ship, he would let it sail, henceforth, toward its destiny.

But the college, whose direction he had entrusted to Father de Cabrières since December 1855, that college from which so many great endeavors had issued forth and which remained their life-giving center, was menaced as never before. Its quite modest subsidies, and much more money besides, were being devoured by the interest being paid on funds borrowed for Clichy as well as Nîmes, and which were increasing inordinately. Monsieur and Madame d'Alzon, tired of the continual appeals of their son, and convinced that his two scholarly enterprises were at an impasse, had decided to call in expert analysts to do a study which Father d'Alzon could in no way prevent from taking place. At Clichy as at Nîmes, the experts acknowledged that the schools had been properly managed and that the administration had acted wisely; they noted that here and there the debts did not exceed the assets; but — less categorical for Clichy whose revenues were more satisfactory — they

concluded that the institution in Nîmes would not be able to balance its budget and that, consequently, there was no other way of paying off debts, even the interest on them, than by selling it.

In August 1856, Monsieur and Madame d'Alzon, acting as substitutes for their son for the payment of debts, committed themselves to compensate the mortgage holders, and further, as a direct consequence of the experts' report, to sell the property. They accepted only to prolong the college's existence during the school year 1856-57. They would use that time to look for buyers. The arrangement became known. The friends of Father d'Alzon were devastated by the news. Many plans for saving the college were developed — proof of the devotion of many to the school. Mother Marie Eugénie offered to contribute generously and even came to Nîmes to have her offer accepted, but to no avail. The unwavering opposition of the family thwarted all such efforts. In these proposals, the d'Alzons saw only stratagems to maintain the existing order of things which they no longer wanted to be party to. Bishop Plantier refused to have anything to do with the matter. Finally, the moral torture of the founder only intensified when there surfaced an attempt to separate Father d'Alzon from his religious who were regarded as a millstone hampering his activity. Father Vernières, his former professor at the Montpellier Seminary, came to the point in a letter he sent to him: "Either the Congregation has enough substance, with a goal sufficiently distinct, to get along on its own, or it does not. In the first instance, your heart alone would suffice to separate yourself from it. If this is not the case, it would bring you some sort of satisfaction to put an end as early as possible to the precarious state of its members and to your responsibility in the matter of their future."

Father Vernières was stating in a matter-of-fact manner how Monsieur and Madame d'Alzon and several of Father's friends felt about

the matter. Faced with such a suggestion, no matter how well-intentioned it was, one can imagine the revolt in the proud and loyal heart of Father d'Alzon. Walk out on his religious? Never! He attempted a new appeal to his family at Lavagnac, but he failed in this also, and on July 1, 1857, he wrote to Germer-Durand: "Here I am at the end of the battle, and I am not the victor. I had counted upon last-ditch backing and, on arriving here [in Paris], I find a letter which takes away all hope."

However, thanks to Father Saugrain, hope was revived. The priest suggested the formation of a society of shareholders, made up of friends and former students, which would purchase that part of the college which was for sale along with its furnishings. Since everyone in Nîmes was now apprised of the college's situation, public feeling was running high, and it served Father Saugrain's purpose. In a few days, half of the amount needed was found. But the college could not hold together unless Father de Cabrières remained as director and if the professors who were priests of the diocese stayed on to teach. So the patronage of Bishop Plantier became essential. Not only did the bishop refuse, but he ordered Father de Cabrières to leave the college the day following graduation ceremonies. He knew that Father d'Alzon could be led, by the needs of his Congregation, to leave Nîmes for Paris, and that Bishop Cart in his will had expressed the wish, which Bishop Plantier considered sacred, that Father de Cabrières succeed Father d'Alzon, should the latter resign his post as vicar-general. Besides, the financial resources of the diocese were such that the bishop was unable to support a college now deprived of its only possible director.

The people of Nîmes grumbled, they wanted their college, they wanted d'Alzon. Parents of students urged the founder, then in Paris, to return to them. Since the repurchase of the college could not be effected

in the name of the diocese, the society of shareholders offered to do it in their own name and to entrust the intellectual and moral direction of the institution to Father d'Alzon. Father left Paris immediately; at Tarascon, between two trains, he met and discussed the situation with a delegation of the shareholders. The meeting took place at night. In the pale light of the station's lanterns, the fate of the college as well as his own was being played out that evening. In Nîmes, Father d'Alzon saw the bishop, then, accompanied by a group of shareholders, he left for Montpellier where his parents were. The last word was about to be pronounced. Would Monsieur and Madame d'Alzon oppose the new-found solution with a renewed refusal? No, because this latest solution meant that their son would not leave Nîmes, would therefore be staying close to them. So they accepted.

Father d'Alzon returned to Paris. Nor had he reached the end of his difficulties. During the course of the summer, new problems arose. Because the vacation period had dispersed the prospective shareholders, sufficient funds had not been received. In September, while Father d'Alzon was being treated at Lamalou, he learned that things were at the breaking point and that the college was due to be sold at public auction. His nerves were shattered by the news, his heart bled. He wrote to Mother Marie Eugénie: "For two days now, at consecration, it is impossible for me to say anything except *fiat voluntas tua*. Whatever may be the will of God, I accept it, without knowing where I am headed." But, at the very moment when everything seemed lost, Father Vernières hastened to Nîmes, settled all the problems, and on October 18 the agreement was signed.

Once again, the college would be saved.

VII - From the Defense of the Holy See to the First Missionary Thrust (1858-1861)

The evolution of the emperor's politics was bound to bring the Roman question to the fore with intense acuteness. Bishop Plantier's attitude did not run counter to, but rather it supported, the ultramontanism of Father d'Alzon. It was well known that in his earlier years — he was now 45 — the bishop had shared Gallican biases to the extent of meeting with Bishop Maret, a notorious and combative Gallican, and he had acknowledged as much himself. But, being a thinker and studious-minded, indeed situated above partisan struggles by reason of his wide-ranging mind, he had arrived, through personal meditation, at conclusions which, in his own words, had "thrust him into a better direction." His original state of mind must already have been reversed by 1855 when he was appointed to the See of Nîmes since, as early as 1856, Father d'Alzon could write to Father Picard, then in Rome: "You will perhaps hear some speak of the bishop of Nîmes as a Gallican. I beg you to say that he has done more for us than his predecessor had and that, all in all, the reforms he is bringing to his diocese are very ultramontane."

It may be, as sometimes happened with Father d'Alzon, that he had reached this conclusion a bit too rapidly in this instance, for it was only at the end of 1858, after a voyage to Rome, during which he had a long interview with the Pope, that Bishop Plantier broke off his last ties with Gallicanism. The final clash would come only in 1859, when the Carbonaro⁸¹ in Napoleon III, dormant up to that time, took precedence in him over the head of State who had been intelligently concerned until

then with winning Catholics over to his policies. The direction taken by the French imperial government regarding the Papal States alerted Bishop Plantier to the danger run by the Papacy. In defense of the Pope's rights and the Papacy's need for temporal power to guarantee its spiritual independence, Bishop Plantier would henceforth bring to bear a persistence which never flagged — for that small, frail man was driven by an indomitable will. Father d'Alzon enthusiastically echoed the words and deeds of his bishop. On behalf of a Pope whose rights were threatened and then attacked, their alternating voices would never cease to be heard throughout several years of fervent collaboration.

An initial heated exchange found Father d'Alzon doing battle with Monsieur Rouland, the minister in charge of religion, over the charter of schools of theology. It had long been clear to Father d'Alzon that the situation of these institutions was perilously ambiguous. Father Maret, dean of the School of Theology of Paris since 1853, had done his utmost to reorganize it. He had sent a plan to Rome, revising its charter from top to bottom, which aimed at achieving autonomy for the Catholic schools of higher education *vis-à-vis* the University. In this *modus operandi*, the bishops alone would have authority over these schools, the State exercising only the right of inspection. A Bull was being prepared which would lay out Rome's conditions in detail.

Father d'Alzon was well versed on this question. He knew Father Maret, who was from the Nîmes diocese and had been a youthful companion of his. He knew him to be a militant Gallican and on the best of terms with Monsieur Rouland, whose unofficial advisor he had become. He had reason to fear that the application of the Bull would be sabotaged under the cover of canonical principle.

On January 10, he met with the minister whom Father Maret had worked up against ultramontanism. Rouland told Father d'Alzon that the

Bull would soon arrive and that he intended “to modify its conditions” because he did not mean “to be taught a lesson by Rome.” Father d’Alzon, realizing that his fears had been only too well founded, alerted the nuncio, several bishops, and highly placed Roman notables. The projected Bull was shelved. Thanks to the prompt action of Father d’Alzon, Rome had avoided the danger of providing canonical cover to a corps of professors infested with the Gallicanism of its dean and which Maret, like Rouland, intended to keep in place.

In this matter Father d’Alzon had served the cause of the Holy See well against a government which saw a great advantage in basing its new policy toward Rome on a powerful Gallican point of view. And now the struggle in the diocese of Nîmes would center even more squarely on the crux of the Roman issue.

On February 16, 1859, Bishop Plantier published a pastoral letter on the spiritual power of the Papacy, followed — shortly before France’s declaration of war against Austria⁸² — by another letter on the temporal power of the Pope. When the defeat of Austria opened the way to the Italian revolutionaries, allowing the occupation of the pontifical Province of Romagna, Pius IX issued a solemn protest on September 26. Father d’Alzon suggested to Bishop Plantier and several other bishops that a collective public demonstration of loyalty to the Pope be held by French Catholics, clergy as well as lay people. For several reasons, one of which was that it was not fitting to get ahead of the initiatives of the bishops, Father d’Alzon was dissuaded from pursuing his project. He was not, however, reduced to inactivity since, on November 4, 1859, Bishop Plantier stepped up his own efforts.

He published, along with the Pope’s speech, a pastoral letter vigorously upholding the papal viewpoint. Nîmes, which was so Roman, immediately seethed with excitement. In the name of the city’s clergy,

which had come in a body to the bishop's residence, Father d'Alzon thanked the bishop in a moving speech. Rome also reacted to the pastoral letter. A brief from the Pope, dated November 7, conveyed to Bishop Plantier his feeling of gratitude and enlisted him, as well as the people of his diocese, in a resolute battle for the cause of the Catholic Church. "That will be my program" declared Bishop Plantier on December 7 in another pastoral letter. As a result, Father d'Alzon again took up the momentarily abandoned project of a collective letter to be addressed by Catholics to the Holy See. Louis Veuillot encouraged him in this, letting him also know that Rome desired it and would be consoled by it. Nîmes was the first to open fire, as was proper. Thousands of citizens signed the statement. However, the missive ran into the prudential reserve of a number of bishops. Consequently, Bishop Plantier had to ask his clergy to suspend this movement.

But the imperial government took it upon itself to render useless these acts of ecclesiastical prudence and, as a result, the internal state of war that the episcopacy had hoped to avoid. The year 1859 had not yet ended when there appeared the famous brochure by La Guéronnière: *Le Pape et le Congrès* [The Pope and the Congress]. Everyone knew that it had been inspired by Napoleon III himself. Bishop Plantier, although aware of this, nonetheless wrote the following: "The author believed that he must keep his name hidden, and that is a good thing since his writing shows him to be without candor in his feelings, without loftiness in his character, without worth in his doctrines, and even without the prestige of literary style..." One can understand how, after such a statement, all bridges were burnt between the imperial government and Bishop Plantier.

In the turmoil which followed the publication of the brochure — the resounding declaration of Bishop Dupanloup [of Orleans], the suppression

of the newspaper *L'Univers*, against which Father d'Alzon and the religious and professors of his college protested, the written or spoken manifestations, etc.— Father d'Alzon concentrated his attention upon any and all constructive efforts in defense of the Holy See. Procrastination was no longer possible; even to remain non-committal was not desirable. The Pope had officially refused to give up the Romagna, and the encyclical *Nullis certe verbis* of January 19, 1860, sealed this resolve. Since the emperor was not living up to his solemn oath and since the support of his armed forces was going to be withdrawn from the Holy See, it behooved Catholics to substitute for the defaulting emperor. Soldiers were needed to defend the Pope, and money to support the army of volunteers!

It was under these conditions that Peter's Pence came into being in December 1859, and its first aim was to defend the Holy See. To this national effort, Father d'Alzon devoted himself with all his heart within the limits of his diocese. His own institutions were in the vanguard of all the fund-raising efforts. In June 1860, he experienced the joy and the pride of seeing his own nephew, Jean de Puységur, enlist in the pontifical troops. He had encouraged him to do so and had seen him off at Marseille. Jean de Puységur would be taken prisoner at the Battle of Castelfidardo, that combat which Father d'Alzon called to mind in the cathedral, the following October 5, in honor of the deceased and the living.

The campaign of addresses of support to the Holy See, twice held up, could now be taken up again in total freedom by Father d'Alzon. He did not hesitate to do so and accumulated signatures with such vigor that Pius IX, impressed by their number, sent to Father d'Alzon, the clergy, and the faithful of the diocese of Nîmes, on June 16, 1860, a touching brief whose meaning was pointedly unequivocal. Another joint petition, solicited by Father d'Alzon and signed by fifty priests of Nîmes, saluted

Bishop Pie who had been brought before the French Council of State. This illustrious bishop of Poitiers, in a circular dated February 16, 1861, had indicted the emperor in person, comparing him to Pontius Pilate. At that very moment, the fall of Rome and the flight of the Pope were being foreseen with apprehension. And when, after Easter of that same year, the minister of Justice notified the public prosecutor's office that priests who attacked the government were liable to imprisonment and exile, Bishop Plantier raised his voice, and immediately Father d'Alzon, followed by the fifty priests, protested to the minister in a text in which the agitation of an indignant conscience propelled a solid argumentation.... In the meantime, on March 8, Father d'Alzon took center stage, this time from the cathedral pulpit. Since Bishop Plantier had, two days before, from that same pulpit, denounced the sacrilegious insults to the Church, Father d'Alzon thanked him in the name of his clergy and his faithful, and from all accounts he was deeply moving on that day.

In June, urged on by several of France's notable Electors, Father d'Alzon took what seemed to be a rather disconcerting initiative. He announced his candidacy for election to the General Council of the Hérault Department for the second canton of Montpellier. Why did he feel the need to get involved in this way? Politics had never interested him. Quite simply, he thought that his presence in the General Council would serve the Church's interests. He received only eight hundred votes, half of his opponent's total. Pre-electoral conniving, which cost him as many votes, was already in full swing under the Empire.

It was a stormy period. The year 1861 would not end without giving Father d'Alzon a new occasion to strike again on behalf of the Church's honor. In October, annoyed to the point of exasperation by the resistance of Catholics to its anti-Roman policy, the government provoked a new controversy of serious consequence. On the 16th, Persigny, the minister

of the Interior, dissolved the Central Council of the Saint Vincent de Paul Society, under the pretext that the organization was involved in secret political machinations. Father d'Alzon seized his pen to urge his bishop to protest the move. Bishop Plantier had already decided to do as much. He wrote bluntly to Monsieur Rouland, the minister of Religions, and sent the letter to Father d'Alzon, leaving it to him to do whatever he wanted with it.

Father d'Alzon communicated it to the newspapers. In retaliation, Monsieur Rouland had his own sharp answer inserted in the *Moniteur* of November 8, in which he invited the bishop to stop writing him letters like this, using such a nasty tone. Once more, the clergy and some eminent lay people of Nîmes sought to express to Bishop Plantier their respectful sympathy in that painful circumstance. The meeting was held in private at the bishop's house. Father d'Alzon spoke in the name of all, firmly, but without useless verbal violence. "Your Excellency," he said in particular, "among us all, you have had the glory of being the first to avenge publicly the unrecognized rights of Catholic charity and the freedom of almsgiving. This episcopal courage has undoubtedly displeased some because an outstanding talent was in this case at the service of great character; the discontent of highly placed persons has been shown to you and officially made known to all of France. Your Excellency, the solidarity which we exhibit today is a strength and a moral power which no one can deprive you of. Behind your clergy, it is the whole of the church of Nîmes which rises up to applaud you, proud of a pontiff who can count on it just as it knows that it can count on him."

That Catholic unity evoked here by Father d'Alzon had been the constant goal of his fifteen years of apostolate in the diocese of Nîmes. The spectacle of a unanimity without division surrounding the bishop, shown on this occasion, had been achieved for the most part through

Father d'Alzon's efforts, and no one thought that any other person was as qualified as he to express its greatness on this occasion. Though this meeting had been very dignified and not provocative in the least, it unleashed the fury of the government and a certain Parisian press. Furthermore, the meeting was misrepresented. It was reported that Father d'Alzon had spoken in the portal of the cathedral when the meeting had taken place inside the bishop's house; remarks were attributed to him, as well as to Bishop Plantier, that neither one had made. The public prosecutor's office of Nîmes brought suit against Father d'Alzon who had had a rectification published to correct the erroneous reporting of the event. Indefensible at the judicial level, the affair went nowhere. But the administration took out its anger on Bishop Plantier. On December 12, the public officials of the Card Department were told confidentially — but nothing becomes so quickly known in public as that sort of secret — to sever all private relations with the bishop. The same warning applied to the bishops of Poitiers and Orleans, also judged to be too much of a nuisance.

While Father d'Alzon was thus waging battles on behalf of the Holy See, he let nothing show of the grief he was coping with. On July 16, 1860, his sister Augustine died. She was only forty-seven, being his junior by three years. She had always been more than a sister to him, she was also his confidante and friend. When he was in Rome, he often wrote to her and, except for his letters to Mother Marie Eugénie, or, at a different level, to d'Esgrigny, there is no correspondence of his which exhibits such a confiding effusiveness of his innermost being. He was well aware of her intelligence, her culture, and all that she hid from others because of her insurmountable tendency to stay in the background, her timidity and modesty. He also knew the sanctity of her soul, as well as her unflinching charity. A few lines written by Father d'Alzon ten days after her death

clearly reveal his wounded heart: "I have come to Lavagnac to rest for ten days. I needed silence, and I asked it of this place so replete with the memory of my sister. I keep going back to her room to ask for her whom it cannot give back to me; in chapel I sit in those places which she used to occupy on a day-to-day basis. All of this shows the power of death and the vanity of all human joy. We must look higher; why cry over the happiness of those whom we love?"

That death knell, heard at the height of summer, was a prelude to the one, even more tragic and striking still deeper, which sounded in the fall of that year. This one Father d'Alzon had been awaiting for a very long time. The Viscountess d'Alzon, who was now extremely old, besides being riddled with physical disabilities, including blindness, suffered a serious fall on the stairs of her town house in Montpellier on September 17. Father d'Alzon hastened to her side. He found her suffering atrociously, but exhibiting the same indomitable spirit as ever. "Now," she told him, "I want to occupy myself only with the joy of being found worthy of suffering...." And Father d'Alzon reflected: "I must say *fiat* and sanctify myself. I can already see my poor mother taking her place beside my sister's remains. Such is life! Ah! How insane we are to want anything but God!" He kept vigil over her for a whole month during which she was constantly racked with pain. "At the moment I write to you," he stated in one of his letters, "I hear her utter agonizing cries. Ah! May God purify her before she appears before him." That would take place on October 2.

Father d'Alzon was crushed at not being allowed to administer the last sacraments to his mother as he had done for his dying sister, for he was the victim of his fearlessness in defending the cause of the Holy See and, especially, of his zeal in promoting Peters Pence. "Excessive zeal," had judged Bishop Le Courtier, of Montpellier, known for his Gallicanism and his servility *vis-à-vis* the imperial power. As a result, Bishop Le

Courtier had withdrawn from Father d'Alzon all faculties in his diocese. Could he not have repealed the ban in such a circumstance? So be it!

By the side of the open grave, Father d'Alzon was deeply pained by the realization that the family was shrinking around him. His father was still there. But he was approaching his ninetieth year. Although his mind was still lucid and his robust constitution continued to allow him to administer his estates, his extreme old age and his occasional fainting spells made it only too clear that his end was near.

Besides the bereavements, there were the defeats. On December 8, 1858, Father d'Alzon had to recall from Rethel the religious he had sent there barely two months earlier, on September 8, at the request of Cardinal Gousset, to take on the management of a diocesan college. Father Picard as superior, Father Pernet as bursar, Father Cusse as the science professor, certainly constituted a choice group, but it was one which had to collaborate with five priests of the diocese, and it is on that score that the foundation stumbled. It was as much the fault of the local clergy who, as old hands of the institution, did not intend to give up their independence, as that of Father Picard who, at age 27, had not yet blunted the sharp angles of his nature and had shown himself to be inflexible when diplomacy was needed. In an amicable agreement with Cardinal Gousset, Father d'Alzon acknowledged the fact that the collaboration would not work. Besides, lacking personnel himself, he could not offer other religious who would have replaced the local clergy as the cardinal desired. Under those conditions, the foundation was stillborn.

In the midst of so many trials, what was Father d'Alzon's dominant aspiration? It was to enter more and more deeply into intimacy with the divine; in 1858, he wrote this note: "As I said Mass this morning...I prayed

our Lord to give me some of the graces of contemplative life, in the sense that I might better see the nothingness of what is not he himself.”

It was at the altar that he found his strength, which he needed more and more of, because the period of disappointments had not yet come to an end. At the beginning of August 1860, Father d’Alzon had to give the order to close the college in Clichy. The reasons for such a decision were quite varied. Some were of a moral order: snobbery had led the aristocracy of Paris Faubourg Saint-Germain to adopt Clichy, but it had taken offense, doubtless ill-considered, at the reduction in the number of students decided upon by the administration in 1855. In the same vein, there was some vacillation in ideas, plans, and expectations for the institution which would have needed the dynamism and energy, as well as the hearty confidence, of the great leader d’Alzon himself. The financial reasons for the failure, considerable though they may have been, would probably not have brought it about, had it not been for that psychological weakening. The budget was not quite balanced, but the assets were considerable. It would seem that, with the sale of a portion of the property, the debts could have been paid off, and with what remained, which would still have been quite substantial, the school could have carried on successfully. As a matter of fact, the debt was paid off by a partial sale, but Father d’Alzon refused to continue this educational enterprise. Was this a regrettable decision, and one which could have been avoided? Perhaps. In any case, the diocesan administration thought so. As a result there was discontent in high places.

Father d’Alzon could thereby have lost every possibility of keeping a footing in Paris. Fortunately, since November 1856, he had owned, in the Paris district of Auteuil, known as La Thuilerie, a house which he hoped to use as a novitiate. Would recruitment, so unsatisfactory in Nîmes, be any better in Paris? This prospect proved to be illusory. Not a single vocation,

in any case not a lasting one, presented itself. Yet one more failure to chalk up!

At least, the hypothetical novitiate was transformed into a residence where a few religious, led by Father Picard, who had returned from Rethel, devoted themselves to various ministries, especially to the Religious of the Assumption. From that springboard, the religious at Auteuil were able to move over to *rue François-Ier*, thanks to the expeditious and skillful Brother Vincent de Paul Bailly. Toward the end of 1860, he had discovered a plot of land there and was able to acquire it before word got out because Father d'Alzon happened to be in Paris at the time, which speeded up the negotiations. The land was purchased and a rather unpretentious house built — it was all done within the year. By December 1861, Assumption was at home in Paris, an event of great consequence.

For this venture, Father d'Alzon had advanced 90,000 francs, absolutely nothing of which he would ever recover, but that was his habitual way with money. If he was able to do this, it was because, since the death of the Viscountess d'Alzon, he was in possession of his share of her estate. More exactly, since this consisted especially of very sizable properties, these served him as collateral. In common accord with his sister Marie, widow of the Count of Puysegur, the brother and sister had taken the necessary steps to make sure that old Viscount d'Alzon would be able to live out his last days in the manner he had always known. Except for that, Father d'Alzon poured into his works, at a rapid pace, the disposable portion of his legacy.

The fact remains that a superficial glance would have indicated that he was piling up failures, at least as far as his essential plan was concerned. Only a handful of religious laboring obstinately in that bastion which was the college of Nîmes; a tiny cluster clinging to the Paris

pavement; a few students in Rome. To all appearances, such was the balance sheet, in June 1861, of a foundation which dated back to 1845. But, one has to cut through these appearances to reach the underlying reality bursting with possibilities. Following the example of their leader, the Assumptionists were discouraged neither by their small number, nor by their setbacks; they went forward with a confidence in the future of their tiny congregation which nothing could shatter. Such a state of soul in and of itself reveals an intense religious vitality; it points out how deeply Father d'Alzon's spirituality permeated the congregation and animated its members. They had such a profound awareness of the originality and efficacy of their apostolic formula that, in their successive attempts at union with other institutes, they turned down any negotiations which would make of them a small group submerged into a large body to the point of losing their own special character.

That distinctiveness, which made them what they were, had such a power of spiritual attraction that it beguiled the future Bishop Gay, the future Cardinal Mermillod, the future Cardinal de Cabrières, and Father Moigno whose names would give luster to Catholicism in the nineteenth century. Each one of them had been on the verge of entering the Assumption novitiate. If, in the end, Father d'Alzon was not able to count them among his own, he knew the religious and human worth of those who did and who would follow him with unshakeable fidelity. A Brother Pernet, who would soon found the Little Sisters of the Assumption, a Picard, who would be the second superior-general of the congregation, an Emmanuel Bailly, who would be the third, and his brother, Vincent de Paul, a Galabert, a Germer-Durand, son of the great friend and collaborator of Father d'Alzon, these were men and religious in the full sense of the word on whom one could rebuild. The feeling they shared and which cemented them to one another was fittingly expressed by

Father Galabert, at the very heart of the crisis of 1857, when he wrote to the founder: "I was admiring the goodness of God these days in the middle of this terrible trial. If it had taken place several years ago, your work would have been destroyed.... Today, the furrow has been plowed deep and, at harvest time, the fruit will be abundant. You would not have had around you a certain nucleus of men who at least have the merit of being devoted to you and resolved to sacrifice themselves to obey you and follow the least of your wishes, convinced that your commands are from God and that, by obeying you, they are obeying God."

Such was the spirit that the founder had inspired in his institute. If, right from the very start, the congregation presented the strong characteristics which distinguished the Assumptionist Congregation from all others, the Rule — which was its framework and existed to preserve for it the purity of its origins and give it the guarantee of continuity — remained for a long time in an embryonic state. This was because Father d'Alzon wanted the sanction of experience for it. In any case, the Constitutions of a new-born congregation always take a long time to be formulated. The founder carefully watched over their fleshing out. The five general chapters, held between 1850 and 1858, worked on them almost exclusively.⁸³

On the other hand, Father d'Alzon never stopped drawing from his interior life the spiritual doctrine without which the Rule would be nothing more than a dead letter. In fact, he would draft it in its totality — in various writings — only in the last ten years of his life. But, already, some essential traits were present, first in a *Directoire* or Rule Book intended for a group of women Adorers of the Blessed Sacrament; then in 1859, in another *Directoire*, compiled for the Religious of the Assumption, which expands upon the first one. While thinking of the Religious of the Assumption, he had kept his own religious in mind, and it would be this

same text, barely modified, that he would give them and which remains their most precious spiritual legacy. His instructions to the Assumptionists over time had been nothing less than the prodigious bestowal of the living doctrine of his inner life and his apostolic ambitions, which he would write up later. One can measure their spiritual value from the point that Father d'Alzon himself had reached, for the year 1861 was the one during which he had made the vow of perfection. "Here I am, impelled to it," he wrote on January 23. "During the fifteen years that I have wanted to do this, how much time lost, how much faintheartedness! This will consist for me in doing everything as perfectly as possible and doing those things which are the most perfect."

