

Anything and Everything, All of the Time: Escaping Liberalism’s Infernal Nadir of Individualism with Emmanuel d’Alzon

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ABSTRACT: Modern liberal democracy feels increasingly divisive, disempowered, alienated, and atomized: we cannot seem to agree on major societal problems and existential crises, from COVID to climate change, let alone resolve them. As precarity and chaos increase, many are retreating from liberal democracy to illiberal, or postliberal, theocracies and nationalisms. The only counter-options seem to be embracing, elevating, and enforcing ever-stricter categories of liberal identities. Both seek to restore interactive predictability and security. Emmanuel d’Alzon, founder of the Augustinians of the Assumption, wrote his political theology in expectation of such results of individualism, as he observed feudal France evolve into capitalist liberalism over the long 19th century. Though a man of feudal sympathies, he was not a man of retreat: he believed this change was a new opportunity—so long as we managed to overcome individualism absolutized in three effects: the abolishment of human fulfillment by alienation, the failure of democracy by the collapse of shared worlds, and the dehumanization of capitalist production and consumption. If these new, liberal problems could be properly navigated, then the changing tides would not be a loss, as his beloved Roman Catholicism feared, but a new opportunity for equality in a liberal order. This would require transcendental goals to avoid self-consumption; a liberalism that was a “freedom for” not merely a “freedom from.” This antidote, d’Alzon believed, could be injected by the tools of education, which did not necessarily require proselytization.

On August 14th, 1829, a young Emmanuel d’Alzon wrote to his friend Eugène de la Gournerie, a student in Paris. In the letter, d’Alzon told Gournerie: “You are so alone in that populous desert, as alone as a drop of water in the ocean, alone as a grain of sand, and finally as alone as that poor quail in my game-bag, the quail that had not been hit by a killer bullet until after four hours of hunting.”¹ With this statement, we can all sympathize. There is a vast urban sprawl in which we navigate alone. There is a great nation of people, throughout which we all clamber as individuals. There is a classroom: one shared screen, twenty-five disjointed Zoom squares. We live with modernity’s isolation, papered over by technological spectacle. Any liberal arts faculty is familiar with this alienation, experienced through student papers couched with apologetic, solipsistic refrains built atop anecdotal stories and quirks of personal appeal, rather than appeals to any shared truth. All justifications revolve around a certain individuality. The truth-value of a claim comes from merely having thought it or felt it rather than it corresponding to a shared reality. Rather than a coherent worldview, our students grasp onto a varied pile of beliefs that have been accidentally accumulated by

¹ Emmanuel d’Alzon, *Father Emmanuel d’Alzon: In His Own Words*, trans. Fr. Eugene V. LaPlante (Rome: Bayard Press, 2007), 7. Accessed March 29th, 2022: <https://www.assumption.us/oldaa/about-us/virtual-library/47-virtual-library/412-father-emmanuel-dalzon-in-his-own-words>

rolling through life's vacuum. Few could fully explain why they believe such. I ask my students why they believe what is good is good. They come back with "I've never thought about this before..." I ask them to consider nihilism, they return with "I think we have all considered the meaninglessness of life at some point..." The individual mind and heart, amidst the majestic urbanity of the American nation that fancies itself the vanguard of human history, is unable to look up. We are alienated, disconnected, and isolated "as alone as a drop of water in the ocean." What brings us this absolutized and incentivized vision of individualism?

1 ILLIBERALISM AND NEOLIBERALISM: COMPETING ANSWERS TO INTERNAL CONTRADICTION

"Man centers every thing in himself, and neither loves nor hates, but for his own sake, everything individual is a little world by itself, and all creatures, as far as their understanding and abilities will let them, endeavor to make that self happy: this in all of them is the continual labour, and seems to be the whole design of Life".²

So argued 17th century Anglo-Dutch philosopher Bernard de Mandeville in his *Fable of the Bees*: the self-focused life is good for "bare virtue can't make nations live." Only the mutual pursuit of self-interest can assure life. Put into the key of Hume, man can only pursue that which at the moment seems to be best for him. We humans aid each other "without bearing...any real kindness; because I foresee that he will return my service."³ When left with the self-interest of the liberal, individualist social contract, the idea of willing subjugation to something outside of oneself is foreclosed. The United States examples this well. It was the firstborn into total liberal, capitalist modernity: functionally endless land to conquer—lubricating the gears of human interaction by excess—and lacking, too, any of the social connectivity that arises from anchorage in a longer, storied, past. It was The United States which nursed individualism to unprecedented stature, with "Life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" its liberal ethos. Every religious, philosophical, and political instinct slowly subsumed to individual affirmation and consumption. These *via negativa* "rights of man" could put neither obligation nor end upon their fellows.

