

A News of the Assumption



EDITORIAL

I love the Assumption!

“At a time when we are experiencing a profound crisis in the world and in the Church, it seems to me more necessary than ever that we take up the challenge to be prophets. Religious life pushes us to announce the Beatitudes.”

Agenda

Ordinary General Council

- n° 42 : April 17-24, 2023

34e General Chapter

- June 1-25, 2023 in Rome (Passionist Retreat House).

Fr. Benoît

- April 26-May 6: Brazil.

Fr. Marcelo

- April 26-May 6: Brazil.

Br. Didier

- March 30-April 2: London.
- May 10-21: Paris.

Fr. Thierry

- April 26-30: Creteil (Orantes).

Fr. Miguel

- (in Rome)

On the cover

Since 2006, the Assumption had been running an orphanage in Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon). As a larger facility was needed, a building was acquired and renovated, adapted to the needs of the children. The new Hoa Hue orphanage is close to the schools where the children are enrolled and to a well-developed public park. Christine and Christian Lamolinerie, whose testimony can be read on page 15, worked there as volunteers.

Our esteemed senior priests, our youngest brothers.



Last March 1, the community of Notre Dame des Vignes celebrated its senior priest, who is also the eldest in our congregation (see picture below). Fr. Roland Imhoff celebrated his 105th birthday that day, becoming the oldest Assumptionist of all time! We extend our wishes for health and longevity to our stalwart brother!

Fr. Roland's age might be attained by other brothers in the future, as many have reached the century mark or are nearing it. The following religious are among the eldest in the congregation. They are mentioned with their provinces and nationalities:

- Fr. Roland IMHOFF (French, Europe): 105
- Fr. Léopold LAFORGE (Belgian, Europe): 99
- Fr. Alexis ROC'H (French, Europe): 97
- Fr. Libert LOWET (Belgian, Europe) : 97
- Fr. Roland GUILMAIN (US, North America): 96
- Fr. Marcel GUIVARC'H (French, Brazil): 96

Since we are looking at the pinnacle of the pyramid, we should also look at its base according to ages. The youngest Assumptionists, at the time of this publication, include the following:

- Br. KASEREKA SIVIRWA Ruphin (DRC, Africa) : 22
- Br. KASEREKA MASHAURI Tuzinde (DRC, Africa) : 22
- Br. MUHINDO KATHUMWA Justin (DRC, Africa) : 22
- Br. KAKULE MANOPE Gabriel (DRC, Africa) : 22
- Br. RANDRIANATOANDRO Sitraka (Madagascar) : 22
- Br. Joseph Miselya YOHANA (Tanzanian, East Africa): 23

The conclusion of this listing is not a surprise: from a purely demographic perspective, the Assumption has its past rooted in the North, but its future is in the South of the planet.

P. Michel KUBLER
(Rome)

I love the Assumption!



Fr. Benoît Grière
Superior General
of the
Augustinians of
the Assumption

After 12 years in Rome as the head of our religious family, I would like to give thanks for all that I have been able to learn and discover. Our congregation is, as our beloved founder Fr. Emmanuel d'Alzon liked to say, a small family. Even if today we are approaching the number of 1,000 religious, we will remain modest and humble. We know that we are not the best. Hervé Stéphan reminded us of the principle of reality, in a beautiful and forgotten text where he said that as children, we thought that our father was the strongest, until the day we discovered that he was fragile like everyone else. We can dream of a strong, great and beautiful Assumption, but we are only workers sent to the vineyard by the Lord. It is he, and he alone, who makes the harvest grow and give it. It is humility that must lead us in all our actions, whatever the responsibility that falls to us. Our strength lies in God alone, and it is the passion we have for his Kingdom inaugurated by Jesus that animates us.

The office of Superior General has brought me into contact with most of the brothers in the world. I am grateful to each religious for having been able to share with me their love for Christ and for the Church during our meetings. I was able to see how each one was committed to making the Kingdom of God known. I was able to see the concrete solidarity with the little ones and the weak in our societies. I had to live the loss of our three kidnapped brothers, Edmond, Jean-Pierre and Anselme, and that of Vincent Machozi, savagely murdered on Palm Sunday. I have associated myself with the permanent bruising inflicted on the people of North Kivu. I have also known the joy of welcoming new brothers, but the sadness of seeing some of them leave. Fidelity remains a challenge that we all have to face. The Lay-Religious Alliance is also a living force, with which we live a close partnership. We will continue the journey together.

The Assumption allowed me to go further in my knowledge of the Church. Living in Rome, the city of the Pope, is a privilege that has allowed me to work under the pontificates of the late Benedict XVI and Francis. Both have a different style, but the same passion for Christ animates them. I had the good fortune to meet Benedict and then Francis. I was marked by the spiritual depth and gentleness of the Bavarian Pope and his astonishing memory. With Francis, it was his simplicity and determination that struck me. Francis is a man of decision and determination. He is ready to change the Church to be more faithful to the Gospel. At a time when we are experiencing a profound crisis in the world and in the Church, it seems to me more necessary than ever that we take up the challenge to be prophets. Religious life pushes us to announce the Beatitudes in season and out of season. We cannot become dull, and the prophets of doom of every stripe do not have to darken the horizon. God does not abandon us. Yes, I love the Assumption in spite of its limitations, its weaknesses. I am sure that each brother has a surprising potential thanks to the strength of the Holy Spirit.

As I hand over to my successor - who will be a gift of the Lord to the congregation - I pray that we will all be mobilized for the mission. If I have hurt anyone in my ministry, I ask forgiveness. If I have been able to do good, I thank God. As I conclude, I will quote Emmanuel d'Alzon: "An Assumptionist must be dissatisfied with himself until he has done a hundred times more than he can... And his rest then consists in doing a thousand times more." (*Spiritual Writings*, p. 182) Yes, there is still much to do. I am aware that my work has been limited, but I am confident that God will give my successor and his team renewed energy to go further and do better.

Fr. Benoît Grière,
General Superior

Callings, nominations, agreements...

Fr. Benoît Grière, Superior General, with the consent of his Council, has admitted:

■ TO PERPETUAL PROFESSION

1) Vicent MUTEGEKI

(East Africa) (02/06/2023)

2) KALINDA Bertin

(East Africa) (02/06/2023)

3) Romaric ABLOUKA

(East Africa) (02/06/2023)

4) Julius JAGEN

(East Africa) (02/07/2023)

5) Francis Émile RAZAFIMANDIMBY

(East Africa) (02/07/2023)

6) MUHINDO MUHASA Angélu

(East Africa) (02/07/2023)

7) Evans MACHUMA ELKANAH

(East Africa) (02/08/2023)

8) Matías Antonio ROMERO

(Andean Province) (02/08/2023)



OPENINGS AND CLOSINGS OF HOUSES

Fr. Benoît Grière, Superior General, with the consent of his Plenary General Council, has given his approval for:

a – **the closing of the house in Cachan**

(France, European Province) ;

b – **the opening of a house of welcome**

for youth in Vincennes (France, European Province)

DEPARTURE DUE TO INCARDINATION

The Holy See has granted an indult to leave the community to **Fr. Manuel Alejandro GODOY VASQUEZ** (Andean Province), due to an incardination “ad experimentum” in the diocese of Villarica (Chile), January 10, 2023.



The General Chapter in audience

It will be a highlight of the 34th General Chapter of our Congregation: on Thursday, June 22, its participants will be received in audience by Pope Francis, in the impressive setting of the Vatican’s Apostolic Palace. This will not be a first, but it remains an exceptional event: when the Chapter is held in Rome, it sometimes has the privilege of a meeting with the Pope, either in a public audience in St. Peter’s Square (as was the case in 1992), or in a private audience as will be the case this time. In addition to the emotion of gathering around the Bishop of Rome, it will also be an opportunity to receive a word that opens the Assumption to the calls of the universal Church. Cf. photo above: in 1952, the audience of the General Chapter with Pius XII, surrounded by Fr. Wilfrid Dufault, the new Superior General, and his predecessor, Fr. Gervais Quenard.

Expectations and questions within the Congregation

The Preparatory Commission for the General Chapter (CPC) has concluded its work by synthesizing the responses received from the communities to the questionnaires it had sent to them. Fr. Thierry Kahongya, head of the Commission, presents the salient points.

Since January 2022, our Congregation has been engaged on the Chapter journey, around the theme: “*The Kingdom of God is at hand*” (Mk 1:15). *Living and proclaiming the hope of the Gospel*”. In the letter of indictment of the 34th General Chapter, the Superior General reminds us that this chapter process is part of the current dynamic of the Church, a time of grace marked by the commitment of the entire People of God to the synodal journey in preparation for the Synod on synodality.

The next General Chapter, like all the others, is therefore a time when the Congregation will apply itself to the synodal discernment of the vocation and mission of our little family within the Church and in our world, for the greater vitality of the vocation and mission of the Assumption during the six years to come.

Signs, graces and calls

The work of community reflection that we have undertaken has made us discover signs linked to our time. In fact, in recent years, humanity has been experiencing crisis situations that certainly have an impact on our life of faith and our mission. These are mainly health, secu-

rity, social, environmental, transmission and abuse crises within the Church. We are also witnessing the rise of populism and nationalism with a certain amount of racism and religious intolerance as well as expressions of violence that are resurfacing in many parts of the world.

We have also been challenged by the search for meaning and spirituality that characterizes the men and women of our time and questions the quality of our pastoral proposal.

