



## THE ASSUMPTIONISTS

# **THE ASSUMPTIONISTS**

**BY**

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329 WEST 108 STREET

NEW YORK, N.Y. 10025

1980

## **DEDICATION**

To the memory of my mother, to whom I read portions of this manuscript and whom the Lord took to Himself before it could be printed.

R.R.

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## FOREWORD

A mosaic is composed of numerous small pieces of stone or glass called *tesserae* embedded in mortar called grout. The *tesserae* can be of many shapes and sizes, in a whole range of colors, including gold. Individually each *tessera* may seem unimportant and unimpressive; but a skillful artist, using thousands of such pieces, can produce a rich, complex picture or design. Frequently, such mosaics were used to decorate the walls and apses of churches, adding color, variety, and vitality to such structures.

What mosaics did for buildings, religious orders and congregations do for the church of Christ. Each congregation, and even each individual religious, has a role to play in the history and the beauty of the Church. Some orders, like the Benedictines or the Jesuits, have played important roles for many centuries; and others, like the Salesians or the Assumptionists, have, for a shorter time, played their apostolic role and added to the splendor of God's church. Each has contributed according to the design bequeathed to it by its founder, which in final analysis is itself a gift from the Divine Architect and Builder of the Church,

The present brief history of the Augustinians of the Assumption, better known as the Assumptionists, might be compared to a rapid look at a single mosaic panel, just one of the many that decorate the church. It attempts to show how the congregation got its design, its shape, from its founder; then it examines the life and contributions of some outstanding or representative Assumptionists, priests or brothers. These vignettes, these snippets of history, are the *tesserae* with which the impressive mosaic of the Assumptionists is composed.

Up to now, most literature on the Assumptionists has been in French. Much of the material in the present booklet comes from French Assumptionist publications. I gratefully acknowledge the writings of many of my Assumptionist brothers, from whom I have heavily "borrowed." The warm solidarity of Assumptionists encouraged me to do so.

## THE FOUNDER

Father Emmanuel d'Alzon, the founder of the Assumptionists, was one of the outstanding churchmen of nineteenth century France. He was born of a noble family, on August 30, 1810, at Le Vigan in southern France. Because of his father's wishes, he studied law for two years at the Sorbonne, but he never took the required law examinations. Feeling himself called to the priesthood, he studied at the seminary of Montpellier for two years. He completed his theological studies in Rome, largely by individual study sessions with some of the most learned clergymen residing in Rome, such as the Capuchin cardinal Micara. He was ordained on December 26, 1834 and during the following summer began his ministry in the diocese of Nîmes. After only three years he was named vicar-general, a post he held under four bishops, until 1878.

Diocesan administration, preaching, spiritual direction and especially confessions took up much of Fr. d'Alzon's time. Moreover, in 1843, he purchased Assumption College in Nîmes (the term "college" should here be understood in the French meaning: a school including junior high, senior high, and the first two years of college). With this purchase began one of the greatest struggles of d'Alzon's life, a fight to obtain "full exercise" in education by breaking the state monopoly. Fr. d'Alzon employed as teachers deeply Christian laymen, some drawn from chairs of the State university, professionally competent to prepare students for higher education.

Assumption College was destined to become the birthplace of the religious congregation of the Assumptionists. For some time religious life had attracted Fr. d'Alzon; and as none of the existing orders or congregations appealed to him, he gradually arrived at the decision to found a new congregation. The inspiration for this seems to have come when, in 1844, at the shrine of Our Lady of Consolation, in Turin, he vowed to renounce ecclesiastical dignities. In June or July, 1845, in the church of Our Lady of Victories in Paris, he pronounced private vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. In November, 1845, he recruited some of the professors of Assumption College and they decided that

they would start their novitiate in December. Besides Father D'Alzon himself, there were five novices: René Cusse, a layman, and four priests: Charles Laurent, Paul Tissot, François Surrel, and Eugene Henri. The novitiate lasted five years, not by design but because Bishop Cart hesitated that long before he authorized public vows.

Suddenly, on Christmas Eve, 1850, the bishop authorized public vows. By then Surrel and Henri had dropped out, and Cusse and Laurent had temporarily separated from the group. The bishop's permission was so unexpected that Fr. Tissot was out of town and didn't even know what was about to happen. Consequently, when Fr. d'Alzon made vows for one year, he was accompanied by a completely different group of disciples who had arrived between 1848 and 1850. They were: Father Henri Brun and Brothers Etienne Pernet, Hippolyte Saugrain, Victor Cardenne. Cardenne died less than one year later, on December 14, 1851, aged 31, the first Assumptionist to die. At Christmas, 1851, Father d'Alzon, Brun, Saugrain, and Pernet pronounced perpetual vows, and at the same ceremony 20 year-old Brother François Picard made temporary profession.

On March 25, 1852 Fathers Charles Laurent and Paul Tissot also pronounced vows in Paris, when Fr. d'Alzon visited there. As of March, 1852, the Assumptionists numbered seven: d'Alzon, Brun, Pernet, Saugrain, Picard, Laurent, and Tissot.

The new congregation of the Assumptionists had few recruits during the first years, but they were all men of outstanding value. Fr. d'Alzon lavished great care upon their spiritual formation. He began work on the *Constitutions* and wrote the *Directory*, held numerous General Chapters, wrote circular letters and meditations. He thus gave to his congregation its purpose and its spirituality, which we will see in later pages. He thus created the design in which the Assumptionists should sanctify themselves and serve the Church.

From 1841 on, Fr. d'Alzon was the spiritual director and advisor of Mother Marie Eugénie de Jésus, foundress of the Religious of the Assumption, whom the Church beatified on February 9, 1975. Their voluminous correspondence over many years reveals the deep spirituality of their souls which has led the Religious of the Assumption to consider Fr. d'Alzon almost as their founder.

Fr. d'Alzon also kept up his external apostolate, including his work as Vicar-general of the diocese. In 1848 he had obtained for his college

what is called “full exercise,” i.e. freedom from governmental interference. He undertook to acquire the same freedom for others, and to this end he founded *The Christian Education Review*. For two years he served on the Government’s Superior Council of Public Instruction, 1850-2. Later he urged the foundation of Catholic Universities. In 1873 he wrote, “When will the day come when all these multiplied efforts result in one Catholic University? The difficulties to be overcome are many, but since the beginning of the century we have overcome far more than that.”

In 1855 he founded the association of St. Francis de Sales, in Nîmes and later in Paris, which had as its object “the propagation of the faith in the country.” as we shall see later, he encouraged his religious to ecumenical efforts in the Near East, and to help them he founded the congregation of the Oblates of the Assumption in 1865. He started schools patterned after the monastic schools of the Middle Ages called “alumnates,” they were a kind of minor seminary for the ecclesiastical education of boys who did not have the financial means to go to college or seminary. In Paris, he developed the association of our lady of salvation, from which would spring two great Assumptionist apostolates: 1) pilgrimages of many kinds, to Rome, La Salette, the Holy Land, and especially the annual national pilgrimages to Lourdes, 2) the *Bonne Presse*, an influential publication house would publish numerous magazines, among which the immensely popular *Pèlerin*, and the daily Catholic newspaper *La Croix*. Unfortunately, although he had long dreamed of such a paper, Fr. d’Alzon did not live to see it as a daily. During Vatican Council I, Fr. d’Alzon played a prominent role, as a strong advocate of papal infallibility.

However, over all these activities dark clouds were gathering and in 1880 the storm broke. Freemason influence had been working for the suppression of all religious orders in France. On March 29, 1880 the Jesuits had been ordered to disband within three months, and all other congregations had been ordered to submit their rules, regulations and lists of personnel for government inspection and authorization. The congregations refused and the government seemed to yield, requiring only that congregations sign a declaration of loyalty to the government. Learning that it was Pope Leo XIII’s wish that the congregations should sign, Fr. d’Alzon did not hesitate. On his knees he signed the declaration, which, he must have felt, would only delay the inevitable. He was right, as events soon proved. On November 5, 1880, the

Assumptionist houses in Paris were raided by the police and the religious were driven out.

Similar raids were carried out throughout France. In Nîmes, only Fr. d'Alzon's illness prevented the Prefect from acting. During October, worn out by his activities and constant mortifications, Fr. d'Alzon had become bed-ridden. On November 3 he was anointed, and only days later the religious who had been driven out of Paris began to arrive. All gathered around the sick bed of their founder, who slowly and calmly told them, "My brothers, you know that after God and the Blessed Virgin you are what I have loved most on earth... we are going to leave each other... Submission to God's will... I am going but my heart will be with you." Then he murmured his last words to his congregation, "Be good religious." He died at noon, Sunday, November 21, 1880. His death shocked Nîmes where he was dearly loved, and for the time being the Prefect did not dare take action against the Assumptionists. If he had turned them out, he said, he would have had rioting in the streets. Still, only days after Fr. d'Alzon's funeral, Assumption College was confiscated, to become a State-conducted school for girls.

On the day after Fr. d'Alzon's funeral, Fr. François Picard was unanimously elected as Superior General and served until his death on April 16, 1903. One of his great achievements was the founding in 1900 of the *Orantes de l'Assomption*, a congregation of contemplative nuns. A man of great faith, Fr. Picard strongly encouraged and often participated in the splendid manifestations of faith known as the national pilgrimages to Lourdes. Emile Zola, the novelist and disbeliever, having seen the Father in action at Lourdes, was led to exclaim, "What will-power in that man, who electrified the crowds and raised them to the height of miracles."

## THE ASSUMPTIONIST SPIRITUALITY

The spirituality of the Assumptionists might be summed up in their motto, “thy kingdom come” and in a phrase used by the very first Assumptionists in a promise made to Fr. d’Alzon in December, 1850: “in the Name and in Honor of the Most Holy Trinity.” Fr. d’Alzon never sat down and wrote out a complete, sweeping, detailed spirituality for his religious. But with his charism as a founder, in many meditations, retreats, letters, instructions, in the primitive *Constitutions*, and especially in the *Directory* he left them a profoundly trinitarian heritage.

In 1868, after mentioning the numerous activities already undertaken by the Assumptionists, Fr. d’Alzon wrote:

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

“Our motto, ‘Thy Kingdom Come,’ gives us this general vision. We want to co-operate as much as we can in any effort to extend the reign of the three persons of the Holy Trinity. Thereby we will struggle against the three great errors of modern times. We want to help bring about:

1. *The Reign of God the Father.* No one wants God anymore! His existence is denied. Self-determined morality is in vogue. Divine Providence is rejected. All this has shaken society. Our first task is to proclaim the rights of God and His sovereign dominion over all creation.

2. *The Reign of God the Son.* God’s Son became man and as man he is King of a regenerated humanity. His reign is that of revealed truth. His kingdom is the Church, in which Jesus Christ the eternal Word lives among us in a threefold way: in the preaching of the truth, in the Blessed Sacrament, and in his vicar, the Sovereign Pontiff. These principles afford us a further series of tasks: the defense of revealed truth, the cult of the Eucharist, and dedication to the Holy See.

3. *The Reign of the Holy Spirit.* By grace the Spirit introduces us to the supernatural world of sanctity and proposes to us the most perfect

model of this sanctity in the Blessed Virgin his spouse. From this flows a third list of tasks we must assume if we want to be faithful to our motto: a proclamation of the supernatural order, the imitation of the Blessed Virgin's virtues, and the service of the congregations of women which request our help and support.

The reign of God the Father in the universe, the reign of God the Son in the Church, the reign of the Holy Spirit in souls: such is, it seems to me, the fundamental vision which must inspire the Assumptionist family."

On June 1, 1878, in a brief document that he addressed "To my successor in the Congregation, whoever he may be"—and by implication addressed to all Assumptionists—Fr. d'Alzon wrote:

I call to mind the Assumptionist motto, "Thy Kingdom Come," and, to stay faithful to it, I propose to myself three main means:

- 1) To work for the restoration of Christian higher education on the principles of St. Augustine and of St. Thomas: this, from the point of view of doctrine.
- 2) To fight the enemies of the Church, enlisted in secret societies under the flag of the Revolution: this, from the point of view of social order.
- 3) To strive for the unity of the Church, devoting ourselves to the destruction of Schism.

Such are the three great means that we must have in mind in order to apply our motto.

The same ideas were stated by Fr. d'Alzon at other times, in other words, but the main thrust of his thought and of the Assumptionists' activities has been in educational, social, and ecumenical apostolates.

For Fr. d'Alzon, the educational apostolate covers a broad spectrum, and it includes not only classroom teachers but also journalists, researchers, preachers, missionaries and whoever makes known God's truth. According to Fr. d'Alzon, the educator's difficult and painful work is analogous with creation, and was well expressed by St. Paul in his letter to the Galatians 4:19, "My children! I must go through the pain of giving birth to you all over again, until Christ is formed in you." There can be no greater aim than to form Christ in the human heart. Jesus is man's supreme model, and the main objective of education is to spread

the knowledge of Jesus in order that Jesus might be followed and imitated. Like the Good Shepherd himself, the educator must be ready to fight to protect his flock, ready to give his life for them.

In Fr. d'Alzon's mind, Christian education is closely linked to what might be called the social apostolate: fighting the enemies of the church, whom Fr. d'Alzon lumps together under the term "Revolution." If Christ's dominion is indeed a reign, it naturally follows that its enemies be called "Revolution." All kingdoms on earth have experienced revolutions, and Christ's reign is attacked whenever someone hates God, denies Christ, or is cruel and unjust to one's neighbor. For Fr. d'Alzon, the "Revolution" means all the struggles against Christ, all Satan's activities upon earth, all injustice, all untruth, all selfishness, all materialism, all religious indifference. If the Assumptionists desire the coming of the kingdom, they must fight its enemies and witness to Christ as Christ witnesses to the Father. Fr. d'Alzon and the Assumptionists are never against the revolutions that seek after justice, but they are vowed enemies of the revolution of Evil against Good.

A kingdom may be destroyed by division as well as revolution, and Christ's kingdom has experienced this danger. Heresies, schisms, rifts between the Church in the East and in the West, the separation of the Protestants have all spoiled the beauty of Christ's church and have become a scandal to the world. Such ruptures of unity between disciples is a challenge to the Holy Spirit, whose mission is the unity of the Church, and an insult to the oneness of God. The challenge must be met, with the help of the spirit, by working to restore Christian unity. The unity of the Church is a symbol and a fruit of the love of the Father and of the Son, and is essential to the coming of the kingdom. If Fr. d'Alzon's sons want God's kingdom to come, they must strive for Christian unity; they must be ecumenical.

Let us add a final but important note to what has just been mentioned: underlying everything else, for Fr. d'Alzon, is Love, which is the center of all Christian life. Accordingly, in the very first lines of the first chapter of the *Directory*, he could write, "the spirituality of Assumption is summed up in these few words: love for our Lord, love for the Blessed Virgin,

His mother, and love for the Church, his spouse." This love, a gift of the Holy Spirit, animates all the virtues needed for the Assumptionist

apostolate: self-sacrifice, chastity, zeal, unselfishness, humility, perseverance, and frankness.

## THE ALUMNATES

Except for Fr. François Picard, Fr. d'Alzon obtained very few recruits for the Assumptionists (or even for the secular clergy) from among the students of Assumption College, who were often from the wealthy, worldly families of Languedoc. Instead, Fr. d'Alzon sought to foster vocations among poorer youngsters, by means of a kind of minor seminary which he called "alumnates." Fr. Emmanuel Bailly learned that an ancient sanctuary in honor of the Blessed Virgin, called Notre-Dame des Châteaux was for sale in the diocese of Moutiers (Savoy). The site was rugged and picturesque, and the tiny chapel was in bad disrepair. In the main building, only the kitchen could be used. Roof, walls, doors, all needed repair. Still Fr. d'Alzon was much interested and purchased the property on August 9, 1871. Even while the structure was being made habitable, Fr. d'Alzon and some of the early Assumptionists began clarifying the goal and the means of the new undertaking, the aluminate would be concerned exclusively with the ecclesiastical education of poor boys, giving them a solid education, but without frills. When the time came for a vocation choice, the boys would be allowed complete freedom: the secular clergy, the missions, or a religious congregation. So that the students might get a maximum of personal attention and training, each class would be limited to 12-15 students. Only the cooking and the laundry services were provided; all other chores such as cleaning, cutting wood, keeping the property neat, had to be done by the alumnists themselves. Aluminate life was quite spartan.

The official opening of Notre-Dame des Châteaux was planned for August 28, the feast of St. Augustine. Five pupils had been accepted as the first class, but when Fr. d'Alzon turned around to preach after the Gospel, he saw six lads rather than five. A little shepherd boy from the neighborhood, who has always remained anonymous, had just wandered in, and would wander away after the mass. Fr. d'Alzon jokingly referred to the six as the "six jugs of Cana." "You do not presently contain anything precious," he said, "but our lord will soon fill you with the exquisite wine of science and virtue." The original alumnists afterward proudly called themselves "the jugs." and the next group had to be content with the title of "new jugs."

The success of Notre-Dame des Châteaux is due largely to the efforts of Fr. Pierre Descamps. Ordained priest in June, 1871, he became superior of the aluminate just two months later. At first he had only one brother as a helper. Fortunately, Fr. Pierre was young, energetic and dynamic, because he had to teach most of the courses, be treasurer, preacher, builder, and fundraiser. Yet he always considered his prime task the spiritual formation of the young men entrusted to him. Fr. Pierre left Notre-Dame des Châteaux in 1877 and spent the rest of his life training minor seminarians in the Near East, in Belgium, and finally in Chile, where he died.

Notre-Dame des Châteaux grew and flourished, despite material poverty. Of the first eleven alumnists, five became Assumptionists. Between 1871 and 1903, 600 students had climbed the mountain to the aluminate; and 220 became priests: in 37 French dioceses, and in the Carthusians, Trappists, Capuchins, Dominicans, Redemptorists, and especially the Assumptionists.

Over the years a distinction was made between grammar alumnates (high school level) and humanities alumnates (college freshman and sophomore). It is quite unnecessary for us to go into the history of the alumnates in detail; we might just say that they sprang up throughout France and spread to Belgium, Holland, Spain, Turkey, Rumania, Chile, England, Italy and even the U.S.A. and Canada. Aluminate life was always poor, frequently austere; the education, though solid, tended to be somewhat narrow (making it hard for those who wished to drop out), and the curriculum was not always adapted to various countries. Nonetheless, in a bit over a century, the alumnates have provided to the Church well over 4,000 priests, including several bishops.

## **FR. VINCENT DE PAUL BAILLY AND THE CATHOLIC PRESS**

Among Fr. d'Alzon's first religious were the two Bailly brothers: the elder, Vincent de Paul who would become a pioneer of the Catholic press in France, and Benjamin, better known by his religious name, Emmanuel, who was to serve as the third superior general of the Assumptionists from 1903 until 1917.