It is surprising to realize that, after conferring such an outstanding spiritual personality on his congregation, he continued his attempts at uniting with other religious institutes. Even in 1858, he conferred at Montauban with Father Causette, superior of the Fathers of the Calvary, founded by His Excellency d'Astros, the archbishop of Toulouse. Yet one more project which led to no result, despite a shared and intense desire to merge, a definite similarity of ideas, and an affectionate friendship which grew spontaneously between the two superiors as a consequence of these talks. Later on, negotiations with the Hermits of Saint Augustine would be resumed. If Father d'Alzon persisted on that track, it was surely because he thought that such mergers might safeguard the spiritual autonomy of his institute which he valued as a special plan of God for him. If these negotiations in succession came to naught, it was undoubtedly because no formula was found which would allow his own mission to have a free rein. What he hoped for in all this was totally unrealistic and unrealizable.

Once again, why was he so unrelenting in pursuing these fruitless attempts? His supernatural confidence in his institute's future was at the

very same time such that he was already looking overseas. He felt drawn to two horizons: England and the Orient. For the one as for the other, his objective was the same: to achieve the unity of the Church by fighting against heresy and schism. However, it was Australia which carried the day. In 1859, Bishop Quinn of Brisbane, who was looking for missionaries for his diocese, asked for some from Father d'Alzon whom he had known since 1856 when he had spent some time in Nîmes. The negotiations dragged on, came close to breaking off, but they were brought to a successful conclusion on November 19, 1860, after all sorts of incidents. Certain clauses of the agreement carried within them the germ of serious conflict. Indeed, they stipulated that the missionaries of the Assumption would have no one but the bishop of Brisbane as their superior during the first ten years. No other bond would exist during that time with the superior in Europe except for the freedom of correspondence. The final clause clearly stated that, as soon as possible, Bishop Quinn "will give canonical investiture to a house which will belong to the religious and that, from that time on, they will come under the common law which regulates convents in the Foreign Missions." But that clause was equivalent to vesting complete confidence solely in Bishop Quinn. It so happened that, during the discussion of terms, Father d'Alzon had seen firsthand the erratic nature of the bishop of Brisbane, so much so that he had rejoiced when the negotiations had almost failed. The undertaking was decidedly starting off on the wrong foot. But, in the end, the die was cast. On December 7, 1860, Fathers Tissot and Cusse, who had joyfully accepted this mission, embarked with the bishop at Liverpool for Brisbane where they arrived on May 10, 1861.

In 1862, Father Brun, who had also been designated for this mission, joined them. The reason for his delay was that he had been held up in England by the possibility of a foundation there. In October 1860, Father

d'Alzon had sent him to London as the chaplain to the second house opened by the Religious of the Assumption at Kensington Square. In Father d'Alzon's mind, this was to be the first step in what he envisioned as a vast enterprise: a contribution to the return of the Anglicans to the bosom of the Catholic Church. He had always closely and passionately tracked the Oxford Movement.⁸⁴ The conversations he had once had long ago, as a student in Rome, with Wiseman, the more recent ones with Allies and Mariott, Cardinal Newman's friends, had never stopped stirring within him. And was it not Wiseman himself who, having become a Cardinal, wanted to unite a parish, entrusted to the Assumptionists, with the house of the sisters? To gain a foothold in a London parish was the best possible point of departure. But, at the head of an enterprise of such scope, an outstanding religious was needed. And none was available. Father Brun could do no more than blaze a trail, but for whom? So, he was allowed to join the missionaries in Australia.

Besides, there being no outlook for the future in England, Father d'Alzon had already turned to the Orient.

VII – Mission to the Orient and Foundation of the Oblates of the Assumption (1861 -1866)

When the prospect of a mission to the Orient took shape in Father d'Alzon's mind, he was thinking of Palestine, the Holy Land. He envisaged buying back the Cenacle and the Tomb of the Blessed Virgin and establishing a convent of the Religious of the Assumption and an Oriental seminary close by. It was this latter prospect which was at the origin of the entire plan, and it had obsessed him since 1861 when he had taken in several young Maronites who had escaped the massacres in Syria. He could already see in them the nucleus of a Maronite clergy. He had even submitted these wishes to Cardinal Barnabo, Prefect of the Propaganda.⁸⁵

When, on May 19, 1862, he left for Rome with a large pilgrimage of priests from Nîmes, he carried within his heart that noble ambition. He began negotiations immediately. His original plan was destined to bog down quickly and never come to fruition. For, on the one hand, there were the religious of various orders who, already established in Palestine, feared competition, and magnanimously disinterested as he was, Father d'Alzon was not petty-minded enough to stoop to that level. On the other hand, there were those who knew that, since he could now dispose as he wished of his inheritance, Father d'Alzon intended to allocate to his Palestinian project four hundred thousand francs, a considerable sum in those days, and they sought to divert that fortune to their own works or objectives. In this regard, Father d'Alzon was once again done in by his ingenuousness, his trust in people. He saw in his interlocutors, whoever they might be, men like himself, driven only by concern for the higher

interests of the Church. Finally, there were some very high-level Roman personages who felt, without any ulterior motive, that certain missionary enterprises outside of Palestine were of greater urgency and scope than those dreamed of by Father d'Alzon.

Bishop Lavigerie and two English prelates, Bishops Howard and Talbot, urged Father d'Alzon to turn his attention to Bulgaria rather than Jerusalem. Father Jerome Kajziewicz, superior-general of the Resurrectionists and a great friend of Father d'Alzon, pushed him in that same direction. He had a great stake in this because the apostolate of the Turkish Slavs, which was one of the objectives of his congregation, was stymied at the time for political reasons. Under the mantle of Father d'Alzon, who enjoyed the Pope's favor and had the financial means which he himself lacked, he counted on saving his mission. Such were the first influences which diverted Father d'Alzon from his Palestinian proposal. But he would not abandon it nor commit himself to a new path unless he received the Pope's command and the approval of the Propaganda. On June 3, during the audience granted to the pilgrims of Nîmes, Pius IX said to Father d'Alzon: "I bless your works of the Orient and the Occident."⁸⁶ In such a way did the Holy Father publicly encourage the missionary thrust of Assumption to the Orient; however, in using that general terminology, the Pope was thinking of Bulgaria.

Father d'Alzon was not long in realizing as much. During a private audience on June 6, the Pope assigned him, as an immediate missionary objective, the return of the Bulgarians to the Catholic faith and, as a first means to that end, the foundation of a seminary in Bulgaria. Cardinal Barnabo, for practical reasons, was not in favor of such a solution, but he could only bow before the clearly stated will of the Pope. For Father d'Alzon, the Popes wish was tantamount to being Gods command. From that audience he carried away, according to his own words, "the right and

almost the mission to study the very grave problem of the return to the faith of the peoples of the Orient [i.e., Eastern Europe] and to seek, with the help of several eminent personages, the best means to employ in order to achieve the designated goal." Father d'Alzon spent the entire week before he left Rome seeing these dignitaries.

On June 15, Father d'Alzon did not return to Nîmes as a man burdened with regrets. He had become impassioned with Bulgaria, just as he had been with Palestine. Once more, what was admirable was his disinterestedness. The Polish Resurrectionists, cleverly and unilaterally,⁸⁷ had taken steps to assure themselves of a share, actually the lion's share, in the plan which was guaranteed to succeed through the name and fortune of Father d'Alzon. Moreover — they would make this very clear at the end of 1863 — they hadn't the slightest intention of collaborating with the Assumptionists. In Father d'Alzon one senses no bitterness. He wrote, "Even though the Poles would not unite with us entirely, there would be room for them and for us: they would have the Slavs specifically, and we would work on the schism in general." These words indicate that Father d'Alzon was aiming at an apostolate to be accomplished by demonstrating Catholic truth, by refuting the arguments of heresy or schism, and, furthermore, through the formation of an indigenous clergy. "The idea of attacking the Photian Schism⁸⁸ in its entirety," he exclaimed, "seems magnificent to me. But what an undertaking! I pray that you will search for what we can do and read in order to see clearly in this matter." Only a less high-minded person would have seen that he was receiving the meanest share for his congregation in this whole matter. He was above all that, considering that what had been left to him for his congregation to accomplish was quite impressive. If one projects Christ and his kingdom over it all, everything is illuminated and takes on a larger meaning.

In that same text, which was written in July, he also wrote: "If we consider the Photian Schism in its entirety, it's in Constantinople that we should locate our establishment." On December 20, 1862, he sent Father Galabert to Constantinople to scout out the possibilities. He could not have chosen a better person. As both a medical doctor and a doctor of canon law, as well as an excellent archivist and a religious whose inner life was very fervent, Father Galabert was well equipped for such a difficult task.

Father d'Alzon also set out. "My God!" he wrote, "what a hornet's nest I have gotten myself into, but one has to be a bit insane for the Lord!"

Beneath the euphoria of the man of action, let us listen carefully to the inner man. A few days before, he had written to one of the women he was directing: "Ask our Lord for the fruitfulness of painful prayer. To pray with sadness and anguish is an admirable mortification, when at the same time one prays with courage and love." Father d'Alzon bore that double-edged prayer in his heart, as he turned eastward.

He arrived in Constantinople on February 21, 1863, and immediately saw Bishop Brunoni, the Apostolic Delegate for the Latin Rite. His sojourn in Constantinople, which lasted until April 16, created around him an aura of warmth and admiration. He preached a Lenten series in the church of Saint John Chrysostom, and his basic theme was the supremacy of the Pope within one Church. Where did he not preach? He was heard in turn at the Sisters of Zion, at the Brothers of Christian Schools, at the Sisters of Charity, in numerous churches. He paid a visit to the Dominicans for whom he had always harbored cordial feelings, to the Lazarists whose superior was Father Bore who in his youth had been, like Father d'Alzon himself, a disciple of Lamennais. Everywhere he went, he enriched his knowledge, clarified or updated his frame of reference.

He returned, having reached the following conclusion: Build a seminary where Greeks and Bulgarians would be trained in their own rite — because the western religious and missionaries were no more than a transitional solution — and build it close to Constantinople where Saint John Chrysostom had been persecuted and where the Council of Chalcedon had been held. As such, it remained a highly symbolic place since it was there that “the prerogatives of the Roman Pontiffs, in anticipation of the Orient’s protest against the schism of Photius, had been proclaimed.” In addition, he planned to build in Constantinople itself a small residence with a chapel.... Finally, he wrote to Father Picard, “The residence-school of Philippopolis⁸⁹ [present-day Plovdiv] will allow us to recruit vocations.” This last suggestion had come from Father Galabert who, between March 10 and April 2, had conducted an investigation throughout Bulgaria.

Armed with a detailed report, and strongly supported by Bishop Brunoni, Father d’Alzon arrived in Rome on April 22. There, he faced a major disappointment, for Pius IX, with whom Father d’Alzon had counted upon discussing the matter at length, was ill and could only receive him briefly, without having taken cognizance of the report. Nor was he able to get the cardinals of the Propaganda to examine the report in his presence. It was clear to him that Pius IX and Cardinal Barnabo did not see eye to eye on the matter. At the height of that imbroglio, he left Rome on May 3. Toward the end of that month, he learned that his report had been, for all practical purposes, pushed aside. Of the proposal that Father d’Alzon had brought back from Constantinople, only that part which concerned Philippopolis would be realized. Any one else but Father d’Alzon would have been frustrated, discouraged even. But Father d’Alzon, whose views were always anticipatory, was working for the future. In his eyes, Philippopolis could be a good starting point.

He had always thought that a congregation of men and a congregation of women, working side by side in the same spirit, with the same goal in view, would constitute a great force for action. He had experienced the benefits of such a collaboration in metropolitan France, and he would have liked to find it again in the Middle East. As early as 1862, he had proposed to the Religious of the Assumption the location known as the Dormition of the Blessed Virgin. Lacking the resources and personnel, they were not able to accept. Before leaving for Constantinople, he had urged Mother Marie Eugénie to establish her daughters within the new framework of his mission to the East, but he had felt some resistance. Was there anything astonishing in this? In Father d'Alzon's initiatives, there was often too much precipitation, too great a disproportion between the breadth of the project and the meagerness of the means. The superior-general of the Religious of the Assumption had experienced this when, upon his favorable opinion, she had decided on a mission to the Cape of Good Hope which had turned into a bitter failure. Now, he was proposing a house of adoration in Chalcedon, a teachers' college in Constantinople, a boarding school at Adrianople⁹⁰ [present-day Edirne]. That was a very great deal; it was too much, and so she backed off.

As early as January 1863, Father d'Alzon thought of a new institute of sisters, a sort of Tertiary group of Oblates who would devote themselves to elementary schools, to the most humble tasks, leaving the door open to the Religious of the Assumption to devote themselves to more advanced cultural training and secondary education. In this first, still rather vague phase, the plan was for the work to be done in tandem — the Religious of the Assumption and the Oblates of the Assumption working together — but Father d'Alzon would not establish the Oblates without the consent of the Religious, and as an offshoot of their

congregation. These prospects were not yet totally organized in his mind. They were the object, in May and December 1863, of discussions in Nîmes between Father d'Alzon and Mother Marie Eugénie. But, by the end of that year, the Religious of the Assumption would be established only at Adrianople where Bishop Brunoni wanted them. This would put them within the sphere, not of the Assumptionists, but of the Resurrectionists, to whom Father d'Alzon had yielded.

So, at the outset of 1864, especially because of the stratagems of the Resurrectionists, the early goals of Father d'Alzon had gone up in smoke. What was left of them? A parochial school in Philippopolis which was maintained under the most precarious conditions: the school belonged to the Italian Capuchins while the upkeep of Father Galabert and his two religious collaborators fell for the most part on Nîmes. Lacking recognition by Rome and the canonical erection that the apostolic vicar, Bishop Canova, had not requested in spite of Father d'Alzon's entreaties, the very existence of that foundation depended solely on the pastor of the parish. Despite all this, the founder of the Assumptionists did not back away because, whatever the means he would need to take, he wanted to have a foothold in the Orient. Once in Philippopolis, a seminary could be envisaged, no longer at Chalcedon, but in Bulgaria, and perhaps even an establishment in Constantinople. It took a heroic religious like Father Galabert to hang on to those few Bulgarian acres under such thankless conditions and for a goal so distant and uncertain. This learned man, whom everything designated for an intellectual apostolate dreamed of by Father d'Alzon — that of putting an end to the Photian Schism — this doctor of medicine, this doctor of canon law, who added to his already vast knowledge by the study of Turkish, Greek, and Bulgarian, in which he would soon become proficient, was about to devote himself for many

long years to directing an elementary school. He would make that enormous sacrifice with astonishing simplicity, serenity, and generosity.

Nothing of what Father d'Alzon accomplished or projected, in the East as in the West, could have any lasting value without a novitiate to provide well-trained religious in sufficient numbers. But such a novitiate could not properly achieve that dual goal without complete isolation, and that indispensable condition had not been assured up to that time. The attempt to establish a novitiate in Paris not having succeeded, the novices were still lodged at the College of Nîmes. That was a situation little likely to attract postulants, besides running counter to religious formation, the course of study, and the regularity of the spiritual exercises. Father d'Alzon, who had inherited from his mother the estate of Le Vigan, both the château and the land, decided to install the novitiate there. That was done by July 1, 1864. Ten novices or theology students and three postulants, under the direction of Father Saugrain, moved in. Several farmers operated the estate where silkworms were bred, and the income guaranteed the upkeep of the novitiate. Moreover, Father Saugrain was a true Norman: he was resourceful, self-reliant, and business-like; his administration turned out to be excellent in all respects. Thrift was enforced, meals were frugal, but the novitiate supported itself. Here, at least, was one foundation which would be free of debt. What a novelty for Father d'Alzon! And what better purpose could he wish for the cradle of his youth than being the cradle of his congregation!

Several months later, the Congregation itself would be sanctioned by Rome. Immediately upon his return from Constantinople, Father d'Alzon, while presenting a report on his mission to the Pope, had registered a request with the Congregation of Bishops and Regular Clergy for the approval of his institute and its Constitutions. As to the latter, the concept

needed further development, but in the meantime, the definitive approval of the Congregation occurred on November 26, 1864.

Just as Father d'Alzon was seeing his spiritual family grow stronger, if not more widespread, his own family was shrinking. On October 27, a month before Father d'Alzon received Rome's approval of his Congregation, Viscount d'Alzon died. He was ninety years of age. Just like a sudden gust of wind extinguishes the flickering flame of a candle which had already dimmed, death occurred so quickly that Father d'Alzon, although alerted and hastening to come, had not arrived in time to assist his father during the last moments of his life. The most beautiful funeral eulogy of this exemplary Catholic were these simple words spoken by his son: "Just as God rewarded him in this world with virtues, foremost of which was the shunning of all pomp, I am convinced that the reward received in this world has not delayed that of heaven.... I like to think that God has treated with mercy a Christian who, for ninety years, has walked steadily along the straightest and most scrupulously pious path." Of the beautiful family that Lavagnac used to assemble, there remained to Father d'Alzon only his sister Marie de Puységur and her two children, Jean and Alix, who had entered the Carmel where she had donned the habit on January 3, 1858. Father d'Alzon was now the only one to carry, in a direct line, his noble ancient name of the Languedoc, one on which he had bestowed, as a nobleman of the Kingdom of God, its right to eternity.

Though his heart was immersed in grief, Father d'Alzon was not a man to wallow in the past. He always looked forward to the future. More than ever, he pursued his purpose. We have seen how he considered the outpost at Philippopolis, not as a fallback situation, but as a first stop on his march toward the East.⁹¹ In addition, now as heretofore, he judged it necessary that the efforts of his male religious be shouldered likewise by the sisters. Father d'Alzon continued to desire that the cooperation of the

nuns be double-faceted. To the Religious of the Assumption would be entrusted the urban boarding schools, to the Oblates of the Assumption, the schools for the poor, even though the Oblates did not yet exist, although foreseen by the constitutions of the Religious of the Assumption. Having returned to Nîmes, Father d'Alzon immediately turned his attention to establishing them formally and giving them as a gift, so to speak, to the Religious of the Assumption. The Oblates would be the second branch of their Congregation. He could count on a first nucleus of candidates: three young women, one of whom, Pauline — on whom everything would rest — was possessed of outstanding qualities. On November 1, 1864, he submitted to Mother Marie Eugénie a precise plan concerning the Oblates.

In December 1864, Mother Marie Eugénie journeyed down to Nîmes. For an entire week, she discussed with Father d'Alzon a foundation in the East by the Religious of the Assumption. The matter had already dragged on for almost a year. The foundress was just as impassioned as Father d'Alzon to extend the Kingdom of God, but more attentive than he to what men and circumstances, such as they happen to be, can place in the way of the apostle's fervor. Each of them viewed the supernatural in the same light, but not human nature with its myriad obstacles. Father d'Alzon was possessed of both judgment and common sense, and his views were quite sound, but because they were too vast, they ran up against the here and now which he had a tendency to skip over, even to shove aside. Father d'Alzon was like a flame running along a trail of saltpeter. Once again, in this particular instance, the levelheadedness of Mother Marie Eugénie served as a brake. She had always advised the founder to be prudent, a virtue which she commented upon as follows with deep wisdom: "That virtue is so necessary to him or her who commands, so that the others [the followers] will not be tempted to have

it.” This matter of the Orient seemed to her to be full of pitfalls which, in her estimation, Father d’Alzon had too great a tendency to overlook.

On December 14, however, Father d’Alzon could write to Father Galabert: “The superior-general is leaving at this very moment. Everything is settled. In May 1865, four nuns will leave for Adrianople: their names have been given. So, you may count on them. As for the Normal School, the sisters will bear the responsibility for it.”

But the sisters did not start out. Mother Marie Eugénie had run into an insurmountable reluctance within her own council. The Polish Resurrectionists were unmistakably the cause of this reaction. Having long been in touch with them, the Religious of the Assumption had consulted them, and they had taken advantage of the situation to list all the difficulties the sisters would encounter at Adrianople in terms meant to discourage them. This time the sisters’ refusal was definitive.

This was a cruel letdown for Father d’Alzon, and certainly in his very sensitive heart he sorrowed at finding himself in disagreement with his beloved Religious of the Assumption about a matter to which he attached such great importance. In a letter to Father Galabert, he conveyed their decision in dispassionate terms, but his concealed distress shows through, nonetheless: “We can’t count too much on them, but it is painful for me to say it too loudly. That is the truth. I sense in these worthy women, even though I contribute many vocations to them, some opposition which is very painful to me. May God’s will be done!” In his relations with the superior-general, he would maintain an absolute silence on the matter of Adrianople, a silence which, because she understood its significance, would affect Mother Marie Eugénie and worry her. He said nothing more, but did nothing less either.

The projected foundation of the Oblates — with Pauline as superior, and conceived as a subsidiary of the Religious of the Assumption — was

to meet the same fate as the Adrianople proposal. Up to that point, however, everything had seemed to be going very smoothly. Father d'Alzon had even leased for the Oblates, a building located between his college and the priory of the Religious of the Assumption in Nîmes. He had also put Pauline in touch with the priory, with her training in mind, but that was the very cause of the failure. Pauline was so taken by the spirit of the Religious of the Assumption that she decided to join them, giving up on founding the Oblates. "Pauline will leave for Paris," wrote Father d'Alzon on March 6, 1865. "For me it's another disappointment to add to a few others which detach a person from the world and push us toward heaven."

When, that preceding November 1, Father d'Alzon was explaining to Mother Marie Eugénie just how he envisioned the Oblates and their role, he had concluded: "If you think that you should not accept the Oblates under these conditions, please simply tell me so because I will then create a small separate Congregation." That was what he would do, now that Pauline, the cornerstone of the original plan, was no longer available and that the Religious of the Assumption, moreover, were evidently not favorable to the idea of incorporating the missionary Oblates within their group. He had even attempted to obtain the assistance of the Tertiaries of three other Orders, but unsuccessfully. Another person would have given up; not Father d'Alzon.

He latched on instead to a sound idea which came from Father Saugrain who, at the Le Vigan novitiate, situated along the edge of the Cévennes Mountains, had noticed that the Christian families of that rugged region could be a fertile ground for vocations to serve the new foundation. Already, several young women, whose spiritual life he was directing, had manifested the desire to enter religious life. When sounded out, they declared themselves ready to do so. There were a dozen of

them. Father d'Alzon was careful not to establish them in Nîmes, for there they risked, at least some of them, doing like Pauline. He leased for them, in a section of Le Vigan, called Rochebelle, a house perched high on a hill surrounded by fields with streams running through them. Three wealthy persons from Nîmes had, with their gifts, made this establishment possible. Events moved quickly. On May 23, 1865, Father d'Alzon blessed the house which he baptized Notre-Dame-de-Bulgarie. On May 24, Bishop Plantier went there, lavished praise on the institution, and blessed a statue of the Virgin which overlooked the garden.

Those first postulants were good girls; their faith was vibrant, their hearts pure, and their natures, though unpolished, were wholesome. Faced with such limpidity and generosity, Father d'Alzon was absolutely delighted. Of them he wrote: "When it comes to giving themselves to God, poor girls don't make much fuss, don't find so many ifs, buts, therefores, and howevers, while how many grand and holy young ladies beat around the bush for months on end and never enter! Oh, the simplicity and straightforwardness of girls who are poor! Oh! the wisdom and circumspection of grand and beautiful young ladies! Oh! the gift of oneself! Oh, self-possession!"

The program he assigned the first Oblates consisted of work, penance, and prayer. "Work for a living, penance to atone for the sins of heretics and to obtain their conversion, prayer to adore the Blessed Sacrament." To the "work-for-a-living" part, Father d'Alzon attached great value. Those young girls, accustomed in any case to the impoverished, hard life of the Cévennes peasants, were destined for missions where they would have to do everything themselves, and under difficult conditions. The founder also believed deeply in the spiritual significance of work, "because it is good," he would write later, "to suffer humiliation, and that to cure laziness and correct a certain independence,

it is an admirable means.... It is my conviction that in certain cases nothing is as good as work in the open air to tame the unruly. Take a sister who drives her superior to distraction, and send her out to rake hay.... If one obliged the difficult-to-control sisters to pump water from a well, many would straighten themselves out.”

If it is easy to send sisters out to the fields, it is less so to ensure their spiritual formation. Certainly Father Saugrain paid close attention to this aspect in the weeks which followed the foundation; Father d'Alzon himself looked after it with great care. But neither one nor the other could replace a mistress of novices. The founder had asked the Religious of the Assumption for one and eagerly awaited her coming. In this instance, it was made abundantly clear that the shadow, which had passed between Father d'Alzon and Mother Marie Eugénie, had not for all that strained their spiritual intimacy, nor loosened the ties which united the two Assumptions. On the one side as on the other, everything was placed at the level of service to God — no ruffling of human susceptibilities, however legitimate, could prevail against that. Constrained to make of the Oblates a separate congregation, the founder wanted them, nonetheless, bound to the Religious of the Assumption as they were to his own congregation. The Rochebelle postulants who would not be found capable of leading a missionary life would be assigned to the Religious of the Assumption as lay sisters. An identical disposition of soul can be found in Mother Marie Eugénie for, on July 25, she sent a mistress of novices to Rochebelle, and, wanting her to be a superior woman, an exemplary religious, she had chosen Mother Marie Madeleine, one of her general councilors, for the task.

The results were excellent. On the following August 14, nine of the eleven postulants were admitted to take the veil. On January 6, 1866, eight months after its foundation, Rochebelle would number nineteen

sisters who had taken the veil. On August 30 of that same year, Father d'Alzon was able to install five of them at his college where they would teach the youngest and also take care of the housework. Inexhaustibly, the mountain villages poured forth recruits into Rochebelle. In his mind, the founder must have compared that bounty of vocations, that readiness, that ease of success, with the difficult beginnings of his own men's congregation, with the persistent stagnation of his recruitment. Moreover, the increasing number of Oblates was not being acquired to the detriment of their religious formation. The initial terrain upon which the mistress of novices was called to work was of sterling quality. The virtues proper to the religious state took root in marvelous fashion. When she was replaced by Mother d'Everlange, a woman of Nîmes, in November 1866, Mother Marie Madeleine having been recalled to Paris, she left behind her a novitiate as serious as it was fervent.

While the young Oblate institute prospered, the mission in Australia was languishing. The cause was the bishop of Brisbane, Bishop Quinn, who made improper use of his authority. He brought into play for all it was worth the regrettable clause in his agreement with Father d'Alzon — referred to earlier — which placed under his sole control Fathers Tissot, Cusse, and Brun for ten whole years. These men wanted to do the work of a canonically instituted congregation, by opening a college and evangelizing the natives. That is exactly what Bishop Quinn implacably opposed. He wanted these religious to be isolated just like the priests of his diocese. So he kept full control over them. Likewise, any purchase of land that they found useful had to be done in the bishop's name. Under conditions like these, it was clear that the Assumptionist Congregation, as such, could never take root in Australia. In the final analysis, the history of this mission can be summarized in the scattered and uneven efforts of the three Assumptionists. In vain did they bombard Father d'Alzon with

their grievances — bound as he was by his contract, he could do nothing to remedy this state of affairs. Had he not been a man for whom an agreement was sacred, even when improperly interpreted by the other party, he would have recalled his religious. Not wanting to do so, he limited himself to a strict observance of the accord; he did not send any reinforcements, and he never would.