These experiences of our human fragility do not lead us to resignation. On the contrary, they are signs that motivate us to be open to the future, counting on the resources and graces that God gives us in the Assumption: first, the promise of the coming Kingdom, then our Augustinian and Alzonian patrimony; vocations, the Lay-Religious Alliance, the fraternity lived in communities that are now international and intercultural; a fruitful mission in parishes, sectors of openness and dialogue, works of education and the press, homes, migrants and displaced persons, ...

These signs and graces of God are also calls for our religious family, always in alliance with the laity, to take care of our

communities, of our Christian and religious life through prayer, fraternal life within the incarnated communities and the authentic living of the evangelical counsels. They invite us to pay more attention to the signs of the times so that our mission can truly respond to the aspirations of the men and women of our time and engage them in the dynamic of the hope of the Gospel.

Questions and issues

We note that in recent decades, the Congregation’s membership is becoming more concentrated in Africa-Madagascar and in Asia. This is a major issue for the Chapter’s reflection. It is a question of understanding the implications in all dimensions of our life and mission as a body. What system of governance can we imagine, in this context, in order to consolidate the impetus undertaken in recent times with regard to the awareness of belonging to a living body in solidarity? What mechanisms should be put in place to prepare future leaders capable of assuming the responsibilities of governing and animating the Congregation in this changing situation?

There are also questions regarding the formation and accompaniment of young brothers to prepare them for the mission ▶



The Preparatory Commission for the 34th General Chapter: (from left to right) PP. Th. Kambale Kahongya (in charge), D. Greiner, R. Kasereka Syayipuma, J. Chi Ai Nguyen, J. Gomez da Silva and J.-P. Sagadou.

(formation of missionary disciples). It is also important to think about the material means to ensure the survival of the brothers and the development of the mission, given the limited resources available.

This last observation generates four areas of interest that could probably be rebounded upon in the exchanges in chapter:

1) *The quest for our Assumptionist identity*

It remains important to remember our Alzonian and Augustinian sources. The reflections coming from the communities mention a pressing need to reappropriate our history, our spirituality and our charism. It is therefore a question of finding simple and sustainable ways that can help us to quickly rediscover our spiritual sources. It is also appropriate to ask ourselves what our spirituality can contrib-

ute in response to the challenges and calls of our time.

2) *Understanding the missionary dimension of our charism*

Always feeling the call to be missionary disciples, what meaning do we give to the missionary vocation of the Assumption and of each one of us? How does this engage us in this “Church on the move” which is always synodal, as Pope Francis reminds us?

3) *Questions of governance and community organization*

In the context of governance and community organization, questions arise about the adequacy of our present structures and means to the need for the fulfillment of the Assumptionist vocation of religious and laity and to our commitment to the mission of the Church: structures at the service of the mission, and not the other way around.

4) *Strengthening the lay-religious alliance*

The Chapter will also be able to focus its attention on the evolution of the Lay-Religious Alliance, as well as on the progress and new steps to be taken in the sharing of charism, life and mission between religious and laity within the Lay-Religious Alliance.

These elements remain indicative, and await to be enriched by the reflections and suggestions of the brothers and sisters which can be entrusted to the capitulants or addressed directly as vows to the Chapter.

P. Thierry KAMBALE KAHONGYA
(Rome)

List of Participants

The 34th General Chapter, that will be held in Rome (at the Passionist Fathers) from June 1-25, will consist of 66 participants. Below is the configuration of groups:

A - CAPITULANTS (43)

OFFICIAL MEMBERS (14) :

Fr. Benoît GRIÈRE, Superior General
 Fr. Marcelo MARCIEL, Vicar General
 Br. Didier REMIOT, Assistant and General Treasurer
 Fr. Thierry KAMBALE KAHONGYA, Assistant General
 Fr. José Miguel DÍAZ AYLLÓN, Assistant General
 Fr. Yves NZUVA KAGHOMA, Provincial of Africa
 Fr. Dennis GALLAGHER, Provincial of North America
 Fr. Juan Carlos MARZOLLA LAIUS, Superior of the Andean Province
 Fr. Luiz Gonzaga DA SILVA, Provincial of Brazil
 Fr. Benoît BIGARD, Provincial of Europe
 Fr. Lucien Telolahy RAZAFIMANANTSOA, Provincial of Madagascar
 Fr. Henri KIZITO VYAMBWERA, Vice-Provincial of East Africa
 Fr. Richard LAMOUREUX, Former Superior General
 Fr. Michel KUBLER, Secretary General and Procurator

ELECTED MEMBERS (29) :

Africa (8)

Fr. KASERKA MUSANDE Salvator
 Fr. KASERKA KIBANDA Wilfrid
 Fr. KASERKA SYAYIPUMA Roger
 Fr. TSHIAMALA KATALAYI François
 Fr. MUSANGANIA KOMBI Jean-Paul
 Fr. KASERKA KAPITULA Ephrem
 Fr. KOMBI NGWESE Floribert
 Fr. KAMBALE WATEVIRWE Faustin
 (substitutes : Frs. DIADIA MAYOKO Fabien, KAMBALE TASI Augustin, KASERKA VALYAMUGHENI Alexis, WAYIVUTA VIHAMBA Jean-Marie)

East Africa (3)

Fr. Dominic KAMAU MUTURI
 Fr. Joachim MPOZEMBIZI SSENTONGO
 Fr. Jacob BARASA WELIKHA
 (substitutes: Frs. Bernard ODHIAMBO YALA, Dominic MUENDO MUTINDA)

North America (2)

Fr. Chi Ai NGUYEN
 Fr. KIVUYA MUKE Louis
 (substitutes : Frs. Alex CASTRO, Irvin SANTIAGO MARTINEZ)

Brazil (1)

Fr. João GOMES DA SILVA
 (substitutue : Fr. Marcos Antônio DIAS)

Andean Province (2)

Fr. PALUKU LUKENZANO Bolivar
 Fr. KAWA MUSWAHILI Joséphat
 (substitutes : Frs. Nelson EGAÑA LEIVA, Juan Carlos CISTERNA)

Europe (10)

Fr. Dominique GREINER
 Fr. Jean-Paul SAGADOU
 Fr. Georges HOUSSOU
 Fr. Pierre TRAN VAN Khuê
 Fr. Vincent CABANAC
 Fr. Iulian DANCĂ
 Fr. Fabien LEJEUSNE
 Fr. NGOA YA TSHIHEMBA Baudouin
 Fr. Nicolas POTTEAU
 Fr. François NGUYEN DINH Hanh
 (substitutes : Br. Milad YACOUB, Frs. Viktors JERMAKOVICS , Pierre CAO BA Vinh)

Madagascar (3)

Fr. Louis Martin RAKOTOARILALA
 Fr. Parfait Elysé ANDRY NIRINA
 Fr. Raymond TONGAMANA
 (substitutes : Frs. Gilbert Romain BOTRALAHY, Aristide Prosper HAJANIRINA)

B - Invited Lay Assumptionists (du 1er au 8 juin)

International Commission :

Bénédicte FAUVEL (Europe-France)
 Patricia HAGGERTY (North America-USA)
 KAHAMBU VUMILIA Stella (Africa-Kinshasa)
 Victoria PRADA (Andean Province-Columbia)

Africa :

PALUKU KIHUNDU Éric (Goma)
 KAHINDO MAHAMBA Émile (Butembo-Beni)

East Africa :

Marisella Kagendo NYAGA (Kenya)

North America :

Maricarmen MARTINEZ (Mexico)

Brazil :

Paulo Alexandre PAUDA

Europe :

Geneviève COUTURIER (France)
 Georges SANEROT (France)

Madagascar :

Anne Marie Agnès VOLOLONIANA
 François Smalah ZAFIMAKASON

Andean Province :

Maria Paula TOTINO (Argentina)

C - OTHER PARTICIPANTS

Facilitator : Alberto TOUTIN CATALDO, SS.CC.

Invited by the Superior General :

Fr. Vincent LECLERCQ,
 Fr. Bernard HOLZER

Interpreters : Mr. Marcelo

RODRIGUEZ, Ms. Wendy BYRNES

Translators : Br. Anastasio CALLE, Fr. Gilles BLOUIN

Technical Secretaries : Br. Clément LÖBEL , Fr. Vincent LECLERCQ

Communication : Br. Clément LÖBEL, Ms. Loredana GIANNETTI

Le Royaume de Dieu est proche...

Fr. Christian AZIAMALE AA.

Fr. Komi Jean-Marc ADEDJE OFM.Conv

Musique et Paroles.

Harm

= 90

Le Ro yau me de Dieu est proche de nous le Royaume est tout proche

le Royaume est tout proche.

1) En vo yé par le Christ dans
2) Fort de no tre Foi nous.....
3) Ban nis sons en nous.....

Fine

no tre mon de di vi sé pour ceu vrer pour son u ni té nous
cla mons a vec confiance qu'il est ro yaume d'a mour et d'u ni té nous
et au..... tout de nous tout ce qui é loigne ce royaume joi

an non çons que le Ro yaume est tout proche oui pro che de nous.
l'an non çons par la for ce de l'Es prit Saint oui car il est proche.
gnons nos mains et ren dont tan gible ce Ro yaume oui car il est proche.

D.C. al Fine

4°) L'héritage de l'annonce de ce Royaume
Nous est légué par Emmanuel d'Alzon
Nous demandons à Dieu la force de son Esprit
Pour la suite de notre mission

5°) Rendons gloire à Dieu le Père tout-puissant
A son Fils Jésus Christ le Seigneur
A l'Esprit Saint qui vivifie l'Eglise
Pour les siècles sans fin.

“We enjoyed their unconditional and joyful welcome.”