As a youth, Vincent de Paul had wanted to enter St. Cyr, the French equivalent of West Point, or the Polytechnic School. Neither venture was successful. Because his family was in temporary financial difficulties, in 1850, he briefly toyed with the idea of coming to California, in the wake of the Great Gold Rush. Instead, along with studying for his degree as Bachelor of Science, he obtained a position in the Telegraph Administration of the Department of the Interior. At one time in 1856 he was the private telegrapher between Empress Eugénie and Emperor Napoleon III. He enrolled in the Faculty of Law in Paris, where in August, 1858 he passed the initial examinations for the Bachelor of Laws degree. Meanwhile his family was looking around for a suitable wife for him, but he didn't seem very interested in this search. In 1860 he undertook a lengthy trip through southern France. He stopped for a while at Assumption College in Nîmes, where he made a retreat under the direction of Fr. d'Alzon. In July, 1860, he decided to join the Assumptionists, resigned his job with the telegraph, and on October 21, 1860 took the Assumptionist habit. After his profession, on October 31, 1861, he left for Rome to study theology and was soon joined there by his younger brother who had meanwhile joined the congregation. After ordination, on January 1, 1863, Vincent de Paul was sent to Nîmes, where he became the Director of Assumption College, in July.

When some 150 young men from the diocese of Nîmes joined the papal troops fighting Garibaldi, Fr. Vincent de Paul went along as a volunteer chaplain. During the Franco-Prussian war of 1870, he served as military chaplain again, first at Metz, then at Mainz where he had voluntarily accompanied the French prisoners of war.

After the war of 1870, Fr. Vincent de Paul settled down, if we can call it that, in Paris. He soon became involved in what was intended as a movement to re-Christianize the people of the working class, the association of Our Lady of Salvation. The movement rapidly spread through France and to achieve its goals began such activities as national novenas, public processions, and especially such public affirmations of faith as massive pilgrimages. Repeatedly Fr. Vincent de Paul led the National Pilgrimage of the Sick to Lourdes. Ever since, the Assumptionists have directed these annual events that sometimes require as many as 30 trains to move the large crowds from different sections of the country. We might mention in passing that numerous miracles have taken place during such pilgrimages. Fr. Vincent de Paul also personally led 28 pilgrimages to the Holy Land. In these days of comfortable airplane and bus travel, and of luxury hotels, we might tend to forget the difficulties the Assumptionists experienced in transporting and housing the thousands of pilgrims with the primitive facilities then existing in Palestine. Being a pilgrim and leading pilgrims required patience, ingenuity, and fortitude. Yet it was from such beginnings that Fr. Vincent de Paul found his true apostolate.

From 1873 on, a weekly bulletin called *Le Pèlerin* (The Pilgrim) was published, giving news about the pilgrimages. Fr. Vincent de Paul frequently wrote articles for it, as did Fr. d'Alzon. In 1877 *Le Pèlerin* was augmented and illustrated and began to run articles on many of the important sanctuaries: Rome, Jerusalem, La Salette, Mt. St. Michel, even Guadalupe in Mexico. Within two years the magazine had over 25,000 subscribers. Usually were included in the magazine short biographies of the saints, for whom Fr. Vincent de Paul had great veneration, and this feature became so popular that a separate magazine, *The Lives of the Saints*, began. The *Pèlerin* evolved into a weekly magazine of great interest, with a circulation of 500,000 which it maintains to this day.

The success of *Le Pèlerin* prompted the publication of another magazine, *La Croix*, which started in March, 1880. On May 24, 1883, the Assumptionists decided to transform it into a daily newspaper. By June 15, daily publication had begun and the paper proudly carried on its masthead a large crucifix. Thus began for Fr. Vincent de Paul the life "of a galley slave, condemned to row ceaselessly aboard an inkwell." He invariably signed his articles "the monk." The tone of his articles and his choice of harsh words sometimes strike us today as excessive in one

who considered the press as an apostolate. The excess may be explained in part by the fact that the religious in France, and Catholics in general, were on the defensive against unjust laws, arbitrary searches, confiscations, and persecution.

Probably, to paraphrase a famous American senator, excess in the cause of justice should not be condemned. And an important French publisher could write, "Father Vincent de Paul was, despite what has been said of him, a man of very great charity. True, his pen was quite sharp, it pricked his adversary. He seemed biting, but he always remained charitable and indulgent toward persons."

*La Croix* spawned numerous publications: many regional editions and affiliates, *La Croix du Dimanche* (for farmers who had time to read only on Sunday, *Le Noël* (for children), the *Cosmos* (scientific review which the Assumptionists revived and entrusted to Fr. Vincent de Paul's brother, Bernard Bailly, a former naval officer).

*La Croix*, like *Le Pèlerin* before it, became the glory of the Assumptionists as well as the cause of much of their grief. The journalist-monks often used the press to battle the government over unjust, oppressive laws and to combat the anti-religious attitude that pervaded France. The *Bonne Presse*, their publishing house, became a strong voice for the cause of Catholicism, religious freedom, and justice, and an effective counterbalancing force against the anti-religious press.

As a result, the government dusted off an ancient law forbidding any association of more than 20 members (it had been passed originally against anarchists), and a dozen Assumptionists were arrested and tried. They were found guilty and were fined. Moreover, the congregation was dissolved by the government and all its members banished from France. Concerned, lest the Assumptionists continue their apostolate anyhow, the government notified Pope Leo XIII that if he forbade the Assumptionists from publishing *La Croix* other religious congregations would be spared and the concordat remain in force. Thereupon Leo XIII ordered Fr. Vincent de Paul to "cease and desist" at *La Croix*. Faithful to Fr. d'Alzon's spirit that one should "always act with Rome, sometimes without Rome, never against Rome," Fr. Vincent de Paul unhesitatingly obeyed the papal order that put an end to his "apostolate of the press." He knew of course that his sacrifice would prove totally useless, but he turned the *Bonne Presse* over to a lay administration. Some years later, the French government indeed acted

against other orders and congregations, and Leo XIII admitted that he had been duped.

Father Vincent de Paul spent his exile preaching and leading pilgrimages until he was 78 years old. Meanwhile *La Croix* continued its publication, thanks to very devoted laymen, until the law of amnesty in 1905 allowed the Assumptionists to return to France legally. Although he was often consulted concerning the *Bonne Presse*, Fr. Vincent de Paul never again set foot upon its premises and never again wrote a single word for *La Croix*.

Some might believe that Fr. Vincent de Paul, with his numerous activities (only a small part of which we have mentioned) and his daily deadlines, would have slighted his religious duties. Such was never the case. He was always faithful to community exercises and to personal prayer, never absenting himself despite a brutal daily schedule. Once, when he mildly complained to his Superior General, Fr. Picard, that he was overworked and needed additional personnel, Fr. Picard answered that if he had so much work he should make an additional hour of meditation each day. And that is just what Vincent de Paul did. As if his labor were not enough, he added fasting and physical penances to his life. In the last years of his life, he spent six to eight hours daily in chapel. His confidence in God never wavered during his entire lifetime. Only a few weeks before his death on December 2, 1912, he wrote, "if we had had money to begin the *Bonne Presse*, it would never have existed. We counted on prayer, and see what it became."

Possibly a fitting testimonial to his life's work might be the following lines written by his successor at *La Croix*:

One grand and beautiful thought dominated his life, the thought summed up by Father d'Alzon in the motto "Thy Kingdom Come," To work for the Kingdom of God... to struggle unconquerably against those who would banish Him, whenever He is chased out, to re-introduce Him, to do everything to re-establish His reign in society, and consequently always to show oneself as Catholic, never to abandon the Catholic position, to labor before all else and until one's last breath as a Catholic apostle, convinced that all good will derive from that—such is the achievement of father Vincent de Paul Bailly.

Daily journalism is indeed a difficult profession, and occasionally *La Croix* wavered, got involved in politics, was deep in the wrong side of

the Dreyfus affair, and in the early 1900's seemed to shun the controversies of the time, yet through the years, under such editors-in-chief as Fathers Leon Merklen, Emile Gabel, Antoine Wenger, Lucien Guissard, and Jean Potin, *La Croix* has continued to be a powerful Catholic voice in France. Technical advances, the *aggiornamento* of John XXIII, and the aftermath of Vatican II may have altered its presentation somewhat; but its spirit has remained the same, under the sign of the Cross. On February 13, 1965, on the occasion of the 25,000TH issue of *La Croix*, Pope Paul VI wrote to its editor: "For us who, for many years now, have read and appreciated the great Catholic daily, the anniversary you celebrate today evokes in fact a long history of fidelity to the Church and to the Holy See...By giving to religion the place it deserves, *La Croix* renders an invaluable service to the Catholics of France...No less valuable is the guidance it gives its readers day after day in helping them judge the secular world from a Christian viewpoint. This service is absolutely necessary today in thinking of the events and course of the world."

## MISSIONS IN THE NEAR EAST

As we have seen, one of Fr. d'Alzon's key ideas was that of Christian unity; he always considered work in that area an essential part of the apostolate of the Assumptionists. In the Near East, political circumstances facilitated to some extent the realization of his dreams, but because the history, and in some cases the termination, of the Assumptionist missions varies from country to country and is further complicated by the spread of communism in the region, we can give only a very incomplete sketch here. We must also keep in mind that the Christian Unity movement, or ecumenism, was significantly different and less sophisticated in the 19<sup>th</sup> century than it has become since Vatican II. Attitudes change, approaches differ, and early ecumenists must not be faulted if they did not see the problem as we do.

In 1862, only twelve years after their foundation, Pius IX personally asked the Assumptionists to undertake work for Christian Unity, especially in Bulgaria. At that time Bulgaria was experiencing a nationalistic surge; it wanted to free itself from the Turkish Empire. Many among the Orthodox clergy sought to use Slavonic, not Greek, in their liturgies and in general wanted to liberate themselves from the Greek Patriarch in Constantinople (Istanbul). To do this, many favored reunion with Rome, and the Pope wanted to take advantage of the favorable situation, particularly by strengthening the position of Catholics of the Byzantine rite.

Pius IX may have chosen the Assumptionists because they were available, adaptable, and had not been "compromised" politically in the Balkans. Although Fr. d'Alzon had only limited personnel in 1862, he nonetheless asked Fr. Victorin Galabert to scout the situation and then went to Constantinople to see for himself. As he was preparing to leave Constantinople, Fr. d'Alzon could not help exclaiming, "My God, what kind of hornets' nest did I shove myself into! Still, one must be a bit of a fool for Christ." His writings of the time indicate that he was already projecting beyond Bulgaria toward vast Russia. He hoped that improved relations between France and Russia would help such a venture.

Victorin Galabert had just received his doctorate in medicine at Montpellier when he joined the Assumptionists. He finished his novitiate in Rome and made his vows at the Confession in St. Peter's Basilica. He spent a few years teaching natural History at Assumption College in Nîmes, and departed alone to found the Bulgarian mission, when he was only 32. In 1865 when Msgr. Popoff was named bishop of the Bulgarian Catholics, Fr. Galabert was chosen as his vicar-general. In that capacity he accompanied the bishop during lengthy pastoral visitations throughout the country, and then went along with the bishop to the first Vatican Council. Fr. d'Alzon, who was also in Rome as the theologian of his bishop, would often notice Fr. Galabert and a number of bishops, all seated on the ground in oriental fashion, while Fr. Galabert explained to them various aspects of the council. As many as 50 bishops asked him for information and translation of the council schemas. Fr. Galabert would sometimes translate into Bulgarian, Turkish, Greek, French, and Italian. We might mention here that Fr. Galabert, besides his doctorate in medicine, also had doctorates in theology and Canon Law. Fr. Galabert was a rotund man with a long, bushy beard and a head as bald as an egg. He was a timid man, but one would never know it by reading of his accomplishments. Although he looked formidable, he was so humble, modest, and discreet that no one feared to approach him. It was he whom the oriental bishops chose to write their petition for the definition of papal infallibility.

During the Russo-Turkish war of 1878, he was notified one day that many men, women, and children had been wounded during the fighting in nearby villages. He promptly ordered that the infirmary and the school facilities be prepared to help the injured. Just as he was hurrying out to help, a delegation from the Pasha approached to award him an important decoration. He just shoved it into his pocket and hurried away on his mission of mercy.

For some twenty years, Fr. Galabert labored as vicar-general for the Byzantine rite and in the Assumptionist mission which then consisted of an elementary school founded in Plovdiv in 1864, and another school at Adrianople (today's Edirne), started in 1868. By 1884 the Plovdiv school had evolved into a secondary school called St. Augustine's College, which became practically the center of Catholic life in Bulgaria. Bulgaria was at that time, let us remember, a part of the Turkish Empire. When the time came to establish another community, Fr. Galabert decided to place it not in the Christian quarter of Istanbul, but at Kum-Kapu, smack

in the center of the European section of the city, a bit west of the great Byzantine church of Hagia Sophia (which by then had become a mosque). It was an audacious act of faith and made the Assumptionists much more available to the people of the city.

At 54, Fr. Galabert returned to Nîmes for what was supposed to be a brief rest period. His health had been weakened by his indefatigable labors, by his fasting, and by his habit of sleeping only four hours each night. After a brief illness, he died at Nîmes on February 7, 1885, the very day he was due to return to Bulgaria. He was buried alongside Fr. d'Alzon.

His work in Bulgaria continued under the direction of Fr. Joseph Maubon, greatly aided by the Congregation of the Oblate Sisters of the Assumption, founded by Fr. d'Alzon in 1865, primarily to help in the Assumptionists' mission. The Adrianople school became St. Basil's College in 1890. Already in 1880 in Adrianople there had also begun a minor seminary which became the training ground for Bulgarians of the Byzantine rite. Other schools were opened at Varna on the Black Sea and in the capital, Sofia. In 1896, a major seminary was started at Kadikoy, just south of the Asia-Minor section of Istanbul, on the location of ancient Chalcedon. This was done because the Assumptionists realized that one of their most important apostolates in the area was the training of a Bulgarian clergy. To facilitate their work, a substantial number of Assumptionists passed to the Byzantine rite.

Chronologically, after Bulgaria/Turkey, the Assumptionists entered Russia, and later we shall deal specifically with their work there. In 1923, the Assumptionists moved into Rumania where they started a minor seminary with a public chapel at Blaj as well as a high school. Minor seminary and chapel at Beius. In 1934, they opened a residence in Bucharest, mainly to have a Christian influence upon the teaching staff and students of the University of Bucharest. In 1925, the Assumptionist mission expanded to Belgrade, Yugoslavia.

Politics in Turkey, World War II, and the slamming down of the Iron Curtain have of course curtailed or ended many Assumptionist ventures in the Balkans and the Near East. Now we have only two houses in Turkey and the single church in Belgrade, Yugoslavia. There are really no longer any Assumptionist communities in either Bulgaria or Rumania; all foreign religious have been expelled and the native religious live and work in isolation. Most have served long prison sentences and at least

three including Fr. Kamen Vitchev have died of forced labor or been shot. Still the Exarch of Sofia, Bulgaria, is Bishop Methodius Stratiev, an Assumptionist. In June, 1979, among the first bishops ordained by Pope John Paul II in St. Peter's Basilica, was a Bulgarian Assumptionist, Samuel Djoundrine, Bishop of the large diocese of Nikopol. Despite terrible difficulties, there is still an Assumptionist presence in these countries.

The Assumptionists have served in Greece since 1912 when Fr. Louis Petit, who had very successfully organized a synod of Armenian bishops, was named Latin archbishop of Athens, a post he held until 1926. During World War I, the Assumptionists staffed a minor seminary in the outskirts of Athens, and in 1934 opened the Chapel of St. Theresa in Athens itself.

Bishop Petit was also very influential in starting what might be called the intellectual ecumenical efforts of the Assumptionists. In 1897 at Kadikoy he had begun a review dealing with eastern theology and history. With other Assumptionists he formed the French Institute of Byzantine Studies (Later based in Bucharest, then in Paris), which had as its organ *Echos d'Orient*, later re-named *Revue des Etudes Byzantines*. The members of the group acquired an international reputation as scholars; they assembled one of the finest and most extensive libraries in the field; they influenced the foundation of the Oriental Institute in Rome; and they have furnished a number of distinguished professors of Oriental theology to various universities, especially after the publication of Pope Pius XI's *Deus Scientiarum* in 1931.

## BYZANTINE AND AUGUSTINIAN STUDIES

An outstanding expert among Assumptionist Byzantine scholars was Fr. Martin Jugie. The list of his titles shows how much his talents were appreciated: member of the French Institute of Byzantine Studies; Ex-member of the Russian archaeological Institute of Constantinople; member of the theological Academy of Valehrad; Professor of Oriental Theology at the Pontifical Oriental Institute, the Lateran University, the Propaganda Seminary, and the Catholic Institute of Lyons. He was also Consultor of the sacred congregation for the oriental Church, and a Qualificator of the Holy Office.

Already in 1902, the young Fr. Jugie began his work as Professor of Dogma at the Assumptionist Seminary at Kadikoy (Chalcedon), and as contributor to the review *Echos d'Orient*. His career, briefly interrupted by World War I, continued when Cardinal Schuster named him professor of theology at the recently opened Pontifical Oriental Institute, in 1917. His teaching led to one of his greatest achievements, the five-volume *Dogmatic Theology of the Oriental Churches*, which remains to this day the authoritative work in the field.

In numerous theological, patristic and historical works, Fr. Jugie remained ever careful to establish the exact characteristics of the Greco-Slavic spiritual tradition. His apostolate was above all else one of Truth. He was tireless and patient in his studies of ancient sources and had respect for all serious recent works. His studies on the "Procession of the Holy Spirit in the Oriental tradition," on the "form of the Eucharist in the Byzantine Church," and on the entire Nestorian question were some of the landmarks on the road to his masterful work, *The Byzantine Schism*. More technical was his massive eight-volume critical edition of the works of Scholarios, an important XIV century byzantine theologian. Of these books, it has been said that they "...not only shed new light on the spiritual life of Byzantium at the time of its decline, but allow us to gauge the influence of western thought upon Greek thought and to ask ourselves whether a mutual understanding having its beginning there might not have revolutionized the relations between the two churches."

The Virgin Mary always occupied a special place in the religious belief of the near east. It should not surprise us then to discover that Fr. Jugie wrote two important books on Mary. *The Death and Assumption of Mary*, according to Pope Pius XII himself, prepared and hastened the definition of the dogma of the Assumption. Fr. Jugie was asked to prepare the patristic section of the Bull of Definition of the dogma, and the day after the dogma was proclaimed in 1950, Fr. Jugie was presented a large solid-gold medal by the Pope as a token of his gratitude for Fr. Jugie's work. In 1954, Fr. Jugie published *The Immaculate Conception in Sacred Scripture and in the Oriental Tradition*, on the occasion of the centennial of the definition of the dogma.

Some people were of the opinion that Fr. Jugie, in his books, seemed too severe toward the oriental dissidents, mostly because he showed the impoverishment which the Great Schism had brought upon the separated churches. The fact is that Fr. Jugie strove to be as objective as possible because he believed that an honest presentation of truth, not an irenic avoidance of problems, would lead to church unity.