Father Cusse's case complicated matters. He had always been an independent type whom the founder had found difficult to keep in line. He could not bear the situation, indeed untenable, in which Bishop Quinn was placing him. He had practically nothing to do and no resources. So he secretly offered his services to other Australian bishops. But for him to be able to set himself up in another diocese, he needed the consent of Father d'Alzon who refused by reason of the contract which bound him. Father Cusse nevertheless went over to the Sydney diocese, which caused his exclusion from the congregation by the General Chapter of 1862. He experienced great sorrow over this decision for, in abandoning Bishop Quinn, he had not in the least wanted to abandon his congregation and Father d'Alzon whom he loved very much. Moreover, he would do great missionary work at Newcastle until his death which occurred on September 6, 1866. It is tempting to find the step taken against him very harsh indeed. But, in the matter of obedience, compromise was no doubt impossible.

As for Father Tissot, a calm and steady man, he led the life of a pastor at Maryborough, attentive to the needs of his parish, shepherding his flock whose number increased under his leadership. Excellent religious, austere in his lifestyle, he was greatly appreciated by all, including the Protestants. No more than at the college of Nîmes was he a man of resounding action, but the perfect equilibrium of his qualities and virtues enhanced his apostolate. By contrast, Father Brun was full of ardor,

energy, and brilliance. He was solidly built, and this served him well because he had to crisscross on horseback a parish which, from one end to the other, measured some 125 miles. He built schools, where six hundred children were taught, chapels, and established good works everywhere he went.

Father Brun would leave Australia in 1873; Father Tissot, in 1875, after accomplishing much good which would bear fruit for a long time to come, but no Assumptionist establishment would ever be founded in that country. Bishop Quinn, who had benefited amply from their apostolate and, in any case, had greatly appreciated them, remained intractable to the end on the letter of the contract from whose intent he had deviated. Despite repeated efforts, Father d'Alzon would never obtain from him that he reconsider his attitude.

Those three missionaries, as if vanished into the Australian outback, how useful they would have been to Father d'Alzon's works in Paris and the South of France! Yet, even with the meager personnel he disposed of, Father d'Alzon somehow found the means to create a new foundation, modest it is true, in the Gard region, at Alès. This small city in the heart of the Cévennes, was one of the feudal fiefdoms of Father d'Alzon, the "King of Nîmes." He had many close and influential friends there. On April 30, 1866, two of his religious moved in with the pastor of Saint Joseph of Ales, a great friend of the Assumptionists. With him they formed a community, devoted themselves to charitable works on behalf of the city, and extended their outreach to the surrounding mountain area as diocesan missionaries. On September 9 of the same year, eager to plant the flag of the Church everywhere that he could, and as high as he could, Father d'Alzon made a vow at the summit of Mount Bouquet to raise there a statue honoring the Virgin if Bishop Plantier, then ill, recovered. This was at the origin of a pilgrimage to which the faithful flocked by the

thousands and which the Assumptionists of Ales would serve. By 1865, at the summit of the Esperou in the Cévennes, at an altitude of 3,900 feet, Father d'Alzon had already undertaken the restoration of the ruins of the ancient shrine of Notre-Dame-du-Bonheur [Our Lady of Happiness]. The site was served by one of his religious, at least during the summer.

The facts just described are simply the highlights on a graph of apostolic fervor where even the lows abounded in sermons, retreats, many types of teaching, and spiritual direction. Besides that, the struggle for the violated rights of the Holy See was not over, and Father d'Alzon, as can be expected, had not abandoned the cause. On September 15, 1864, Napoleon III had concluded an accord with Italy without including Pius IX. It stipulated that France would withdraw its troops within a period of two years. Whereupon Rome issued the Encyclical *Quanta cura* and the *Syllabus*⁹² which struck like thunderbolts. The bishops who made these documents known were prosecuted. From Rome, where he happened to be, Bishop Plantier protested and publicly gave his adherence to the *Syllabus*. The date of his return to Nîmes being set for February 20, 1865, Father d'Alzon, responding to the wishes of the Catholics of the city, busied himself with organizing a triumphal reception for the bishop. The Prefect of the Gard was opposed, fearing a clash of opposing forces within the city. On his orders, Nîmes was transformed into a city under siege. All of this was done in vain since Bishop Plantier arrived when no one was expecting him — at six in the morning. The Prefect had lost face.

To compensate for the effect of the Franco-Italian Accord of September 1864, the imperial government authorized the formation of a corps of volunteers to replace the soldiers it had recalled. Maurice de Giry, a cousin and student of Father d'Alzon, and an only son, like Jean de Puységur, wanted to enlist, as Jean had earlier. Father d'Alzon wrote him,

on July 19, 1866, these words which convey like a passing windstorm what was in his soul: "Dear friend, my advice will be quickly given. God can only bless your departure for Rome. Consequently, since you are consulting me, I am telling you: Go. I know that the Pope would like to see some Frenchmen around him. Castelfidardo had a huge moral effect. After that, it's up to you to decide if you feel that you have a martyr's vocation. It is impossible that God would not bless the entire life of a young man who offers himself under the circumstances in which you do so and with the feelings which move you so to do.... Farewell, my boy. You are fortunate in feeling that your heart contains its share of devotion. Alas! How many there are who have in theirs nothing but mud, with which one can make nothing worthwhile. I embrace you with all my heart; if you only knew how much I love you!" On that manly and tender farewell, Maurice de Giry left for Italy. He would be buried in Rome, in the midst of battle under the ruins of the Porta Pia. Such was the valor of the family lineage.

In the period during which these events were taking place, a new spiritual family was born. Its founder was not Father d'Alzon, but it issued forth in direct filiation from the spirit which he had instilled in his sons. One morning in January 1864, Father Pernet, then in residence at *rue François-Ier* in Paris, was struck during Mass, as if by inspiration, with the following thought: there should be, for the relief of colossal human misery, a community of religious women who, having received training for such work, would care for both the bodies and the souls of the sick poor in their homes, while women and men of the world would collaborate with them, not in the manner of one who in passing simply donates alms, but by giving of themselves, their devotion, and their labor in a spirit of Christian brotherhood through which the social classes could be united. For the execution of such a great vision, Father Pernet found

the worker he needed: a soul inflamed with love of her fellow human beings, Marie-Antoinette Fages. His immediate superior, Father Picard, approved the idea. And soon — toward the end of 1865 — Father d'Alzon could write: "God appears to be blessing us for the little bit of good we are doing for the poor. Just imagine! Father Pernet has founded an association of poor girls, depending for their livelihood solely on charity, consecrating themselves to be sister-nurses to the poor, without receiving a cent of payment from them. They are Little Sisters of the Poor, but who work in private homes."

Thus were founded the Little Sisters of the Assumption, established today throughout the world. To tell the truth, some astonishment pierces through Father d'Alzon's words transcribed above. He had certainly always admired Father Pernet's virtue. When he had sent him to *rue François-Ier* in September 1863, he had said: "There needs to be someone who stays there for the confessional. It will be Father Pernet." But he hadn't gone beyond that. He had not yet taken the full measure of his colleague, much less realized that there was in him the stuff that founders are made of.

But also, was he not underestimating, in his humility, the potentialities of his own spirit that he had succeeded in instilling in his sons? This was such a vigorously supernatural spirit, endowed with such strong human prescience that he was able to create, as if without knowing it, and even beyond his own personal foundations, beyond even his conscious realizations. Whatever the case may have been, and amid so many misfortunes, spiritual father and, in a sense, co-founder of the Religious of the Assumption, founder of the Augustinians and the Oblates of the Assumption, "grandfather," according to the spirit of God, of the Little Sisters of the Assumption, who love to call him that, he was already,

at the end of 1866, as he approached his sixtieth year, the person whom Pius IX had prophetically called: the Patriarch.

IX – Before and During Vatican Council I (1866-1870)

If Father d'Alzon continued to think, for a while longer, that the Congregation of the Oblates could be attached to the Religious of the Assumption, even after their refusal to found a school in Adrianople, he definitely had by now lost that illusion. Sending, first Mother Marie Madeleine and then Mother d'Everlange to the Rochebelle novitiate had been an act of pure friendship on Mother Marie Eugénie's part; she had done so to save Father d'Alzon from an embarrassment for the time being. The founder was well aware of the drawbacks of such an unstable situation. Not being able to depend upon the Religious of the Assumption, the Oblates were now obliged to train their own recruits to assume positions of leadership, and first of all they needed to be directed by a capable superior who had received an education which these good farm girls lacked.

Since 1866, Father d'Alzon had been looking to Marie Correnson, whom he had known as a child, to occupy such a position. A doctor's daughter, who had been well educated, she possessed solid virtues and strong will power. The first time he sounded her out about joining the Oblates and assuming the direction of the community, she had been dead set against the idea of burying herself for life among persons whose social rank was so different from her own. Such a thing was out of the question! The founder was far from seeing in this reaction only an arrogant prejudice, for he knew the importance — within the confines of working shoulder to shoulder in religious life — of an existing community of taste, culture, and thought patterns. He himself, before making this particular

proposal to Marie Correnson, had written to her: "As to your becoming an Oblate yourself, that is another question. I would not want that unless several of you did so who, being of nearly the same social class, would insert yourselves in that small family to do it some good and to receive some from it in return."

For the time being, these hoped-for companions did not appear on the scene. Father d'Alzon nevertheless went ahead with his plan because he knew what Marie Correnson was capable of when it came to sacrifice. His letter of reply to her refusal was couched in very delicate terms. In it, he reminded her that our Lord had not been loath to take on our humanity and that the apostles among whom he lived were ignorant and very poor people. Had he not lowered himself more than would Marie Correnson in sharing the lives of decent mountain girls? Marie Correnson relented because she was a generous person and the sort of woman who never backed away once she had reached a decision on a given matter. Even the opposition of her parents — who were distressed, not by her religious vocation, for they were committed Catholics, but rather by the nature of her choice — did not deter her. On June 27, 1867, she joined the Oblates, whose

169 superior-general she would later become. On April 18, 1868, it was in Father d'Alzon's hands that she made her profession.

While he attended to the consolidation of the new congregation, Father d'Alzon kept an eye on Rome. Garibaldi was at the city gates. A diocesan committee was formed at Nîmes to send and maintain a group of new defenders to the Pope. Father d'Alzon chaired the committee. He sacrificed not only himself — by praying, through his writings, by preaching for the cause — but also his own assets. "For the Pope," he wrote, "I am willing to ruin myself, if need be. It seems to me that never has a vocation been so beautiful." It was to Father Vincent de Paul Bailly

that he addressed these words, and he offered this same Father Bailly to the Holy See. Though he was in need of religious in so many positions, Father Bailly was sent off as chaplain in November 1867, with the first contingent of volunteers from the diocese which, on its own, would furnish 150 of them. The clash of arms made Father d'Alzon even more mindful of the preparation for the ecumenical council where the question of papal infallibility was to be submitted, among other questions, to a vote of the Fathers.

The same can be said of the Bulgarian mission. Amid his multi-faceted activities, he never lost sight of his key ideas which he held to unconditionally. His concern for the tiny mission of Philippopolis — from which he hoped that Assumption would exert its influence — never wavered. He was eager to send some Oblates to Father Galabert. On April 25, 1868, five sisters embarked at Marseilles, escorted there by Father d'Alzon, Mother Correnson, and Mother Marie Eugénie also who, with great sensitivity, wished thereby to demonstrate the solidarity which existed among the various Assumptionist communities. After arriving at Adrianople, these first missionaries opened, on May 24, in one of the city's suburbs, a school to which would be attached a small boarding school. A second school, in another part of the city, opened on September 20, 1869. These would be followed by a dispensary, a sewing school, and an orphanage. In November, two other Oblates joined the first group.

No better good fortune could have befallen the Oblates of Bulgaria than to be guided by Father Galabert. He had earned the trust of the Latin [Papal] Delegate at Constantinople, Bishop Brunoni, and of the Administrator of the Bulgarians, Bishop Popov, who now depended in large measure upon Father Galabert, who thus exerted considerable influence. At the bishop's request, the Propaganda had appointed the

Assumptionist to be his companion and counselor on his apostolic visits, as well as his consultant theologian. Having been born and raised in the schism before his conversion to Catholicism, the bishop very humbly recognized his inadequate knowledge, especially in matters of canon law. All of this points to the pre-eminent role played by Father Galabert in the Bulgarian Church, which, however, did not prevent him from tending to the most humble of tasks and, as a medical doctor, from treating patients at the Oblate dispensary. He was the complete missionary, as able in dealing with concrete details as he was capable of seeing the larger picture, and his devotion knew no bounds. With this in mind, one can fully understand why Father d'Alzon wrote to him one day as follows: "Allow me to express my tenderness for you in this brief note; I love you a little more each day, and I perhaps do not show you enough all that I feel for you in my heart. A superior cannot, of course, flatter the pride of his religious, but he can assuredly let them understand to what extent he feels that he is their father and their friend when he sees them accept the kind of life to which you are devoting yourself."

If the East was not forgotten, neither was the West. On November 30, 1868, the Assumptionists took over the administration of the orphanage of Father Halluin at Arras.⁹³ For twenty years, this Father Halluin had been admired by the entire region for rounding up orphaned or abandoned children and protecting them from an even worse fate by providing them with a trade. To achieve his goal, his charity knew no bounds. He had stripped himself of his entire inheritance on their behalf, but, more importantly, he had given them his heart without counting the cost. From dawn until a late hour of the evening, he devoted himself to them, and to them alone. He had managed to bring together about four hundred children, housing them in the large buildings of the old minor seminary that he had bought from the diocese. An abandoned child that

he encountered — never by chance, because he was always on the lookout for such children — would be taken in immediately. He was even partial to the most difficult temperaments, the most unprepossessing of them. In short, he was one of God's finest madmen. But, needless to say, having arrived at middle age and now being totally destitute, he had to think of the future of his undertaking. That is when he asked to enter the Assumptionist Congregation, and, as a result, his orphanage would become one of their apostolates. It also meant that Father d'Alzon would have to find fifty thousand francs a year to support it. But the question of money, or the lack thereof, had never been a reason for him to back away. He saw only the holiness of the priest and the magnificence of the work. He acquiesced, and Father Halluin joined the Assumption community.

A few months later, in the spring of 1869, bereavement would once again be visited upon Father d'Alzon when his last surviving sister, Marie de Puységur, became ill in Nîmes. She was stricken suddenly with a malignant fever which, within a few days, left no hope for her survival. She did not want anyone to pray for the alleviation of her suffering: "I do not ask for a decrease of my pain, but only for patience" She asked that no one pray anymore that she be cured; she wanted only the will of God. Her last words to her son Jean were the following: "You will agree with your sister — Alix, the Carmelite — on doing good works. Remember that it is only what one does for God which remains at death." She was all love and, for her brother, the perfect friend. The huge gathering at her funeral gave witness to the good she had done in a lavish manner for those around her.

"The loss of Madame de Puységur," wrote Father d'Alzon to Mother Correnson, "is the one that I perhaps have felt the most grievously in my family. While death was creating more and more emptiness, my heart

relied on poor Marie, and when she was no longer here, I remained all alone from that point of view. Fortunately, God has given me my Assumption family, and you, my daughter, know what you mean to me.” At Lavagnac, Father d’Alzon could now conjure up only shadows. His highly sensitive nature could not do otherwise but dwell on funereal thoughts. But to be downcast, to be diminished? Not at all. The date of the Council was fast approaching. He was due to accompany Bishop Plantier to Rome. For him it was like a call to arms. He rose to his feet and, although wounded, rushed nonetheless into battle.

Father d’Alzon arrived in Rome on November 6, 1869. On the threshold of his sixties, he was the same person he had always been, even in his student days, with a single-mindedness which never faltered. What had he been doing in Rome back in 1834 and 1835 if not consolidating within himself Lamennais’s teaching of the early years — defense of the Church, rallying around the Chair of Peter — and then detaching himself from the fallen Lamennais, at the cost of a painful crisis of conscience, in order to remain faithful to the Church and its head? His very vocation to the priesthood, and then to religious life, was born of that idea, at once impassioned and considered, which had possessed him in his youth: to serve, to defend in every venue the Catholic, apostolic, and Roman Church, since it alone held the keys to the Kingdom of God. Throughout the intervening years, that program had dominated his entire life and provided the explanation for everything else; he had even made of this the rule of his Congregation.

He had always felt and breathed with the Church. He had so strong a sense of this that he very often promoted reforms which in France anticipated certain Roman guidelines. Such was the case when he adopted the Roman liturgy and Gregorian chant for his institute and, at the philosophical and theological levels, the thorough study of Saint

Thomas Aquinas, the same approach Leo XIII would later recommend with great insistence. In his struggle against Gallicanism, Father d'Alzon relentlessly denounced the subtle ambiguity which led to recognizing in the Pope the doctor rather than the supreme legislator. From the verities taught by the Pope, Father d'Alzon used to say, to the laws which proceed from them, the link is evident. Consequently, he wished for an encyclical which would make this point more explicit and impose it upon the Church. He had even solicited as much from Pius IX in May 1855, and from that interview he had come away with the decision to orient his congregation toward the knowledge and defense of the holy canons." In militating for religious freedom, it was again largely Gallicanism that he was fighting against. Under the Second Empire, when the same danger had appeared once again, Father d'Alzon had continued to counter the takeover of the clergy by the French State, which Lamennais had vehemently denounced during the Restoration. Before that time, if he had fervently hailed the young Revolution of 1848, it was because it had appeared to him to be doing away with the excessive hold which the State maintained over the clergy.

All of this needs to be remembered to understand that for Father d'Alzon the year of the Council represented the solemn culmination of the ideas and feelings that he had always promoted enthusiastically and with great lucidity. The scope of the event being prepared was clear to him in its fullest extent. Nothing proves this better than the note, written a month after his arrival in Rome and destined for his Oblates: "When one studies attentively the goal of the Council," he wrote, "it becomes evident that it intends especially to restore the whole supernatural order brought to earth by Our Lord. It is attacked by lack of belief, naturalism, rationalism, and socialism. To unbelief, the Church wants to oppose the principles of faith; to naturalism, the entire panoply of supernatural aids

and hopes; to rationalism, the unshakeable foundation of divine authority, fortified by the doctrine of papal infallibility; to socialism, the more perfect notion of social principles such as those communicated by the great Christian society: the Church.”

From all of this, Father d'Alzon drew the following lessons for the usage of his Oblates: “From the promulgation of the infallibility of the Pope, there rigorously follow: 1 - the necessity to attach oneself with the very core of one's being to that imperishable center of the Church; 2 - the privilege, no less great, of serving it suitably in order to extend the reign of Our Lord.”

It was in that state of mind that he saw Pius IX in a first audience on November 10. We know what the Pope was for him. Service to and love of the Church had always been but one and the same thing as service to and love of the Pope in Father d'Alzon's mind and heart. To the Pontiff, he had vowed unconditional obedience, even when the Pope's guidelines or wishes did not square — as had happened — with Father d'Alzon's personal preferences. This line of conduct had doubtless been in part the cause of the cooling of his relationship with Montalembert. It was at the height of the Council, on February 28, 1870, that Montalembert, with Louis Veuillot in mind, attacked those “lay theologians of absolutism who began by trampling our liberties at the feet of Napoleon III and then sacrificed justice and truth and the judgment of history, in a holocaust to the idol they have erected at the Vatican.” Father d'Alzon had never made an idol of the Pope, but he did see in him the successor of Peter, the delegate of Christ's authority, and as such, the center, the incarnation of unity; from this he had drawn the conclusions in which all his powers of intelligence and feeling were engaged at one and the same time.

In addition, there existed between Pius IX and Father d'Alzon a man-to-man affection, an instinctive affinity, a reasoned admiration and also

— the term is not too strong — a veritable intimacy of thought and feeling. It is easy to imagine that Pius IX, sometimes exasperated by the old foxes, subtle diplomats, and insidious intriguers who swarmed about the Vatican, as they do in all centers of government, must have enjoyed being able to relax and feel secure and joyful with someone like Father d’Alzon, so upright, magnificently ingenuous, innately disinterested, who, in a word, was like an open book. And, especially, the Pope knew what a chivalrous servant of the Holy See Father d’Alzon was, and the attachment he felt for the Pope himself as a person. Pius IX could even confide, in him at least, without reservation, and often did not hesitate to do so, even going so far as to share secret information with him.

Father d’Alzon even saw the Pope twice in a single day on November 23. Nothing has been divulged concerning these conversations. But it may be that they contain the key to Father d’Alzon’s activity throughout the Council which went far beyond his official function as a theologian attached to Bishop Plantier. His exertions were of such a nature that it was supposed, with good reason, although no concrete proof exists, that he had received some special mission⁹⁴ from the Pope.

He resided at the French seminary called Santa Chiara. This too can be linked with his “Romanness”. . . for just who was at the origin of this seminary if not Father d’Alzon himself who, dining one day in 1852 with Bishop de Ségur, auditor of the Rota, Bishop Mathieu, the future Cardinal, and Fr. Régis, a Trappist, invited them to bring about the foundation of that seminary? It was an old idea of his; even as a student for the priesthood in Rome, he had already suggested it to Lamennais who had dissuaded him. Félicité had written to him then, on May 28, 1834: “A seminary must belong to someone; it must come under the authority of one or more bishops. On whom would it depend, to whom would belong the one you are talking about to me? It could not come under the direct

jurisdiction of the Pope, because then how could it be a French seminary? As for the French bishops," Lamennais had added, "assuming that some of them would go along with such a project, whom would they put in charge of its execution, if not men of their choosing? As to the choice, on whom would it fall?... At best we would have a second edition of what we already have. The only difference might be that there would occur a merger of the small-mindedness, the inconveniences, and the miseries of both countries."

But Father d'Alzon's idea had remained alive, surviving the opinion of a disillusioned Lamennais. The proposal he had made to his eminent table companions of 1852 carried the day and, at their suggestion, some bishops had invited the Holy Spirit Fathers to bring it to fruition. This had taken place in 1853 along the lines set out by Father d'Alzon: "A French seminary where students would come to acquire, along with the treasures of the sacred sciences, a love for the Apostolic See, as well as the fervor to combat the unhealthy ideas of Gallicanism, Jansenism, and rationalism."

It is no wonder then that Father d'Alzon felt very much at home at Santa Chiara. In addition, it was a center for invaluable, often contradictory, information, where gossip overlapped reliable intelligence. If silence, that exemplary expression of prudence, reigned at the bishops' table, that was not the case at the one which Father d'Alzon livened up both with his overall views, which he delivered at rapid-fire speed, and with his cracking of jokes in typical Southern French fashion.

The Council fathers were split into two camps. On the matter of pontifical infallibility, Bishop Pie, who had already partly set forth the propositions on faith, led the partisans of infallibility along with Bishop Plantier. Bishop Dupanloup and Archbishop Darbois of Paris were among those who contested its timeliness. It goes without saying that Father

d'Alzon sided with the first camp. He had always fought side by side with Cardinal Gousset, Bishop de Salinis, Bishop Pie, Bishop Parisis, Dom Guéranger, Abbé Gaume, Father Combalot, Du Lac, Veuillot. Veuillot himself was in Rome where his obdurate presence was causing a great stir and provoking the no-less-vehement temper of Bishop Dupanloup. Father d'Alzon frequently saw Louis Veuillot. He pointed out to him what was most interesting in the official documents of the Council, as well as in what was being published about them. Father d'Alzon had the ability to see at a glance, the power of assimilation, the aptitude to be selective which, in that immense buzzing beehive that was Vatican Rome that year, enabled him to grasp everything at once and retain what was essential.

Regarding the ordinary sessions of the Council, Father d'Alzon was kept informed by Father Galabert who had accompanied Bishop Popov to Rome. The theologians of the bishops could not attend these sessions, but Father Galabert had been exempted from the rule because he was needed to translate for Bishop Popov and other Eastern bishops what was being said in Latin which they did not understand. That information from Father Galabert was invaluable to Father d'Alzon, but there were also those countless bits of information which he gleaned, day after day, here, there, and everywhere, from this or that person. He had numerous connections among the French. Almost all the bishops of France were his friends or persons he knew well, as were many of the theologians who accompanied them. Through Cardinal Manning and Bishop Mermillod, he had contacts within the English and the Swiss episcopacies. As for the Roman world itself, he was well acquainted with it.

Moreover, many came to him; he was in great demand; they even fought over him. He was objectionable to no one because he was devoted beyond all measure — lively, efficient, and sparkling. Because he mingled in everything, was active everywhere, he was humorously called *"la*

mouche du coche" [the stagecoach fly].⁹⁵ He acknowledged the epithet with good grace and even said it of himself. In point of fact, his activity was mind-boggling. A letter from him of December 1869 gives us an idea of what his days were like:

This was my life yesterday. I said Mass, had breakfast, and left for Saint Peter's in the coach of the Bishop of Rodez. A general assembly was in session. A half-hour later, I went to see a friend, to consult some books; from there to Veillots. Not finding him there, I gave my information to his sister. I returned home, wrote a letter, and ate after shaving and reciting my office. I read your letter and then went to see if the bishops had returned. I was given a small folio volume to read during the evening. I thought I could hide away. Nothing doing, the Bishop of Versailles called for me, so I accompanied him. Confound it! Then Veillot arrived. I stayed with him for an hour at the residence of the Bishop of Nîmes. Ah! now I can breathe. No way! Monsieur de Cabrières came to my room to write up a petition to the Academy and provided me with a very witty discourse on the paintings of Claude Lorrain, but one that I did not need. He left; an embassy attaché arrived to speak to me about the Spanish bishops. I had not yet got rid of him than Bishop Mermillod sent his servant to fetch me. I went to wait for him at the Ecclesiastical Academy. "My dear friend," he told me, "I will provide you with a carriage; you will go to Cardinal Pitra's and from there to the General of the Dominicans; and then you will come to bring me their opinions." I hastened to Pitra, who knew nothing, and from there to Father Jeandel who had not prepared anything, before returning to Bishop Mermillod. A bore got hold of me. I got rid of him by suggesting that Mermillod go on up. He would have chatted with me until all hours, but I wanted to eat. I turned him over to the bore and came home; everyone was at table. I quickly went to my quarters after having told my bishop the object of my errand. I locked myself in and at 11 p.m. said my office.

And so it went.... At first sight, one could get the impression of much useless ado, at least in part, but no. It was Father d'Alzon's way of doing things which puts us off the track. Though some visits were fruitless, which was inevitable, and some conversations futile, which he notes as such, for the most part these were encounters from which his nimble mind was able to extract some marrow. They served to strengthen the case for infallibility and to thwart the adversaries' maneuvers. He listened

a great deal, and though he also spoke a lot, he only said what he wanted to express. He was effusive of manner, in southern fashion, but he remained very secretive as to substance. Moreover, he was not only the relay-er of information, the go-between who was prized by all; the breadth of his theological knowledge, and particularly his mastery of the matters being debated at the Council, enabled him to contribute positively to the extra-conciliar work where the interventions intended for the assembly of the Fathers were being prepared. He certainly did a great deal to ensure that the infallibilist majority populated the principal delegations.

Father d'Alzon's positive contributions can only be sensed in light of a few letters: "Rome," wrote Father himself, "holds for me at this moment an immense interest, but because of my position, I cannot talk about it, even to priests with whom I am closely linked." From the depths of such discretion, one fact emerges, nevertheless: in February 1870, authorized by the Presidents of the Council, perhaps even commissioned by them to do so, he organized an international press service. Its purpose was to react against certain tendentious news bulletins which were in circulation everywhere, and which were interpreting — in a light unfavorable to the Church — some secret documents, fraudulently released to specific embassies and published. Its goal was also to give an authentic view of the facts regarding the Council. A note, which Bishop Mermillod drafted later, highlights the role of Father d'Alzon in this undertaking. "The most eminent men," it stated, "of England, Germany, the United States, France, Spain, and Italy contributed to that effort. Father d'Alzon was certainly one of its most intelligent and devoted workers, and his news bulletins always bore the stamp of true Catholicism, that firmness of doctrine and that distinction of style which made them acceptable even to adversaries."