Christine and Christian Lamolinerie were volunteers in Vietnam in our orphanage in Saigon. Today Christine is vice-president of the Catholic Delegation for Cooperation of Orphanages, and Christian is a volunteer at the service of refugees and migrants.



left for a year to volunteer for international solidarity with the Catholic Delegation for Cooperation of service of Assumptionist orphanages in Saigon (DCC). It was there that we really understood, in living it, their rule of life: “Work for the love of Christ for the coming of the kingdom in us and around us.” We worked with Vietnamese brothers, some speaking French, others not so much; to understand was not always the simplest thing!

A welcome that was unconditional and joyous

With the Assumptionist brothers in France, we immediately loved their openness of speech, their tone, and the capacity they had to put themselves in the right place to be able to make free choices. We relished their unconditional and joyous welcome, and equally listened to their joys and pains of life in community. We worked on the demands of their educational project and their accompaniment of the young, specifically in the orphanages.

Because the intelligence of faith is one of their fundamentals, we accompanied the Bayard group in their diverse situations close to an ethic and necessary demand. We prayed and celebrated Christmas with them, in the mountains and in their chapels, amid the crowds of Vietnam; they are deeply and freely attached to the Church. We have met brothers with whom we experienced such pleasure to exchange, to share, to work, to pray and to live!

**Christine et Christian
LAMOLINERIE**

(this article appeared in
L'Assomption & ses œuvres n°
772, February-April 2023)

Twenty-five years ago in Valloire, at Christmas, we encountered the Assumption. We were thanking the priest for his beautiful homily, and he invited us for a drink the following day! It was Benoît Gschwind, and he introduced us to a joyous group who were there for a time of skiing and prayer. Over the years, we have met a good part of the Assumption family. The people and the different communities---Bayard, the Assumptionists in Vietnam, and the congregations of women religious. Many have become friends. Following them, and others as well, we have continued to entrench ourselves on the path of the Gospel.

Trying to make the Kingdom come

Some years later, in the name of the “commitment to the poor” and devoted to their charism, we

We tried to work on the coming of the kingdom of God with these joyful children, who were so sadly marked by poverty, abandonment, and violence. The connection between these children, and those working with them, profoundly and radically impacted us. We recall times of true fraternity with Toan, Thien, and Nhat, and the smiles of their mother Zion. We recall songs, dances, games, the complicity and love that connected some of us.

The coming of the Kingdom was listening to the voice of God, sharing in the Mass with the brothers or the Catholics in the area, the times of prayer in community, the sharing of fraternal life with the communities, the exchanges that brought us closer to the message of Christ.

Strengthening our Mission in the East

Last October, a session brought together religious, Oblate sisters and lay Assumptionists concerned with this apostolic field, in view of the Chapters.



Visit to the headquarters of the Orthodox Patriarchate of Romania.

The last General Chapter, in 2017, invited us to give “a strong constant to our *Oriental Mission*, as much from the point of view of the overall vision that can justify it from now on, as of the means to strengthen it” (GC 2017, p. 85). The session of the Oriental Mission, which took place in Bucharest from 26 to 30 October 2022, took this recommendation to heart. For the first time, a dozen or so motivated lay people were able to participate, along with the Oblate Sisters of the Assumption and, of course, religious, essentially from the Oriental Mission. The Saint Peter - Saint Andrew Center was perfectly suited for this kind of gathering. It was both simple and fraternal, under a radiant autumn sun!

Of course, the weight of the war in Ukraine was not absent

from the debates. A highlight of this session was a live video from Lviv, obviously full of emotion: are not Assumptionists invited to go “to places where God is threatened in man and man is threatened as an image of God” (RL 4)? About thirty people were present. Other participants, unfortunately too few in number, were able to follow the high-level conferences from a distance and participate in the exchanges.

In a message to the sessionists, Father General had invited them to “produce robust orientations that would help the General Chapter to take valid hold of the destiny of the *Oriental Mission* and would be a sign for all parts of our congregation.” The ambition was therefore vast. But the content of the interventions and debates already gave the outline of an agreement on fundamental

points. (1) In a world more divided than ever, the Oriental Mission must be at the service of unity, peace and reconciliation. But how can we be present to these realities? How to be “truly Catholic” today?

1st conviction: *The future of the Oriental Mission does not depend only on the brothers on the spot, but on the whole congregation.* And it is a matter of clarifying together its nature, its mission and its organization. This work deserves to be done without haste. An analysis of the context is more necessary than ever. We are now in an endemic instability in this area, with new major confrontations: between Putin and the West, between Shiites and Sunnis, between rich and poor... The confrontations underway have global repercussions, particularly in Africa. But, as one of the speakers, Antoine Arjakovsky, forcefully put it, we are called to leave behind “false prudence”, a “pseudo-realism”, in the very name of the Gospel. Our role is to remain close to the populations, especially those most affected by this crisis, such as the displaced and refugees.

2nd conviction: *We are not without means.* Several fields of intervention are possible. It is up to us to discern them. Several speakers and workshops have rightly insisted on the importance of dialogue: listening, discovering, learning, sharing, interacting?

- First of all, *ecumenical dialogue* is at stake. It is true that the Churches, especially the Orthodox, are wounded by the current crisis. More than large ecumenical gatherings, we can rely on local meetings, the experience of believers, the support of migrants. It is necessary to recognize mistakes, but we must also support those who want to move forward. The meeting at the Faculty of Orthodox Theology in Bucharest was very representative of this desire. It is up to us to keep ourselves informed in order to become aware of and relay happy initiatives, such as the Taizé meetings in which young Assumptionists willingly participate!

- Moreover, *interreligious dialogue* must not remain outside our concerns. In fact, a true “*ecumenical science*” (A. Arjakovsky) would be necessary. But we must also insist on the different forms of life presence, simple and concrete in the communities of the East. These can give the experience of a way to take diversity into account. Young people need to be trained in these areas to be missionaries in these regions.

Finally, in view of the current situation, the *dialogue of minorities* would be necessary. The entire Oriental Mission is concerned with the question of refugees and displaced persons. What additional step could we take in welcoming them to protect them and give them a future? Fabien Lejeusne, delegate of the Provincial of Europe, also underlined this in his overview of the communities of the Oriental Mission.

- For his part, in keeping with the “doctrinal” dimension of the Congregation, Antoine Fleyfel,



Visit to the Orthodox Monastery of Stavropoleos, in Bucharest.

the director of the new Institute of Oriental Christians, insisted on *the importance of strengthening research on the Orient*. How then can we better associate our universities, colleges, centers and places of formation in this sector and be better represented in research bodies? Here, the fields are vast: they go from patristics to contemporary ecclesiology...

In sum, an updated rereading of the Superior General’s 2012 letter, *The Passion for Unity*, would be in order. It was based on a triptych: “*A vision to propose*”; “*A mission to define*”; “*People to call*”. It will be up to the next General Chapter to verify whether the orientations implemented in 2017 were validly followed. Nevertheless, it emerges from the work of Bucharest the need to distinguish, among our communities, “flagship places” where our presence is visible, “source places” where we can catch our breath, and “places dedicated” to certain forms of mission.

The Oriental Mission has been a constituent part of the Assumption’s mission practically since its origins. It is a fundamental part

of its “identity card”. The priority seems to be to renew and accentuate the forms of animation: the new means of communication offer good prospects here. But the whole congregation must work on the reasons and modalities of its attachment to the Oriental Mission. In spite of the numerical weakness and apostolic dispersion, the insufficient sensitivity in formation, a historical responsibility falls to the Assumption. The coming months, through dedicated meetings, will help to clarify these points and launch a dynamic. In other words: “*The Oriental Mission needs the Assumption, the Assumption needs the Oriental Mission*”!

FR. Cezar ANDREI, Mihai Iulian DANCI, Jean-François PETIT

(article published in ATLPE n° 37, Dec. 2022)

1) For a part, the conferences can be found on the site www.centrulpetrusiandrei.ro



The adventure of the “schools of the bush” in Madagascar

The Assumptionist network of « primary Catholic schools” celebrated its 25th anniversary of foundation in 2023: the occasion illustrated the significance of one of the seven “mobilizing works” of the Congregation.

If we consider the success of the education brought by the Assumption to Madagascar, we must go back to the first years of our presence in Toliara. In 1958 there was a big construction project in the town of the College of the Sacred Heart of Tsianaloka, followed by another in Nazareth---both including a boarding school. The bush is not devoid of this success: schools or childcare centers were opened as early as 1960, like in Itomboina, but they didn't last.

By the year 2000, seeing that almost 80% of children of the bush did not know how to read or

write, the Assumption wanted to help the illiterate young children of southwest Madagascar. So, in 1989, Fr. Bernard Watier opened a school in Tsikombo. In 1997, when Fr. Daniel Carton arrived in Ejeda, there were three or four schools connected to parishes, but without clear contracts. The cost sharing was not the same, and even a teacher had no diploma! Also, in July 1998, Fr. Daniel proposed a specific contract for each village; only two villages accepted the contract, and their school continues to function.

Word of mouth operates, subsequently, especially in the region

of Tsikombo where an instructor, Roger Enamboariny, showed a lot of zeal to respond to the question from the villagers asking for a school. That was the beginning of the “Écoles primaires catholiques » (Primary Catholic Schools). According to the story, Fr. Michel Jary succeeded Fr. Daniel in 2001.

Around 2000, Fr. Daniel gave more responsibility to Mr. Roger, specifically to provide salaries to the other teachers, mostly in the region of Tsikombo. With the number of schools expanding, Mr. Roger became the right-hand man for the administration of the

schools and their relationships with the villagers. We owe him a great deal for his work with the EPC (Primary Catholic Schools). This is also a wonderful example of our collaboration with the laity!

