Fr. d’Alzon Day by Day (Part II - July - December)

Quotations from his writings

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Rome, 2006
In the northern hemisphere, the month of July is traditionally the time for an extended holiday, well suited to relaxation and leisure reading. Why not take advantage of the period to delve into some of Fr. d’Alzon’s writings once again? We would need a guide to help us find our way through the thousands of pages in the 52-volume set of writings collected for the cause of his beatification, now completely computerized in the d’Alzon data-base. An intelligent and substantial selection has been provided to the Assumption by Fr. Sage in the volume entitled *Écrits spirituels* (1956), 1503 pages long, with notes and an index (translated into English under the title, The Essential d’Alzon).

There are other possibilities as well, most notably the remarkable edition of the Letters of Fr. d’Alzon, in 17 volumes, an anthology of which has been published in four languages (Fr. Emmanuel d’Alzon: In His Own Words) provides a generous introduction. A number of other texts, in excellent translations, are likewise available, without making any mention of the many studies that have been dedicated to the thought of the founder of the Assumption. Have a great summer!
July 1

*How beautiful are your works, O Lord!*

I am reading Plato, in the original, as well as La Bruyère, and I take walks with my three dogs, when I'm not off hunting. The countryside is so beautiful when it rains, and since it's raining right now, it is ravishing. You have a clear preference for autumn, given how easy it is to dream when leaves are falling from the trees. But I wonder if dreams wouldn't come in droves if, while you walked among bushes full of nightingales, a gentle breeze were to make the petals of a white rose, covered with a few drops of rain, fall on your hair. Or if in a clump of box hedge, you were to discover a nest with a mother on the eggs. Or if you were to read a meditation of Lamartine, with the accompaniment of a dozen small birds singing their hearts out. No need to insist, the countryside in springtime is all we want it to be: it accommodates itself to every feeling of the soul, it helps spread them beyond. Instead of falling leaves, there are falling flowers, which is at least as thought-provoking.

*Letter to Henri Gouraud,*

*May 13, 1830*

As of May 1830, Emmanuel d’Alzon left Paris with his family because of political events stirring in the capital. He lived as if on retreat at Lavagnac, until his entrance into the Major Seminary of Montpellier in March 1832.

July 2

Courage, faith and mercy

Pray to God, let us all pray to Him. What could we not obtain with prayer? Say what you like, you are approaching the point where God will make you reap what you have sown. A trial is one of those necessities that Our Lord wishes to mark with his own seal. Students who leave and who enter are both useful in their own way. Do not worry, have faith. The time is coming. A bit of courage. Do what you can to maintain academic standards. The best way to have people say that we are strong is to send away the students who are weak. With regard to the Oblates, show some mercy. You will see that they will learn. You will provide them with the courage that they need. Also, we’ll pray to the Blessed Virgin, who will help us by providing the sisters with their own little Pentecost. My best to all and to our Brothers.

Letter to Fr. Vincent de Paul Bailly,

October 9, 1866

(Letters, vol. VI, p. 156)
In 1866, the young Fr. Vincent de Paul made his first attempt as Director of the Collège of the Assumption at Nîmes. He brought to the position the enthusiasm of his youth and the awkwardness of his inexperience. As best he could, Fr. d’Alzon provided him with advice and paternal affection, until it became clear that Fr. Vincent de Paul’s place was not within the four walls of a collège, but in the open air involved in the struggles of public life!

July 3

**The leisure of an aristocrat in the countryside**

I forgot to finish telling you how I spend my day. I study from noon to five in the evening. Since it is fairly warm these days, when all I can do is to read, I go down to the garden and I walk, either along the rows of old chestnut trees or among the boxwood hedges, which are very thick even if too much in the French style. Sometimes, after the evening meal, I walk along the Hérault, which is very close to the chateau, and I amuse myself by reciting the Meditations of Lamartine. Unfortunately, those listening are not always in a position to understand. At other times I go alone with the boatman, who I make sit at the end of the boat while I row. When I’ve gone far enough up-river, at a certain point, I stop working, and since the current is imperceptible, I let myself drift slowly in the middle of a fairly large pool… Since my dogs always keep me company, the outing never ends without my having them take a swim.

*Letter to Henri Gouraud,*

*May 23, 1830*
In addition to swimming and reading, while at Lavagnac, Emmanuel d’Alzon also did some hunting, horse-back riding, fencing and group games. The family often welcomed guests to the chateau, and Emmanuel d’Alzon also liked to explore the wilds on the lookout for picturesque spots. His sisters, Augustine (1813-1860) and Marie-Françoise (1819-1869), joined him. At the Collège of the Assumption in Nîmes, sports were likewise encouraged, in the spirit of an old saying that Father d’Alzon valued: *mens sana in corpore sano*. He himself wrote that he preferred education in a group and in a public, stimulating arena rather than that given “in a hothouse,” an allusion to the education of his early youth.

July 4

*How great are your works, O Lord!*

Yesterday, I enjoyed one of the most beautiful sights that I have ever seen. No doubt you’re aware that La Gournerie has been here for a few days. We went to visit the oak tree of Tasso, located high upon the Janiculum. The sun was setting behind us, casting its golden rays on the dome of Saint Peter’s, which seemed to be entirely separated from the rest of the city. Facing us was the city of Rome, fully brilliant with the last light of day. Further away, the Sabine Hills and the mountains of Albano, beginning to disappear among the clouds. It was absolutely beautiful. It is only after scenes like these that one can begin to understand what Rome is. You see it in all of the majesty of its ruins and its newer monuments; you understand what separates the remains of Nero’s palaces from the vaults of the Vatican. That’s all poetry, I hope, but I don’t know why I would hesitate to be poetic with you. I spare you everything that I could add regarding the cupolas and the orange groves, the fountains and the palaces, this old Tiber whose waters are still yellow, these pine trees resembling umbrellas on the horizon. Please, plant some pine trees in our fields.
Emmanuel d’Alzon, who was a seminarian in Rome from November 1833 to June 1835, knew how to combine the useful and the pleasurable. The city enchanted him with all of its wealth, artistic, archeological, liturgical and simply natural. Spiritual and religious reflections are never far from the descriptions in his correspondence.

Let us pray for the United States that celebrates Independence Day today.

July 5

*Humor and imagination up his sleeve*

I’m informing the novitiate that my mood is still rather somber. Besides, although the evil seems to be less violent in the area, still it always wins over its own. While there is a kind of fever present in certain places, there are those who denounce me in a neighboring village as if I had contracted smallpox. To put it simply, things are not going well, and the novices should be very happy that they won’t be exposed to the pox. Finally, I have an idea. Inasmuch as the
Carthusians have their liqueur, as well as the Trappists, the Carmelites their “water”, the
Dominicans their “kermes” (oak-based cough syrup), the Jacobins (another name for the
Dominicans in France) their elixir (medieval monastic potion), couldn’t we have some medicine
or other that would keep people from dying and that would provide the novitiate with a living?
We could call it “essence of the Assumption” or any other name you would fine agreeable.
Father Cusse produced something or other like this once upon a time. What a shame he’s in
Australia! In any case, I wanted to communicate this idea to you; I remain your very humble
servant.

Letter to Fr. Alexis Dumazer,

July 18, 1864 (Letters, vol. V, p. 95-96)

Father d’Alzon was a bit of a character and knew how to use humor, when appropriate. He did
not like coarseness, but his humor had a certain edge. As a man of a certain class, he knew
that you attracted more flies with honey than with vinegar. It would have been nice to know the
concoction that Fr. Cusse had invented. Since his health was not strong, this beverage must
have had some medicinal character! ‘The essence of the Assumption’ has (yet) to make its
appearance!

July 6

Concern for people at the Assumption
[I write to you] first of all to tell you that if they want to give me 30 orphans to begin with, I will take them, as long as they also give 300 francs for up to 15 years, as Miss Franck mentioned. Without too much difficulty I think we could do something good and even make ends meet, if not do better yet. Here is why. Brother Charles worked with Mr. Roussel and knows how to deal with children. He made them work, made them help to build and to work the land. With that, it seems to me we could produce good results. Yesterday, I visited Montmau,¹ and I saw that there is still land to be cleared, to the point that we could increase our revenues by a third. Well, little by little, these orphans who would not cost a great deal could help to work the land, and if, in time, they eat what they’ve grown, that would be a fine operation, without profit, but also without loss. Labor costs have become exorbitant in this region. Consequently, we would lose nothing by taking workers from elsewhere... Secondly, it seems to me that you, Father Vincent de Paul, son of Mr. Bailly, founder of the Conferences, should be aware of what you need to do in the face of all the horrors committed by the revolutionaries. Forget those in charge. Aren’t you convinced that we can take care of the people? Look. I would like to tell you, as the Abbot of Saint Paul-Tre Fontane told Saint Philip Neri: “You have an America to convert.”

Letter to Fr. Vincent de Paul Bailly,

May 27, 1871

(Letters, vol. IX, p. 74)

¹ Montmau, farm-land near Lavagnac, belonged at that time to Fr. d’Alzon.
Finding God at work at the heart of society and the family

I am so convinced of what you have said that, after having assured the success of the collège that I've founded in Nîmes, I am withdrawing these days to get involved with an association of approximately one hundred young people, to whom I would like to communicate some true principles. I might try to dig a bit more deeply than you, which is to say, I would like to find beneath the principles of the family, of society and even of God's commandments, the action of God Himself. Mr. de Butenval has already insisted on original sin, a fact that casts very sad but also very fruitful light on human nature and on Jesus Christ, who restores it. Do not forget what Pius IX said to Bishop Mermillod: “The Church sets down the principles, and leaves their implementation to others.” Too often we have confused eternal principles with human, and therefore necessarily limited, applications. When a society has exhausted its applications by overuse or by deviating dangerously from the principles, it is necessary to return to the true source in order to rediscover the divine element that gives life to people.

Letter to Frédéric Le Play,

October 4, 1872

(Letters, vol. IX, p. 438)
Frédéric Le Play (1806-1882) was a well-known engineer and economist from Normandy. He was a professor and State councilor. Analysts place this 19th century social observer and theoretician among conservative scholars. His son Albert was a student in the Assumption’s schools.

July 8

Following the rhythm of the seasons and capricious changes in weather at Lavagnac: God and the devil!

I am distracted. The Hérault is in the plain, with its blood-red waters. A torrential downpour is falling on the trees and roofs, and even a bit inside the house. But that is a detail. Yes, it is raining, cats and dogs. You’ve done well to prefer the Assumption to the zouaves (papal soldiers)! See if you haven’t fired more bullets at the devil and at the Revolution from our strongholds than at Garibaldi and Bismarck, and at Mentana and Patay. Besides, I have you with me. But we need to be detached from all of this. The rain is coming down twice as hard, soothing, serious, without any wind. A peaceful deluge. Confidently the Hérault, which had fallen, is on the rise; that’s for sure. The victim is always ready, but what will happen? Yes, I was very tired while in Nîmes, and add to that a number of retreats and my neuralgia which now acting up only at night. What a downpour! Fortunately, Lavagnac is set high up, but the Delponts? In the cellar, contrary to what happened at Cana, the wine will be changed to water. Not a happy situation. That’s what happens. Hail in springtime, with hailstones the size of a hand; that’s how Mr. Bauchet puts it, and he’s seen them. During summer, there is phylloxera; in autumn, floods. And may God be blessed! But this time, the devil won’t be roasted; it’s raining too much.

Letter to Fr. Vincent de Paul Bailly,
October 16, 1874

(Letters, vol. X, pp. 324-325)

Variations in the weather always make the front page and are frequently a way for getting into a conversation. Father d’Alzon, well aware of the impetuosity of his disciple, takes the opportunity to send a few salvos his way, gentle or peaceful, but changeable like the weather!

July 9

*Keeping watch before God, like a lamp in the night*

Raising my eyes, I noticed light. It was coming from the chapel window. Separate from the chateau, to the right of the front, this chapel opens on to the garden by a small hill that I fixed up last winter. The window above the door was visible through the plantain trees. I took a few steps, leaned against one of these trees, and gazed at the window for a long time: “My God, soon I shall sleep, and, You, what shall you do? While I sleep, you wait for me. If only I went to see you when I stay up late… If only I came often to tell you that I love you… I do love you, my God, at least I think I do, but I love you as if I didn’t really love you. And yet, for me, you will spend this night, alone, waiting for me, with this lamp whose brightness reminds me that you are my guest. And I, in a few minutes, will give you no further thought; how many nights, You didn’t come to mind at all! Why do you still come? Why do you take pleasure in the children of men? Am I in some part the cause of your delight? My God, I would like to spend one night alone with you.”
Letter to Luglien de Jouenne d'Escrigny,

October 2, 1831

(Letters, vol. A, p. 221)

Text taken from a diary of Emmanuel d'Alzon, at Lavagnac, the summer of 1831

July 10

Pious thoughts and prayers during a Mass in the greenhouse

My nephew had invited a few people to the noon meal. Suddenly, after a long dry season, rain fell in buckets. When he tries to get it to rain, I get him to procure a jackrabbit and say to his friends, “Come and eat it with me.” I'm guilty of sins of envy. The chapel (of the château of Lavagnac) is being repaired, and I'm celebrating Mass in a chapel the likes of which I could not wish you better. It is a greenhouse, where I’m absolutely content, midst the orange trees and the camellias, though the latter are almost all past their prime. I’m thinking of you and our daughters, and I’m praying for you all. I was reading yesterday and again this morning from the Second Letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians. It includes many chapters that are applicable to missionaries and therefore to the Oblates. Remind me, during some holiday, to explain this to our daughters; they would find this beneficial.
Letter to Marie Correnson,

November 8, 1877

(Letters, vol. XII, p. 231)

The chapel of the chateau at Lavagnac, still in existence, is a separate building, on the left side of the main facade, as you look at the building from the terraces. The greenhouse mentioned here, used temporarily as a chapel, is one of two forward structures that frame the platform, which served as an entrance court for carriages and horses in the 19th century, and for automobiles today when one arrives by the park path, from the entrance. In fact, Lavagnac is situated on a mound or small hill overlooking the plain of the Hérault River.

July 11

Benedict, abbot, patron of Europe

I visited the chapel where Scholastica came to spend the afternoon with her brother, Benedict, who, as evening came, wanted to return to the monastery. Scholastica pleaded with him to spend the night with her. Benedict refused for fear of giving the impression of having invented an excuse for violating the rule. But Scholastica, her head in her hands, prayed with such an abundance of tears that suddenly the sky became overcast, and rain and thunder began with such fury that it was impossible for Benedict to leave. Scholastica turned to him and said: “Now leave if you can and see how God has on the spot granted to me what you refused with so
much harshness.” The following day they took leave of one another to return to their respective monasteries, and shortly thereafter Benedict, praying in his mountain refuge, saw the soul of his sister rising to heaven in the form of a dove… Imitate Scholastica, so that a man of God stay a long while with us, or at least visit us often.

*Homily of Fr. d'Alzon,*

*published in Le Pèlerin,*

*February 9, 1878, p. 83*

Emmanuel d’Alzon visited the convent of Monte Cassino and its surroundings in January of 1834 (San Germano). We know that these historic sites were severely damaged during the Second World War, in May 1944, when the Anglo-Polish troops were forced to dislodge the German resistance (at the center of the Gustav line). The site was reconstructed according to the original design and inaugurated by Pope Paul VI in 1964.

**July 12**

*Monte-Porzio*

*(outings in the countryside and Roman mythology)*
Monte-Porzio is one of the hills at the periphery of the flatlands of the Roman countryside, on the southeast side. It leans against the mountain where Tusculum was located, with modern-day Frascati on its left and Tivoli (or Tibur, if you prefer) on its right. On the horizon, with Tibur on one end and Tusculum on the other, in the background near the sea are the Apennines and Mount Soracte, forward guard of the Sabine mountains. In this setting, there is the immense plain of Rome, and in the middle of this plain, the Eternal City lying in its dry and silent fields. It is a beautiful scene, especially if you fill every uneven stretch of terrain with reminders of a grandiose past. First of all, it was on this plain that there took place all of Aeneas' adventures, described in the six last book of Virgil's poem. Then, there were the more historical traditions. Lake Regillus, still there since the wars of the ancient Romans; the Sacred Mount, Nero's tomb, the field tilled by Cincinnatus, the countryside of Regulus, the arches of Claudius, and innumerable remains of villas, triumphal arches, baths, and columbaria, so many reminders, with rare and magnificent pine trees, of the immensity of this deserted theatre of so many victories, of so many pleasures, and of so much suffering.

Letter to Clément Rodier,

October 10, 1834


Clément Rodier was one of Fr. d'Alzon's first cousins.

July 13
Summer, time for vacation, for rest, for visits, for change

I am pleased that you were so happy with Fr. Vincent de Paul [Bailly]'s arrival. Fr. Vincent [Chaine]'s arrival here has helped me a lot. I am leaving him here in Nîmes, which will allow me to take some time to rest at Le Vigan. Mrs. Varin wrote to tell me she would like to invite Fr. Pernet for vacation. If Servas can do him some good, I will allow him to go, unless he decides that it would be better than it was last year to visit Le Vigan. As for you, we eagerly await your arrival. Fr. Laurent preferred Saint-Paul-Saint Louis to Sainte Perpetua. That seems natural to me. He can stay at François I er for the whole period of Lent. If Bishop Manning wants us to come, I think that to begin with we could give him a lay brother and Fr. Raphael, who has considerably changed for the good. It would be up to him to find some English novices, but I haven’t got a red cent, and experience teaches us that it is foolish to found something if we don’t know where the resources will come from. Tell Fr. Laurent that I will answer his letter soon.

Letter to Fr. François Picard,

July 3, 1865

(Letters, vol. V, p. 352)

The date is the summer of 1865, which saw a certain reorganization of Assumptionist communities, with a stronger structuring of the novitiate at Le Vigan. Servas is a small commune near Alès, the residence of the Varin d’Ainvelle family. Fr. Laurent was beginning a
new period of his apostolic life, leaving teaching for preaching. Saint-Paul-Saint-Louis is a church in Paris, Saint Perpetua, the parish of the Collège de l'Assomption in Nîmes.

July 14

A Climb up to Notre-Dame de Rochefort in the Gard Valley

In 1849, during the school holidays, Fr. d'Alzon organized a pilgrimage to Notre-Dame-de-Rochefort. He put himself in charge of the group. At 3 in the afternoon, the group recited the prayers for pilgrims in the chapel of the Assumption and set out, light-footed and full of ardor. Father d'Alzon didn't walk; he ran. Before arriving at the inn at Lafoux, where we were going to eat and sleep for a few hours, we were literally exhausted by the torrid pace. As a result, supper did not settle well for some; two of them ended up “leaving it on the ground.” Father forced a student to take his bed, while he made do with the rug next to the bed, an old sofa pillow and a blanket. At 3:30 AM, without breakfast, we crossed the Gardon River and climbed toward Rochefort. It was clear that Father was in pain. He was dragging his feet and kept silent during the meditation. We saw him sit down on a pile of rocks. The moon was shining, and by its light we examined the feet of the pilgrim. He was walking in new shoes that were too tight and had wounded his feet. Mr. Ferry cut the upper parts of the shoes into strips like sandals. Finally, we arrived at the foot of the holy mountain. Father d'Alzon insisted on going barefoot. We were all opposed to the idea, and we succeeded in stopping him, but it wasn't easy. He celebrated Mass with touching devotion, after having asked us to unite our prayers to his as he fulfilled a vow he had made to come to this shrine of the Mother of God. We thought it had to do with his fledgling religious Congregation. After the noon meal, Father and four companions set out for the Charterhouse of Valbonne. They returned to Nîmes on a dusty and endless road, sunburned and limping, but happy to have made a pilgrimage that they would always remember.

Story of a pilgrimage to Rochefort by Fr. d'Alzon,
The shrine of Notre-Dame de Grâce at Rochefort-du-Gard was a major spiritual center in the diocese of Nîmes, particularly dear to Fr. d’Alzon’s heart, as was the Carthusian monastery of Valbonne. He often brought students, teachers and religious from the Collège de l’Assomption to these sites for retreats and spiritual exercises. In his day, the shrine at Rochefort was in the care of the Marist Fathers. It was there that the young Pernet affirmed his vocation. At the shrine, Father d’Alzon entrusted his young Congregation to Mary, in its early stages in 1849. The site reflects the peace and the beauty of the Mediterranean countryside, alongside the grape-growing plain that unites the slopes of the Provence region to the Languedoc. Today, a community related to the Foyers de Charité offers room and board to pilgrims and provides the support of its prayer and service, in a serene setting, housed in impressive 17th buildings. For additional information, the reader can consult pages 540-542 of volume XVII of the Letters of Fr. d’Alzon.

Let us pray for France that celebrates its national holiday today, in memory of the taking of the Bastille on July 14, 1789

July 15

Rest, recreation and fun

If such is the case, you will need some rest, but how shall you get it? In any case, I have concluded that you should not hesitate in the least to take a few hikes, even to waste some time, as is proper to a person who needs to recoup energies that have been depleted. That’s original advice with which to start off a letter of spiritual direction: rest as best you can. Our Lord gave the same advice to his disciples¹… I am of the same mind as Fr. Hippolyte [Saugrain]; Saint Francis de Sales had the same idea. The young sisters need to have some fun. I am in favor of charades. The Assumption is not a Trappist monastery. Each Order has
its customs. No doubt, there might be a down side to such “license”, but isn’t that always the case? It is up to Superiors to be attentive. If you want to consult Mr. Darboy, you may, but before God I assume responsibility for my opinion, as long as the Superiors are there to foresee any abuses and cut them short.

Letter to Mother Marie-Eugénie de Jésus,

January 2, 1859

(Letters, vol. III, pp. 7, 8)

¹ See Matthew 6:31. Bishop de la Bouillerie, who was at official Church advisor/superior of the Religious sisters of the Assumption in Paris at that time, obliged the sisters to renounce all entertainment and diversion, to which Fr. d’Alzon refers in this letter; the bishop didn’t find them fitting for religious. Fr. d’Alzon was more flexible and broad-minded in this regard.

July 16

Vocation ministry, the future of the Congregation
Pray God that he might send us five or six young priests, very fervent and capable, and at the same time very humble. We need to take great care of our alumniate project; it’s the future of the Congregation. In the not too distant future, they will have to be providing fifteen to twenty young men for the novitiate each year. Believe that that will happen if we invest all of our energies. In October, the novitiate will begin with a full complement of young people, remarkable for their ability as for their piety. Now, along with piety, we are insisting a great deal on ability; as a result, we need to be very demanding at the time of examinations. We will realize our plan for a solid and expeditious program of studies, if we insist on reports every three months from those responsible for the alumniates and from the masters of novices, on written essays every eight days, and on oral examinations and finals at the end of the year. In any case, we will do all we can.

Letter to Fr. Vincent de Paul Bailly,

November 6, 1874

(Letters, vol. X, p. 332)

Caring for vocations of every kind was the major and constant apostolic preoccupation of Fr. d’Alzon. At the twilight of his life, he mentioned this explicitly himself. Whenever he was accused of spending too much time preaching or in a multitude of activities that dispersed his energies, he insisted that his goal was always and everywhere to awaken vocations.

July 17

In the frenzy of Constantinople¹
Well, I’ve had supper, I’ve seen two people, and I’ve talked about properties to buy. Dear brother, property here is going for insane prices. Rather than make a purchase, I’d prefer that someone give me a gift. Don’t you agree that that would be best? If you find someone in France who would like to make a contribution, give him my best wishes from Turkey; tell him a gift would please me greatly and I would be most thankful. Can The Turks doubt how pleased I would be, if they didn’t treat me as a Turk in Maure? Once you’ve responded to this letter, send nothing more to Constantinople, but rather to Rome, unless between now and a second exchange of letters I change my mind and decide to stay another eight days. There’s a good chance of that. In that case, I would leave the 18th, rather than the 10th. You know that I have given up on the idea of Jerusalem. Father Galabert is always the same. I loan him my umbrella; he breaks off the handle. I loan him a book; it comes back to me in shambles. He brings me letters; I wonder if he hasn’t used them to wrap something beforehand. But overall he remains full of zeal and good will, ready for anything and completely devoted. He’s gallivanting right now in Bulgaria, in search of an honest man. If he finds one, I’ll burn a candle for him.

Letter to Fr. Hippolyte Saugrain,

March 17, 1863


¹ Constantinople was the only long trip that Fr. d’Alzon took all his life (Winter 1863), not counting his stays in Rome. He did so to define more precisely with Fr. Galabert the elements
of the Assumptionist missionary foundation in Eastern Europe. Hippolyte Saugrain was General Treasurer; that explains the mischievous references of Fr. d’Alzon.

July 18

Bull fights and bull runs

We cannot allow ourselves to be drawn into the debate between the partisans and the opponents of what aficionados today are calling an art and not simply a sport. It goes without saying that living in Nîmes, Fr. d’Alzon could not ignore their existence, any more than he could ignore the existence of ‘pétanque’ (a kind of bocce played in southern France). In his day, Bishop Plantier wrote a famous pastoral letter against the re-establishment of bull-fighting. We limit ourselves here to a reminder of the oft-repeated, clear testimony in Fr. d’Alzon’s correspondence regarding this subject:

“In some places, we still hold bull-fights or bull-runs. In a village by the name of Marsillargues, where the population is Protestant, such a fight was held a few Sundays ago.” (Letters, vol. A, p. 145, October 19, 1830).

On May 13, 1863, he wrote in similar terms to Fr. Vincent de Paul Bailly: “There was a major spectacle in the Arena on Sunday, during which seven bulls, who manifested their desire to live by fleeing their attackers, were killed. A butcher could not have done a better job.” (Letters, vol. IV, p. 294).

And again on September 3, 1866, in a letter to Fr. Picard, he noted among others things:

“Nîmes is saddened by three disasters. The night before last, four train employees were killed on the Beaucaire route. Yesterday, a toreador was killed instantly by a bull. Today, an inmate of the central prison killed a guard and one of his fellow-inmates, and then slit his own throat. So long for now, dear brother, don’t imitate such deeds.” (Letters, vol. VI, p. 141).
Fr. d’Alzon’s reactions leave no room for doubt with regard to his own feelings.

Nîmes still organizes bull-fights and bull-runs, in particular during the Pentecost holiday period. Everyone is aware of the fact that a successor of Bishop Plantier, Bishop Jean Cadilhac, was a fan and knew a great deal about them.

July 19

A day in the life of a clam at Lavagnac

I know someone who must be wondering: I’d like to know how Father spends his time. This is what he does. He enters his room before seven, gets dressed, prays to the good Lord until eight. He celebrates Mass, prays in thanksgiving, drinks a very, very small cup of chocolate, goes for a walk, returns, reads, hangs out, works. At 11, he has lunch, and (horror of horrors) does not refuse a cigar offered to him by his nephew; he takes another walk, more or less rapidly, rests a bit in his room, prays the Office, the rosary, etc., etc., has supper at 6:30, takes a cup of coffee, talks; around 9 o’clock, a solemn moment, he is given a cup of orange tea to calm his nerves, shaken by the emotions of the day, he says his prayers, and tries to sleep the sleep of the just. What do you think about this life of a clam? Also, my teeth are causing me some pain, but I think they are becoming more reasonable and congratulate them for that. But today I’d like to do great things. I would like to be alone like a solitary sparrow on its roof. How interesting, the life of a solitary sparrow!

Letter to Marie Correnson,
April 14, 1871

(Letters, vol. IX, p. 36)

The letter is dated April 1871. Exhausted, Fr. d'Alzon was resting for a few days at Lavagnac (10-16 April), before resuming once again his whirlwind activities. His plan was to review the text of his Conferences given to the Religious sisters of the Assumption (assembled in Nîmes during the winter of 1870-1871), in order to adapt them for the novices at Le Vigan. In August 1871, he learned about the shrine of Notre Dame des Châteaux and founded the first alumniate on that site.

July 20

Espérou, Notre-Dame de Bonheur (Our Lady of Happiness)

Near one of the highest peaks of the Cévennes mountain range there was once a very famous foundation but now forgotten: Notre-Dame-de-Bonheur, near Espérou. This church, abandoned now for a long time, preserved the memory of a major grace that had been granted. Why not establish nearby, close to a population still considerable but deprived of religious services because of their isolation, a chapel that could be useful at least in summer to a few hundred lumberjacks and shepherds, and in the winter to a few villages lost in the woods or isolated by the snow? It would be a popular pilgrimage destination, precisely because of its difficult access, even in the good season. What would a pilgrimage be without obstacles to overcome? Such difficulties intensify one’s devotion. Fatigue and the length of the route are all part of the sacrificial dimension of a pilgrimage. In this regard, no site is better suited than that of Notre-Dame-de-l’Espérou. We propose the following: that individuals of faith sign on to certain
pious commitments, made conditionally, to request a temporal favor, but which would be the concrete and visible guarantee of spiritual favors, and which others would come to ask at the new shrine of Mary.