Personally, Fr. Jugie was humble, modest, timid, but he accepted positions and honors because he felt that they really honored his congregation. After his death, Cardinal Tisserant, the Dean of the Sacred College of Cardinals, had this to say: "Fr. Jugie, remarkable for his religious virtues and his sacred knowledge, was an eminent specialist of the Oriental Church and the Sacred Congregation was honored to have him among its Consultors. He brought a most important contribution to the solution of questions arising from the revision of many of the liturgical books of the Oriental rite." Cardinal Ottaviani, of the Holy Office, wrote: "The extraordinary erudition of this member of your order was of great service to the church, in many different duties which he performed with rare distinction and competence. We ourselves readily consulted him, asking his advice, which was always well-balanced and wise."

One might think that such a scholar would be ready to retreat to his ivory tower. Not at all. He was a charming, affable member of his community, mingling graciously even with young student brothers. Toward the end of his life, Fr. Jugie was afflicted with Parkinson's disease. Still, during recreation periods he would shuffle along, animatedly conversing on a variety of subjects, always ready to learn...and to teach.

Brief mention might now be made of a few other Assumptionists involved in Byzantine Studies. Among Fr. Jugie's collaborators was Fr. Severien Salaville. He began writing about the Byzantine problem as early as 1903, when he was still a seminarian. He became a specialist in Byzantine liturgies, considered not from the aspect of rubrics, but of theology and spirituality. For years he taught at Kadikoy and then replaced the future Cardinal Agagianian as professor of Byzantine theology at Rome's Propaganda seminary. His books include the three-volume edition of *Oriental Liturgies* and *Christ in Oriental Piety*.

Fr. Raymond Janin's contribution to Byzantine studies reached its peak when he published two volumes on *Byzantine Constantinople* (1950) and *Churches and Monasteries of Constantinople* (1953), learned studies on the topography and ecclesiastical geography that became best sellers among Byzantine scholars.

Fr. Venance Grumel specialized in what is known as *Registers of the Acts of the Patriarch of Constantinople* prior to 1207. Only someone with a vast knowledge of history, theology, civil and canon law, literature, and Byzantine institutions could be able to produce such studies.

Fr. Vitalien Laurent's expertise was in sigillography, the study of seals. His gigantic and authoritative eight-volume *Corpus* is a study of the seals of the Byzantine Empire. He expanded his knowledge to include numismatics, and became an internationally recognized expert on ancient coins. He helped identify and catalog the collection of Harvard University and in 1952 was named Harvard Research Fellow for Art and Archeology. Even a partial list of his titles and distinctions is impressive: Corresponding Member of the archaeological Institute of Berlin; Honorary member of the Rumanian Academy and of the Society for Byzantine Studies in Athens; Member of the Academy of Social and Political Sciences of the USA; Scientific Advisor of the Historical Institute of Bucharest University; Titular Member of the American Numismatic Society.

He has taught at universities in Poznam, Warsaw, Prague, Bucharest, Munich, as well as at Dumbarton Oaks, in Washington, D.C. Since 1954 he has been Conservator of Numismatics of the Vatican Library. For thirty years he served as the director of the institute of Byzantine Studies. His bibliography contains over 600 works to his credit.

Some people may question the apostolic value of such specialized erudite works. In response, I would like to quote a passage from Fr. Vitalien Laurent:

Pius XI, in 1937, through the intermediary of Cardinal Mercati to whom I had expressed my doubts [on the apostolic value of such work] gave me orders--yes, orders--to continue in the path we were following. In 1951, Archbishop Roncalli, Nuncio in France, brought me into his office to show me the proofs of the final volume he was publishing on *The Acts of the Canonical Visitation of St. Charles Borromeo* in the diocese of Milan. He had already brought us the first volume in Kadikoy. I seized upon the occasion to ask him point-blank, "Do you think, Excellency, that the works of erudition which we priests are working at, sometimes during a whole life-time, really correspond to a need of the Church?" The Nuncio brought his hand up to his chin then, rising suddenly, he said, "Venga pure" (Come). We were soon in his private study. "You see these volumes?" he asked. They were the complete collection of *Echos d'Orient* and *L'Unité de l'Eglise* and many of our other works. "Well, these works would not be here if they were not useful to the Church. They were very useful in Constantinople and will be more useful to me in Rome, especially this one." And he pointed with his index finger to a large in-quarto volume on the spine of which I read V. Grumel, *Registers of the Acts of the Patriarchs of Constantinople*.

Among Assumptionists involved in this kind of scholarship and teaching today we might mention Fathers Julian Walter and Daniel Stiernon in the Byzantine area, and Father George Tavard who specializes in the area of Protestantism.

#### AUGUSTINIAN STUDIES

Another field of interest to the Assumptionists is Augustinian Studies, and the major figures here are Fathers Athanase Sage and Fulbert Cayré. The latter began specializing in patrology soon after ordination and for many years he taught the subject in Assumptionist seminaries and at the catholic institute in Paris. He became particularly interested in the works of the great Bishop of Hippo, Augustine, whose rule the Assumptionists follow. In 1927, he wrote a fine book on

*Augustinian contemplation*. He followed this with a two-volume *Precis of Patrology* (1927-1930) which seminarians the world over have used as a basic text book. 1933 marked the beginning of his connection with the publishing house of Descleé de Brouwer in Bruges, preparing a double collection: one of selected texts of St. Augustine, and the other containing studies on Augustine, under the general title *Augustinian Library*. In 1943 he founded the center for Augustinian studies which he would direct for a dozen years. As Fr. Fulbert himself said, "St. Augustine became the soul of my teaching and of my life." Under Assumptionist sponsorship, the *Revue des Etudes Augustiniennes* and *La Vie Augustinienne* have also contributed to a better knowledge of the great St. Augustine.

## JERUSALEM

On May 11, 1882, the "Pilgrimage of the Thousand," organized and led by Fr. François Picard entered Jerusalem, thus beginning the Assumptionist saga of gigantic pilgrimages. Among the Assumptionists involved was Father Joseph Germer-Durand. Fr. Germer-Durand was the son of a man who served as dean of studies at Fr. d'Alzon's Assumption College. His mother was an accomplished poet, harpist, and musical composer who also painted fine watercolors. After the death of her husband, she would enter the Congregation of the Oblate Sisters of the Assumption and become a missionary in the Near East. It therefore seemed only natural for Germer-Durand to become an Assumptionist. He was ordained in 1869 and became one of the college teachers as well as director of the school band. Between 1878 and 1880, he was master of novices at Sèvres, outside Paris. In 1873 he started publishing *Le Pèlerin*, of which he remained manager even after Fr. Vincent de Paul Bailly became its editor.

In 1882, along with the pilgrims led by Fr. Picard, Fr. Germer-Durand had visited on the slopes of Mt. Zion a grotto reputed to have been the place where St. Peter bitterly wept over his denial of Jesus. A wealthy layman, the Count of Pelliat, discreetly purchased the grotto and some adjacent land and shortly afterward resold it to the Assumptionists. Thus began Fr. Germer-Durand's lifelong adventure in Palestine, where his archaeological background would be put to good use. Fourth century documents had mentioned an ancient church erected at this spot. Diggings revealed v and vii century ruins, Byzantine and Crusader capitals, ancient lamps and Christian inscriptions, mosaics, coins and even Jewish artifacts pre-dating the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. Ruins of a palace believed to have been that of Caiphas, High Priest at the time of Jesus' trial, a deep dungeon in which Jesus may have passed the terrible night after his arrest, and a stone stairway, some 70 yards long, probably used by Jesus after his Agony in Gethsemane, all these were carefully and scientifically examined; and Fr. Germer-Durand published a number of reports on the excavations. Doubters and scoffers, Fr. Germer-Durand never bothered to answer. He was by nature a charitable, very peaceful man who preferred to let facts, rather

than angry words, defend his belief that this location was in fact connected with Jesus. Many of his articles appeared in *Revue Biblique* between 1892 and 1914, alongside those of his friend, the great Dominican exegete, Father La-grange.

From 1887 until his death in 1917, Fr. Germer-Durand resided in Jerusalem. As superior of the Jerusalem community, he was largely responsible for the construction of Notre-Dame de France. Notre-Dame was located on a large tract of land just outside the walls of the ancient city, near the new gate. Designed in large part by Father Etienne Boubet, the immense hostel contained some 300 rooms for pilgrims. It also housed a novitiate and facilities for seminarians studying philosophy, theology, or biblical archeology. Because of its immense size (it is still the largest structure in Jerusalem) it took twenty years to build. One wing housed Fr. Germer-Durand's archaeological museum, containing some 10,000 objects, many of which he had excavated himself, and ranging from the stone age through the Jewish, Roman, and Byzantine periods to the time of the Crusades.

Fr. Germer-Durand undertook three major expeditions in the transjordan region, besides many yearly trips with the Assumptionist students. He discovered numerous Roman milestones and was thus able to trace the ancient Roman roads. In 1897, the Society of Antiquaries of France elected him by acclamation as a corresponding member and in 1902 they awarded him their gold medal. He was also twice awarded the Academic Palms by the French Government.

His many years of labor in the Holy Land had undermined his health; he developed diabetes, partial amnesia, and was partially paralyzed. He never lived to see the wonderful church of St. Peter at the Cock's Crow, built over the area he had excavated, because the church was begun only after World War I, and he had died on September 27, 1917, aged 72.

## **FATHER PERNET AND THE LITTLE SISTERS OF THE ASSUMPTION**

Father Etienne Pernet's life and works were considered so outstanding that his cause of beatification has been introduced at Rome. He once wrote:

On earth we have but one duty: to continue the race of saints. It is not an easy task, but woe to us if we fail. Undoubtedly the Glory of God is interested in our becoming saints; so too is our neighbor, because it is by saints that God accomplishes his works on earth, in his Church...Faced with the future which God has in mind for us in the Church, for the good of souls, let us remember that his views, his designs will be realized only insofar as we become saints... And a saint is a heart totally God's, at God's mercy.

Etienne Pernet's greatest apostolate was intended to help the poor materially and physically in order to help them spiritually. This concern came from the social mission which Father d'Alzon wanted his congregation to have, but it may also have come, at least in part, from Pernet's family background which was one of great poverty. His father was a common laborer and his mother was a mid-wife. Guided and helped by an admirable Parish priest, Etienne discovered his vocation to the priesthood and entered the seminary at Besançon. He remained hesitant about becoming a secular priest and left the seminary, accepted a temporary job as tutor, and sought a teaching position somewhere.

Mother Marie-Eugénie de Jésus, the foundress of the Religious of the Assumption, was aware that Fr. d'Alzon was seeking professors for Assumption College and sent Etienne Pernet to him. Besides teaching, Etienne served as assistant-treasurer of the college, monitor and prefect of discipline. His kindness, graciousness, and modesty endeared him to everyone. Students obeyed him because they respected him and never wanted to hurt his feelings. They affectionately dubbed him "The Phantom" when, pale and emaciated, he reappeared among them after a two-month bout with typhoid fever.

In 1850, along with three others, Etienne addressed to Fr. d'Alzon a document in which they promised to join his projected congregation and accept beforehand whatever Constitutions Rome approved. On December 25, 1850 he pronounced first vows, and perpetual vows exactly one year later. He was ordained on April 3, 1858. Despite poor health he devoted himself at Assumption College and worked at Fr. d'Alzon's *Patronages*, a sort of Catholic boys' club and day camp. In Paris, later, he ministered by hearing countless confessions and by often visiting the sick and the poor, trying to understand their situation and help and encourage them.

During all this time he was maturing an idea which he describes himself:

Really, I understood what might be called the sad situation of the worker and what remedies we might bring to it when Fr. d'Alzon placed me in charge of the *Patronage* at Nîmes, where some 200 children came each Thursday and Sunday. Eventually I would meet their parents, whom I would visit as often as possible. I never helped them out with money, but I don't know why, these poor people told me of their sorrows, their miseries...and it was there that I saw the distress that I had until then known only by name. At that time the carpet factories and others were still operating and there was no time to take care of the sick, who despaired. In all these homes there were things to be said and done which no man or priest could say or do. Evidently what was needed was a woman and a religious woman. But I still couldn't see clearly; things were not yet clear in my mind. God's hour had not yet come.

For Fr. Pernet, the hour came in 1864, when he realized that he had to do something to save the family--which was being shattered. God was being excluded from schools, hospitals, and charitable institutions. God was being set aside as the rich speculated upon the poor and the powerful abused the weak. Society was crumbling and could be saved only by restoring the reign of God, especially at the heart of home and family. One way to achieve this was by the ministrations of women who, while nursing sick bodies, like humble servants, would re-introduce prayer, instruct family members, and bring them back to the reception of the Sacraments. This was to be the charter of the Little Sisters of the Assumption which he founded in 1865, along with Marie

Antoinette Fage, who took the religious name of Mother Mary of Jesus. Mother Mary of Jesus herself came from a broken family and her mother had died when she was still a child. Yet she almost instinctively devoted herself to the care of the poor, especially orphans and girls of the working class. Fr. Pernet found in her his providential collaborator in the creation of a congregation of nursing sisters of the sick poor.

Fr. Pernet told Mother Mary of Jesus:

...The work which we want to undertake is difficult. Everything is supernatural, the end and the means. We want to do something great; but because we are nothing and have nothing, God must be everything for us.... In the eyes of the world we will pass for fools...We will be persecuted...despised from within and without...we will have the hard trials of poverty: earning nothing, owning nothing. You may even lack the essentials such as bread, or clothing, or firewood. We will have to put up with many flaws of character. While having at heart the work of our own personal sanctification, we must have great zeal to form our children to religious life and to the practice of all the virtues.

We might say in passing that all the anguish, all the physical and moral sufferings mentioned by Fr. Pernet were experienced. Through them all Fr. Pernet was encouraged by Fr. d'Alzon whom the Little Sisters kiddingly called "grandfather." During the war of 1870, Fr. Pernet served as volunteer chaplain and infirmarian. At one point he was arrested as a spy, his religious habit being mistaken for a disguise. He accompanied thousands of French war prisoners to Mainz, wanting to continue to minister to their spiritual needs. After the war things got even worse; and during the commune with its religious persecution of priests, Fr. Pernet had to "go underground" in Fr. Halluin's orphanage in Arras. The danger was real and serious, as the massacre of 64 priests and an archbishop at Mazas proves.

In 1878, Fr. Pernet was pleased to learn that henceforth his Little Sisters would be authorized to pronounce perpetual vows. Until then they had been able to make only annual vows. He saw the apostolate of the Little Sisters expand to England in 1880, and to the United States and Ireland in 1891. In 1893, when he was 72, he passed six weeks in America, visiting the missions of his Little Sisters.

One of the most edifying aspects of his life was that although he was the founder of a congregation in his own right he remained a humble and obedient Assumptionist: always sharing in community exercises even in his old age, and conscientiously observing religious poverty, to the point of requesting the small change for tram fare, to visit his Little Sisters. He died after a painful illness, in 1899, having truly lived the message he had preached: union of spirits in truth, union of hearts in charity.

## FATHER QUENARD AND THE EXPANSION OF THE CONGREGATION

One man who symbolizes much of Assumptionist history is Father Gervais Quenard. His life with the Assumptionists spanned 74 years, from 1887 when he entered the minor seminary of Notre Dame des Châteaux until his death in 1961. He was a living link between the generation of the immediate disciples of Fr. d'Alzon and the Church on the eve of Vatican II. During 30 years he was a pioneering missionary in the Near East and then served 29 years as the fourth Superior General of the Congregation.

Ironically the French military law of 1889 helped the Assumptionists spread far beyond the frontiers of France. Military service was compulsory even for priests and seminarians, but they were exempted if they engaged in cultural or official activities outside of Europe for at least ten years. Many Assumptionists took advantage of the exemption as did Brother Gervais Quenard who pronounced his first vows on August 12, 1893 and set sail the very same day for Istanbul. There he finished the second year of novitiate that was then required, and his novice master found him to be "sincere, very often despite his timidity, pious...studious... generous in sacrifice." Having finished his philosophical studies in Istanbul, in 1896, Bro. Gervais left for Jerusalem. The city at that time did not seem to have changed much from biblical times, and camel caravans still could be seen arriving in the city. The gigantic hostel of Notre Dame de France, as we have seen, was still being constructed when Bro. Gervais undertook his Biblical studies and other theology courses. He started also guiding the numerous pilgrims who came to the holy Land and he participated in some of the archaeological expeditions throughout the country. These were adventurous, arduous, and occasionally fun. I myself remember Father Gervais, later, in Rome, chuckling over the tricks to which the Assumptionist "archaeologists" sometimes resorted in order to mask their interesting discoveries until they could be published before the rival German teams. In that heyday of Rationalism in France and Germany, such men as Renan, Harnack, and Loisy considered the

biblical texts largely mythical, whereas biblical scholars such as Lagrange, Vincent, and Abel strove to prove the truth and historical value of the texts. It must indeed have been a heady experience for such men as Bro. Gervais to be among the adventurous ones whose work helped show the authenticity of the Bible narratives. Their expeditions were not always fun, and one expedition of 30 students and their professors on their way to Petra almost died of thirst and heat near the Dead Sea, and then almost froze in the highlands of Idumea.

It was from such exposure to the land of Jesus that Bro. Gervais obviously learned to love the Gospels, which he later commented upon, repeatedly and eloquently. Enthusiastically he followed the journeys of Jesus from village to Palestinian village.

Brother Gervais was ordained priest August 20, 1899 and spent the autumn months guiding important French pilgrims around Palestine. It is ironic that during those very same months, in France, the Assumptionists' houses were being broken into and searched by police; a dozen Assumptionists were arrested, convicted of "illegal association" and had to abandon their apostolate at *La Croix*, at least temporarily. After a brief vacation with his family in France, Father Gervais returned to Jerusalem where he taught courses in Sacred Scriptures. Along with some confrères, he began preparing *A Guide to Palestine*, a scholarly historical and exegetical work which reveals that the authors were indeed familiar with the topography as well as the secular and biblical history of Palestine. The *Guide* was eventually published in 1904, and is still useful and fascinating reading.

In 1904, Fr. Gervais was assigned to the *Bonne Presse* in Paris, where the community were still scattered throughout the city, living under assumed names and changing residence often in order to escape police surveillance. Fr. Gervais' work was piecemeal, almost clandestine, far from satisfying his desire for a meaningful apostolate. He was therefore immensely pleased when he became one of the three Assumptionists assigned to Russia in 1905, thus realizing one of the dreams of Father d'Alzon.

The three missionaries had to have a "reason" for working in Russia and Father Jean Bois, aged 28, became a professor in St. Petersburg; Father Auguste Maniglier, aged 31, became curate in Odessa; Father Quenard, then aged 30, became chaplain to the French colony of Vilna, in Lithuania, which was then part of the Russian empire. Fr. Gervais had

trouble arriving at his post: the Russian railroads were on strike and he was delayed twelve days in Berlin. When he finally arrived in Vilna he ran smack into a revolution, bombs were exploding in the streets and cossack troops were searching out Jews. But slowly Fr. Gervais developed his apostolate, holding liturgies attended not only by members of the French colony but also by Russians and Protestants.