In 2022-2023, the total number of schools totals 53 with a combined school population of 5,301 students. There are many demands awaiting us in the villages. Of the totals, 26 are in the district of Fotadrevo, 16 in Ejeda, 8 in Betyoky, 2 in Andranohinaly, and one in Ampanihy.

The contract

The contract is clear: the parents of the students should pay 50% of the salary of the teacher and the congregation pay the other 50%. If the village's share is not paid by the end of June, there will be no school starting in September, due to the precarious economic situation in the region. Certain schools are closed each year, but others are opened. There are also villages that ask to reopen schools after several years of their absence. These are accepted if they manage to settle their debt. School enrolments are increasing every year.

The « extras » for these schools

For fifteen years we have organized two medical visits for the students with the doctors of the bush "Tealongo". They specialize in preventive care and consultation on certain diseases: schistosomiasis, bilharzia, dental caries, sight, club feet, splenomegaly. Furthermore, these visits in the bush also provide time for "school for the parents." This helps teach them issues of education, of health, and of other things. Each year, thanks to our benefactors, many children can

receive operations for different medical conditions (appendicitis, hernias, club feet. . .)

Outside supports

The network of Schools in the Bush could not function without the aid of outside sources. Our Assumption Province is not able to manage the cost of 50% of salaries, for example. Our gratitude goes to the Province of Europe, which subsidizes the biggest part of the budget for the operation of the Primary Catholic Schools! Also, generous donors help support this mobilizing work with their own resources. Some groups (Ejeda Solidarity, for example) and other benefactors collaborate with us for the operation of our schools. They help us with the construction of classrooms and the purchase of materials for the teachers to use.

The construction of schools

The construction of classrooms is not a priority; this usually happens five or six years after the opening of the schools. During this time, the children have classes under the trees or in a hut borrowed by the village. The reason for this delay is that the villagers will show their faithfulness and motivation for fulfilling the school contract, which will help with the functioning of the school. This construction is also a work undertaken with the village. The people must provide the basic materials (stone, sand, gravel) for the construction of the building.

What follows

Our communities in the South ensure that the schools run smoothly and that the contract we have with the villagers is respected. A religious is charged with overseeing the school in each dis-

trict. Each year, we provide pedagogical formation to the teachers using the framework called *Edu-care*. We also provide formation so they will integrate the charisma of the Assumption in their roles as educators.

Some dreams

The administrators of the bush schools have a project that is an annual trip to Toliara for the most deserving students and their teachers. At this time, we have to restrict our numbers to 20 students who have the best average in their Certificates of Primary Studies. The number of teachers would probably be around 23. We are also planning a football tournament among the schools, and the winner will receive a special trophy.

Names/Acknowledgements

Among the French missionaries who worked toward education in the bush, are the following: Frs. Détré (Betyoky), Jean-Gabriel Chatelin (Ampanihy), Jean-Claude de Rosny, Bernard Watier, René le Bec, Br. Antoine Miss (Ejeda) and Frs. Daniel Carton and Michel Jarry (Réseau EPC).

The Malagasy religious who have succeeded each other in charge of the bush schools: Lucien Robia, Romain Botralahy, Aristide Hajanirina and Frédéric Rasolonianina.

**Fr. Jean Lucien
ANDRIAMASILALAINA
(Fotadrevo, Madagascar)**

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A new start for our Assumptionist parishes in Mexico

New pastors have just been appointed to the three parishes run by the congregation: a sign of missionary and vocational dynamism.

In Mexico, the Assumptionist communities serve the project of the Kingdom of God by running three parishes. Currently, all three communities also host young religious in formation as well as projects of vocation ministry, in addition to the ordinary tasks of parish ministry.

In a fundamentally Catholic country, the Christian communities of our parishes face the estrangement and lack of interest of the great majority of the baptized. For years, we have been trying to enliven our parish work with a missionary spirit persistently offering the Gospel to those who no longer

even seek Jesus Christ in their lives.

The first of our parish insertions took place in 1947, in a small chapel dedicated to St. Joseph that later would become the *Empress of America* Parish, located in the southern part of Mexico City. At the time this was a barely populated area, but over the years it became an upper middle class borough fully integrated into the city.

This community is also a formation community where our young postulants spend their last months of preparation before the novitiate, and also for Assumptionist brothers pursuing their studies in Mexico.

The *San Andrés Totoltepec* Parish is located in the town of the same name in the southern outskirts of Mexico City. The town draws its origins from a group of Tecpanecas who in the 14th century settled on a hill they called Totoltepec (hill of birds, in Nahuatl). With the arrival of the first Christian missionaries, a chapel was built there dedicated to Saint Andrew; in fact, a mission of the Dominicans in charge of the parish in a nearby town. Popular religiosity and deep-rooted traditions are both an asset and a challenge for the work of evangelization entrusted to the Assumptionists a little more than 12 years ago.



P. 14 left: the parishes of Emperatriz (top) and Totoltepec (bottom).
P. 14 right, and above: the parish of Tlilapan.

The parish, located in a poor area, is made up of ten chapels, almost all of which are in full development. Three Assumptionist priests make up the pastoral team, with a good number of lay people also actively involved in pastoral animation. They envisage several social development projects, but financing is scarce, which delays their realization. We try to encourage and strengthen the faith in those small communities through missions carried out within the parish itself; our main objective being to increase fraternal communion and a sense of belonging in all the parishioners from the different chapels.

In this community there is a

guest house where young people can discern their vocation among us and have a first experience of Assumptionist community life.

Finally, the Parish of *Santiago Apóstol* is located in Tlilapan, the seat of the smallest town in the State of Veracruz, very close to the city of Orizaba. It is a diversified municipality, with indigenous communities in the mountains but also areas where the most people are deserting agriculture for commerce or other jobs in the city.

The parish was erected as such on February 6, 1767, and our community took charge of it on August 2, 2017.

This new Assumptionist com-

munity is the realization of a dream we had entertained for more than 20 years: cooperating with the dioceses of Orizaba and Cordoba in their revival missions in the summer and the Holy Week. Also, we were looking for a new community, outside of Mexico City to engage in another kind of ministry in a different environment. This settlement has made it possible for us to develop a vocational project that has already borne fruit, and has put us in contact with many young people seeking to deepen their Christian vocation through our charism and spirituality.

Sébastien Bangandu, aa and
Flavio Bustos, aa.

The Kingdom of God for Fr. D'Alzon

Our Founder saw the Kingdom and witnessed to it as a passport to conversion and a pass to mission



Our motto is born of a social work and grows in a school

Adveniat Regnum Tuum (ART) was born in an educational context. The motto comes from the Sisters of Mary Theresa (or Servants of Jesus Christ). (1) They had taken the initiative to open free schools for poor girls; adolescents or young adults, sometimes even repented of prostitution. In 1836, Fr. d'Alzon had them come to Nîmes to run the Refuge. He took up their motto and gave it a soteriological perspective: his goal was the salvation of souls, especially of young people.

Thereafter, Fr. d'Alzon would often return to ART, not only to encourage a type of apostolate but to expose his vision of the consecrated life. To do this, he draws on the experience of two new congregations: his own and the Religious of the Assumption. The Kingdom is a recurring theme in his correspondence with Mother Marie-Eugénie, who stresses the importance of “working for the coming of the Kingdom of our Heavenly Father over us and over others.” (3) As Nicolas Potteau explains:

“Working with Mother Marie-Eugénie on the Constitutions of the Religious of the Assumption, he took up this vow and formulated it using the vocabulary of the Kingdom of God, a term that belonged to the language of Marie-Eugénie. Thus, the accompaniment and collaboration with the latter allowed him to (re)discover a religious vocation, a vocation as founder and a spirituality for his congregation.” (4)

On December 25, 1844, Mother Marie-Eugénie pronounced “perpetual vows” in Paris with four sisters; the three vows of religion, plus a fourth committing her to “work with all her life to extend the Kingdom of Our Lord Jesus

Christ in souls. Abbé d'Alzon anticipates the event with humor: “The first four stones will be laid on the crib of the Child Jesus.” (5) These stones designate the four sisters, but perhaps also in a solemn way the vows that commit them to follow Christ.

The meaning of our religious consecration

Initially chosen to support the impetus of a social work, ART became for Fr. d'Alzon like a “passport”. Very quickly, our motto crossed the walls of the Refuge and the College of Nîmes and opened up to other spaces, both geographic and more interior. Essential to stimulate apostolic activity, the theme of the Kingdom also offers the opportunity to deepen the meaning of one's consecration to the Lord.

Our motto is the identity card of every Assumptionist. It refocuses us on the Kingdom of God and what it implies *in us* and *for us*. It is also a “pass” for the mission. Thanks to it, our religious family has been able to welcome the newness of the mission and to respond to it in a great diversity of apostolates, in France and elsewhere. Finally, it allows us to go back and forth between conversion and mission, contemplation and action.

A horizon for grasping the grace of new times

The newness of the Kingdom can only be perceived by reading and rereading the Gospel. The preaching of Jesus gives us a glimpse of a new creation where God can act without obstacle in the life of Man. Embodying the Kingdom in person, Christ is the *autobasilea*. He bursts into history and offers the *chronos* (the time measured by our watches) a *kairos*. For D'Alzon, this *kairos* signifies the grace



of the new times that Jesus inaugurates by his presence: Christ is the One whom the Father sends to save Man and transform his existence.