*Letter to Catholics of the diocese of Nîmes,*

*May 21, 1865*

*(Letters, vol. V, pp. 312-313)*

Notre-Dame de Bonheur was the name of an old collegiate chapel, built in the mountains in 1436; “Bonheur” was the name of the stream that ran through the plateau. A chapel was built in 1868, on the property bought by Fr. d’Alzon in 1865. Before the summer of 1874, there was an attempt to found an aluminate; a community of Oblates stayed until 1879.

*July 21*

*Acting as a personnel recruiter*

I am always happy to write to you, when Fr. d’Alzon asks me to do so.¹ I will try to be a faithful secretary, but my bad memory sometimes plays tricks on me. A gardener for your new monastery has been proposed to Fr. d’Alzon. He is in his fifties; his wife is a cook with a position of her own. He worked for a long while for Mr. de Surville, and Fr. d’Alzon thinks he is well suited to care for your garden, and his wife could answer the door for you during the day. It
would be useful to have a male guardian for our sisters at night. The salary question would pose no difficulty. However, I feel obliged to communicate certain fears founded on experience: men who are paid little ordinarily work little. In this case, one hopes that the saying will not prove true. If you authorize Fr. d’Alzon to do so, we could arrange with the man to lodge him temporarily in the shack built by the contractors who would not refuse. The wife of your future gardener would remain in her present position until you need her as receptionist.

Letter to Mère Marie-Eugénie de Jésus,

April 2, 1859

(Letters, vol. III, p. 52)

¹ Fr. Hippolyte Saugrain wrote this letter, in part, for Fr. d’Alzon. Work was being done at the time to set up the new priory of the Religious sisters of the Assumption in Nîmes, on the road to Bouillargues.

July 22

Saint Mary Magdalene
It seems to me that you have always been like Mary Magdalene, pouring her silent perfume on the feet of Our Lord.¹ Magdalene said nothing, but the sweet aroma from her vase filled the whole house. The regrets that you have left here might be heartbreaking, but also consoling at the same time. How do you manage to avoid becoming proud at being loved so much? We’re in the middle of Holy Week, and I have a real desire to be converted. Take advantage of the time to rest that you will probably be given again these days and pray a little for me.

Letter to Sister Françoise-Eugénie de Malbosc,

April 10, 1865

(Letters, vol.V, p. 282)

¹ Gospel scene in Jn 12:3.

Sister Françoise-Eugénie de Malbosc, Superior of the community at Nîmes, left southern France for Auteuil in March of 1865, following upon her nomination as Councilor at the General Chapter of 1864.

Fr. d’Alzon always had a great devotion to Mary Magdalene. When he left Lavagnac for Nîmes in November of 1835 and was able to move into his place at Arc-du-Gras Street, he brought with him a large portrait of Magdalene in tears over her sins. It was the only decoration in his apartment, along with a skull on the mantle in his room and on his table a large crucifix given to him by Bishop de Chaffoy and two large mirrors given by Mrs. d’Alzon (Notes et Documents, vol. II, p. 80). Fr. d’Alzon had a particular liking for the composition of the poet Reboul, entitled “Magdalene,” which appeared in his Tableaux évangéliques.
July 23

*Bocce at the Assumption*

“*Pétanque*” (a form of bocce, sometimes called “bowls” in English) was very popular in the South. The game is played before a gallery of spectators by two teams made up of shooters and pointers. After the evening meal and the Miserere, Fr. d’Alzon, followed by his small band, headed for the battle-ground. He was a shooter, but the kind that caused the balls he struck to explode. According to the experts, he had an advantage because he played with his left hand. Fr. Hippolyte [Saugrain] was a terrible shooter. Victor Cardenne was the premier pointer. Fr. Tissot played in the same role, with his own system. From Lyon, he pointed the balls scientifically, and for that reason usually failed each time. Fr. Brun was clever; before pointing the ball, he raised it in the air, always confident of his throw. You’d have thought that he was absolutely sure of himself, so much so that when he missed a shot, he always found excuses: either it had rained, or the ground was too dry, or the court had somehow changed since the last match. He was a player with potential, for many of his former students assured me that he eventually became very proficient. The spectators followed the game in silence, with hearts beating rapidly. Their body movements imitated those of the ball as it rolled to the right or the left, and eventually came to a stop. Once the ball did stop, bodies straightened up and tongues began to wag, according to the circumstances, in approval, mockery, congratulations or gibes. Assumption, founded in Nîmes, had its own bocce court on the other side of the viaduct.

Brief narrative, as told in Galeran, Sketches, pp. 210-212
July 24

*A controversial play: Le Fils du Giboyer*

It is reported that the *Fils du Giboyer* (*The Hunter's Son*) will appear on stage in Nîmes. This is imprudent on the part of the theater’s management and will cause some disturbance, for which we should by all means deny all responsibility. The author himself has declared that his play should be more appropriately called *Les Cléricaux*. To say “clerical” is to say member or friend of the clergy. In that sense, all Catholics of Nîmes are “clericals,” and they should all feel affected. People tell me that many want to go to the theatre to boo the performance. Allow me to beg them, not to abdicate entirely their right to literary justice which comes with the price of the ticket, but to avoid letting themselves get involved in demonstrations, the significance of which could easily be distorted. There would be a better way of protesting against this insult: cut off the livelihood of the insulators or at least their means of expression. A petition addressed to the Mayor of Nîmes and the Municipal Council, asking for the elimination from the next city budget of subsidies to the theater, would certainly draw an abundance of supporters. Just as I’ve signed many such petitions in favor of cleaning up my neighborhood, I would willingly sign this kind of petition. Many people who believe that scandal is a sad way to achieve success would share the same sentiment.

*Letter to Numa Baragnon,*

*December 31, 1862*
This work by Émile Augier, targeting Louis Veuillot and the ultramontane party, was clearly satirizing clerical opposition, especially strong with regard to the Italian policy of the emperor Napoleon III.

July 24 is the anniversary of the death of Mère Correnson.

July 25

Saint James, Apostle

(Self-criticism and Re-adjustment)

I spend too little time speaking with the teachers. It’s truer than one might think. In any case, I’ve made it known that I will see them more. However, since I do not have the gift of bi-location, if I do spend recreation time with the teachers like in the past, it’s because I spend it with the religious. Make it possible for me to be in two refectories at the same time and at two places of recreation, and the problem will be promptly resolved. You will recall that last year every evening recreation period was real torture for me. Let us conclude that instead of all of the “should’s” of your virtuous advisers, we “should” be a little more patient. Pray for that for me; it is essential. Patientia autem opus perfectum habet.¹ A great motto: before giving a piece of advice, examine it to see if it is doable. Apart from that, the advice you give me is excellent, and I admire it. Adieu.
Letter to Victorin Galabert,

January 2, 1859

(Letters, vol. III, p. 9)

Poor Father Galabert, with every good intention, had communicated to Fr. d'Alzon a few remarks concerning the college at Nîmes. The latter responded rather sharply as to what he himself considered to be self-evident truths (“vérités de la Palisse”). The reference to the Letter of James suits his purpose as it does ours, for in this case the Founder of the Assumption reveals himself to be like the apostle, “sun of thunder”, though it is true that he softens the remark by adding at the end a complimentary remark, with nonetheless an element of irony (not to be found in the apostle!).

¹ James 1:4: “Let perseverance be perfect, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.” The reader will make the necessary adjustment: the epistle is by James the Lesser, though on July 25 we celebrate the feast of his namesake, James the Greater, son of Zebedee and John’s brother.
July 26

Saints Joachim and Anne

My dear daughter, you wanted a few words for the Assumption; you will have them for the Nativity. I hope it all comes down to the same thing. It might even be better. You are not at the end of your course, at which time you will no doubt have to contemplate the Blessed Virgin ascending into heaven and to grab hold of a fold of her mantle in order to follow her. But you can always consider yourself like a very small girl, a new-born in religious life and in need of growing up. I think that confessors for religious sisters should have a great devotion to Saint Joachim, who raised the most perfect of creatures. But those unfortunate directors have a little bit more to do than the husband of Saint Anne, given the fact that the Blessed Virgin was so perfect, and sisters much less so, at least some of them. The time has come, I think, given his great capacities, to pray to him in heaven for the poor seekers after perfection and for those who have the responsibility of fashioning them. In short, be born again with the Blessed Virgin. If you have not made a novena to her before this feast, make one after; ask her to become a good little girl, like the infant that Mary will give to Amédée.

Letter to Sister Jeanne-Emmanuel Varin d’Ainvelle,

September 2, 1880

(Letters, vol. XIII, p. 389)
The cult of Saint Anne was held in high esteem by Father Combalot, who had the idea of founding the Religious sisters of the Assumption. In memory of this, Marie-Eugénie de Jésus wanted to make a pilgrimage to Saint Anne at Auray, in 1864. Amédée and Mary, future parents, were the brother and sister-in-law of the religious to whom this letter is addressed.

July 27

**Concern for the health of his confrères**

After taking a circuitous route, your letter was finally given to me last night. I can assure you that it gave me a good deal of pleasure, since I was going to suggest to you that I go to Nîmes to care for you to the extent that I am able, for I can’t say that I am especially able to do a great deal. The best thing for you to do is to take good care of yourself, and for that follow Hippolyte’s advice. Go spend a few days at Le Vigan. There you will be cared for by Mr. and Mrs. Durand, and the air of the Cévennes mountains will remind you of your own in the Franche-Comté region. You will return to us as strong as a bull, for I am convinced that once you have survived the trial of the heat, you will be able to support our climate thereafter without a problem. You were asking my advice on how to sanctify your suffering. My dear, this is what I can say on all of that: 1) That we are only a bit of dust that the breath of God has animated, and that the breath of God can dissolve and disperse; do what we may, we are nothing other than this… 2) Since God knows what we need most, if He wants us to be sick, we should bless His will and accept it in all humility and gratitude; 3) Above all, God loves trust; therefore, we must practice this filial trust as much as possible, and God will surely reward us.

*Letter to Brother Étienne Pernet,*

*September 24, 1849*
July 28

Care for the sick, in body and soul

Your position as a nurse demands of you the most patient, the most humble, and the most compassionate charity. You need to acquire this most of all and to promise yourself to remain faithful to it at all times. Believe me, you can do an immense amount of good. Maintaining regularity in an infirmary, that is to say in a place where it can be least easily observed, making it valued by providing all of the attention and care to be found in the spirit of the rule; speaking a word of God at an opportune time, when the sick are resting or when they are discouraged; making these words acceptable because they have been spoken by patient lips and someone with a gentle heart; inviting people to be respectful of the smallest things, without harshness but with gentle firmness, is to assure the fervor of the house, in circumstances where it could be most lacking. I've just received a letter from your Mother, to which I must respond without delay. Consequently, I will leave you, entreating you to make every effort so that, when I come, I will find you a religious sister worthy of such a beautiful name.
Letter to Sister Marie-Thérèse de Commarque,

May 9, 1851

(Letters, vol. I, pp. 35-36)

Sister Marie-Thérèse de Commarque (1811-1882), Religious sister of the Assumption, was a nurse her whole life in the different communities to which she was assigned. Fr. d’Alzon met her again in Nice in December 1874 and, even though she was ailing herself, she gave him the greatest care and attention, all the while gathering notes on the history of the origins of her Congregation.

July 29

At the beach, to bathe in the sea
A tooth ache has forced me to interrupt my retreat, and I am quickly taking the time to drop you a note, dear child. What effect does bathing in the sea have on you? Do you bathe quickly? Are you satisfied simply to breathe the air of the beach quickly? I’ve received word from Montpellier saying that the heat has been unbearable. Here, except for a few hours, the weather has been fantastic. I think it would be more agreeable to you than all the beaches of the world. You will respond no doubt by saying, yes, good for tooth-aches. Well, no, that’s not the case; I had it already in Nîmes; it’s not my fault if it came with me here. Would you believe me if I told you that I am hungry and thirsty to see you, and though embarrassed to say it to you, come quickly or stay there. However, since I know how to love my friends for their sake, I will tell you: stay as long as you need to, but when you come back to me, you will be received with joy. Consider the following a sneeze. Is Augustine in Sète with you? If she is there, will she not accompany you to Le Vigan? I understand that Mrs. Correnson is asking for her, but she will have plenty of people here to accompany her to Nîmes, if necessary, or would she rather like to come for us? Does she have any desire to make a pilgrimage to Espérou? I’m letting you know that I plan to make a pilgrimage for your intention, and if I obtain healing for you, I will take what the train fare would have been in order to erect a statue to the Virgin on the summit of Aigoual.


Letter to Marie Correnson,

August 11, 1869

(Letters, vol. VII, p. 376)
July 30

*Opening one’s soul to God through and through*

Your word, though short, brought me great joy, dear child. I have a great deal to tell you, and it will do fine to write them to you once you’re back from Lourdes. Our Lord wants you more for himself each day. There are some very intimate spaces of your soul, which he wants to penetrate fully. You need to open up to Him, and once you’ve done so, open yourself even more because this divine Master’s desire for your love and your personal sacrifice is insatiable; it is by these that you will witness to Him. If you ask me for a motto for the rest of your life, I would summarize it in two words: purity and love. Purity, because our Lord loves lilies above all, that is to say, souls dazzling by their innocence. You can and should become, by great effort, one of those virginal souls, whose goal is to flourish in the light of God. Love! Either I am mistaken, or there is in the depths of your soul a capacity for love, that you do not doubt and that will make it impossible for you to find joy and rest in a single creature. You do well to say, it is the infinite God alone that you need. Nothing else will do.

*Letter to Angélina Chaudordy,*

*July 15, 1873*

*Letters, vol. X, p. 84*
Valentine Chaudordy was a spiritual directee of Fr. d’Alzon. She was part of a bourgeois family of Nîmes and had two sisters, Angéline and Noémi, that Fr. d’Alzon likewise knew very well.

July 31

_Ignatius of Loyola, founder of the Jesuits_

Yesterday, for example, I left at 10 o’clock in the morning for Versailles; at noon, I returned. Why did I go? To attend a wedding, the marriage of Mr. Veuillot, editor-in-chief of the _Univers_. I went with Du Lac and Mr. Wilson, and because I was in a hurry to return I came back with Father de Ravignan. It was the feast-day of Saint Ignatius. Mr. Veuillot insisted on being married on that day. Father de Ravignan performed the ceremony and wanted to return fairly early, he said, to celebrate one last time the feast of their founder in their house in Paris, before its closing. It seems that they are keeping their future plans well hidden¹; however, Fr. de Ravignan and a few others are no longer residing at the Rue des Postes. It seems that in Rome it is Cardinal Acton, an Englishman, who pushed them to withdraw, and Cardinal Lambruschini who foresaw the arrangement that we are aware of.²

_Letter to Augustine d’Alzon,

_August 1, 1845_

¹ In his letters, Fr. d’Alzon occasionally expresses a certain number of complaints regarding the Society of Jesus, even if fundamentally he admired the historical foundation of Saint Ignatius and his commitment to the defense of the Church’s interests. In his own way he shared a certain number of tenacious prejudices regarding the Jesuits, freely attributing to them an exclusive partisan character, the cult of secrecy, a certain artificiality and an apparent incomprehension of the ideals of protests on behalf of Catholic liberty (Letters, vol. B, p. 185). These accusations are not entirely lacking in foundation, but were overly generalized.

² In 1845, the Jesuits were paying the price of a virulent campaign of the French government against religious Congregations who were making loud and strong claims among Catholics on the right for the freedom of secondary education. The July Monarchy succeeded in obtaining from the Holy See the provisional banishment of the most visible Jesuit communities from the country. Remember that in the 18th century, Western monarchies had expelled the Jesuits from their properties and obtained their suppression from the Papacy. Re-established under Pius VII, they were again expelled, in France especially, in 1845, in 1880, and like many teaching Congregations and others beginning in 1901. The irony of history is such that in France, at the end of the 20th century, the Jesuits succeeded in obtaining legal recognition from the regime.

And so, with this feast of Saint Ignatius, the month of July comes to an end. In re-reading this month, the reader will have noted that, without sacrificing certain remembrances of the saints in the liturgical calendar (July 11, 22, 25, 26 and 31), we profited from the passing of ordinary time to evoke a certain number of themes that conger up the more relaxed rhythm of summer and vacation time: walks, the beauty of creation, rest in the countryside or by the sea, pastimes and recreation; or pilgrimages to local shrines fill out the litany of days and of the years. The thought of the Lord is very present to Fr. d’Alzon, even during the times of rest that he so appreciated at Lavagnac or at Le Vigan. His correspondents, men and women, did not find him to be without spiritual energy at this time of year, to the contrary. Three texts are presented in italics, in part or entirely (July 14, 18, 23) given their particular authors, in order to respect their special origin.
THE MONTH OF AUGUST

In the middle of August (15th), we are invited to praise the glory of Mary with all the pilgrims who frequent the major Marian shrines, uniting our prayers, in particular, to those of the crowds and the infirm at Lourdes. With faith and gratitude Fr. d'Alzon went five times to this Marian city of the Pyrenees, known as “the world capital of prayer,” placing in Mary’s care the whole Assumption Family that enjoys meeting there yearly for the solemnity of her feast. Together with Fr. d'Alzon, we join in honoring several saints this month: Alphonsus Liguori (01), John-Mary Vianney/the Curé d'Ars (04), Dominic (08), Bernard of Clairvaux (20), Rose of Lima, patroness of the Americas (23) and Louis of France (25), not to mention the apostle Bartholomew (24), as well as Augustine (28) and his mother, Monica (27). Pope John Paul II enriched the listing of saints for August by adding a few more recent witnesses that our Founder could not have known: Bénilde Romançon, a French Christian Brother, and Maximilian Kolbe, a Franciscan deported to Auschwitz. These names call to mind and represent the innumerable ranks of saints, known and unknown.

August 1
Alphonsus Liguori,

founder of the Redemptorists

It seems to me that the annoyances you mention must be quite troubling. Nevertheless, don’t get discouraged. God is there. Overcome all these miseries by your charity, humility, and peace. With regard to Aimery, I’m not worried: he may have a few faults in his mannerisms that will trip him up, but basically he’s solid. In one way I am sorry to hear about the match suggested for one of your daughters. My sister, to whom I thought that I should say something in order to stop her negotiations concerning another young lady, not only cut short her plans, but insisted that I offer you Lavagnac if you thought that it was convenient to come in order to deal first-hand with this matter without risk. This is what Saint Alphonsus Liguori did as often as he could, in his sermons.¹ It seems to me that nothing could make you happier in every respect; in a case you would have to urge them to live a more energetic Christian life. They need to be more tested if they are to carry such a load.

Letter to the Countess of Narbonne-Lara, 1865,

(Letters, vol. V, p. 466)

¹ Whatever advice St. Alphonsus may have given concerning the marriage of young women, Fr. d’Alzon held in great esteem Liguorian morality, more detailed and more human than the Jansenist legacy. In the first part of the 19th century its diffusion in France thwarted the rigors of Jansenist teachings which were still deeply ingrained in the clergy.
August 2

*Advice and themes for reflection during vacation*

Is it possible to twist the neck of the Revolution to restore life to Europe? That is the question. Can you examine it with me during the vacation-time? First, the reason there is no longer a Europe is that there is no longer any solidarity. Every one for himself, every one in his own house. That is the universal motto, which is nothing other than egoism taken to the highest degree. Do you want to fight this evil? Start by getting rid of the egoism in yourself. Fight it by not sparing your own personality, your petty calculations, your pleasures… Europe has certain parts that are colliding with each other; Europe is at war. In order for Europe to live again that era of glorious combat of yesteryear, it needs unity. Here’s something amazing: you really won’t understand anything by a first reading. Why? Because Europe lost its life when it lost its unity and its unity disappeared on the day that it no longer wanted to retain different degrees of Catholic unity. With regard to this chapter, those first guilty are the Protestants; the second ones are the Jansenists and the Gallicanists; the third the philosophers in the mold of Louis XV, and the fourth, liberal Catholics. But this is quite heavy for you; let me stop and let you use your vacation to meditate on the problem so as to understand it. After that, be wise, obey your dad and mom, give good example to your younger brother, don’t pull the hair of your sister, don’t anger the servants and when you receive visitors, don’t give them a hard time. This is very important advice for those who cannot understand anything mentioned above.

*L’Assomption of Nîmes, 1877, #63, pp. 310-311*

August 3
We can apply to the Catholics of Geneva the words of the apostle Paul to the Corinthians: ‘Consider, my brothers, those of you who have been called to faith. There are few who are wise according to the flesh, few are influential and few are from noble families’.¹ Indeed, for the most part, our brothers from Geneva are poor and uneducated. In this circumstance, God wants to use what is weak to shame what is strong.² Their meager resources will prevent them from successfully completing the building which they urgently need, unless the Catholics of France and Europe come to their aid. When we used to visit the ramparts of this famous city overturned by their latest revolution, they were assigned the names of Protestant countries that furnished the sums needed for their construction. Why shouldn’t Catholics, in their turn, raise funds to build a more peaceful fortress in which the only arms will be prayer and the word of truth?

Letter to the clergy of the Nîmes diocese,

October 28, 1855

(Letters, vol. I, p. 612)

¹ Approximate quote of I Cor 1:26.

² I Cor 1:27. Fr. d’Alzon, a friend of the future Bishop Mermillod who was at the time pastor of Geneva, endeavored through the Association of Saint-Francis de Sales to collect funds in order to help the Catholics of the city to develop their places of worship. This is how the construction of the Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception church was started in 1850. Fr. d’Alzon went to
Geneva in July 1858.

August 4

Saint John-Mary Vianney,

patron of priests

I want to compare three contemporary men: John-Mary Vianney, Don Bosco, and Fr. d'Alzon. These three priests worked toward the same goal, but in a different way, in various fields of the Church of Jesus Christ. They never met one another here below or tried to; each one worked courageously, then died with their boots on at the time chosen by the Master, who has now gathered them together in eternity. The Curé of Ars, a model of humility, never left his modest parish; Don Bosco, a model of gentleness, spent his life in the midst of children; Fr. d'Alzon, always bold in doing good, dared to try everything, to take in everything; he sent forth his soldierly sons to the East and the West. People flocked to Ars to crowd around the humble John Vianney; Don Bosco traveled through city and country to gather and save children; Emmanuel d'Alzon, with unbelievable strength and enterprise, extended his charity to schools, alumnates and foreign missions. These men left behind them deep, indelible marks, the striking features of what it takes to be a man, a priest, a saint.

Summary according to Galeran,
Sketches of Fr. d’Alzon, pp. 97-98

It would seem that Fr. d’Alzon never went to Ars. But his esteem for the holy pastor is clearly attested when he writes the following to Juliette Combié on July 7, 1857: “I willingly grant you permission to write to the pastor of Ars”: Letters, vol. II, p. 282.

August 5

Adoration of the Trinity

Jesus Christ is my God, and He became man for the sole purpose of reconciling the world to its offended Creator and teaching me to worship His Father in spirit and truth.¹ What is my attitude toward God the Father, the Author and Source of all that is good and of every perfect gift? Have I any conception of the reverence, worship, gratitude, and honor that I should offer Him, in union with the adoration and glory given to Him by His Son? The eternal life of the angels and saints consists in knowing the one true God and Jesus Christ whom He sent to reveal Himself to mankind. How can I ever thank my Divine Savior for undertaking this merciful mission? Have I given any indication of my gratitude up to the present, and how shall I show it from now on? “God so loved the world that he gave His only begotten Son”²; when do I intend to give myself to God, entire, undivided, and without reserve, together with His Son, and with the love that Jesus enkindles in me through His Holy Spirit? The love that unites the Father and the Son is God Himself, and it is through this love that is the Holy Spirit, that I am able to love God, “because the love of God has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given us”.³ God the Father has given me His Son, who in turn has given me both Himself and the Love between Him and His Father; He has made my heart a temple, a holy place, in which is enshrined the love who is God… When will I abandon myself to the torrent of love that the Holy Trinity pours into me?

Love of Our Lord, Directory, I, 2
August 6

Transfiguration of the Lord¹

Why does the Savior choose three of His apostles and lead them apart to a high mountain? Why does He appear to them between Moses and Elijah, if not to show them the various stages of humanity? After Adam and natural law comes Moses with the written law, the Elijah with penitence and the prophetic mission, then Jesus Christ, the fullness of the law. And not only Jesus in the humility of His flesh but also in the splendor of His glory, so that the Christian, contemplating the marvelous effects taking place in the body of His Savior, can understand, even though imperfectly, something of what was happening in this soul that is a model for his own.
Homily by Fr. d’Alzon, published in Le Pèlerin,

March 16, 1878, p. 176

¹ According to the story of the Transfiguration. Mt 17:1-9, Mk 9:2-10 and Lk 9:28-36.

From 1877 to 1880, Fr. d’Alzon collaborated with Le Pèlerin by writing a series of homilies or sermons for the magazine. He had his own idea of sacred eloquence, feeling that an instruction, if it were to be retained, had to be short but substantial. He reproached himself with having been too long-winded when he was young, an illness, alas, that is very frequent in certain regions where a homily is confused with gossip: “I demand that our preaching become more and more a substantial and doctrinal nourishment. I am going to give a type of course on preaching according to the spirit of the Assumption for the religious of Nîmes… Why are so many country parishes corrupted? Because the devil’s emissaries have penetrated them boldly and too many Catholics have been silent dogs unable to bark at the thief, as the very meek Saint Francis de Sales explains” (Le Pèlerin, no. 157, January 3, 1880, p. 833).

August 7

The power of silence

Silence is one of the greatest resources of the religious. The Prophet said: “Your strength will be in silence and hope”,¹ that is, in prayer. These two great means to holiness go hand in hand: without silence, there can be no recollection; without recollection, there can be no interior life. Indeed, if I am always talking, how can I expect to hear the voice of the Lord my God within me? How can I hope to be united to Him? How can I prepare myself for this union, either by looking back over the past, which will result in my disavowing my sins and purifying my soul, or by making acts of loving adoration, which require a great peace and quietness of soul? For what reasons do I break
silence? When I examine myself, I find: 1) my thoughtlessness; I don't want to concentrate; little by little I begin to have a distaste for serious thought; it tires me out, exhausts me, becomes burdensome. 2) my imagination, which is inclined to stray; my curiosity, which wants to know everything, my spirit of criticism, whose tribunal is always set up to judge all that is said and done around me, and my self-will, which contrives innumerable reasons for not doing as I am told. In addition, I am afraid to see myself as I really am, and wish to think about anything except my failures. When shall I make up my mind to speak less with creatures and listen more attentively to what God has to say?

Directory II, 3

¹ Is 30:15. The Jerusalem Bible has the following version: ‘Your salvation lay in conversion and tranquility, your strength, in complete trust’. Concerning silence, Fr. d'Alzon wrote in September, 1860: “There is certainly a silence that comes from the mute demon; I hate that one, because it inspires many useless sentences and words. But how I love the silence that comes from the attention given to listening to God in one’s heart and the desire to have Him reign there!” (Letter to Sr. Mary-Margaret MacNamara, Letters, vol. III, pp. 297-298).

August 8

Saint Dominic, founder of the Dominicans

Do not let certain criticisms hold you back. Is not the true Christian spirit a closed book for many people? Accept with humility the reproaches and jokes that some will direct at you. That will do you a lot of good by teaching you to be on the side of the cross and against the ideas of the world. Imbue yourself with the spirit of Saint Dominic; in great part, it is the spirit of the Assumption.¹ Our Lord, who is the same for all, reveals Himself to His servants according to the different virtues that He asks of them, and differentiates, so to speak, faith and His counsels, so that each one can find what agrees with the depths of his nature. That is one of the wonderful things concerning the actions of God on souls.
Letter to Mrs. Emile Doumet,

August 2, 1858

(Letters, vol. II, pp. 485-486)

¹ While Fr. d’Alzon situated the raison d’être of the Assumption ‘between the Jesuits and the Dominicans”, for him the spirit of the Assumption was closer to the spirit of Saint Dominic, who linked apostolic zeal with the fraternal, common life.

August 9

Faith-love

Looking for God with love in our hearts will help us to know him, bring us close to him, make us
one with him. Let us come to know God better and better every day. With the eyes of our Faith we can begin to penetrate the Divine Nature – but we must pass through Our Lord Jesus Christ, because only through him will we find access to the Godhead. Jesus Christ provides us with a description of God. We need Faith in order to penetrate further, and Faith necessarily entails obscurity. As we journey onwards, we must expect to encounter weariness, pain, anguish of mind, doubt, incertitude … Faith leads us on through the dark – we cannot see the way. No wonder! Who has ever seen God? “Nobody,” replies Saint John. Deum nemo vidit umquam (“Nobody has ever seen God” Jn 1:18). We have to appeal to Our Blessed Lord, through whom God communicates with us. Locutus est nobis in Filio (“In these days he has spoken to us through his Son” Heb 1:2). It is this lack of direct contact with God which makes it so difficult for us to talk about him. Saint Augustine tells us : “God is so beyond human description, that as soon as I attempt to say anything about him, I say the wrong thing.” Yet the triumph of Divine Wisdom has been to give us some inkling into what God is. We begin to perceive Him in the light of Faith. Haec est enim vita aeterna: ut cognoscant te, solum Deum verum, et quem misisti Jesum Christum (“For this is eternal life : that they should know Thee, the One, True God – and know Jesus Christ, the One Thou hast sent” -- Our Lord’s own prayer to God the Father after the Last Supper Jn 17:3). To get to know God – to get to know Him through Jesus Christ the Mediator – such must be our aim so that having got to know Him, we may enjoy him.

