TURNING POINTS in Emmanuel d’Alzon’s Way of Holiness

Publications for the Bicentennial Celebration of the Birth of Fr. Emmanuel d’Alzon (1810-2010)

General Council

D’Alzon 2010 Bicentennial Collection [i]

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Preface

This book is the result of three years of reflection, of discussion and also of prayer. A modest amount of research was also necessary. It is the fruit of an exchange during a General Council meeting on the best way to prepare for the 2010 Bicentennial celebration of Father Emmanuel d’Alzon’s birth on 30 August 1810. We understood that no amount of organization would bear fruit unless we ourselves took the time to “rediscover” the founder and live from his teaching. In 2007 the canonization of Saint Marie-Eugénie Milleret made it clear to us that our founders were before anything else people on a path of holiness. As good Augustinians we think of the life of faith as a pilgrimage, an adventurous journey during which we encounter challenges and enjoy glimpses, however brief, of the glory awaiting us. The members of the General Council began wondering: what were the challenges and the joys of Father d’Alzon’s journey? Was the path that he followed as smooth as it sometimes appeared?

Though none of us on the Council are “specialists”, we were able to identify a number of “turning points” that seemed to be particularly challenging for Emmanuel d’Alzon. We decided to focus on six, but others might have been included. Each one then chose one of these “turning points” and over the course of the next year or two studied the sources more carefully and eventually produced a text that was communicated to the rest of the Council. What you have in your hand is the final draft of this work.

In the process we have discovered another dimension of the person. Since the centennial celebration in 1980, we have come to appreciate more fully the merits and even some of the limitations of Father d’Alzon. Historical research and extensive study of his major texts have made that possible. Since then, however, thanks to the diligent efforts of a number of our brothers, a critical edition of Father d’Alzon’s entire correspondence has been published, and a hundred of some of the most significant of these letters have been republished in two volumes accessible to a wide range of readers, specialist and non-specialist alike, lay as well as religious. It is my guess that these letters have helped us rediscover d’Alzon the man: his ups and downs, his breadth of spirit, his intelligence, his passion, and his affections. And it is especially this new vision of the man and the saint that has nourished our presentation of these turning points in his life. It is not d’Alzon the hero that most immediately appears, but the greatness of the man nonetheless shines through clearly.

The presentation of our work is somewhat sketchy, and that is intentional. These are simply notes to be used by you in your own reflection and research, notes that could suggest an
approach and provide information that could be useful in preparing a day of recollection or even an entire retreat week. In fact, since beginning this work, the members of the Council have all used this material in animating sessions for both religious and lay people, sessions that have been universally well received.

In these six turning points in Father d’Alzon’s life we easily recognize dimensions of our own journey toward holiness. In this way, it has become evident that beyond the “style” and the language that can distance us from our founder, he remains a companion for us as we seek to respond to the call of holiness that we have received as individuals and as members of the Assumption family. May this grace, among many others, be ours during this anniversary of Father d’Alzon’s birth.

Richard E. Lamoureux, a.a.,

Superior General
to me that God wants me elsewhere and that it is as a priest that I must work. (Letter to La…

Augustine, 17 January 1835,

Finally Rome has spoken. In a new encyclical, the Pope has condemned your work without…

§ 14 March 1832 — departure from Lavagnac for the seminary

Emmanuel d'Alzon asks him (in 1829) for a study plan (Vailhé, vol. 1, p. 81ff, for further…

Each day there is a revolution going on inside me, a revolution not from evil to good, though…

He was not, however, called to ministry in the ordinary sense of the word. To prepare himself for…

It should be said that he did not simply foresee a life of priestly ministry; he was not especially…

... him as...

André FAVARD, wants this, for it seems that I can witness to the fact that I have fought to the last moment...

It should also be said that the number of religious persevering in their commitment was hardly up a bit later because of my ailments, and I’ll leave you to go celebrate Mass. Adieu, my daughter. Pray for me and trust that the thoughts that I have just communicated to you and represents the “Ecce homo” standing, with words from Saint John: “Ecce rex..."

In the beginning of a long way of the cross, at once physical, moral, intellectual and even spiritual. It is my soul that I gave for Jesus (and death is a gain)."

I should pursue; I am not organized enough. This is especially a consequence of my... Whether a man is to love Jesus be..."

It is the Holy Spirit who will guide us to Jesus. How are we to communicate this strength, this faith, this love among our students?... If a man is to love Jesus be..."

"Conseil Supérieur de l'Instruction publique" in France and was asked on two different occasions the following question: "Are we obliged to promote the reign of Jesus Christ, or to promote the reign of man?"