For Nicolas Potteau, this newness of the Kingdom is received not only from history but also from the tradition of the Church. D'Alzon was strongly inspired by the catechism of the Council of Trent, where the Kingdom refers to the theological virtues: the work of the Holy Spirit in each person, faith, charity and hope are reflected in the life of the Church, which is charged with bringing people together in truth, fraternity and unity. For D'Alzon, the reference to the Council of Trent does not express nostalgia for a bygone era, but the hope of a life lived with Christ. The ART carries the project of Jesus to gather his people and lead them to the Father.

That Christ may reign in us and that the Church may grow

Our first Constitutions reflect the twofold desire of the Catechism of Trent: that Christ may reign in us and that the Church may spread further. Assumptionist spirituality finds in them its Christological source and the impetus for an apostolic life. In us and around us are the two poles of the same magnet. ART orients us in our vocation and guides us in the accomplishment of the mission.

With the Tridentine Rite, we sometimes associate the Council of Trent with traditionalism or even fundamentalism. However, Trent is a Council of the Reformation: committed to correcting errors and deepening doctrine after the schism between Catholics and Protestants, it was also very fruitful on the pastoral level. He

was at the origin of seminaries to train future clerics and of numerous congregations, and inaugurated an apostolic zeal without precedent in the history of the Church: opening hospitals in New France (present-day Canada), missions in Asia, South America and on the African continent.

What Fr. d'Alzon was looking for in the Catechism of Trent was both doctrinal fidelity, to counter the errors that had arisen from the Revolution, and a new impetus for the mission. He found in the ART something to nourish his personal charism and the project of a new congregation. He did not aim at fundamentalism, but at the integralism of faith. Welcoming the newness of Christ necessarily leads to transforming one's way of living and evangelizing in a changing world. This coherence between conversion and mission characterizes his path of holiness, the *Adveniat Regnum Tuum*, the unity of his whole life. (6)

In us and around us: two inseparable poles

As early as 1849-1850, D'Alzon wrote the draft of the Congregation. In the Spiritual Writings, this text is soberly entitled "Notes for a draft of the Constitutions. The purpose of the Order appears in a fourth vow, that of *"working to extend with all its strength the reign of Jesus Christ in souls: in our own first, that of our Brothers and in those of all Christians."* (7)

ART demands that we make a spirit of faith triumph both within us and around us. For our founder, faith is lived concretely in *obedience*. For faith requires the cultivation of a taste for filiation to the Father, to listen to the Word, to submit to the teaching of the Church. It also requires a taste for unity by becoming the

"defenders and soldiers" of Jesus Christ, the only *"Word, God and eternal Truth"*.

Welcoming the Kingdom then comes down to cultivating a spirit of hope. For D'Alzon, this virtue is practiced in poverty to the point of "detachment from the goods of the earth. It unfolds in the selflessness and humility of one who has renounced himself. It is above all a matter of devoting oneself to the search for God and his graces, especially in prayer.

Finally, the Kingdom invites us to give *priority to the love of Our Lord*. For D'Alzon, such a ▶

- 1) Spiritual Writings, p. 659.
- 2) "The commitment to devote oneself to the extension of the Reign of Christ is another formulation of the consecration to work for the salvation of souls." N. Potteau, «Le Règne de Dieu chez le P. Emmanuel d'Alzon», in *Que ton Règne vienne*, Recherches Assomption n° 6, 2022, p. 17.
- 3) Letter of Mother Marie-Eugénie de Jésus to Father Lacordaire, in *Marie-Eugénie, Textes fondateurs*, 1991, p. 125.
- 4) Potteau, «Le Règne de Dieu», p. 24.
- 5) Father d'Alzon to Marie Eugénie de Jésus, 20 December 1844. Note 2 on p. 135 (Letters 1843-1849) specifies that they were Srs. Thérèse-Emmanuel, M. Augustine and M. Thérèse, with Sr. So there were five of them!
- 6) The first occurrence of the term dates from 18 March 1835: "I am convinced that what remains for the priest to do is to work according to his strength to establish the reign of Christ", letter of Fr. d'Alzon to Alphonse de Vigniamont, quoted in Jean-Paul Périer-Muzet, *Nouvelles chronologie du P. d'Alzon*, p. 61.
- 7) ES p. 647.



Jesus hands the keys to Peter (Perugino fresco, 15th century).

love is lived in the vow of chastity and is expressed in a “triple love”. (8) For the love of the Kingdom implies love for Our Lord through “the imitation of his virtues”; love for the Blessed Virgin, “his mother and our special protector” and love for the Church, “his spouse”. It is verified by “zeal for the salvation of souls, which will be manifested in the works of education understood in the most general sense of

the word, in the missions among the infidels and in the propagation of works of charity.” (9) The threefold love is very present in the cradle of the Congregation and it is spelled out in these “First Rules” of 1850.

This project of Fr. d’Alzon would not reach its full maturity until the Constitutions of 1855, deposited in Rome but unfortunately not approved. In 1855, the Order’s goal was still “the coming of the reign of Jesus Christ for ourselves and for our neighbors.” The same attention is given to the works as to the virtues that animate them. In the 1865 text, the theological virtues (in other words: the Kingdom “in us”!) seem to disappear. In fact, this text is transcribed from our Constitutions as they were deposited and finally accepted by Rome. N. Potteau reassures us by explaining that the Founder was asked “to remove from a text of a juridical nature considerations of a spiritual nature”. (10)

The novelty of 1868: the Kingdom among us.

The Constitutions of 1865 did not weaken the expression of the charism of the Assumption: the Kingdom in us and around us. The figure of Fr. d’Alzon remains essential for measuring the spiritual and missionary scope of our texts. Indeed, his personal holiness bears witness to the coherence of a life lived in Christ (in faith, hope and charity), for Christ and the coming of his kingdom (in truth, unity and fraternity), and in the following of the obedient, poor and chaste Christ. For him, the Reign of God touches all the dimensions of our being and acting as Assumptionists.

In the form of an Instruction, Fr. d’Alzon closed the General Chapter of 1868. He recalls the principles of the charism and the means to develop it. And he speaks of it as something that should also strengthen our fraternal bonds. Despite the geographical distance and the imminent

8) Nicolas Potteau writes: “In his closing address, commonly called the Instruction of 1868, Fr. d’Alzon proposes a synthesis of two spiritual lines developed separately, the Reign of God and threefold love” (pp. 21-22). In fact, the “synthesis” was formulated in 1850. D’Alzon had an intuition of it from the beginning.

9) D’Alzon, ES, p. 648.

10) N. Potteau, «Le Règne de Dieu», p 21.

11) ES p. 130-131.

separation at the end of the chapter, the charism will allow us to love one another. His speech is well known to us:

“Our spiritual life, our religious substance, our reason for being as Augustinians of the Assumption is found in our motto: Adveniat regnum tuum. The advent of the reign of God in our souls, by the practice of the Christian virtues and the evangelical counsels in accordance with our vocation; the advent of the reign of God in the world by the struggle against Satan and the conquest of souls redeemed by Our Lord [...]. If, to this main love, you add the love of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of the Blessed Virgin his Mother and of the Church his spouse, you will know in its most abbreviated expression the spirit of the Assumption.”(11)

To assure this cachet for the Assumption, d’Alzon called for “simplicity of means” and asked each one to appropriate the common sense. It is a matter of being “Catholics in one piece” and “as much as possible. It is about being “frankly” Catholic and serving the Kingdom of God in this way. For D’Alzon, the simplicity and frankness of fraternal relationships, the hospitality of communities, closeness and openness are the means of living and developing the charism.

“Let us always have for one another that affection of true religious, based on respect and the need to hold each other tightly; let us form but one body in the sincerity of our souls and the loyal frankness of our relationships; let our indissoluble bond be Jesus Christ.” (12)

These qualities, which have become essential for the apostolate, make it possible to identify the true workers of the Kingdom.

It is a matter of serving God in fraternity and not of using him. D’Alzon concludes the General Chapter of 1868 by reminding us that Christ is our indissoluble bond and insists on what we are living together: the coming of the reign of God *in us and around us* but also, and probably for the first time, among ourselves through the fraternity.

The Kingdom in us: seeking holiness

At the General Chapter of 1868, the capitulants had asked the Founder for “a series of instructions” for the novitiate to summarize the spirit of the congregation. D’Alzon did so in the most direct style: the letter. “*Not being able to speak to you, I can write to you, to have you more present in my mind and heart...*”. (13)

The first letter to the Master of Novices speaks of personal sanctification. Communion with God is the primary goal: the Kingdom is born and grows first in us. It is “*the state of intimate relations to which we must arrive, according to what God is and according to what we are.*” (14) To desire the Kingdom is to seek God, to welcome his presence in one’s life in order to know him and love him more and more. The divine presence mobilizes all the faculties of man. It quenches the spiritual thirst of his soul, unfolds the intelligence of his spirit, forms the freedom of his will and guides the rectitude of his actions. “*The Kingdom of God in us is therefore the most absolute dependence of our whole being, of all our faculties on the intimate action of God.*” (15)

For D’Alzon, the image of the Kingdom expresses an unreserved “yes” to God’s action: “*Everything in us, down to the smallest atom of our body, to the*



Tabernacle of the Assumptionist chapel in Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso).

most elusive of our thoughts, to the most delicate of the feelings of our heart, belongs to him in an absolute, sovereign way...”. (16) For him, such transformation anticipates the glory of God. The Kingdom is on its way in our lives when we accept to belong to the Lord, to contemplate him and to love him: “*It is through dependence, adoration and love that our whole life must be transformed here below.*” (17)

A missionary holiness

The second letter to the Master of Novices, entitled “On the coming of the Kingdom of God around us”, is centered on the mission. It calls us to go straight to the goal “*without straying to the right and to the left in useful,*



12) ES p. 145-146.