To the Religious of the Assumption, August 1860,

The Essential d’Alzon (ES , pp. 1152-1153)

August 10
Between the past and the future, God acts in the present

Look around you – do you not perceive how the shadows darken, how the storm-clouds pile up, how the storm threatens to break? And amid these impending calamities, there stands the Church, solid as a rock, while the rest of the world is about to crumble! It is similar to what Saint Augustine saw from the tranquillity of Hippo, while Caesar’s Rome fell to pieces under the barbarian onslaught. His book, the *City of God*, is like a second revelation for us. The more we study it, the clearer we see, by way of analogy, into the future. How terribly sad and discouraging it is to contemplate the havoc wrought by fire and sword at the hands of Attila and Genseric (Gunseric)! Yet it was the mighty hand of God, sweeping away the debris of a corrupt civilisation in order to lay the foundation of something new. The bishops of Gaul were not deceived – let us imitate their foresight. They welcomed and transformed this new-fangled feudal barbarism – let us, in turn, welcome and transform the barbarism of modern democracy. Many of these old Gallo-Roman bishops must have looked back with nostalgia on the glories of a vanished past. They nevertheless rebuilt France, like a lost swarm of bees producing a new hive. Why not do the same? So let us indulge neither in useless regrets for what is gone nor in deceptive hopes for what is to come. Let us just carry on with the good work God gives us to do.

*Closing Address to the General Chapter of 1868,*

*The Essential d’Alzon (ES, pp. 142-143)*
August 11

Form only one body

And now, dear Fathers and Brothers, our work is done. Let us thank the Lord for having inspired us with a common vision and determination of purpose, which we all intend to develop and pursue with both mind and heart. Let us retain that fond affection towards one another as true religious must – an affection based on mutual respect, and on the need to stick together through thick and thin. Let us form but one body in the sincerity of our aims – loyal to one another, frank towards one another. Let our indissoluble bond be Our Lord Jesus Christ himself. Saint Paul tells us: *Unum corpus multi sumus omnes qui de uno pane participamus* (“We are one body though we are many, by sharing the same bread” I Cor 10:17). Let the altar be our center, because we find Jesus Christ there – let it be likewise the throne of our Sovereign King. In the Blessed Sacrament we find Jesus Christ, the object of our supreme love, giving himself to us – and teaching us how to give ourselves to him by serving the Church he loves so well. So let us continue on our way – full of confidence, full of joy. Having laboured hard to extend God’s Kingdom here on Earth, may we be found worthy to participate for ever in the glory of his Kingdom above. Amen.

*Closing Address to the General Chapter of 1868,*

*The Essential d’Alzon (ES, pp. 145-146)*
August 12

Through the prayers of all, work towards getting a Pastor according to the heart of God

Very dear Brothers of ours, the spirit of Jesus Christ is always alive in His Church, but in some way this spirit must be roused through the incessant supplications of Christians. That is why, as soon as a bishop has passed away, public prayers are prescribed to obtain a new bishop according to the heart of God. We have to sway divine justice on behalf of the pastor who has just left us; we need to implore the supreme Pastor not to leave usorphans but to send us a prelate worthy of the one whose casket has just been closed. Let us lift up our hands toward heaven in order to obtain a bishop inflamed with the charity of Jesus Christ, filled with love for the interests of the Church, resolutely united to the immutable chair of Peter, skilled in the sacred sciences, able to inspire others with its zeal: in short, a model leader in all aspects for his people, forma gregis ex animo.¹

Pastoral Letter published in ‘L’Univers,’

August 31, 1855

(Letters, v. I, p. 584)

¹ This quote is not biblical and seems to be borrowed from a liturgical text (“truly an example for the flock”).
August 13

The coming of the Kingdom in me

*Regnum Dei intra vos est* (“The kingdom of God is within you,” Lk 17:21), the Apostle tells us. There is no need to search for it elsewhere. What is the Kingdom of God? It is the intimate relationship you and I must establish with God, considering who God is and who we are. God is infinitely perfect – God is unchangeable. So God’s attitude towards us cannot change – but our attitude towards Him must. Day by day we must fight our faults – try to rid ourselves of our sinful habits – endeavour to become less unworthy of God’s ineffable communications because day by day he showers his blessings upon those who sincerely and generously try to do their best to establish his reign over their hearts. And as we cleanse our souls by wiping out what stains we perceive, Jesus Christ, that “true light which enlightens every man coming into this world” (Jn 1:9) draws nearer to us, and gives us a deeper insight into God’s perfections and what we owe him as well as greater energy to accomplish the duties of which we are now more aware.

*First Letter to the Master of Novices,*

*The Essential d’Alzon (ES, pp. 150-151)*
August 14

Of Humility

Humility will rid us of our self-seeking. Good works done for personal gratification, and not simply to please God, expose us to the danger of hearing these terrifying words: “Ecce in sacrificiis vestris invenitur voluntas vestra”¹. In your sacrifices is found your personal will”.¹ If we are humble, we will obey, no matter how difficult the sacrifices demanded of us, for self-distrust will make us understand our need to be led; and being conscious of our own weakness, we shall place all the more confidence in God. Humility will give rise to a great openness of heart with regard to our Superiors and will enable us to discuss with them our faults, our temptations, our difficulties, our needs, in fact, all of our spiritual ailments. It will lead us to accept all assignments, even the most lowly and despised. It will give us reverence for time-honored traditions of the Community, even when their meaning escapes us. And it will lead us to control our tongue.

DIRECTORY, II, 2

¹ Is. 58:3. The exact text is: Ecce in die jejunii vestra invenitur voluntas vestra: “Lo, on your fast day you carry out your own pursuits.”

August 15
Assumption of the Virgin Mary

(Mary shares the glory of Christ because she embraced the Way of the Cross)

The mystery that unifies the life of Mary is the Immaculate Conception; the mystery that consumes her in glory is the Assumption. Between the two and in order to unify them, I identify her painful Compassion. Why? Because the birth of Jesus Christ and the rest of His life are linked to human salvation taking place through the cross, and Mary was the purest of creatures in order to cooperate perfectly with Jesus Christ in the mystery of the Redemption through her Compassion. Her glory in heaven is so great because of this very cooperation. By this we are taught that we must purify ourselves more and more each day in order to be less unworthy of suffering. The more we have suffered, the greater will be our glory.

Letter to Mother Marie Correnson,

August 19, 1868

(Letters, vol. VII, pp. 140-141)

In founding his congregations, Fr. d’Alzon had no intention of their being a Marian Assumption in the sense that the Marists or the Oblates claim a specific Marian identity since he insisted rather on an Augustinian foundation. In the Augustinian tradition Mary enjoys the important, even extraordinary, place she plays in the faith of all Christians. Nevertheless, Fr. d’Alzon had a premonition that one day the Church would define the Assumption of Mary on a par with the
Immaculate Conception (cf. Letters. vol. VI, p. 214, and vol. VII, p. 380 and vol. XII, p. 175.) It was Pope Pius XII who proclaimed the dogma of the Assumption on November 1, 1950.

Obviously the feast of the Assumption is also the feast of the entire congregation, which enjoys gathering together during pilgrimages it organizes in shrines throughout the world, in Europe as well as in Latin America.

August 16

The Gospel, a school of Christian life

Take the Gospel and read it, re-read it, meditate it, apply to yourself what you can imitate of the life of the Divine Savior. His time in Mary’s womb and then at Nazareth, do these not convey to you the need to withdraw from the world if you want to be in communion with God? Doesn’t His birth in a poor stable warn you of the contempt that you must have of worldly goods and a comfortable life? Don’t you see the spirit of poverty preached in a lively manner that does battle with our sluggishness? Already on the eighth day of His life on earth He undergoes circumcision, which can serve as a model for the circumcision of our hearts, for the sacrifices and the pruning that we must have the courage to undergo if we want to imitate the Savior. His hidden life in Nazareth can serve as a model for everyone. He lives in obscurity; He works; and there is found perfection. For most of us the hidden life, the life of work, is surest way of acquiring Christian virtue. But what doesn’t Jesus do in the role of sanctifying Mary and
Joseph? A wonderful model of the action of sanctification that persons who want to become perfect must exercise in the midst of families, even the most humble ones.

*Instruction for the Tertiaries of the Assumption,*

*B.P., 1930, p. 14*

During his pilgrimage to Nazareth in 1964, Pope Paul VI developed this same theme of the school of life that the hidden life of Christ in the hills of Galilee illustrates.

**August 17**

*Soaring toward God, source of all good*

Since God is life, since God is light, then He must be the supreme Good. It is to this supreme Good that we aspire. Why did our Saviour come down to this world? Was it not to teach us to look for everlasting happiness in the possession of limitless goodness? And where can this limitless goodness be found except in God and God alone? How precious and beneficial to us
is this light of Jesus Christ. It teaches us to seek single-heartedly the pearl of great price for which the merchant of the parable sold all that he owned in order to buy it.¹ What a limitless gain! What incomparable beauty! What a source of inexhaustible joy! It is towards you, Lord, that I now wish to hurl myself, freed of every earthly good. Give me wings to fly - up above the vain deceptions of this world. Let me find my rest in you, and you alone. Yes, I leave it to you to decide what will make me truly happy. You are the fulfilment of all happiness. You will raise my mind and my heart to their true level by transporting them, now and forever, into the Kingdom above.

Sixth meditation, The Essential d'Alzon (ES, p. 363)

¹ cf. Mt 13:45-46.

August 18

Shattering false ideas

It’s terrible to receive false, evil, unjust ideas. So it is that a young man will hear it said that all religions are good. He allows to take root in himself that principle which the Protestants in the time of Luther propagated: Illius est religio cujus est regio: One must follow the religion of one’s
country. But in this case, one would have to be a Catholic or a free-thinker in France; Protestant in Germany; Muslim in Turkey; Brahman in India; pagan in the center of Africa or the Americas. Or he may hear it said: “
Th e Catholic Church should be persecuted because it persecutes other religions!
” You can see the risk of certain false ideas: they spread and win over minds. Well! Here is a fundamental aspect of your education: discovering true ideas, correct ideas. But how will we present them to you? Saint Augustine will once again provide us with an answer: “
This trinity, then, of the mind is not therefore the image of God, because the mind remembers itself, and understands and loves itself; but because it can also remember, understand, and love Him by whom it was made.
”¹ Let us be totally clear about this: you were made in the image of God; you were able to know Him; but original sin came and shattered something in you and its first effect was ignorance.

Saturday Instructions, B.P., 1932, pp. 80-81


August 19

The gift of faith and

the comprehension of faith

This gift will not enable us to delve into such deep mysteries as we hope to comprehend when we get to Heaven – but even here below it will aid and increase our faith. The more we
understand of the things of God by the light of faith, the closer we will cling to what we cannot yet grasp but look forward to understanding one day. So this gift of understanding will help us to study, to meditate and to pray. It will assist us in our search for God. It will make us work hard to get to know Him better and better. Better and better. Yes, the gift of understanding will make us do better and better. *Da mihi intellectum et scrutabor legem tuam, et custodiam illam in toto corde meo* (“Give me insight to observe your teaching, to keep it with all my heart” Ps 119:34). This gift is possessed by every Christian soul in the state of grace. With God’s help it must be developed. Faith also brings us the gift of knowledge, whereby we discern what we have to believe and what we don’t. This gift is more concerned with the acquisition of human knowledge, the development of human thought. But, seen from the supernatural point of view, it does enable us to employ our human knowledge in the service of God. Lord, give me a deeper understanding of things human and things divine. In the light of faith, let me comprehend, as far as possible, what I must believe in – and do, as perfectly as possible, what I have to do.

_Eleventh Meditation, The Essential d’Alzon (ES, p. 404)_

August 20

_Saint Bernard of Clairvaux_

Let us pray well and you will see how God will treat us with His greatest love. _Mulier cum parit,_
Oh! Why didn’t I take care of the alumnates first of all? Why? But the good Lord had not yet inspired me with that idea. So, the time had not yet come. When Saint Dominic established the core of his Order, he dispersed the members, sending them out one by one. Numbers matter little; what counts is bravery. And the bravery of religious consists in holiness. Make use of Fr. Laurent; the best way to deal with Bro. Edmond and Fr. Thomas is not in reproaching them but in engaging them in dialogue; finally, have people pray a lot. I am totally convinced that relentless prayer will obtain immense spiritual treasures for us. Look at Saint Bernard. He wanted to become a religious; his parents tried to dissuade him. It was he who influenced them and, with thirty young persons, he knocked at the door of Cîteaux. Have the zeal of Saint Bernard and thirty religious will rise from the earth.²

Letter to Fr. Emmanuel Bailly,

August 20, 1875,

Letters, vol. XI, p. 213

¹ Jn 16:21: “When a woman is in labor, she is in anguish”.

² Fr. d’Alzon had a great devotion to the founder of Clairvaux, “the Virgin’s cantor.” He liked to recall that the feast-day of this saint made a deep impression on him, “having undergone a sort of conversion on the feast of Saint Bernard in 1830, each year I have felt repercussions from it ” (Letters, vol. I, p. 68-69).
 Félix Hedde

Pray to God for the Assumption of Nîmes; this is the sixth child that has died this year. I bless God, but like Job, with suffering that cannot be washed away by tears. A child who last year was given the title “old student,” and who was preparing for the Polytechnic school: the young Hedde that Mr. Tissot knows well. He took ill some two weeks ago when he went to Beaucaire, and until thirty-six hours before his death, the doctor was not worried. He died in the arms of his father and mother. The poor mother had lost six children; the seventh remained, alone and full of hope, and God took him. So long, my daughter. Only one thought consoles me: he left for heaven as the first fruits of the Assumption; for, as long as he was alive, he never stopped talking about becoming a religious with us. God took pleasure in his desire. Do not be scandalized if I show a bit of weakness. He was one of the children that I loved the most. God takes for Himself what is the best; it’s in His plan. May His will be done in everything and everywhere!

Letter to Mother Marie-Eugénie de Jésus,

August 8, 1851

(Letters, vol. I, pp. 64-65)
August 22

**Of manual labor**

I must tell you the result of my own experience on this matter and also discuss the different opinions that people may have about it. Every now and then at Le Vigan, Father Hippolyte sends his novices to work in the fields, to cut hay or harvest the grapes, whatever the season requires. When Fr. d’Alzon is there, he also goes to the fields to give edifying example, but he quickly gets winded and his sixty years force him to stop. Well! Fr. Laurent who is, you know, an excellent religious, very fervent, even scrupulous, is extremely scandalised by this way of doing things. He feels it is perfectly useless to put novices, destined for the priesthood, the teaching profession, or missionary work, to this kind of servile activity. Let’s examine this matter, and without getting into a quarrel with Fr. Laurent, I’ll say straightaway that Fr. Hippolyte is right. It’s very useful to impose manual labour on novices, because it’s good to taste humility once in a while; manual work is a marvellous means to cure laziness and to correct certain attitudes of independence. Without launching into the opinions of Mabillon and de Rancé¹ on this question, all I want to say is that I’m convinced that in certain cases there is nothing as effective to cure headstrong characters as work outside in the open air. If a sister drives her superior crazy, then let the superior send her to gather the hay. I guarantee that in a very short time, thanks to fresh air, she will mend her ways... If we gave the job of drawing water from the well to deranged sisters, many a head would get cleared up.

*Conference to the Religious of the Assumption*

*(November 1870),*

*The Essential d’Alzon (ES, pp. 673-674)*
¹ De Rancé was the founder of the Cistercians of the Strict Observance at La Trappe in France. Mabillon was a Benedictine monk and scholar.

August 23

*Saint Rose of Lima*

*(patroness of Latin America)*

Even though I hope to see you next Friday, my dear daughter, I want to wish you a happy feast of Saint Rose. Although your devotion to this charming little saint is not a devotion of the first order, it seems to me that in her life there are many virtues that you could imitate, if only her ardent love for Our Lord. Why wouldn’t this love fill you with enthusiasm? If you persist in the plans you have revealed to your mother, why wouldn’t you apply yourself to undertake that more serious life that you have spoken of with her? The feast-day of Saint Rose would be a beautiful feast on which to decide what you should do. I promised that I would help you see all the disadvantages of the life that you choose: I believe that I have adequately fulfilled my promise. If you persevere in preferring above all your white crown and lily, well then, be a young lady bent on perfection.

*Letter to Marie Correnson,*

*August 29, 1864*

¹ The feast of Saint Rose of Lima, renowned for her penitence and the first one to be canonized on her continent, was celebrated on August 30 in the 19th century (in Latin America the feast is still celebrated on this day). Fr. d’Alzon had recently read a biography of this saint.

August 24

Saint Bartholomew, apostle

I was beseeching the good Lord for you a short time ago with great fervor. I still believe that you could be an auxiliary of love, suffering, and sacrifice for me. You can ask the Assumption for books that are not too serious, but interesting. Louise, when Our Lord announced the Eucharist, He declared that one must eat His body and drink His blood to have eternal life¹; finding such a discourse too hard to accept, the Jews left him. And Jesus, turning to the Twelve, said these simple words to them: “Do you want to go away, too?” I say to you: Incline the ear of your heart toward the tabernacle and if you hear Our Lord say to you: “And you, too, shall you go away?” Answer Him with Saint Peter: “Jesus, my God and my spouse, to whom shall I go? You have the words of eternal life”.

Letter to Louise Chabert,
May 31, 1870

(Letters, vol. VIII, p. 392)

¹ Jn 6:60

² Jn 6:67

August 25

Feast of Saint Louis

And you, Christian parents, present at this celebration that is so dear to you, I shall give you no other encouragement to work for the education of your children than to remind you of your duties toward them. And these duties, I find them expressed magnificently in the words that an illustrious princess said to her son, whose feast the Church celebrates this very day: “My son,” said Queen Blanche to Saint Louis, “God knows how dear you are to me, and nevertheless I would rather see you dead at my feet than to know that your soul was stained by a mortal sin.” That is the foundation on which the education of this king, one of the glories of the Church and of France, was established. Don’t let others educate your families; thus you will cooperate
worthily with the tireless efforts of the devoted teachers of your children. You will have understood as well what inspires these men to strive incessantly to obtain better results from their teaching. And finally, you will pay your debt to the first magistrate of this city, whose enlightened zeal has as its goal a lasting good, since he sows it in the heart of young generations.

Speech on the occasion of the distribution of prizes

to the students of Saint-Maur (1840),

according to T.D., vol. 48, pp. 141-142

On this day the Assumptionists and the entire Assumption Family pray in a special way united with the Religious and the Oblates serving in the parish of Saint Louis in Moscow where, since Bishop Neveu’s arrival, they have shared a beautiful page in inter-Christian fellowship, in times of tears as well as in times filled with hope, something that makes ecumenism shine forth daily.

August 26
Between war and peace, a patriotism of charity

After a glorious war also comes a glorious peace thanks to the moderation of the victor, the principles that it honors, the fears that it calms, the sacrilegious hopes that it confounds. Later, you will be asked to pray in thanksgiving for a benefit so promptly obtained; today, we are approaching you so that you might point out to your parishioners a duty of Christian charity. Even though the war was ended quickly, nevertheless there were victims: some died, others are stretched out on a bed of suffering. The families who have lost a member and the wounded reduced to inactivity call out for help that France should offer them with pride. A national fund has been established for this purpose, and we approach you, dear Pastor, to call on the patriotism as well as the charity of your flock. You are asked to collect all the monetary gifts as well as those in kind that will be entrusted to you and asked to deposit them either with the mayor of your commune or the mayor of your district, whoever has been named president of the special committee to receive this kind of help.

Letter to the diocesan clergy of Nîmes,

July 16, 1859

(Letters, vol. III, p. 120)

This call for solidarity for the victims of the war followed the Franco-Sardo-Austrian conflict that saw the birth of a first kind of Italian state in 1859. Even if the Church cannot stop conflicts, it always tries to humanize their sad consequences.
August 27

Saint Monica

Since receiving your letter yesterday, I have prayed a lot for you. An hour after reading it, at St. Croix de Jérusalem, we were able to venerate the relics of the passion. This morning, the feast of the Dedication of Saint Peter and anniversary of the consecration of His Excellency, we went to celebrate Mass at Saint Peter’s: all of the relics are exposed on the main altar. Again I asked that many graces be showered upon you. His Excellency stayed for the High Mass; I preferred returning slowly and visiting a few churches on the way back. I stopped at that of Saint Augustine; I prayed in front of the famous Madonna, at the Saint Nicholas chapel, and at that of Saint Monica. Shall I admit it? Nothing tempts me to join the Augustinians. It is a dead Order. There is only cardinal Pitra who would want to see me mitered abbot of Saint Augustine. Let me tell you that I wouldn’t want that at all.

Letter to Mother Marie-Eugénie of Jesus,

November 18, 1869

(Letters, vol. VIII, p. 20)

In November 1869, Fr. d’Alzon was in Rome with Bishop Plantier for the opening of Vatican I. It is in the church of Saint Augustine that the remains of Saint Monica were transferred from Ostia in 1430 under Pope Martin V. As he faced the church, Fr. d’Alzon could recall his ordination to
the priesthood in December 1834 which took place in the buildings of what had been the vicariate of Rome, now la Casa del Clero. Concerning Augustine’s mother, Fr. d’Alzon sticks to tradition: “You saw, during these days, that, on the feast of Saint Monica, Saint Augustine was content to cry for his mother’s death a tiny half-hour” (Letters, vol. II, p. 436). In 1858, he mentions his intention of starting an association of Saint Monica, patroness of all mothers praying for the conversion or the protection of children and of Christian schools.

August 28

Feast of Saint Augustine.

The Assumption in the Augustinian tradition

To be loved, Jesus Christ must be known. We must study him first and foremost in the inspired books. Jesus Christ will be for us the prized treasure sought as we delve into the sacred pages. We will strive to know him as God, as man, and as the author of the supernatural gifts which unite us to the Father. Saint Augustine, our patriarch, will be our principal guide. Study his treatise on the Blessed Trinity — study the wonderful writings for which the Church has given him the title of “Doctor of Grace” — let these form the substance of our theology. To these we would add his “Letter to Volusian” in which he treats the Incarnation; and, as an introduction to true philosophy, his treatises, “Against the Academicians,” “On Free Will,” and the “Letter to Dioscorus.”
Closing Address to the General Chapter of 1868,

The Essential d’Alzon (ES, p. 140)

The study of Saint Augustine’s thought was the occasion for a first-class patristic editorial initiative under Fr. Fulbert Cayré (1884-1971). Since 1956, The Institute for Augustinian Studies (Institut des Études augustiniennes), which enjoys an international intellectual reputation today, has continued to pursue its work of diffusing the thought of the Patriarch of the West. There is no lack, moreover, in Europe, in Africa as well as in America of Assumptionists with an intellectual, spiritual or apostolic temperament who do honor to this Augustinian heritage. The review Itinéraires Augustiniens generously opens its columns to all of Augustine’s friends. The Assumptionist scholasticate of Bulengera in the Congo is named after Saint Augustine.

August 29

The Martyrdom of Saint John the Baptist

You have Sisters who pray for you in heaven and their prayers are efficacious because their sacrifice was accepted. I don’t want to send all of you to the cemetery at the same time but I do want you to make the resolution of becoming true victims of love for the salvation of souls. Have a bit of courage, and let it grow a bit every day. Ask Our Lord to make of you ardent and brilliant lamps. Like Saint John the Baptist, seek to be his forerunner everywhere. Yes, in every
place where He could be better known.¹ Two weeks ago the Pope said to missionary bishops: ‘
I bless your sweating, your tears, I bless your blood
’, and this evening I heard the bishop of Tulle preach to the Zouaves and say that the superiority
of the soldier over the angel is that he can spill his blood as Jesus Christ did. Who knows if you
will not spill your blood? I am not worthy of martyrdom, but who knows if before I die, I won’t
have the joy of seeing some of my daughters soar toward heaven with the martyr’s palms?
Why not?

Letter to the Oblate novices,

December 22, 1869

(Letters, vol. VIII, p. 83)

¹ You can refer to the Gospel texts of Mt. 25, Jn 5:35 and 15:1. The masculine branch of the
Assumption saw the Church recognize the martyrdom of three of its Bulgarian religious in May
2002, in Plovdiv.
Case of conscience concerning mixed marriages

One day in 1848, Rev. Coquerel, the father, narrated a story in the halls of the National Assembly of which he was a member, in which he had just been the main actor. “Imagine,” he said to me, “that a young Catholic wanted to marry a Jewish girl. Neither the pastor nor the rabbi wanted to marry them because their religious observance made it repellent. They came to see me in a sorry state. Oh! I said to them, I don’t have such scruples; in the name of charity, come let me bless you. And I married them.

“All of liberal Protestantism follows such thinking. Be you Catholic, Protestant, Jew, Muslim, pagan, as long as you are an honest man and that you have charity, of what importance is the rest? There is surely some difficulty for the Jew who detests Jesus Christ; but the Protestant Coquerel, having fixed things up with the marriage blessed by him, why be more severe? One must be more open. Mr. Cazaux affirmed it! Mr. Viguié, in his fine description of the last judgment, confirms it! Mr. Joubin, the headmaster, supposedly a Catholic, with his crown of immortals, will not dare to invalidate it, and this will not only be tolerance, but justice in the name of equality, a message from the Protestant Midi!

Gazette of Nîmes, April 11, 1875

(T.D., vol. 7, p. 322)

In this page Fr. d’Alzon especially wanted to stigmatize a certain religious indifference that leveled everything. As far as the practice of the Catholic Church, it has become much more supple in accompanying to the altar couples with mixed religion (what is known in Canon Law as “disparity of cult”). The Church thus takes into account the desire of the spouses to be recognized at the same time in their religious difference and their mutual respect to grow according to their own spiritual roots. Let our prayer sustain these homes where listening to the other goes through a certain suffering since they are not able to share fully one and the same faith.
August 31

*Mary Mediatrix*¹

We ought to know how to leave Jesus. Sometimes, Jesus leaves us and we should not grumble. We say to the Savior: “*Quid fecisti nobis sic?*”² Jesus answers: *Quid et quod me quaerebatis?* ² In Jesus, there are two things, His humanity and His divinity. For, if we can imagine an imperfection in Mary, she sees in this moment in Jesus more her son than her God, and Jesus wants her to see more her God than her son. We must do the same. As long as we are on earth, we must go to the mediator, Jesus Christ the man, yet remember that as man He is only the mediator. If we have to treat Jesus in this way, what are we to say of the means that God has given us? Let us use them as means, but only as such. Let us see the holy humanity of Jesus, but a mediating humanity.

*On Jesus rediscovered*

*(T.D., vol. 48, p. 356)*

¹ This feast of Mary Mediatrix, born in Belgium in the wake of a powerful Mariology, is meant to evoke the participation of Mary in the work of grace of Christ. The super-eminent place of the Virgin in the Christian mystery must still be understood and interpreted in the light of Christ, the
only Savior and Mediator between God and man. Let us remember the wise precisions of Vatican II: “Therefore the Blessed Virgin is invoked by the Church under the titles of Advocate, Auxiliatrix, Adjutrix, and Mediatrix. This, however, is to be so understood that it neither takes away from nor adds anything to the dignity and efficaciousness of Christ the one Mediator.” Lumen Gentium, #62.

2 A reference to the passage in Luke’s gospel when Jesus is left behind in the Temple and his parents return to find him there. They say, “Son, why have you done this to us?” Then he replies, “Why were you looking for me?” Lk 2:48, 49.
few feast days and memorials occur in the course of it. They are: the 3rd: St. Gregory the Great; the 8th: the Birth of the Virgin Mary; the 13th: St. John Chrysostom; the 14th: the Triumph of the Cross; the 15th: Our Lady of Sorrows; the 21st: St. Matthew; the 27th: St. Vincent de Paul; the 29th: the Archangels and the 30th: St. Jerome, a selection that offers a few appropriate d’Alzonian quotations. Moreover, each day the Founder allows us to deepen an aspect of his thought and of his spirituality that we find here and there in his writings, of his activities or his instructions, even sometimes some of the improvisations for which he had a gift and which were spared the oblivion that often comes with the passage of time.

September 1

A wonderful start of a new school-year,

the beginnings of a fine harvest

The school-year has just begun. The number of students is really much better than we had dared to hope for, almost thirty new boarders, and I wouldn’t be surprised if we exceeded that number before New Year’s Day. I’m convinced that we were quite wrong in not sending out more recruiters. Our trips this year produced very good results, and we have decided to do more. The members of the admissions committee are determined to pursue this work and they want me to go out and beat the bushes as well. I have an idea for an association: of St. Monica, patroness of all mothers, sisters, etc. and having them pray for the conversion, or rather the protection, of children and of Christian houses of education in particular. Tell Mother about it. I shall elaborate and set down a plan.
Letter to Fr. Hippolyte Saugrain,

October 20, 1858

(Letters, vol. II, pp. 549-550)

In the 19th century the beginning of the school-year occurred much later, usually in late October, in order to allow youngsters from the countryside, at least those who went to school, to help their parents in the heavy farm work.