From an inefficient and ineffective COVID-19 response in much of the West to an inability to answer climate change, we find a psychopathy that is driving us all mad. An individualist world does not reward recognizing a shared reality; positive obligations are often met as infringements upon one's own freedom to pursue life, liberty, and happiness. We strive for things to consume to make us unique, performatively different. All the while, American participation in organizations drops off: from traditional religion to trade unions, most Americans do not even belong to a political party and just over half even vote at all. These are symptoms of a world that has driven us into isolation, separation, and alienation.⁴

² Bernard de Mandeville, *Fable of the Bees: or Private Vices, Public Benefits*, 2:178.

³ Both of these quotes were brought to attention by Adam Seligman's *Modernity's Wager* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 1-3, and can be found in Bernard de Mandeville's *Fable of the Bees: or Private Vices, Public Benefits* and Hume's *Treatise on Human Nature*.

⁴ Eli Rosenberg, "Workers are fired up. But union participation is still on the decline, new statistics show," [washingtonpost.com, The Washington Post](https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2020/01/22/workers-are-fired-up-union-participation-is-still-), January 23, 2020, Accessed August 18, 2021, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2020/01/22/workers-are-fired-up-union-participation-is-still->

The only growing communities are digital, and it seems doubtful such communities require transcending individualism. Communities known entirely on your own terms, exit able with a click, requiring little actual commitment or sacrifice but a great deal of performative consumption and virtue—these can hardly be said to entirely provide traditional community. Here we spend our days upon virtual action, virtual opinions, virtual repetitions, parasocial relationships and rituals. There is a malaise: a sinking inevitability of undirected hopelessness, a carnivalistic world of infinite options, an endless field of bombarding horrors and tormenting amusements. These things enchant us to scroll them, down into stygian depths...but which leave us callous. We are hollowed out from the inside by the relentless calculations of individual performance and the infinite, unsatisfying, superficial “mountains of content”; advertisements selling us all things, all of the time. It is just as easy to engage in the deepest perversities known to man as it is to present a work of overwhelming beauty: the internet reflects our sociological being. Their isolated, individualized nature encourages itself: the incapability of imagining and feeling another as truly as you feel yourself, and acting accordingly. The internet is merely a showy example: if you fail to navigate the real, individualist market, the cost is your shelter, your food, and the lives of you and your children. Rarely are obligated social communities waiting to catch you. If you become an expert in competition, pushing others down to pull yourself up, you are rewarded with wealth and material success. The nature of an increasingly global, private, and deregulated neoliberal market emphasizes only individuals competing with other individuals. Personal thrift, labor, and prudence are meant to pull us ahead, but they also, paradoxically, atomize us within a system where relations, virtue, and transcendence become commodities; where attention itself is the last frontier of consumption. There is a noble work of democracy to equalize all voices and rights, but the gravity of its partner, individualism, bends us towards equalizing all knowledge, virtue, and truth, as well, while simultaneously alienating people from their work, their power, and each other for the material benefit of a few. How do humans react, as precarity, distrust, and isolation increase? When we feel anonymized, despite supposed connection to every event and person on earth? When we are left as alone as a sand grain, as the distant star, as the ocean droplet?⁵

Such creates reaction. A particular kind of reactive communities are often termed “illiberal” or “post-liberal”, commonly tied up in theological nationalism that preach a return to old community founded in the supremacy of such associations. Examples abound: Catholics and Protestants preach an explicitly “illiberal democracy” under Viktor Orbán’s Hungary,⁶ not unlike the Western Catholic integralists down from Salazar and imperial

[decline-new-statistics-show/](#); Jeffrey Jones, “US Church Membership Falls Below Majority for the First Time,” *news.gallup.com*, *Gallup*, March 29, 2021, Accessed August 18, 2021, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/341963/church-membership-falls-below-majority-first-time.aspx>; Pew Research Center, “What the 2020 electorate looks like by party, race and ethnicity, age, education and religion,” *pewresearch.org*, *Pew Research*, October 26, 2020, Accessed August 18, 2021, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/10/26/what-the-2020-electorate-looks-like-by-party-race-and-ethnicity-age-education-and-religion/>