13) Letter of introduction to the principles of the Congregation (Lavagnac, October 8, 1868), ES, p. 148.

14) ES p. 150.

15) ES p. 152.

16) ES p. 153.

17) ES p. 154.

18) ES p. 156.

19) ES p. 157.

20) In Letter 243 addressed to Lætus, tempted to leave the community out of tenderness for his parents, Augustine quotes Acts 4:32 and adds: “Your soul is not yours alone, but belongs to all your brothers, just as their souls in turn are yours; or rather, their souls and yours are not souls in the plural, but they are one soul, the one soul of Christ.

21) Letters of Fr. d’Alzon, vol. III, p. 84 (11 May 1859).

22) I Corinthians 3:21-22 and Spiritual Writings, pp. 210-211.

23) Lumen gentium n. 44: “The religious state, which assures its members greater freedom from earthly burdens, also makes more evident to all believers the heavenly goods already present in this age [...]. Finally, it shows in a special way how the reign of God is exalted above all earthly things and how supreme its necessities are; it shows to all men the surpassing greatness of the power of the reigning Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit in action in the Church in an admirable way.”

even excellent works, but which would divert us from the line we must follow and the efforts we must attempt...”. (18) The urgency is to reconquer hearts, because the presence of God in each person is irreplaceable in order to support his sovereign role in the good functioning of the world.

For this, poverty will be our weapon in the fight against greed and the power of money. D’Alzon wrote in 1868. We are on the eve of the war of 1870. The writer Emile Zola was about to publish *The Fortune of the Rougons* and *La Curée*, describing the business practices of the Second Empire (1851-1870) and the destruction of Paris by unscrupulous real estate speculators. Our founder had spotted that the world was stingy in its compassion for the little ones, to the point of causing conflicts or the risk of war. “Above all, we will be apostles. (19) The Kingdom seeks its disciples in a world still waiting for justice and peace.

For D’Alzon, the Church is the continuing ministry of Christ

Jesus, and that explains why he loves it so much. He is the heir of St. Augustine and his *Christus totus*: Christ is the head of the Church which is his body. No one can belong to Christ without also belonging to his Body, the Church. (20) He expressed this conviction in May 1859 to the Adorers:

“I touch here on the special purpose of the Assumption, which is to extend the reign of Our Lord in souls and which implies the double love of Jesus Christ and of souls. Jesus Christ is alive, as God in his holy humanity and in the Church, which is at once his body, his bride and his kingdom.” (21)

The “rights of God”, often mentioned, are the expression of this double love of Jesus Christ and souls. We belong to the Church. But the Church belongs to Christ. And Christ belongs to God. (22) No one belongs to God superficially but only through an existence lived with Christ, for Christ and in the Church.

Conclusion

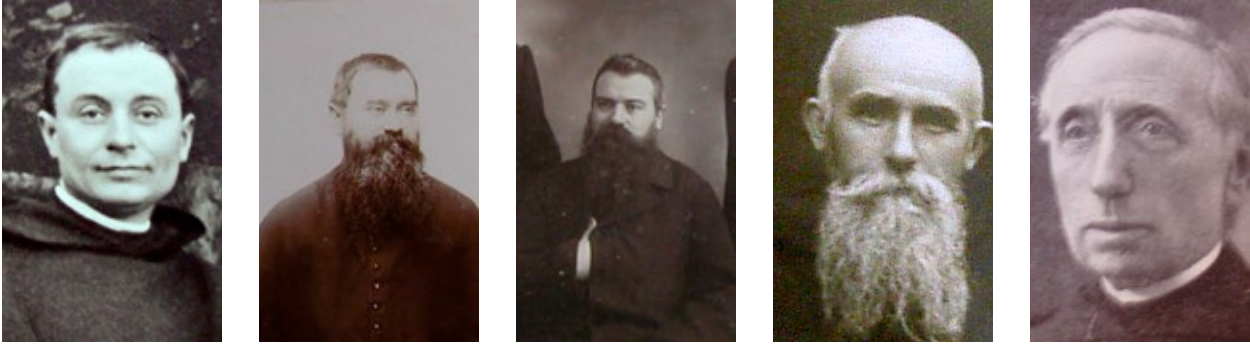
Faithful to the Council of Trent, Fr. d’Alzon seems to anticipate Vatican II. Religious life is not aimed at an elite living in convents, but at the holiness of all the faithful so that they may commit themselves to the following of Christ and bear witness to the things necessary for God’s salvation. (23)

Everything we do and everything we are must be linked to the action of the Father, the Master of the harvest, and to his Son Jesus, his Envoy, to teach us to “live and proclaim the hope of the Gospel”.

P. Vincent LECLERCQ,
Postulator General

The General Chapter of 1921-1922: creative fidelity

100 years ago, our Congregation experienced an important turning point, painful but salutary, under pressure from the Vatican.



The actors of the crisis of 1921-1922: (from left to right) PP. Merklen, Jaujou, Baudouy, Vailhé and Maubon.

The adage “History is the teacher of life” is usually traced back to Cicero; it tells us what we should do... or avoid. The General Chapter of 1921-1922 can be seen in this light. At a time when the Congregation is preparing for a new Chapter, the one held a century ago undoubtedly represents an example not to follow. Fortunately, it allowed us to give birth, albeit painfully, to the official approval of our Constitutions on January 30, 1923.

The structures of the former Assumption

The main question of the time was that of structures and the exercise of authority in the Congregation. Fr. d’Alzon had desired a religious family that was fairly centralized in order to be effective and responsive in the tense context of the time. At the end of his life, he had had a division into Provinces adopted (1876), which Fr. Picard had suppressed in 1880, in a context of expulsions, in view of a “unity of command and strength”. Later,

at the Chapter of 1918, Fr. Ernest Baudouy, Assistant General, spoke of a “unity of authority and of funds”...

In the meantime, the Congregation had taken off. At the time of the death of Emmanuel Bailly, the third Superior General, there were 594 professed members and 52 novices, but the structure had not changed: the Superior General, elected for life, decided everything in a congregation that had no provinces. Even if the system worked at the beginning, was it still relevant with 600 religious spread over 17 countries? Another difficulty: the capitulants were co-opted (appointed, not elected) at each General Chapter and remained so for life. This system, which is unique to the Church, was intended at the time of Fr. d’Alzon to maintain the spirit of the Congregation led “by an aristocracy enlightened by knowledge and virtue”. It sought to imitate the model of the universal Church, with a pope elected for life who governed with cardinals appointed for life; that would be an additional proof of our love for

the Church. In the long run, one can imagine the risk: that the Assumption would be governed by a handful of elders arrogating all the power to themselves.

The disappointment of Fr. Maubon

Also in 1917, the Code of Canon Law came out, which laid down fundamental guidelines for religious life. They no longer wanted Superiors General elected for life and they pushed for decentralization and the establishment of a measure of democracy in religious institutes. Assumptionist leaders view all this with suspicion, as much out of political conviction (distrust of democracy, attachment to a monarchical system) as out of attachment to tradition. Who would dare question the specific character of the Assumption?

Another difficulty: our constitutions were still not approved. Now that the Code of Canon Law had been published, they had to be corrected to adapt them to the new legislation. When Father Joseph Maubon, Vicar General, met



The Generalate at Ara Coeli, in Rome.

Cardinal Tonti, Prefect of the Sacred Congregation of Religious, in February 1918, he thought he would be named Superior General. He was quickly disillusioned: the Pope found the system of organization “troppo francese, troppo concentrato, troppo estivo camarilla” (too French, too concentrated, too vulnerable to insiders’ influence). In order for the Assumption to have a Superior General again, its constitutions had to be modified and approved.

In April 1918, the General Chapter meeting at Notre-Dame des Lumières (near Avignon) timidly modified our texts. Regions were created, but not really Provinces; the members elected to the General Chapter had to have been in vows for at least ten years; its composition left a large part to ex officio members; the Superior General still decided everything. In short, Rome was

obeyed, but not totally. The result: the Holy See insisted that we go further in order to make our texts finally conform to Church law.

A turbulent election

One detail, quite technical, will prove problematic. The Congregation for Religious asked that the election of delegates be organized at the regional level. Each Region would send to the General Chapter its Regional Superior, as well as members elected from among the religious of the Region. This was a one-step system. Our Constitutions advocated a two-step system: election of one delegate per community, then a Regional Chapter with the Regional Superior, local superiors, and delegates elected in local chapters. This system limited democracy, giving pride of place to ex officio members. In fact, all but one of the elected delegates

were community superiors: they risked perpetuating the existing system. In contrast, the procedure desired by Rome favored the participation of a greater number of people, in a spirit of deconcentration. The Procurator asked the Holy See how to proceed: viva voce, he was told to follow our texts... but this would never be attested to by any written document.

The elections turn out to be agitated. At the scholasticate in Louvain, the young brothers were under pressure to elect the religious designated to them by the Superior. In addition, identical forms of requests circulated from one local chapter to another, demanding reforms in the Congregation. The Assumption was divided. On the one hand, the older members, supporting Fr. Maubon and led by personalities such as Ernest Baudouy, Matthieu Lombard and André Jaujou, considered them-

selves to be the spiritual heirs of Fr. d'Alzon and wanted a French Assumption, from the South of France. For them, centralization was a distinguishing mark of the Congregation. On the other hand, the younger members, aged 30 to 40, had suffered from the rigors of the Near Eastern Mission (Mission d'Orient), or for the most part had been formed in Louvain 10 or 15 years earlier with Fr. Pierre-Fourier Merklen: their vision of the Assumption is more decentralized, and for them the spirit of Fr. d'Alzon did not reside in a structure, but in a state of mind. Under strict control, they maintained a clandestine network of correspondence - hence the formulation of their requests. In the middle, the majority of the congregation (including many young religious) hesitated, without taking a stand on the matter.