September 2

Acting together in one concerted effort

Every day they come to do their exercises under the chestnut trees. I marvel at all the arm and leg movements, the orders well executed and not, in order to become soldiers, even though, after all, they will only be peaceful national guards. How sorry the nation protected by such people! How sorry the nation with so many of them! Well, religious life is very similar. So many repetitions of the same exercises before we can be what God wants us to be. Not to mention those that we don’t do. Even if France were to have a great national guard or even a valiant army, what would it be capable of without a leader? Thus, all the members of the congregation have to work at different levels, from the postulant on up to the superior general. However, instead of a single leader, the congregation needs a sort of aristocracy so that the key ideas will not die with the one leader. It needs, if I may say so, a permanent council of war even if it isn’t
always in session, at least meeting often and exchanging their views by correspondence, as frequently as possible.

Letter to Fr. Emmanuel Bailly,

October 27, 1870

(Letters, vol. VIII, p. 519)

Father d’Alzon was not afraid of making tough statements. During the 1860’s he encouraged the formation, at his college in Nimes, of para-military units that might prepare youth to enroll in the ranks of the Pontifical zouaves for the defense of the States of the Church which were then being threatened, or later in 1870, in a voluntary national guard since the country lacked a system of obligatory military service.

September 2 is the national holiday of Vietnam. Let us pray for and with our brothers and sisters of the Assumption Family in Vietnam. May the Lord bless their apostolic desire to hasten the coming of the Kingdom of God in every heart.

September 3

Saint Gregory the Great

There are beautiful ruins here: ruins of palaces, of tombs, of temples. But ruins of commodities as well! What memories! The present generation will not leave any, unless you become saints. Harsh words, but true! I went walking the other day in the garden of St. Gregory the
Great. On the one hand, there are the ruins of the Palatine, beautiful ruins soiled by the orgies of Nero and Caligula; opposite, the Baths of Caracalla; at my feet, the stylish quarter of that period; then Saint Peter’s on the right, Saint Sebastian on the left, and under my feet, the cradle of the faith in England. What remains of Nero, of Caligula, of Vespasian, of Domitian and so many others? Look at what remains of St. Peter, the saints who came after him, the works they did, initiated or completed!

Letter to the students of the Collège de l'Assomption,

March 30, 1870

(Letters, vol. VIII, p. 292)

Before his ordination Gregory the Great was prefect of Rome; at first he became a monk in the monastery of St. Andrew. Later he became the evangelizer of the Angles by commissioning missionaries sent forth in the spirit of St. Augustine. He wrote many letters of which 858 are extant. One of them contains this observation: “Man is a leaf fallen from the tree of paradise”.

September 4

Our Lady of Consolation

It was after coming out from Mass, at which I received the profession of Bro. Alexis Dumazer, that I found your letter, my dear daughter. I shall pray for your father and I think it’s not for nothing that the Blessed Virgin permitted that he leave this world almost on the eve of the day dedicated to this beautiful feast, the mystery of which you wanted to honor in a special way in the Congregation that you placed under the protection of the triumph of the Mother of God. I understand your concern for a soul of someone who had already caused you so much anxiety,
but the spirit of faith of your brother and of your family must have given all of you the
consolation that one may ask for at such a time. Please your brother my best. I must admit
that I like him very much, first of all because he is your brother, and also because he is who he
is.

Letter to Mother Marie-Eugénie de Jésus,

August 15, 1864


This feast day belongs to the Augustinian proper. This letter was written when the father of
Mother Marie-Eugénie died in August of 1864. The brother of Mother Marie-Eugenie mentioned
here is Louis Milleret who had been very active in promoting the interests of sisters' collège in
Clichy.

September 5

Reading with pen in hand

For it is not sufficient to have ploughed through twenty or thirty volumes of Church History in
order to learn all there is to be known. The problems which keep on cropping up in this
“Progress of the Peoples” have each to be placed in their context, and carefully studied. You
can’t just turn over page after page, and expect to absorb the lot. Each page contains facts,
affirmations and denials, more or less elaborated. Pen in hand, you must sift the material and
extract the essential. At times the truth stands out as clear as daylight – what is so patently true
must be borne in mind. At other times it is difficult to see your way – so you must advance
slowly, but with dogged persistence, accepting nothing you cannot be sure of.
Underline passages by all means – but ask yourself questions as you go along. It appears that Bossuet’s Bibles and Saint Augustine’s Commentaries were smothered in notes. So I would like this young man I am thinking of – this young man condemned to the kind of solitary study which Monsieur de Bonald² describes as both requiring and creating genius – I would like him to deface and massacre his Church History text book by scrawling all over it. Let him tussle with it and get the better of it! Having read it once, let him read it all over again – even if he were to find in this rereading stains, lacunae, and incomplete solutions.

From The Essential d’Alzon (ES pp. 1044-1045),


The 26th Nîmes Lecture”

September 6

To resemble Christ
Lord Jesus, you had nowhere to lay your head (Luke 9:58), and you were obedient unto death (Phil. 2:8). You are the Lamb of God whose blood is the wine “bringing forth virgins.” Come and crown the three faculties of my soul with the three-headed crown of regeneration. O let me be poor like you, obedient like you, chaste like you, so that I may resemble you in all things. Of all my wishes, you know what I long for most: it is to become like you – to share everything with you, especially the Priesthood in which you were not only Priest but Victim. But before exercising its redoubtable functions on you, my Lord and Saviour, teach me how to exercise them on myself. Teach me to offer myself to you all the days of my life – my entire self: my passions that they may be enslaved to your service. And one day let me hear your voice summoning me higher yet: “Quia super pauca fuisti fidelis super multa ego te constituam.”¹

The Essential d’Alzon: Personal Notes: “My Portrait,”

February 1831 (ES, p. 744)

¹ Mt 25: 21, 23 “Well done, good and faithful servant. Because you have been faithful in a few little things, I will place you over greater things and more.”

September 7

Positive Education

Let us work to make Christians out of our students; the rest will follow. Don’t you think that perhaps we have been too busy with our students’ faults and not enough with the virtues that we should be helping them to acquire? We have proceeded negatively, or, rather, we have proceeded by destroying and not enough by edifying or planting seeds. You may be inclined to respond: “Before planting good trees, you first have to pull out the bad roots”. Not always. In America they leave a lot of tree trunks to rot in the fields, but the harvests are even better as a
result. It is a matter of obstacles being transformed into means. Let us leave aside the trivial questions which seem to inundate us. As we would with brambles, let us set fire one fine day to all that and let us go on with our work. Let us demand a lot of virtue from our students; let us have the courage to speak to them of their call to holiness; let us train them. If the parents want to protest, let them. Believe me, Assumption has a marvelous future if its main concern is none other than God and the Church. Let us love; let us get them to love Jesus-Christ and his Blessed Mother; the rest will follow. However, to achieve such a goal requires a lot of contagious faith.

Letter to Fr. Emmanuel Bailly,

October 12, 1878

(Letters, vol. XII, p. 580)

This beautiful reflection on the ministry of education at the Assumption, recalling the paramount characteristic of a positive commitment to those values which must be fostered and developed in the hearts of the young, no doubt inspired many Assumptionists and Oblates in their dedication to teaching. We recommend the beautiful piece on this topic which Fr. Jean-Michel Brochec wrote: To Educate and to Teach according to the Assumptionist Spirit.

September 8

Birth of the Virgin Mary

I’ve been preparing to celebrate this feast for a number of days, and, as I was telling you, I think, in my last letter, I would have wanted it to be for me like a second birth. That’s the thought that struck me the most. So, to prepare myself to enter into this mystery of the birth of
Mary, I have spent these last few days reflecting on it for several hours. What struck me the most are the necessity for limitless dedication, a great sensitivity of conscience and then a great remorse for not having pushed you enough toward the good. Also, my dear child, I insist on asking your forgiveness. And if I don’t do it on my knees it’s because the Rule of St. Augustine forbids it. This morning, at Mass, I renewed the vows that you know I have made. I made an additional one: to devote myself entirely to your perfection.

Letter to Mother Marie-Eugénie de Jésus,

September 8, 1846

(Letters, vol. C, p. 128)

This Marian feast, celebrated since the High Middle Ages, was honored in a particular way by two Fathers of the Church, Andrew of Crete and John Damascene. In addition, there is this unpublished composition by the poet Leconte de Lisle:

O Earth, forget for a day your ancient distress;

O sky and sea alike, beat with sure happiness.

The Blessed Virgin was born in the womb of God.

She flies, enlightened by a fiery rainbow broad,
Like the dove that carried to the ark of refuge,

The olive branch that survived the deadly deluge.

The morning star illumines the seas; creatures without number, greet her and bless her,

The One whom the Most High God’s shadow will cover,

The One Virgin who would carry within,

God existing before time would ever begin.

September 9

Beautiful grape harvest

Now then, do all you can to prepare for the arrival of Mother Françoise-Eugénie (de Malbosc); do all you can to welcome her with all the solemnity that corresponds to the position she holds. Also, before I forget, without adding to the expense, remind your Reverend Assistant, Sister Marie Gabrielle (de Courcy), that on the 19th I would like her to do the adoration of the Blessed Sacrament at a parish that has asked to have their day changed. What shall I say about the recent grape harvest? I would imagine that is of interest to you. The harvest won’t be as abundant as it was last year, but it will be of a much, much, much better quality. Someone has asked me for a little barrel of 45 liters. If you are very good, I shall have you taste some. We have some grapes that are as large as those of the Promised Land. Now then, repent, and at each new degree of holiness that Sister Marie-Gabrielle observes, I promise to send you a bottle.
Letter to Sister Thérèse de la Conception Bardou,

September 8, 1864

(Letters, vol. V, p. 135)

Father d’Alzon was resting at Lavagnac from the 18th to the 22nd of September, 1864. He had plenty of free time to oversee the ripening of the grapes. At the time, his cousin, Edmond d’Alzon, was nearby at the family residence of l’Estang. He had introduced a variety of table grape, called chasselas, for that wine-growing region.

September 10

The Goal of Assumption

Our little Association intends to grow in holiness by extending the Kingdom of Christ in souls. The most characteristic aspect of our spirit must be love: a burning love for Our Blessed Lord and for his Blessed Mother who is to be our special patroness – an immense zeal for the Church – an eradicable attachment to the Holy See. Our life must be one of faith – of dedication and self-sacrifice – of prayer, apostolic activity, and complete frankness in all our dealings. We are distressed at the sight of so much rivalry between the diocesan clergy and the religious orders. Let us be extra-specially careful to avoid it by remaining within our assigned limits. We must not meddle with what is specifically their task. We must know how to hand over to them some of the good work we ourselves have been doing well – to restrict ourselves to what they wish us to do. Let us always be humble and disinterested. What matters is that Christ’s servants should co-operate in brotherly love – each cultivating that portion of the vineyard entrusted to his care.
Mr. Thiers (a nineteenth century French economist) wrote a book in which he maintained that a field belongs to whoever cultivates it, to whoever labours and sweats to make it productive. I do not intend to discuss this theory now - but the fact remains that everybody experiences an extraordinary propensity to appropriate the soil from which he earns his living. Look at the delightful little field you have been given to cultivate: orchards laden with fruit - kitchen-gardens full of choice vegetables ... name them and count them. Look at the souls, look at the hearts. Watch them budding and ripening. Look at these lovely flowers. Look at these luscious fruits. You have laboured so hard to produce them, that it is only natural for you to think they belong to you. But you mustn't. Their perfume and their sweetness belong to God. You must never forget that you and I are - I won't say “machines,” but I will say, “humble tools” wherewith he operates. It is so easy to say: “What a pity this child is no longer in my charge. I was the only one who could do him or her any good” But here we are enthroning our own spirit, our own thoughts and feelings, where the Catholic spirit, the thoughts and interests of God, are alone entitled to dwell. It's like many a priest whom the bishop has placed in charge of a particular parish. He introduces so many of his own ideas, his own attitudes, his own devotions, that it can hardly be called a “Catholic” parish any more - it has become “Father So and So’s parish.” Don’t laugh. The same applies to many a school - it becomes “Mother So and So’s school.” No, we must work for Our Lord - and with his help we must increase his influence, not our own. Bring Christ to souls. Don’t just bring yourself. Amen.
September 12

Commerce and morality or the corrupting reign of money in society

What have become of industry, trade and commerce? For many of us they have degenerated into one vast system of carefully organized theft. What is the purpose of financial speculation, of private or public enterprise? It’s to make money, as quickly and abundantly as we can, with the minimum of effort and inconvenience. But in order to waste no time, to grow rich quick, we have to twist and fiddle with basic morality. This we do – and it’s amazing how many people make a fortune overnight. Immense fortunes, rapidly amassed by God knows what scandalous methods.

So much for the wealthy and influential men in high places. What goes on further down the scale? What would you expect? – imitation, of course. They have a far better excuse. The big
thieves steal because they want the best of everything – the little thieves steal because they’ve got to live! But meanwhile, respect for other people’s possessions has become a thing of the past. The “haves” know the others are casting envious glances in their direction, and this makes them constantly on the lookout. They’ve got to defend their goods – whether they have been well or ill-gotten – to defend what is theirs at all costs, even at the cost of further malpractice. As for the “have-nots,” they may not desire much, but they do desire what isn’t theirs. They aspire to dismantle the rich – sharing the proceeds with their companions in poverty… but as for sharing what they themselves have earned, they wouldn’t dream of such a thing.”

_Seventeenth Meditation, The Essential d’Alzon, (ES, p. 458)_

**September 13**

**Saint John Chrysostom**

I have set out to make myself very familiar with St. Augustine, St. John Chrysostom, Tertullian and a few other Fathers of the Church. Everyone has to agree that these men were outstanding. In their writings we can often see the faults of their era coming through. For example, the antitheses in St. Augustine or a neologism in poor taste in the harsh African are things that mar his masterpieces. Still, they deserve their reputation. They deserve an even greater one than the one they enjoy today. It seems to me that one might find in them the
answer to many of the objections that are made against Christianity, objections which can be found among the Greeks as well. In this regard, ecclesiastical education may develop, and will, I hope, develop before long a great deal along those lines. I hope that, once all the memories of the Sorbonne will have died, a few arguments, a few scholastic proofs that are now out of date will be abandoned for the good of the truth. Thus they will be able to present to the young the marvelous parallel of Catholic dogmas that are immutable like the truth which they express, in contrast to the thousand and one errors which arise and die every day and are as elusive as the principles on which they are based.

Letter to Eugène de La Gournerie,

September 4, 1832

(Letters, vol. A, p. 333)

The love and study of patristics is part of the Assumptionist heritage. Fr. Antoine Wenger had the good fortune to discover on Mount Athos the text of five Baptismal Catecheses of St. John Chrysostom, which were published in volume 50 of Sources Chrétiennes (1950).

September 14

Feast of the Triumph of the Cross

The heat of summer has taken a toll on me. I went away and found an almost complete solitude at Betharam, in the Pyrenees. I might have been able to write to you from there at greater length if I had felt that I owed something to my beloved daughter. My dear child, you are worthwhile, very much worthwhile, that we take care of you. Consider the dates of our two letters. You wrote to me on the 14th, feast of the Triumph of the Cross; I answered on the 17th,
feast of the Stigmata of St. Francis of Assisi. Doesn’t that show that although you ask me to keep my promise on the day of the exaltation of the triumphant instrument of salvation, you have an opportunity to take advantage of it by crucifying yourself a little? Could it be that that the major fruit of our correspondence is that we learn to suffer in the spirit of the cross by impressing on our souls the meaning of the sacred wounds of our Lord? We are growing older and we are no longer young. We need, therefore, to ask which guide will be given to us on the road to eternity, toward which we are making our way. It seems to me that Providence has shown it to us: the cross.

Letter to Mrs. d’Escures,

September 17, 1874


September 15

Mother of Sorrows

(Patroness of our Eastern Missions)

I have asked Our Blessed Lady – in virtue of what she had to suffer as she stood at the foot of the Cross – to obtain for me the grace of giving birth, howsoever painfully God wills it, to our little religious family.
This morning at Mass I experienced the deep feeling of how utterly I depended on God – and as I held the Sacred Host in my hands, I besought Him to accept me too as a victim.

I put it to Our Blessed Lady that, since the work of ransoming captives from the Muslims was now an anachronism, could she please transfer the appropriate graces to that of ransoming souls from the captivity of our pagan universities.

“Personal Reflections,” September 1854,

The Essential d’Alzon, (ES, p. 815)

The Mission to the Eastern Europe (“Mission d’Orient”) usually refers to the apostolate, begun in 1862 by Father Victorin Galabert in Constantinople and its surroundings. This came in response to a desire, expressed by Pope Pius IX to Fr. d’Alzon. After some trial and error Fr. Galabert settled in Philippopoli, today Plovdiv, a Bulgarian city under Turkish control. The apostolic work began with the foundation of a modest primary school. From there, Fr. Galabert moved, in 1867, to Andrinopolis, at the gates of Constantinople, but on the European shore. This move had as its purpose a better insertion into the Greco-Slav world of that period and greater proximity to the Eastern Christian population of various rites and jurisdictions. Subsequently, as things developed, this apostolate moved into Turkey (1883), Jerusalem (1883), Russia (1903), Greece (1912), Romania (1924) and the former Yugoslavia (1924), without neglecting the original foundation in Bulgaria.

September 16

Condolences to the parents of René d’Esgrigny
My dear friend, du Lac has informed me that your sacrifice has been consummated. God has taken back what he had given you for such a short time. Your silence, during my last visit, told me how much your heart had been broken, and I was at a loss as to how to tell you how much I was suffering with you. You can derive at least some relief from the thought that if God gave you a child, you did everything that was asked of you and Mrs. d'Esgrigny to return to him an angel. He left us for God on a Saturday, according to what du Lac wrote to me. Now the Church encourages the belief of those who think that on that day the Blessed Virgin obtains even greater graces for the dying. No matter how deep the wound caused by blows such as the one that has just struck you, there is nevertheless some consolation in telling oneself: We did everything that was asked of us to help our son to take his place in God's presence. In spite of the horrible break in nature, which death creates, the soul rests in contemplating the horizon that faith reveals to him. I am praying a lot for you, my dear friend, for your spouse, for little Jeanne. I am not sure I am praying for René. Isn't he already in heaven? Farewell. On the day after tomorrow, the feast of Our Lady of Sorrows, I will be saying Mass for you.

Letter to Luglien de Jouenne d'Esgrigny,

September 16, 1859

(Letters, vol. III, p. 158)

Out of friendship Fr. d'Alzon had accepted be the godfather of Rene's sister, Jeanne, a privilege that he had refused to give to his sister, Marie-Françoise, for his nephew, Jean de Puységur, and for a son of his cousin Edmond d'Alzon.

September 17

Careers and planning for the future
At the end of the academic year, a certain number of young men pass through the doors of the institution where they were formed, never to re-enter as students. Their departure does, however, leave many pre-occupied with the future and which career to pursue. This preoccupation begins long before the end of the year. It seizes in its grip not only fathers and mothers on whom such a great responsibility weighs at this time, but also these young people with their hyper-active imaginations. And instead of pushing them to greater study, they are often led into some kind of dreadful distraction. The fact is that not every thought in the head of an eighteen year old is serious. In pursuing what they call the “positive,” they sometimes stray from the real. Alas, how many times have we not groaned on seeing them consider life only from a materialistic point of view. Not that we have ever thought that all students should think of soaring toward the sublime; but we have often regretted sensing that even modest ambitions were not ennobled by superior motives. Oh! how we have deplored that love for what is simply of this world wherein the only consideration is for practical and serious results, that is, those which entail higher salaries and produce greater financial benefits.

Discours de distribution des prix

(“Talk given on the Occasion of the Awarding of Academic Honors”),

1863, T.D. vol. 1-5, pp. 207 bis and 208

September 18
Spiritual lessons to be derived from nature

You are absorbed in your sadness and in the reasons for your sadness. That is not good, not good at all. I really take issue with you and, as much as I can, I order you to abandon this absorption. Sadness is good when it serves as a spur driving us to have recourse to God who gives us the joy of His salvation, but to become absorbed in one’s sadness, to take pleasure in it, is not good at all. Sadness that is treated that way is the eighth capital sin that Cassian writes about. Let go of it as soon as possible, my dear, and be sad only for having done so little, for having asked wrongly, for having been so rigid. What you really need to do is preserve hope that Jesus, meek, humble, patient and gentle in spite of your rigidity is waiting to raise you up and lead you to perfection when you are once and for all meek, small and humble in the very depths of your soul. You express quite well your supposed incapacity for loving, but everything you say lacks something, the truth. You can certainly love God, not by permanently developing the sentiments that you may have had in the past, but through a new series of sentiments. Since you use the comparison of the fruit that follows the flower, I will tell you that when the fruit has been harvested, the leaves fall, the North wind takes the last ones, and during winter, under the snow, the tree seems to be dead. Often we prune the useless branches and so in the spring it’s a damaged tree. Even though the flowers and the fruit that it gives are not those of previous year, they are not any the less good. As a matter of fact, they are tastier. The best wines are those which the oldest vines give, those which were pruned the most.

Letter to Mother Marie Eugénie-de Jésus,

July 6, 1848

(Letters, vol. XIV, pp. 431-432)
September 19

*From the season of flowers to the season of fruits*

You tell me you're feeling sad. Are you praying? Prayer does not always dispel sadness, but it makes it fertile; it gives life to that which was sterile. Tell me, where has your languor brought you? I felt like you a few times. I tried to find some distraction. Because we're not good for anything, we waste our time and efforts. Well, my dear friend, we're still only in our springtime. Let us wait for our autumn before we start losing our freshness, become yellow and fall to the ground. To each being, its own destiny. For trees it's flowers, fruit and shade; for people it's virtue, work and love. Every barren tree will be cut down (Mt. 3, 10), and the man who doesn't bear fruit will also be cut down and thrown into the eternal fire. Therefore, produce your fruit and don't tire yourself out in melancholy or in discouragement which produce no results. Dense fog has always destroyed buds. Get out of that fog, seek the sun, seek God who will warm you, give you love and enable you to do good.

*Letter to Luglien de Jouenne d'Esgrigny,*

*November 2, 1830*

September 20

*Dreaming about one's friend in the “Lane of Sighs”*

If you come to see me, come in the spring or in the fall. Why not come right now, for example? In the garden we have named a lane of old chestnut trees the “Lane of Sighs.” It is enclosed at each end by two small hillocks. At one end, there is an old wall almost eaten away by moss and ivy; at the other, there is a grove. There is nothing more agreeable than to stroll there alone or with someone who understands you. It’s a lane of secrets. Oh, if you could have seen it during the last fortnight with the lilacs in bloom, the rosebushes heavy with buds, and the old chestnuts with their leaves so fresh and with their whitening clusters! You can’t imagine how much of a pleasure it is to see the cherry tree, with its white flowers in crumpled beauty, or to discover under some brushwood a nest of grouse or of guinea-fowl, or in a young cypress tree a nest of canaries. I love all these things; they make my spirit soar. Maybe you think they hedge me in? In short, be assured that I love you always, always.

*Letter to Luglien de Jouenne d’Esgrigny,*

*April 4, 1831*

September 21

*St. Matthew, Apostle and Evangelist*

It's a real pleasure for me, my dear daughter, to chat with you a little and to tell you how much I would like for the trials of your position to serve toward your sanctification. Alas! We mustn’t complain about these opportunities to become saints, but rather, for letting them pass by without taking advantage of them. I strongly encourage you to read the Sermon on the Mount in St. Matthew (Ch. 5). Applied to a religious superior, there are some wonderful passages for enlightening, strengthening and consoling her. You will find there happiness from tears and from problems. You will find there the perfection of charity expressed in terms of loving one’s neighbor, the complete abandonment of self from day today. All that is good, even the sentiment that we are good for nothing and that God seems to be making a fool of himself when he uses us as his instruments.

*Letter to Sr. Marie du Saint-Sacrament de Gouy*


Sister Marie du Saint-Sacrament de Gouy (1824-1908) was a Religious of the Assumption and had Fr. d’Alzon as her spiritual director. One of her sisters was also a Religious of the Assumption: Sister Marie de Jésus (1826-1906). The family was originally from Wamin. Their father was a member of the military.
September 22

**Spiritual Alms**

Spiritual Alms! It's a protest against the invading flood of materialism. These waves rise with ever frightening rapidity. Material well-being, that's what everyone wants above all else. And in order to obtain it they cling to the surface of the earth as though it were about to escape from them, as if death wasn’t destined very shortly to receive the dissolved dust of their bodies into its bowels. Material well-being! Such is the source of those gigantic and criminal efforts expended in financial speculation. They're willing to ruin a hundred people if it will enrich them; and if they're willing to roll around in the depths of the abyss, heaven only knows how many victims they have drawn down with them as a result of the craziest of schemes! Now where does it come from, all this disorder in fortunes, if not from the conviction that material satisfaction and the wealth that can procure it must take precedence over everything? I am well aware of the fact that accepting the great principles of Christianity is almost impossible for those who have no other preoccupation than to increase their wealth. But we must protest against the dreadful doctrines behind which they try to hide their immoral project that we have to protest. Almsgiving is a life-saver for the masses; it's an obstacle to the progress of materialistic speculations.

*Discours de distribution des prix*

(“Talk given on the Occasion of the Awarding of Academic Honors”),

1861, *T.D*, vol. 1-5, p. 192
September 23

The Classical Christian writers: true beauty

In discussing the quarrel concerning classical authors, we shall disengage it from other matters that need not be treated here. About such matters, I shall only say, given that the efforts which have been made to note unity have in fact detected, to the contrary, their divergence, that we will maintain our freedom, our complete freedom, until a higher authority makes a pronouncement. In every controversy there is an infallible sense that alerts individuals, without their even being aware of it, with regard to the secret relationship that exists between questions which are apparently secondary and those that are of major importance. This distinction takes place naturally as well. And if we know who is against us, we know also who is for us. Against us, there are those who put the cult of form above all else and pretend to find in paganism the most complete realization of literary beauty. They forget that a pagan, among the most eloquent, the divine Plato, defined beauty as “the splendor of the true.” Even as we might find a certain degree of beauty in pagan works, its highest expression here below cannot be found elsewhere than in the doctrinal deposit of the highest and the most complete truth. Against us are all those who place perfection of beauty in the expression of the exterior world, in all that flatters the senses, unaware that in the same way that the soul is above the body, so also the beauties of the intellectual world are above the beauties that the material world can offer.

Discours de distribution des prix

(“Talk given on the Occasion of the Awarding of Academic Honors”),

1852, T.D., vol. 1-5, p. 152
September 24

**Concerning the foundation of a Catholic university**

While waiting for the tree (which, I hope, has already seen the axe put to its roots) to be toppled by the very weight of its branches and fruit of iniquity, do not Catholics always have a strict duty to prepare the way for free universities side by side with the official (State) university? In these free universities the faith of students will not only be respected but will also inform the very life of all disciplines which, in turn, borrow from it that sap which is faith’s crown. In order to achieve this, Catholics can invoke two rights: that very right already usurped by the State, that is the right to teach, which everyone possesses in virtue of the principles of ‘89. Where there is freedom of the press, there also should reign freedom of education. The monopoly of higher education is all the more a flagrant contradiction. Either they should reestablish censorship and oblige all citizens to pay for the Official Newspaper (*Journal Officiel*), or they should finally bring this scandal of State education to an end. But, for us Catholics, this argument has value only against the adversaries before whom we find ourselves. We have something else besides, the conviction of our absolute right not only not to be educated in the manner of the (State) university, but to be educated in the manner of the Church of God, with the authority that this Church received from its founder.

*Discours de distribution des prix*

(“Talk given on the Occasion of the Awarding of Academic Honors”),

September 25

*The Catholic Commissions*

Pius IX used to say: “It’s not enough to pray; one needs to act.” Don’t you think that we anticipated the thought of Pius IX when we formed these Catholic commissions everywhere which came to birth as a result of much reflection in Paris, at an intimate meeting of a few courageous men during the evil days of the Commune, surrounded by enemies outside and those even more formidable enemies within? By the light of our monuments ablaze and the sound of hostages being executed, a few energetic Christians founded the first Catholic Commission in a tiny room. In various parts of France others imitated this powerful example. Pius IX blessed and encouraged a general gathering of all these individual groups in order to form a vast association. I would add with a certain pride that an alumnus of the Collège de l’Assomption deserves the credit for later straightening out the legal difficulties that arose as a result of the development of similar commissions all over France. From now on we can count on obtaining all the necessary authorizations that already exist in Nîmes.