Fr. Gervais' marvelous sense of humor is revealed in an anecdote about what happened to him one day:

I had in Petersburg a colleague who resembled Nicholas II in height, in features, in beard. He was in his cassock, and I wore my red tie, as we went to Peterhof, that small Versailles created by Peter the Great...At the railroad station, everyone respectfully refused to sell us a ticket for Peterhof. At the palace everyone stood aside, bowing respectfully, without saying a word. We visited the main rooms, and went up to the second floor, without however entering the private apartments of their imperial majesties. Then amid more silent bows we again took the train, without tickets, and returned home. My colleague had been mistaken for the Tsar in disguise, and I, as his secret police guard.

In September, 1908, Fr. Gervais was recalled from Russia, met the Superior General in London and was told to proceed to Plovdiv, in Bulgaria, to become the Superior/Director of the St. Augustine College there. He spent four days crossing Europe aboard the famed Orient Express, and was received at the College by the outgoing superior and a 58 member band playing "the Caliph of Baghdad." Ten days later he received as guest of the College Ferdinand I, who had just proclaimed himself "Tsar of the Bulgarians." Immediately Fr. Gervais threw himself whole-heartedly into the educational apostolate in a college having Bulgarian, Greek, and Armenian orthodox students, along with a smattering of Catholics, Jews, and Turks. Talk about practical ecumenism!

The religious in the community numbered between 20 and 25, and as some of them were there somewhat reluctantly Fr. Gervais' task as superior was not easy. Yet during twelve years he worked at it with his customary patience and kindness, trying to maintain religious fidelity

and a cordial atmosphere, which were most important if the Assumptionists were to make a proper impression on their students.

Close and warm ties soon developed between Fr. Gervais and the royal family, to whom he became a sort of spiritual father. He was often an honored guest at court and the king frequently dropped in at the college. While the College served as a hospital, during the Balkan troubles of 1910, the queen and two princes came to help nurse the wounded. At the time there was a saying in the country, "there are only two diplomats in Bulgaria: King Ferdinand and Fr. Gervais."

At the outset of World War I, most of the French Assumptionists had to leave Bulgaria. Fr. Gervais very briefly served as a military infirmarian, but soon returned to Plovdiv. When Bulgaria entered the war on the German side, the college had to close its doors. As the Assumptionists and the Oblate Sisters had also to leave Turkey, it seemed that the Near East missions had been completely destroyed. The religious were obliged to take the "long road home" through Rumania, Russia, Sweden, Norway, England, and finally arrived in France. Fr. Gervais stayed in Russia, keeping with him Fathers Zephyrin Sollier, Romuald Souarn, Placide Machon, and two lay brothers, Boris and David. Among other activities they administered a Red Cross hospital for typhoid victims in Rumania. Most of the time the clothing of the victims was literally lousy, and the people had to be deloused before they could be treated. To prevent his staff from being unnecessarily contaminated Fr. Gervais once made a trade with a Russian lieutenant: a half-litre of cognac for twelve pairs of high military boots. The Russian also threw in four steers that he didn't know how to get rid of. So the patients were fed steaks and the nursing staff were protected, at least up to their knees. Despite such precautions Fr. Gervais himself caught typhoid; the rumors of his death reached France and masses were said for his soul. But he didn't die; he lived to be decorated for heroism during the epidemic by Rumania, by France, and even by Russia (in the name of the Kerensky government, after the Tsar's abdication). In September, 1920 he was named Superior of the entire Near East mission, which meant that he had to move to Constantinople.

In his new post, Fr. Gervais spent the next couple of years working intensively at projects to foster Christian unity. He revived an older magazine into the bimonthly *Union des Eglises*. (As this title seemed to imply that there was more than one church, he later changed the title

to *Unité de l'Église*). He was always operating in the Assumptionist spirit of strengthening and unifying the church.

We must now interrupt our picture of Fr. Gervais to consider some events in the years after World War I which were to affect him and the entire congregation. A new code of canon law had taken effect in 1918 and the Assumptionists had to present their Constitutions, aligned with canon law, to the Holy See for approval.

The Congregation had received papal approval as early as 1864, but for a variety of reasons the Holy See deferred approving their constitutions, early general Chapters had repeatedly worked on the Constitutions but the expulsion of many religious from France; the continuing legal troubles with an anti-clerical French government; the death of Fr. Francois Picard, the second Superior General, in 1903; Pope Pius X's authorization hand-written by the Pope himself, to defer approval of the Constitutions until after the promulgation of the Canon Law Code; World War I; all these factors had postponed the much desired and much needed constitutions. The delays had complicated what would have been earlier a far easier task. In effect, there had developed in the congregation two schools of thought: the older religious wanted to maintain the centralization of authority, finances, and administration. The younger religious, who believed that the congregation had already suffered too much from over-centralization, desired a division into provinces.

The Holy See ordered General Chapters to be held, which would submit the Constitutions for approval and would then elect the Superior General according to the provisions of those Constitutions. The Chapter was held while World War I still raged, April 21-28, 1918, and did submit the Constitutions. Rome acted with its usual deliberate speed, required some revisions in 1921, the main change being the erection of provinces, according to the desires of the founder and of earlier general chapters. There was also need to elect a successor to Father Emmanuel Bailly, the third Superior General, who had died November 23, 1917. Meanwhile the Congregation was being governed by Father Joseph Maubon, as Vicar-General. When he was received in audience by Pope Benedict XV, on November 17, 1921, he was reminded that the Congregation was now so large that it could no longer be governed as it had been; it had to be less centralized, more democratic.

The General Chapter which began in December, 1921, was presided by a Benedictine, Dom Maur Etcheverry, who told the delegates what the Holy See required of them in the matter of Constitution revision. After some difficulty, the revision was completed and Fr. Gervais was entrusted with drawing up the report to the Holy See. Subsequently, the Holy See ordered a referendum of all the religious, asking them to submit a slate of general officers for the congregation. The delegates dispersed, and Fr. Gervais returned to Constantinople. The outcome of the whole affair was made clear one year later, when Cardinal Vannutelli, in a letter to Fr. Gervais, informed him that by a decree dated January 30, 1923, the Holy See named him Superior General. His reaction was, "How could they ever go and find me, in our poor Near East, to become a successor to Fr. Bailly, Fr. Picard, Fr. d'Alzon! It is beyond all imagining."

Fr. Gervais was 48 at the time and had spent most of his life outside France; he seemed to be just the man to lead the Assumptionists in their "international" phase. Being a humble, understanding, and patient man he could accept the decentralization that now had to take place.

When he met with the newly-named general officers of the Congregation, Fr. Gervais reported on the worldwide activities of the Assumptionists and concluded that they had to stop dispersing their efforts and concentrate instead on their oldest, most vigorous, or most characteristic works. Soon after, four provinces were erected: three in France (Lyons, Bordeaux, and Paris) and another consisting of Belgium and Holland. Decisively, Father Gervais had begun to lead. He soon visited most of the houses in France in order to see precisely what next steps had to be taken. He also accepted that works in the Near East were evolving, largely because of the political situation, and decided that when ministry in one spot became impossible, the religious would simply move elsewhere to continue their ministry.

It is obviously impossible in these few pages to present even the main activities of Father Gervais' 29 year term as Superior General. Some aspects of his generalate are mentioned in these pages in connection with other religious. It might be mentioned, however, that he found a solution to the nagging problems of the *Bonne Presse* by turning the entire enterprise into a corporation. He re-purchased at auction the former Assumptionist house in Paris, on François I street, which had been expropriated by the government. In 1925 he visited the Assumptionist posts in the United States, Canada, Chile, Argentina,

England, Yugoslavia, Rumania, Bulgaria, Turkey and Palestine. Fortunately he loved to travel. In 1927 he started the construction of a new General House in Rome, at Lungotevere Tor di Nona, because the old house, known as Ara Coeli, was being razed in a beautification project near the Capitoline Hill. At the General Chapter of 1929, he was re-named General for another term.

The 1930's were a period of rapid expansion for the Assumptionists. Between 1929 and 1935 their number increased from 864 to 1164, excluding 122 novices. Fr. Gervais, in a Circular Letter dated August 15, 1938 reminded his religious to concentrate on spiritual things. He wrote:

Let us remain watchful servants, faithful observers of religious life. We must impose silence upon the worldly atmosphere around us, even upon the radio and newspapers, if we want to hear God and stay in contact with Jesus, in order to treat of the things of the Heavenly Father and of eternity. A bit of austerity, a profound sense of duty, a scrupulous attention to vowed obedience—these are an absolute minimum if we are to remain “salt and light” as well as “fishers of men.”

Circumstances in France, the U.S.A., and elsewhere frequently required the Assumptionists to accept ministry as parish priests, which was somewhat outside their original orientation. Pope Pius XI approved such ministry but required that each province be involved in foreign missions. There already existed the Assumptionist posts in the Near East, to which was now added a mission in a strictly pagan country, Belgian Congo (now Zaire). When Father Piérard (about whom we will say more later) was named bishop there. Fr. Gervais contributed the entire sum given him on the occasion of his feast-day, to enable the bishop to acquire his episcopal wardrobe. In Manchuria, the Assumptionists built and directed a regional seminary at Hsinking, (Changchun) which operated until the communist take-over in 1948 forced it to close. Some of the seminarians transferred to the Propaganda College in Rome, where they remained very grateful for the efforts of the Assumptionists in their land. Other foreign missions undertaken under Fr. Gervais were in Brazil, Tunisia, and Madagascar, and the missions in South America were developed.

During World War II, Father Gervais remained in occupied Paris, only occasionally going into “unoccupied” France, as when he went to Nimes in 1942 for the translation of the body of Fr. d’Alzon from the former Assumption College to the chapel of the Oblate Sisters.

After the war, at the General Chapter of 1946, he was elected for another twelve year term, despite the fact that he was 71 at the time. The same chapter erected three new provinces: Holland (separate from Belgium), England, and North America. Shortly after, Fr. Gervais was involved in a serious auto accident in Holland, in which his driver was killed and he was badly injured. He recuperated rapidly, celebrated his Silver Jubilee as Superior General in January, 1948, and the next summer returned to North America to visit his religious, traveling aboard an ancient troop ship overcrowded with passengers. He took it in stride as the following account shows:

Everything is O.K. in nice weather: we saunter along the narrow, open decks, seizing a bench when we can. But when it rains, we don’t know where to go. There are only the hallways, the staircases, or a large hallway down on the fifth deck. In there, there’s all the hubbub of some international tavern, except in the morning when we install our altar for mass. Our room is occupied mostly by students, who have no trouble finding a comfortable position. They are very pleasant, but somewhat rambunctious at times. We occupy a tiny corner, but it’s right near the “men’s room.” Really, it’s all quite amusing and I’ve never made a more interesting crossing. Fr. Wilfrid sometimes worries about my having embarked with the “troops.” He shouldn’t. Today one has to be a democratic general, or even a bit communist.

By 1951, Fr. Gervais felt that his health and mental powers were failing and started to think of resigning. He consulted his General Officers and the various Provincials, because, as he said “old age is an evil which the young do not forgive.” He submitted his resignation to the Holy See which accepted it. The General Chapter of 1952 therefore became an election chapter. In his report to the chapter, Fr. Gervais proudly noted that the Assumptionists were serving in 166 houses spread through 26 countries. He seemed especially pleased to state that during his generalate the Congregation had increased by 1,055 priests.

The Chapter proceeded to elect as Superior General Father Wilfrid Dufault, an American. From now on, Fr. Gervais had the status of a patriarch, with the patriarch's profound sense of historical continuity. For him, the Assumptionists formed a family, of which he venerated the ancestors and encouraged the youngsters. He spent his last years writing about aspects of the Assumptionists' history, calling upon archives and especially upon his own splendid memory. He would relax by taking a daily stroll in Rome, in the company of his faithful Brother Jules Pector. In late 1960, he started having heart trouble and died on February 6, 1961.

Fr. Gervais' prolific writings revealed his thoughts and his spirituality; what he did and the manner in which he did it reveal his soul. He was never vulgar, but always dignified, affable, patient, and gentle. At first glance, he may have seemed timid, but he was skillful, tenacious, and we might almost say hard-headed in doing what he felt he must. He had great simplicity, humility, and kindness, even when exercising great authority. He was all this because ultimately he was loving, using authority, but paternally.

## **AN ASSUMPTIONIST LAY-BROTHER: JULES PECTOR**

The Assumptionists are primarily a clerical congregation, but since their origin they have had members whom the Lord has called to serve him as brothers, not as priests. These men have been, and still are, a most important segment of the congregation. Each in his own way has been an apostle, contributing various talents to the efforts of the congregation. Some are carpenters, cooks, electricians, nurses or infirmarians, accountants, farmers, printers, gardeners, or teachers. It must be said that some apostolates simply could not exist or function without them. Alongside bishops and priests, they have worked generously and humbly for the Coming of the Kingdom, in Rome, Paris, Worcester, Ma., or missionary Africa, to mention only a few places.

One such brother was Jules Pector. He entered the aluminate of Bure, in Belgium when he was only 15. He soon decided that God had called him to be a brother, and he made his religious profession in 1909. Doctors believed that because of his delicate health he would not live long. In 1911 he was sent to Rome where he worked for Fr. Louis Petit, a noted Byzantine scholar who was then completing the Mansi collection of the various Ecumenical Councils. Fr. Petit himself wrote ten of the folio volumes and wrote most of three others. In this he was greatly aided by Bro. Jules.

When Fr. Petit became Archbishop of Athens, he brought Bro. Jules along as his secretary. In this capacity, Bro. Jules served for 12 years. He had an unusual talent: he was able to decipher and read ancient manuscripts. He said he had started reading Greek by reading street and shop signs. Gradually he became amazingly proficient at reading the scrawly script of old documents. He would then type up the text and the scholars would begin their work on the texts. But all their erudition would have been impossible without the work of humble little Bro. Jules who had furnished them their texts, thanks to his uncanny talent.

In 1926, Bro. Jules arrived in Rome. For 44 years he was secretary to the superior general, taking care of most of his correspondence with the congregation and with the Holy See. Yet this was only one aspect of his

work. It was he who typed the complete writings of Fr. d'Alzon, including some 40,000 letters, which were contained in 21 volumes presented to the Holy See in connection with Fr. d'Alzon's cause of beatification. He also typed the writings of Fr. Vincent de Paul Bailly and of Fr. Galabert, whose handwriting was so atrocious that Fr. d'Alzon, whose own penmanship was awful, complained, in all, this amounted to some 100 typewritten volumes. All this above and beyond his full-time occupation as confidential corresponding secretary of the Superior General and of the Curia.

At the risk of being somewhat repetitious, I would like to include here a tribute paid to Brother Jules by Fr. Martin Jugie in the foreword of his edition of the complete works of Scholarios:

Having arrived at the completion of this laborious edition of *The Complete Works of Gennade (George) Scholarios*...we believe it our duty to draw the attention of our readers to the contribution of a collaborator, since the very beginning, of one who might be called "the unknown soldier" of the difficult operation, so that he not remain completely unknown.... We mean of course Brother Jules Pector...After having deciphered the manuscripts of the great Byzantine, he transcribed them by typewriter. His cooperation did not end there; he compared the copies with the original manuscripts, corrected the galley-proofs, and drew up the tables of contents. Thanks to him many typographical errors were avoided and many omissions were caught in time. Brother Jules is not an intellectual by profession. He is a modest Assumptionist lay brother. As early as 1907 he was fortunate enough to become involved in the tiny print shop of our scholasticate in Louvain. He trained his "typographer's eye" by printing the analytical catalog of the library and the theses of the students. In 1911 he was called to Rome by Fr. Petit to become a worthy helper of the great editor of texts. The following year, Fr. Petit became archbishop of Athens and brought the young brother with him...The brother not only learned to speak Greek but also to read it, in almost illegible handwritings. After that, his typewriter never stopped...during 14 years, all the time of Bishop Petit's Athenian episcopacy. The works of Scholarios represent only a small portion of the Greek texts he transcribed, to say nothing of works written in Latin alphabet...Back in Rome in 1926, Brother Jules has continued his hidden labors, which were most useful in a house where the pen

never stopped, where superiors, professors, and students constantly called upon the services of this intelligent and tireless typist.

## THE ASSUMPTIONISTS IN SOUTH AMERICA

### CHILE

Over the years, the Assumptionists extended their apostolate to South America where, because of the mentality of the people, their activity has had a strong Marian character. In recent years, sensitive to the problems of the Christians in the Third World, they have added a new social dimension to their work. Because of the political situation in some of the countries, the Assumptionists have run into trouble because of their efforts for human rights.

Interestingly enough, our first mission in South America, in Chile, was born of a devotion for Our Lady of Lourdes, on the part of Archbishop Mariano Casanova of Santiago. In 1880 or 1881, when he was still only a priest, he had translated into Spanish the story of Lourdes. As a result of the book, devotion to Our Lady of Lourdes grew strong in Chile. A Parish priest, Don Jacinto Arriagada, obtained a fine statue of Our Lady and began building a church to shelter it in Santiago. As we shall see in a moment, the Assumptionists will take over this Parish of Our Lady of Lourdes. In 1889, the same Mariano Casanova, who had by then become the Archbishop, was in Lourdes on the occasion of one of the early national pilgrimages organized by the Assumptionists. He began chatting with the leader of the pilgrimage, who happened to be Fr. Francois Picard, the Assumptionist Superior General. During the conversation, the Archbishop invited the Assumptionists to start working in his diocese. Fr. Picard's answer, according to Archbishop Casanova, "was that of a saint. 'If there is enough work, we will go.'" Thus it happened that on September 20, 1890 ten Assumptionists (5 priests, 5 brothers) sailed from Bordeaux on the *City of Metz*, bound for Chile. They finally overcame the objections of the ship's captain who refused "to authorize religious manifestations of any kind aboard his ship." They began saying Mass for some of the 190 passengers. They baptized a three-month baby; and when the ship docked briefly at Talcahuano, on October 29, after 50 days at sea, they

buried a little girl who had just died. They ministered before even arriving at their mission.

They made their way in small groups to an estate called Mendoza, on the outskirts of Rengo, where dozens of poncho-clad horsemen greeted the arriving missionaries. Their arrival was also announced nation-wide in the Catholic papers. It did not take the religious long to get to work; already by the end of November a couple of them accompanied the archbishop on his diocesan visitation. This was no small chore, because in each Parish they heard numerous confessions. In one week they heard 6,000 confessions. They soon learned that the dearth of priests meant that even the smallest Parish in the diocese had 15,000 Parishioners, while many of the largest had 30,000. They set about preaching missions at Mendoza. These were ten-day closed retreats, with five sermons a day, plus an introduction and a concluding sermon. Soon they were writing to Father Picard, begging for reinforcements.