⁵ Perhaps best illustrated by the internet, the final experience of faux connection and absolute atomization, to which this paper’s title refers: inspired by Bo Burnham’s haunting song on the matter from his special “Inside”

⁶ Shaun Walker, “Orbán deploys Christianity with a twist to tighten grip in Hungary” *theguardian.com*, *The Guardian*, July 14, 2019, Accessed August 20, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jul/14/viktor-orban-budapest-hungary-christianity-with-a-twist>

France, across Europe, with everything from Jarosław Kaczyński's Law and Justice party in Poland, to Marine Le Pen's National Rally in France, to winning inheritors of Mussolini in Italy.⁷ Christians in the US range from arguing for “Catholic Taliban rule” to “the [Protestant] church directing the state”, with God-chosen messianic leaders empowered at its head.⁸ Christian nationalists form the fundamental base of Donald Trump’s MAGA movement,⁹ with similar evangelical energy behind the right wing of Jair Bolsonaro’s Brazil Union party.¹⁰ We need not even speak of the explicitly illiberal Islamic fundamentalist states across the world or the theocratic nationalism of Israel, long in power, now overflowing with Itamar Ben-Gvir and the Jewish Power party.¹¹ Even Buddhists are not immune from embracing theological nationalism in the name of material benefit.¹² The unifying factor here is religiously-allied nationalisms that reject the norms of a liberal, egalitarian, democratic order. Orbán, who has been welcomed to the premier conservative action committees in the United States, argues

⁷ Emma Green, “The Specter of Catholic Identity in Secular France” *theatlantic.com*, *The Atlantic*, May 6, 2017, Accessed December 13, 2022, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/05/christian-identity-france/525558/> ; Justyna Pawlak & Alicja Ptak, “As Poland’s Church embraces politics, Catholics depart” *reuters.com*, *Reuters*, February 3, 2021, Accessed December 13, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-poland-church-insight/as-polands-church-embraces-politics-catholics-depart-idUSKBN2A30SN> ; Press Association, “Polish leader says ‘everyone must accept Christianity’” *premierchristian.news*, *Premier Christian News*, April 25, 2019, Accessed December 13, 2022, <https://premierchristian.news/en/news/article/polish-leader-says-everyone-must-accept-christianity> ; Christopher Lamb, “Giorgia Meloni: Who is the new Italian prime minister invoking the name of God?”, *premierchristian.news*, *Premier Christian News*, September 28, 2022, Accessed December 13, 2022, <https://www.premierchristianity.com/news-analysis/giorgia-meloni-who-is-the-new-italian-prime-minister-invoking-the-name-of-god/13948.article>

⁸ Jack Jenkins & Paul O’Donnell, “Who is Trump and Kanye’s dinner companion, Nick Fuentes?” *religionnews.com*, *Religion News Service*, November 27, 2022, Accessed December 13, 2022, <https://religionnews.com/2022/11/27/who-is-trump-and-kanyes-dinner-companion-nick-fuentes/> ; Samuel Perry & Andrew Whitehead, “Why White Christian Nationalism Isn’t Going Away”, *time.com*, *Time*, November 13, 2022, Accessed December 13, 2022, <https://time.com/6233438/white-christian-nationalism-isnt-going-away/> ; Adela Suliman & Timothy Bella, “GOP Rep. Boebert: ‘I’m tired of this separation of church and state junk’”, *washingtonpost.com*, *The Washington Post*, June 28, 2022, Accessed December 13, 2022, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2022/06/28/lauren-boebert-church-state-colorado/> ; Anthea Butler, “Why Trump—and some of his followers—believe he is the Chosen One”, *religionnews.com*, *Religion News Services*, August 23, 2019, Accessed December 13, 2022, <https://religionnews.com/2019/08/23/why-trump-and-some-of-his-followers-believe-he-is-the-chosen-one/>

⁹ James Diddam, “Integrate Church and State? Steubenville Panel Ponders Postliberal Future,” *juicyecumenism.com*, *Juicy Ecumenism*, March 29, 2021, Accessed August 20, 2021, <https://juicyecumenism.com/2021/03/29/integralist-new-polity/>

¹⁰ Amy Erica Smith, “Religion is shaping Brazil’s presidential election—but its evangelicals aren’t the same as America’s”, *theconversation.com*, *The Conversation*, September 26, 2022, Accessed December 13, 2022, <https://theconversation.com/religion-is-shaping-brazils-presidential-election-but-its-evangelicals-arent-the-same-as-americas-190509>