Meanwhile, time was moving on. The minority opinion among the Council Fathers, sensing that it would not be able to prevent the *schema* of infallibility from being voted upon when it came up for discussion, had adopted — following Bishop Dupanloup's example — a whole series of stalling tactics and, especially during the sessions themselves, were using obstructionist maneuvers, hoping thereby to delay its introduction into the debates on the Constitution of the Church — which included the definition of infallibility — so that it would be postponed *sine die*. The bishops were known to be concerned about not staying away too long from the affairs of their dioceses. By making the debate drag on, they hoped to reach the season when the heat in Rome would render conciliar work impracticable. This approach, handled with perseverance and finesse, seemed to be bearing fruit. In March, the Church Constitution was still not listed on the order of the day. An international committee of the majority — Father d'Alzon was the only priest to be a member of it — was constituted to speed up its placement on the agenda. The committee voted to send a petition to the Resolutions Commission on this matter. Father d'Alzon went to incredible lengths to obtain signatures. In three or four days, he had obtained 180. Bishop Dupanloup, who saw in that action an "impassioned haste on this most delicate matter," instigated a counter-petition.

At this point, a controversy arose between Bishop Dupanloup and Father d'Alzon. In a public statement entitled "Public Response to the Most Reverend Deschamps, bishop of Malines," the bishop of Orléans touched upon "the provocations made from the height of the pulpit by some vicars-general in their cathedrals." Vicars-general...the plural was meant to cover up a singular. Knowing that the statement was aimed at him, Father d'Alzon replied in an open letter dated March 29. He reminded his readers that from the pulpit of the Nîmes cathedral he had

developed only the following theme: Report on the remarkable appropriateness of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, which has been defined, to that of the infallibility of the Pope, which should be. “Such are, Your Excellency, the provocations which vicars-general permit themselves... at about the same time that they allow themselves to say, but not in the pulpit, that you aspire to become the Napoleon of Catholicism.” The taunt was sharp and characteristic of the man who had one day uttered the following statement: “Our Lord said of certain moderates: Since you are neither hot, nor cold, I shall spit you from my mouth. I adore moderation, but have little sympathy for it when it has on Our Lord the effect of an emetic.”

The atmosphere in Rome was such as to invite confrontations because nerves had been rubbed raw. The question of placing the Constitution of the Church in the order of the day was unending. It passed through highs and lows, as well as constant turmoil, which Father d’Alzon’s correspondence echoed. The Pope and his entourage kept silent because they did not want to exert pressure on the Council.

However, Pius IX, without taking action on the substance, could not allow the deliberate procrastination to persist, for it risked rendering the Council powerless. On April 19, in response to a step taken by five French bishops, friends of Father d’Alzon, Pius IX called together the Presidents of the Council who, caught between the contradictory measures of the majority and the minority, were floating from one to the other. He urged them to move forward, putting aside all maneuvering. On April 23, Father d’Alzon accompanied three bishops to see the Holy Father, bearing petitions which had garnered 220 signatures. On April 27, Cardinal Bilio, president of the Commission on Faith, announced that the debates on the Constitution of the Church, were going to come first. To cut short the controversies which were painful and could damage the peace of minds

and consciences, Chapter XI of the aforesaid Constitution, which treated the infallibility question, would even be moved up to be discussed before any of the others. There was no doubt that Father d'Alzon had been one of the artisans of this auspicious solution.

Only a few days before, Bishop Plantier had left Rome, stricken by the illness which, since his arrival, had prevented him from playing the eminent role to which his personal worth, as well as his service to the Holy See, had destined him. He designated Father d'Alzon to act as his proxy. That appointment, flattering because of the terms Bishop Plantier employed in supporting it, did not change anything in the intensity of Father's activity, but granted him certain prerogatives which the vicar-general of Nîmes chose not to use, having no taste for honors and their public display.

He was himself broken with fatigue, and his nervous system had gone to pieces. The acute dizzy spells he experienced made him wonder if the illness he had suffered from, sixteen years earlier, was not about to start over again. His intense sensitivity was affected by this campaign, sometimes underhanded, sometimes violent, whose every vicissitude he had experienced in all the fibers of his being and which attacked what this son of the Church cherished most: "People claim," he wrote, "that it is the exuberance of my nature which brings on this immense sadness; I prefer to think it is my love for the Church. One is not capable of suffering here below unless one is capable of loving; and as I have often said before, a stump has never suffered."

His battle was not over. From May 13 when, following upon a report from Bishop Pie, the general debate on the Constitution of the Church began, to July 18 when infallibility was proclaimed, a text of the definition had to be upheld with those in the minority defending themselves inch by inch and trying to weaken its meaning and reduce its scope. The members

of the majority were themselves far from always agreeing on the wording. In his vigorous style, which raced along as fast as he did, Father d'Alzon set forth the problem clearly. "How can you expect us to be ready? Yesterday, I spent two hours in a meeting of the bishops; we are not in agreement on the wording. I will tell you that Cardinal Bilio has adopted one...and now no one is happy with it. At the very moment that I was picking up my pen, two of the Pope's theologians were discussing a new formula in my room. Each word is made, unmade, remade; each sentence is made, unmade, remade. We add, we remove, and we're never satisfied. The problem is: we want to define the subject of infallibility without touching upon the object *ad ambitum* [to its fullest extent], otherwise we'd be here until December. But to find a formula which makes the distinction between the subject and the object and clarifies the first without touching the second is as difficult as confessing the devil. There are incredible scenes among the theologians."

This letter was dated June 20. Until July 18, when infallibility would at last be proclaimed, Father d'Alzon's correspondence shows that he was more active than ever, coming and going, as he had previously, from one to the other and rendering significant services. It was the good fortune of the majority to have at its disposal such a force of nature and of supernature. Up to the last moment, new problems arose. The outcome of the final vote was not in doubt — the infallibilists would definitely prevail, but they hoped to avoid the effect that too large a minority would produce. On the very eve of the proclamation, the departure of Bishop Dupanloup and the other fifty-four opponents, planned in agreement with the Pope, was going to allow a moral unanimity to be made manifest, one worthy of the great measure which was about to be enacted.

On July 18, 1870, at the side of his battle companion, Louis Veuillot, Father d'Alzon attended the grandiose ceremony at Saint Peter's which brought to their highest level the emotions which had constantly uplifted him during the nine months which had just passed. Never once, even in the midst of the negotiations and the rough patches, had he lost sight of the grandeur of the goal being pursued. For him, the supernatural value of the stake had always eclipsed the inevitable human component, too human in fact, and often of quite mediocre quality, of the debates which he had witnessed. On that day, amid the booming of the organs matched by the thunderclaps of a violent storm, he felt that Gallicanism, his old enemy, had disappeared, that the primacy of the Roman Pontiff, confirmed in his infallibility, was now established forever in the universal Church.

He quickly departed for Nîmes on the evening of July 18, leaving behind him a shining light, but from the German border bloody clouds were rising in the sky. War was imminent.

X – The Campaigns in Favor of Catholic Action (1870-1875)

At the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War, Father d'Alzon did all he could for the war effort. Five of his religious left for the army as volunteer chaplains: Fathers Emmanuel and Vincent de Paul Bailly, Etienne Pernet, Alexis Dumazer, and Augustin Gallois. He converted his young men's club into a field hospital where the Oblates of the Assumption would care for wounded or sick soldiers. He supported the war effort with his own money by sending supplies for the soldiers to his chaplains, despite the needs requested of him from all sides. In the pulpit of the cathedral, he became the echo of both a dejected France and the city of Nîmes which mourned its mobilized citizens whose ranks were decimated very early on. Each day, in the college chapel, where he preached every morning, Mass was offered for the victims of the war; for he considered that one of his most sacred duties was to console hearts and brace the spirits of those around him.

Then came Sedan,⁹⁶ the fall of the Empire, and profound public unrest which followed the proclamation of the Republic. Nîmes was not exempt from all this for it contained a large working-class, hot-headed population. It was feared that the city would fall into the hands of revolutionary elements. On September 4, 1870, the seething crowd spilled dangerously into the streets. The city's administrative structure having collapsed with the regime itself, the prefecture and the mayor's office were up for grabs. Father d'Alzon saved the day by singling out the man required at such a time: Demians, a courageous Catholic, who had been his old friend for the past thirty years. Father d'Alzon convinced him

to take the situation in hand. Demians addressed the wavering crowd from the balcony of the City Hall. He was acclaimed mayor of Nîmes, while Laget, a Protestant, a brave and wise man also, replaced the prefect on his own authority. Thanks to these two energetic men, peace was preserved in Nîmes up to the war's end.

And then, to their convent in Nîmes came the Religious of the Assumption, their superior-general, Mother Marie Eugénie, with her novices, and a few professed nuns. They had succeeded in leaving Paris before the Prussian siege of the city began. From November 5, 1870, to March 20, 1871, Father d'Alzon gave fifty-four lectures on religious life to these sisters. He did not improvise them; on the contrary, he prepared them carefully, and they count among his best work. No misfortune of the moment, no external events, however ardently he devoted himself to them, could divert Father d'Alzon from what he considered to be essential: the coming of the Kingdom of God.

More than ever, his powerful personality and the scope of his activity brought him to the attention of the government. On May 16, 1871, Jules Simon, minister for Religion, wrote to Monsieur de Champvans, who had been officially appointed as prefect of the Gard — replacing Monsieur Laget, the acting prefect — asking for his opinion of Father d'Alzon whom he would have liked to propose for the episcopacy. Before sending his reply to the minister, Monsieur de Champvans communicated confidentially with Father d'Alzon on his proposed elevation. It was the third time that Father d'Alzon found himself in this situation, and for the third time he refused. He would not consider himself released from the vow he had pronounced years before at the Consolata unless it be by a formal order of the Pope. "I implore you," he wrote to Monsieur de Champvans, "not to encourage what some well-meaning friends could

want for me, it being my firm resolution to remain on the sidelines, not in order to sulk, but because of a desire to be useful.”

To Numa Baragnon, an alumnus of the College of Nîmes, who had been appointed as a Deputy to the National Assembly from the Gard, he was more outspoken: “Jules Simon had someone ask me whether I wanted to be a bishop. Under no circumstances whatever do I want that, and it seems to me that enough people will be willing to accept so that they will leave me alone on that score. Without appearing to know my secret, you could do me the favor of saying that you know me well enough...to state that I would send anyone packing who spoke to me about it.”

He had many other irons in the fire. On May 15, 1871, he had founded, on his estate of Lavagnac, at Montmau, an orphanage for the children of farmers which two Assumptionist brothers would look after. But, more importantly, at that same time, he was preparing one of the outstanding works of his life, one that would influence all the others. His Congregation had suffered from the start, and still did, from a dearth of vocations. It was already a quarter of a century old, and it still had only forty or so religious, and the majority of these were lay brothers and young men who had not yet been ordained. The providential idea of founding an aluminate had come to him through a proposal by a priest from the Province of Savoy, Father Desaire.

An aluminate was to be an educational establishment where children attracted to the priestly life would be expressly prepared for it while pursuing their studies. Since rich children, the students of his College of Nîmes, for example, were acting like the young man of the Gospel who had great possessions, Father d’Alzon wanted only poor children in the future aluminate which he conceived not as the minor seminary of today, which is more like a high school from which one hopes for vocations, nor

as an apostolic school, exclusively oriented toward the missions, but as a truly clerical training institution, even monastic in many of its characteristics, which would supply trained religious manpower to congregations as well as the secular clergy of France itself, in addition to the missions, as always, Father d'Alzon acted for the general interest of the Church. The vocations would not be oriented to his institute alone. The young man, formed in his aluminate, would go forth to serve God wherever his aspirations called him.

The essence of Father d'Alzon's thought is to be found in a simple and beautiful text that he would compose two or three years later: "In order to form those who aspire to the priesthood, one needs to communicate, it seems to me, a fully sacerdotal life and for that reason impart ecclesiastical mores to them. A great bishop once said that it is not sufficient for a priest to be a man of God: he must be a man of the Church. He must have the habits of the Church, its mores, its virtues, even its joys and sadness; he must be imbued with the aroma of the sanctuary; and for that to happen, to have its thoughts, inspirations, its doctrine in superabundance.... What we want to communicate above all, is divine life.... We would want to make the blood of Jesus Christ flow in its greatest fullness into souls.... Ah! who will give us the wherewithal to mold our children in order to turn them into warriors against Satan and the world, doctors for wounded and sick souls, friends of the working class where so much hatred against all that is just, good, and true is accumulated today, intellectuals to counter modern science, and, in the face of modern degradations, characters so strongly tempered that they would not be satisfied with achieving commonplace virtue, but who would have the generous ambition of attaining every perfection for themselves and the aspiration to proselytize others?"

Thus can we appreciate the loftiness of Father d'Alzon's conception for the new foundation; he was a man used to summits. Such a formation of souls excluded most persons. "Influence," wrote Father, "must not be imposed, but inspired.... That is the reason for limiting the number of alumnists. To mold them, we need a family atmosphere, and find me a familial setting with two hundred, one hundred, or even fifty students! With more than thirty, it is almost impossible not to have recourse to punishment. But in the formation of souls as we envision it, punishment is excluded."

As for the formation of the mind, it was not simply a matter of preparing young men to obtain a Bachelor of Arts degree. The intellectual life also would be that of the Church. "Religious studies," formulated the founder, "must occupy an almost exclusive place, especially the study of Latin and Greek, the two languages of the Church."

Such was the vision Father d'Alzon had conceived. At the end of a novena of Masses he had made to obtain vocations, Father Desaire came to see him and informed him that in the Savoy Province, at a thousand meters in altitude, there was an abandoned property composed of a house with a chapel, which had been a shrine dedicated to Notre-Dame-des-Châteaux, where the people of the region came to pray during the summer. The proprietor, added Father Desaire, would cede it to the Assumptionists as long as they promised that Mass would be said at the shrine year round. During Easter week of 1871, Father Emmanuel Bailly sent by Father d'Alzon with full powers of attorney, went to the site with Father Desaire. Three towers in ruins, inhabited by an eagle and birds of the night, indicated where the château of the princes of Beaufort had stood. As for the house, it was dilapidated; the same was true of the shrine. No matter! Poverty is the mother of the works of God; that harsh solitude, the poor soil of the meadows, that sparse grove of fir trees were

in harmony with the austere, hard life that Father d'Alzon wanted for his alumnists. In addition, the region, poor also and deeply religious, could furnish quantities of vocations. Basic repairs were immediately begun, and on August 28, Father d'Alzon inaugurated the aluminate with a Mass. There were six students, joined by six more a few weeks later.

The origin of the Assumption alumnates lies in that foundation of Notre-Dame-des-Châteaux for which Father d'Alzon always had a soft spot. In 1875 he wrote to Numa Baragnon: "You understand that this work is worth the lives of several men, and I would be very happy if God saw fit to take the ruins of mine as the prelude to that gigantic task. That is why I stay on my crag among three feudal towers, at the feet of which one occasionally finds spearheads from the Middle Ages. We have built a house where children are preparing to become pastors, missionaries, and religious. Divine strength and vigor seem to me to be circulating in their veins, and the spectacle they provide for me seems a thousand times more beautiful than that which one can enjoy from the top of all the great Sees of the earth." Thinking of those humble origins, he would also write again: "God has wanted that the future of the Congregation be especially contained within the alumnates. We were not thinking of them three or four years ago. The idea was sown like a foreign seed by a bird of passage; but thanks be to God, it has borne fruit."

In fact, that is exactly how it had happened. A papal brief dated September 18, 1873, would bless the work of the alumnates to which Pius IX himself gave the name of Notre-Dame-des-Vocations. In the single month of November 1874, three new alumnates would open: at Nice, at Arras, and at Le Vigan, to which would be added in 1879 one at Mauville in the Pas-de-Calais. They would be, like Notre-Dame-des-Châteaux, establishments at the secondary school level. We observe here a pedagogical viewpoint of Father d'Alzon, one upon which he never

compromised. At the College of Nîmes, he wanted the grammar school students and the humanities students of the upper divisions to be totally separated. He proceeded in the same fashion in the new foundation. In the early years, that meant that the alumnists of the humanities classes had to move about a great deal, but soon they would be settled in two locations: Ales, in the South of France, and Clairmarais, in the North.

Through these alumnates, Father d'Alzon was the first to have responded to a wish expressed by the Council of Trent [1545-1563] concerning diocesan minor seminaries, and he did so thoroughly thanks to the scope of his concept regarding the internal administration of the alumnates and especially the formation of the alumnists. He thereby demonstrated to the various congregations an irreplaceable method of recruitment, which many would adopt during his lifetime, and almost all of them afterward, calling them juniorates or apostolic schools, with the very great difference, however, that the other congregations would use them only for themselves, while Father d'Alzon left every path open to his alumnists to opt either for the regular clergy or for the secular one.

That characteristic of disinterestedness was in Father d'Alzon's very nature. In his eyes, his congregation had value only through its unconditional service to the Church. Now, this Church, which was the soul of his soul, as he saw it in those years, was more than ever being threatened. That is truly why he wanted to provide the Church with a clergy equal to its needs — in numbers and quality. He had considered and reconsidered the political events which had taken place after the Vatican Council in light of the higher interests of the Church, for though they had affected Rome they had also impinged upon France.

In Rome, the defeat of France had left the temporal power of the Church at the mercy of the Italian revolutionaries; in fact, this power was no longer a reality, for the Pope was a self-imposed prisoner at the

Vatican. Within the framework of a comprehensive Catholic action, Father d'Alzon envisaged a vigorous and organized claim — supported by the Catholics of France's legislature, the *Assemblée Nationale*— for the Pope to recover a zone of temporal power sufficient to guarantee his freedom of action and spiritual government. But he would quickly have to forego a personal initiative in that direction. The wave of petitions presented by the bishops to the *Assemblée* was drowned in a clever parliamentary maneuver, to which Bishop Dupanloup had lent a hand. At least, France had left only a *chargé d'affaires* in Rome, which was a form of official protest. But now the French government named an ambassador to Rome, known, moreover, for his anticlericalism. A second wave of petitions followed, but this was sabotaged by the Catholic deputies who failed to give them their support. In a letter to *L'Univers*, published on April 7, 1872, Father d'Alzon protested against their attitude.

Veillot now joined the fray. The fierce confrontations of the 1850s on that matter began all over again. Pius IX was not pleased with this state of affairs for, although he had not accepted the *fait accompli* and had never let any opportunity go by to let this be known, he did not want it to be a new source of division among French Catholics. In a public audience on April 13, 1872, the Pope reproached both opposing camps, the one for its lack of humility, the other for its lack of charity. The latter blame was aimed particularly at Veillot although it did not name him. Veillot consulted Father d'Alzon who answered in a forthright manner; according to him, it was when it was at its most painful to one's nature that obedience to the Holy See acquired all its value and its worth as an example. "What to do?" he wrote to Veillot. "Submit, sincerely, loyally.... Your submission will be the strongest proof of your faith in your principles." And he added these words, so touching in their affectionate delicacy: "Don't make Pius IX's burden any heavier. In the parable of the

Prodigal Son, the elder son was angry that the fatted calf had been killed for a wretch in rags who had committed so many foolish things. What did the father say to him? *'Omnia mea tua sunt.'* ['All that I have is yours.'] Understand then that under such a tender disapproval, there is the silent prayer of a father entreating you to help him strengthen the return of sons who, themselves, have not always consoled him, and they know this to be all too true." On April 16, *L'Univers* published Louis Veuillot's act of submission.

Of course, Father d'Alzon had aligned himself with the order from Rome, i.e., to claim steadfastly and with dignity the Church's right, through a minimum of temporal power, to safeguard the freedom of its spiritual magisterium, but to abstain from polemics and to avoid an aggressive attitude. Even so, the field of combat left open to Father d'Alzon was immense. The founder of Assumption, whose constitutions included a fourth vow — that of extending the Kingdom of Jesus Christ — decided to elaborate on this in order to make it more precise. The vow would now include toiling at whatever works the Pope would propose in order to battle against the Revolution, as well as Freemasonry which appeared to Father d'Alzon as having been the deliberate and organized forerunner of the Revolution. Under that somewhat vague term, which covered too many things, there is no doubt that Father d'Alzon was taking aim at secularism, the worst abettor in the subversion of Christian society. Deprived of the word which was not yet in general use, it would seem that this "ism" and its nefarious effects are what he was seeking to thwart. He conceived the antidote to secularism in the guise of a League for the Defense of the Rights of the Church which would open y battle Masonry, that secret organization, and propose to restore society based upon the Syllabus and the Constitutions of the recent Vatican Council. First of ill, he proposed an energetic and recurring claim for freedom,

especially that of higher education and that of association which, in practice, are the only ones which can assure respect for the rights of God. All conceivable means of action were envisaged by Father d'Alzon, from pious societies and the Catholic press to the creation of independent universities.

To launch the idea of this League and make known its program, Father d'Alzon resumed publication of the *Revue de l'Enseignement chrétien* in May 1871 in which he printed his call to action. The idea was generally well received because all Catholics felt the need for such an organization. But the project did not take shape. Its program collided with diocesan particularities, the existence of already-established diverse leagues — dispersed and lacking in intellectual vigor — but tending toward an analogous goal. What Father d'Alzon was not able to organize successfully on a national scale, he did at least accomplish at the regional level. All the elements which ensure success were in place at Nîmes: first of all, a leader recognized by all, Father d'Alzon himself, and also the network of flourishing and fervent institutions which he had created or sustained over a long period of years. By dint of meetings, lectures sometimes grouping two thousand listeners and which were held from November 1871 to February 1872, to begin again in 1873, he was able to constitute a diocesan Catholic committee at the religious and social levels from which all politics were excluded. At the head of the committee were the six pastors of the city and Father d'Alzon himself. Forty or so lay persons formed the action committee which met each week under Father d'Alzon's presidency. From that two-pronged administrative organization, instructions for action reached down to Catholic clubs whose foundation by Father d'Alzon dated back to 1868 and which, by 1872, had increased to twenty-two, in Nîmes alone. The founder of Assumption had thereby given an uncommon example. If every diocese had been organized and

brought along like that of Nîmes, the National Catholic Federation could have been established a half-century earlier.

The general orientation of the movement was clearly pointed toward social issues. It is, as a matter of fact, a notable early example of such movements. At Moulins-à-Vent, close to the city, a hundred or so young workers frequented a young men's club founded by the parish. Father d'Alzon often went there. With his sharp eye, which very much looked beyond his time and toward the future, he realized that there was much more to be done there than to occupy their spare time in a wholesome manner. An apostolate of the workingman by young workers themselves was what he urged them to get involved in. In the course of long conversations with them, he instructed these young workers in his views and methods; he also trained several young priests who came with him to Moulins-à-Vent. Father d'Alzon was intensely attentive to all aspects of the working-class question. He would have liked to see a revival of the guilds which took into account the evolution of attitudes, and, if he argued against the separation of employers' organizations from those of the workers, it was because he saw only too clearly that socialism would work to set them against one another. The opinions of Father d'Alzon on the question of the working-class were not improvised out of thin air. They resulted from in-depth studies. Among others, he knew Le Play⁹⁷ well and had meditated on his writings.

Along the same lines, he followed, as closely as possible, the experience of worker-groups, but although he approved of their purpose, he did not care for their approach and some of their leanings. He would have the opportunity in 1872, at the *Congrès des oeuvres ouvrières* [Congress of Worker Enterprises] at Poitiers, to rebuke Albert de Mun⁹⁸ and La Tour du Pin⁹⁹ rather sharply on that score. As nearly as one can judge, he especially feared a leveling from below. It was not that he

allowed himself to be drawn along on that point by an antiquated aristocratism. Had he not written in 1869: "My very great conviction is that, for the conversion of people in this era, aristocratic forms, above all else, must be cast aside. We are approaching a democracy whose requirements will be awesome...."? It remains that he was speaking here of aristocratic forms of action and that he had no intention of outlawing, for all that, the fundamental aristocracy of intelligence and culture, of character and virtue which should fittingly constitute a meritocracy within society, including that of the working-class.

The role of such a ruling elite was even his major preoccupation when he was battling for independent higher education. He saw in such a parallel university system — free of government intervention — the principal, perhaps the only truly effective, means of training such an elite. Hence his ardor, indeed his passionate conviction, in advocating on their behalf. From 1871 to 1875, he fought this battle with unrelenting vehemence. In March 1871, he prepared an article published in the *Revue de l'Enseignement chrétien* and widely disseminated under the incendiary title: *Delenda Carthago!* The Carthage needing to be destroyed was the State-run university system. The title itself comes as a surprise, as does the violence of Father d'Alzon's tone, in addition to his peremptory demands. Suppression of the State university system was a great deal to demand, too much in fact, on the basis of what was possible, even reasonable. Father d'Alzon was taking into account here only one factor, but one which haunted him to the point of anguish: secularism, that enemy of a Christian society, which he perceived as insinuating itself everywhere, threatening to render official government-controlled teaching antichristian. In a speech delivered the following July 29, on graduation day at the College of Nîmes, he returned to the attack: "Abolition of the University, establishment of Catholic Universities." All

the same, Father d'Alzon did reach the point of admitting that political reality could not allow itself to be disrupted in that way. Conducted at such a pitch, the campaign would come to nothing but a dead-end. As conservative as the majority of the National Assembly still was, it could not go that far. So Father d'Alzon adjusted his aim.

One must try to understand where he was coming from and not try to explain everything by an excessive rigidity on his part nor by an aggressive intransigence, and we must especially not judge him from the perspective of present-day France. Father d'Alzon had emerged from a time when the State admittedly wanted to keep its monopoly on the educational system and had not consented, except grudgingly, to the relative freedom of education established by the Law of 1850. But, in the final analysis, Father d'Alzon was on the lookout so that this monopoly would not display any sign of undermining the rights of God and the Church. The fall of the Empire, the war, and the Commune¹⁰⁰ had brought about a violent rift. A new, clearly antireligious tendency was taking shape whose danger Father d'Alzon certainly did not overestimate since it resulted for all practical purposes in the anticlerical laws of 1880 and 1903-1906. But, in the final analysis, minds and attitudes had evolved too much for it to have been possible to consider with any seriousness the construction of schools of higher education free of State intervention upon the ruins of the State university system.

Deep down in his heart, Father d'Alzon, who championed every iota of the *Syllabus*, preferred the *Delenda Carthago* approach. But he did not want to lose everything for wanting to win it all. He kept himself informed through his multiple contacts, many of whom occupied key positions within the political world. He moderated his demands to the level of what could feasibly be achieved and presented them to the first Congress of Catholic Committees which was held in Paris from 4 to 7 April 1872. He no

longer insisted upon abolishing the official university system, but sought instead the recognition of a system of higher education unfettered by State oversight and a legal status for it. Broadly speaking, his proposals boiled down to the following: abolition of the monopoly of the State and the baccalaureate degree obligation, Father d'Alzon's *bête noire*; the establishment of independent professional schools; the question as to whether Catholics would have to continue to pay for the professors of their choice in addition to those in State-run schools whose teachings were becoming less and less compatible with their faith; authority granted to private education to award degrees. With this list of requests, which were adopted by the Congress, Father d'Alzon was situating himself squarely within the realm of civil rights, which did not contradict his previous ultimatum, but were more likely to be implemented.