On May 21, 1892, they took possession of the church and convent of Our Lady of Lourdes in Santiago, which we mentioned earlier. The buildings were still under construction when they arrived. In 1892, during the National Pilgrimage in Lourdes, France, it was announced that four additional Assumptionists were being assigned to Chile, and these arrived in January, 1893. During that year, the Assumptionists were given a second Parish, the immense parish of the Assumption in Los Andes. The territory of the Parish was vast and stretched to the Argentinian border. It was at the mouth of a major pass through the Andes. The same year, they began work in the Parish of St. Anne in Rengo, a large Parish with 30,000 Parishioners. The extent of their labors becomes clearer when we remember that they still numbered only nine priests and five brothers.

Additional Assumptionist communities were later established at Lota (1904) which is still an immense but frightfully poor parish even today. In 1911 they went to Valparaiso, and in 1941 accepted a second parish in Santiago, Our Lady of the Angels. One of their latest undertakings is the Robert Kennedy Mission, in one of the sectors of Santiago. It ministers to poor workers, in the midst of the poverty and squalor of a frightful shanty-town.

Returning to the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Lourdes in Santiago: the popularity of pilgrimages to the shrine increased amazingly, aided in

part by a magazine, *Eco de Lourdes*, which the Assumptionists started in 1901. The original church was now inadequate for the vast crowds, and a larger, more impressive church was started. The Apostolic Nuncio, Ettore Felici laid the cornerstone on November 9, 1929.

Probably the Assumptionist the most involved with this church, which became the national shrine, was Father Zénobe Goffart. He had been ordained in Louvain in 1912, had studied in Rome for a year, and had arrived in Chile in 1913, along with four others. He was destined to spend exactly fifty years of his life in Chile until his death in 1963. He passed the first ten years at Concepción. After two years at Rengo, he went to Santiago, where he spent 37 years. During 35 years, he was superior of the same house, Our Lady of Lourdes, thus setting, I believe, some sort of longevity record for superiors. In 1962 the Superior General wrote to him, "Your mandate as superior rendered immense service to the Congregation, service constantly renewed not to satisfy any personal ambition, but because your eminent talents of prudence and paternal goodness made it impossible for your superiors to find a better man."

Immediately after assuming the direction of the Lourdes Parish, Fr. Zénobe started to develop the Marian devotion and to build the monumental basilica. Initial funds came from the sale of a stamp collection assembled over the years by an Assumptionist who had died in 1925. Jewels donated to the Assumptionists were sold. A subscription drive was started, to which even the poorest could contribute his "brick," i.e. his tiny contribution for the basilica. Fr. Zénobe supervised the entire project until the dedication of the basilica in 1958, centennial year of the Lourdes apparitions.

Fr. Zénobe, as you may have guessed by now, was beloved by all because of many endearing traits. He was very human yet very supernatural. He was audacious, daunted by no obstacle, drawing his strength and confidence from his faith and from his love for the Virgin Mary. He served as Provincial vicar in Chile for 25 years, during which his serenity, kindness, fine sense of humor enabled him to serve very effectively.

In 1963, aged 83, he returned to Europe to visit members of his family. On his trip back to Chile, he stopped briefly in Worcester to visit his brother, Brother Armand Goffart, of whom we shall say more later on. By the time Fr. Zénobe reached Costa Rica, he was exhausted and

had to be transported to Santiago on a stretcher. He was found to have cancer of the bones, accepted his fate with admirable resignation, and died December 31, 1963. The Cardinal of Santiago presided at his funeral in the Basilica of Lourdes for which he had so long labored.

At the present time, there are 37 religious in Chile, 18 of whom are Chileans. Their evangelization, by word and work, denounces injustice and defends human rights and evangelical values. Such an apostolate irritates the repressive military dictatorship of the country which tends to consider any effort to help the poor as a pro-Communist activity (just as Somoza did in Nicaragua). Persecutions, repressions, intimidation are constant; but the Assumptionists continue to labor for God's Kingdom and man's welfare.

## **ARGENTINA**

Argentina was the second South American country to which the Assumptionists went. In 1911 Fr. Geoffroy Pierson was sent from Chile to Santos Lugares, some 15 miles from Buenos Aires. All he found upon arrival was a cafe, a few houses, and a pre-fabricated chapel of wood and corrugated zinc, which came from the USA. He set about establishing a Parish among the 5,000 people of the village, half of whom were railroad employees. There was, to say the least, variety among his parishioners: Italians, Spaniards, French, Germans, Englishmen, Chinese, Russians, and a handful of Argentinians. To try to get some sort of unity from this mixture, he first started catechism classes for about 150 children and teen-agers. Next, probably basing himself upon what he knew from Chile, he established a society of Our Lady, in an attempt to foster deeper piety and more frequent reception of the sacraments. He was joined during the summer of 1911 by a second Assumptionist, Fr. Romain Heitmann, who had been chaplain of the Little Sisters of the Assumption in Buenos Aires.

In late 1911, a young Assumptionist in Chile, Fr. Raphael Doassans, connected with *Eco de Lourdes*, suffered a cerebral hemorrhage which endangered his life. Fr. Joseph Maubon, who was in Santos Lugares, Argentina at the time, vowed to build there a sanctuary of Lourdes if the young priest's life was spared. The very next day, he was notified of an unexpected and happy reaction. The crisis was over and Fr. Doassans would live. The promise had to be kept, despite lack of funds. The

grotto was constructed in 1915 by Fr. Antoine Silbermann, who had arrived in Santos Lugares from Worcester, Ma. A pilgrimage tradition soon sprang up, which would increase over the years. So many pilgrims came from all over the country that the Ministry of Public Works in 1919 decided to name the local railroad stop "Lourdes." The promised church, which was really two superimposed churches as at Lourdes, France, was begun in 1922.

Long before then however, in 1914 to be precise, Fr. Romain Heitmann had become pastor of the fine parish of Our Lady of Mercy, in Buenos Aires. There was an empty school building on the Parish grounds. Following a novena to the Blessed Virgin, Fr. Romain received the promise of an annual subsidy of \$12,000 for the school, which he called Emmanuel d'Alzon college. Shortly after the school began to function, evening classes were added for teen-agers. Now there are three functioning schools. In 1932, the Parish of St. Martin of Tours was opened in Buenos Aires. As all the parishes and the Lourdes sanctuary are relatively close to each other, the Assumptionists can often lend each other a helping hand.

The religious situation in Argentina was not rosy in the 1970's. Like the Argentinian church in general, we have suffered from the totalitarian military regime. Simply stated, persecution rages against the Church, and clergymen are often victims. The Parish of St. Martin of Tours has had to endure systematic and violent attacks in newspapers and television. A few years ago, police agents arrived one night to arrest one of our priests. He did not happen to be in at the time, so they arrested instead two Assumptionist seminarians, Brother Luis Rendon and Carlos di Pietro. There has been absolutely no news about them since, despite repeated efforts to find out what happened to them.

By 1978 there were only 12 religious left to minister to three Parishes, one shrine, and four schools. Two other religious are ill, and another is in exile because he would be arrested should he return to Argentina. Nonetheless, in every parish, one of the priests is especially charged with handling social problems, which are numerous.

## ***BRAZIL***

In 1934, Cardinal Copello, Archbishop of Buenos Aires, in Argentina, asked the Assumptionists if they could possibly send a religious from

the *Bonne Presse* in Paris to start a Catholic newspaper in his diocese. Father Cherubin Artigue was chosen because he had the background and the technical knowledge required, having worked at the *Bonne Presse* since 1919. Before Fr. Cherubin had even left France, the Cardinal, having lost the local aid he had counted on, abandoned the project and asked that the whole venture not even be mentioned again. The provincial superior told no one of the change in the situation and let Fr. Cherubin depart for Buenos Aires. When he arrived there in the spring of 1935, he discovered that he would be jobless. He decided to go to Rio de Janeiro, in Brazil, where Cardinal Leme had offered the Assumptionists a Parish some years before. The Cardinal assigned Fr. Cherubin temporarily as chaplain of a boarding school run by the Marist Brothers. He still seemed favorable to the idea of an Assumptionist Parish, but insisted that the Assumptionists first become “brazilianized.” Help arrived for Fr. Cherubin in September, 1937, when Fr. Alexis Chauvin came as superior and promptly went about building a residence for the religious in the teeming Flamengo neighborhood. Temporarily the religious occupied a dilapidated building which was later razed to make way for the Church of the Holy Trinity, on the same land.

The Church is a splendid modern structure, with an impressive, soaring spire. It was dedicated by Cardinal Leme in 1944. The following year, the Cardinal appointed Fr. Cherubin, who had originally come to South America to be a journalist, as I mentioned, as the first pastor of the new Parish. He wore himself out during the last years of his life, trying to pay off the church’s debts. He also spent countless hours hearing confessions, a ministry particularly uncomfortable in the tropical climate of Rio.

In time the French Assumptionists were so overburdened with work that in 1944 some Dutch Assumptionists accepted to share the burden. Other works entrusted to the Assumptionists include two parishes in Sao Paolo; a parish in Eugenopolis, where an aluminate was begun; a Parish on Fernandopolis, so extensive that some of its mission chapels are more than 40 miles from the center of the Parish. Another Parish at Jales, which numbered 200,000 souls, became the nucleus of a new diocese carved out of the diocese of Rio Preto. The first bishop was a Dutch Assumptionist, Bishop Arthur Horsthuis, well known for his organizational skills, his calmness, his goodness, and his apostolic zeal. It was Bp. Horsthuis who started a diocesan radio station called Our Lady

of the Assumption, the Director of which is an Assumptionist. This radio station, which can broadcast to the entire diocese, is a powerful apostolic tool because of its programs to cure illiteracy, its religion and hygiene courses, and its prayer programs.

There are only slightly more than 50 Assumptionists in Brazil, but their impact is widespread and effective in this country where devotion to the Madonna remains a bulwark for the faith and the people. The political atmosphere is undoubtedly much more favorable to evangelization than in Chile or Argentina.

## **COLUMBIA**

In 1946 Belgian Assumptionists inaugurated their mission in Columbia by arriving on the first plane on the new Paris-Bogota flight. In Bogota they founded the parish of Our Lady of the Assumption and the Emmanuel d'Alzon College, which now has over 700 students. In Cali, the Assumptionists have other parishes: St. James the Apostle, and St. Nicholas Parish, which was badly damaged in 1956 when sixty tons of dynamite blew up nearby. Extensive repairs were necessary. The Holy Gospel parish in Medellin is staffed by Flemish Assumptionists. In 1978, there were still only 20 Assumptionists to handle all this immense apostolate.

Summarizing the general situation of the Assumptionists in South America, we might say that it means far too much work, far too few apostles, and severe troubles with a number of the national regimes, because of the attention given to the problems of the poor.

## **The Assumptionists in Africa**

The first Assumptionist Missionaries in Africa arrived in the Belgian Congo (now Zaire) in 1929. Bishop Gabriel Grison of the Fathers of the Sacred Heart ceded to them the eastern part of his immense diocese of Stanleyville, the section bordering on Lake Edward and Uganda, exactly astride the Equator. The mission center had only recently been moved to the town of Beni, because of a severe epidemic of sleeping-sickness which had raged in the Semliki Plain to the east. To Beni then went the first six Assumptionists, four priests and two brothers, with Fr. Henri Piérard as the group leader.

Fr. Piérard's studies had been interrupted by World War I during which he had served as a stretcher-bearer, a duty often assigned to priests and seminarians because they would thus not have to bear arms. Military service did not dampen Piérard's spirit; it matured him. According to some of his brethren, it also gave him the somewhat "salty" language he was occasionally known to use, even later in life. During the war, Piérard also began thinking of the missions as his chosen field of apostolate. After ordination in Louvain in 1925, he spent four years as a teacher before his dream of missionary work became a reality and he was assigned to the Belgian Congo.

The first years at Beni were very difficult. Two Sacred Heart fathers stayed on for three months to initiate the Assumptionists, but they were then left on their own to take care of the two existing mission posts, at Beni and Kimbulu. First of all, the Assumptionists had to learn the Swahili language; only then could they venture into the bush, in treks that sometimes lasted for five or six weeks. The entire diocese was then bush country. Fr. Piérard found only an embryonic Christian community of around 2,000 baptized Christians and around 3,000 catechumens. Permanent chapels, infirmaries and schools had to be built to replace flimsy temporary structures. When, in 1934, the mission was erected as an independent mission, Piérard was named its superior. By 1935 he noted the foundation of three new mission posts and stated that there were at the time 7,047 baptized and 27,729 catechumens. As the Superior General wrote at the time, "the Holy Spirit is blowing a real

tornado” in the Congo. In 1938, Fr. Piérard was ordained a bishop, the first Apostolic Vicar of Beni. By then the mission had 27,259 baptized and 62,509 catechumens. Less than two decades later, baptized Catholics numbered over 200,000.

In the face of the amazing flowering of Christianity in the vicariate, one is brought to wonder how this came about. To be sure, the Spirit was at work. But also Bishop Piérard and his brethren lavished thought, planning, initiative, and hard work upon the mission. We would like to know what means they used to be so successful. Reports and literature from the mission seem to indicate that part of the success was attributable to the multiplication of mission posts. Bishop Piérard accepted that each post be staffed by only a few religious, sometimes even by a single man. He made every effort to motorize each station so that the priest might more easily and more often make the rounds of the villages entrusted to him. He insisted that each village be visited as often as possible, and that the priest sojourn there at least three times a year. There was also a carefully conceived education and training program for the many catechists, who were one of the strongest factors in the spreading of the gospel message. Education, at all levels and of all kinds, was given high priority. At the center of each mission post was at least one elementary school for boys. In the bush country, there were multiple “lower cycles,” i.e. classes. For girls, there was at least one of these “lower cycles” in every post, and a complete elementary school in the dozen mission posts where there were nuns. On the high school level, there were for boys: a minor seminary, a technical school, an agricultural and veterinarian school, a normal school (to prepare teachers), an auto mechanics’ school, and two trade schools for carpenters and brick-masons. The girls had a boarding school, a normal school, two schools for midwives and nurses, and two domestic science schools. Catholic Action groups were encouraged. These included the Legion of Mary (a very active and effective force), the Eucharistic Crusade, and the League of the Sacred Heart. The lay people in these movements were the real local leaders, models, and the ferment for others. Their generous efforts help explain much of the success of the Assumptionist mission in Zaire.

A prime preoccupation of Bp. Piérard was the formation of a Congolese clergy, and in 1942 he started a minor seminary. When World War II left him short of personnel, he taught French and Latin classes himself. In 1944, he had the great joy of ordaining his first

Congolese priest, Fr. Andre Boyori. Some Congolese even became Assumptionists, Fr. Jerome Masumbuko being the first, ordained in St. John Lateran in Rome, in 1961. When the Assumptionists arrived in 1929, he had not even been born.

In 1946, Bp. Piérard founded a congregation of Congolese sisters, the Little Sisters of the Presentation; in 1954 he founded the Brothers of the Assumption, for Congolese.

In 1960, the Holy See determined that Zaire was sufficiently Christianized to no longer be considered mission country. All the vicariates became dioceses, and Piérard thus became Bishop of Beni. By then almost three-quarters of the population had converted to Christianity. Still, the years that followed Zaire's independence from Belgium were dangerous and painful for the Bishop and the missionaries. The situation was so explosive that Bp. Piérard judged that he should remain at his post rather than attend the third session of Vatican II. The last days of 1964 saw the Beni mission attacked by Mulelist rebels. Fr. Edgar Cuypers, in a letter to the American provincial of the time, Fr. Armand Desautels, described what happened:

It was really as if the devil himself had been unleashed against the missionaries. On Saturday morning (Sept. 26, 1964) about ten o'clock, the mission was invaded by a band of savages, youths and adults, armed to the teeth, bare-chested, with, around their necks and wrists, amulets that were supposed to protect them. They screamed their rallying cries "Mulele maji" and "Lumumba maji" and fired rifles in all directions. The fathers were obliged to show them the entire mission, which was searched because, they said, we were hiding "enemies of the people..." The Bishop and the fathers were brought to Beni Center, about five kilometers from the mission. Awaiting them were hundreds of Mulelists, all members of other tribes, except for about twenty inhabitants of the region who were Mulelist sympathizers. *All* the other inhabitants, almost all Christian, had fled days before. The rebels were armed with clubs, machetes, spears, and also rifles. When they saw the priests, exposed on a sort of platform, they screamed "death." The rebel commander...assisted by a "Chief of Operations" and by the "great witch doctor"... placed the Fathers on trial, accusing them of being involved in politics, of refusing true independence, and of selling out the country to the Americans. The crowd screamed "mateka" which means "We want plunder," in this case from the

captives, who then had their watches, eyeglasses, etc. seized. The rebels grew more menacing. The commander had the prisoners placed in a cell, to save them, he claimed. The rebels were given leave to plunder a store abandoned by a European. Meanwhile, the rebel commander brought the Fathers back to the mission, saying he would be back the following morning to bring them to Stanleyville for trial. The Fathers had been back at the mission only about a quarter of an hour when the rebels returned and accused the fathers of having tried to escape. They were flung into Jeeps and beaten. Now the Fathers thought it was the end for them, and Bishop Piérard gave them general absolution. Unloaded at Beni a second time, they were again beaten and tossed into a tiny room. They were forced to shed their cassocks and shirts. They were frequently questioned, accused of many crimes, and their execution was discussed. Fortunately the commander had placed a couple of trustworthy guards over them. But the guards were overpowered by some of the rebels who, drunk or drugged, wanted to kill the priests. One of the rebels advanced toward Bishop Piérard...young father Philippe (a Congolese) stepped between them. They screamed to him, "you have had your fill of American foods. We'll teach you." They beat him mercilessly and then threw him unconscious into the room. The rebels would come to the door and yell "tomorrow we'll kill you." All Saturday night passed this way, and Sunday morning...until the Mulelists fled before the approach of the soldiers of the national army who did not enter Beni because the night had fallen and they were afraid that the rebels would hide and regroup. In reality the rebels had abandoned Beni to re-group at Mbao, some 20 kilometers away, caring only to save their own skins and abandoning or forgetting their prisoners. The prisoners escaped by breaking down a door, then going out into the bush to sleep.

In another letter, Fr. Cuypers recounts how the missionaries, in the face of a second rebel advance, scattered in all directions. Some took refuge in Uganda and some returned to Belgium. Efforts were made to salvage some things from the mission posts and to save Bishop Piérard's chancery documents.

Still suffering from the physical and emotional shock of the attack, Bishop Piérard finally went to Rome. Together with young Father Philippe who had saved him at the risk of his own life, he attended the canonization of the Uganda Martyrs, to whose intercession he

attributed the lives of the fathers. In December, 1964, Bp. Piérard returned to Zaire to re-group the missionaries and to continue their mission work. In 1966 he joyfully ordained as bishop his successor to the see of Beni, a young Congolese, Emmanuel Kataliko, whom he had ordained priest in St. Peter's Basilica, in 1958. The old bishop could be consoled with the results of years of labor: a diocese predominantly Christianized (from 2,000 in 1929, they had become 800,000 by 1979), a native bishop, and a relatively numerous Zairian clergy.

Bishop Piérard died in Zaire in 1975. He had been a simple, unaffected man, hard-working, with a deep devotion to the Blessed Mother, and he served the Congregation and the Church well.