¹¹ APNews, “Far-right Ben-Gvir to be Israel’s national security minister”, *apnews.com*, *Associated Press*, November 26, 2022, Accessed December 13, 2022, <https://apnews.com/article/middle-east-religion-jerusalem-israel-benjamin-netanyahu-189ef3fc8c82d7163c1339e64bb1e40f> ; ADL, “ADL Expresses concern over likely inclusion of extremists in New Israeli Coalition Government”, *adl.org*, *Anti-Defamation League*, November 3, 2022, Accessed December 13, 2022, <https://www.adl.org/resources/press-release/adl-expresses-concern-over-likely-inclusion-extremists-new-israeli>

¹² Thu Thu Aung & Poppy Mcpherson, “Monk Militia: The Buddhist clergy backing Myanmar’s junta”, *reuters.com*, *Reuters*, December 8, 2022, Accessed December 13, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/monk-militia-buddhist-clergy-backing-myanmars-junta-2022-12-08/>

this post-liberal state “does not deny foundational values of liberalism, as freedom, etc. But it does not make this ideology a central element of state organization, but applies a specific, national, particular approach in its stead.”¹³ This “particular” approaches means heavy nationalist exceptionalism that regularly imposes exclusionary ethnic or religious policy or demands restrictions on press, multiparty parliament, and judicial independence. In the name of opposing “degenerate” gender politics, immigration, or multiculturalism, liberalism’s much-vaunted “institutions of democracy” come under a singular nationalist vision. Liberalism is felt to have failed delivery on its promises of individual dignity, self-oversight, and meritocratic prosperity; that the precarity which once defined the lives of social outsiders has begun to creep upon the lives of insiders, as well.¹⁴ This is, as ever, the fear which motivates the symptomatic scapegoating of illiberal orders.

Some of these reactions explicitly seek a feudal order, wherein a “Caesar-like figure [takes] power back from this devolved oligarchy and [replaces] it with a monarchical regime run like a start-up.”¹⁵ Among many, we can observe an advanced form of this reactionary post-liberalism in the modern nationalizing religious alliance between Patriarch Kirill of

¹³ Viktor Orbán, “Full text of Viktor Orbán’s speech at Băile Tuşnad (Tusnádfürdő) of 26 July 2014”, Csaba Tóth of *the Budapest Beacon* (July 29, 2014) Accessed March 31, 2022: <https://budapestbeacon.com/full-text-of-viktor-orbans-speech-at-baile-tusnad-tusnadfurdo-of-26-july-2014/>

¹⁴ Zack Beauchamp, “It Happened there: how democracy died in Hungary”, *Vox* (Sep 13, 2018). Accessed April 5, 2022: <https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2018/9/13/17823488/hungary-democracy-authoritarianism-trump> Luke Waller, “Viktor Orbán: Hungary, the Conservative Subversive”, *Politico* (2016) <https://www.politico.eu/list/politico-28/viktor-orban/> ; Tucker Carlson, “Elon Musk restoring free speech to Twitter would be a threat to the people in charge”, *Fox News* (April 4, 2022). Accessed April 5, 2022: <https://www.foxnews.com/opinion/tucker-carlson-elon-musk-free-speech-twitter> ; Fatma Khaled, “CPAC Texas Welcoming Viktor Orbán Despite Outrage Over No-Mixed-Race Speech” *Newsweek* (July 30, 2022): <https://www.newsweek.com/von-der-leyen-rips-orban-over-mixed-race-speech-cpac-still-welcoming-him-1729399> ; Caleb Ecarma, “Tucker Carlson is Joining the Right-Wing Parade to ‘Illiberal’ Hungary”, *Vanity Fair* (August 3, 2021). Accessed April 5, 2022: <https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2021/08/tucker-carlson-right-wing-parade-hungary> ; David Smith, “How Tucker Carlson and the far right embraced Hungary’s authoritarian leader”, *The Guardian* (August 8, 2021). Accessed April 5, 2022: <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2021/aug/07/tucker-carlson-hungary-viktor-orban-donald-trump> John Burnett, “Christian nationalism is still thriving—and is a force for returning Trump to power”, *NPR* (January 23, 2022). Accessed April 14, 2022: <https://www.npr.org/2022/01/14/1073215412/christian-nationalism-donald-trump> ; Robert Bellah, “Civil Religion in America”, *Daedalus: Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, vol 96, no. 1 (Winter, 1967), 1-21. Accessed April 14, 2022: http://www.robertbellah.com/articles_5.htm