*Discours de distribution de prix*

(“Talk on the Occasion of the Awarding of Academic Honors”),

1874, T.D. vol. 1-5, pp. 319-320
September 26

The Spirit of the Christian Teacher

One day I was coming out of St. Stanislaus where I had studied twenty years earlier. I was with one of our former deputies, who is missed much, and with Mr. Charles Lenormant whom the free-thinkers of those days had just forced to abandon his chair at the Sorbonne. Two young men came to give me a hug. “Who are these gentlemen?” queried Ferdinand Bechard. From their accent he recognized that they came from the same part of the country as he did. “They are,” I answered, “two former students that I was obliged to send home.” “Ah,” commented Mr. Lenormant. “I had all sorts of success at my prep school but it never occurred to me, once I had finished my studies, to preserve a hint of a relationship with my former headmaster.” With very rare exceptions, this is the great privilege of Christian teachers: they have the power of forming groups, of extending their influence far beyond the school years. It’s this incomparable power that one must develop, and increase for the good. The secret of our influence, a secret which we must precisely preserve as a privilege, is that we love our students, that our students know themselves loved. In other institutions people do not love. In general, they give more or less heavy doses of Greek, Latin, mathematics and even gymnastics. However, they don’t know how to show affection, and, above all, they never receive it.

Discours de distribution des prix

(“Talk given on the Occasion of the Awarding of Academic Honors”),
Imagine for a moment, in a dark little valley in the Pyrenees, a child returning at night with his small flock to a poor thatched cottage; his clothing is coarse, and to feed himself along the way he has been obliged at times to beg for pieces of food fallen from the French army convoys. Here you have the reformer of the French clergy; here you have the man who, during almost half a century, would have in his hands the power to select those he judged worthy of being made bishops. Without being concerned with his own material well-being, he would weigh, in view of that challenging burden, the merits of those he thought should be called to the authority of the sanctuary. Here you have the man who, together with men like Berulle, Bourdoise, Olier, would render to the Church of France its ancient splendor. Follow him in the obscurity in which he hides to prepare himself for the priesthood; observe him being cast away by storm onto the Barbary Coast, enduring very harsh slavery for three years. But, Lord, how time passes! Your servant was incapable of accomplishing all the plans you had for him. Be assured, my brothers, the ways of God are not the ways of man.

September 28

Literary contests at the collège

Here at the collège we are still under the charm of the most wonderful rebuttal made by Mr. Monnier against the ideas put forth by Mr.(Germer)-Durand. Yesterday, for an hour and a half, the former presented the principles of higher education regarding the great pagan rhetoricians and the Christian method, as he understands them. He injected into his presentation a fire, an ardor and a spirit that compensated for the occasional and faltering incorrectness of his speech. I tried to heat up the debate which will continue, I hope, because these are things which enlighten minds sometimes numbed by routine. Mr. Durand was delighted to see his position attacked, although he stuck to his guns. Monnier’s speech proceeded like an attack ship sailing in full sail and, releasing its broadsides, without pausing for a moment in its advance. I was quite pleased with his success. This was just an ordinary meeting of the Third Order of the congregation, but we have resolved to transform our meetings into literary discussions for a while.

Letter to Mother Marie-Eugénie de Jésus,

November 8, 1847

(Letters, vol. XIV, p. 385)
September 29

Saints Michael, Gabriel and Raphael, archangels

I must tell you that I fear criticism of the national pilgrimage since so many people are planning to go. Either you will get lost like a drop of water in the ocean, or at least in a demijohn. That is my horribly profound impression. Ah! What won't we see in heaven? First of all, God; and already there are more than ten thousand novices. Then there is our Lord, who is quite handsome as well. And the Blessed Virgin, of course, not to mention St. Peter and St. Paul with the other apostles. And good St. Joseph! Personally, I would like to see St. Michael and Saint Gabriel. St. Raphael a bit less, though I have no intention of playing down his merit — which is considerable. St. Raphael makes me think that I am a lot better off here now than during the time of the Council. What have you done to Fr. Brichet? He's always talking to me about you with inexpressible tenderness. I deeply regret not having gone to Rome these past seven years. If I can find a spare 600 francs, I'd like to return there every year. Fare thee well, all of you. Become saints and pray for me.

Letter to Fr. Vincent de Paul Bailly,

February 6, 1877
September 30

St. Jerome, Doctor of the Church

That was a wonderful idea you had to read the letters of St. Jerome. He's not tender-mouthed. Far from it. He goes straight to the point and does not mince his words. If you feel the need for that kind of vigor, so much the better. Nowadays we have such softened natures that sometimes such energy offers a pleasant contrast, besides being the only thing that gets results. I hope then that, having begun so well, you will move briskly on and before long you will become a perfect Christian. If you can't go to Mass every day, try at least to engage in frequent adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. You have to go straight to our Divine Savior with immense confidence. He's the object of great hatred. It's important to make it up to him by loving him twice as much. You can take it from me: leave aside the novels and the serials. That sort of thing is no longer for you. God expects something very different from you. You are, no doubt, young, but suffering has made you mature. Take advantage of what you have gone through to offer our Lord a life of suffering and holiness.

Letter to Ms. Fayet, September 1, 1880 (Letters, vol. XIII, p. 387)
The month of October has been observed for centuries as the month of the Rosary.

To avoid needless repetition of the Marian texts already used in the month of May, during October we will explore an alphabet, A through Z, of d’Alzonian themes, while honoring a few feasts of the sanctoral calendar which find a resonance with Fr. D’Alzon. These themes reflect the spirituality of the 19th century but with undisguised attachment to the Christological accents linked to the Incarnation, Passion and Redemption. The century of the Curé d’Ars and of Lourdes invites us to penance, sacrifice and prayer in a style or with an insistence that can surprise us; but the Christian God that d’Alzon reveals to us, in losing jansenistic rigor, allows Himself to be sought in prayerful intimacy, in the experiences of faith and love, but also in the generous gift of one’s soul through an abundant flowering of charitable works that engender without ceasing apostolic women and men attentive to the common good and the societal needs of that era.
October 1

*A as in Abandonment in Love*

Imitating Jesus Christ is a full-time occupation which at any given moment can reach white-hot intensity. One single act of love on the part of the Lord Jesus was of greater value, in terms of love, than all the acts of love on the part of the angels and saints since creation began. This is the very degree of love you and I are called on to imitate. As for Our Lord’s other virtues, are they not all expressions of his immeasurable love? Even our human weakness can help us to progress in holiness. With God’s help we keep on trying, and eventually we find ourselves drawing closer and closer to him day by day. Our intentions become purer. We become more whole-hearted. We abandon ourselves more and more willingly to whatever God asks of us – not only in our general attitude of life, but by loving application to every single detail whereby we can imitate the Saviour we love. Isn’t it wonderful – isn’t it marvellous? The more we study the Lord Jesus, the better we know him. The better we know him, the dearer we love him. The dearer we love him, the more we wish to imitate him. But in order to imitate him better, we study him again. And thus by triple process of study, affection and imitation we grow in sanctity as the years go by.

*Second Meditation, The Essential d’Alzon (ES, pp. 325-326)*
October 2

_B as in Beatitude or Happiness_

But man on his part, to whom God has revealed Himself by Faith to be the Supreme Truth containing all truth – to whom God has revealed Himself by Hope to be the Supreme Goodness containing all happiness – man who seeks his happiness in possessing God, finds in Him so much loveliness and charm that he longs to be united to God beyond the possibility of separation. He now loves God for God's own sake. He wants to offer God everything a creature can who owes God his very existence. He wishes God to be adored and glorified throughout the universe. Let every knee bend before His Supreme Majesty – let the hearts of all his children be filled with love for Him … No matter how perfect our dispositions may be, no matter how purified our will, it is God who sets us in motion and gives us the power to love Him. Saint Thomas Aquinas tells us: “Caritas est amicitia quaedam hominis ad Deum, fundata super communicationem beatitudinio aeternae” — Charity is a friendship between man and God, established by the communication of His own eternal Happiness.” It is Hope which reveals to us this eternal happiness in God. But, if God is generous, we, in turn, want to be so as well and so out of sheer thankfulness we begin to love God for Himself.

_Thirteenth Meditation, The Essential d’Alzon (ES, pp 411, 415)_

October 3
C as in Confidence in spiritual union

Obedience should rest on two foundations, trust and humility. You are the only judge of the trust aspect. Am I really the guide that God wants for you? It is not up to me, but rather up to you to decide. You will be the one to receive the grace in making your choice. And if later you say: “Father, I believe that I have made a mistake, I will say: “My daughter I give you your complete freedom.” [If] the fondness I have for you and the desire that I have to do you good and the sympathy that I have for a soul such as yours are not sufficient, understand it well. It is you, before God, who must make your choice; but once that choice is made, your trust must be complete, and I have the right to require it in order to do you good. Humility must be joined to obedience and must allow you to speak freely. I promise to help you in the practice of that virtue as soon as you will have said: “I wish to be a trusting soul, humble and obedient.” I will suppose that you have agreed to this and I will follow suit.

Letter to Angelina Chaudory,

March 24 1865


Prayer intention: Germany, as it celebrates the reunion of West Germany (Federal Republic of Germany) and East Germany (the German Democratic Republic) as of October 3, 1990.

October 4
I have asked Saint Francis to give me a great love of Poverty – and that affection he had for every creature … Turning my thoughts once again to Saint Francis, it seems to me that I must seek my peace, and learn to love my neighbour, in complete poverty of spirit. If I have nothing, if I am entitled to nothing, then what have I to complain about? This spiritual poverty comprises everything: my feelings, my self-esteem, my reputation, my very life. Detached from all these, I will be poor indeed. Some things irritate me. I must ask Our Lord, the Holy Lamb of God, to give me that meekness wherewith he overcame the world.

*Personal Reflections,*

*The Essential d'Alzon*

*(ES, pp. 816, 817)*

If it is true that no two angels are alike, it must be true that no two of them praise God in the same way. What goes on in heaven must also happen on earth. Whence I conclude that we must use the means given us by God to praise Him. Did not the viewing of things of nature foster in Saint Francis of Assisi a greater love? Why should it not be the same for you?

*Letter to Marie Eugénie of Jésus,*

*October 6, 1843.*

*Letters, Vol. B, p. 100*
October 5

*D as in Deprivation or Stripping Oneself*

Working for one’s perfection consists in two things, according to St. Paul’s phrase: stripping oneself and re-clothing oneself. One strips oneself by working to destroy every defect, every human attachment, every imperfection. Harsh aspects of one’s character, bouts of sadness that are too natural, discouragement, self-centeredness, touchiness, love of creatures, the need for consolation, human joys, a desire for the “finer” things, a certain laziness, a great desire to escape in the midst of certain trials: all of this and everything that resembles it must be set aside as carefully as possible. And, to be sure, this effort must never lag if we don’t want the moss of half-heartedness and laziness to take root in those small corners where we have already overcome the enemy. Yes, we must strip ourselves. As long as we hold on to the rags of our sinful nature, we cannot pretend to be putting on the clothing of light which Our Lord has planned for us.

October 6

Saint Bruno, founder of the Carthusians

I am writing to you from Valbonne, Madam, where I have come to pay a visit to Fr. de Vaulchier. We are perhaps saying farewell to each other because who knows where we’ll be in two or three weeks? We want to proceed against Freemasonry. Religious need to get together and agree among themselves on the best approach possible, despite the ill-will to which they are subjected. When I attended some of their functions, I said to myself: They find that all these musicians who play in the streets, in cafes, or in concerts are not dangerous; but these individuals who get together only to pray, to work and to give alms (because this is what they do), they consider them to be a danger to society because they sleep when Mr. Gambetta¹ is eating, and they get up in the morning asking God’s forgiveness for everything that happened in the darkness of the night. France has lost much of what it used to be. This is the conclusion that must be drawn, and this is also the reason why I have come here, instead of going to Servas. You acted very prudently in not inviting me to baptize Mr. Jean-Baptiste. Who knows? I might have made a Carthusian of him, because Saint John the Baptist is the great patron saint of the sons of St. Bruno.

Letter to Mrs. Varin d’Ainvelle,

September 15, 1880

¹ Gambetta, Turgot, and d’Alzon – all great Frenchmen of the late 19th century.
Fr. d’Alzon knew and loved the Carthusians. He visited the Grande-Chartreuse in 1835 and often visited the community in Valbonne. He was even tempted to join the Carthusians, even if we might doubt somewhat his real capacity to lead such a life. He maintained close ties with a former classmate, a seminarian at Montpellier, Roch Boussinet, who became the Prior General of the order in 1877.

¹ Léon Gambetta was a French statesman prominent particularly after the Franco-Prussian War of 1870. He was a freemason together with other towering figures such as Jules Ferry and Jules Simon. Freemasons were at the forefront of republicans calling for the regulation of Church activities, especially in the missions.

October 7

Our Lady of the Rosary

(To Jesus through Mary rather than to Mary through Jesus)
them later on to nourish the souls entrusted to your care.

*First Circular Letter, pp. 1-2*

Fr. André Sève (1913-2001) has already given a wonderful commentary on this aspect of Marian devotion in Assumptionist spirituality in the framework of what has become known as the “triple love” (love of Jesus Christ and everything he loved, his mother and the Church), a love which is directed principally to Christ who illumines the entire mystery of God and of the Christian faith (*Christ is My Life: The Spiritual Legacy of Emmanuel d’Alzon*, New City Press, New York, 1988, chap. 10).

**October 8**

*E as in Exemplariness*

Nothing in the whole world is more sublime than such a mission – that of purifying the souls of youth – making them brighter and whiter – increasing their likeness to Jesus Christ, the Exemplar of all brightness and purity. But how is the Christian teacher to set about operating this purification – administrating this additional baptism – with the greatest possible efficacy? In umpteen ways. But surely the best means at his disposal is the good example he gives. “Words push,” they say, “but example pulls (*Verba movent, exempla trahunt*).” And, indeed, we may evaluate a teacher by his moral influence over the pupils. The good tree produces good fruit (Mt 7:17). Let me not be accused of making “sweeping statements.” It is possible for a veritable saint to turn out pupils of mediocre moral calibre – just as it is possible for a teacher totally unworthy of his noble profession to exercise a most salutary influence on those whom he is in charge of. But such phenomena are rare, to say the least – and it is here, more than anywhere, that we can talk about the exception confirming the rule. But this good example we are rigorously obliged to give our pupils does meet with obstacles – and the greatest of these
obstacles is: “What will other people think?” Let’s face it: this subservience to public opinion which so often prevents our students from being as good as they ought to be, is not unknown to have an equally pernicious influence on their teachers. We don’t wish our colleagues to notice that we have turned over a new leaf. Now let me tell you: such a mentality is to be shunned like the plague if we are to become worthy of teaching in a Christian establishment. Let our students notice – “let them see our good works” (Mt 5:16). They will certainly follow our good example – certainly, spontaneously and openly.

Instructions addressed to teachers at the Collège de l’Assomption, Nîmes,

The Essential d’Alzon (ES pp. 1341-1342)

October 9

F as in Fervor in regularity, in community
What was the situation in the house when you took over from your predecessors?¹ Was there regularity, fervour? Notice that in our modern world where machines do so many things for us, it’s not enough to have one so that the work gets done. We have to use it, run it; we have to maintain it, change parts, renew the springs, oil the wheels. It’s the same with a community. If it runs well, so much the better! It is important that it continue to go well, and that’s why it needs constant supervision to assure that nothing stands in the way of regularity in performing all the exercises, in carrying out all the duties of religious life. Guidance is needed to help each one grow in his vocation, in seeking greater perfection through prayer and obedience, fraternal affection, and a spirit of penance, work and zeal.

Thirty-fourth Meditation, The Essential d’Alzon (ES, pp. 596-597)

¹ Addressed to superiors on retreat

It is easy to pick out in this list of the characteristics of a well-run community the general criteria which Fr. d’Alzon mentions, in passing, for the direction of institutions and apostolic works, both internally and externally.

October 10

G as in Gravity
What do we mean by seriousness? Surely not that exaggerated and altogether disagreeable seriousness, otherwise known as pomposity! The kind of seriousness Jean-Baptiste de la Salle recommended to his disciples wouldn’t do for us either. In their ‘Christian Schools’ the Brothers are expected to maintain a visible dignity – a degree of seriousness which duly impresses the uncouth characters of their pupils (usually younger students) with sentiments of awesome respect. But a teacher in charge of secondary education must aim at something higher than this. De la Salle trained his Brothers to outward dignity. To this we must add inward dignity, inward seriousness. We must learn to radiate our dignity, to communicate it to the students assembled before us, to earn their respect because we ourselves are what we hope them to become. Let us take note that even the most serious occupations do not necessarily produce serious characters. Indeed, the character of a man, however serious his occupation, is often neither more nor less serious in consequence. And this is the deplorable product of the superficial atmosphere in which we now live. We live in a day and age of singular superficiality. We are ‘mass-producing’ characters incapable of attaching due importance to anything under the sun! So how can our generation be expected to take Christianity seriously? And whoever is not imbued with the true spirit of Christianity will always remain, no matter what his occupation, a superficial character. Some people seem to possess a certain natural dignity, a certain majesty of manner. It’s a quality, a pleasing and desirable quality – but it’s not what I mean by seriousness. They still seem to lack that purposefulness, that concentration of effort, whereby, adopting a Christian standpoint, we come to envisage the world around us with all due gravity and in all due proportion. Genuine seriousness is Christian seriousness. Whatever we do is impregnated with the thought of our eternal salvation. We never lose sight of God – we never cease to worship Him in our hearts – and thus we never forget what life is all about.

*Spiritual Advice, The Essential d’Alzon (ES pp. 1299-1300)*
October 11

**H as in “Hardiesse” or the Boldness**

**of a supernatural love**

Oh, yes, let us be bold! When dangers surround us – when yawning chasms threaten to engulf us – when the baying of the very hounds of Hell deafens our ears with its diabolical rhythm ... then to be prudent according to the maxims of this world – to consider vested interests and political expediency – is more than being careful and cautious – is worse than being lazy and negligent – it's downright treason and downright sacrilege. We are accused of being rash – of taking too many chances – of "sticking our necks out." Well then, let this be our glory! You so-called wise and prudent men – you would probably have accused Jesus Christ of being fool-hardy when he risked the life of the Church by dying on a Cross. You would have found the Apostles mad and the martyrs out of their mind, when with dauntless courage they faced up to persecution by Jew and Gentile alike, boldly proclaiming to all and sundry that Our Lord had, indeed, risen from the dead. But we in our madness – we both envy and emulate the audacity of the Apostles and the boldness of the martyrs. It is with such audacity and such boldness that we claim to love and serve the Church of God with all our might. What do we care about what other people think? – in any case our foes contradict one another in their efforts to overcome us. How was the world saved? It was saved by the folly of preaching and the imprudent boldness of the preachers.

*Closing Address to the General Chapter of 1868*,

*The Essential d'Alzon (ES pp. 137-138)*
October 12

*I as in Mystical Incarnation*

Jesus Christ has two kinds of birth: that in the crib and that in our hearts. The Word was made flesh in the womb of Our Blessed Lady. He manifested himself in Bethlehem – he continues to manifest himself in the lives of those who love him. Saint Ambrose tells us: “Where is Christ born in a deeper sense of the word, but in your heart, within your breast?” *Ubi enim secundum altiorem rationem nascitur Christus, nisi in corde tuo et in pectore tuo?* 

Today I wish to speak about this deeper sense of Our Lord’s birth – about the wonderful effects it produces in us. Jesus Christ becomes incarnate in you and me,¹ to make of us new creatures and² to make of us sons of God. Our Divine Saviour, in his measureless mercy, wishes us to participate in his birth. How? – by Baptism. By being born in us he obliges us to be re-born. Listen to Saint Leo: “Baptism has sprung up as the universal source of Christian life. By it we are crucified with Christ in his Passion, restored to life in his Resurrection, seated at God’s right hand in his Ascension – and by it we are born again with him in his Nativity. *Universa summa fidelium fonte orta est baptismatis, sicut cum Christo in passione crucifixi, in resurrectione ressuscitati, in ascensione ad dexteram Patris collocate, ita cum ipso sunt in ista navitate congeniti.*

"This is indeed, a new birth – and this new birth is the starting point of our imitation of Christ in the various stages of his human existence. We go through his sufferings and death – we share his victory when he defeats death – we even share his triumph in Heaven above. In all these epic events we must become and remain his true and faithful imitators."
Love of Our Lord,

The Essential d'Alzon

(ES, pp. 887-888)

In Spanish-speaking America, October 12 has been chosen as the day to celebrate “la hispanidad” (Hispanic culture). It is an opportunity for us to pray with and for all of our communities in Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, and Mexico.

October 13

J as in Jesus Christ

“I no longer call you servants – I call you my friends” (Jn 15:15). These words were spoken by our Divine Master to his apostles at the close of the Last Supper, when he was about to die for them – and this comforting assurance of his friendship is addressed not only to the apostles but to each and every Christian soul. Yes, Jesus Christ wishes to be your friend – and it is in the Holy Eucharist that he offers you this precious gift of friendship. You cannot turn the offer down without being guilty of the most appalling ingratitude. Who would dare say there is anything selfish about Our Saviour's love for us? Does God need us? – would his happiness be incomplete without us? Of course not! It is out of sheer kindness that he insists on our loving him. Was it not sufficient for him to save us creatures to whom he owed nothing at all? But his love is not content with this. He has nothing to gain by offering himself up in the Holy Eucharist – nothing to look forward to except a greater or lesser degree of ingratitude.
Eight Sermons on the Blessed Sacrament,

The Essential d'Alzon (ES, pp. 973-974)

October 14

Loss of Fr. Jerome Kajziewicz.

Once again we’ve lost a few people — actually quite fortunately in the final analysis. Fr Desaire left us and that’s not to be regretted, far from it! It’s unbelievable how much this young man dealed and schemed. Still, we have 18-20 excellent novices; that will allow us, sooner or later, to send you quite a few troops. I approve your trip to Constantinople with the Sisters. I will bring your last letter to Paris where I shall be going in two weeks. Good-bye, good friend. I have just learned of the death of Fr. Jerome.¹ This misfortune won’t change the situation of the Polish fathers at all, will it? Things have been quite serious here in France and I think that we will avoid a crisis only with great difficulty. I shall soon be leaving for Paris. Let me know if there is something that I should be requesting at the Ecoles d’Orient.
Letter to Fr. Victorin Galabert,

March 1, 1873

(Letters, vol. X, pp. 30-31)

† Fr. Jerome Kajziewicz, Superior General of the Resurrectionists, died in the middle of the street in Rome, Ash Wednesday, February 26, 1873. He was with Fr. Semenenko, an old friend of Fr. d’Alzon; all three of them had worked together on steps to bring the two congregations together in the years 1855-1856.

October 15

Saint Teresa of Avila, doctor of the Church.

To allow oneself to be won over by

an apostolic missionary spirit

From this point of view, zeal for the extension of the Kingdom of Our Lord in souls and an apostolic spirit are absolutely the same thing. Do I have such zeal? Do I have this spirit? I am not going to say that this has nothing to do with women. Saint Teresa, a simple woman and cloistered religious, truly had the zeal of the apostles.† Why wouldn’t I have it? Why wouldn’t I do everything that depends on me? And here, since everyone’s position is different, it is up to each one to examine herself from the point of view of her position in order to appreciate what she could have done in the past, what she is currently doing, and what she should do.
Letter to the Adorers of the Blessed Sacrament,

May 11, 1859

(Letters, vol. III, p. 84)

¹ Fr. d'Alzon would not know another saint Thérèse (1873-1897), a Carmelite from Lisieux, who was to develop an apostolic and missionary spirit so intense that Pope Pius XI, in canonizing her, didn't hesitate to proclaim a patron of the missions. The admiration of Fr. d'Alzon for Saint Teresa of Avila (1515-1582), the Carmelite reformer, can be seen time and time again in his writings. Thanks to the founder of the Assumptionists a community of Carmelites was founded in Nîmes as of 1843. His own niece, Alix de Puységur, became a Carmelite in Paris.

October 16

L as in Liberty or Freedom of the soul

Freedom from the world devolves from a higher kind of freedom which is freedom of soul. This freedom consists in being the slave of no earthly desire or ambition. It consists in saying these words of the Lord's Prayer: “Give us this day our daily bread. *Panem nostrum quotidiamum da*
Absolute trust in God never lets us down. If, at times, God seems to take pleasure in putting our trust to the test, this is only to manifest his munificence when the time comes for him to show us he really cares. Interior freedom comes from poverty. How could you expect to get through your meditation while dreaming of money? It is worthwhile trying to see how it works. Attach yourself to anything whatsoever – then see if you can pray half so well. It will prove an invincible “stoppage” every time you are supposed to be thinking of nothing but God. Need I mention those unhappy souls who wish to “have their cake and eat it?” How often do we feel while dealing with such cases, that they are chained to something which prevents them from flying straight up to Heaven!

Twenty-Second Meditation, The Essential d’Alzon (ES, pp. 501-502)

October 17

M as in Meditation

You deserve a little to have your ears pulled. You haven’t spoken to me about the novitiate;
there you're really in the wrong. Well, I am going to speak to you about it. I am hopeful that shortly you will have 15 to 20 novices or postulants. First of all, we have to find place for them; then we have to find things for them to do; finally, we need to form them better than others have been formed up to now. To do so, for my part, I am planning to develop a commentary on the Rule, on the first book of the Constitutions, and on the Directory, as well as a series of meditations. In addition to the ones I write, I will try to explain a method for meditating well. I'd like to begin all this by the beginning of May. In such a way, it seems to me, we can finally develop a tradition of religious life. It's understood that you will give me a hand. This course would take place from May 1 to January 15, more or less. I'll tell you why I would stop at that point. Really, in 9 months, one can, it seems, form quite a few people and tell them quite a bit. Let us not forget that for those who are going to do a serious novitiate, we have to make them study: 1) Sacred Scripture; 2) The Fathers of the Church; 3) Church History; 4) the Liturgy. If to this you add mystical theology, their time will be well spent.

*Letter to Fr. Alexis Dumazer,*

*April 2, 1874*


*October 18*
Saint Luke, evangelist

My daughter, you have asked me to send you some words of encouragement. I have just read a few from the gospels that are quite consoling. One can see in the Gospel of St. Luke Our Lord commanding St. Peter to cast his nets. St. Peter replies, “Master, we have worked hard all night and have caught nothing, but at your command I will lower the nets”¹ and he made a miraculous catch of fish. I am not sure why it has seemed to me, for some time, that Our Lord has been saying to a certain person to throw her nets for a catch, that is to say, to throw herself completely into his service, leaving aside all human considerations: the mocking of her sister, the distractions of her children, the reproaches of boredom. It seems to me that this person must feel that, since people around her find that she has changed and is “less lovable” than before, she need not pay too much attention to this but should give her all to the one who is calling her. I do not think that God is calling you to lower your nets to catch lots of men and women, like St. Peter, my dear daughter; but it does seem to me that you are approaching that time when you will have no worldly obligations and that without regard to the opinions of others you will embrace everything that Our Lord requests of you, regardless of all those judgments that people may make either about your physical or moral well-being.

Letter to Mrs. Doumet, September 2, 1861 (Letters, vol. III, pp. 504-505)

¹ Lk 5: 4-5

October 19

N as in Nature, Naturalism and Supernatural
In studying the goal of the Council, one can see that what is being proposed above all is a re-establishment of the entire supernatural order which Our Lord brought to earth and which has been attacked by the forces of unbelief, naturalism, rationalism, and socialism. That’s what’s wrong! To unbelief, the Council wishes to oppose the principles of the faith; to naturalism, the complete plan of supernatural help and hope; to rationalism, the unshakeable foundation of divine authority, strengthened by the doctrine of papal infallibility; and to socialism, the more perfect notion of social principles as they are presented by the great Christian society, the Church. The affirmations of the faith, the superiority of the notion of happiness and how to obtain it, the power of the reasons to believe, the social life of the Church: here is what the Council is taking as a starting point. But once these overall guidelines have been put in place, you have to draw the consequences. From a faith which is more forcefully affirmed flows teaching that is more powerful and the need to study once again. From supernatural hope, which is opposed to modern naturalism, flows a more fruitful notion of holiness. From the authority of the Sovereign Pontiff, more vigorously confessed, flows the need to receive from him a clearer, more compelling direction. From a more complete presentation of the Church’s principles flows the light to work to cure society’s ills.

Letter to Marie Correnson,

Decembre 4, 1869

(Letters, vol. VIII, p. 47)
October 20

O as in Openness of Conscience

As fellow members of this association,¹ we give ourselves a two-fold aim – or rather a single aim with two complementary aspects. We are to work for the glory of God, and for the salvation of souls by the extension of Christ's Kingdom here below. Hence our motto: “Adveniat Regnum Tuum” – “Thy Kingdom Come”.

How are we to set about it?