Besides missions in Zaire, the Assumptionists also have missions in Madagascar, where at one time the diocese of Tulear had as bishop Michel Canonne, an Assumptionist, who had been ordained priest by the Assumptionist bishop Pius Neveu. Prior to the troubles in Algeria, the Assumptionists also had the College of Bone, in the homeland of St. Augustine.

## APOSTOLATE OF THE SEA

Assumptionist apostolate for seamen began in 1894, initiated by Mr. Bernard Bailly, brother of Fathers Emmanuel and Vincent de Paul, who was a former naval officer. The first president of the enterprise was Admiral Lafond. Fr. François Picard became involved from the very outset of the venture which aimed at providing religious and medical support for seamen, especially for the fishermen off Newfoundland. Newspapers wrote enthusiastically about the plan and contributions poured in. By 1895 the hospital ship *St. Peter* had been outfitted. The first Assumptionist to serve as chaplain of the Apostolate of the Sea was Fr. Yves Hamon, who was later joined by Fr. Xavier Marchet and by Brother Eugene Bergé. Unfortunately, the *St. Peter* did not imitate its patron saint: on its second voyage it foundered on the rocks off Cape Ste. Marie. Fr. Yves and the crew were eventually rescued by an American fishing vessel. The *St. Peter* was replaced in 1897 by two ships: the *St. Peter II* and the *St. Paul*. One would serve off Newfoundland; the other, off Iceland. Later on, the fleet would be increased to five ships.

Fr. Yves Hamon, a compatriot of the Breton fishermen to whom he would minister, was completely at home working with humble, hardy folk. His disdain for comfort, his adventurous spirit, and even his prodigious physical strength admirably equipped him for his task, which he began less than two years after his ordination. His first project was a sailors' home on the island of St. Pierre (of St. Pierre and Miquelon). During the winter, an off-season for fishermen, he would visit them at home in France, preaching missions and even closed retreats. To accommodate his fishermen, he added a chapel to his sailors' home, where they could worship without the constraints which they felt in the local churches. But religious authorities resented what they considered an intrusion and competition. The Pope personally intervened to grant Fr. Yves whatever authorizations were needed. Still the clamor did not die down; even the French Chamber of Deputies became involved. To let the storm subside, if I may be permitted this figure of speech, Fr. Yves was sent to China, of all places, as military chaplain with the red cross, for six months. When he was re-assigned to the Apostolate of the

Sea, it was in Iceland. He worked there from 1901 to 1906, and again founded a sailors' home, in Fask-rudsfjord. Fr. Yves certainly got around the world. From 1906 to 1920 he served in England, except for two seasons back in Newfoundland, in 1912 and 1913. His robust health ruined by many years of work in harsh climates, he became a semi-invalid in his last years. In his conversations he continued to recall his picturesque voyages to Newfoundland, Iceland, Madagascar, and China. One day, years ago, a friend remarked to me, "Join the Assumptionists and see the world." In Fr. Yves Hamon's case, this was all too true.

## THE ASSUMPTIONISTS IN RUSSIA

Fr. d'Alzon dreamed, even as he sent religious to Bulgaria, that his congregation would one day serve the Church in Russia. Between 1905 and World War I a few religious did in fact establish themselves very discreetly in St. Petersburg, Odessa, Kiev, Moscow, and Vilna. Religion in Russia was traditionally identified with nationality, and all Russians were deemed to belong to the Orthodox Church and any attempt to convert them was punishable by law. The Assumptionists tried to remain as inconspicuous as possible and usually the authorities presumed that they were secular priests.

One of these Assumptionists was Fr. Pius Neveu, who arrived in St. Petersburg on October 13, 1906 to become chaplain to the Good Shepherd Cancer Hospital and Orphanage. In May, 1907, many of the French and Belgian mining officials, engineers and their families in the Donetz mining region in the Ukraine petitioned to have a French-speaking priest to minister to them. As a result, Fr. Neveu was transferred to the town of Makeyevka to begin his work, and arrived there on November 21, 1907.

At the time, Fr. Neveu was thirty years old. Having studied in Jerusalem and Constantinople, he had been trained in both the Latin and the Slavic rites and had a working knowledge of the Russian language. Makeyevka really had need for the spiritual services of a priest because of the large Catholic population, and all the more since there were frequent epidemics and many serious accidents in the mines and factories. Fr. Neveu soon became so indispensable that when his superior General attempted to transfer him to Odessa the people of Makeyevka said they would prevent Father's leaving, by force if necessary. Fr. Emmanuel Bailly, the superior General, never rescinded the order, but neither did he enforce it. Father Neveu proceeded to build a church and rectory and develop his ministry. During World War I, he was requested by French officials to remain where he was rather than serve in the armed forces, his service to the French-speaking people of the Donetz basin being considered so important.

Fr. Neveu was of necessity always overworked; his own Parish was some 80 miles long and he had been asked to serve temporarily as pastor of Enakieve, which had some 3,000 Catholics. In his labors, he was greatly helped by an Assumptionist lay-brother, Brother David Mailland who was 52 at the time and had spent 35 years in Turkey and Bulgaria.

Under the Bolsheviks, Fr. Neveu was not molested at first and continued to hold services in the church, despite the Communists' threat to convert it into a movie theater. About this time Fr. Neveu wrote:

To the north, my nearest priest neighbor is in Kharkov, 230 miles away; to the east at Enakieve, 18 miles; to the south, in Taganrog, 80 miles; and to the west, in Ekaterinoslav, 200 miles. How far I could radiate, if only I were well shod or had a horse! The only shoes I have belonged to a man who had bigger feet than I have. However, even if I had a horse, my problem would be to train it to live without eating. The pitiless sun of last summer burnt up the hay as well as the wheat.

Both Brother David and myself are suffering from chronic rheumatism, and in addition he has enphysema. What I thought at first was a tumor in my lower stomach turns out to be a hernia, but I dare not have an operation here. I am fortunate to have a companion as versatile as Bro. David who acts as sacristan, cantor, organist, cook, gardener, goatherd (we have one goat), locksmith, chimney sweep, and electrician. His vegetable garden arouses the admiration of all who see it. Our diet is still not very substantial, and we have both become very angular. We hesitate to accept anything from the parishioners who are always willing to share the little they have...

Within the span of two years, the Bolsheviks searched Neveu's house 22 times. Once he was arrested and almost shot, because he had accepted to keep a small box left behind by some retreating Germans, after having been assured that it contained no weapons. When the Communists opened the box, they found a tiny pearl-handled revolver and summarily condemned Neveu to face a firing squad. He was saved only when an officer noted that the nails of the box were so rusty with age that Fr. Neveu could not have known the contents of the box. Fr. Neveu was told that his turn would come later.

Pope Pius XI conferred upon Fr. Neveu the power to confirm and practically act as bishop except for the functions requiring episcopal consecration, and Fr. Joseph Maubon (then functioning as Vicar-General of the Congregation) indicated his desire that Fr. Neveu remain in Russia, thus allaying some scruples Father Neveu had had for not obeying Fr. Bailly's earlier order. Fr. Neveu's lack of clothing, food, and altar wine was to a large extent taken care of when in 1922 he succeeded in obtaining some packages through the American Relief Organization, operating for the Pontifical Relief Mission.

In 1923, Fr. Neveu tried to draw the attention of his religious superiors to the fact that the Catholic Church in Russia was now without a hierarchy, the bishops having left on their own or having been forced to depart. In early 1926 Fr. Neveu heard that he would soon be receiving the visit of a Father Michael d'Herbigny. Fr. Neveu had never met Fr. d'Herbigny and wondered why this distinguished Slavic scholar would want to come to Makeyevka. He would soon find out. He received a post-card from the superior general, Fr. Quenard saying, "In view of the kind of life you have been leading for the past few years, you would probably not be surprised at anything that happens."

The story of Fr. Neveu's episcopal ordination reads like some cloak and dagger story. The "cover" for d'Herbigny's visit was that he was commissioned to make a report on the French cultural property in Russia. The French ambassador had been ordered to co-operate with him in every way. Actually d'Herbigny's mission was to ordain Fr. Neveu as Bishop. He had himself been secretly ordained bishop in Berlin by the Papal Nuncio, Eugenio Pacelli (later Pius XII). Fr. Neveu of course knew nothing about all these plans. Ambassador Herbette requested him to come to Moscow at his earliest convenience, and Fr. Neveu promised to be there at 5 a.m. April 26, 1926.

The French national church, St.-Louis-des-Francais, is just across the street from Moscow's infamous Lubyanka Prison. It was there that Bishop d'Herbigny awaited Fr. Neveu, very impatiently, because he himself had been summoned to appear at 2 p.m. before the Moscow Municipal Soviet, and feared that he might be expelled from the country before accomplishing his mission.

Bishop d'Herbigny wrote about the ceremony in his book *Sixty years as a Jesuit*, and the following is an edited version of his narration:

5 o'clock, 5:30, 6, 6:30, 7, 7:30 and still no Father Neveu. 8 o'clock. I will soon have to return to my hotel so that no one will note my absence... At 9 o'clock I begin the mass, "the first today" i thought. When I turned around at the *Orate Fratres* I saw enter a big, robust Russian peasant, dressed in sheepskins. "That must be him." ...After the Benediction at the end of Mass he crossed the choir and entered the sacristy.

That morning the congregation left rapidly. Only Fr. Neveu remained, and the two witnesses, about whom he knew nothing yet.

- Father Neveu?

- Father d'Herbigny.

- Very happy to see you. Have you said Mass yet?

- No. I have been fasting in order to do so.

- Father Neveu, I would like to go to confession.

He sat down and i knelt. During my confession I said: I am a bishop, sent by the Holy Father to organize religious jurisdiction in Russia as soon as possible, but it must remain a secret for the moment. I need your advice and your help.

- What wisdom, he said, to have sent a bishop here. That has been the essential point. But, you poor unfortunate! What suffering awaits you. From the Soviets, to be sure, but also from many others, even among the clergy, those who the most need a good pastor... I will do whatever I can to serve the Pope and Our Lord whom you represent.

- Good. And before you say Mass...I am not in Russia to stay. I must, according to my instructions, ordain at least one bishop. I have to do it today;...I have to act without delay because I am summoned before the Municipal Soviet. I may be arrested and expelled... you have told me very well about the sufferings that await the first bishop who will work in Russia. My dear Father, you are that man... It was just as if he had been hit by lightning!

- It's impossible!

No, Father Neveu. Here is the order of the Holy Father, I said as I drew from my pocket the document signed by Pius XI and Cardinal Gasparri. He read it and said, "But I am a religious! Does my Superior General know?"

- He knows. He consents. He orders. Read. Here is the letter signed Gervais Quenard.

- Then I have only to obey. What must I do?

First, make a retreat. A condensed one...You have a half hour.

During the Mass that followed, in the presence of only two absolutely trustworthy witnesses, Bishop d'Herbigny ordained Fr. Neveu a bishop. Both bishops had a tiny breakfast and Bishop Neveu returned to distant Makeyevka. Some time later he returned to Moscow and began to hold services in St.-Louis-des-Francais, still hiding the fact that he was now a bishop.

It was about a year later that Bishop Neveu openly presented himself as a bishop. For ten more years he continued his apostolate, frequently harassed by Soviet authorities. Nevertheless, he ordained Brother David Mailland a priest *ad missam*, that is to say Mass for the Parish at Makeyevka. Bishop Neveu also found himself a confessor by converting the saintly Russian bishop Barthelemy (who was arrested in 1934, executed in 1935) whom Bishop Neveu always considered a veritable martyr.

During many years, the Assumptionist Superior General had been attempting to send Bishop Neveu an Assumptionist companion. He was unsuccessful until 1934 when President Franklin Roosevelt, after long negotiations with ambassador Litvinov, obtained that an American Assumptionist enter Russia as chaplain to the Americans in Russia.

The pertinent passages of the Roosevelt-Litvinov agreement are as follows:

1) from a letter of Roosevelt, dated White House, November 16, 1933:

We will expect that religious groups or congregations composed of nationals of the United States of America in the territory of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics will be given the right to have their spiritual needs ministered to by clergymen, priests, rabbis or other ecclesiastical functionaries who are nationals of the United States of America, and that such clergymen, priests, rabbis, or other ecclesiastical functionaries will be protected from all disability or persecution and will not be denied entry into the territory of the Soviet Union because of their ecclesiastical status.

2) Maxim Litvinov responded at great length, quoting from Soviet laws guaranteeing free exercise of religion and saying:

Finally, I have the honor to inform you that the government of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, while reserving to itself the right of refusing visas to Americans to enter the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on personal grounds, does not intend to base such refusals on the fact of such persons having ecclesiastical status.

The young priest assigned to Moscow was Fr. Leopold Braun, a graduate of Assumption College, who spoke four languages fluently, and who was teaching German at the College when he was asked to become Bishop Neveu's assistant in Moscow. He arrived in Moscow on March 1, 1934 and was warmly greeted by the bishop who had seen no other Assumptionist except Brother David for 17 years. In 1936, a cardiac valvular disease obliged the bishop to return to France. The Russians promised orally that he would be re-admitted to Russia when he requested. But they never kept their promise and Bishop Neveu, who had suffered during 19 years under the terrible Soviet regime, anxiously awaited for ten years that his re-entry visa be honored, but in vain. Meanwhile he kept busy preaching, confirming, ordaining, even during the German occupation in France. He died suddenly in October, 1946, his dream of returning to Russia unfulfilled. Ironically, his re-entry visa was granted, after his death.

From 1936 on, Fr. Leopold Braun was the only officially recognized Assumptionist in Russia. He too was bullied and harassed by the Soviets who tried to force him to surrender the Parish records of St.-Louis-des-français, especially the baptismal registers. Fr. Braun energetically refused. Between 1939 and 1941 the church of St.-Louis was broken into five times and the Blessed Sacrament profaned twice. Fr. Braun was once tried on the trumped-up charge of "assaulting a soviet citizen," because he tried to protect the French embassy, all the diplomats in Moscow having fled before the German advance. He was convicted, but upon appeal the verdict was reversed. On December 27, 1945, Fr. Braun returned to the United States. He had been in Moscow eleven years, nine of them as sole Assumptionist there.

Fr. Antonio Laberge: in Moscow from October 26, 1945 until January 28, 1949.

Like Fr. Braun, he was allowed the use of St.-Louis-des-Français church. In May, 1947, he was joined by a French Assumptionist, Fr. Jean de Hatha Thomas, who became the pastor of the church while Fr. Antonio remained the Apostolic Administrator of Moscow. During the

summer of 1948, Fr. Antonio was able to obtain a visa which allowed him to consult his religious superiors, in England. The Russians honored the re-entry visa. During December, 1948 the Assumptionists were trying to obtain a visa for a replacement for Fr. Antonio. On January 28, 1949, armed with a two-month re-entry visa, he left Russia. But this time the Russians refused to honor the visa. That left only Fr. Jean de Matha in Moscow. On May 13, 1949, Fr. Jean de Matha was forced to surrender the keys to the church of St.-Louis-des-Francais, which had been under French care since 1789. (The present church, dating from 1849, had been confiscated in 1918 along with other foreign properties, but an admirable Frenchwoman, Mme Ott, had become its legal guardian and remained so until she and her daughter were arrested in 1947). On Sept. 1, 1950, Fr. Jean de Matha was expelled from Russia, despite official protests from French diplomats. Fortunately he had been able to “hold the fort” between Fr. Laberge and Fr. Brassard.

Fr. Louis-Robert Brassard: in Moscow from January 20, 1950 until February 12, 1953.

After a gap of a year, an American Assumptionist was again in Russia, when Fr. Brassard finally arrived, But the situation was very, very different. The Russians had managed to obtain what they desired when they confiscated the church. Henceforth, the Moscow Assumptionist, not being allowed to use the church, would have almost no contacts with Soviet citizens. For his parishioners among the staffs of the foreign embassies, Fr. Brassard was obliged to convert a portion of his apartment into a chapel. An interesting feature in the chapel was the tabernacle. It was made from wood from the room in the white house where President Roosevelt had signed the agreement by virtue of which Fr. Brassard was now in Moscow. At that time the White House interior had been gutted and was being restored. The wood was made into the tabernacle, which was blessed by the Apostolic Delegate in Washington, and forwarded to Fr. Brassard. Another prominent feature was a splendid cedar wood statue of the Virgin of Fatima, carved by Jose Ferreira Thedim. The Rosary on the statue had been specially blessed by Pius XII. Ironically, because news about the statue leaked into the press, Fr. Brassard’s ministry was made somewhat more difficult.

Fr. Georges Bissonnette: in Moscow from January 25, 1953 until March 5, 1955.

Fr. Georges, having studied Russian at Columbia University, was fluent in the language when he arrived in the Soviet Union. During his stay, he was lucky to travel quite extensively in the country, even as far as Soviet Central Asia. He has written a very interesting book on his stay, *Moscow was my Parish*. Suddenly in early 1955, the American Embassy in Moscow was notified that Fr. Bissonnette's presence in Russia was no longer appreciated. Soviet officials refused to state any reasons, but American officials saw the move as retaliation for the refusal of American authorities to extend indefinitely the visa of Exarch Boris, a Russian Orthodox ecclesiastic whom the Russian refugees in the U.S.A. begged the state department not to authorize to remain in the country. On March 2, Fr. Georges, summoned to the Section of Visas and Registration of Foreigners, was told he had to leave Russia within four days. French embassy officials promised to hold his apartment for his successor. Meanwhile all the liturgical vessels were entrusted to the care of the Bishop of Helsinki, via diplomatic pouch.

Louis Dion: in Moscow from 1959 until 1961.

There was a four-year gap after Fr. Georges' expulsion, until Fr. Louis Dion entered Russia in 1959. He reestablished his apartment as the usual place of worship for the foreigners in Moscow. Since then, things have run fairly smoothly, and Assumptionist replacements have regularly taken place. The Assumptionists really have performed no ministry for Soviet citizens; they limit themselves to serving the Americans and by extension the other diplomatic colonies.

Other Assumptionists in Moscow have been:

Fr. Joseph Richard, 1961-1965

Fr. Eugene La Plante, 1965-1968

Fr. Louis Dion, second mission, 1968-1971

Fr. Joseph Richard, second mission, 1971-1976

Fr. Philippe Bonvouloir, 1976-1979

Fr. Eugene La Plante, second mission, 1979-

Any picture of the Assumptionist presence in Russia would be incomplete if I failed to mention Fr. Jean (Judicael) Nicolas. As a young man, he had at one time thought of becoming an architect, but had

entered the Assumptionists instead. After his ordination, he adopted the Byzantine rite and taught for more than twenty years in a Rumanian high school. In 1943, he accompanied the Rumanian army when it occupied Odessa, in Russia. There he managed to re-open the church of St. Peter. This church had been founded by another Assumptionist, Fr. Auguste Maniglier, in 1910. Fr. Maniglier had been forced to leave the church in 1921, and it was closed by the Russians in 1937, despite the fact that its congregation was large enough to function under Soviet law. Fr. Nicolas was asked by his religious superiors to attempt to remain in Odessa, even after the expected Russian return. When the Reds did re-capture Odessa in 1945, they did not bother Fr. Nicolas, at least for the first year. In fact, the very first Russian soldier Fr. Nicolas met, a man about 40 years old, gave him four rubles and asked him to light a vigil light to thank God for the Russian victory. Suddenly on April 29, 1945, he was arrested and tried on trumped-up charges of espionage. He found out later that he had been denounced by some of the local children and even by some of his altar boys, who had been forced to report his activities.