¹⁵ James Pogue, “Inside the New Right, Where Peter Thiel is Placing His Biggest Bets,” *Vanity Fair*, April 20, 2022, Accessed May 9, 2022: <https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2022/04/inside-the-new-right-where-peter-thiel-is-placing-his-biggest-bets> Andrew Whitehead and Samuel Perry, “The Growing Anti-Democratic Threat of Christian Nationalism in the US”, *time.com*, *Time*, May 27, 2021, Accessed August 20, 2021, <https://time.com/6052051/anti-democratic-threat-christian-nationalism/>; Brett Samuels, “Trump: Take the guns first, go through due process second,” *thehill.com*, *The Hill*, February 28, 2018, Accessed August 20, 2021, <https://thehill.com/homenews/administration/376097-trump-take-the-guns-first-go-through-due-process-second> ; Philip Rucker and David Weigel, “Trump advocates depriving undocumented immigrants of due-process rights,” *washingtonpost.com*, *The Washington Post*, June 25, 2018, Accessed August 20, 2021, https://www.washingtonpost.com/powerpost/trump-advocates-depriving-undocumented-immigrants-of-due-process-rights/2018/06/24/dfa45d36-77bd-11e8-93cc-6d3becdd7a3_story.html ; Reuters Staff, “Trump says he is seriously looking at ending birthright citizenship,” *reuters.com*, *Reuters*, August 21, 2019, Accessed August 20, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-immigration-trump/trump-says-he-is-seriously-looking-at-ending-birthright-citizenship-idUSKCN1VB21B> ; the examples could go on.

Russian Orthodoxy and Vladimir Putin's autocracy. Together, they argue for the spiritual unity of Slavic people under Moscow, the success of the Russian state in pursuing "traditional values" against pluralistic tolerance, and a will to sacrifice civic freedoms for these aims.¹⁶ Outsiders are designated the enemy—gender minority, Muslim, immigrant—to be blamed for this unstable and alienating experience at the end of liberalism, and a few most extreme take up the fight. Illiberal unions of church and state seem to be the answer of many exhausted by modernity: a return to some kind of shared vision, some kind of community, and something for which to sacrifice. But it is ever a phobic and hierarchical return. The liberal project fails and with it goes its tolerance. A strange paradox: while individualism creates the possibility of goods like democracy and egalitarianism, individualism eventually turns to swallow its children, like the monster of Saint John's vision in Revelation 17 and 18.

Can liberalism yet survive? Because if clung to, like a determined bull-rider, another option may appear: neoliberalism. This is mainly an economic force of commodification, globalization, and privatization, but left to its own consumptive devices, it possesses a social effect, as more demographics are enfolded into marketing. Herein, the previously excluded and unnecessary become new opportunities to uphold profit margins, marketing issues of identity categorization as of final and ultimate importance. It is rarer than the illiberal reaction, but is found in the generation of a very particular form of "identity politics" which serves to distract and defang rebellion from within. Rather than resolve the deep, systemic troubles which cause social alienation and material precarity, such as systemic racial discrimination and labor exploitation, neoliberalism surrenders to a symbolic resolution by mere 'recognition', alone. In a sense, this is inherently hopeless: believing the project of equal and fulfilling human community dead, neoliberalism must accept divisions as eternal and essential. The conclusion is that if we just tolerate all the harder, draw more rigid and enforceable demands around who is what, we can inject predictability into multicultural pluralism by individual characteristics raised to rigid ultimacy.¹⁷ Identity collection becomes the whole of one's self-worth, carrying with it the expectation of preferential or condemnatory judgment from others.¹⁸ Genuine solidarity and fellow-feeling is smothered as the complex mutuality of human interaction must be coded and controlled, machinelike, by a presumptive and unforgiving logic of identity recognitions. These identity markers, reinforced panoptically by ritual shame and exclusion, are felt ever-more as the alienated consumer's most important characteristics: and they truly do keep one's head above water in modernity's all-consuming sea of individualized alienation. Unable to address socio-economic needs or power imbalances, arch-individualism can only demand uncompromising social performance, manufacturing security on a purely cultural-symbolic level. To say it another way, only respectful, but ineffective, "customer service" is demanded, such as in education, where monumental silos of self-righteousness are built to reaffirm the

¹⁶ Scott Kenworthy, "Why is Russia's church backing Putin's War? Church-state history gives a clue", *Religion News Service*, March 23, 2022, Accessed April 14, 2022: <https://religionnews.com/2022/03/23/why-is-russias-church-backing-putins-war-church-state-history-gives-a-clue/>

¹⁷ See also the works of Adam Seligman, esp. *Modernity's Wager: Authority, the Self, and Transcendence* (Princeton University Press, 2009) and *Rethinking Pluralism* (Oxford University Press, 2012).