A man of his day, during this period of suffering d'Alzon had recourse to the medical practices of the time. He also coped with his problems by turning to religious people..."

Insuper specialiter promitto me aucturum pro viribus regnum Domini nostri Jesu Christi apud...</n

There are four things that cause me not to be attracted to them: 1) their secretiveness; it is said they are changing on this score; 3) their incapacity to understand, at least up until now, what I call Catholic..."

In that sense it is a time of beginnings, an important period of foundation. It could be called "The Years of fire."...

§ 16 August 1844: Emmanuel d'Alzon reviews his discernment process as a religious in a letter..."

§ June or July 1844, at Notre-Dame des Victoires in Paris: Fr. d'Alzon professes private religious vows (on 18 May 1844) before the Bishop, Msgr. Cart, he professed these vows in the chapel of the College, in the company of his..."

With the advice of two lay University graduates, Eugène Germer-Durand and Jules Monnier, d'Alzon elaborated a number of educational principles, on the basis of the pedagogical practices of the heart of the institution, the active participation of the students, preparation for active involvement in society, the formation of minds and hearts by faith in Jesus Christ and love of God, and all with the help of Christian parents. In that sense it is a time of beginnings, an important period of foundation. It could be called "The Years of fire.

Insuper specialiter promitto me aucturum pro viribus regnum Domini nostri Jesu Christi apud..."
During his entire life, d'Alzon will continue to reflect on the best way to renew society. To do this, he says, he must take into account the first lesson which he learned from the Novissimae Scripturae: the best way to renew society is to begin with oneself. If a man is not his own apostle, he will never be able to make others his apostles. Therefore, he says, the Congregation must begin with Father d'Alzon himself, with his personal life. It was a profound commitment from the start, and a profound calling from the Lord.

Father d'Alzon pursued his talk by giving recommendations for the recruitment and formation of religious. He insisted on the importance of spiritual formation, which he saw as a triple exhortation.

In this address, Father d'Alzon set forth a plan of action for future apostolic projects and for the renewal of the Congregation. He emphasized the importance of religious education and the role of the religious in the apostolate.

Significant dates:
- 23 February 1863, Fr. d'Alzon writes to Mère Marie Eugénie from Nîmes (Lettres, vol. 8, p. 15).
- 22 April 1868, Fr. d'Alzon writes to Fr. Picard (Lettres, vol. 11, p. 372).

Father d'Alzon was told that the Pope wanted to see him and that he should present himself for an audience. On Tuesday, 3 June 1862, Fr. d'Alzon went to the Vatican to meet the Pope. He presented himself for an audience, and the Pope gave him a set of instructions. Father d'Alzon was asked to prepare a plan of action for the Congregation, and to give a talk on the renewal of society.

The Pope said: "I would like to raise another series of questions. Ever since Pius IX suggested the mission in Russia, I have been in a state of unrest. I have been a little taken up with this thought. Since then, a Catholic Russian woman has come to me and asked me to consider the mission in Russia. She is a good person, and she is willing to sacrifice everything for the Church. She is willing to take her place in the Church as a spectator, and to be an apostle in the future."

The Pope said that he had a plan of action for the Congregation, but that he wanted to consult with Father d'Alzon. "I would like to have a plan of action for the Congregation. I would like to have a plan of action for the renewal of society. I would like to have a plan of action for the missionary work. I would like to have a plan of action for the pastoral work."

Father d'Alzon asked for a sign from heaven to confirm his mission in Russia: the sign of the Cross. The Pope said: "Do you know the first foundation I would like to make? A house in Odessa. I know that's hard, but I believe that it will be possible."

Father d'Alzon knew that the Pope's mission in Russia would be a test of the Congregation's faith. He knew that it would be a test of his own faith, and that it would be a test of the faith of the people who were interested in the mission.

In the months preceding the Chapter and in the years following, the founder insisted even more on the importance of religious education and the role of the religious in the apostolate. He emphasized the importance of spiritual formation, which he saw as a triple exhortation. He also followed closely the development of the Oblate sisters. After the profession of some of the first sisters, after their departure for the Near East and after the installation of Marie Correnson as their Mother and whom he was preparing in Nîmes. Marie Correnson will take over the role of religious education and the role of the religious in the apostolate.

In conclusion, Father d'Alzon pursued his talk by giving recommendations for the recruitment and formation of religious. He insisted on the importance of spiritual formation, which he saw as a triple exhortation. He also emphasized the importance of religious education and the role of the religious in the apostolate.

END OF TALK