Fr. Nicolas was sent to Lubyanka Prison, in Moscow, where he underwent 250 hours of interrogation during his four-month stay. He was sentenced to eight years of hard-labor. After his last interrogation, he was brought face-to-face with Fr. Pietro Leoni, an Italian priest who had for a while helped him in Odessa. Fr. Leoni whispered to him, "Absolution." "What did he say?" asked the examining magistrate. "Nothing. I'll tell you about it later." "So, you know each other. You are happy at meeting again. Well, say hello to each other." Father Nicolas continued his narrative of the meeting by saying, "as we were leaving, we asked the judge one favor. Finding ourselves in tragic circumstances, and not knowing what the future held in store for us, we begged him to let us give absolution to each other because we did not know if we'd ever have another chance to meet a fellow priest." "All right," said the judge, "but on one condition, that you do it in Russian so that I can understand what you are saying." "What a scene for a film," continues Fr. Nicolas. "In an interrogation room on the 7th floor of the Soviet Ministry of the Interior, where without doubt many priests had preceded us, before the judge who crossed his arms and stood impassive beneath a portrait of the Little Father of the Peoples, two friends, two priests knelt to give each other pardon and blessings."

The preceding narrative is taken from Fr. Nicolas' book, *Eleven Years in "Paradise"* which in many respects is reminiscent of Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago*. In his first prison camp, at Petropavlosk, in Kazakhstan, Fr. Nicolas was relatively well treated, for a very unusual reason: he had great artistic talent to sketch and paint. He made pictures for guards and villagers, getting paid a few rubles for the work. He used some of the first money he earned to telegraph a contact in Moscow, ostensibly begging for money, but really letting that person know where he was being held, a full year after his arrest. He was transferred from Petropavlosk to Camp Eight, at Vorkuta, in the Urals far above the Arctic Circle. He remained there six and a half years. We cannot in these few pages dwell upon his imprisonment, but we can indicate that again he survived by using his talents, painting portraits and landscapes for guards and officers, and murals glorifying Lenin, Stalin, and Communism, in schoolrooms and post-offices. He was one of eight priests in the same camp. Briefly he had as companion the same Fr. Leoni that we mentioned earlier. Fr. Leoni's 10-year sentence was somehow replaced by a 25-year sentence. Russian justice!

Fr. Nicolas was released from the prison camp at the end of his sentence, but he was given the astonishing news that as a former prison inmate he would never be allowed to return to his native France. He had to remain in the village of Vorkuta. Again he lived by his talents as an artist until unexpectedly in march, 1954 he was repatriated. On his way back through Moscow, he was the guest of his Assumptionist confrère, Georges Bissonnette. His eleven years in the Red "Paradise" were about to come to an end.

The fine artistic talent of Fr. Nicolas is exemplified by the mosaic used as the cover of this booklet. it may be seen in the Assumptionist general house in Rome, and represents the "triple love" of the Assumptionists: Christ, His Mother, and His Church.

## **APOSTOLATE FOR THE WORKERS: LA CLOCHE**

One of the problems of the Church in France was the separation or estrangement between the clergy and some of the people. This seems to have been at the same time one of the causes and one of the effects of religious indifference in France. In the post-war years, various attempts were made to bridge the gap, the JOC (Catholic Action of Workers) being one, and the Mission of Paris (priest-workers) being another. A comparable Assumptionist attempt was "*La Cloche*," (the name came from the French slang expression meaning "poor" or "run-down," and it referred to the dilapidated quarters in which the pioneers of this apostolate lived).

Fr. Gervais Quenard, always sensitive to the needs of the Church, wrote, "A religious family can survive only if it detaches itself from the passing conditions in which it was born, and adapts itself to new conditions." The Assumptionists realized that in the postwar years it was useless to speak to people about going to church and receiving the sacraments. First of all, some kind of religious spark had to be rekindled. To do this, the clergy had to be present--not hidden in a rectory or monastery, but among the workers, in their milieu. If the people would not go to church, the churchmen must go to the people. Consequently, in 1946 three Assumptionists were authorized by the Provincial Superior of Paris to live in an old apartment house in the Sevres section of Paris. In our post-Vatican II times, this may not seem too unusual, but in 1946 it was practically unheard-of, especially for religious.

The location of the house was ideal for their purpose, very close to the immense Renault automobile plant. The four-story building, occupied largely by working-men's families, had been, half a century prior, the first novitiate of the Little Sisters of the Assumption. In fact, the chapel still stood alongside, but it had been downgraded to a kind of communal storeroom. The Assumptionists lived in two rooms in the basement, one room on the first floor, and two tiny rooms beneath the mansard roof. The original team of Assumptionists consisted of three Catholic Action chaplains: Fr. Michel Cornillie, the team leader, Fr. Paul Charpentier, who was later, in 1969, elected as Superior General of the

Congregation, and Fr. Tharcisius Santu, whose ministry among workers had begun years before, when he had volunteered to be one of the “underground chaplains” of Frenchmen in the forced-labor camps of Hitler’s Germany. Within a year, the team expanded to include Fr. Jean-Francois Mudry and Brother Vianney Le Grandvalet, whose skill at caning chairs helped finance the work of the team.

“*La Cloche*” at first puzzled its neighbors. One day one of them asked a friend, “The priests are really going to live there?” “Why not? Didn’t Christ live like that?” “Yeah, but now priests are rich,” he answered, and he got into the habit of dropping in on the team, apparently checking to see if they really lived as poorly as it seemed.

It soon became apparent that the Assumptionists were indeed living among workers, living like workers, and pleased to have workers drop in for a friendly chat. Everything was informal, a continuous “open house.” That is precisely what was intended.

A friend and I visited “*La Cloche*” during the summer of 1947. We were greeted by smiles, handshakes, and brotherly “hugs.” We were then “ushered” into the kitchen/living room, with its second-hand gas stove, rickety stools that served as easy-chairs, the tiny table about three-feet square, and the pine-board pantry.

At supper-time, an old door was balanced on the small table, to give everyone enough room to eat together, no two pieces of tableware matched; much of it had been borrowed from the upstairs neighbors for the occasion. It seems that the Assumptionists shared everything: pots and pans, cutlery, even food when guests dropped in. The workers and the Assumptionists were not only present to each other, they shared, they really spoke to each other, they listened to each other. The mission soon became a very effective Christian witness because the Assumptionists were living, according to the phrase of one writer, “the acts of the apostles of the XX Century.”

This interesting social apostolate lasted from 1946 until 1964, when the team dispersed for a variety of reasons (one of which was the changing character of the neighborhood). They were sad to leave their mission, but were consoled by the thought that their type of apostolate had meanwhile been undertaken by other Assumptionists, at rue Bourret, an area better suited for such work.

## THE ASSUMPTIONISTS IN ENGLAND

In England, the Assumptionists worked mainly in Parishes and in secondary schools, and surely one of the outstanding English Assumptionists was Andrew Beck. He studied at St. Michael's College, in Hitchin, where, after his ordination, he taught for fourteen years. He was greatly appreciated, by peers and students alike, as a fine teacher of mathematics and history and as an enthusiastic director of athletics. In 1941, he was named director of the school. Three years later he became director of the Becket School, in Nottingham, which he completely reorganized to satisfy the requirements of the "Education Act" of 1944. He was soon recognized as an educational specialist and became the liaison man between the Catholic hierarchy in England and the government authorities. According to Cardinal Griffin, this was a major factor in his being named co-adjutor bishop of Brentwood in 1948; the English hierarchy needed such a specialist among its ranks. From 1949 until 1970 he served as President of the Bishops' Council for Catholic Education, of which Fr. d'Alzon would have been very proud.

When he succeeded to the see as ordinary, in 1951, he built churches, established Parishes, and created schools in the developing urban center. In 1955, the Holy See transferred him to the diocese of Salford, which had a Catholic population triple that of Brentwood; during his nine years at Salford he founded fourteen Parishes. On January 29, 1961, he succeeded Cardinal Heenan as archbishop of Liverpool, the largest diocese in England. After Vatican II, Archbishop Beck was the first in England to implement the decisions of the Council: he was the first to establish a diocesan Pastoral Council, and the first to establish a Press and Information Office. Son of a newspaper man, he had always been interested in the press. Ecumenically minded, as are most Assumptionists, he was the first archbishop of Liverpool to preach in the Anglican cathedral, as archbishop, he started 22 new parishes and 71 schools.

In a 1970 interview, Archbishop Beck had this to say:

I know very well that in certain circles there is debate concerning Catholic schools, as they exist in England. Some say that they should

be closed; they are enormously costly (that's true), that the Christian education which they provide does not form better Christians than elsewhere.

The arguments do not hold water if one really knows the special history of the Catholic church here. The Catholic school remains, and will remain for a long time, the backbone of the church. By progressively abandoning their schools, the Anglicans showed us what we should not do.

At the present time, 67% of the Catholic children aged 6 to 16 (90% in Liverpool) are in Catholic primary or secondary schools. That's 851,000 children in more than 3,000 schools.

Whereas in the past Catholic schools were financed completely by the Catholic community, various agreements with the Government have reduced this contribution to 20%, the other 80% being a government subsidy.

The immense effort which we impose upon ourselves... may seem exaggerated, but it allows us to form generations of Christians who will undoubtedly see the problems in a different way, but with a solid faith that will be more necessary than ever.

In October, 1975, for reasons of health, he resigned as Archbishop of Liverpool. At his funeral in 1978, there were 18 bishops, 300 priests, and thousands of faithful who wanted to show their gratitude for his tireless labors.

At his Silver Jubilee as bishop, in 1973, Cardinal Heenan had said of him:

Everyone knows what he accomplished during a quarter of a century, thanks to his patient negotiations. Constant travels, countless meetings, frequent interviews with government ministers and local authorities have resulted in an educational system that is the envy of English-speaking Catholics throughout the world. Probably his most extraordinary achievement was his unflinching support of the right of Catholic parents to give their children a Christian education..."

Bishop George Patrick Dwyer said of him:

He will remain in history as one of the greatest bishops of England because of all he did for Catholic schools. During more than 30 years

he represented the hierarchy to the government, exhibiting extraordinary patience, tenacity, and understanding. He was respected by all officials, regardless of party... Generations to come will owe him their Catholic education.

His successor at Liverpool, Archbishop Worlock said of him:

The Catholic Church in England was emerging from the catacomb mentality. By his lively intelligence and his vibrant personality, the young religious who was Father Beck helped us all to answer the challenge of the time.

Assumptionists staff Parishes in Brockley, Charlton, Hitchin, and at Bethnal Green, in London's East End.

## **ASSUMPTIONISTS IN NEW ZEALAND**

Assumptionist ministry in New Zealand began in 1952, when three priests from the Dutch province arrived, with the purpose of helping Dutch immigrants adapt to social and religious conditions in a new land. Additional priests arrived from Holland, but, as the number of immigrants dwindled, they soon found themselves occupied only part-time. Many began to follow University courses in preparation for opening a high school.

On June 15, 1969, Viard College (High School) in Porirua, about ten miles outside Wellington, opened its doors. It had a girls' school staffed by Nuns of St. Brigid, and a boys' school staffed by Assumptionists. In ten years time, the enrollment had grown to 700 pupils.

Besides the school, the Assumptionists staff two Parishes: at Inglewood and at Otahuhu-Auckland. In 1978, the first Assumptionist New Zealander, Paul O'Connor, was ordained to the priesthood.

## **APOSTOLATE AMONG CHILDREN : FR. LUIS MADINA**

Most Americans know about Father Flanagan's Boys' Town, but most people don't know that a Spanish Assumptionist, Fr. Luis Madina has started *four* Boys' Towns. He started the first one in Madrid in 1944, a second in Costa Rica in 1957, a third in Panama, and a fourth in Columbia, in 1968, and all are very much alive. To Fr. Madina, a Boys' Town is neither a jail, an asylum, nor a house of correction. It is essentially a home where children can find a welcome and a family life that allow them to develop their personality. The "Town" is therefore divided up into family units of about ten children entrusted to the care of a couple who adopt them. Some arrive as young as six years old, and they stay until they have finished their high-school or technical studies and are able to lead a life of their own.

Fr. Madina is a Basque who considers himself a bit of an adventurer, a little bit like Don Quixote. But rather than fight imaginary enemies of widows and orphans, he fights very real battles for abandoned children. Abandoned children are a serious problem in Columbia: in Bogota alone there are some 10,000 abandoned children annually. The problem was developing in Cali, and in 1968 Fr. Madina responded to the Archbishop's request to found his fourth "children's City." He set about it with his characteristic energy and humility. It might be interesting to hear a bit about his work, in his own words.

Arriving in Cali in 1968, I set about to meet the "gamines." (In Columbia the French word for street urchins, *Gamins*, is used.) It's easier to do so at night than in the daytime. Under the intrigued gaze of passersby, by the curb, I talked to them. I try to understand them, to get an idea of their conflicts, of their attitude toward life, their hopes, and their hopelessness.

After a few months, I decided to do something for them; a house in the center of town was rented. A committee of women was formed; for their first meeting they brought their own chairs because the house had no furniture, nothing. Little by little tables, beds, chairs arrived. On the first morning the house was open, four urchins arrived;

a few days later there were 25, and that's all the house could hold, for the moment. The most demanding and fundamental work began: giving a soul to this group of children and creating values. For these denizens of the streets, with all that that signifies of instability, anguish, and adventure, we had to replace the equation of "street-child" with the equation "home-child." We had to domesticate them; it was necessary that the home become in a sense the extension of the street... Slowly a change took place in the children: they felt accepted and understood thanks to the atmosphere of security, they started to call me "papi," runaways became fewer, hostility diminished... I didn't need to seek children; they came in by themselves. There were soon 75 in a house that could hold only 25. ...I was given a farm on the outskirts of the city. In no time there were 140 children and we had to build. The definitive city will be able to take care of 600 boarders and 400 externs. Where do they come from? Sometimes they come on their own initiative, pushed by their distress. Sometimes it's the police, or juvenile court, or parents or neighbors who bring them. Every day i have to refuse 5 or 6 children.

The children are very spontaneous, and that strikes all the visitors. For example, when they return from school, they come in and embrace me, even if there are people present. At night, before going to bed... they're at home, secure.

Above all, there must be an atmosphere of trust, or friendship. There has to be a lot of love. But as I look back at the past I have confidence for the future. Today there are many men who lead well-balanced, honest, happy lives thanks to the "children's cities," where they were welcome at a time in their lives as children when they were dramatically left to their own devices.

Fr. Madina concludes: "I am happy that the Assumptionists are engaged in this work of love and redemption."

Mention might be made that in 1955 and 1956, Fr. Madina was temporarily stationed in New York City where he was requested by the archbishop to deliver radio talks for Hispanics. The main portion of the programs was devoted to answering questions sent in by listeners. The talks were printed in the Hispanic journal, *Excelcior* and later published in a book entitled *Luz por Las Ondas*.

## **THE ASSUMPTIONISTS IN NORTH AMERICA**

The first Assumptionist to come to the United States was Father Henri Brun, who came here the long way--through Australia! Already a priest, he had obtained his bishop's permission to teach for a few years at Assumption College in Nîmes, where he was also Prefect of Discipline. After much thought, he decided to join the projected congregation, and was the first to pronounce vows after Fr. d'Alzon, in 1850.

All his life he would show great common sense, thoughtfulness, tranquility, flexibility, and availability. He undertook whatever his superiors asked of him, regardless of the difficulties. Between 1860 and 1862 he studied English in London and Dublin, and this was soon to stand him in good stead. In 1859, bishop Quinn had asked for personnel to help in his new diocese of Brisbane, Australia. Already by 1860 two Assumptionist priests and a brother were in Australia. Fr. Brun left Ireland and arrived in Australia in March, 1863, after what was considered an exceptionally rapid crossing--84 days. During ten years Fr. Brun labored, most of the time in extremely difficult circumstances for a religious. By the terms of their contract, Bishop Quinn could do practically what he wanted with the Assumptionists, and he scattered them to Parishes hundreds of miles apart, never allowing them to form a community. Domineering and distrustful, the bishop never permitted the Assumptionists to work directly with the native population. Fr. Brun's Parish was immense, stretching 125 miles from north to south. To visit his Parishioners, Fr. Brun sometimes spent as many as twenty hours a day on horseback. He constructed ten schools (with almost 600 students) and almost as many chapels. One day, at a ceremony, Bishop Quinn praised Fr. Brun, "Fr. Brun, as a priest, you are a tireless worker. No one surpasses you in your zeal to build churches and in your activity in the sacred ministry. There is one thing I have never seen you do: I have never seen you sitting down for an hour's rest." Despite such kind words, Bp. Quinn refused to allow the Assumptionists to form a community. Reluctantly Fr. Brun left Australia in 1873, and the last Assumptionist departed in 1875, somewhat disappointed but believing

that “we left memories which prepare the way for some other religious congregation, in better times.”

Back in France, Fr. Brun was superior of a couple of alummates. He then humbly accepted to become a simple teacher, in three different houses, seemingly happy to obey men far younger than he. In 1891 the Little Sisters of the Assumption had opened a house in New York City and needed a chaplain. Though he was 72 at the time, Fr. Brun sailed for New York. Despite his desire to live in community, it seemed to be his destiny to live separated from his religious brothers. In New York he was chaplain of the Little Sisters and of the Daughters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, was the confessor of at least four communities of nuns, and helped in the ministry of a number of New York parishes.

Fr. Brun once wrote, “One can get an idea of what we might do in New York only by studying the situation on the spot. But I can assure you that my ministry here is real mission work. Convent chaplaincies would not appeal to me very much, were it not that there is much good to do. It also assures me of food and lodging, and leaves me free time to...prepare the future. We will someday have here a place in the country, where we can build a seminary, have brothers etc. This is not utopian.”

Two weeks after writing the above, Fr. Brun died, on January 15, 1895. This first spiritual son of Fr. d’Alzon had heeded the founder’s words: “Go forth, be undaunted, generous, unselfish...”

In the autumn of 1895, three more Assumptionists landed in the United States: Fathers Fulgence Moris and Amédée Ollier, and Brother Macaire. Within a few years they will be followed by many others, among whom we find Venance Besset, Omer Rochain, Thomas Darbois and Isidore Gayraud, about some of whom we will say more later.