Father d'Alzon would now be given another occasion for effective action. The Alliance of Catholic Schools, which he had long been advocating, had just been formed by a group of priests led by Father Mingasson. Its main purpose was to facilitate the publication and purchase of those classics which were in accord with Christian principles. Also in existence since 1868 was the General Society of Education and Teaching which had accomplished some good work along the same lines. Thanks to Father d'Alzon's initiative, both associations joined with the *Revue de l'Enseignement chrétien* to organize a conference which took place in Paris from 1 to 7 September 1872 and met with remarkable success. The episcopacy was quite largely represented. The principals or delegates of 150 institutions took part. Carefully prepared and well organized, this first Congress of Catholic education proved to be quite useful. Its conclusions and resolutions would furnish a solid base for action by the Catholic deputies in view of a new law on education.

The general secretary for the conference was Father Vincent de Paul Bailly. As for Father d'Alzon, he studiously avoided the limelight, either on the Board or in Commissions. During the general public sessions, he spoke only once. And yet, it was he who had taken the initiative in organizing this congress, and he had inspired it. But he did not want the congress to appear as being solely an Assumptionist affair. Rather, he intended that it be the authentic expression of the Catholic educational milieu in its entirety. His discreet self-effacement cannot be explained otherwise. Moreover, Father d'Alzon also knew that the vigorous activity of the Assumptionists in this regard had aroused some jealousy and had offended some susceptibilities which had upset the powers that be at the archbishopric of Paris.

Father d'Alzon felt the need to keep up the pressure of Catholic opinion on the *Assemblée Nationale*, as on the government in general. Thiers, then head of the government, was not favorable to the proposed law, but since the majority of the deputies had already been won over to him, he used a velvet glove to slow down the law's progress. Meanwhile, in the diocese of Nîmes, Father d'Alzon instigated petition upon petition. For its part, the *Revue de l'Enseignement chrétien* relentlessly pursued the campaign in favor of the law.

In the interval, on January 24, 1872, the *Association de Notre-Dame-de-Salut* [Our Lady of Salvation Association] came into being. A few good Catholic women, under the guidance of the Paris Assumptionists, had decided to work for the salvation of France by organizing public prayers and by raising the moral standards of the working-class. Such, in any case, was its first concept, its initial purpose. This may appear to have been quite a modest goal, even though a salutary one. But Father d'Alzon came by and, immediately, the minuscule foundation, which had seemed destined to remain confined to the chapel of *rue François-Ier*, began to

take wing and soar. He gave a retreat to the group in the spring of that same year, circulars were sent throughout the entire country, and numerous diocesan committees were formed. Father d'Alzon led things at such breakneck speed, he obtained wonderful results so quickly, that by May 17, 1872, the approval of Pius IX, enriched with indulgences, had been obtained for Notre-Dame-de-Salut. And soon, Father d'Alzon could write to his religious: "Resources were needed to encourage several recently founded undertakings on behalf of the working-class; prayers were needed to appease the wrath of God. Atonement through prayer, atonement through intelligent almsgiving, such were the twin thoughts summarized in one word: atonement, the guiding force behind Notre-Dame-de-Salut. Through it, public prayers, so necessary for France, have been organized; by it a profusion of works, languishing for lack of funds, have been revitalized; thanks to it, pilgrimages, the idea for which had developed close to the Association's cradle, these have all received the admirable impetus which will touch the heart of God and which have forced the Mother of our Savior to renew her miracles, restoring to popularity public acts of faith which it was said were no longer part of our customs...."

Father Picard, superior of the Assumptionists in Paris, had played an important role both in the formation as well as the development of the association. He can truly be considered its cofounder. To him, as well as to Father Bailly, is due for the most part the remarkable organization of the pilgrimages of Notre-Dame-de-Salut, particularly the national pilgrimages. On this very matter, Father d'Alzon amused the students of Nîmes by recounting the following anecdote: "I must tell you about an instance where I did not play a brilliant role. Last year, I was thinking that our Fathers should be putting an end to their pilgrimages. The very obstinate Father Picard insisted so much that he extracted from me my

consent to make one more. So we went to our dear Notre-Dame-de-Lourdes. Do you know how many miracles this caravan obtained? Twelve in all! What should we conclude from this? Either that Father Picard had more faith than I did or that he knows how to put it to better use.”

We must be careful not to take that statement too literally. With Father d’Alzon, one must always expect a clever, witty sally. No one more than he realized the spiritual importance of pilgrimages; no one better than he had defined their value for purification, atonement, and as a public act of faith. On this matter, he wrote, “We gave as a mission to the steam of the locomotives, which carried streams of pilgrims to a host of shrines, to purify the air reeking with the stench of immorality.... Pilgrimages...are after all nothing but huge processions, lasting longer and so more efficacious. The Church, through the pious voyages of its children, regains possession of the land belonging to the public as well as the open air: we assert ourselves in broad daylight. Christians who assert themselves are close to being triumphant Christians...”

Besides, how could the entreaties of Father Picard not find in him the ear of an accomplice? Well before the foundation of Notre-Dame-de-Salut, had not Father d’Alzon himself undertaken many pilgrimages with great gusto, in the manner of medieval pilgrims who went to Santiago de Compostella, covering kilometer after kilometer at a breakneck pace, his feet bleeding, his stomach hollow, choosing shrines in the most highly perched places so that the illumination to be found upon their summits was the reward for a rough climb? The students of the Nîmes college that he brought along in his wake knew all too well what it was like. And now that Notre-Dame-de-Salut had been founded, Father d’Alzon, on October 6, 1872, scaled Notre-Dame-de-Bonheur situated at an altitude of 1400 meters [just under a mile], followed by 3,000 persons, and on August 17 of that same year, Notre-Dame-de-Rochefort with 5000 persons at his

heels. On June 23, 1874, he was at Paray-le-Monial with the pilgrims of the dioceses of Nîmes and Montpellier. On August 17, 1874, he led 3,000 people from Nîmes to Lourdes. Everywhere, he deeply impressed the crowds by the faith which literally radiated from him.

In all of this, Father d'Alzon found some compensation for the failure of his proposal to establish a Catholic League. In truth, however, that project was far too ambitious. In January 1870, had not Father d'Alzon written to Father Picard that such a league would be "an association opposed to Freemasonry with Assumption playing, within the scope of its small numbers, the same role against the Revolution that the Jesuits had played three centuries before against the Reformation"? The grandeur of his views was evident, but also their partly chimerical character. To accomplish a program that vast, that radical and dynamic, the unanimity of Catholics could hardly be reasonably counted upon, nor even that of the episcopacy. On the other hand, the goals, undoubtedly grandiose but well defined of the Association of Notre-Dame-de-Salut, were within the realm of possibility. Founded essentially on prayer, it could not do otherwise but unite hearts. Indeed, the impulse given in those years to national prayers was admirable in its fervor and scale. As for the petitions addressed to the government in support of Catholic demands, the number of signatures gathered by the association would attain 1,600,000.

The necessity for a powerful Catholic press in France increasingly dominated Father d'Alzon's thinking. By the end of 1870, he had already written to Father Emmanuel Bailly: "Before you leave Le Vigan, I would like you to draw up the program for a Catholic newspaper to appear on January 1." But the hour of that newspaper had not yet arrived. In addition to the *Revue de l'Enseignement chrétien*, which had rendered such great service at its particular level, the Assumptionists issued on July 12, 1873, the first number of the *Pèlerin*. It was not yet much more than a

modest bulletin, an outgrowth of the work of the pilgrimages, but it would become a well-regarded illustrated weekly magazine [still published today]. In January 1875, it was the turn of *l'Assomption*, a periodical destined to make known the congregation, its past as well as its present. In it, Father d'Alzon published his "*Mémoires d'un ancien*," "a spirited and colorful account of the heroic epoch of the origins of the congregation." These publications with a single specific focus were only a prelude of what was to come. The founder of Assumption would soon encourage his sons to achieve realizations having a much broader scope. In 1874 his sixty-three religious, spread out over fourteen locations, were in charge of ninety-two establishments, fifty-four of which were pursuing different goals!

He himself continued at the same accelerated rhythm to preach, lecture, and give retreats. To that he added the ministry in which he excelled, that of spiritual director. Women penitents of all categories, of all social classes, lay siege to his confessional at the cathedral, where he spent long early-morning hours. On top of all that, since the end of the Council, his duties as vicar-general had become much heavier. Bishop Plantier's health had worsened ever since he had had to leave Rome precipitously. Overcome by illness, he managed to survive only by dint of sheer energy. His heart was failing; there was no possibility of a cure. Although he knew this, Bishop Plantier refused to take a complete rest. However, what he absolutely could not do, he left to Father d'Alzon. Matters went along like this for almost four years, up to that day, May 24, 1875, when Bishop Plantier died suddenly.

Father d'Alzon deeply felt this death which put an end to an affectionate and trusting collaboration of twenty years duration, whose closeness had grown stronger through the years, bolstered by their shared views on essential matters. In 1872 Father d'Alzon had lost his old

friend, Du Lac. The only relatives remaining to him were his de Puységur nephews, and now were disappearing, one by one, the great friendships which had formed his second family, for his heart was naturally inclined to such ties. He, himself, without losing any of his alacrity, was increasingly aware, although in a muted fashion, of the call of eternity beneath the indomitable refrain of his action. These years following the Council were also those during which he wrote, for the usage of his men and women religious, certain works which are in a way his spiritual legacy, notably a series of circulars on Assumptionist religious life and some meditations in which his manly faith and pulsating love for Christ and his Church converge. It is striking to note that during those same years he preferred to address his lectures on mystical theology, either to the students at Nîmes, or to the Oblates. And it was in 1873, at the height of the activity that one could wrongly think would result in dispersing his actions, that he wrote to Mother Marie Eugénie: "This morning, before Mass, I spent almost two hours praying in chapel before the Blessed Sacrament, but in my study, I arrange it so that my studies are focused almost constantly on meditation. I take care of worldly matters, but I assure you that my preference is for solitude."

Father d'Alzon was entering more and more into the depths of God.

XI – The Final Years (1875-1880)

Following the death of Bishop Plantier, everyone in Nîmes expected that Father d'Alzon would be appointed capitular vicar, as he had been after Bishop Cart passed away. That did not happen. The Chapter chose to elect the dean of the cathedral instead. It was, no doubt, one of those periodic manifestations, customary enough in those venerable diocesan senates, by which the Chapter intended to remind everyone in as ostentatious a manner as possible that it had to be contended with. Father d'Alzon's striking personality was so omnipresent within the diocese that it was inevitable to find some who were inconvenienced or indisposed by such a situation. Whether or not the Chapter yielded to such resentment, their vote was generally deemed to be unseemly. *Monseigneur* de Cabrières, Father d'Alzon's former student, then the bishop of Montpellier, having been invited to deliver Bishop Plantier's panegyric in the cathedral of Nîmes, declined to do so in order to protest the Chapter's decision. Eight days later, in his own cathedral, he delivered a funeral oration for Bishop Plantier and seized upon the occasion to remind his listeners that in the entourage of the deceased bishop of Nîmes there was "only one personality who towered above all the others by the soundness and elevation of his doctrine, by his generosity and enthusiasm in action."

However sensitive he may have been to his exclusion from diocesan administration, Father d'Alzon was not one to sulk in his corner. His only thought was to bring all his influence to bear in order to ensure that the bishop who would be named to replace Bishop Plantier would follow the same doctrinal line. He proposed four candidates, all of whom were

rejected. He settled on the candidacy of Father Besson whom he had known for many years. He hesitated to do so, knowing that, although Father Besson was a brilliant preacher with an excellent pedigree as a humanist, Father d'Alzon could not ignore the fact that the candidate was the object of well-founded reproach in Rome, at the Nunciature, and elsewhere, for a certain slovenliness of manner and speech thought to be incompatible with episcopal dignity. But Father d'Alzon insisted nevertheless.

Before any decision was taken on the matter, Pius IX wanted a canonical inquiry to take place so that he would know Father Besson's doctrinal orientation. Ultramontanism? Gallicanism? In the aftermath of the Council, the Holy See's preoccupation with these matters was more acute than ever. The Pope entrusted this inquiry to Father d'Alzon himself, thus manifesting his utter confidence, not only in Father d'Alzon's Roman orientation, but also in the rectitude of his conscience. Father Besson might well be Father d'Alzon's candidate, but Pius IX knew that he would not hesitate to note and make known any regrettable tendency in him, were he to detect one.

Fortunately, the investigation concluded favorably and, despite the very active-opposition of the Nîmes Chapter, Father Besson was appointed on August 3, 1875. Father d'Alzon immediately requested of the bishop that he think of naming another vicar-general, promising him, nonetheless, to remain in office for three months longer to facilitate the start of his episcopacy. But the three months would extend for another four years since Bishop Besson could not bring himself to let go of such a collaborator.

Father d'Alzon must have had a foreboding that he would suffer from the unkempt appearance of Bishop Besson. So refined himself, it was known that he appreciated in others, and always recommended dignity in

manners to his religious, as well as to his students. The new bishop of Nîmes was wanting in all that to a degree which went so far as to sometimes entail a lack of tact or refinement which, on a daily basis, made accommodation difficult. If Father d'Alzon had supported Father Besson's candidacy, despite his shortcomings, it was because he knew him to be of sound doctrine and endowed with solid qualities. Still another consideration must have been even more decisive. At the very moment that he was occupied with advancing Father Besson's candidacy to the See of Nîmes, the vote on the law regarding freedom of higher education appeared headed for a favorable outcome — and it was indeed enacted on July 31 — the eve of Bishop Besson's appointment. The vision of an independent university in Nîmes occupied Father d'Alzon more than ever. How could he not have taken into account the support that would surely be brought to the plan by a very cultured prelate and friend of the liberal arts like Bishop Besson?

Although this institution would never see the light of day, Father d'Alzon had quickly begun to lay its foundation. On July 31, 1875, the day the law was voted upon, he constituted a committee composed of fifteen persons, entrusting it to set up a series of public lectures on Law, Literature, and the Sciences to be inaugurated in November. He reserved for himself the course on Ecclesiastical History. In fact, from November 16, 1875, to June 1878, the lectures would be given regularly throughout the school year. Father Edmond Bouvy, an Assumptionist, was his close and highly appreciated colleague. The endeavor went forward in spite of the meager means at its disposal. No premises and no funding having been obtained from government officials at the level of the department, the locale was quite simply the library of Assumption College. But the professors were of a remarkable caliber, and the number of enrollments approached 140. Father d'Alzon could therefore legitimately hope that

this undertaking of Catholic lectures might eventually give birth to the university he dreamed of founding, or at least to a School of Law as a start. But in the very first year, he came to the conclusion that the idea had to be given up. The Catholic University of Lyons was already established, and Nîmes belonged to the ecclesiastical province of that city. Competition was unthinkable. As a result, the Catholic lecture series remained just that until 1878 when, lacking sufficient funding, the program came to an end. How many times had Father d'Alzon's enterprises come to naught! He sowed, the grain sprouted or would sprout elsewhere. For him, it always seemed as though he was left with nothing more than a defunct undertaking.

The cause of freedom for higher education, to which he had given so much of himself, benefited from the Law of 1875. The law itself was far from completely satisfying to Father d'Alzon because, among other provisions which he deplored, the State university alone retained the right to confer degrees. As it stood, however, it still represented a victory which he had worked diligently to achieve. Many thought like the Bishop of Aquila in Italy who, once the law had been voted upon, wrote to the founder of Assumption: "Hardly had I read the news in the papers than I thought of you who had brought about and organized the crusade against the State monopoly of the University. What consolation, I told myself, must Father d'Alzon have felt!"

True enough, but Father d'Alzon was not singing his *Nunc dimittis* as the Bishop of Aquila invited him to do. He was still in battle mode, thinking ahead of the struggle needed for the morrow. The freedom acquired was only half a freedom. Wisely, he decided that he should leave it at that for the moment, and he even suspended the publication of the *Revue de l'Enseignement chrétien*, whose issues for the previous six years had aimed at one purpose alone, that of demanding freedom of

education. The universities, free of State oversight, would first have to prove by their excellence their right to total independence. "Once that has been achieved," he wrote, "we will appear again with our old slogan, *Delenda Carthago*, and we will launch a new assault." With these words, the *Revue* came to an end. It would have surprised no one had the radical approach of *Delenda Carthago* appeared once again.

On January 22, 1877, Father d'Alzon left for Rome to accompany Bishop Besson. Pius IX received them together in a private audience on January 28. The Pope immediately cried out upon seeing him: "Ah, here is my very dear d'Alzon; come here." Affectionately, the Pope took Father's head in his hands, saying: "You have done a bad thing; your hair has turned white." He then added with heartfelt emotion, turning to Bishop Besson: "D'Alzon is our friend." "And for me," responded the bishop, "he is my guide." Pius IX then replied, "To take him as a guide is the best thing you can do...." On February 1, during the public audience granted to the pilgrimage from Besançon, the diocese from which Bishop Besson originated, Father d'Alzon mingled with the pilgrims. But he did not manage to remain hidden within their ranks. He was a tall man, and he maintained an erect posture; as the people of Nîmes were wont to say, he continued "to hold his head like the Blessed Sacrament." The Pope quickly spotted his handsome face, strongly chiseled by the extraordinary toil of his entire life, with that aquiline nose, that proud and unswerving gaze, which made him look like an old untamed eagle. "There is d'Alzon," cried Pius IX, loud enough to be heard by everyone, "he is our friend!" So it was that the prerogative of fidelity was forever stamped with the pontifical seal. The knight of the Church had received his reward.

On April 11, he returned to Rome with a pilgrimage from Nîmes. Rome again and always! On May 2, he was received privately by Pius IX and on that occasion conversed at length with the Holy Father about

Russia. For several years, at least since 1873, Father d'Alzon's attention had been turned toward that vast territory given over to schism. He foresaw as being imminent the shake-up of this immense empire and thought that in such a case it would be opportune to press forward courageously by establishing a foothold there, with his religious as pioneers. He now looked upon Bulgaria as but a leg en route to Odessa where, according to him, a plan would have to be worked out to penetrate into Russia. A few young religious, dressed as laymen, would study Russian there. Some would adopt the Greco-Slavic rite.

In a note of 1878 to the Sacred Congregation of the Propaganda, Father d'Alzon described how Pius IX had reacted to his plan: "Around the month of May 1877, less than a year ago, having been received in an audience by the Holy Father, I allowed myself to ask for his blessing and his encouragement to establish a seminary to train missionaries for Russia. Pius IX greatly encouraged me, gave me his blessing, and I withdrew, preoccupied with this idea." The most influential cardinals at the Vatican also urged Father d'Alzon to follow up on his project. Father Galabert happened to be in Rome at the time; this allowed Father d'Alzon to pursue this question in detail with him, as well as with Fathers Picard, Saugrain, and Descamps who at that time were in Rome leading the pilgrimage of Notre-Dame-de-Salut. As a result, Father d'Alzon returned from Rome full of hope.

A year had not yet gone by when he learned of the death of Pius IX on February 7, 1878. What a blow to the heart of Father d'Alzon! He returned in haste to the Eternal City, arriving just in time to kiss the foot of the great Pontiff, "majestic even in death," he wrote. On February 24, in the course of a public audience for French pilgrims that Father Picard, once again, had led to Rome, he saw for the first time Leo XIII, the man elected by the conclave. He sensed that Leo XIII would be "a very great

Pope...thoughtful, tenacious, a reformer and a holy man.” He rejoiced to learn that the Pope was also a very learned man, “a remarkable theologian in the school of Saint Thomas.” He discerned in him, under cover of the consummate diplomat, the leader who wanted people “to toe the line and obey,” and that was something that Father d’Alzon could well understand.

On April 23, a long private audience allowed him to take up many questions with the Pope, especially that of Russia. He would undoubtedly have informed Leo XIII that, since his 1877 voyage to Rome, a Russian lady had offered him the opportunity to open an establishment with several young people, on her lands in the Caucasus. He would have said that he saw in this offer the possibility of working on the reform of Eastern monasticism. A monastery of men and one of women, united to Rome, existed near Adrianople. Why not transfer them to the generously offered domain where they would be helped in the attempted reform by Assumptionists and the Oblates of Assumption? There is no document to confirm that he submitted that exact proposal to the Holy Father himself. What is certain is that Leo XIII, among the approvals which he showered on Father d’Alzon, included the general views of the founder for the evangelization of Russia.

But here again, Father d’Alzon would not succeed. The monasteries he was thinking of as the first elements of a reform split up irremediably. In March 1880, the irreplaceable Father Galabert was stricken with a cerebral hemorrhage. All efforts to find a worthy successor remained fruitless. The truth is that Father d’Alzon’s plans concerning Russia were based on an expectation which the future would invalidate. He rightly believed that sooner or later, a revolution would overthrow the Czarist regime, but it would not happen in the way he believed it would. “For a long time now,” he wrote in his 1878 note to the Propaganda, “there has

been talk of giving Russia a parliamentary regime. The day after that act takes place — and it will come as a consequence of the liberation of the serfs — freedom of religion will need to be proclaimed.” The world now knows what happened to religious freedom in the aftermath of the Russian Revolution. Father d’Alzon could certainly not foresee such an outcome. Among all the valid hypotheses of what might happen, his natural bent had led him to settle on the most optimistic and thereupon had he built his plans.

Even though the encouragement received from both Pius IX and Leo XIII on that score would remain without concrete results, at least Father d’Alzon brought back exceptional solace from these last two trips to Rome. He had been received in Roman circles with the solicitude and affection which had not lessened since the time of his youth. To this, veneration was now added. He was feted, surrounded, consulted. He had the joy of speaking to French pilgrims from the pulpit of Saint Peter and he obtained a new papal brief for the work of Notre-Dame-des-Vocations. He was able to attend the meeting of the delegates of French Catholic organizations. Finally, he had received from the Holy See permission for the foundation in Rome of a General Development Office for Assumption together with an Assumptionist scholasticate. It seemed that the city, which he had loved so much, had wanted to surround with its prestige and pomp — as if in an act of grateful farewell — this great servant of the Church who was never to return.

Father d’Alzon was struck by the insistence of Leo XIII in wanting to speak to him about the press, its fundamental importance, and the need to promote popular Catholic publications. Regarding this last objective, Assumption would realize, in part, the wish of the Holy Father. In 1877, the *Pèlerin* magazine had been transformed. It was no longer the bulletin of Notre-Dame-de-Salut, but a weekly with a wide circulation, which as

early as 1896 would become an illustrated publication in color. The credit for this transformation belongs to Father Vincent de Paul Bailly more than to Father d'Alzon. Not that the latter was unaware that a publication for the general public with a broad circulation was of the utmost timeliness, and even a work of great urgency, but he did not envisage it the same way as did Vincent de Paul Bailly. He was of the opinion that Father Bailly made excessive use of a popular style, sacrificed too much to caricature, to amusing topics, was too easily satisfied with a "minimal dose of intelligence and the supernatural." Such a criticism was that of a great lord of the mind, convinced that a certain degree of culture was always needed. He had remained, in short, an aristocrat whom all vulgarity annoyed.

However, by 1878, he had come to the realization that there was hardly any other way of injecting into the general public of his time the maximum "of intellect and the supernatural" it was capable of receiving without becoming bored. In a note of that year, he emphasized that the way "to make people love and support" Catholic charities, menaced on all sides, was through a press having popular appeal. "We already have an example of that," he had added, "the *Pèlerin* with its circulation of 60,000 copies." That was in fact, at the end of one year, the actual number of copies printed. Such a success carried with it a lesson which Father d'Alzon accepted graciously, even though his personal taste must have suffered. However, since there was a core of truth in his earlier criticism, he continued to recommend to his collaborator more seriousness and follow-up in the treatment of certain subjects. Nor had that stopped him from participating personally. He was an active contributor to the *Pèlerin* in various ways, the most remarkable and the most influential of which was a series entitled "*Vie des saints populaires*" [The Lives of Popular Saints]. The idea had come from Father Bailly, and the articles written by

Father d'Alzon had an extensive and wholesome effect on the households of his time. "The lives of the saints," he wrote, "is one of the greatest and most soothing means of instruction that one can offer to a host of readers who are powerless or too much inclined to reading certain works which result in deleterious moral turmoil."

Should the Congregation go further in this regard by founding a daily newspaper for the people? Father Bailly — who was at heart a journalist — and, generally speaking, the Paris Assumptionists, thought so. To sound out public opinion, Father Bailly went so far as to announce in the *Pèlerin* the probable appearance of such a newspaper in 1880. On that score, he was jumping the gun, for Father d'Alzon seems not to have been consulted on the advisability of that particular publicity. As it turned out, Assumption's founder was not, at that moment, a supporter of the idea. He feared the competition that such a newspaper would bring to bear on other dailies or Catholic publications. Neither could he discern among his religious a group that could constitute an effective editorial team around Father Bailly. Nor did he have the financial means to undertake such an enterprise. In the final analysis, he refused to allow Father Bailly to go forward. In essence, he thought that a periodical publication, but not a daily, better suited Assumption at that stage in its development. He proved his point by founding a monthly magazine, and, as a man who had always reached for the heights, he called it *La Croix*.

Since 1878, Father d'Alzon had been focusing his activities more and more on the Catholic press because it was the only one left to which he could usefully apply his failing strength. For years now, his overtaxed body had been crying for mercy. His suffering, aggravated by the nervous condition which had always afflicted him, was unremitting. After his return from Rome, in July 1878, he had been grievously ill. On June 27, he had verbally presented his resignation as vicar-general to Bishop Besson

who had not accepted it. On August 11, he had insisted in a letter: "I had asked you to be your vicar-general for three months, and it has now been three years that I have kept a place which should no longer be mine.... My personal dedication will remain the same. When I shall no longer serve the bishop of Nîmes, I will still retain my affection for the man I have been fond of for a long time." Bishop Besson responded as follows: "Your friendship will not be taken away from me, nor your counsels, I know that, but I have always been convinced that you have brought me graces and that your actual presence is necessary for me to obtain their continuation." A highly placed person in Rome was asked to pressure Father d'Alzon into changing his mind, but he would not yield. From Lavagnac, on September 25, he wrote a new letter of resignation. The bishop left it unanswered for a month before bowing to the inevitable, naming Father d'Alzon honorary vicar-general.

In January of that same year, Father had turned over the direction of the *Dames de la Miséricorde* to Father Bailly. His body refused to serve him henceforth at the pace he had inflicted upon it up to that time. He wrote to Mother Marie Eugénie on January 14, 1879: "I feel such a weakening of strength that, if it has not returned by the end of winter, I greatly fear that I will not be able to leave here. So my wish for you, as it is for me, is the constant thought of heaven and the grace to accomplish all your actions while thinking of eternity. It is not fear of the judgment of God that I ask for you, but the feeling of the spouse who, as she awaits her husband, wants him to find everything so well arranged that he will have nothing to do but rejoice upon his arrival. Age must give our acts the character of divine gravitas which is but the reflection of God's gifts to us. What have we to do other than to be steeped in the reality and the truth of the divine, so that, because of our sincerity, that truth will one day be our joy without end? This is perhaps a bit somber. But what can I say? I

am speaking to you in the frame of mind of a man who must hurry so as to be ready.”

In the summer of 1879, Father d'Alzon's doctor sent him to Lamalou. From that stay, which in the past had always been so beneficial for him, he emerged as weak as before, “not only sick as a dog, but as four dogs,” as he wrote tellingly two months later. What was left for him to do at the level of action? Take up his pen and transmit his fervor through his writing, for though his body had given up, or almost, his soul had not capitulated. The articles he contributed to *La Croix* were the *ultima verba* of his public life.

His plan of action aimed at the same goals, resounded with the same accent, throbbed with the same ardor: “The organization of Catholics themselves; an alliance of all Catholic associations to save France for the Church; to be on the offensive in such a war; publicity within the Church as well as to the outside world; matters concerning foreign lands in the interest of Catholicism.” From the very first issue, dated March 1880, he charged forward, denouncing the State for acting as God. He saw religious freedom in danger of impending death. Events were progressing in a manner he had always denounced: Protestantism engendering, through freedom of conscience and the rejection of the doctrinal authority of the Church, an antireligious revolution with secret societies as its driving element, and these societies were seizing hold of democracy in order to achieve their own ends.