1. By mutual help which results from a close-knit brotherhood.

2. By the self-conquest which results from submission to a common rule of life.

3. By the condemnation of worldly attitudes which results from living in austerity.

4. By the establishment of Christ’s Kingdom which results from the evangelisation of souls.

The Spirit of our Association

1. It must be one of deep love for Our Lord. He must be the model and the ideal of every one of us.
2. We must be kind, compassionate, full of fatherly love for everybody.
3. Openness and sincerity. We must be absolutely genuine in the accomplishment of our duty, and in our relationship towards one another.
4. Personal poverty – this is to constitute our primary mortification.

Rule of the Association of the Assumption,

The Essential d'Alzom (ES, pp. 1283-1284)

The Association of the Assumption refers to the community of committed teachers, lay and religious, whom d'Alzon gathered at Collège de l’Assomption.

October 21

P as in Peace in Truth

“Peace be to you” (Jn 20:19). Gentlemen, what more appropriate text could I take for our farewell than the words from today’s gospel reading? We have closely collaborated, and produced excellent results. The Apostles, assembled in the Upper Room in what could be called the first congress, must have felt very downhearted at Jesus not being there. Then to comfort them he appears miraculously among them, and says simply, “Peace be with you.” I have taken these words from our Savior’s lips and address them in my turn to you, “Pax vobis.” So let this peace be among you, the fruit of your past labours and the aim of your future endeavours. “Peace be with you” for you first, because, unless you yourselves are at peace, you will never transmit peace to others. We are now going our separate ways, each on a mission of peace. And the secret of this peace – between yourselves and among these to whom you are returning – lies in Faith, Hope and Charity. Peace in yourselves – peace among yourselves – peace with others and among all men (Luke 2:14). Let your peace be founded on Faith. Walk in that light whereby we see events and situations from God’s point of view. Be sons of Truth. Be men of principle, and not men of expediency. Let your whole life, patterned
on the example and teaching of the Savior, be characterized by fearlessness, virtue, and fruitfulness. May you be at peace because you breathe truth.

Sermon at the Closure of the Catholic Congress of 1872,

The Essential d’Alzon (ES, pp. 1436-1437)

October 22

Q as in the Social Question

“Down with God! Let us have no more God’. “Hear this latest atheistic war-cry, echoing throughout Paris, echoing throughout a world without God! And in the face of all this, shall there be no warriors in God’s camp? Will there be no men and women ready to lay down their lives for his cause? Do you understand the opportunity Assumption has, I am telling you, to give God his rights back and to proclaim the Kingship of Jesus Christ? This, my dear Sisters,¹ is what we may call the social question. We don’t take it seriously enough. We look for the answer everywhere, except there where it can be found. The rights of God imply his supreme dominion over all things. “The Earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof.” (Ps. 24:1) Domini est terra et plenitude ejus.”

¹
mmunism destroys this order of things. It deprives the Lord of his sovereign rights. The rich are saying: “It all belongs to us.” The poor reply: “No it doesn’t. It belongs to nobody.” And both are wrong because it all belongs to God. Such is the never ending struggle between the poor and the rich over who owns what – and it will go on until the rights of God are firmly established. So cannot you see what our social problems really amount to? They amount to a struggle between the “haves” and the “have nots.” By human standards the problem is insolvable. God alone can provide an answer. May his Kingdom come with his rights intact.

Conference to the Religious of the Assumption (1871),

The Essential d’Alzon (ES, p. 660)

¹ A series of lectures to the Assumption Sisters (RAs) – given by Father d’Alzon during the year following the 1870 Franco-Prussian War. The sisters had taken refuge in Nîmes at their priory. There were 53 of these lectures in all, given over a period of several months from November 5, 1870 to March 20, 1871. Some have been published in full; of others, only excerpts remain.

October 23

R as in Responsibility

First and foremost, you must feel responsible.¹ You cannot do everything yourselves. You
have to see that it is done, and well done. Remember that your overwhelmingly principal task is to look after your community. This is the first question you will be asked on Judgment Day: how have you cared for your community? And you will bring about your own damnation if, by allowing your community to deteriorate, you allow your brethren to lose their souls. Their damnation will be laid at your door. Your life among them must be that of Jesus Christ among his Apostles. Let it comfort you to consider that Judas was one of them – but think of the personal love Jesus had for Judas (Mt 26:50). “The good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep. *Bonus pastor animam suam dat pro ovibus suis*” (Jn 10:11). Have you that tender, loving, persevering care with which Jacob looked after Laban’s sheep night and day? (Gen 30:29). The souls of your religious are bound to you by their vow of Obedience – the souls of others, not so. What good would it do to save many of these others if outside interests keep you from properly watching over your own community?


¹ addressed to superiors of communities

**October 24**

*S as in Simplification*

I am not sure what to say with regard to your retreat. What I try to do is to engage in as much mental prayer¹ as possible and, what’s surprising, I have proof that I am doing good to souls when I have resisted the boredom of prayer that is dry, arid, and full of aversion and distraction.
I have learned to pray mostly as a result of my experience in prayer itself and I don’t have much in the way of advice beyond what I have tried to do myself. Remain before God; tell him that you are nothing and how much you need him. Ask Our Lord to give us his spirit; ask the Holy Spirit to give us his love. It’s as simple as saying, “Hello” and by so doing I have found all the strength and hope I need. I don’t know of any greater goal than to search for God with all one’s strength. In a word, I have tried to simplify things as much as possible and can only urge you to become as simple as possible in your prayer.

Letter to Mother Marie-Eugénie de Jésus,

November 26, 1878

(Letters, vol. XII, pp. 619-620)

¹ Fr. d’Alzon used the term “oraison,” which, for want of an exact English equivalent, is rendered here by “mental prayer.” In his Fifth Circular Letter Fr. d’Alzon expands on the meaning of mental prayer.

October 25

T as in Testament
Here is the spiritual testament which is meant for you. I am not sure if I will be preaching you other retreats, but at a time when the sending off of a certain number of you to Adrinopolis will allow us to establish a definite regularity in this mission, when a fuller novitiate gives greater hope for the future, when time has allowed you to develop more solid traditions in the mother-house, when, finally, I have established a Council together with your Mother General, a Council to help her in her deliberations, it seemed important to me to share with you in what spirit I would like to see you grow in the perfection of the religious virtues, according to your special charism. Therefore, maintain the framework of these instructions as the foundation of your spiritual life. I have already given you Constitutions and a Directory. Both of these are similar to those given to the men. In this retreat I will try to underline more vigorously the mark of originality which is proper to you and the character by which you are to be recognized as true daughters of the Blessed Virgin, Queen of the Apostles.

Letter to the Oblates of the Assumption,

September 10, 1876

(Letters, vol. XI, pp 465-466)

October 26
U as in Unity or Union

Jesus prays to his Father, “Let them be brought to perfection as one. Ut sint consummati in unum” (Jn 17:23). Unity is the supreme benefit he desires for them. Unity is the last word of his Gospel. So let us meditate on it. He prays for unity among his followers, with his own Person as the centre of this unity...Unity in the Universal Church of which the Apostles are to be the foundation stones.(Eph 2:20)... Unity among themselves as individuals... Unity in their missionary endeavours. Here are four aspects of unity on which it will be fruitful to meditate. Let us suppose for a moment that the Blessed Virgin was present in a corner of the Upper Room and heard these words. Let us suppose this so that we can place ourselves in her place and listen with her and like her to what her divine Son is teaching. This exercise will provide us with much food for thought about how best to imitate her whom Christ gave us to be our Mother. When we consider the unity brought about by union with Our Blessed Lord, was anybody ever so perfectly united to him as was his Blessed Mother? Since the very first moment of his conception in her most pure womb, had Mary ever ceased to be completely united to her Divine Son? How could her thoughts, feelings and affections - how could anything she ever said or did - fail to conform to the thoughts and feelings of Christ?

**Conference given to the Religious of the Assumption (1876),**

**The Essential d'Alzon (ES 701-702)**
October 27

*V as in Interior Life (Vie intérieure)*

The religious life, strictly speaking, is but the more perfect life of Christ within us; it will flourish only on condition that we die completely to ourselves. In order to effect this death, we must practice: 1) dying to our senses, subduing them to such an extent that they are completely under control and exercise no dominion over us. 2) Dying to our desires. As long as I wish for anything other than God or what contributes to his glory, I have not died to my desires. 3) Dying to our affections. The word of God penetrates more deeply than a two-edged sword and reaches to the division of the spirit; God wishes to be sole master of my heart. 4) Dying to creatures. Since I became a religious, the world is dead to me and I to the world. As long as there is anything which I have not renounced, I shall be living by human standards and cannot achieve interior holiness.

*The Interior Life, Directory, III, 22*
W as in Wiseman

Just when the tumult occurring in Italy draws the attention of Catholics to the Sovereign Pontiff, and when Catholics might fear, in spite of the most sincere intentions, that events would prove to be even stronger than men, Cardinal Wiseman’s book¹ is of particular interest. The thousand and one details which the author enjoys citing give his accounts a charm which enhances one’s appreciation of that which history doesn’t always say, to discover, without any dressing, the life of those men who are always and necessarily accompanied by a certain majesty. It helps one understand why human vicissitudes, at the gravest moments, leaves them unperturbed and why, like Jesus in the boat on the Sea of Tiberias, they can sleep without fear in the ship of the Church in the midst of storms which, for eighteen centuries, has destroyed so many heresies and so many empires.

Revue Catholique du Languedoc, May 1859, p. 29

¹ Memories of Cardinal Wiseman on the Last Four Popes: Leo XII, Pius VIII, Gregory XVI and Pius IX.

October 29

X as in Xenophon

I intend to go over my studies again; sticking to my previous plan, I will pursue them historically. I will study the truth under its triple aspect of theology, philosophy and morals, in their historical
framework. I will begin by the “Discourse on Universal History,” then Saint Augustine’s “City of God,” and then Rohrbacher’s “History of the Church.” I will read through the Bible and its commentaries. I will consult the historical works of...[?], the “History of Philosophy” by Gerando and that of Brucker, the “Symbolique” by Kreutzer. I will make a special study of Plato and Aristotle. I will read Titus Livy, Xenophon, Herodotus, and Plutarch’s “Illustrious Men.” Then, as I read through the history of the Church, I will also read those fathers of the Church (those early Christian writers) whose lives coincide with each particular period, the history of great Christian events, the history of the nations involved. I will continue with the Middle Ages, the struggles between spiritual and temporal power, and the philosophic movements. Saint Thomas Aquinas and Saint Bonaventure will draw my particular attention. I will examine the roots of the Reformation. I must also study the history of monastic orders. History unfolds itself as they come into being.

Note, between 1845-1850,

The Essential d'Alzon (ES p. 789)

October 29 is the national holiday in Turkey. Let us pray for this country, for inter-religious dialogue, for Christian minorities, and for the joint community of Assumptionists and Oblates in Istanbul Kadikoy.

October 30

Y as in Yankee

Trying to find canonized saints in that part of North America occupied by the United States
would be something entirely useless. There are several reasons for this. First of all, these good Protestants (Episcopalian, Puritans, Anabaptists, Quakers, Methodists, etc.) persecuted each other so cruelly, how could they not have persecuted Catholics? If you rely on the work written by Mr. de Tocqueville on the United States or the more than fantastic examples of Mr. Laboulaye of the Collège de France on American tolerance, you would arrive at the reality of the situation fairly well. But if you take up the two excellent volumes of Mr. Carlier on the foundation of the United States and if you add to that the more recent work, no less remarkable, of Mr. Claudio, both of which come from Protestant hands, you may be surprised by the counterclaims. I am speaking of the counterclaims that these two lovers of Yankee freedom have gathered on American tolerance. Excommunication, the whip, arms, the red-hot iron, death; all these means were acceptable in the hands of these fierce sectarians. They used them against each other. Having left England without knowledge of civil laws, they had recourse to Mosaic laws.

*Letters of a Pilgrim, in Le Pèlerin,*

*March 29, 1879, p.197*
Z as in Papal Zouaves

Maurice is probably about to leave at this very hour, my dear cousin, or at least will be leaving soon. Here we have received the order to send the diocesan “zouaves” back to Rome. Ours have already taken up their assignment, but I immediately thought of your son. Alas! Yes, we must face terrible suffering, but what great honor in God’s eyes. Our hearts bleed and are broken, and yet would we want to take back what we once offered? It is with such a feeling, I am sure, that, not without great pain, doubtlessly, but also with great love, you give what is dearest to you in the world. I must admit that there is at such moments, in my opinion, a difference between allowing a son to enter the monastery and sending him to a battlefield in Italy. Finally, my dear daughter, know how much you are in my thoughts. I pity you sometimes and admire you. My heart is so attached to yours that I wish to support you, if possible, as much as I possibly can.

Letter to Mrs. Louis de Giry,

October 7, 1867

(Letters, vol. VI, p. 385)

Maurice de Giry (1847-1870), son of Louis de Giry and Constance (nee Roussy de Sales), was educated at the Collège de l’Assomption in Nîmes and died as a papal “zouave” at the Porta Pia in Rome, in 1870. The Papal Zouaves were formed in defense of the Papal States by Lamoricière in 1860. The Zuavi Pontifici were mainly young men, unmarried and Roman Catholic, who volunteered to assist Pope Pius IX in his struggle against the Italian Risorgimento. They formed an international regiment, coming from Flanders, France, The Netherlands, Bavaria, and even Canada.
The month of November opens with All Saints Day followed the next day by All Souls Day. This gives this fall month when the trees lose their leaves and when the vegetation takes a vacation, as it were, a mournful quality, half asleep or misty. Despite the fact that everything in nature dies during this season (at least in the Northern Hemisphere), November is still in full bloom with the solid optimism of the faith and the prayer for the deceased. Sadness is not its spirit. It is rather characterized by the fervent, fraternal supplications for those whose memory we continue to cherish just as Fr. d’Alzon continued to carry in his heart and in his prayer the members of his family on earth and those of the Assumption who preceded him in death. The Congregation remembers her own this month, more especially on November 13 when the Augustinian calendar recommends prayer for the deceased members of the Order and when we celebrate, likewise, the three Bulgarian martyrs who were beatified by Pope John Paul in May, 2002, in Plovdiv. The mystery of the Communion of Saints teaches us that grace is a two-way street.
November 1

All Saints Day

Because it is impossible for human beings to express the ineffable mysteries of God exactly, it is necessary to represent them in metaphors and symbols. That is why the dwelling-place of the saints is called the New Jerusalem in the Scriptures and why the Apostle John in the Book of Revelation¹ describes its layout and mysterious beauty in images borrowed from cities on earth.

On the day when the militant Church celebrates the glory of All Saints, she joins in a certain way with the permanent feast of heaven. Saint Gertrude, who was blessed to experience in this life a taste of heaven in numerous visions, saw, on one All Saints Day, the gentleness, the joy and the beatitude of the Holy Trinity being communicated to the saints of the earth in a way that human language is incapable of expressing. She tried, nevertheless, to describe this revelation by using images.

Le Pèlerin, October 26, 1878, p. 694
November 2

All Souls Day

There is never a feast day without a sequel. On the day after All Saints there is a new joy in heaven because of the arrival of those souls that the unanimous prayers of November 2 deliver from purgatory. The commemoration of the dead is the feast of the saints in purgatory with this difference that the saints in heaven pray for us while we pray for the saints in purgatory. Yesterday we received. Today we give.

This feast, characterized by generosity, was instituted in our own country of France, like so many other holy solemnities, and from France it was extended to the Catholic world by Holy Mother Church…The French feast for the dead, which preceded the universal feast which we celebrate in the Church, is the work of an abbot of Cluny (992), St. Odilon, born in Auvergne…A century ago the feast received extraordinary growth thanks to an indulg from Pope Benedict XIV. Just as we say three Masses at Christmas to celebrate the birth according to the flesh of the Child in whom we all are born again, so the Pope authorized one portion of the Church, who had requested it, according to ancient usage, to celebrate three Masses on November 2 in order that the souls in purgatory might receive new birth in heaven.

Le Pèlerin, November 2, 1878, pp.710-711
November 3

The Rights of God

If God exists by himself, then he is the principle of all things. Everything returns to him.

If he is the ultimate good, everything should aspire towards him.

If he is perfection, everything must imitate him.

If he is truth, everything must confess him.

If he is life, everything must derive life from him.

If he is will, everything must want his will.
If he is love, everything must love him.

If he is justice and mercy, everything must fear him and seek his embrace.

If he is power, everything must obey him.

If he is happiness, everything must seek happiness in him alone.

HOLY, HOLY, HOLY

Plan for a retreat talk, as found in The Essential d'Alzon (ES, p. 873)

¹ The theme of the rights of God, as opposed to the rights of man proposed by the French Revolution, is certainly one of the most pregnant themes in the thoughts of Fr. d'Alzon who did not hesitate to write: “Faced with everything that has been done in the name of the rights of man, I would want to establish an association which would be devoted to fighting for the rights of God.”

November 4

St. Charles Borromeo
As you know, people accuse me of wanting to imitate all the saints whose lives I read. At the moment, we are reading the life of Saint Charles in the refectory, and I want you to know that I have not the slightest desire to be either an Archbishop or a Cardinal.¹ Nevertheless, I am profoundly impressed by the beauty, the strength, the energy, the perseverance of this man. On the one hand, the good I seek to do for my students brings me closer to them. On the other, I am even more attached to the few novices I see coming to us. They bring me to believe that more will come. Let me also add that my less than robust health, which the slightest effort adversely affects, gets me down. What should I do? Where is the will of God in all of this? Frankly, I do not know. Sometimes I reproach myself for being too invested in the details, the little things. Sometimes I am quite incapable of doing anything that requires the least effort. What does God want of me? I think I am ready to do anything, if I see it clearly, but there are times when I see too much and other times when I see nothing. Let me know your opinion on this, if you have one.

Letter to Mother Marie-Eugénie de Jésus,

March 28, 1859

(Letters, vol. III, p. 49)

¹ In 1844 at the shrine of Our Lady of Consolation in Turin, Fr. d’Alzon made the vow of priestly humility; he renounced any and all ecclesiastical honors, unless they were expressly requested by the Pope personally. We know that he refused to be named bishop several times.
November 5

**Meditation on Death**

"Morieris tu, et non vives."¹ Let us place ourselves for a moment on the edge of the tomb and let us look at the two horizons that we find there: the past and the future, the end of time and the beginning of eternity.

The past: death is the end of time and of the means of profiting from it: it is the end of suffering and merits, regrets and remorse, hopes, delusions, deceits, worldly thoughts, the world of the senses, passions, guilty habits, and God's patience.

The future: death is the beginning of eternity, the separation of the soul, the corruption of the body, the justice of God, the carrying out of the sentence, the setting in place of what shall always be, the beginning of useless regrets.

*Notes for a sermon on death, as found in T.D., vol. 44, p. 116*

¹ The exact Latin quote is: “Morieris enim et non vives” from II Kings, 20: 1, “for you will die, you will not live,” with regard to Hezekiah.
November 6

**Commemoration of our Deceased Brothers**

If I had been in Nimes when I received the news of the blow you have just received, I would have gone immediately to offer you the only kind of consolation a Christian woman such as yourself wants to receive. But you have already found it in the holy life and peaceful death of your mother. People will say that since she had already done her purgatory on earth because of her long illness, God gave her a little peace the better to think about heaven and to enjoy a few more days with those she was about to leave so as to console the during those final moments of consciousness, which were quickly disappearing and were filled with thoughts of eternity. You will feel an immense void, but Our Lord, who is very good, will fill a part of it with the return of Amédée. His time at school will be finished and since they are installing two new regiments in Nimes, he will certainly be made a lieutenant. May God allow you to use the freedom you are about to regain in terrible solitude in a holy way. All of that shows us the way. Let us encourage one another to walk in the tracks of those who have gone before us. There is a great gentleness in loved memories when we find there such beautiful models to follow.

*Letter to Mrs. Varin d'Ainville,*

*January 16, 1875*

*(Letters, vol. XI, pp. 25-26)*
November 7

A Thought before Death

It will take me a long time to get over the feeling I experienced yesterday at the cemetery, as they lowered the coffin of our poor brother Edouard Patt into the grave, there to await his glorious resurrection. Life and death are solemn mysteries indeed. Hardly a week ago this excellent religious was teaching – completely dedicated to his task. Did it not strike me that he was exhausted? Ought I not to have prevented his over-doing it? Too late to worry about it now – but it’s a frightful burden on my conscience. If we don’t look after the health of our religious, we lose them. If we look after them too well, we produce a generation of mollycoddles.

Now, this applies to us, superiors. But with regard to you, religious, you must not be overly concerned about yourselves. While this lays a heavy responsibility on the shoulders of those in charge, your attitude must be, and remain, that of one hundred per cent dedication – with generous enthusiasm, and mindless of the consequences.

Conference given to the Religious Sisters of the Assumption (1870),

from the The Essential d’Alzon (ES, pp. 681-682)
¹ This refers to the death of Brother Edouard Pratt who died suddenly from a hemorrhage on November 28, 1870, at Nimes and was buried the following day.

November 8

Communion In Prayer

I think, my dear friend, that you have completed your journey and that you have become a new man having viewed the glaciers and let your hands be baptized by the snow. Unfortunately, my elder sister, also, has completed her journey on earth. And you know yourself what it means to lose a sister. She leaves us, of course, with many consoling memories. Her confessor was telling me that she was a saint of the first order because of her spirit of faith, her immense charity and her delicate conscience. However, the judgments of God are unfathomable and we still need to pray for those we love. I commend my sister to the prayers of you all. I will be in Paris on the 7th in the evening, and if you would like to drop by to see me the morning of the 8th of August, you will almost certainly find me there. Things look bleak on the Italian front and I am hoping to offer hospitality to a few professors who would like to come and teach in Nimes. The persecution of Herod brought about the dispersion of the Apostles and was the occasion for spreading the Gospel to the Gentiles. In the hands of Divine Providence, everything is a means, even studying Roman Theology without going to Rome. You understand Garibaldi.

Letter to Vincent de Paul Bailly,
July 27, 1860

(Letters, vol. III, pp. 266-267)

November 9

The Dear Presence of the Departed

Thank you for your fine letter. Let me tell you very simply where I am at this point. The sufferings I saw my mother going through made me hope they would soon come to an end. Since that time I have been talking with her and I know she hears me. Because I was so accustomed not to having her present, death seems to have brought her somewhat closer. Perhaps I have come to love solitude since it had already visited me when my sister died; it increases a little every day. This is self-centered, but I am telling you what is going on. I feel fine with the souls which faith tells me are in a better world or ready to enter it. I never understood the joy of being a priest and religious better than by the prayers we are wont to offer for these poor and dear souls, and then the honor of being able to suffer in one’s family at the time when the large Christian family is suffering so much. It indeed makes sense when the love of the Church is not some vain word. The person with whom I find the most consolation regarding the death of my mother is mother herself. If you only knew what I suffered when, after having written to several other persons, I entered her room and asked her forgiveness for all the pain I had caused her and I went to kiss that hand that had cared so much for me! There was sadness, of course, but after all we are not like those who have no hope.
Letter to Mother Marie Eugénie de Jésus,

October 18, 1860

(Letters, vol. III, p. 325)

November 10

In memory of a Sister who did good deeds

I have time only for a very brief word, my dear child, to thank you for your letter which I received yesterday. I accompanied my beloved Marie to her final resting place, and now, at every moment, I expect to see her in the parlor, in the chapel, in the corridors, in the garden. I know where her body is buried. I hope that her soul is in heaven. The spontaneous testimonies
spoken at her wake were a true triumph. You could feel the respect for a saintly woman who had disappeared. Every day I become more aware of the extensive influence of her quiet charity and of that unity of purpose in doing good of which she never lost sight. After her death I discovered some very moving details. But the honors that were given her and which clearly had not been orchestrated were nothing more than an explosion of gratitude for the good she did for all. Pardon me for going on about what I saw that far surpassed what I might have ever expected. But does God judge as human beings do? Please pray for her.

Letter to Marie Correnson,

April 7, 1869

(Letters, vol. VII, p. 284)

November 11

Meditations and thoughts on death
Are you aware, my dear friend, that we will all die one day, you and me and everybody? Oh! We don't think about it. Still, death is our goal. Death is our worst enemy or our most faithful benefactor, depending on the way we ourselves treat it. Doesn’t it appall you to think that a little dust will one day hide this body from the view of others, as well as that head and figure you love so much? *Homo natus de muliere, brevi vivens tempore, multis repletur miseris.*¹ Yet, we love these miseries. We get attached to them, for lack of something better. Why, you might ask, after writing to you yesterday, I now write about such lugubrious things? Why? Because my heart is filled with inexplicable melancholy. The Day of the Dead never comes along without turning my entire being upside down. Just as it pleases me at times, at other times it horrifies me. Die to be destroyed. Die to be untied with God. Ah! This is where I realize how far I still am from the goal to which I must aspire. Why don’t I always greet death with joy?

*Letter to Luglien de Jouenne d'Esgrigny,*

*November 1, 1832*


¹ Job 14:1 “Man, born of a woman, has a short life but never-ending torments”.

*November 12*

*Actual experience of a burial*
A thousand circumstances are coming to me to fortify these thoughts. For example, the other day, an old priest who at one time had been the superior of the seminary, was buried there. He was really a man of the good old days, not very aware the questions of the day, but leaving all liberty on controversial matters, giving his life over to theological studies, good works and prayer. I was asked to carry the cross at the funeral and I was at the edge of the grave when they deposed his body. The casket was not well closed and that allowed me to see his hand on the priestly vestments he wore, the hand which had so often touched the One who was then his nourishment and now his judge, the hand that had been so often raised to absolve and perhaps to condemn. And when, in a thoughtful moment, I considered that one day, after having offered many sacrifices, pronounced many absolutions, I would be thus lowered into the earth and that my judgment would be heavier than all the divine blood I had spread, than all the absolutions I had given, than all the souls that had been confided to me, than all the battles I would have to fight in defense of the truth, than all the weight of the priesthood, I was surprised to find that I was clutching the cross with all my might. And it was not only my fingers that clutched the icy metal but especially my heart that sensed at that moment the need for an absolute crucifixion, and accepted with delight whatever was in store for it that might be bitter and distasteful.

Letter to Charles de Montalembert, November 10, 1832

(Letters, vol. XIV, p. 13)
November 13

*All Saints of the Augustinian Order and the Congregation.*

*Feast of Blessed Pavel, Josephat and Kamen.*

What chance is there of my going straight to heaven? What am I to do? Where am I going to look for friends when I see the dead being so neglected? But there is a sure means of insuring myself against that terrible day – a means at my disposal. Let me acquire a tender devotion to the Holy Souls in purgatory. The living may forget me (they invariably do) but not the dead. If I have thought about them, prayed for them, suffered for them – then they will never, never forget!

Holy Souls, this is the deal I propose. You are suffering in the flames of purgatory. Very well, I for my part am going to offer God, through Mary’s intercession, the little I have to offer Him in the way of atonement from henceforth till my dying breath. I’m going to offer it all for you, keeping nothing back for myself – so much so that whatever merit I acquire goes to the relief of your pain. And in return, when my time comes to depart this life – whether by that time you are up in heaven or still down in purgatory – you will pray and intercede on my behalf – you will obtain mercy and pardon for me, as I have endeavoured to obtain it for you.

*To the students at Nimes,*
November 14

The gratitude of a grave digger

You can see how much I esteem my happiness by the way I compare it to the pain of others. You understand then that, if I am not unhappy, that is not an excuse for me not to understand the pain of others or not to be affected by what they suffer. Yes, my friend, that is why I feel sorry for you in your suffering and hasten to go and help you carry your cross. A great way for me to dispel any thoughts of my personal pain is to remind myself of the instructions I give every winter to the farm help. When I see these poor people, most of whom do not have a place to lay their heads, work despite the cold and the rain, obliged to feed themselves as well as their parents and their children, how could I complain? Just today someone mentioned to me the case of a grave digger. He, his wife and his five children share the same bed. And I was also told of the joy of these poor people when the bell tolls to announce that there is a new grave to be dug. “Father, the witch has fallen,” say the children in their energetic patois and their father thanks Death for giving him some bread for his children.
Letter to Luglien de Jouenne d'Esgrigny,

December 10, 1831

(Letters, vol. A. p. 249)

November 15

At the Catacombs of Rome

The other day I was present at the transfer of a few bodies of saints that had been found in the catacombs. Whenever the workers who are in charge of the excavations find a certain number of tombs, they advise either the cardinal Vicar or the Pope's sacristan bishop who then sends someone to reclaim the body. This time it was an Augustinian religious who was presiding the excavation of the bones. First we entered a catacomb that has just recently been excavated and which gives one a good idea of how the early Christians hid the various entrances which they used to attend their meetings. In a vine and under an old wall hidden with bushes, we went down a very steep stairway into the long and narrow passageways which are lined with
empty tombs to the right and the left. There we found three tombs, which turned out to be those of martyrs, either by virtue of the palm engraved on the stone that enclosed the sepulcher or by virtue of a small vase in which one could see the dried blood of a martyr. The Christians were always careful to leave one of these clues. When the bones have been in a humid place, they are usually very well preserved. When they have been in a dry spot, their appearance is quite beautiful but they break at the touch and are reduced to dust.