Between 1897 and 1900 a short-lived venture took place, at first called St. Henry Alummate (then St. Augustine Clerical School), which was opened at 109 East 83 St., with two Assumptionists as its entire staff. The curriculum included courses in Spanish, Italian, and German, because the school planned to prepare priests for the apostolate with the immigrants. From the very beginning, the venture was shaky: the archbishop never gave his written approval and even notified the Assumptionists that the alummate would have to close whenever the archdiocese obtained its own minor seminary. The secular clergy was

cool to the foundation, recruiting was extremely difficult, and the financial problems became so great that the school was forced to close in 1900.

In the late 19th century, the situation of the blacks in the Southern States was still tragic: they were exploited by unscrupulous preachers, and neglected by the sometimes overworked Catholic priests, who discouraged any effort to give special help to the blacks. One priest of the diocese of New Orleans, Fr. Renaudier, was an exception. At Klotzville, on the outskirts of his Parish at Paincourtville, he had built a small school and chapel exclusively for the blacks (who still could if they so wished worship at the main church).

Fr. Renaudier encouraged community singing, imitated the preaching style of the Baptists, personally attended wakes etc. All this extra work necessitated help, which his diocesan confrères refused to give. Fr. Renaudier was authorized by Archbishop Janssens to seek aid from the Assumptionists.

This is the background of the temporary mission of the Assumptionists in Louisiana, which lasted from 1893 to 1900. Briefly stated, the venture was a near-disaster, for many reasons: 1) insistence by Archbishop Janssens and by his successor, Archbishop Chapelle, that the Assumptionists confine their ministry to the French-speaking blacks of Klotzville (really a Jim Crow mission), 2) character problems among the Assumptionists (Fr. Marcellin Guyot, the first superior was very authoritarian; Fr. Ildephonse Causse, was too young, timid, and indecisive), 3) stubbornness and procrastination on the part of the Assumptionist Superior General, when urgent decisions had to be made to enable the religious to take advantage of local happenings, 4) the deaths of Fr. Renaudier and of Archbishop Janssens (the very next day after authorizing the Assumptionists to purchase land for a parish in New Orleans itself), 5) the inability to develop this land, at 1819 Esplanade Street, into a parish for English-speaking blacks, because of ever-increasing opposition of the local clergy ("We don't want religious, that's all," said Msgr. Rommel, administrator of the diocese), 6) the sad financial situation of the Assumptionists. For all these reasons, the Assumptionists' "Mission to the American blacks" ended in 1900.

In September, 1897, Fr. Venance Besset became French tutor for the son of the editor-in-chief of the *New York Tribune*, and wrote to the Archbishop suggesting that the Assumptionists might usefully be

employed in ministering to the Italians and the Hispanics in New York City. The Archbishop thought well of the idea and authorized the Assumptionists to establish a church in the Spanish region of the city, just north of Greenwich Village. As we saw earlier, between 1897-1900 the Assumptionists were attempting to start an aluminate, but when this proved unsuccessful they returned to their idea of ministering to the Hispanics. In 1901, there were six Assumptionists in New York, with Fr. Thomas Darbois as superior.

Fr. Venance Besset had found what he considered to be a suitable house, well situated for their purpose, at 229 West 14 Street. Fr. Darbois purchased the house from Miss Delmonico in January, 1902, and this property was to become the location of the Parish church of our Lady of Guadalupe. In 1906, Archbishop Farley inquired whether the Assumptionists would consider building and staffing another church, as part of a Spanish cultural complex between 156 Street and Broadway, that was being planned by Mr. Archer Huntington, they accepted, and on July 21, 1912 the church of Our Lady of Esperanza was opened to the public, both New York parishes are still staffed by the Assumptionists.

As the number of Assumptionists in New York City increased, they began seeking additional ministry. In 1902, an interesting proposal was made to Fr. Darbois by Rev. Charles Crevier, pastor of Precious Blood Parish in Holyoke. Fr. Crevier owned a 500 acre farm in Granby, Mass., and offered to give the farm, the livestock, and all the equipment to the Assumptionists for an aluminate and agricultural school (French-speaking). At first, Bishop Beaven of Springfield was not greatly in favor of such a school and tried to impose upon the Fathers a number of conditions. Eventually he insisted only that the Assumptionists contract no indebtedness for the school, without the written authorization of the ordinary. In May 1903, three priests and three brothers left New York with Fr. Darbois, bound for Granby. When they arrived they discovered that there can be a great difference between promise and reality: the living quarters were inadequate, the farm itself was in poor condition, the animals were old and lame. Moreover, Fr. Crevier became difficult and refused to cede the property as he had promised. It soon became evident that what he had been seeking was someone to cultivate his miserable farm, He tried to add all kinds of obligations upon the Assumptionists. In July, 1903, they decided that they would not "take it" any more and they left Granby. They hoped however to be able to continue to work somewhere in the area, and many found work

preaching missions or helping as temporary curates in many of the Franco-American parishes in New England and upper New York state.

During the summer of 1903, Fr. Thomas Darbois submitted a request that the Assumptionists be allowed to open a residence for missionaries in Worcester and start an aluminate and trade school. He was told that written permission from the bishop was unnecessary. The Holy See had approved the Assumptionists' coming into the diocese and they were free to make arrangements for a settlement in Worcester, with the bishop adding that he himself would notify Rome of the change from Granby to Worcester.

Fr. Darbois soon purchased a house at 27 Fales St., in the Greendale section of Worcester, on November 5, 1903. The original community comprised: Fathers Georges Demiautte, Marie-Joseph Laity, Isidore Gayraud, Marie-Emile Ladret, Antoine Silberman and Brothers Felipe Uceda, François Bourtembourg, and Jean Despas. One of the first apostolates that the Assumptionists undertook in Worcester was the chaplaincy of the Notre Dame Institute (The Lake) of the Sisters of Notre-Dame de Namur. They began on December 10, 1903 a ministry that has continued to the present day. At first Fr. Darbois was the common superior of both the 14th St. community in New York and the Worcester community. That meant an inordinate amount of commuting, and therefore in April 1904 Fr. Isidore Gayraud began what was to be a one-year term as superior, during which time he purchased a second house on Fales St. and connected it to the first by a 50 foot passageway.

In the fall of 1904, a school known as the Apostolic School of Our Lady of Consolation opened its doors to its first pupils: all seven of them. The academic year 1905-6 started with 15 pupils and ended with 18. By the fall of 1906, the enrollment was 30. Meanwhile a new plot of land had been acquired along Baltimore Avenue (later Assumption Avenue), construction was begun, and by January 1907 priests, brothers and students were moving into their new quarters. Among the new Assumptionists we now find Fathers Marie-Jean Toujas, Donat Cordier, Lazare Chabant, Hydulphe Mathiot, with Tranquille Pesse as superior.

It is difficult to determine precisely when the school ceased to consider itself an aluminate and became a college. The generally accepted date is 1907, when the move was made from Fales St. to the campus alongside

Baltimore Avenue. In any case, the name Assumption College became official when, on February 6, 1917, the Assumptionists obtained a Charter of Incorporation authorizing them to grant the Bachelor of Arts degree.

The “brick and mortar” expansion of Assumption College and High School was necessitated by the constantly increasing student body. To the original 1907 structure were added other portions in 1912 and 1922. On March 24, 1923 the central section, with its tall tower, caught fire. Although there were no casualties, damage was extensive. Reconstruction began immediately. The building was again enlarged in 1926 and 1946 and became an impressive landmark, amid its beautiful campus.

The 1930's and 1940's were decades of expansion and consolidation. Still board, room, and tuition fees were kept at \$350, to enable lads from working-class families to acquire a quality education. The low fees were made possible by the “contributed services” of the Assumptionists and by their outside ministry. At that time the staff was preponderantly composed of religious. In the late 1940's there were 41 Assumptionist priests and 15 brothers working at the school (excluding 9 student brothers). They received no salary for their teaching or other services, and returned to the coffers of the school all funds beyond their board, room, and small personal expenses. moreover, in addition to their teaching assignments, the priests helped balance the budget by their ministry in local Parishes and in other Parishes as far away as Manchester, N.H., Woonsocket, R.I., and Hartford, Conn., to name only a few. Every Saturday noon most of them left the campus with their little black bags, on their way to hear confessions and to celebrate Sunday masses.

In 1950, Assumption College was granted full accreditation and a broader charter authorizing it to grant masters' and doctors' degrees. Plans were being drawn to allow the separation of high school and college facilities, because the students were beginning to feel squeezed in the existing building, despite its huge size. Tragic events caused these plans to be altered.

One of the major events in the history of Assumption College was a devastating tornado on June 9, 1953, which killed Fr. Engelbert Devincq and two of the Antonian sisters, who were on the kitchen staff. Damage was extensive, and most of the facilities of the college section, as

distinct from those of the high school, were completely destroyed. The Assumptionists decided to rebuild only the preparatory school in Greendale and to move the college section to a new campus, at 500 Salisbury Street.

In 1970, because of the changing demands for high-school level boarding schools, Assumption Prep. was forced to close its doors. Assumption College continues to thrive. In 1968 it changed its governmental structure to a Board of Trustees composed of Assumptionists and laymen. In 1969 it became co-educational. For many years it has offered night courses and graduate courses and is very proud of its ecumenical institute for religious Studies.

The lean, energetic figure of Father Wilfrid Dufault is often seen scurrying around the campus of Assumption College, yet many of those who see him know very little about his long and distinguished career as an Assumptionist. He graduated from Assumption College, and after his ordination in Rome in 1934, he returned to the College as professor of philosophy. He received a Ph.D. from Laval University in Quebec. He then served as master of scholastics (seminarians) when Assumptionist brothers studied philosophy at the college. In July, 1946 he was named the first non-French superior of the Assumptionist community in Worcester, and thus became the first Franco-American President of Assumption College. He served only months in that capacity however, because he soon received a letter from the Assumptionist Superior General, Fr. Gervais Quenard, dated December 24, 1946, naming him the first Provincial Superior of the newly erected province of North America. The province included Assumption College and High School, two New York Parishes for Hispanics, a novitiate and shrine of the Sacred Heart in Bergerville (Quebec), and the Moscow mission. Very soon a novitiate for Americans was opened in Hyattsville, Md. (It was later transferred to Saugerties, N.Y., then to Dedham, MA., and is now in Brookline, MA.).

During Fr. Dufault's term as Provincial, the Assumptionists took root in Mexico, where the parish of our Lady of Guadalupe "Empress of the Americas" was given to them. In Canada, they took over the shrine of the Sacred Heart at Beauvoir, in the diocese of Sherbrooke. Then on May 26, 1952, the Assumptionist General Chapter in Rome elected Fr. Dufault as the fifth Superior General of the Congregation. During his

term as General he was saddened by the imprisonment of a number of Assumptionists in Bulgaria and Rumania (some for 20 years) and the condemnation to death of three priests in Bulgaria. His deep veneration for Fr. d'Alzon caused him to encourage the publication of *Les Ecrits Spirituels* (Spiritual Writings) of Fr. d'Alzon, a collection of most of the most important documents of the founder on spirituality. During Fr. Dufault's term, provinces were erected in Chile and Argentina and additional missions were accepted in Madagascar and the Ivory Coast. During his generalate, he visited practically every house of the congregation.

In preparation for Vatican II, he was named to the Commission of Bishops and Government of Dioceses, and he served as one of the council fathers, with all the rights and privileges of a bishop. He advanced the General Chapter of 1970 to 1969, in order to facilitate drafting of new constitutions before the deadline set by the Holy See for all congregations and orders. At the Chapter, he resigned his position and was succeeded as Superior General by Fr. Paul Charpentier.

Fr. Dufault returned to Worcester where he humbly took up where he had left off, but as professor of Italian. He twice served as Acting President of the College. In 1979, he became Chancellor of the College, and remains very active in the affairs of the College, especially in the establishment of a Franco-American Institute there.

The alumni of Assumption College have long had a fond place in their hearts for another Assumptionist, Brother Armand Goffart, the brother of Fr. Zénobe, whom we met when we spoke about Chile. Brother Armand arrived from his native Belgium in September, 1909. He devoted many long years to Assumption College and high school (as it was then known). In fact, though not in title, he was the Director of Food Services, and purchased and supervised the preparation of all the meals for students and staff. He lovingly prepared the annual alumni banquets that are still fondly remembered. He was Supervisor of Buildings and Grounds of the Green-dale campus, and he kept everything in perfect order. Every summer he supervised the general house-cleaning from attic to basement, and caused everything to gleam

with polish and paint. In his spare time, he ran the campus candy store, always one of the busiest spots on campus. If, as a religious, you sought a little something to ward off the chill of the Greendale Hills, it was Brother Armand who would provide it, for he was also Grand

Cellarer. For many years he was the school infirmarian. He was also the one many of the community turned to when errands had to be run: a pair of shoes needing repairs, the purchase of some socks or shirts, or watch repairs. Everyone, often, called upon him and he always responded with a smile and a wise-crack. In fact his twinkling eyes, easy smile, and ready wit seemed to be his trademark. They remained so, until his death in 1980. Ever popular with the alumni, he still deserved the nickname conferred upon him by students years ago, "sugar."

The devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus was widely spread throughout much of the USA and Canada, largely by the efforts of the tireless Fr. Marie-Clément Staub. Born in Alsace, then a part of Germany, in 1876, he entered the aluminate of Mauville, near Arras, in 1890. In 1896, he received the Assumptionist habit from Fr. Vincent de Paul Bailly, founder of *La Croix*. His studies in Rome obtained for him a doctorate in philosophy and another in theology, prior to his ordination in 1904. His first assignment was as sub-prior of the Assumptionist novitiate in Louvain. Shortly after, when a special novitiate for lay-brothers was started, he was named its first novice master, in 1906. Significantly he requested that the novitiate be placed under the patronage of the Sacred Heart.

Fr. Marie-Clément's devotion to the Sacred Heart was partly an Assumptionist tradition. Already in 1835, while still studying theology in Rome, Fr. d'Alzon had enrolled in the Confraternity of the Sacred Heart. When *La Croix* was being launched as a daily paper, the feast of the Sacred Heart was chosen for its first edition. In 1889, the Superior General had consecrated the Congregation and its apostolate to the Sacred Heart, in the vast basilica of the Sacred Heart at Montmartre. In 1899, *La Croix* had organized a nation-wide fund-raising campaign to pay for the expenses of raising the immense dome over the same basilica of the Sacred Heart. Fr. Marie-Clément is exceptional however, because most of his life was spent spreading the devotion to the Sacred Heart. Sent to England in 1908 to establish an aluminate there, he preached the devotion to the Sacred Heart while he was awaiting the necessary ecclesiastical permissions to start the aluminate.

In 1909, Fr. Stephen Chaboud, who was the common superior of the Assumptionists in North America, made a special request to the superior general to send Fr. Marie-Clément to America. At first Fr. Marie-Clément was somewhat reluctant to change what he was doing, but in December, 1909 he arrived in New York. He soon began what

would be a life-time apostolate of establishing the archconfraternity of prayer and penance (in honor of the Sacred Heart) in parishes and homes throughout New England and much of Canada. He accomplished this despite chronic throat trouble that prevented him from preaching as much as he might have desired. Fr. Marie-Clément was assigned to Assumption College in Worcester. It was in Worcester, at the Orphanage of the Grey Nuns, that he first preached the archconfraternity in the United States. The entire congregation of the Grey Nuns enrolled, and they were soon followed by the Sisters of St. Anne and the Sisters of Notre-Dame de Namur, who involved all their houses in the USA, thus spreading the devotion widely.

The membership of the Archconfraternity soon became so large that it was burdensome to keep corresponding with its international center at Montmartre in Paris. Fr. Marie-Clément therefore obtained authorization to set up national centers, at the Assumptionist Parish of our Lady of Esperanza in New York City and at the Shrine of the Sacred Heart in Bergerville, Quebec. By 1914, as a result of Fr. Marie-Clément's constant preaching in the United States and Canada, 32 religious congregations and countless homes were enrolled in the archconfraternity.

Fr. Marie-Clement's preaching brought him into numerous rectories where he noted the difficulty that Parish priests had in obtaining competent and discreet housekeepers and cooks. While preaching a Lenten series in St. Joseph's Parish in Fitchburg, MA., he concluded that a solution to the priests' problem might be a congregation of nuns whose specific apostolate would be as housekeepers and cooks in rectories and seminaries. He gathered three young women who seemed to have such a vocation, and they recruited other girls. Thus in the chapel of Assumption College in Worcester, in December, 1914, began the congregation of the Sisters of Joan of Arc. To his preaching apostolate, Fr. Marie-Clement thus added the burden of guiding and directing a fledgling religious congregation. Somehow he managed, with energy, dedication and zeal until his death in 1936. By then, by 1917 in fact, the Mother House of the Sisters of Joan of Arc had been transferred to Sillery (Bergerville,) Quebec.

## POPE JOHN XXIII AND THE ASSUMPTIONISTS

The future John XXIII's relations with the Assumptionists were long and close, beginning when Archbishop Roncalli was named Apostolic Visitor in Bulgaria in 1925. He frequently visited the college at Plovdiv, and a Bulgarian Assumptionist, Fr. Methode Oustichkof taught him French and Bulgarian.

The first bishop ordained by Archbishop Roncalli, in 1937, was an Assumptionist, Bishop Gregoire Voutsinos.

When he became Nuncio in Paris, Archbishop Roncalli for a short time had as his secretary Fr. Remi Kokel, in 1945. Fr. Remi was followed by Fr. Vincent Delouf, who served as the Nuncio's secretary during eight years. In 1959, Fr. Vincent had an audience with the Pontiff and was moved to tears by old memories. The pope, noting the tears, joked, "Now, now, no more tears. You don't see me crying, do you?"

While he was Patriarch of Venice, he received *La Croix* after an interruption in the delivery of the paper, and he wrote to the editor, "I am a friend of *La Croix* and of the Assumptionists since my youth, and I lived with the Fathers of your Congregation as well in Rome as in Bulgaria, Turkey, and in France. You will therefore understand how the return of this paper has been dear to me." He humorously disapproved of its large format however. "When I open it, I seem to be papering my room."

I have mentioned earlier how much he appreciated the scholarly works of the Assumptionists, that he had found immensely useful to him.

Msgr. Capovilla, John XXIII's private secretary, said that he read to the Pope the article in *La Croix* about his reception of the Balzan Prize for the encyclical *Pacem in Terris*, during the Pope's long last agony. John XXIII expressed his gratitude to *La Croix* which had accompanied him all his life as priest, as bishop, and as Supreme Pontiff.

## COMPLETING THE PICTURE

The preceding pages have presented some of the *tesserae* of the Assumptionist mosaic. Some are sad, even tragic. Some are humble and ordinary. Some are noble and heroic. All are inspired by the Gospel message of God's Love and by Father d'Alzon's vision of a struggle for the Kingdom of God. All Assumptionists have lived and served with the knowledge that the kingdom must be constantly extended and protected. They need helpers and successors. The work far exceeds the number of workers. There is always room for new Assumptionists, who will find in the congregation a means of personal sanctification and a means of apostolate which allows ample room for anyone's originality, initiative, and zeal. The beautiful mosaic panel started by Fr. d'Alzon already has many fine parts. but it is far from completed.