In fact, in the very month in which the first issue of *La Croix* appeared, two decrees were inserted in *L'Officiel*, the government's official publication: one of them ordered the Jesuits to disperse within three months and close their institutions within six months; the other requested non-authorized congregations to formulate, within the same six months, their request for legal authorization. Religious persecution

had begun. The superiors of eighteen religious institutes of men met in Paris on March 30. Father Picard, with his accustomed energy and resolve, played an active role in the debate. He thought, and declared as much, that to show solidarity with the Jesuits was a question of honor, that they all had to join forces with them and, as he would write to Father d'Alzon in reporting on the meeting, "attempt by all means possible to prevent the phalanx from breaking up." This was, in any case, the feeling that prevailed and which a second meeting on April 2 would confirm. A decision was reached not to register the statutes of the congregations with the government by reason of the principle that religious rules must not be delivered over to the judgment of the enemies of the Church. It should be noted that Father d'Alzon, prevented by his health from going to Paris, had given full powers to Fathers Picard and Bailly and approved unreservedly "the very wise idea to stand together as one body."

While the resolution of April 2 was being transmitted to all the superiors-general of France for their approval, Father Picard went to Nîmes to obtain precise directives from Father d'Alzon before going on to Rome where he was leading the French pilgrimage yet one more time. There resulted from the private audience with the Pope granted to him on April 24, that Leo XIII preferred to let the religious and the bishops act on their own to avoid the appearance of seeming to be obeying a watchword from Rome. But the Pope did not hide from Father Picard that he had taken note with pleasure of the unanimity of the resistance. "You must remain undivided and fight back; religion will be victorious," had concluded the Holy Father.

The plenary meeting of superiors was held in Paris on April 27. They did not move beyond the decision taken earlier on the second of that same month. A rather disturbing rumor began circulating among the attendees regarding Father d'Alzon, to the effect that he was in favor of

registering the religious order regulations with the government. This caused a great stir because, had it been true, the unified front would have been broken. How anyone could have imagined such a thing on the part of Assumption's founder, whose fighting spirit and intransigence on matters of principle were notorious, is hard to believe. Father Bailly, worried about the general anxiety the rumor had caused, telegraphed his general. The reply he received was clear and arrived in time for Father Bailly to share it with the assembly: "I am formally opposed to any registration of the statutes."

Thereupon began the termite-like work of Bishop Lavigerie, a born conciliator, and Bishop Maret, the bishop of Sura, the very person who had crossed swords with Father d'Alzon on account of Marets Gallicanism. Because of them, the unanimity reached by the religious congregations was not matched by that of the bishops. Bishop Lavigerie formulated a declaration which received the approval of Monsieur de Freycinet, the head of government, and which he judged would satisfy both the Church and the State. Since it was not at all consistent with the position taken by the religious, they rejected it. Bishop Lavigerie, supported by Cardinal de Bonnechose, then turned to Rome where he found a favorable reception. A new text was prepared which simply repeated the old one, with only slight variations. The Pope did not impose it, but it was obvious that he wanted it to be signed. He stated as much in a letter to Cardinal de Bonnechose, in measured and cautious terms, but which left no doubt as to where he stood. "This act," the Holy Father wrote significantly, "is not contrary in any way to the maxims of the Church, nor the constitutions and rules of each congregation. It seeks only to save them from complete dismantling which would cause irreparable damage to the Church and to Catholic France..."

Moreover, refusing to sign the new declaration, one presented by the bishops who had received the Popes endorsement in order to obtain the approval of the religious, now amounted to going against the advice of the Holy Father. From that moment on, the attitude of Father d'Alzon was settled, for he was adamantly faithful to the maxim of his youth: "One must always work for Rome, sometimes without Rome, never against Rome." There is no doubt that what the Pope sought in this matter clashed with the founder's personal conviction. He thought that Rome would come to regret such a solution and went so far as to dread a renewal of Gallicanism. In his eyes, the concessions would be to no avail; the Declaration was "as much use as a poultice on a wooden leg." But, in accord with the sublime logic of the principle which had governed his life, he stated at the time: "If we are the regiments in an army whose general is the Pope, when the commander-in-chief speaks, we, the colonels, have only to execute the maneuver." And even more categorically, he added: "A colonel who disobeys his commander on the battlefield deserves to be shot." And so, on August 26, he signed the Declaration. He felt no bitterness, no rancor. With him, obedience to Rome resulted at once in the serenity of a duty fulfilled. "To the Pope," he wrote on August 29, "is left the responsibility of what he has asked — obedience is our lot and I am sleeping soundly as a result." And on August 30: "We will have obeyed; that is our consolation. Obedience has relieved us of a heavy responsibility." And he added: "Perhaps Father Picard has not thought enough of this these last few days."

It was a fact that Father Picard had had to overcome harrowing inner turmoil in order to accept the situation. Father d'Alzon went to great lengths to calm him, and he succeeded in doing so, as can be attested by the following lines from Father Picard in which a marvelous candor is allied with the most genuine religious spirit: "Since the Pope requests this

act of us, he has his reasons, and we must accept them. Before leaving Paris, I confessed myself of having been so sharply against this declaration. How dreadful uncompromising minds can be under certain circumstances! I thank you for having made me understand that, and I beg you to castigate me whenever I manifest such vehemence about certain ideas.”

It would not be long before events demonstrated that the concessions made — as Father d'Alzon had foreseen — had served no purpose. The brutal manner used by Monsieur de Freycinet in dispersing the Jesuits and closing their houses after June 30, due date of the decrees, was an omen of the absence of any and all consideration or possibility of compromise in the matter of secularization. Father d'Alzon harbored no doubt that the most violent religious persecution would shortly fall upon all congregations, and he was already taking care to secure residences for his religious in foreign countries. The evolution of the situation in September caused him to be specific about his arrangements: novices from southern France would go to Spain, those of the north to England.

What then? Those first fruits of his congregation, which had required so much effort to recruit and train, he would now have to send far away, at a time when they were the hope of so many good works in France, born of his own tenacious exertions. But Father d'Alzon's soul was above all this. To Father Picard, whose first name was François, he wrote: “I've been told that the novitiate in Sevres — for a second novitiate had been established at Paris in 1875 — is preparing splendid celebrations for the feast of St. Francis. Do you think this is a time for festivities? I venture to believe it is not. Never again will we have the opportunity to invoke Saint Francis in his poverty. *The foxes have their lair and the birds of the sky their nest. The Son of Man has nowhere to rest his head.* That is what we

will have to arrive at in the end and find with the Poor One of Assisi the perfect happiness of being expelled from our own home, beaten and insulted, as he used to say to Brother Leo.... I have resolved to accept persecution, as the saints would have, that is to say from its most perfect side. After that, I may sometimes break my resolutions.”

But he would not renege on them. The story of those last weeks is one of alternating his struggles for the City of God — because he intended to remain active up to his last breath — and gathering up his inner strength in the face of death which he felt was fast approaching. He continued writing his articles in the *Pèlerin* and *La Croix*. They were so vigorous in thought and tone that they appeared to come from an athlete who, just before reaching his goal, increases his pace with an all-out burst of effort. The doctrinarian of the rights of God rose up in these writings with unflagging energy against the “heresy of the sovereignty of man against God.” At the same time, he was searching, in successive retreats, for silence and contemplation. “I refuse to go to Lamalou, Lourdes, Paris, the Châteaux, Le Vigan, in a word, any of them; I am preoccupied only with my conversion.” He wrote that statement on August 8; on the 15th, he made a first two-week retreat at Nîmes. On September 13, he was at the Chartreuse of Valbonne. The Prior, Dom de Vaulchier, was his friend. With him at his side, he prepared for his final moments. Finally, on September 21, he took part, as a retreatant, in the annual retreat of his religious at Nîmes, which was preached by Father Laurent. Three retreats in the space of ten weeks!

The man who found the strength for the inner discipline required by a retreat and who was simultaneously sparing no effort with his pen, while keeping up with all the great events around him, was imposing such great wear and tear on his body as would have reduced any one other than him to total prostration. For a long time now, he had been wasting

away, but appearances belied that fact. When it did show, it happened so quickly that, within the space of a month, a vigorous man was transformed into a very old person. All the witnesses to this agreed regarding this sudden change. It was like a great wind which suddenly strips the autumn forest at one fell swoop. Father d'Alzons letters reveal his own awareness of this. August 2: "Each day I feel a little more exhausted." August 10: "I have been sinking very rapidly for some time now; I feel my last hour approaching." August 23: "I feel my strength giving out." His health showed some improvement at the beginning of September, but this did not last. He said Mass every day in the chapel of the novitiate, but he had trouble genuflecting.

He would say Mass again on October 11, in memory of his mother who had passed away on the 12th of the same month. He would never say it again. Thus, by this final gesture, the consecrating priest was reunited once again with the woman who had watched over the adolescent of Lavagnac with such fervent maternal love.

XII – The Death of Father d’Alzon (1880)

On the very same day that he said his last Mass, Father d’Alzon took to his bed. He would not be able to leave it for several days. He was beset on all sides with dismal prospects. Religious persecution was being implemented in the harshest manner possible. It was threatening at the very doors of the college of Nîmes and the Assumptionist residence in Paris, on *rue François-Ier*. Here, as well as there, expulsion was expected to take place at any moment. As to the building where Assumption had been founded, and so dear to everyone, precautions had been taken so that, once the religious had been forced to leave, the college would continue under Germer-Durand’s direction. No one could assume that assignment better than he. Though he could not give what only the religious were capable of doing, this steadfast friend of Father d’Alzon had totally absorbed the spirit of the founder whose spiritual son he truly was. In the final analysis, he had sacrificed an outstanding university career for the Nîmes college — he had lived in it, by it, for it, since its beginnings.... As to the Paris residence, there was no other choice but to abandon it.

Apprehensive as to what approach to pursue should such an event take place, Father Picard decided to go to Nîmes for his superior-general’s instructions, arriving on the 13th. He was painfully surprised to find Father d’Alzon in such a pitiful state. In spite of this, he brought him up to date on the situation in Paris. Although Father d’Alzon certainly did not harbor any illusions about the fate which awaited Assumption, like the other congregations, how could he not feel an increase of sorrow? To cap

all of this, he learned on the 16th of the sudden death of Germer-Durand. Yet another harsh blow of the ax befalling this ancient oak.

The disappearance of Germer-Durand placed the college in jeopardy. Though Father d'Alzon immediately named a worthy successor in the person of Professor Allemand, who had the required university degrees, the University, which had never accepted the competition of the Assumptionist college, multiplied administrative red tape and instituted measures designed to abort the appointment of Monsieur Allemand. If it had succeeded in its aim, the college would have had to close its doors. To save it, the personal intervention of the administrative head of the Department of the Gard to the minister of the Interior was needed. Professor Allemand was finally approved.

Such were the cares which weighed down the sick founder. However, on October 19, he felt better, was able to get up, and even take a few carriage rides. He took advantage of this to pass by the boarding school of the Oblates, which was under construction, and to bless it from the carriage. Hope sprang up again among his religious and his friends. Father d'Alzon had always been so marvelously alive, he had so often surmounted grave health crises, that everyone hoped that this improvement too would last. But he knew just what to expect. He felt throughout his being what his doctor said of him: "No sickness; his organs are healthy, but they are all used up; he is like an old man of ninety." He knew that this was only a respite and wanted to take advantage of it to perform a key act. In the presence of Fathers Laurent and Emmanuel Bailly, he named Father Picard his vicar-general, thus turning over to him the government of the Institute. And now, all matters having been settled, he forthwith turned his face resolutely toward eternity which awaited him.

He knew, in any case, into what solid hands he had transferred his responsibilities. Father Picard had shown himself to be a man of action, an organizer, a conqueror, and in that respect he would be true to the impetus given by Father d'Alzon. Headstrong, he had the defect of that quality: a certain rigidity in his decisions, and somewhat authoritarian in command. The congregation would, however, benefit from being firmly governed which, in the difficult times that were beginning, would be of great value. Father d'Alzon had always recognized in him those natural virtues which he so loved: candor, uprightness, and what he set above all else in the supernatural life — the spirit of faith. He was truly the pilot to whom could be entrusted the ship's helm at the height of a storm.

On the 23rd, Father d'Alzon received the affectionate sign of an incomparable friendship. Mother Marie Eugénie, who had been kept informed, wrote to him, expressing her sorrow: "I wish, my dear Father, that my heart, along with my efforts to care for you, could reach you." Just a few lines, but that sufficed between these two souls, for never had anything unknown or alien separated one from the other. On the 27th, the alumni banquet was held at the college. Despite his extreme weakness, Father d'Alzon insisted on going down into the courtyard for several minutes. And everyone gathered around him to shake his hand. He smiled at these men whom he had known as children and who had become his friends. Their eyes were filled with tears, for everyone understood that this would not take place ever again.

On the 29th, Father d'Alzon was supposed to go to Lavagnac, to his nephew de Puységur. But he would never again see the alley of chestnut trees where, as an adolescent, he would lie in wait with his rifle for the blue-winged jays, and where, as a priest and then as a religious, he often pursued his solitary meditations. During the night of the 28th to the 29th, he took a turn for the worse. The doctor who came to see him the next

day did not hide his concern: "Your health," he told the sick man, "is like a diminished fortune." And with his wonderful laugh, Father d'Alzon exclaimed: "I have depleted so many during my lifetime, I could well have made a dent in this one also" By November 1, the downward spiral had begun. In Nîmes, where the evolution of his condition was followed with anxiety, prayer groups sprang up everywhere — at the cathedral, in religious communities, at the novitiate, at the college. While they walked, the students wanted to say the rosary for Father d'Alzon.

Over all of this floated a sinister menace. The expulsion of the Assumptionists could take place any day. A deeply moved crowd filled the streets. On the morning of November 5, Father Bailly, alerted by the doctor, informed Father d'Alzon of the extreme seriousness of his condition. Father understood that the hour to receive the sacrament of the sick had arrived. He thanked Father Bailly, then added, "I would much rather have you proceed in this way and that you tell me the facts quite simply." He confessed himself. Since everyone feared the imminent arrival of the government agents empowered to force their way into religious houses, a large number of alumni and parents of students had gathered in the courtyards to prevent them from entering. Also, in order not to add to the general emotion, the viaticum was brought to Father's bedroom very discreetly. There, along with Henri his manservant, were Father Etienne and a priest friend, Father Barnouin. At this point, it is probably best to leave the last word to Father Bailly:

There is no way to portray his reverence after receiving the Holy Eucharist and the joyful serenity which illuminated his features. Calm, joy, faith, and peace shone forth from him all at once. When it was all finished, he opened his arms, and folding them together again around my head, he said to me with tears in his eyes: "Here! Let me embrace you, and tell all the religious of the congregation that I embrace them.... And you, Father Barnouin, I embrace you, and tell all the priests of the diocese that I embrace them.... And Henri! You also, and do not forget to tell all the servants that I embraced them also by

embracing you." Then he began to cry. Overcoming as much as I could the emotion which filled me, I told him that we had not yet reached that point and that he should not let his feelings get the better of him. He composed himself immediately and began to smile with an inexpressible kindness. I took advantage of that to get on my knees and ask him for his blessing for the entire congregation. He gave it to me right away, always with the same kind smile.

Father Picard was not present. He had been obliged to leave Nîmes on October 28 to go to the Paris residence at François-Ier, from which his religious expected to be expelled any day. The presence of the superior was urgently required. Several days had passed in continual prayer, waiting for this to happen. By an impressive coincidence, the government agents arrived and proceeded to expel the religious after breaking into the house, on the morning of November 5 at about the hour that Father d'Alzon was preparing to receive the viaticum and the sacrament of the sick.

That same November 5 at Nîmes, Mother Correnson, who knew that Father d'Alzon was at death's door, came to the college at eleven o'clock in the morning. To her amazement, she found Father in his room, standing before the fireplace and trimming his nails. In this ordinary gesture can be seen not only a sort of aristocratic casualness that he had never rid himself of, but the reflex of the priest who always wanted his hands to be well-groomed because they held the body of the Lord. As he lifted his head at the sound of the door opening, Mother Correnson noted that his eyes were filled with tears: "I won't be able to give you the last rites as I had promised you; Father Emmanuel has just administered them to me." This dying man had remained true to the man who had made the most of his life: deeply sensitive, as shown by his tears, along with an energy which kept him on his feet in spite of everything.

Up to that time, Father d'Alzon had continued to use the sawhorses and planks which served as his bed. After much entreaty, he was now

prevailed upon to use a real bed. Father Picard, after making sure that his religious were lodged among friendly families, came to see him and stayed with him until the end. Mother Marie Eugénie came also. Of the conversation between the two founders we know nothing. How can we not regret this? For we can imagine the sublime level reached by this ultimate dialogue which had been so admirable throughout their mortal lives.

From November 11 to 16, Father d'Alzon's condition only grew worse. During that time, since the decree of expulsion of the religious of Nîmes was immediately enforceable, efforts were made to avoid the abomination of breaking into the college during Father d'Alzon's agony. Bishop Besson intensified his attempts, reaching up as far as the President of the Republic, and obtained a stay of execution. The government agents would not have long to wait. On November 16, it seemed that the end was at hand.

Father d'Alzon was in a state of great weakness, but his mind remained lucid and serene. No laments, only total resignation: "What would you like, Father?" he was asked. — "I want only the will of God." — "Father, are there some wishes you would care to express?" — "Heaven is my only desire." Early in the afternoon, all the religious, professed and novices, gathered around his bed. The dying man opened his eyes with difficulty, a look of affectionate goodness shone through, then his eyelids closed again, and he slowly said: "My dear brothers, you know that after God and the Blessed Virgin you are the ones I have loved most in the world." And after a silence: "We are going to leave one another. Submission to Gods will. He is the Master." And again: "There are many good religious who are not here, my heart reaches out to them."

"*Mon Père*" said Father Picard in a voice quivering with emotion, "we ask your pardon for all the sorrow we have caused you." — "It is I,"

replied Father d'Alzon, "who should kneel down and ask pardon of you all." At Father Picard's request, he raised his arm for a final blessing. In spite of his weakness, he kept it raised for several moments as he would have done from the peak of the Esperou, before the immense crowd of praying pilgrims, as if he wanted, beyond the religious present, beyond his death near at hand, to reach his spiritual posterity with that sacred sign.

Once more, he said: "I am with all the houses. I am going, but my heart will be with you. I will protect you as much as I can." And then this last recommendation, so simple yet which, for him, said it all: "Be good religious." Then his sons left the room with broken hearts, to cry and pray in the chapel. And now, Mother Church, whom he had so loved, bent over the deathbed of her magnificent child, in the person of her leaders. First, the blessing of the Holy Father which had arrived by wire. Then, the visit of Bishops Besson and de Cabrières who both asked for his blessing, which he gave with the simplicity that was so like him. His two visitors were bishops, and no one more than he understood the meaning of, or felt more respect for, the sacred hierarchy. But he did not protest, he showed no embarrassment, for one was an old friend, and the other had been his student. By virtue of those titles, the blessing they requested of him would be dear to their hearts. And so, he blessed them.... And he would retain that obliging attitude during the six days which still separated him from death. To the doctor who asked how he was feeling, he replied: "Like someone who is leaving."

The day of departure finally arrived, on Sunday, November 21. During the prayers for the dying, Father d'Alzon held tightly to the lighted candle by his side. Then the religious recited the rosary. By a tender thoughtfulness of the Patroness of his Institute, he departed this world at the stroke of the noon Angelus, as they were finishing the fourth decade

of the glorious mysteries, the one dedicated to the Assumption of the Blessed Mother. His last cry was: "My Jesus!"

Regrets were heard from every side. First, the profoundly sorrowful one of Mother Marie Eugénie which she expressed to her daughters in her own fashion, both clear-headed and forceful: "I have gotten into the habit of seeing in souls only what I will see in them for all eternity. Ephemeral things have passed, but what I will see eternally in Father d'Alzon is his love for Jesus Christ, his dedication to the Church, his zeal for souls. And he loved my soul and has done it some-good; his strong guidance was a great help to me in my youth. He supported our undertaking in its difficult beginnings. We owe him a great deal"

Emotion ran high throughout the city of Nîmes. The entire diocese mourned the passing of Father d'Alzon, as did those regions of Provence and the Cévennes he had crisscrossed in every direction. The day of the funeral, November 24, the widespread grief was made manifest; the most authoritative of witnesses wrote the following:

People came from everywhere to attend the ceremony, from Marseilles as well as from Montpellier, from the banks of the Rhone and the summits of the Cévennes. I will not describe the funeral itself, which lasted three hours, amid the most prayerful and the most sorrowful silence that ever was. When the group selected to form the cortege passed through another throng, which was no less moved and no less saddened, then everyone removed their hats and bowed, in the streets, in the squares, at the cemetery; all lips murmured a prayer, all eyes were turned toward the sky. Thus did the deep peace which had marked the agony of Father d'Alzon descend again like a reflection of his soul, along the entire route taken by his mortal remains. And he who had so often and with such authority called out: "Rise! Stand up! Speak! Petition! Claim the rights of the Church!" seemed to command once more from the silence of his tomb saying to us: "Now that I rest in God, do not speak, but pray." Father d'Alzon was obeyed. Not a cry, not a word, not a gesture was raised against that mute order....

Who was the author of this text? Bishop Besson himself, in a public letter written on the day after the funeral, and which summarizes the life of Assumptions founder. This moving text ends on an evocation of Lacordaire and Father d'Alzon jointly: "When Lacordaire died at Soreze on November 21, 1861," wrote the bishop, "a woman of the working class cried out: 'We had a king and we have lost him!' It's the same date which has returned, it's the same feast which the Church celebrates, it's the same cry which I was tempted to utter at the foot of the funeral bier where Father d'Alzon rested.... Truly, we too can say the same: 'We had a king and we have lost him!'"

A king, and much more: one of those Fathers according to the spirit, whose magnificent lineage has enriched the Church for the past 2000 years. Nîmes had lost its king, but the Church had not lost the one who continues to live on in his sons.

XIII – The Soul of Father d’Alzon

To evoke the soul of Father d’Alzon is tantamount to recalling the man in his entirety. Biographies of saintly persons too often treat their virtues separately, as though the human and the superhuman, the latter sublimating the former, did not act in tandem to create the whole being. This is a deplorable practice and doubly so for Father d’Alzon whose warmhearted humanity marked every aspect of the spiritual greatness of the man. Did he not himself write: “We are something only with our nature. We must, no doubt, spiritualize it, but to destroy it is to create an empty shell where God had wanted to make a masterpiece of his creation”?

Throughout his life, he achieved this fullness of his own nature with seemingly extraordinary ease, managing to do so without destroying or deforming his God-given temperament. What he supernaturalized most in himself were his strongest human qualities; his chief virtues correspond to the major elements of his moral being: thus, his asceticism and rigorous mortification can be linked to his uncommon energy; his apostolic zeal to his ardor; the nature of his piety to the virility of his temperament.

The impression of richness and superabundance which flowed from his person and his life can be attributed to this in great measure. In all the supernatural undertakings of the religious man and the apostle, in the very remarks of the meditative person, the robust humanity of Father d’Alzon is always prominent — he was always totally himself, whatever he did or whatever he wrote or said. And, likewise, in his leisure time with friends, his resounding laugh, his witty quips, which could be scathing, his

wonderful gusto, his soul so full of Jesus Christ would enter in like a whirlwind, proclaiming the crucial demands of Christianity on which he did not compromise.

One day, during the course of a cordial meal at the home of a friend, Father Combalot, who was present, stated that he was getting old, that up to that time he had given of himself without rhyme or reason, and that he would now have to conserve his strength for his old age. "Father Combalot," burst out Father d'Alzon with lightning speed, "if there ever was anything admirable in you, it was especially your selflessness, and now it seems that pure gold is going to change itself into base lead. The Master, whom you have served so well, does not deserve this lack of confidence in him." Such was Father d'Alzon; one spoke to the fellow guest only to find the impressive apostle; had one spoken to the apostle, the good-natured friend could be counted upon to appear. That was the way it had always been. This was also a notable characteristic of his enormous correspondence. It is impossible to stand back to study him, for he did not present himself so much as come charging and under an aspect one had not expected.

He was at once simple and complex: simple in his rectitude, his straightforwardness, which did not put up with any beating about the bush, any maneuvering, or any expediency — one could even add, simple by his candor, in the very best sense of that word — and complex by the contrasts in his nature, which were startling.

One must pay attention to these features of his temperament if one seeks to understand him. He was uncompromising, intolerant even — that is the word he used and it was true — on the question of principles and the need to conform ones life exactly to them. It was not in a passing remark, during the course of a conversation, but in his *Directoire*, which became the manual his religious would live by, that Father d'Alzon stated:

“If someone does not love Jesus Christ, let him be anathema. That is not very tolerant, but those who love much, tolerate little. And, strictly speaking, the true nature of love is in the robustness of a noble and frank intolerance. In these days when men no longer have the energy to love or to hate and do not see that their tolerance is a new form of weakness, we are judged as being intolerant because we draw our strength from our love for Jesus Christ.”

Uncompromising also, as we have seen, on matters of doctrine, on service — unlimited and without reservation — to the Holy See and the Church in general, and on the evangelical spirit. That touch of intransigence was part and parcel of his character, but he saw it as being consistent with the rights of God, those of truth — error not having any rights — and as the logical consequence of the primacy of the supernatural. He wanted it to be a characteristic of his Congregation in everything that touched upon doctrine and the goals of the apostolate.

But this indomitable and intolerant man was also very broad-minded. He has given us an excellent definition of a progressive mind and, by antithesis, of a narrow one. In it, he himself is recognizable, and the description thus contributes to drawing Father d'Alzon's portrait:

The broad-minded person applies himself to seeing things in themselves; the narrow-minded one sees them in relationship to himself.... The broad-minded person dedicates himself to a cause, while the narrow-minded one is devoted to himself in pursuit of some cause, whatever it may be; the broad mind soars on the heights, while the narrow one digs mole holes and is quite content to find shelter in them, for the essential goal of the narrow mind is not to compromise itself, calling it prudence.... The open mind is quite useless in and of itself unless it is accompanied by a strong and generous character, otherwise the person sees what needs to be done, but does nothing, whereas a narrow-minded person with an energetic character does more harm than good, at best a lot of noise signifying nothing.... The broad mind carries within it a certain wariness because, being able to see afar, that individual understands that he might be able to see still farther. The narrow mind finds itself so comfortable under the lid of a

stewpot that it is little concerned with what lies at its bottom.... It bangs its skull against the lid and says: "You can readily see that there is nothing beyond this." Happy the mortal who mistakes a pot cover for the expanse of the heavens.

Intolerance in Father d'Alzon applied to ideas, not to persons; it did not offend because everyone felt that it derived from his love of Christ and truth and that his most indomitable convictions were borne aloft by the wind of the open sea.

Much has been said of his caustic and mocking side which often resorted to using cutting remarks which, it must be admitted, sometimes greatly mortified the recipient. One day, speaking at a meeting of priests, he was less clear than usual, being tired. One of the youngest listeners expressed out loud the wish that he be more precise. Father d'Alzon responded: "So, you want me to be more precise? It is therefore with precision that I declare you to be impolite, out of line, and pretentious for daring to interrupt, you the youngest in the assembly when your elders and your betters remain silent." To a pastor proud of his chasuble — yellow flowers on a purple background — and who was showing it to him with naive pride, Father d'Alzon commented: "That is the most atrocious combination of unpeeled eggplant and slices of squash that an artist whose taste is bad has ever dreamed up." Hundreds of quips of the sort could be quoted. Father d'Alzon admitted to this propensity to scoff bluntly and to what he himself called his "abruptness," and accused himself of it with the simplicity of a child, notably in his letters to Mother Marie Eugénie. He tried hard to cure himself of this, experiencing great difficulty in doing so but, little by little, he managed to take the edge off his barbs.