¹⁸ Rashmee Kumar, "How Identity Politics Has Divided the Left: An Interview With Asad Haider", *The Intercept*, May 27, 2018, Accessed January 23, 2023: <https://theintercept.com/2018/05/27/identity-politics-book-asad-haider/>

self, safely away from challenge or trouble.¹⁹ Toleration exponentially complicates, with little space for grace or “moral credit”—the benefit of the doubt that lubricate social relationships with a presumption of peace.²⁰ Neoliberal ideologies and structures are beyond critique and so individualist “good” can look no higher than to make board rooms and militaries “more diverse” and so claim success. This cultural policing often wounds with isolating self-righteousness and fearful boundaries its own noble purpose of diverse equality, benefit, and safety.

It seems that most embrace one of these two responses: to individualize all the harder into the most ‘proper’ identities and consumption, becoming Tolkien’s self-consumptive Ungoliant (what we might call the neoliberal path) or Dostoyevsky’s Grand Inquisitor—domineering and others for the one righteous path (what we might call the reactionary conservative path). These cry out against liberalism: “We have taken the sword of Cæsar...for having begun to build their tower of Babel without us, they will end, of course, with cannibalism.”²¹ The former projects precarity inwards and lashes with self-flagellation, while the latter projects the trouble outward, to lash scapegoats. What has this to do with Emmanuel d’Alzon? He stood on the brink between the feudal age and the liberal age in France, between Monarchists and the new Bourgeoisie. We stand upon a similar split, between illiberal and liberal. What might d’Alzon say to us?

2 THE LIFE AND TIMES OF EMMANUEL D’ALZON AND HIS BELOVED FRANCE

Emmanuel d’Alzon was born into the aristocratic ‘Second Estate’ on August 30th, 1810, in the bosom of the last lingering memories of feudalism; the twilight days of Napoleon’s liberalizing empire. The model world of the *Ancien Regime* was mostly a memory. The Catholic Church, the ‘First Estate’, had once owned nearly 10% of France’s surface area and Catholicism had been supported by some 90% of the people: a “grid of relative conformity” for the common peasant of the ‘Third Estate,’ under monarchical Divine Right.²² But blame Enlightenment principles of liberalism and popular sovereignty, blame the people resentful of complex privileges and a *noblesse oblige* that had long ceased to even resemble an equal exchange for extracted surplus, blame social elites weakened by the barrage of the black death, the little ice age, and the Protestant Reformation, or blame the unmanageable economic crises and famines of the late 1700s that Louis XVI could only answer with despotic violence, in imitation of his predecessors.²³ Altogether, the whole stumbling construct

¹⁹ Vincent Lloyd, “A Black Professor Trapped in Anti-Racist Hell”, *Compact Magazine* (Feb 2023), <https://compactmag.com/article/a-black-professor-trapped-in-anti-racist-hell> ; Kathleen Foody, “Hamline University under fire for art professor’s dismissal,” *AP News* (Jan 2023), <https://apnews.com/article/education-colleges-and-universities-minnesota-middle-east-religion-e39841dd59ea2647a6019b4ba669bfe5>

²⁰ Adam B. Seligman & David W. Montgomery, “The Tragedy of Human Rights: Liberalism and the Loss of Belonging”, *Springer Nature* (2019), <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12115-019-00356-7>

²¹ Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Constance Garnett (Minneapolis: Lerner Publishing Group, 2015), 257-258.

²² Peter McPhee, *A Social History of France 1789-1914* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 8. Ibid, 16; Ralph Gibson, *A Social History of French Catholicism 1789-1914* (Oxfordshire: Routledge, 1989), 2; Francois Mignet, *History of the French Revolution* (Luten: Andrews UK, 2012), 11.