Letter to Augustine d’Alzon,

January 17, 1839


November 16

Visit to the cemetery: four planks and some worms
I have but one word to offer you today, my dear child, to thank you for your good news and to tell you that as a small sign of my thanks I will offer Mass for you on Thursday around 8 AM. As you can see, I am trying to get to you by appealing to your feelings. I was thinking about what would be the best way for you to destroy little by little what seems to be the impossibility of becoming a good person. The only answer I could come up with: acts of humility or mortification carried out in a spirit of faith. Imagine this, my daughter, we are getting old and this comfortable and easy life, these family pleasures, the satisfactions of pride, all of this will be replaced by four planks and worms. All winter long I offered hospitality to a Carthusian who went to visit the cemetery every day. Why not go yourself and get ready to appear before God?

Letter to Clémentine Chassanis,

1864 (Letters vol. V, p. 219)

November 17

Memories of an old Capuchin
When I arrived in Nîmes in 1835, there were at least 40 excellent priests left in the Diocese. They had been formed by an old Capuchin, whose leg had been broken by the former minister of Louis-Philippe, during the Revolution. He had withdrawn to a little hamlet which was accessible only by following a small river-bed and which I could not follow without getting my feet wet. Fr. Chrysostom’s lodgings consisted on one room with a table in the middle. That was the study hall, the classroom and the dining-room. At night the upper part of the table was removed and he slept in his casket ready at hand as it were. His bones were swept away in a storm down the hill of a cemetery. But he had formed 40 priests. What resources did he have, in a place where the chestnut was the only food of the mountain folk? He discovered these young men and one day they were able to be ordained.

Letter to Fr. Victor Bougaud,

August or September 1878

(Letters, vol. XII, p. 532)

Father Chrysostom de Barjac, born Antoine Pellier in 1775, died in 1819. He was a legend in his own time among the local clergy at the time of the Revolution. His life reads like a novel. Being a Capuchin missionary, he preached in the Cévennes Mountains, was expelled and lived like a fugitive between 1792 and 1795 while continuing his ministry, even in hiding. He was arrested several times and freed until his deportation to the island of Oléron, from which he managed to escape in 1800. He returned to St. Marcel de Careiret Parish, went to Aigues-Mortes in 1804 and was pastor at Cambon from 1805. He was especially dedicated to the recruitment of priests and opened a presbytery school which became the Saint Vincent de Paul minor seminary in 1815. He died in December, 1819, “in the odor of sanctity”.

November 18
A landscape of death.

Floods in Provence

My dear friend, yesterday I witnessed one of the most awful sights imaginable. The Rhone River flooded the plains of Beaucaire. Avignon is almost totally under water. The day before yesterday, Tarascon was under water up to the first storey. At the minor seminary, only the kitchen and the dining room were flooded. They had about 8 feet of water in the interior court yard. Yesterday I went to Beaucaire with the bishop. While I was there, two rural houses collapsed. Fortunately, water only entered Beaucaire through a break in the dike which took place down below; after opening up over a stretch of more than 300 feet, it did some terrible damage. The steamboat went to save the workers many of whom had spent the night in the trees. Several people drowned. Oxen, horses and whole sheepfolds were swept away at a horrible rate. Some villages have been cut off for several days. They needed to lodge the horses in the church and the herds in the cemetery. In the midst of all this there are some people who are incredibly self-controlled. Albert de Tessan, who is losing his entire wine harvest, was rubbing his hands at the thought that he would be dispensed from the trouble of going to market. Only one thing bothered him: knowing the fate of the sparrows.

Letter to Augustine d’Alzon,

November 5, 1840

(Letters, vol. B, p. 56)
November 19

*The Company of the Dead*

Thank you, my dear friend, for your kind words to me and mine during this time of trial sent our way by God. You are always there to share the suffering of a friend. It is the true character of authentic affection to go especially to those who are suffering sadness. Mr. de Puységur died as he had lived, as a true Christian. In the moment of such a severe trial, it is a great consolation for his wife, who was nevertheless too broken, even with regard to her health, to come to see my mother once again. As for me, because I was alone in Nîmes at the chancery, I had to resign myself to sending her a word to support her even though I would have desired so much to be near her. Along with this, God has sent me another sadness, of another type, but no less burdensome from a certain point of view. I was close to my brother-in-law especially because of my sister and her children. For the past six years, in the deepest recesses of my heart, I cherished a young man destined for greatness, who after achieving great success in high school was preparing for the Polytechnic Institute. At the age of 16 he had already composed a Chinese dictionary and was working on an Arabic dictionary. He had great facility for poetry and the last poem I have from him speaks of the students of the Collège de l'Assomption whom we have already accompanied to the cemetery. But he had a presentiment of his death. In fact on most of his books we found these words: "*Dies mei sicut umbra declinaverunt et ego sicut foenum arui*".¹ This poor child had written his memoirs.
Letter to Luglien de Jouenne d’Esgrigny,

August 26, 1851

(Letters, vol. 1, pp. 71-72)

¹ Ps 102: 11 “My days are like an evening shadow and I wither away like grass”. The person mentioned here is Félix Hedde.

November 20

The good thief: a rare example to avoid

Yes indeed, hell does exist. I hope from the bottom of my heart that no one ever goes there, neither you, my reader, nor myself, nor even the enemies of the Church, if they accept to be converted. Some 40 years ago, an old paralyzed bishop told me of an apostate bishop who had just left his office. He had spoken him of the conversion of Mr. de Talleyrand. It is hard to believe, he added. Then turning with some difficulty toward his crucifix he said: “Alas, dear God, you forgave the good thief.” And he murmured under his breath: “Yes, but this was one of those surprises you don’t pull off every day.” God can do similar things, but not often. So, let’s not place ourselves in the same difficult position as the good thief and Mr. de Talleyrand. Let’s believe in hell so we can avoid it; at the same time, such a belief is a powerful means of giving us a chance of going to heaven. As for those who believe neither in heaven nor hell, let’s stay far from them. They might drag us along with them.
The Presentation of the Virgin Mary is not an article of faith. It is a pious belief with many lessons. Today I would like to take a look at a few of the virtues that the Church, borrowing the words of St. Ambrose,² admires more especially in Mary. I will set aside everything the Archbishop of Milan says about her amazing mortifications, her fasts, her prolonged vigils, her prayers. I will pause to consider three points that he brings to mind and that I would like to contemplate with you. “Secretum verecundiae, vexillum fidei, devotionis obsequium.” (The secret of her modesty, the standard of her faith, her devoted obedience.) This is one of those revolutions brought about by Christianity. There was a moment when, in pagan society, women were either immodest or bound as slaves. But this chaste reserve of the Virgin Mary was totally unknown. What did these women have to hide when the master’s terror didn’t hold them back? Let us note today where Christian morals are heading; the absence of reserve is making itself felt. Women, too often, exercise no self-control. This can be seen and felt at every moment of life. Blessed the soul that respects itself and knows how to imitate Mary in her modesty.
Fr. d'Alzon died in Nimes on November 21, 1880, the day of this Feast of the Virgin Mary, around the time of the noon-day Angelus.


On the fourth Thursday of November Thanksgiving Day is celebrated in the United States. It began in 1621 with the survivors of the Mayflower (“The Pilgrims”) in order to give thanks for the fruits of the land. This observation became official in 1864 and is a holiday, usually celebrated in family. Let us pray for our communities in the USA.

November 22

Saint Cecilia

Saint Cecilia is too great a saint for us not to be overjoyed to do something for her. As for her devotees they would fight tooth and nail to prevent us from doing what they would like to see done for her. So, Father de Servas has been authorized to say the Mass for the inauguration of St. Cecilia School. If more is desired, we will see. I will pray especially for you tomorrow, my dear child; I will ask your patron saint for the spirit of zeal and ardor for the good that she united with great detachment from the world and remarkable purity of heart. Since the Church offers her as one of the four great virgins of the Western Church, ask her to teach you that perfection which Our Lord would have you practice it. Too bad you will not be at Servas for New Year’s
Day. I would have gone seeking refuge at your house. Perhaps I will be content with St. Joseph’s rectory. I’ll see. Thank you for the news concerning Amédée. As for the building, let me know when the first stone is laid.

Letter to Cécile Varin d’Ainville,

November 21, 1871

(Letters, vol. IX, p. 223)

November 23

Death and resurrection in the Christian life

But we also have our weapons. And these weapons, if we want to use them, would have great influence. The supernatural world is, as it were, at our command. The saints, the angels, God himself offer us their support. Suffice it to ask for them in prayer but especially in public prayer. Society has become pagan and tyrannical, unbelieving. Philosophical skepticism, which has
turned into social skepticism, shakes it to its foundations. We must restore its vital moorings. What has already been accomplished serves as an encouragement for what remains to be done, if we really want to achieve it. Do not Catholics, from one end of France to the other, have the sense that their prayers have begun to be heard? Did the large pilgrimages of the summer and fall not bear fruit? Did the novenas of November, a scandal and a curse for many, not set in motion useful and undeniable movements? Does not the presentiment of resurrection in the Christian life appear as a source of joy and hope for some and as a subject of irritation and rage for others? Whoever has eyes to see and ears to hear is struck by the results of prayer offered to Divine Justice, ready to strike. Prayer is even more necessary as well as a multiplication of those public acts destined to purify the political and social atmosphere, reeking from the blasphemies and sacrileges of our public discourse, our morals and some of our laws.

*Revue de l’enseignement chrétien,*

*January, 1873, no. 21, p. 242*

**November 24**

*The Vietnamese Martyrs*
Ah! My dear child, if we had the hearts of seraphim and apostles, what breakthroughs we would make there and elsewhere! Do you know one of the aspects of Rome that moves me the most? It’s to meet bishops from all over the world. At the Vatican, on the day of our audience, there was the bishop from Porto-Rico (sic), an elderly Capuchin. We went to St. John Lateran and there we found a Dominican bishop, with his Chinese valet. Leaving the Office of the Propaganda, I met Bishop Brunoni, the former bishop delegate of Constantinople, delighted not to be there anymore. And it is like this everywhere: North America, South America, Asia, Chaldea, Syria, Egypt, and Central Africa. Each region provides its contingency and all of this works entirely for the Catholic Church. In all of these countries there are enormous conquests to be made. They are almost all “mission” countries, where the Oblate Sisters could work. Tell our Sisters that they have only a very limited idea of all they will have to do. I count on Sister Marguerite to teach them about this from her place in heaven. I can’t tell you how much I count on this “little flower,” placed at the feet of the Virgin Mary, to attract many graces for us. But one must be faithful. One must have a big heart, one as wide as the world.

Letter to Marie Corenson,

November 17, 1869

(Letters, vol. VIII, p. 16)

Let us pray today with and for our communities and the Church in Vietnam. The Assumptionists founded their first community there in 2006.
November 25

*Preaching Revitalized: an Autumn Fruit*

Whenever he travels, the pilgrim always attends as many “instruction Masses” as he can, at least on Sundays, that is to say, one of those Masses which include simple, homey, down-to-earth instructions that have always done him more good than those grand sermons that never end. He likes the more natural tone, supernatural but definitely not anti-natural. The natural style is that of the early bishops who called these instructions “homilies,” conversations. These early bishops did not engage in grandiloquence. They talked to the people. The nature of their supernatural style: they were not afraid to call to mind those prodigious events recounted in the Gospel. They subscribed to the school of miracles. Since everything about Our Lord is miraculous from his conception and birth to his resurrection and ascension into heaven, these great Doctors of the faith preached, as did St. Augustine who summarizes them all, that the greatest miracle of all would have been that the world be converted without miracles. Theirs was no anti-natural style…..and there lies the difficulty. How does one preach without using a few well-turned phrases, or throwing a few rhetorical flourishes to the audience, without employing grand gestures? Fénelon notes that these early bishops would have been too embarrassed to engage in such grand gestures; anyway, the huge chasubles that they wore while preaching prevented such gestures. Besides, they knew that an instruction needs to be brief if it is to be retained. Brief but substantial; otherwise, one does not have the time to present much of anything.

“*Le Pèlerin,* October 20, 1877, p. 657

November 26

*Mystery of life, mystery of faith*
We all must die….it's inevitable. What is this mystery? I have not lived very long, still I can recall the names of so many people I have known and loved. I call them; none of them ever answers. I will not meet them again either in the towns they inhabited or in the homes where they lived. I'll never meet them again. They will never speak to me. They were torn from my affection in spite of themselves and me and now everything is over. No, all is not over. At the risk of denying my baptism, I must believe in the resurrection of the body and eternal life. I must believe that my Redeemer lives and that I will see him in my own flesh even when the worms have devoured it. I believe in eternal life and that I will be judged by the living God who gives life and death, who casts into netherworld and calls back again. What matters is that one prepare oneself for death, resurrection and eternal life. How do I prepare? By not attaching myself to that from which I will some day be separated, by remembering that the image of this world passes and that it passes quickly. When we bury some well-known man, this millionaire banker or that victor of so many battles, this king or that emperor, this president of the Republic or that actor, what remains of them? His soul appears before God while his body is condemned to the tomb and to terrible decomposition. If he is embalmed, some revolution will come along, and since his body will not have decomposed, it will be desecrated by people. We’ve seen it happen!!

“Le Pèlerin,” November 3, 1877, p. 690
November 27

*Death and resurrection in Naim*

Our Lord enters Naim and comes upon a widow making her way to the tomb of her only son. Who was this widow? And if her son had died, how was she involved? That our Divine Master, infinite mercy itself, was touched by this tragedy is not surprising. But we need to wonder if there are not today great numbers of young men who die as a result of the great weakness of those who gave them life. Where are those Christian mothers who say to their sons as Queen Blanche of Castile said to St. Louis: “My son, you know how much I love you. Still, I would prefer to see you dead at my feet rather than see you commit a single mortal sin”? Real tenderness has disappeared. We prefer to cater to the whims and passions of adolescence. We are losing souls; we are creating ingrates; we are setting ourselves up for terrible suffering, sometimes irreparable suffering. We even go to the point of favoring certain disorders. The door is opened to premature death. Then we tear out our hair and ask God what we have done to be so cruelly treated.

*“Le Pèlerin,” September 13, 1897, p.590*
November 28

Mockery on the occasion of the funeral of Fido, the dog

There was a professor who expressed affection for his dog alone. He had not been able to keep his marriage together. This dog took all his affection, except, I think, for a pair of canaries. One day the dog fell ill. A dog Doctor was called, a homeopath like the dog’s master. In spite of the homeopath, the dog died. The master, wanting to keep something as a souvenir of Fido, had the dog skinned and with the leather made a bed-spread. Exactly as a certain professor of medicine in Paris, whose name I will give if asked, used the skin of a young lady who was not his wife to make a night-table and slippers. Once Fido had been skinned, what was he to do with the rest? This professor of mine invited his colleagues to a funeral ceremony. The poor lot had the courage not to attend. These sacristans did not want a civil funeral! The servant, who was responsible for digging the grave, let it be known that at a specified hour, the remains of Fido, wrapped in the professor’s finest sheet, would be carried to the tomb and interred. But before the burial, this man of mine, who still held the dog in his arms, went into the grave, unwrapped the body and, despite the skinning, placed his hand on the heart of the deceased animal to make sure it was not beating. The undertaker’s shovel finished the job. We do not know if military honors had been requested.

Letter to the editor of “L’Assomption,”

November 25, 1876

(Letters, vol. XI, pp. 516-517)
November 29

*Words of wisdom to a widow*

As to the facts, among the holy individuals you mention, there is already a widow, a few young women, undoubtedly, who were housewives and, therefore, quite aware that they were not to live like nuns in their cells. Obviously, that means that a certain freedom of action is needed in this situation but it’s as you would expect for missionaries. They are religious but obliged to take certain decisions on their own. What advice would be best for a widow? St. Paul says that they should truly be alone, something which favors the spirit of prayer, sacrifice, and solitude. You know that I asked you to host many in your home, but you also know that I suggested it as a duty in charity and as an alternative to certain meetings where the ideas would obviously be less Christian than yours. As for you, life should have a certain discipline and you should not be too upset if, because of that, you seem to displease certain people. The goal of Third Order members and even more that of the Adorers, is to elevate their surroundings, as much as they can, to the level of Christian living. You can see that from this point of view a woman who has numerous contacts can do more than a person who has few. She needs to mix firmness with condescension, firmness being the base and condescension the means.

*Letter to Mrs. Varin d'Ainville,*

*April 8, 1864*
November 30

_Saint Andrew, Apostle, Patron of the Church of Constantinople_

There is hardly a better occasion to meditate on the wonderful subject of vocation than the feast of St. Andrew. Let us examine the call from Our Lord and the way the apostle responds. The call is recounted in two ways and both probably took place.¹ There are a variety of calls. Sometimes the Lord uses other men as he did with John the Baptist. On other occasions, he acts directly as he did later on with Peter and Andrew. What matters is that one listen to the divine call, whether it comes directly or indirectly. The Lord uses the means that seem preferable and in all instances he wants us to give ourselves to him. It is not a question of looking for our vocation but rather of listening in the depths of our heart to the call Jesus Christ is making. What is frightening is that every day the Lord requires more of us and that is what our frightened, lax, and independent nature does not want. Let us resolve to listen to Jesus whenever he calls, in the everyday details of our life. Let us give ourselves to him and follow him wherever he wishes to lead us.

_Instructions to the Members of the Third Order, B.P.  1930, pp. 40-41_
In the liturgical calendar the month of December features Advent, the preparation for Christmas. There are two highlights in this month: the Immaculate Conception (8th), the dogma being proclaimed in 1854, and the Nativity of the Lord (25th).

In addition to these two feasts, there is a host of others, including St. Stephen (26th), St. John the Apostle (27th), the Holy Innocents (28th), before turning the page to the feast of St. Sylvester (31st).

Fr. d’Alzon helps us to enter the spiritual season of Advent, a time of waiting, of longing, and of preparation. On the night of Christmas 1845, the adventure of faith which led to the foundation of the congregation began. Fr. d’Alzon enjoyed fully the proclamation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, a decision which he had already prepared since the provincial
council of Avignon in 1849 and, on the occasion of the proclamation, he wanted to point to his Collège in Nîmes as a citadel of faith. The calendar of December is sanctified by many other figures of which we have retained only a few: Francis-Xavier (3rd), Ambrose of Milan (7th), John of the Cross (14th), which serve as so many stepping-stones leading to the star of Christmas, in the middle of the winter solstice when light is overtaken by night (at least in the Northern Hemisphere).

December 1

A Resolution for entering into the season of Advent:

Being love at the heart of the Church

Why, my dear daughter, beyond all these questions, does an interior voice keep telling me that I must make a saint of you? I beg you, throughout Advent, to enter into the following dispositions. The Holy Fathers assure us that “the virgins are, in a very real sense, the mothers of Jesus Christ”.¹ During this season, from now until Christmas, please be sure to have Jesus
Christ in your heart and to picture yourself, since you are his mother, as having to manifest to him the purest of your being, so that he might grow in you in proportion to that which you will give him of your being. That thought must be sustained by an immense love and a heart like that of a mother for your God.

Letter to Mother Marie-Eugénie de Jésus,

November 24, 1852

(Letters, vol. I, p. 216)

¹ A veiled allusion to a thought of St. Gregory Nazianzen, Oration 38 (para. 1) on the Theophany (Church Fathers, ed. Schaff): “Christ is born of a Virgin; O you Matrons, live as Virgins, that you may be Mothers of Christ.” Therese of Lisieux was able to bring this touch of religious fervor to her love of the Church by finding her true place in it: to be love at the heart of the Church.

December 1 is the national holiday of Romania. Let us pray for all the Churches of this country and, in a particular way for the mission of the Assumptionists and the Oblates united in the same ecumenical effort.

December 2

Entering Advent, the time of waiting, like Mary
Is it possible that you find astonishing the fact that Martha’s occupation, as you say, has replaced that of Mary? But you are going to take it up again after all your emotions, ups and downs, joys, sadness, and fatigue. You are going to take up the yoke again and I promise you that we will seek to keep you firmly under it. The first thing I recommend to you for Advent is to keep yourself in the presence of God deep within your heart, just as the Blessed Virgin, before the birth of Our Lord, adored him within herself. It is a practice to which I am deeply committed and which, it seems to me, is quite suited to maintaining us in God’s presence in the most useful way since we can bring to it the Blessed Mother’s own attitude.¹ So, there is something already, I believe, that you can sink your teeth into. To begin with, during Advent, as you await Christmas and the feast of the Immaculate Conception, it seems to me that you can perfectly get out of the rut you say you have been in. All that is needed is a bit of good will. You told me that you have a lazy spirit. First of all, I don’t believe a word of it and, moreover, everything that you have just done proves that laziness and you don’t go together at all. Finally, even if you were to be so, there would be but one thing to do: no longer be so! Courage! Your great mortification during Advent shall consist in being extremely patient and in offering Our Lord a heart once again steeped in gentleness.

Letter to Mrs. Paulin de Malbosc,

December 2, 1878

(Letters, vol. XII, p. 624)

¹ Lk 2:51 “…his mother kept all these things in her heart.”
December 3

*St. Francis Xavier, S.J., patron saint of the missions,*

*Apostle to Asia*

This absolute dependence, whereby you and I are to place ourselves in relation to our neighbor, makes up a part of our practice of obedience. It’s our way of fulfilling our vow. It must be accepted with love. Doesn’t St. Francis de Sales say that the devotion of a bishop is one thing, that of a Carthusian another? We are a bit bishops, my daughter; we must bear the burden of our office. Nevertheless, I strongly urge you to carve out moments for yourself. Didn’t St. Francis Xavier take two hours every afternoon to get away to the bell-tower in Goa in order to care for his soul? That’s a bit what we also must do. There is the rub, however. In summary, I find that everything without exception will be taken care of, if, given that we take a certain amount of time necessary for ourselves, we then abandon ourselves absolutely and without reservation.

*Letter to Mother Marie Eugénie de Jésus,*

*January 30, 1854*

Francis Xavier, canonized in 1602, was declared patron of the missions by Pope Pius X in 1927.

December 4

*The best preparation for Christmas:*

*becoming a living copy of the Christ Child*

I ask of Our Lord that we might see in each one of you a living copy of the Christ Child. Indeed, what better can you do than to be like him in his childhood? An alumnist¹ must prepare himself to become, when he is ordained, another Christ, the Pontiff, par excellence. To reach so high, one must penetrate the depth of his humility, his self-effacement; one must give oneself over unreservedly to the practice of all virtue which he preached at each moment of his existence. One must become not only poor, but detached from wealth as he was, obedient as she was, a man of work and of prayer as he was. That is why the feast of Christmas should mean so much for you. It's a point of departure. From the crib, one springs toward the perfection of one’s age that later was that of Our Lord as he continued to grow.

Now, while the Christ Child worked and obeyed, he also prayed with all his heart; he became the most perfect child of prayer that ever rose from earth to heaven.

*Letter to the alumnists of Notre Dame des Châteaux,*

*December 25, 1878*
December 5

Jesus, Loving Savior

Here I am back again writing to you in order to tell you that my deepest conviction is this: that you should make every effort to change whatever is bad into whatever is good, that is to say, to vanquish all things in yourself as Jesus Christ did when he became man for us sinners, in spite of our sins. For he loved us while we were yet sinners; if he had not loved us, in spite of original sin and the others that ensued as a result, he would not have given himself up for us. So it is that I propose to you as a model Jesus Christ who loves those he has created in spite of their sin. This is an excellent topic for reflection during Advent: this love of the Savior who seeks us out beyond our sins. You can compare his divine dispositions with your own and I have no doubt that it will be for you an abundant source of embarrassment and humility. But now I have to stop; I am being disturbed. I intend to pray a lot for you during this Advent; do the same for me. I cannot tell you how much I wish you every measure of holiness that would make of you a worthy spouse of Our Lord.

¹ Alumnist: this is the name given to young boys, seminarians, from families of modest means, whose education was directed toward the priesthood. The schools themselves were called alumnates.
Letter to Mother Marie-Eugénie de Jésus,

November 30, 1848

(Letters, vol. XIV, p. 462)

Since the time of St. Anselm, there exists a theology of suffering, well known and very Western, the entry-way to which is atonement. But in Eastern theology redemption itself is a return to God, that is, a return to a human nature that is capable of divinity. The call to holiness, therefore, is not a consequence of the sinful nature of man. By his redemption Christ draws all men and all of creation into union with God, the return to true life.

December 6

Humility and Charity, doorways to Advent

But now I return to the topic of Advent. Well, my dear daughter, I have been quite preoccupied the past couple of days about the degree of holiness that I would like to see you acquire. You say that you don’t have the heart to remedy your self-centeredness. Well, ask for it these days from Jesus, humiliated, emptied out in his mother’s womb. Bear in mind that if you wish to attract the Christ Child into your heart, the only way is humility. You want me to be more specific, but I cannot. In all of your letters I believe I have discovered nothing but a desire to withdraw within yourself, one that is content to despise what is not you and to be sorry for all that you could have been. Perhaps, from such a great distance, I am mistaken as to the exact nature of this disposition; however, if it’s not exactly that, it’s pretty close. I don’t think you should attack this problem head on. What will make you better is greater love for Our Lord and it seems to me that Advent is a wonderful season to enter into acts of emptying oneself out in charity.
Letter to Mother Marie-Eugénie de Jésus,

December 5, 1848

(Letters, vol. XIV, p. 463)

December 7

St. Ambrose, bishop of Milan and Doctor of the Church

The weather is superb. When I say superb, that is not to say that it is not hot; to the contrary, there have been refreshing rain showers every two or three days. It couldn't be nicer. May God grant that it remain this way until my arrival and I'll be able to boast of having made a delightful trip. My Aunt Rodier has suggested that once I arrived in France I visit the tomb of St. Francis Regis. I encouraged her to visit the tomb of St. Rose of Lima, in Peru. Today I celebrated Mass before the tomb of St. Charles Borromeo; I had already celebrated it before the tomb of St. Ambrose. Although I have great respect for the saints, I don't believe it's necessary to visit them all; besides, life wouldn't be along enough! I have to admit that, when it comes to celebrating Mass, all this moving about from place to place affects me a bit. In Rome I went to say Mass in very few places. I hope that the saints won't hold this against me, but I have little devotion to this kind of piety.
Letter to Augustine d'Alzon,

June 18, 1835


December 8

**Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary**

*patroness of the North American Province*

Behold the wonderful provision of God's most loving care! A woman had been the first to be seduced; by an incomparable grace, a woman would be the first to be preserved of all stain. A woman would be raised to the unique privilege of sinless beauty. *Tota pulchra es, amica mea, et macula non est in te* ("You are all-beautiful, my beloved, and there is no blemish in you." Song of Songs 4:7), thus cries the heavenly Spouse of spotless souls. In Mary there is absolutely no sin, no stain, not even a shadow – all is beauty, all is perfection, all is light. And in this perfection, this beauty and this light, see her advance along with her Son.

*Specie tua et pulchritudine tua, intende, prospere, et regna*

("You are the fairest of the children of men; in splendor and majesty ride on triumphant! Ps 45:3,4). She is to be the Queen of all queens, and the Virgin of all virgins, *adducentur regi virgines post eam*
(“Virgins will follow her into the king’s presence” Ps. 45:15). What makes her so beautiful is her humility, this humility which does away with pride, the source of all ugliness:

quia respexit humilitatem ancillae suae: ecce enim ex hoc beatam me dicent omnes generationes

“For he has looked upon his handmaid’s lowliness; behold, from now on will all ages call me blessed. Lk 1:48). Satan inherited terrible and everlasting torments as the inevitable consequence of his pride. Mary will inherit inexpressible and everlasting joy to crown her humility. Even here on earth all generations will proclaim her glory, bless her name and beg her intercession, for the Lord God has looked with favour upon her. Humility and purity: these two sister-virtues walk hand in hand.

Love of the Blessed Virgin, The Essential d’Alzon (ES p. 996)

December 9

Advent Preachers at Assumption

At the moment Fr. Emmanuel (Bailly) is preaching in Toulon. Wherever he goes he is successful. It’s too bad that Fr. Edmond (Bouvy) can’t be the superior! No one can contest his many superior talents, but he flies off the handle too easily and gets caught up in too many details. Still, he is a wonderful teacher in the upper classes, preaches well, and is a very holy religious. I would have wanted to relieve Fr. Emmanuel of the business side of governance.
That isn’t possible yet. Although he’s assistant director, Fr. Edmond won’t be able to replace Fr. Emmanuel for a long time to come. If I was not afraid of the proximity of Fr. Edmond’s family in Paris, I would lend him to you for some preaching assignments. He’d certainly be successful.... Writing this letter has cured me. Last night I was suffering from pain between my shoulders; in order to write a few letters before this one to you I had to stop several times and rest in my arm-chair. But now I feel much better! Still, I’ll have dinner in my room and not go out the rest of the day. I am quite prepared to believe in your miracles, not only when we call on you, but also when we write to you. However, one must not overly tempt Providence, so I’ll stay close to my fireplace.