A broken General Chapter

The General Chapter met from December 8, 1921 to January 10, 1922 in Rome, in the General House at Ara Cœli, under the presidency of a Basque Benedictine abbot, Dom Maur Etcheverry, mandated by the Congregation of Religious. From the beginning, there was a bolt from the blue: verifying the validity of the elections, Dom Etcheverry noticed irregularities, as well as the difference between the two electoral systems mentioned above. After two days of interminable waiting, he announced that the Chapter was broken and had to be transformed into a commission, to adapt the Constitutions and make them conform to Canon Law. The Chapter had the choice of accepting or refusing. In the case of refusal, one might have asked what the future of the Assumption would have been.....

A crucial meeting was held that very evening to decide on the capitulants' response. The personal notes of Fr. Simeon Vailhé tell us about the discussion. The oldest members like Fr. Maubon were the most radical. He said, "These matters go to the heart of the Assumption, to the work of Fr. d'Alzon; they would like to see us dead." He suggested that the only way to deal with this was to have Fr. d'Alzon beatified: they wouldn't dare touch the work of a saint! Others proposed to found a new congregation that would be authentically Alzonian. All of this seemed to be out of place! Fortunately, a word of wisdom came out of the mouth of Fr. Gervais Quenard, then superior of the Near Eastern Mission, who considered it wiser and more Alzonian to submit to Rome. He managed to convince the other religious to accept the Roman proposal. The capitulants set out to work and modified our texts according to the will of the Holy See: a superior general elected, elections in accordance with the Canon Law, decentralization of the Congregation with the creation of Provinces. The Vatican then organized a consultation of all Assumptionist priests in view of naming a new Superior General.

1922, a year marked by waiting and turmoil

The wait would last nearly a year, during which the Congregation was in great turmoil. The authorities seized a clandestine letter from Fr. Merklen, which revealed the existence of a network of protest within the Congregation. Maubon sent a circular to all the religious on February 18 in which he published the intercepted letter and revealed the network that he accused of being

the source of all the problems. He even manipulated the Congregation of Religious in his direction. Maubon committed a serious error: if Fr. Merklen and his followers had informed the Vatican of structural dysfunctions in the Congregation, the Congregation of Religious had only reminded them of the law of the Church.

In January 1923, the Holy See made its decision known. The Constitutions were approved and Fr. Gervais Quenard was appointed Superior General by Rome. The members of the former General Curia were all dismissed and Fr. Maubon left for Jerusalem where he died a saintly old man. As for Fr. Merklen, he was propelled by papal decision to head the Documentation Catholique (1923) and then La Croix (1926), in the context of the condemnation of l'Action Française.

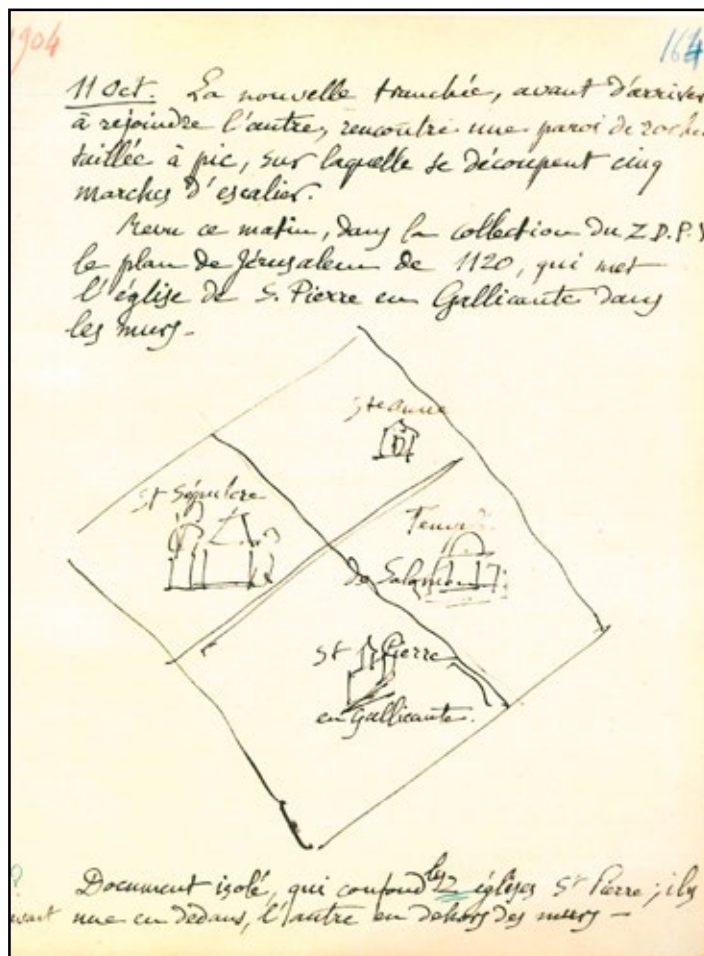
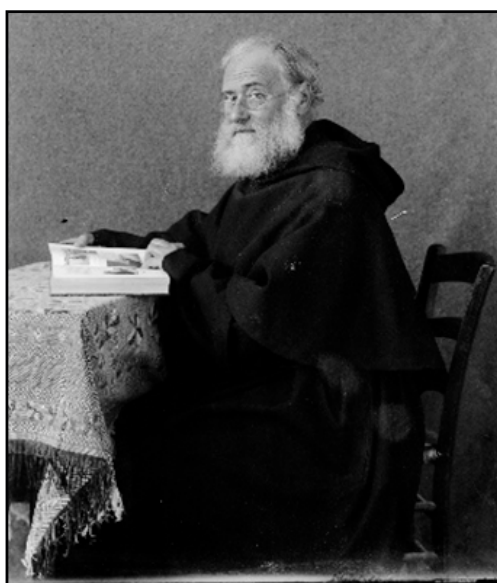
History, teacher of the truth

This episode is rich in lessons learned. At a time of synodality, it shows the danger of concentrating power in the hands of a single person or a few. A broad view of the charism of the Assumption is needed; otherwise, there is a risk of narrowing it down to one's own cultural vision. It reminds us of the risk of confinement when we remain within ourselves. The role of the Holy See was salutary, while Fr. Merklen, who did not come from the mold of the alummates, was able to bring another perspective. Who, in this matter, was more faithful to Fr. d'Alzon? Without a doubt the partisans of obedience to Rome. Sometimes, in order to be more faithful to the intuition of the origins, one must know how to evolve and move on. That is what is at stake in a creative fidelity.

**Fr. Nicolas POTTEAU
(Lyon)**

The Diary of Fr. Germer-Durand's excavations in Jerusalem

Rector of the Shrine of St. Peter in Gallicante from 2011 to 2020, Fr. Gullung has edited the notebooks of this important Assumptionist archaeologist



During the first Assumptionist pilgrimage to the Holy Land in April 1882, Brother Liévin de Hamme, a Franciscan guide, brought a group of pilgrims to the slopes of Mount Sion to show them a cave where Saint Peter is said to have come to mourn his denial. Photographs from the 1890s show how, under the complex of David's tomb, the area outside the walls south of Jerusalem was nothing but fields given over to olive trees. Among the group were the Count of Piellat (builder and benefactor of the French Hospital Saint-Louis) and Father Joseph Germer-Durand.

The Count of Piellat felt called to raise the church of Saint-Pierre and acquired the land in 1884. But excavations around the cave revealed no religious signs. In 1887, he gave the land to the Assumptionists for

crops and livestock to feed the pilgrims who came to Notre-Dame de France.

Father Germer-Durand, superior of Notre-Dame-de-France, was studying the accounts of former pilgrims and decided, as early as November 1887, to take soundings. But his diary of excavations did not begin until October 25, 1888, once he had received his first pilgrims in May 1888. For 24 years, Brother Polycarp provided valuable assistance in supervising the workers and planting vines and olive trees. Father Etienne Boubet drew the plans for the excavations and then for the church of Saint Peter, which he built and decorated from 1924 until his death in 1934.

Appointed to Jerusalem in August 2011, I only had two brochures to document the history of the site: "The House of Caiaphas

and the Church of St. Peter in Jerusalem” and the “Notice sur le musée archéologique de Notre-Dame de France à Jérusalem” (part of the *Revue Biblique*). I only had a black and white photocopy of the excavation journal and a bad typed copy. The only solution: go to Rome. So in December 2013, I scanned the journal. When I had in hand the humble notebook on which Fr. Germer-Durand wrote day by day for twenty-three years, I was amazed by the beauty of the pages, the quality of the writing, the fineness of the drawings and the freshness of the colors.

The diary of the excavations of Fr. Germer-Durand goes from October 25, 1888 to December 16, 1911, that is to say 329 pages, spread over four school notebooks. The right-hand pages are numbered; the left-hand page is left blank and unnumbered to accommodate notes, drawings, sketches and corrections. While reading the journal, one follows the discoveries, the hypotheses, the corrections, the good and bad surprises. Germer-Durand created the Notre-Dame de France Museum, which was destroyed and looted during the 1948 war.

When I was able to create the Germer-Durand memorial, inaugurated on June 28, 2018, I drew extensively on the diary of the excavations to relate the objects recovered from the ruins of the museum, the text of the diary, and the ancient photographs of the Notre-Dame de France collection, 700 photographs now digitized and preserved at the *École Biblique de Jérusalem*. But the diary remained in my computer. But in February 2020, three archaeologists excavating in Siloé came to visit our site. They saw the memorial and were interested in the photos of the

excavation journal; they would have liked to see it...