The fact remains that this was a natural tendency in him and — yet another contrast — it existed side by side with the most exquisite refinement and the most loving sensitivity. A certain alumnus, for whom

he cared deeply, having acted in a way which had pained and irritated Father d'Alzon, and with good reason, found himself warned by Father de Cabrières that Father d'Alzon was preparing to admonish him harshly. He approached Father d'Alzon, expecting to undergo the sharpest of tongue-lashings; but Father rushed to him with open arms: "Ah, my child, here you are! What a pleasure to see you again!" And Father de Cabrières to exclaim: "What? After all that you told me, this is how you greet him!" "What can I say?" answered Father d'Alzon. "I was quite prepared to rebuke him; then, as soon as I saw him, my resolve crumbled; I couldn't hold back, the heart prevailed." If he realized that he had wounded someone by too sharp a retort, he found words that went straight to the heart to excuse himself. By soothing the wound, he made the other forget everything.

As a spiritual director, a ministry in which he excelled, he was known to have a great respect for the liberty of souls, to take infinite care not to offend, nor to be repressive. We must not forget, however, that when Mother Marie Eugénie insisted that he accept her vow of obedience, he stated categorically: "It is not my style to be a torturer; but to be a pontiff suits me quite well, and since every day I immolate Jesus Christ, I warn you that it is with pleasure that I will crucify you in the same way I crucify our Lord and that I will make the blood of your will flow into the very chalice in which my words cause the blood of my God to flow." But such an admonition from one strong soul to another of the same type, who could bear it, did not stop Father d'Alzon — when his advisee was passing through a period of interior desolation — from knowing how to console her with an almost motherly gentleness. Having noticed, after a long study of Mother Marie Eugénie, that she was one of those exceptional souls that God alone should direct, the counselor in him delicately faded into the background.

On December 12, 1846, he wrote to the foundress of the Religious of the Assumption: "The manner in which I believe that I must guide you henceforth must be so delicate from the point of view of authority that you will never have any more difficulty whatever in that respect, so supple must the bond be. What would then become of your vow of obedience? It would be, to my mind, more of a disposition of the spirit and the heart than an occasion to put that virtue into practice..." This priest of whom Mother Marie Eugénie had rightly said: "You were born to command," was the same one who added in that very letter: "You must do something better than to obey, and in that way, it seems to me, you will return to the frame of mind of order and peace." That flexibility in the guidance of souls, along with so much stiffness and brusqueness at times, that virile energy in governing, allied to demonstrations of an almost feminine sensitivity in its delicacy and consideration for others, all of that too was characteristic of Father d'Alzon. On the question of the tenderness of his heart, Mother Marie Eugénie was not mistaken when she told him, one day that he was suffering: "I know all too well that you are a man and so do not cry, but the heart cries also."

As a young man, Emmanuel d'Alzon was wont to say that pride formed the basis of his character and that he was trying to curb it. He wrote in 1831: Pride is waging a cruel war against me. I am sadly experiencing the influence exerted upon me by the opinion I have of myself. I contemplate myself endlessly and I always admire myself; I almost adore myself, and yet pride makes me sink to the level of dirt; it is shattering me, it is crushing me.... I know all too well that I have been worth something, have adhered exactly to my plan of conduct, been firm in my work, strong against my passions only when I attacked the first of these, only when I was convinced of my uselessness, only when I told

myself: "You are nothing. You are worth nothing." I know all this, and yet the opinion I have of myself is always the very best.

He can be believed because he was clear-eyed about his flaws, and his absolute truthfulness was not only applied to others, but to himself as well. It should be added, however, that the uncompromising judgment he was directing against his own person in his correspondence gives the impression not of humbleness, which is the result of a virtuous constraint, but of the most natural and spontaneous humility, as can be seen in a letter of 1867:

We were speaking after dinner about the reasons which have prevented the Assumptionist Congregation of men from reaching a greater level of development. I was letting them discuss the matter, but I confess to you, so that you can learn from it, that I found all those causes in myself, in the failings of my nature. Certainly we sometimes need to know how to repel, but it is also very good to be appealing, and when virtue is its basis, we are almost always blessed, even in this world.

And again in 1854, he wrote:

The shame that the sight of my past life causes me, the futility of my life, the blemishes which human feelings have cast on the little bit of good that I am capable of doing, all this upsets me greatly. I hope that God will have pity on me.

And, finally, for statements such as these are numerous and space is limited, the following, dated 1855:

The Blessed Virgin has obtained for me...very great graces. I have understood that I preach myself too much and not Jesus Christ enough; that I must attract souls by being less mocking, irritable, proud, and scornful. I must draw them through patience, humility, gentleness that I do not have and that I must acquire.

One senses in these comments, without having to insist on the fact, the expression of a temperament and not only of virtue. The uprightness of Father d'Alzon recognized in himself, from the outset, what was confirmed by his humility.¹⁰¹

The noble family that he descended from was strongly visible in him: the pride of his bearing, that aristocratic air which he maintained to the end, his horror at vulgarity of manners. And yet, it was the same Father d'Alzon who from Rome during the Council was writing the following:

It is my great conviction that, in order to convert peoples today, aristocratic customs, above all, must be put aside.... The place of honor certainly does not belong to the Hungarian bishops who are the last grand lords of Europe, it belongs to the missionary bishops who arrive at the Vatican Council on foot because they have no carriages.... The strength of the future lies there; it is through poverty and humility that the world will be saved.

This text makes marvelously clear Father d'Alzon's fundamental point of view. If he retained some of the manners of a grand lord, it is because they were natural to him, integral to his physical self, and they were associated with the greatness of his moral being. They formed part of those things in one's nature that must be sublimated, not destroyed, and which he was thinking of when he said, "We are something only with our nature." He greatly valued politeness, courtesy, distinction of manners, precisely when he saw in them "something resolute, dignified, and amiable which attracted friendship while warding off familiarity." He constantly recommended them to his religious. When he stated that one must put aside aristocratic conventions, he was aiming at the pride of appearances, that notion of superiority or of command based solely upon a title or on wealth and expressed by external ostentation.

If he rejected these aristocratic practices, it was not in the name of a democratic principle. He was always singularly indifferent to political

regimes which interested him only to the extent that they served or ran counter to achieving the Kingdom of God. All that in him represented dignity and pride in his family origins, in his lineage, he had wholly transposed onto the divine level. It was in that sense that he dreamed of a noble militia, of a totally spiritual aristocracy which would impose itself by its grandeur of soul, its nobility of character, its generosity and disinterestedness — all the qualities which he himself possessed to a rare degree — and also by its superior culture, its scholarliness, its flight from vulgarity and mediocrity. It was exactly that ideal which he proposed to his congregation.

His recommendations, which insisted so much on refinement, have no other meaning. One of the most beautiful instructions he gave to his religious was based upon “supernatural distinction.. ..” “When the soul is great and beautiful,” he stated, “that greatness and that beauty show through on the countenance....

It is that intimate union of beauty inside and out and that radiance of the soul on its external self which constitute supernatural distinction.” And he added, “That distinction, companion of holiness, is not a privilege deriving from an illustrious origin; it is accessible to all, to the shepherd as well as the prince. Saint Vincent de Paul brought into the salons of Anne of Austria¹⁰² his religious poverty and the humble memory of his obscure birth....”

Religious poverty — Father d'Alzon practiced no virtue more intensely than this one. We have seen how one of the largest fortunes of his time — that of his parents — melted away in his hands, distributed entirely among his apostolic works, with the result that, at the end of his life, his circumstances were those of the very poor. This man, who had grown up surrounded by the splendors of the château of Lavagnac, was now content with a narrow cell, with a bed made of planks. New

underwear and linen which Madame d'Alzon sent him were, more often than not, given to the poor. He wore patched-up shoes, and one day that Canon Galeran, his former student, expressed surprise at this, he replied: "Believe me, let us wear patched shoes and threadbare cassocks, provided that the shoes be shined and the cassock brushed clean. After all, I am a religious; I have embraced poverty; should I not preach to my religious by example?"

He was adored by the people for the kindness he showed them, the devotion he lavished upon them. The most unfortunate were those he preferred. He never missed an opportunity to proclaim, on any and every occasion, what honor was due to these "friends of Jesus Christ." One day, when the students of the Saint Vincent de Paul Conference of his college had wanted to use a tipcart to transport a paralyzed old man, he had expostulated against treating him in that way, and so it was in a sedan-chair of the royal epoch, glittering with gilt ornamentation, loaned by a lady of Nîmes, that the poor old man passed through the streets of the astonished city. Truly, no one more than this grand lord put into practice the conviction he had expressed in 1869, again from Rome: "As for me, when I see so many misfortunes at the Council, I believe that God blesses the poor and strikes those who revel in everything that does not tend toward the suppression of self."

That was the very essence of Father d'Alzon's religious life. Although he was very attentive at keeping whatever in human nature was a gift from God and bore the stamp of the divine, he applied himself to the annihilation of everything in a temperament which might thwart the effort to achieve perfection. If it cost him little to disperse his fortune to the four winds in the name of charity, because he was naturally prodigal, on the other hand, he had to struggle hard to conquer within himself pride, impatience, nervous irritability, and that impertinent turn of mind

that has been described. There is no doubt also, even though on this point he was very secretive, that such a handsome, vigorous, and ardent man had to work hard to bridle his senses. It was at the price of a strict surveillance over himself — and who knows whether that mocking manner which characterized him, turning many women away from him, was not often a defensive tactic?—that he magnificently preserved that purity of which he wrote: “It is not held back by any weight; it is free, it has wings, it can soar toward the glory of God.”

To keep himself pure, to triumph over any slackness and all sensuality, he mortified himself without respite, often using a scourge with spur-like tips, a hair shirt, and bracelets of iron. “Corporal austerity,” he stated in his *Directoire*, “is the guardian of chastity.” He mortified his body for himself, and also for others — to obtain a conversion, to cast a soul into a more perfect life. In one of those gestures that disconcert us somewhat, but which were customary to his expansive nature, he once threw his blood-soaked handkerchief at one of his spiritual advisees who was resisting grace, saying to her: “There, my poor girl, is what you have cost me!” Thus, mortification was for him a passionate form of love of souls.

This energetic man was essentially an ascetic. Asceticism was the mark of his spirituality. A man of action, contemplative life was not his way. He venerated it, certainly; we know his fondness for the Carmel, and, at the very end of his life, on September 17, 1880, he wrote, as he was making yet one more retreat at the Carthusian monastery of Valbonne: “One finds oneself short on merit, when contemplating such a strong life lived in solitude.” But in that same letter, he repeated what he had so often said: “I don’t feel that I was made to live with the Carthusians.” Though in his last years he was accentuating mystical theology more and more, one need only read the course he taught in

1874 on that theme to become aware that he did not situate its application for himself and his sons at the level of a Teresa of Avila or a John of the Cross — even though he had studied in depth those geniuses, those saints of the contemplative life. He did not like Bérulle¹⁰³ whom he found excessively subtle, nor Fénelon. His spiritual author was Saint Francis de Sales, especially in his *Traite de Vamour de Dieu* [Treatise on the Love of God]. That mystical theology course insisted above all on study, love, and the imitation of Jesus Christ. And there is the key to Father d'Alzon.

Jesus Christ was his Master, his center, his all. The spirituality of Father d'Alzon is powerfully Christocentric. To achieve perfection, to attain holiness, a person need only put his or her footsteps in those of the Lord — and do it with feelings of love, surrender, adoration, and fidelity, being especially attached to the Passion of Christ which shines forth in Father d'Alzon's admirable text on the Crucifix, *L'Ami de tous les jours* [The Friend of Each and Every Day]. For Father d'Alzon, everything comes down to this. His interior life had consisted of living in union with Jesus — an intense, emotional union — which in prayer often caused him to shed tears — and to model himself upon him. Likewise, he considered that the unique goal of education was the formation of Jesus Christ in souls. As for his religious, he wanted that, before all else, Jesus Christ be embodied in them. The instructions he gave them were constantly inspired by this conviction.

Thus can be explained the asceticism of his spirituality. Fighting against one's defects, purifying oneself, perfecting oneself continually, that is how one can endeavor to destroy anything and everything which tend to separate us from Jesus, to distract us from him, that delays or jeopardizes that blessed union with Christ. From that comes the great importance that Father d'Alzon attached to the examination of

conscience. His *Directoire*, undoubtedly the most important of his spiritual writings, is almost entirely written in the form of a self-examination. But this is not approached in a finicky manner; there are no hair-splitting minutiae in these pressing interrogations of conscience which he suggests to his religious, so that in knowing themselves better, they can overcome everything which distances them from Jesus. These writings of his are driven by love, they proceed from a broad frame of reference, they challenge the person to strive for holiness and apostolic fervor; they invite the religious individual to establish the Kingdom of God, first of all in himself, in order to be able to make it triumph around him.

In Father d'Alzon, the man of action, everything was turned to action, and for him action had but one name: the apostolate. The *Adveniat regnum tuum* [Thy Kingdom Come], which he made the motto of his congregation, is not a passive prayer, but the passionate cry of a spiritual militia, in the very midst of combat. The point is to ensure the reign of Jesus Christ by the power of the Father and the outpouring of the Spirit. Under whatever aspect the apostolic instructions of Father d'Alzon are considered, it is always Jesus Christ who appears. This is so with regard to service for the Church — the reign of our Lord being nothing other than his action in the Church and unable to propagate itself except through the Church, custodian of the truth, guardian of the teaching of Christ. Love of the Pope, defense of the papacy, these are meaningful only because the Pope is the Vicar of Christ. Such is the animating principle which Father d'Alzon bestowed upon his religious and which powerfully unites the multiple and diverse works in which he engaged them.

It also explains a fundamental attitude of Father d'Alzon; he never compromised, never conceded anything when it came to the rights of God — which are absolute, both on souls and on society — and to the

pre-eminence of the supernatural. He wanted to make of that attitude a characteristic of his congregation. Nothing can, nor must it ever, prevail over truth, which is Christ, nor over his law. The very honor of the Catholic lies in not compromising on that score. Father d'Alzon expressed this in memorable fashion when he stood for the General Council of the Gard region. His proclamation of faith was certainly not among those which electoral assemblies were accustomed to hearing: "We possess neither the art of intrigue, nor the manipulation of certain influences, and I add this proudly, nor the will to employ certain means which bring victory at the cost of honor.... As a Catholic and a priest, I belong to that race of people who did not oppose giving to Caesar the things which belong to Caesar. But, in the things which belong to God, whose most precious jewels are the souls which he ransomed, I will genuflect neither before Caesar, nor before anyone."

Father d'Alzon had spoken of honor for which he had a penchant, one could go so far as to state even a cult, to a notable degree. And this leads us to stress to what extent his spirituality was infused with his natural virtues. Honor, straightforwardness, loyalty, openness of mind and heart, which were precisely his own dominant traits, he saw as the indispensable foundations of religious life. Character likewise, that is to say that type of courage which is so rare because it does not, of itself, facilitate temporal success, for it consists in publicly harmonizing one's life with one's convictions, one's principles, in knowing how to commit oneself to a cause. Never did Father d'Alzon yield to a base idea, even in the least of his proceedings, never to a self-interested calculation, from fear of being frowned upon or criticized. All his life, he was willing to go out on a limb. "In an age like ours," he used to say, "to follow the prudent theories of the flesh, that is to say human interests and political scheming, is more than cowardice, it is betrayal, it is sacrilegious." If he

saw betrayal and sacrilege in this, it was because it meant deserting the service of Christ; to be ashamed of him, preferring man to God.

There is in all this an intimate and original aspect of the spirituality of Father d'Alzon which goes further than it seems. If he bequeathed it to his sons with so much insistence, it was because he could not admit that a priest, a religious, could pretend at one and the same time to practice supernatural virtues and lack humanity, sincerity, and uprightness in his dealings with people. With eyes fixed constantly on the person of Christ — God and man at one and the same time — Father d'Alzon wanted to be sure that, in his religious, the human side would collaborate actively with the divine, including all that it could muster of nobility, dignity, and efficacy. In his eyes, natural virtues and supernatural ones are interdependent, they respond to and call forth each other.

One loves to discover that note of humanity, so alive, so sensitive, in Father d'Alzon's friendships. He had many of these which were incomparable. Nothing makes friendship come into being and last more than the feeling that a friend has of being necessary to his counterpart. Father d'Alzon experienced that feeling and benefited from it because, being basically good, he was avid of affection and he had the most loving of hearts. "I must love," he wrote in his youth, "and love someone.... I need to hear it said that someone loves me. I need even more perhaps to say that I love in return." He noted this in his youth, but it remained true in his prime. Here again is one of his most seductive and most beautiful of contrasting traits: at once so energetic and yet so tender; so much master of himself, so strong, so apparently able to be self-sufficient, and yet, experiencing the irrepressible need for understanding and faithful friendships. He, himself, was of unflinching loyalty in friendship; for his friends, he also knew how to commit himself and proved it time and again.

At age nineteen, he was already sublimating such a strong inclination toward friendship. In fact he wrote in 1829, with a certain awkwardness of style that stemmed from his youthfulness: "No, it is not man who must be questioned... about that love which, considered between two friends, establishes an ineffable society which intelligence alone cannot account for. This principle is not within himself, and if he shares in it, it is from elsewhere that it emanates... he senses that this is so.... It is not of the earth that one must ask wherefrom flows such a divine feeling." This youthful text must be acknowledged with respect for in it is foreshadowed that other one, written thirty years later, which sees in all relationships with one's neighbor the means of extending the Kingdom of God. The more Father d'Alzon grew in perfection, the more he considered that human friendships are a springboard toward that friend among all friends, to that "Friend of each and every day," to Jesus crucified!

To this love for Jesus, he closely linked a love for Mary, considered particularly in her Magnificat and her Assumption. What these express of joyous triumph satisfied in him an optimism and an enthusiasm which he based on confidence in God and his omnipotence. But it was also at the heart of the Passion of Christ that he loved to find the Mother of the human race. It was in saluting her that he found his best style: "Mary is not only a model for me," he wrote in his *Directoire*, "she is my Mother. It was on Calvary, at the foot of the cross of her son, that she adopted me. She took me when she was in a way still covered with the blood of Jesus poured out for me — and, in spite of the horror which I must cause her since, if Jesus died, it was for my sins — she accepts me as her child. From that moment, I am her son." Jesus, the Virgin Mary, and the Church, that is the triple love Father d'Alzon left as a legacy to his sons.

Such was the tone of his piety, manly and always centered on doctrine. He used to say to his novices: "No twisted necks, and don't try

to show the angels the whites of your eyes when you pray, meditate, or contemplate.... Learn the art of dealing with God; go ungrudgingly to our Lord; serve his majesty with generosity and faithful love." He could not stand fussiness and unctuous circumlocutions in piety; he wanted a person to go to God directly, simply, and sincerely. He said Mass rather quickly, in about twenty minutes. The reason for this, according to his biographers, was that his Mass, said very early in the morning, was attended by people of modest means, in a hurry to get to their work. It is also possible that Father d'Alzon — and this would be quite in conformity with the style of his spirituality — considered the Mass for what in effect it is: a sacrificial action and therefore an act which it is fitting to carry out with alacrity. In any case, it was not ill-considered haste, because his preparation for Mass was a lengthy one and his thanksgiving also was very prolonged. He wrote and spoke magnificently of prayer, that essence of the Christian, as well as the religious, life. He prayed a great deal himself and devoted to prayer all the time he could spare from his daily round — devoured as he was by so many occupations — and, above all, a large portion of his nights.

He especially prized purity of intention and a great unselfishness in the act of praying. To his religious he recommended in his *Directoire*: "1. Never to ask in their prayers for anything which did not tend toward the greater glory of God; 2. In their own ordeals...never to ask to be delivered from them except inasmuch as their deliverance could contribute to the greatest extension of the reign of Jesus Christ; 3. All the while that they looked to be freed from their temporal hardships, (that they seek through them) only a greater opportunity for the service of God to whom they must be entirely consecrated."

Service of God, service to the Church — which constitute only a single entity in his eyes — that is the adage to live by, bequeathed by

Father d'Alzon to his sons. That maxim has value and acquires its strength, its efficacy, only through a spirit of faith wherein is to be found, when all is said and done, the principal characteristic of Assumption and the soul of Father d'Alzon. A Religious of the Assumption is quoted as having said of Father: "What struck me the most in my dealings with him was a supernatural spirit and a faith for which there existed no obstacle, and that faith somehow communicated itself. Faced with a sacrifice or a difficulty, one could not say the word 'impossible' within earshot for that would have resembled a doubt, and to doubt was to stab him in the heart, so much did it seem that his mission was to establish the reign of faith in souls."

It is that spirit of faith which made him accumulate works upon works, with dauntless confidence, without ever allowing himself to be discouraged by a failure. In the last stages of his life, he spoke these words — surprising for their vivacity and youthfulness of soul — to Father Vincent de Paul Bailly: "I am resolved also in 1879 to be a man of faith and confidence in God, to the point of driving to despair all the rascals who surround us." On his deathbed, leaving behind him only forty-three professed religious who were, besides, under the gun of expulsion and dispersion by the government, he could still view the future of Assumption with serenity. It was because, for Father d'Alzon, who projected everything onto the supernatural level, the question came down to this: "Assumption is preparing itself for much better days; if it truly desires only God and the Church, the rest will come later." A *contagious faith*, is the way he phrased it, was in his eyes the secret of apostolic successes.

Father d'Alzon wanted that spirit of faith to be continually fostered and fortified by study and by doctrine. This was at the forefront of his preoccupations. One is left to wonder how, in such a prodigiously active

life, he could himself have given so much time to intellectual pursuits, but the facts speak for themselves — he never stopped studying throughout his life. Everyone was struck by the universality and the solidity of his knowledge which he carefully kept up-to-date. Cardinal Manning¹⁰⁴ marveled at his in-depth knowledge of the Anglican Church and the Oxford Movement. As for Father d'Alzon's views, often anticipatory, on the Eastern schism, they were not those of an intuitive or imaginative person, but of a mind very well informed on the history of the Eastern Churches, quite as much as on their position in his day, and of the possibilities, as well as the difficulties, which the situation presented. It was the same for all other matters. A rare facility, a power of assimilation, also quite uncommon, served him well, but they were backed up by unrelenting hard work which he considered to be more apostolic in nature than anything else. No one was more convinced than he that the modern evil had its roots in the mind. That is where, he said over and over again, it must be hunted down and destroyed.

Near the end of his life (1878), Father d'Alzon proposed to his Order three principal means of working fruitfully for the coming of the Kingdom of God based upon the many years of experience which had confirmed his life-long conviction. Two of them — the third concerned the social order — were of an intellectual nature: "Work for the restoration of Catholic higher education according to the principles of Saint Augustine and Saint Thomas. Fight for the unity of the Church by devoting ourselves to the destruction of schism." Those are goals which call for a lengthy preparation. Accordingly, Father d'Alzon added: "The Assumptionist religious must become and remain all his life a man of study and a man of doctrine..."

But what should he study? he asked rhetorically in one of his meditations. This was his reply: 1. Jesus Christ; 2. Dogmatic Theology; 3.

Moral Theology; 4. The Bible and Jesus Christ in the Bible; 5. The Holy Fathers; 6. History; 7. Canon Law; 8. Literature and Aesthetics which should be permeated with the Christian spirit.

For Father d'Alzon, this program of doctrine and studies commanded all the forms of apostolate. Teaching, first and foremost, but that stands to reason; it also governed every other activity: charitable, social, the work of the press, and even the public manifestations of Faith, such as processions and pilgrimages. To cut these off from doctrine, in his estimation, was to cut them off from their roots. Likewise, certain original characteristics, notably those of a monastic nature, which Father d'Alzon gave to his Order — an active one par excellence — the monastic habit, recitation in common of the canonical office, fasting once a week, profound reverence for the liturgy — proceed from a doctrinal point of view.

But here one must disengage the word doctrine from what it could suggest of abstraction and dryness. Nothing was farther from Father d'Alzon, from his sense of the concrete, from his way of considering the whole man, from his intense feeling for life. In this, as in everything, and more than elsewhere, his affective powers came into play. Knowledge for him — no matter how thorough and erudite it might be — was love, and as such it became part and parcel of the work of religious perfection. If Jesus Christ is to be known properly, it is so that he might be loved better; if his teachings and the sacred sciences which flow from them must be known thoroughly, it is so that one can serve God and his Church with a heart all the more ardent because it is more enlightened.

All of that, which is so noticeable in the spiritual writings of Father d'Alzon — *Directoire*, circulars, instructions, or meditations — is evident also in his correspondence, and in a more gripping fashion perhaps, because in his letters the man bared his heart and mind. This is a

correspondence second to none, in my estimation, unheard of in number — estimated at twenty or thirty thousand letters by his best-documented historian, Father Siméon Vailhé. Though extraordinarily impressive in number, they are even more so in the fullness and the substance imparted to them by his complete openness of mind and heart, his total forthrightness, his outpourings, his liveliness, his impulsiveness, and also by the picturesqueness of Father d'Alzon's style, but also, when the subject required it, by the firmness and gravity of his thought, the extensiveness and variety of the views expressed. They are such that one could almost, through his letters alone, reconstitute the story of his life and, by the same token, learn a great deal about many of the great events of his time. Without exaggeration, it seems to me that one could say that Montaigne, thinking of La Boétie,¹⁰⁵ would delight in the letters to d'Esgrigny; that Paul Louis Courier¹⁰⁶ would envy Father d'Alzon his exuberance, his drive, the witty and biting tone of certain missives; that a historian of the Church of France in the nineteenth century would find in these letters a treasure trove of information. It can be stated also, with as much veracity, that the letters of spiritual direction of the founder of Assumption, the spiritual father of Mother Marie Eugénie and Mother Correnson, would certainly not suffer by comparison with those of Saint Francis de Sales, or Father Henri de Tourville,¹⁰⁷ of whom he often makes one think. It would be easy to believe, after all this, that the correspondence is such a dense forest that one could get lost in it. But no! the trees here do not hide the forest.

They do not hide it because, no matter how rich, exuberant, diverse, and made up of contrasts the man might be, or how profuse, even superabundantly so, in his very different undertakings the apostle may have been, Father d'Alzon was motivated in everything by a grandly simple idea, one alone, and by a single passion. During his lifetime, he

was greatly reproached by many for dispersing his efforts. For my part I am, on the contrary, struck by the unity of his thought, action, and life and by the magisterial way in which he brought the varieties and contrasts of his nature, as well as the multiplicity of his initiatives, back to one essential objective, perceived once and for all and from which he never departed. From his approximately forty thousand letters [as currently estimated] and ten thousand sermons, from the two congregations which he founded and those he had a hand in founding — or which he sustained — from the associations and works which he conceived, realized, and constantly inspired, from his labor as vicar-general, from his struggles for the defense of the Church and the coming of the Kingdom of God, finally, from his many-sided dizzying activity, he emerges like a boomerang whose trajectory does not deviate and whose point of departure is identical with its point of arrival. Unity was Father d'Alzon's obsession, even his torment. The principle of this unity can be found in the last word which escaped from his dying lips: Jesus.