Letter to François Picard,

December 2, 1878

(Letters, vol. XII, pp. 622-623)

December 10

Advent in Rome, 1869

You do well to read as much as possible; but, please, take notes, then give yourself completely to this love of the Church which is the true guiding-light of our times. I am witnessing quite a
spectacle: wonderful on the one hand, painful on the other. Rome has its human side, as is the case for every human institution composed of men. But what wonders as well! Sunday I saw a procession of some 20 heads of Orders, 300 bishops, some 30 cardinals and the Pope, carrying the Blessed Sacrament in St. Peter’s. It was the first Mass of Advent that is ordinarily said in the Sistine Chapel, but had to be held in the Vatican basilica because of the crowd of people who attended. And these bishops came from the five parts of the world to bear witness to the Catholic faith. It would take me too long to explain to you why, humanly speaking, the Council is a huge mistake; but, in the order of faith, it is a miracle such as has not been seen, perhaps, since Pentecost. Pray for the foreign missions; pray for the Orient especially. Oh, my daughter, a Catholic heart, as big as the universe. I send you my blessing.

Letter to Louise Chabert,

November 30, 1869

(Letters, vol. VIII, pp. 34-35)

December 11

Growing in stature: from the beauty of creation to that of vocation
You have been in Le Vigan for two weeks, my dear children. What's becoming of you? How has your fervor grown? Are you good postulants? I would like to know. I had hoped you would write. But, nothing! I suspect that you are a little homesick. Have I guessed correctly? Do you know that when my mother would bring me to Paris¹ – yes, even Paris – I was homesick as well. There were days when I was sad, as sad as three old maids. I remember I was once crying, in bed, because I missed the sun of the South. You, you must be crying because you miss the snow. Perhaps I'm mistaken. In any case, it's just a guess. In the end, though, I realized that there was nothing like Paris and I was really upset when I made the sacrifice not to live there.² Likewise, you must be experiencing some tough moments or, surely, you will. But, if you hang in there, you will see that little by little, with Our Lord showing you the beauty of your vocation, you will become devoted children of Assumption, apostles, missionaries, in a word, all that is most beautiful on earth, instruments of God for the conversion of the world. Notice that I am the first to write. So, you have to answer now.

Letter to the postulants of Châteaux,

October 5, 1873

(Letters, vol. X, p. 125)

¹ Emmanuel's first trip to Paris took place in 1823 for the beginning of the school-year, when he was 13 years old. To speak of the “sunny climate” of southern France is not to speak in vain especially if you’re comparing it to the weather in Paris where the sky is overcast at least six months of the year.

² Emmanuel left Paris in May 1830, wary of the revolutionary winds that were blowing.
December 12

*Jesus in the womb of Mary*

Ask the Blessed Virgin to teach you to adore Jesus Christ as she herself adored him during the months that she carried him in her womb, especially at that moment when she was about to give her divine Son to the world. Mary can teach us to what intimate extent we should dwell with Jesus Christ, to what extent we should live the very life of Jesus Christ. With her we shall study the characteristics of the adoration of her divine Son in the womb of Mary. The three principal characteristics are: sacrifice, prayer, meditation. Jesus in Mary’s womb was in a state of sacrifice for the salvation of the world and the glory of his Father. He, the holy God, the perfect God, the God of all purity, the almighty God had lowered himself to a state of total emptying out and of silence. He had voluntarily stripped himself of every prerogative of his divine nature to take on the form of a slave. In fact, he lowered himself even to less than that, because, while he was still in Mary’s womb, what was he if not less than nothing ….. Jesus Christ sacrificed, silent, forgotten, unknown in Mary’s womb. Now there is the model for our adoration.

To the Adorers, E00178 (notebook, ACR 1CC4)

December 12 is the national holiday of Kenya and Russia. Let us pray for the Assumptionist missions in East Africa and St. Louis in Moscow. December 12 is also the feast day of Our Lady of Guadalupe, patroness of Mexico and all the Americas. Let us pray for all of our brothers and sisters in Mexico.

December 13

*Tender thoughts of friendship*
So I remember that last summer, while in the country on a moonlit night, I would go down to the orchard to pick peaches, frost-covered from the night breeze, or I would go down to the vineyards to pick grapes. My hands full of fruit, I would take delight in going to the top of a barren hill that overlooks the mansion (the chateau of Lavagnac); from there, I could see in the plain below smoke rising to-and-fro above the roofs of a dozen villages. In the plain, the River Hérault glimmered in the darkness as it glided past several groves of trees. I could hear the dying murmur of these waters as they approached a nearby dike. However, few things could have matched, even in such moments, the delights which friendship offers. As I sat on a bare rock, the memory of my friends caused me to forget the passing hours. And so it happened that from time to time I would dream of that other nocturnal journey which brought another trip of two hundred leagues to an end when, alone, on foot, I reached once again the paternal mansion and where, in order to soothe the weariness of the road, I imagined myself arm in arm with one of the friends I love more than anyone, recounting the adventures of the road.

cf. TD, vol. 43, p. 143 and following (June 1829), D00294

December 14
St. John of the Cross, Doctor of the Church

Read and re-read St. John of the Cross; it’s hard, but it’s helpful, even excellent. Nevertheless, it seems to me that it’s not really necessary to see him as a Carmelite. For example, the Jansenists have claimed that since religious are meant to live a life of penitence and solitude, they shouldn’t at all be involved in the work of saving souls. Their position was countered by quoting a number of conciliar and papal writings and, among other things, a canonical text from a council held in Nîmes in 1096, under the presidency of Pope Urban II, at which 10 archbishops and 86 bishops or abbots attended. This canonical text indicates that religious are better suited than other priests to administer the sacraments. Therefore, it is beyond doubt that there has to be Trappists, Carthusians, Carmelites, with their customs; and there may be as well Jesuits, Franciscans, Assumptionists with theirs. The same principle should be valid everywhere: freedom of heart and the purest possible love of God. While some may remain in silence and solitude, the others who are required to live in the world should mutually support one another: “A brother is a better defense than a strong city, and a friend is like the bars of a castle,” says the Holy Spirit.¹


¹ Prov. 18:19
December 15

_In all things, to submit oneself with the utter fullness of love_

I would have liked to undergo a conversion on the feast of Saint John of the Cross. What have I done about it since? I had to cancel the retreat I intended to preach to the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul. Man proposes – God disposes. In the course of the Minor Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament recently established at the cathedral, I promised Our Blessed Lord to concentrate on my duties of state – that is to say, on my duties as a religious superior. These duties had to take priority over the retreat I had set my heart on preaching. But however incapacitated I may be, I must learn to accept my illness like a saint. I must learn lovingly to submit to whatever misfortunes come my way. So this is the pact. I am delighted at being ill, since Our Lord wishes it so. With all the love I am capable of, I offer him my miserable little aches and pains, that his Kingdom over souls may be extended.

_Personal Reflections: The Years of Trial 1851-1858,

December 4, 1854,

_The Essential d'Alzon (ES pp. 817-818)
December 16

*Faith-sharing at Assumption*

Such a reading (of the minutes of the meeting of the third Order), Fr. d’Alzon tells us, is an excellent thing. It becomes a stricter way of committing ourselves to observing the Rule; it develops in us a spirit of simplicity and leads us naturally to speak of divine things and to share our reflections with one another. One of the marks of a piety that is good and authentic is this mutual sharing of thoughts which fosters within us a certain confidence toward those who have spoken to us in simplicity. We shouldn’t forget that we are entering into Advent. It is a time of waiting which should rouse our desire to redouble our devotion in order to offer Jesus Christ something that will please him. Once we have reminded ourselves that although we have chosen a mentor, we must not forget the responsibility which the novice-master exercises on each one of us (Mr. Monnier for the Third Order). Fr. d’Alzon, the director, concluded the meeting by insisting once again on this simplicity, source of such abundant fruit.

*Cf.* Notes of the Third Order (ACR CE1 E00348)

December 17
God made man, light of truth

What are you about to receive? A God made Man. But this Eternal God is also the Eternal Truth, and this we must never forget. He is “the radiance of his Father’s splendour” (Heb1:3). He is that “light which enlightens whoever comes into this world” (Jn 1:9). He is Jesus Christ, Son of Mary. Beneath his humanity dwells this light which never fades – “a light which shines through the darkness, and which the darkness cannot comprehend” (Jn 1:5). But he is no less infinite beauty as well. Saint Augustine observes that every being draws its beauty from the light. You may come face to face with the most magnificent panorama, but unless some ray of light shines upon it you can see nothing. It may be beautiful in itself; however, unlit it appears as nothing but blackness. It is, therefore, light which gives things their beauty. And our Doctor (Saint Augustine) adds: “Is not the sun the most beautiful object in all of nature, since it provides light for everything else?” But what is the sun compared to that light which is divine – that light which is God, that light which is “the radiance of his Father’s splendour”? (Heb1:3). This infinite light wishes to come down to you and endow you with something of its infinite beauty. And when, with his light, he has communicated his beauty – then he will say to you: “O, my beloved, how beautiful you are!” (Song of Songs 4:7).

On the Occasion of a First Communion at a school run by

the Oblates of the Assumption,

The Essential d’Alzon,

May 27, 1880 (ES p. 1222)
December 18

*Retreat prior to Christmas 1834*

I am about to place myself into the hands of an old Jesuit, at a retreat house, and I shall be scrubbed, soaped down, and thoroughly washed by him for a whole month. After this experience, if I am not white, it’s because I’m really dirty. Nevertheless, support me with your prayers because they can, I have no doubt, do much for my conversion. I’d like to share all my plans with you. I begin my retreat on November 30; on December 8 I will be ordained a sub-deacon by Cardinal Odescalchi. On the Saturday of Ember Days I will be ordained a deacon of the Roman Church, or at least in the Roman church, since the ordination will take place in St. John Lateran, which is *omnium ecclesiarum mater et caput* (the mother and head of all the churches). On Christmas Eve Cardinal Odescalchi will imposed his hands upon me and raise me to the order of the priesthood and on Christmas Day I hope to say my first Mass before the crèche where Jesus Christ is born. It is kept in the basilica of St. Mary Major, where Cardinal Odescalchi is the archdeacon.

*Letter to the seminarians at Montpellier,*
November 15, 1834


This timeline was, for the most part, maintained. However, Fr. d'Alzon was only ordained a priest in the oratory of the vicariate of Rome which faces St. Augustine Church the day after Christmas, on the feast of St. Stephen, and celebrated his first Mass in the crypt of St. Peter (in the chapel of St. Clement) the following day, December 27 (the feast of St. John). The conferral of the subdiaconate took place on the Third Sunday of Advent, December 14, 1834; that of the diaconate the following Saturday, December 20.

December 19

God, Christmas’ Child

Without leaving his place of repose, God hurls into space thousands of worlds in the fullness of his creative power to such far-flung corners of the cosmos that the masses stand in awe, sensing themselves as lost, as imperceptible points in this vast universe. As these worlds turn throughout space, they contribute to the harmony established with other worlds and glorify, in silence, the wisdom of the Creator. In the midst of these worlds, a seed has been planted, preparing the Savior’s birth. This mystery of Christmas presents to us a God who is a child. Following his example it is necessary for us to become children. A newborn child who enters the world knows nothing, can do nothing, possesses nothing. We must acquire a sense of our ignorance, of our powerlessness, our poverty…. Let us go to the crèche. This is hwy Jesus is ignorant, powerless, and poor. So it is that we must embrace this ignorance, this powerlessness, and this poverty.

Christmas sermon, 1838-1839,
December 20

**A trying birth**

Hardly a year had gone by since his wedding day than Mr. Monnier became a father. He was so happy that he almost strangled the nurse; so he had to be taken out. He ran to Fr. d’Alzon. When d’Alzon saw him, wild-eyed, he asked him what catastrophe had occurred. “Did the child die before being baptized? Did the mother depart this life?” Only with the greatest of effort was Monnier able to say, “I am a father” and then fainted. Not new to such situations Fr. d’Alzon took a bottle of ether, poured a few drops on some sugar, and had his agitated friend breathe in the concoction. Then he took him into the chapel of the Blessed Mother in the cathedral to pray, had him take a walk along the boulevard, and brought him all the way back to his home, where he was allowed to enter only after promising that his joy at being a father would no longer lead him to strangle anyone!

*Assomption et ses oeuvres, 1875, n° 4, p. 26*
December 21

*Christmas, a double birth for thousands of cribs*

If you see nothing in the crèche but the crib of God made man, you have understood nothing of the mystery. With Jesus Christ is born the entire Church. Two births: that of the Church and that of each believer. What happiness there is when the Church reflects on her beginnings, in the midst of persecutions: the One who gave her a manger for a crib shall give her her Son’s cross as a support. So, she shall forever walk between extreme misery and extreme greatness. We, too, are born and the manger, if we so desire, will be our crib; and if we wish to be reborn, we have to go there. For we were dead because of sin and the one who has life eternal, in taking on our flesh in the manger, gives us eternal life. He accepts death; he does more, he digests it; he devours it within himself and then gives us the life that he has within himself, which is none other than himself. He has this life within himself; he communicates it to us, he passes it on. Do you desire this life? Enter this crib, go to the crèche. Humble yourself at the side of Jesus.

*Cf. T.D., vol. 42, p. 239, D00141*
December 22

Christmas, the ancient sceptre and the new power

What Caesar Augustus was doing was nothing less than observing that the sceptre had been withdrawn from the House of Judah. Indeed, if this sceptre had continued to hold sway in Jerusalem, Caesar Augustus would not have ordered a census. The Christ was able to come since the sceptre of the house of Judah no longer prevailed. Thus it is that Providence arranges things. Far away, among men who would come from the East, there was spreading a belief in a universal governing power; Tacitus took note of this, just as Caesar Augustus was asserting that he was truly the master of this East. It was from here that there was to arise a new power and its universal law-giver. Nevertheless, at the same time, he gave an order that would serve another purpose as well. The lawgiver, the head of Israel, had to be born in Bethlehem and, without the edict calling for a census, he would have never been born there. Because the Roman Emperor demanded it, Joseph once again returned to the land of his ancestors and brought Mary with him, the instrument of God’s mercy toward the guilty human race. What a lesson for us and how we must understand that God’s ways are not our ways.

To the students of the Collège de l’Assomption,

the end of 1877, cf. T.D. 47, p. 221, D01068
December 23

*The Beginnings of Christianity*

In just a few hours you will celebrate the great mystery that the angels announced to the shepherds on Bethlehem plain. In her turn the Church stirs with joy and will invite you to go and contemplate the God-child. But being more fortunate than the shepherds of Judea, you will not say, “Let us go to Bethlehem,” since you have prepared a home here for Our Lord, whom you come to adore today hidden under the Eucharistic veil and since this chapel is your Bethlehem, that is to say, the city of bread par excellence. The spirit of faith that gives you life has the power to push you on to adore Jesus just as the shepherds did. What a wonder are you offered! It is no different than the one offered to the shepherds. They went in haste and found the child and Mary and Joseph. Let us, too, approach in great haste and contemplate the first elements of Christianity: a crèche, Joseph, a common carpenter, Mary, a simple housewife, and a small infant. This is how Christianity began. And what lessons there are to be learned in such rapid strokes!

*For the Association of the Servants,*

*December 23, 1877,*

*T.D. vol. 47, p. 192, D01064*
December 24

* Five rays emanate from the crèche, around the crib of Jesus *

I want to wish you a Merry Christmas and I’m doing it a bit in advance because I don’t know if I’ll have time later. At the same time I want to wish you five virtues, which, it seems to me, are the primary rays which shine forth from the new born Jesus, in the humility of his manifestation. He desired to be born in a crèche in order to preach poverty to us. He allowed himself to be wrapped in swaddling clothes by his mother, to be carried by her, and to be held every which way in order to teach us obedience. Mary gave birth to him in a stable, after experiencing all of the inn doors of Bethlehem closed to her and Joseph: an excellent lesson in accepting the contempt of others. What is more simple than a child? I wish that you might become such just as the Christ-child in the crib. Why enter this world? For love of his Father’s glory and for the salvation of men. Here is the sublime lesson of charity which he gave at his very origin.

*Letter to the Religious of the Assumption in Paris,*

*December 17, 1854*


If one understands well Fr. d’Alzon’s thought, the five rays of the crèche are five virtues: humility, poverty, obedience, acceptance of the contempt of others, and simplicity. The sisters have surpassed this number a long time ago!

December 25
Christmas, the Nativity of Our Lord. The humble beginning of the Assumption (1845)

I would like to speak to you only of the work by which God has permitted me to repay him part of my debt. We began with six; you began with five. We needed a slightly larger number to compensate for the head start that you had. The night before last, we met as we had agreed. But this first talk of mine was ice cold; I was worn out, I had hardly slept the night before and I had spent the entire day in the confessional. The other brothers were also sleepy. At 10 PM, when I had to leave for the cathedral where I was to sing the Office and say midnight Mass, I wasn’t very happy with myself or the others..... When I tried to give myself to the Lord, it seemed to me that it had already happened and there was no need to come back on the matter... On my return, I wanted to spend the night next to the crèche. I was going to sleep there when, after about a half an hour, one of our fathers, who had also celebrated Mass elsewhere, came back and I thought it better to go to bed. Someone was supposed to wake me up at 6 AM; I had to say Mass at 6:30 – for the community. They forgot and only came at 6:45. The Mass for the students had to be celebrated at 7, so we pushed ours back to 7:30. So, I said the midnight Mass for you, the second one for the students, where I had the pleasure of seeing many receive Communion, and the third for our community.....

Letter to Mother Marie-Eugénie de Jésus,

December 26, 1845

December 26

St. Stephen, the first martyr

You must begin by establishing love as the principle of your new life. You shall ask it of the Christ-child, requesting that he enter your soul on Christmas Day. You shall also ask it of St. Stephen, as well as a readiness to be stoned to death¹ rather than to be lacking a spirit of obedience. You shall ask it of St. John, the apostle of love, together with the permission to rest your head on the breast of Our Lord,² as he did. On the feast of the Holy Innocents, you shall undergo in your heart a great massacre³ of all of your self-centered thoughts, which you cherish as your dearest children, but who are certainly not worth all the little ones that Herod had slaughtered. Finally, on the Feast of the Circumcision, you shall take the knife of penitence, so dreaded, and you shall begin to cut to the quick.

Letter to Mother Marie-Eugénie de Jésus,

December 21, 1848

(Letters, vol. XIV, p. 468)

¹ cf. Acts 7:58. The figure of Stephen would also inspire Fr. d’Alzon at the time of the events of July 1879: “The dispersion of the collèges will have the same result as the martyrdom of St.
Stephen: leaving Jerusalem and going to the Gentiles.”

² Reference to Jn 13:25.

³ Reference to the massacre of the Holy Innocents in Mt 2:16.

December 27

St. John, Apostle and Evangelist of Love

Let us listen to how Our Savior, once he had restored and enriched our intelligence, wanted, as well, to mend and enlarge our hearts. On the occasion of the Last Supper he eagerly wanted to eat with his disciples. It was on that occasion that the disciple whom he loved rested his head on his breast, “I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so must you love one another.” There you have friendship in all its perfection; you must love as Jesus loved. Even in love, he desires to be our model, “as I have loved you.” And how did he love us? Until death, St. Paul says, and death on a cross. It is in this way that in Jesus love is purified or, to put it more accurately, it is from him that love flows. Before him, what was love, what was friendship than a natural attachment of one man for another like him? There is nothing loftier in this relationship where divinity doesn’t play a role. One man, then another man, and that’s it. But now it is no longer so. It is two intelligent beings, gifted with the faculty of knowing and loving, who, as the Serbian poets say, are wedded in God.

cf. T.D., vol. 43, p. 219 and following, June 1829, D00294
December 28

*Feast of the Holy Innocents, martyrs*

Will you allow me now to speak to you of my little ones and of an exceptional experiment that I tried recently? It was so successful that I am determined to do it again next year. I gave them the Feast of the Holy Innocents¹ off. For 24 hours I withdrew as director of the house. I had the students name a headmaster from among their ranks, a dean of discipline, a head monitor, assistant monitors, and Council members. We ceded all our power to them: the library for their deliberations, supervisory powers, in a word, the entire running of the house. We obtained some really precious results: 1) an inexpressible feeling of fatigue, on the part of the leaders, who all discovered, by the end of the day, that it is better to obey than to command; 2) the certainty that these children love us and aren’t as bad as we may have thought. They only went overboard once, when they allowed themselves to have half a dozen cigars brought into a room.

*Letter to Mother Marie-Eugénie de Jésus,*

*January 3, 1847*

*(Letters, vol. C, pp. 177-178)*

¹ This practice, inaugurated at the collège in Nîmes in 1847, was maintained for a long time in the alumnates (the minor seminaries of the Assumption). Fr. d’Alzon was undoubtedly inspired by his own experience as a student at the Collège St. Stanislas in Paris. This experiment underlines his desire to introduce pedagogical practices that foster proximity and trust with students.
December 29

Memories of an elder

If I take up the pen to recall my memories, it is because I am witnessing so many generations of the Assumption passing by that I am afraid to see it lose some of its venerable spirit. It wavered at times, but just as fir trees, buffeted by a storm, after bending their heads this way and that, hasten to direct their tops toward heaven, I would like to see our venerable and much appreciated spirit of yesteryear, after so many tribulations, *tempora mea* ("the dangers I've witnessed") as Cicero says, return to its original direction. Who am I? What does that matter to you, dear reader? As long as I can hold your interest as a faithful witness! Believe me: if I bore you, I'd be happy to see you yawn at the mere sight of my name. I am among the elders now: let that suffice to understand that I know a few things that you don't. I love young people, and, as a vicar general of Moulins would say, I do not see why someone who had been a fool for 50 years should be preferred to someone who has only been in his right mind for 25. Besides, at the Assumption, the elderly love the young; the young respect the elderly – which is a great consolation for the elderly who can be upset at being old and for the young who will grow old one day. In any case, this method is essentially-anti-revolutionary.

*L'Assomption et ses oeuvres*, 1875, p. no. 1, pp. 1-2

December 30
God alone remains

Time passes, but God remains, eternal, unchanging. He existed before me, and when my body is destroyed, he will still exist. He has given immortality to my soul and a time will come when I will come face to face alone with him for my judgment. However, before being my judge, he is my Creator, my Father, my Savior. Can I not understand that if he remains when all will be taken away from me, that it is on him alone that I should depend? As St. Augustine says, “Certainly I must avail myself of passing creatures like myself, but I must depend on God alone”.¹ I have often heard these words sung, “Et veritas Dominis manet in aeternum”.² What does it mean? The truth of God is the being of God, the reality of God: God in his fullness, the beauty of his being; God with his infinite power, his wisdom, his goodness, his love, his happiness. So, if God remains and if I can go to God, why do I need anything else? My God, who remain for all eternity, I no longer need anything since you will be mine eternally.

Instruction to the members of the Third Order, B.P., 1930, p. 54

¹ This is a thought that would have been familiar to Fr. d’Alzon, as can be found in De Doctrina Christiana, chap. III

² Ps 117:2 “The truth of the Lord shall last forever.”

December 31

Greetings, good wishes, and advice on the occasion
both of year-end and new year

Happy New Year, my dear Numa! I should have answered long before this. Do you know why I have kept you waiting? Because I wrote first to your sister, who, in the name of her friends, sent me a delightful letter for my feast-day.¹ In your regard, my dear friend, I hope that you will develop everything that God has given you. Wrestle a bit with all the defects of your character, your laziness, your petty weaknesses. Always be a man of faith; courageously hold to this faith in every circumstance.

Let me urge you to read the Traité des lois by Suarez. You can find it in the Cours de théologie by Migne; it’s in our library. Buy a copy of the Summa by St. Thomas in Latin and read a section of it every day. This reading, dry at first, will, little by little, fill your mind with the assurance of things known. Never go to bed without reading a chapter of the Imitation of Christ.
Receive Communion as often as possible.

Letter to Numa Baragon,

December 31, 1856

(Letters, vol. II, p. 172)

¹ Fr. d’Alzon’s first name was Emmanuel and his feast-day was celebrated on Christmas Day, the birthday of “Emmanuel” (God-with-us).

By 1856 Numa Baragaon was already an alumnus of the Collège de l’Assomption. He was
preparing to become a lawyer and begin a political career in the ranks of the conservative legitimist party. His loyalty to Fr. d'Alzon and to the Assumption was faultless.

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Life of the Saints: May 27; June 3

Meditations of 1878 destined for the Augustinians of the Assumption

Second Meditation: October 1

Third Meditation: January 9

Fifth Meditation: April 8

Sixth Meditation: January 10, August 17

Eleventh Meditation: August 19
Thirteenth Meditation: April 9, October 2

Seventeenth Meditation: September 12

Eighteenth Meditation: January 11

Nineteenth Meditation: April 22

Twenty-second Meditation: October 16

Thirtieth Meditation: May 11

Thirty-first Meditation: April 11

Thirty-fourth Meditation: October 9

Meditation on the Eucharist: January 20; May 27

Meditations on Religious Perfection: January 1; March 22-23, 26-27

Month of Mary: May 5
Notes between 1845-1850: October 25; December 21, 27

Notes from an Instruction: June 28

Notes for the Adorers: December 12

Notes of the Third Order: December 16

Notes, private: January 18; September 6

Notes on the Spirit of God: April 5

Panegyric for St. Vincent de Paul: September 27

Protestant Controversy: April 25

Retreat given to the Religious of the Assumption: April 26; August 9; September 11

Retreat on the knowledge of Jesus Christ: March 25, October 12

Revue catholique du Languedoc: October 28

Revue de l'enseignement chrétien: November 23
Rule of the Association of teachers at Collège de l'Assomption: January 7; October 20

Sermon of Lent 1862: February 4; March 18

Sermon of Closure for Catholic Conference of 1872: October 21

Sermon for a First Communion: December 17

Sermon from a retreat with the Religious of the Assumption: March 15

Sermon for Christmas: December 19

Sermon on Jesus rediscovered: August 31

Sermon on the Compassion of Mary: May 8

Sermon on the Cross: March 30

Sermon on the Glory of God: May 11

Sermon on Death: November 5
Sermon on the Word of God: June 26

Sermon on the Passion: March 29

Sermon on Holy Virgin Mary: December 8

Sermon on the Truth: June 4, 20

Sermon on the Octave of the Blessed Sacrament: June 5, 10, 14; October 13

Sermon on the work of the Servants: December 23

Sketches (Galeran): July 14, 23; August 4

Speeches on the occasion of academic honors: April 20; August 25; September 17, 22-26

Spirit of Assumption: April 10

Spiritual Advice: October 10
GUIDE TO ABBREVIATIONS

A.A. Augustinians of the Assumption

ACR Archives of the Augustinians of the Assumption in Rome

A.R.T. Motto of the Augustinians of the Assumption, “Thy Kingdom Come”

B.P. Bonne Presse (now Bayard Presse), international publication house of the AA, with headquarters in Paris

C.A. Cahiers d’Alzon (a series of writings on various topics organized by Fr. Bisson)

E.S. Ecrits spirituels (foundational texts of Fr. d’Alzon chosen by Fr. Athanase Sage and soon to appear in English under the title, The Essential d’Alzon)

O.A. Oblates of the Assumption, a missionary congregation of sisters founded by Fr. d’Alzon in 1863

R.A. Religious of the Assumption, a congregation of religious sisters founded in 1839 by Mother Marie Eugénie de Jésus, a close friend of Fr. d’Alzon

T.D. Texts of Dossier submitted at the Congregation for Saints for Fr. d’Alzon’s process of beatification
Fr. Emmanuel d'Alzon

(1810-1880)

Founder of the Augustinians of the Assumption (1845) and the Oblates of the Assumption (1863).

Faithful disciple of Jesus Christ, in the spiritual school of St. Augustine, Emmanuel d'Alzon consecrated his life to the service of the Church.

Sensitive, by nature and grace, to the changes of his time, he made his own the great causes of God and man.

His favorite apostolic work included: the education of the young, vocations, Church unity, seminaries for the poor, the press, pilgrimages, and missions in Eastern Europe.

Following in his footsteps, the Assumptionists, male and female religious as well as lay associates, work out of love of Jesus Christ for the coming of the Kingdom of God in us and around us.
Identity and Charism of the Assumption

“Our spiritual life, our religious substance, our ‘raison d’être’ as Augustinians of the Assumption is to be found in our motto: *Adveniat Regnum Tuum.*

The coming of the Kingdom of God in souls, by the practice of Christian virtues and the evangelical counsels, in keeping with our vocation;

The coming of the Kingdom of God in the world by the struggle against Satan and the conquest of souls ransomed by Our Lord and yet buried in the depths of error and sin;

What could be more simple! What could be more common, if I dare say it this way, than this form of loving God!

If, to this primary love, you add the love of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of the blessed Virgin his Mother and of the Church his Spouse, you will have in a nutshell the spirit of the Assumption.”

*Fr. Emmanuel d’Alzon*, *Instruction of 1868*