Following this visit, I came up with the idea of printing the digitized diary and making an edition that could be consulted in the library of the *École Biblique*, where archaeologists could find it as well as the issues of the *Revue Biblique* in which several of Fr. Germer-Durand’s articles are published, especially the one that reports on the excavations at Saint Peter’s (RB January-April 1914). A deposit was also made at the *Studium Franciscanum* and at the Latin Patriarchate, where Fr. Aziz, the archivist, had told me that he could hardly read the writing and that a typed version would be necessary.

So I undertook this work, which I was able to have printed in early July 2020, just before leaving Jerusalem. The work was printed in ten copies in three volumes: two for the facsimile of the diary and a third to present a typed version, with notes and comments, as well as the presentation of the Germer-Durand Memorial, so that the memory of it would be preserved. In order to limit costs, the cover pages contain a few photographs of the excavations. A deposit was also made in the archives in Rome and Paris.

One word still in order to understand why the notice of the museum is dedicated to his father and why Fr. Germer-Durand put a footnote in the brochure on the House of Caiaphas about the discovery of the crosses engraved around the circular hole of the deep pit.

When he published “A Palestinian Museum” in 1907, the first page reproduced the bust of his father and the dedication: “*To the memory of my father, Eugène Germer-Durand, Direc-*

tor of Studies at the Collège de l’Assomption, founder of the Musée Lapidaire de Nîmes.” A gesture of filial piety certainly, but at the same time, a delicate way of making his opponents and detractors understand that he had something to stand for.

And in the brochure on the House of Caiaphas, we read, page 26: “*While cleaning the rock, we noticed that towards the middle there was a rather large hole filled with earth and stones: something like a cistern mouth.*” *We hurried to empty it* [according to the diary of the excavations, it was February 26, 1889]; *during this operation one of the little workers came to me running and shouting: “Salib! salib! The cross, the cross” On the rock walls of this hole had just appeared three large crosses of 0,40cm height, engraved deeply in the rock.* Fr. Germer-Durand reports that “*The child who told me about this discovery at that very moment is called Gozlan; he is now one of the sheikhs of Siloé, and he is ready to testify to it again.*” And in a note we read, “*I note this particularity, because doubts have been raised about the reality of this discovery and the authenticity of these crosses.*” To understand the meaning of this note, and the allusion to the doubts expressed, it is necessary to know that some people went so far as to accuse Fr. Germer-Durand of having had these crosses engraved!

Germer-Durand and the human qualities that he shows. May the publication of his diary of the excavations of Saint-Pierre en Gallicante also constitute a tribute to his memory.

P. Jean Daniel GULLUNG
 (Albertville, France)

The inculturation of religious life in Africa

Adapting the African concept of Ubuntu to religious life, Fr. Jean-Paul Sagadou does new and useful work



When religious life becomes Ubuntu
by Jean-Paul Sagadou.
Bayard Africa (Abidjan),
81 p.

At its origins, African theology asked a fundamental question: is it possible to be Christian without ceasing to be African? (1) It was to pose the problem of the inculturation of Christianity in Africa. Fr. Sagadou approaches it from the point of view of religious life and responds with a paradigm of African wisdom: *Ubuntu*, a concept currently at the crossroads of African thought.

How to define this concept, coming from Bantu languages and literally meaning “the human”, that is to say the quality proper to man. It has such a rich meaning that to translate it into other languages would be to impoverish it of its more encompassing meaning.(2) Sagadou takes it up with the meaning commonly attributed to it: “*The concept ubuntu means: ‘I am, because we are’*”, because “every person is only a person through other persons”.

Raised to a philosophical-theological and socio-anthropological conceptualization, this concept, to borrow Desmond Tutu’s thought, reflects an African

wisdom that “*a person is a person only through other persons. None of us comes into this world fully formed. We would not know how to think, walk, talk, or behave as human beings if we did not learn from other human beings. We need other humans to be humans. I exist because other people exist.*” (3)

The paradigm of *Ubuntu* has a “polysemous richness” from which Sagadou dreams of the inculturation of religious life in Africa, in response to the invitation of Pope Francis.(4) His book traces the paths of *Ubuntu* in order to celebrate otherness in religious life; to articulate person and community; to curb racist attitudes; to draw on the African palaver - in short, to be authentic religious who are conscious of their historical memory.

This is an important book to escape the risk of insignificance when religious life is lived with a borrowed personality.

Fr. Alexis KASEREKA
VALYAMUGHENI
(Rome)

1) Doesn’t Christianity, such as it is, involve for the Negro a peril of alienation? In other words, can the Negro be Christian without renouncing his negritude?” R. SASTRE, «Liturgie romaine et négritude,» in Des prêtres noirs s’interrogent, Cerf, 1956, p. 154.

2) For Desmond Tutu, “the word Ubuntu is difficult to translate into a European language. D. TUTU, *Il n’y a pas d’avenir sans pardon*, Albin Michel, Paris, 1999, 38.

3) D. TUTU, *God is having a dream. A vision of hope for our time*, Desclée, Paris, 2008.

4) Cf. POPE FRANCIS, Apostolic Letter to all consecrated persons (21/11/2014); Querida Amazonia, n. 95.

The adventures of Fr. Joseph in the Congo

A recent book brings back the vivid memory of the last European Assumptionist to work in the Province of Africa

What is a white man going to do among the Blacks? The question irresistibly evokes a colonial past that is necessarily controversial. Following in the footsteps of Tintin in the Congo, the European missionary does not only maintain the ardor of the pioneers of the end of the 19th century who left to evangelize sub-Saharan Africa.

A French Assumptionist, Joseph Delvordre arrived in 1968, eight years after decolonization, in a Zaire in search of its “authenticity” under the reign of General President Mobutu. This native of Linselles, on the Belgian border, discovered North Kivu, on the borders of Uganda and Rwanda. He chose to devote his life to it.

For 48 years, he tried to make information available to everyone. In this particularly impoverished region, he made radio an educational tool against ignorance and in the service of freedom of thought and peace. Convinced that “committed” and professional journalism is essential to build a healthier society, he made it a weapon against exclusion and injustice. As a “*pilgrim in the service of an orphaned Africa*”, he also went to meet Pygmies and occasionally rubbed shoulders with witchcraft practitioners.

He also witnesses the mass exodus and massacres that follow one another in the region. And he can only observe the organized plundering of the decidedly too rich subsoil of Kivu by multinational

companies, under the willingly complicit gaze of the military forces deployed on the ground.

By retracing half a century of often tragic events, Alain Fleury’s book offers us the example of a missionary who has “inculturated” himself in Africa. Joseph Delvordre (now in community in Albertville) took care to write down in semi-annual letters addressed to his confreres, family and friends.

The author, who had already dedicated a book to the arrival in 1929 of the first Assumptionist missionaries in what was then called the Belgian Congo (*Congo-Nil*, L’Harmattan 2008), was especially interested in restoring the atmosphere of an adventure lived for almost half a century among the Congolese.

(article published in *ATLPE*, n° 37, Dec. 2022)



A missionary in Kivu :
Itinerary of Father Joseph Delvordre in DR-Congo from 1968 to 2016
by Alain Fleury
Éd. L’Harmattan, Coll. « Églises d’Afrique », 2022, 108 p., 13 €.

Fr. N. Potteau’s thesis distinguished

Nicolas Potteau’s thesis on *Augustine, reader and interpreter of the book of Isaiah* (cf. *AA Info* no. 12) was presented in our bulletin three years ago. This work, whose high quality was immediately recognized, has just been awarded the Adalbert-Hamman Prize.

Awarded every two years by the J.-P. Migne Association, this prize is intended to help the publication of an unpublished work in French written by an author under 40 years of age and dealing with the Fathers of the Church from the 1st to the 10th century. The amount is paid to the publishing house chosen by the winner, in this case the Institute of Augustinian Studies.

Congratulations to Fr. Nicolas, whose passion for history has led to notable contributions to *AA Info* (see p. 21-23 of this issue)!

Editor

Michel KUBLER, General Secretary



Assunzione@mclink.it

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Our Deceased Brothers



† **Fr. Jean-Chrysostome TSIRIOGNA**, of the Lomé community (European Province), died on January 2, 2023, in Lomé, Togo. His funeral was celebrated on January 20 in Lomé. He was 63.

† **Fr. Pierre Marie BOUCARD**, of the Albertville community (European Province), died on January 3, 2023, in Albertville, France. His funeral was celebrated on January 6 in the Chapel of Our Lady of Vignes, followed by burial in the Chiriac cemetery. He was 94.

† **Fr. François NEUSCH**, of the European Province, died on January 5, 2023, in Rouen, France. His funeral was celebrated on January 16 in the Chapel of our Lady of the Angels (Paris 14e), followed by burial in the cemetery of Montparnasse in Paris. He was 88.

† **Fr. Norman MEIKLEJOHN**, of the Worcester-Old English Road community (North American Province), died on March 5, 2023, in Worcester, MA (USA). His funeral was celebrated on March 10 in the Chapel of the Holy Spirit at Assumption University, followed by burial in St. Anne's Cemetery in Fiskdale. He was 94.

† **Fr. Alain FONTAINE**, of the Strasbourg-Santé community (European Province), died on March 24, 2023, in Strasbourg (France). His funeral was celebrated on March 30 in the Chapel of the Sisters of the Cross in Strasbourg-Neudorf. He was 71.