Notes

Material for these endnotes was culled from Rev. Siméon Vailhé, A.A.'s extensive notes to the Letters of Emmanuel d'Alzon, meticulously edited by him in the 1920s, as well as from French, American, and religious works of reference. Notes from the original French edition are marked with the author's initials: G.B.

¹ "Liberal" in 19th century French history refers to a political ideology that espoused freethinking" and rejected any consideration of the "rights of God" and those of the Church.

² Georges Tavard, *Le Père d'Alzon au Ier Concile du Vatican* (Rome: 1996).

³ Tavard, "Blondel's Action and the problem of the University" in Darrell Jodock, ed., *Catholicism Contending with Modernity. Roman Catholic Modernism and Anti-Modernism in Historical Context* (Cambridge University Press: 2000), pp. 143-168.

⁴ *Lettres du P. Emmanuel d'Alzon*, vol. IV (Rome: 1992), p. 342, footnote.

⁵ Victorin Galabert, *Journal*, vol. I (1862-1866) (Sofia: 1998); vol. II (1867-1869) (Sophia: 2000). French with Bulgarian translation.

⁶ Department. The French Revolutionary government divided France into administrative divisions called departments.

⁷ Cévennes. A mountainous region of southern France which became a Protestant stronghold.

⁸ Wars of Religion. Fierce wars of the second half of the sixteenth century between Catholics and Protestants in France which came to an end in 1598 with the proclamation of the Edict of Nantes by King Henri IV. (See below also, note 5.)

⁹ Huguenots. Name given to French Protestants.

¹⁰ Edict of Nantes (1598). The edict which granted French Protestants concessions regarding their freedom of worship and civil rights. It was revoked during the reign of Louis XIV.

¹¹ Camisards. Protestant peasants of the Cévennes region so-named from the distinctive shirt they wore in night raids.

¹² Mayenne. Department in northwest France.

¹³ Vendée. Department in western France which gave its name to the Catholic uprising of 1793 in opposition to the anticlerical French Revolution.

¹⁴ Charette, François (1763-1796). One of the leaders of the Catholic uprising; he was captured and executed by the government.

¹⁵ Jacobins. Political faction of the French Revolution known for its extremism. Robespierre and Saint-Just, who instituted the Reign of Terror, were its leaders. The name Jacobin derives from the *rue St. Jacques* in Paris, site of the Dominican monastery whose buildings the Jacobins had expropriated.

¹⁶ Musset, Alfred de (1810-57). Outstanding French poet and playwright of the Romantic School.

¹⁷ Romanticism. Artistic movement in France during the first half of the nineteenth century which permeated French culture and society. It produced outstanding poets, playwrights, and novelists, among them Victor Hugo, Alphonse de Lamartine, and Alfred de Vigny, in addition to Musset.

¹⁸ Blanche of Castille (1188-1252). Wife of King Louis VIII of France and mother of Louis IX (1214-70) who built the Sainte Chapelle in Paris and was canonized in 1297.

¹⁹ Restoration (1815-1830). Refers to the restoration of the Bourbon monarchy in France after the defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo.

²⁰ Friends of Emmanuel d'Alzon who were, like him, the scions of France's most noble and notable families and who would later become illustrious in their own right, e.g., La Bouillèrie, François Alexandre (1810-82), who became bishop of Carcassonne. At his death, he was coadjutor to the archbishop of Bordeaux. For information on La Tour du Pin, see Chapter X, note 4.

²¹ Lodève. City in the Hérault, a department bordering the Gard River.

²² Barante, Baron Prosper Brugière de (1782-1866). Historian who occupied various government positions during the Napoleonic Empire and the Restoration.

²³ Chateaubriand, Viscount François René de (1768-1848). Precursor of the French Romantic School; he wrote *Le Génie du Christianisme* [The Genius of Christianity] in 1802 in defense of Christianity and, in 1809, *Les Martyrs*, which is considered a Catholic epic. A writer known for the beauty of his style, he also played an important political role during the Restoration as a moderate royalist.

²⁴ Delavigne, Casimir (1793-1843). Liberal poet and playwright.

²⁵ Pascal, Blaise (1623-62). Brilliant mathematician and scientific scholar, best known for his *Pensées* [Thoughts], which were notes for a projected apologia of Catholicism. He died before completing the work.

²⁶ Voltaire, François Marie Arouet (1694-1778). Prolific writer in all genres, known for his liberal ideas expressed in his *Lettres philosophiques* and *Candide*. He was viewed by nineteenth-century Catholics as having played a role in bringing down the monarchy and weakening the Church in France.

²⁷ Montesquieu, Charles de Secondat, Baron de la Brede (1689-1755). Noted French liberal philosopher of the eighteenth century. He is best known for *L'Esprit des Lois* [The Spirit of Laws] in which he defended human liberty, the

separation of powers, and just reforms of society. He exerted some influence on the thinking of the American Founding Fathers.

²⁸ Bonald, Louis de (1754-1840). (See Introduction.)

²⁹ Racine, Jean (1639-99). Famous seventeenth century writer of tragedies whose *Andromaque* had revealed his genius to the French public.

³⁰ *Anacharsis*. A 1779 reconstitution of the public and private lives of fourth-century Greeks by Abbé Barthelemy.

³¹ Salinis, Rev. Louis Antoine de (1798-1861). Founded the *Association pour la défense de la religion catholique* and the *Mémorial catholique*. A close friend of Lamennais, he parted with him when Rome condemned the latter's philosophy. Became vicar-general of Bordeaux (1840), bishop of Amiens (1849), and archbishop of Auch (1856). He published a *Précis* of the history of philosophy (1847) and a book entitled *La Divinité de L'Eglise* (1855).

³² Most of these numerous friends of Emmanuel d'Alzon became men of noteworthy accomplishments. Listed below is further information on them.

Gerbet, Olympe Philippe (1798-1864). A disciple of Lamennais, he founded *La Revue catholique* based upon Lamennais's philosophy of religion (See the Introduction of this book.) A precursor of Catholic socialism in France, he later became bishop of Perpignan.

Combalot, Théodore (1797-1873). Noted preacher and friend of the d'Alzon family who would become the spiritual director of Eugénie Milleret, foundress of the Religious of the Assumption.

Boré, Léon and Eugène. Followers of Lamennais, especially Eugène who enrolled in Lamennais's school in Paris, became his representative in that city, and remained faithful to him. Léon became a priest and superior of the Lazarists; Fr. d'Alzon would meet him again later in Constantinople.

Bonnetty, Augustin (1798-1879). Founder in 1830 of the *Annales de philosophic chrétienne* (96 volumes). Became director of *L'Université Catholique* (1837). His viewpoint was condemned by Rome.

Gouraud, Henri. Close friend and correspondent of Emmanuel d'Alzon. He became a doctor. General Henri Gouraud, his namesake, and hero of World War I fame, was his grandson.

D'Esgrigny, Lugien de Jouenne (1806-1886). Emmanuel's closest friend along with Du Lac (see below). Wrote for *Le Correspondant*. Friend of Louis Veuillot, the well-known Catholic author.

La Gournerie, Eugène de (1807-1887). Traveled in Italy with Emmanuel d'Alzon in 1834. He is the author of *Rome chrétienne* and an important article on the origins of the press (1873) which appeared in the *Revue de Bretagne et de Vendée*. He and d'Alzon had met through Lamennais and de Salinis.

Du Lac, Jean Melchior (1806-1872). He was only twenty when he began writing for the *Mémorial Catholique* and *Le Correspondant*. Later wrote for *L'Univers*. (See n. 33; Chap. II, n.3; Chap. V, n.1)

Cazalès, (1804-1876). Son of Jacques de Cazalès (1758-1805), a famous member and brilliant orator of the Royalist Party in the early days of the French Revolution. The son became a priest and wrote for *Le Correspondant*.

Carné, Louis de (1804-1876). Catholic journalist at *Le Correspondant*, author of *Souvenirs de ma jeunesse* [Memories of My Youth] and *Etudes sur les fondateurs de l'Unité Nationale en France* [Studies on the Founders of National Unity in France]. Elected to the Académie française in 1864.

³³ Lamennais, Félicité de (1782-1854). The most celebrated French cleric of his day. Born in Brittany, he was an advocate of ultramontanism in France. (See the Introduction to this book for more extensive information presented by George Tavard, A.A.)

³⁴ Maistre, Joseph de (1753-1831). (See Introduction.)

³⁵ Gallicanism. (See Introduction.)

³⁶ *Fidéisme*: A doctrine put forth by Lamennais according to which the true nature of things and absolute truth can be known only through revelation and faith.

³⁷ La Chesnaie. A school where Lamennais trained his followers and where he hoped that Emmanuel d'Alzon would join him. A second school of his was located at Malestroit.

³⁸ Bailly, Emmanuel Joseph (1793-1861). Founder of many associations, including the Saint Vincent de Paul Society (1833) along with Frédéric Ozanam. He also started the Catholic newspaper *Le Correspondant*, published twice weekly from 1829 to 1831, and later founded *L'Univers*. His two sons became Assumptionist priests: Vincent de Paul (1832-1912) founded *Pèlerin* [Pilgrim] *Magazine* in 1873 and the daily Catholic newspaper *La Croix* [The Cross] in 1880; Emmanuel became the third superior-general of the Assumptionists in 1903.

³⁹ *Congrégation*. Religious association founded in 1814 which brought together many leading figures during the Restoration. It engaged in charitable works, e.g., visiting both the sick and prisoners, in addition to teaching catechism to young chimney sweeps, but was suspected falsely by the liberals of undue influence upon the government. It came to an end in 1830.

⁴⁰ Hôtel-Dieu. A famous Paris hospital, dating back to the Middle Ages, located near Notre Dame Cathedral, where Emmanuel visited the sick as a result of belonging to the *Congrégation*.

⁴¹ Lacordaire, Henri (1802-1861). One of the leaders of liberal Catholicism in France alongside Lamennais and Montalembert. After the Papal condemnation of *L'Avenir* in 1832, he separated from Lamennais, became a Dominican in 1839,

and re-established the order in France (1843). He was a renowned preacher who founded *L'Ere Nouvelle* after the Revolution of 1848.

⁴² Congregation of Saint Peter. Founded in 1829 by Lamennais and “designed to inaugurate a new type of religious institute, more flexible in its organization than existing religious orders. It combined a broader outlook on the world with a training, considered better suited to modern needs, that introduced members to the founder’s ideas concerning the revival of Christianity.” (*Catholic Encyclopedia*) (See Introduction also.)

⁴³ Guérin, Maurice de (1810-1839). Spent a year in Brittany studying for the priesthood under the direction of Lamennais but gave it up to live a worldly life in Paris. His sister Eugénie published his diary *Le cahier vert* [The Green Notebook] after his untimely death from consumption.

⁴⁴ Polignac, Jules de (1780-1847). Imprisoned for his involvement in the Vendean uprising and later in a plot against Napoleon I, he managed to escape in 1813. Ardent defender of Catholicism during the Restoration of the Bourbon dynasty after the fall of Napoleon, he became Minister for Foreign Affairs under Charles X, king (1824-1830). His intransigence led to the short-lived July Revolution and the fall of the Bourbon monarchy.

⁴⁵ Louis-Philippe (1773-1850). From the Orléans branch of the royal family, he reigned from 1830 to 1848. His father, called Philippe-Égalité, had voted in favor of the guillotine for his cousin Louis XVI.

⁴⁶ *L'Avenir*. Newspaper published in Paris from October 1830 to November 1831 under the direction of Lamennais and his collaborators, including Gerbet, Lacordaire, and Montalembert. Condemned by Pope Gregory XVI in 1832.

⁴⁷ *Le Correspondant*. Newspaper founded by Emmanuel Bailly. Directed by Count Charles de Montalembert (1810-1870), it expressed a liberal Catholic viewpoint. Early collaborator of Lamennais and Lacordaire, Montalembert submitted to the Holy See after the condemnation of Lamennais. Elected to the Académie française in 1851.

⁴⁸ Malebranche, Nicolas (1638-1715). French philosopher and theologian who was ordained as an Oratorian in 1664. Author of important works, including: *De la Recherche de la Vérité* [On the Search for Truth] (1674), *Traité de la Nature et de la Grace* (1675), *Traité de la Morale* (1683), and *Les Entretiens sur la Métaphysique et la Religion* [Discussions on Metaphysics and Religion] (1688).

⁴⁹ Montaigne, Michel Eyquem de (1533-1592). French magistrate and renowned essayist. Author of the outstanding three-volume *Essais* published in 1588.

⁵⁰ Sévigné, Marie de Rabutin-Chantal, marquise de (1626-1696). Celebrated writer of letters, especially to her daughter; these letters were published posthumously in 1726.

⁵¹ Saint-Simon, Claude Henri de Rouvroy, *comtede* (1760-1825). Precursor of Positivism and the science of Sociology. *Le Nouveau christianisme* [The New Christianity], published posthumously, became the basis for the Saint-Simonian School of Socialism.

⁵² Lamartine, Alphonse de (1770-1832). Author of the Romantic School. *Les Méditations Poétiques* were published in 1820. A prolific writer in many genres, he also engaged in government service, becoming Minister of Foreign Affairs (1848-1851).

⁵³ Guérin, Eugénie de (1805-1848). Sister of Maurice de Guérin, author of poems and a *Journal*; she corresponded regularly with her brother. (See also Chapter I, note 38.)

⁵⁴ An entire chapter could be written on the key role played by friendship in the life of Father d'Alzon. In such a text, the 16th century legendary friendship between Montaigne, the renowned essayist, and the brilliant intellectual La Boétie would be surpassed in every way, but especially at the spiritual level. In 1829, Emmanuel noted: "No, it is not man who can be asked to explain...this love which, when examined between two friends, is seen to have established an indescribable bond that cannot be accounted for by his intelligence alone for its source is not within him, and if he partakes of it, he himself senses full well that it originates elsewhere." His source for this statement, as he indicated immediately, are the words of Jesus himself at his last supper: "He loved his own in the world and he loved them to the end." In 1831, Emmanuel also noted: "I have a few friends. I cherish them as I do myself. I seek to love them for God; I owe them all the joys that one finds in the total surrender of one heart to another. To look for something better would be impossible for me. I have met all too well. I will not even look any further because I do not know how to open up to everyone." G.B.

⁵⁵ This one, for example: "To adore the Word by whom everything has been created, to be the echo of the Eternal Word and like a mirror in which he who is the life and the light reflects his rays which shine forth in the middle of the darkness, such is, to my thinking, the most beautiful goal for me." Emmanuel assigned himself as a model the Son of God "in every aspect of his mortal existence... but especially, for me, when he was preaching to sinners and announcing the truth to the nations who were sitting in the shadow of death." G.B.

⁵⁶ These are not the words of Saint Francis Xavier, but of Saint Augustine. Memory lapse.... G.B.

⁵⁷ Montalembert. (See note 3 above.)

⁵⁸ Georges Goyau, *Religious History of the French Nation*, pp. 553-554. G.B.

⁵⁹ Guéranger, Dom Prosper Louis Pascal (1805-1875). Purchased the Abbey of Solesmes (1833) which had been nationalized during the French Revolution, and obtained papal approval to reorganize the Benedictine Order in France. He

was the author of important works on the liturgy. An ultramontane, he was a friend and collaborator of Louis Veuillot at *L'Univers*. (See also n. 1 of Chap. V.)

⁶⁰ Emmanuel also allowed himself to be swayed by the prejudice of his day against the Jesuits. Moreover, he wrote in a spontaneous outpouring of words, incisively, without weighing any of his expressions. His thinking was categorical and his remarks like battering rams. Between him and the Jesuits as a body there was certainly an incompatibility of spiritual temper which would subsist. But one cannot size up the absolute accuracy of his judgment from his percussive style. Far from it; we will see later that on one occasion, when the Jesuits had been threatened with expulsion from one of their colleges, he became their most resolute defender. G.B.

⁶¹ That letter was said to be lost. The text has just been found again and is published here for the first time. G.B.

⁶² Fénelon, François de Salignac de La Mothe (1651-1715). Author of a treatise on the education of young women, *Traité de l'éducation des filles* (1687) and preceptor (1689-1694) to the Duke of Burgundy, the heir to the throne of France, for whom he wrote *Aventures de Télémaque* (1699). His orthodoxy was placed in doubt when he chose to adopt Quietism, a doctrine which was subsequently condemned by the Church. This accounts for E. d'Alzons reference to him here.

⁶³ Ultramontane / ultramontanism. (See Introduction.)

⁶⁴ Confiscated by the Vatican Post Office and recently discovered, like the letter of February 15. G.B.

⁶⁵ *Common sense*. (See Introduction.)

⁶⁶ Daudét, Alphonse (1840-1897). Famous French writer of short stories and novels based upon characters from the south of France where he was born. *Les Lettres de mon moulin* is his best-known collection. Daudét's drama *L'Arlésienne* was set to music by Bizet.

⁶⁷ Reboul, Jean. A noted lyric poet instrumental in reviving the language and culture of Provence. (See also note 1, Chap. VI.)

⁶⁸ Sainte Pélagie. Lamennais spent a year (1841) in this jail for attacking the policies of the July Monarchy.

⁶⁹ Veuillot, Louis (1813-1883). A militant Catholic, he became editor of *L'Univers* (1843), a Catholic newspaper (1860-1867) suspended by Napoleon III. He was in favor of the dogma of papal infallibility.

⁷⁰ Rancé, Armand Jean Le Bouthillier de (1625-1700). After leading a worldly life as a priest, he became a Trappist in 1663 and abbot at Soligny (1664) which he reformed. Author of *La Sainteté et les devoirs de la vie monastique* [Sanctity and the Duties of Monastic Life] (1683).

⁷¹ Choral office was not officially instituted in this first rule; it was practiced nevertheless, as early as 1845. G.B.

⁷² He had been its sole proprietor since early November, Father Goubier having given up his interest in the enterprise. G.B.

⁷³ Thiers, Louis Adolphe (1791-1877). Author of a history of the French Revolution and journalist, he played an active role in the July Monarchy (1830-1848), becoming first, Minister of the Interior and then, of Foreign Affairs. He would become the first head of the French Third Republic in 1871 after having served in Napoleon III's government.

⁷⁴ Cousin, Victor (1792-1867). He was Minister of Education (1840) in the Thiers cabinet; considered to be the founder of the history of philosophy and spiritual eclecticism.

⁷⁵ Saint-Marc Girardin, François (1801-1873). Journalist, literary critic, and professor at the Sorbonne. Active in politics during the July Monarchy, in the early years of the Second Republic, and again in 1871 after the fall of Napoleon III.

⁷⁶ These authors were members of the *félibrige* founded by Roumanille in 1854 to preserve the Provençal dialect. *Mireille*, the epic poem by Frédéric Mistral (1830-1914), inspired Charles Gounod to turn it into an opera (1864). In 1878, Mistral published a lexicon of the various dialects of the South of France. His works would earn him the Nobel Prize in 1904. Roumanille is considered to be the creator of modern Provençal prose. Aubanel and Reboul were lyric poets. The presence of these writers proves that Emmanuel d'Alzon appreciated the writers of his day and wanted his students to be aware of contemporary literary movements. In the case of the *félibrige* poets, it also illustrates his attachment to the region of his birth.

⁷⁷ Ozanam, Frédéric (1813-1853). One of the founders — along with Emmanuel Joseph Bailly (See Chapter I, note 33)—of the Saint Vincent de Paul Society (1833). As a journalist, he collaborated with Lacordaire at *L'Ere Nouvelle*. Once again we find Emmanuel d'Alzon linked with the outstanding men of his day.

⁷⁸ Gallicanism. (See Introduction.)

⁷⁹ Gaume, Rev. Jean-Joseph (1802-1879). Taught dogmatic theology at the major seminary in Nevers, then became its rector before being named vicar-general of that diocese. Dismissed by his bishop for his views on the study of the classics. Wrote over 40 books on a wide variety of religious and educational topics. In *Le Ver rongeur des sociétés modernes ou le paganisme dans l'éducation* [The Worm Gnawing at Modern Societies or Paganism in Education] (1851), he blamed the dechristianization of France on the intensive use of Greek and Latin classics in the schools, arguing for a greater use of early Christian authors. An ultramontane, he was condemned by Catholic liberals, including Bishop Dupanloup of Orleans. (See note 5 below.)

⁸⁰ Dupanloup, Félix (1802-1878). Consecrated as bishop of Orléans in 1849, he was a renowned pedagogue and a leader of liberal Catholicism. He would be

opposed to the proclamation of papal infallibility, but he submitted to the Holy See.

⁸¹ Carbonaro. A reference to the Carbonari, an Italian secret society linked to Freemasonry, formed to obtain political freedom in Italy.

⁸² Austria. By declaring war on Austria, Napoleon III came to the rescue of the Italian cause. The victories at Magenta and Solferino (1859) chased the Austrians from Lombardy, but his haste to sign a treaty with the Austrians disappointed his Italian allies.

⁸³ It should be noted, however, that, already in 1855, the rule existed in its essential elements; after that it would never be substantially modified. G.B.

⁸⁴ Oxford Movement. Begun at Oxford University in 1833 by clergymen belonging to the Church of England who wished to revive some Catholic doctrine and rituals.

⁸⁵ Propaganda. Abbreviated name of the department of the Roman Curia which is charged with the supreme direction and administration of the missionary activity of the Church. Pope Gregory XV formally erected the Congregation for the Propaganda of the Faith on January 6, 1622. (Catholic Encyclopedia)

⁸⁶ "I bless your works..." For more on this subject, see Introduction.

⁸⁷ It would not be amiss here to recall what Emmanuel d'Alzon wrote about himself in 1831: "I am too simple, too trusting, and often duped; I don't know the human heart enough." He could have signed that same statement in 1862 as well. G.B.

⁸⁸ Photian Schism. Named for Photius (c. 820-892) who became patriarch of Constantinople and later challenged the rights of the Pope in Bulgaria besides questioning certain Roman practices. He is considered as having been ultimately responsible for the East-West division in the Catholic Church which, however, became final only in the 11th century. He is credited with having organized the mission of Saints Cyril and Methodius to the Slavs (862-863).

⁸⁹ Philippopolis. An Assumptionist school was founded there in 1864 and a college, which opened its doors in 1884, was closed by the Communists in 1948. In November 1952, the Communist-controlled regime of Bulgaria put to death three Bulgarian Assumptionist priests after a mock trial which condemned them as "spies and conspirators, seeking to foment an imperialist war against the USSR, Bulgaria and Popular Democracies." These three priests: Josaphat Chichkov, b. 1884, Kamen Vitchev, b. 1893, and Pavel Djidjov, b. 1919, were declared martyrs in April 2002 and beatified by Pope John Paul II on May 26, 2002, in Plovdiv, the modern Bulgarian name for Philippopolis.

⁹⁰ Adrianople. An ancient Greek city now in Turkey, and called Edirne, it had been the capital of the Ottoman Empire (1361). The treaty recognizing Greek independence was signed there in 1829.

⁹¹ Although the “mission to the East” debuted in a small way, with the primary school of St. Andrew in Plovdiv, it would spread to other parts of Bulgaria and then to Constantinople, to the Turkish coast and to Rumania with numerous educational institutions and a research center for Byzantine studies; it eventually extended to the Holy Land, Father d’Alzon’s original goal.

⁹² Syllabus. Document issued by Pius IX (Pio Nono) along with the encyclical *Quanta Cura* in 1864. It listed 80 propositions which Pius IX considered the principal errors of the modern era, e.g., pantheism, socialism, rationalism, liberalism, etc. The title of the document is so long that it is usually shortened to *Syllabus of Modern Errors*. (See Introduction also.)

⁹³ Arras. Capital of the Pas de Calais region in northern France.

⁹⁴ See Rev. S. Vailhé, *Vie du Père d’Alzon*, vol. 2, p. 517. G.B.

⁹⁵ “*la mouche du coche*”. This is a reference to a fable by the 17th century writer Jean de LaFontaine: “Le Coche et la Mouche” in which a *mouche* [fly] busies itself with trying to make a *coche* [stagecoach] advance in difficult terrain by buzzing about incessantly.

⁹⁶ Sedan. City in northeastern France, bordering on Belgium where the French were defeated by the Prussians in 1870. This led to the imprisonment of Napoleon III, the downfall of the Second Empire, and political unrest throughout the nation.

⁹⁷ Le Play, Frédéric (1806-1882). Economist and sociologist, he instituted the *Société d’économie sociale* (1856) and initiated the monographic method in Sociology. He was the principal representative of social Catholicism of a conservative, traditional nature which sought to reform society through a paternalistic approach by restoring the authority of landowners, employers, and heads of families. Published *L’Ouvrier européen* [The European Worker] and *La Réforme sociale* (1864).

⁹⁸ De Mun, Count Albert (1844-1914). Favored the collaboration of social classes within mixed, i.e., employer-employee unions under the control of the State. As a legislator, he promoted laws favoring workers, especially women. Wrote *Ma Vocation sociale* in 1908. Elected to the Académie française in 1897.

⁹⁹ La Tour du Pin, Marquis Rene de (1834-1924). One of the leading representatives of social Catholicism in France. Founder and leader of Catholic Worker Circles. Sought to use the Catholic ideal as the basis for a representative regime of corporatism.

¹⁰⁰ Commune. Revolutionary government constituted in Paris and several provincial cities in March 1871, hostile to capitulation to the Prussian forces which the “official” government had already done. It was overpowered by French troops in May. They were ruthless in killing the *communards* who are still revered by the Left in France.

¹⁰¹ An admirable testimony of that conquered humility are the “reviews of life” of Father d’Alzon to the one among his sons whom he had selected as his

spiritual director, Father Picard, especially the one dated November 6, 1866. One cannot imagine greater simplicity or self-abnegation. G.B.

¹⁰² Anne of Austria (1601-1666). Wife of Louis XIII and mother of Louis XIV.

¹⁰³ Bérulle, Pierre Cardinal de (1575-1629). Established the reformed Carmelites in France (1604) with the help of Madame Acarie. He founded the Oratorians, a secular congregation in 1611. Elevated to the cardinalate in 1627. Illustrated the seventeenth century French school of spirituality along with St. Vincent de Paul, etc.

¹⁰⁴ Manning, Henry Cardinal (1808-1892). A convert to Roman Catholicism under the guidance of Cardinal Wiseman — whom he would succeed as archbishop of Westminster (1865)—he became superior of the Oblates of Saint Charles (1856) for Catholic Missions in London. Appointed cardinal in 1875, he was in favor of the doctrine of papal infallibility. Wrote *The Dignity and Rights of Labour* (1874)

¹⁰⁵ La Boétie, Etienne de (1530-1563). Highly precocious — he composed the *Discours de la servitude volontaire* [Discourse on Voluntary Servitude] at the age of 18 — in which he denounced tyranny. He introduced his friend Montaigne to the doctrine of Stoicism. His friendship with the great essayist has been called “a marriage of souls.”

¹⁰⁶ Courier de Méré, Paul Louis (1772-1825). A career military man, he was a Hellenic scholar who wrote mordant pamphlets against the Bourbon Restoration. His *Lettres écrites de France et d'Italie* [Letters Written from France and Italy] are models of the epistolary genre. He also wrote *Le Pamphlet des pamphlets* (1824), an apologia of the pamphlet genre.

¹⁰⁷ Tourville, Rev. Henri de (1842-1903). French sociologist, initially a disciple of Frédéric LePlay (see note 2, Chap. X) whose school of thought he would later oppose as being “too moralistic.” In 1886, he founded the school and its periodical, both named *La Science sociale*, which sought “to complete” LePlay’s method by insisting on the individual rather than the family and known as the particularist mentality. His major work was *Histoire de la formation particulariste* (1905).