²³ McPhee, 17-18; Mignet, 12-13, 22-23.

mediating human social life was finally kicked over by the National Assembly of 1789, their Tennis Court oath, and the storming of the Bastille.²⁴ Liberal rights of man were proclaimed, a king was executed, there were terrors and counter-terrors, alongside the assaults and depravities of war from the rest of monarchical Europe. From this chaos the Napoleonic coup built the First Empire and spread liberalism's jurisprudence, cosmopolitanism, laissez-faire markets, and meritocracy across Europe. Outcompeted by Britain's colonial empire, industrialized aristocracy, and maritime power, the man who was once "world spirit on horseback" was overthrown and Bourbon kings were restored to France. But this was merely a tactical retreat for liberalism into constitutional monarchy. When Charles X sought to return to a world without an elected legislature, he was overthrown in the Three Glorious Days of 1830, during d'Alzon's Parisian schooling years.²⁵ An Orléanist fifth cousin carried forward a "royal republic", the July Monarchy, dominated by those bankers and industrialists who were born from the new liberal economy. This was but a "stock exchange" for spoils of new business and colonies, in the words of Tocqueville and Marx, while the poor were left illiterate and cholera-stricken.²⁶ It was here when d'Alzon took his Orders and became a priest, then Vicar-General of Nîmes, eventually acquiring a secondary school in 1846. It was a crop failure in the 1840s which brought proletariat and bourgeoisie close enough to each other that universal male suffrage was achieved, which then chose a candidate for order and glory, a man more mediocre and farcical than his uncle, yet who still shrewdly played as all things to all men: Napoleon III, at the head of a religiously-tolerant Second Republic.²⁷

It only took four years for the Republic to falter. The vote had returned to less than 1% of Frenchmen under a tax-based hierarchy, and 1% of landholders owned 28% of the soil resources.²⁸ These French elite feared a victory of the new socialists who did not, as the Priest did, "propagate that good philosophy which teaches that man is here to suffer" but rather "that other philosophy which tells man...you are here below to take up your little share of happiness, and if you do not find it in your present situation, strike without fear the rich whose egotism prevents you from enjoying your share of happiness."²⁹ In this fear, liberalism bid another minor retreat and in Marx's words, "gave up the crown to save the purse."³⁰ Napoleon III's coup successfully raised the Second Empire, and like his uncle, guided liberalism's development in an orderly and safe way for those who benefited most from its boom of industry, steam, and coal, from the national unity of telegraph networks, railway lines, and a common tongue, from the declaration of individual rights, the dark

²⁴ McPhee, 31.

²⁵ McPhee, 112-113.

²⁶ Born from increasing colonies, markets and resources in Tangier and Morocco, North Africa, & Polynesia. McPhee, 116-117, 140-141.

²⁷ McPhee, 168-169; Scott W. Haine, Frank Thackeray & John Findling, *History of France* (Santa Barbara: Greenwood, 2000), 105-107; Pierre Goubert, *The Course of French History* (Abingdon: Taylor & Francis, 1991), 247-248. McPhee, 171-172. Gibson, 104-105, 108. Roger Price, *People and Politics in France, 1848-1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 244-248. Adolphe Thiers, "le Vile Multitude" (1850), trans. Thomas Bouchet, *To The Barricades*. Accessed May 10, 2022: <https://www.barricades.ac.uk/items/show/124>

²⁸ McPhee, 147, 157, 165.

²⁹ Price, *The French Second Empire: An Anatomy of Political Power* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 195, 272, 292

³⁰ Price, *The French Second Empire*, 26-27, 184.

factories, and the urbanizing slums of proletarianization.³¹ Even the needs of the empire—surveillance, controlled press, and criminalized political gatherings—slowly acceded to liberalism: relaxed censorship, restored democracy, and rights to strike, assembly, and press.³² But unlike most empires, this one did not fall from within but was goaded into fatal error by Bismarck’s politicking. War with Prussia-Germany led to the near-immediate capture of the Emperor himself in the disastrous Sedan campaign of 1870.³³ In the chaotic aftermath and with Paris under siege, the Empire’s elite fled to Versailles and declared the Third Republic. The lower classes and their organizers left in Paris declared a Commune. They were to be governed by what they believed was the transcendent aim of the liberal revolution: socialist principles of separate church and state, labor rights, co-operative ownership of productive means, rent remission, and radical social equality.³⁴ The Third Republic—liberal enough to abandon emperors and kings, but not so much that they understood Communards as anything other than property-pillagers and thieving revolutionaries—made peace with Germany and waged war to take back Paris. Their bloody violence was answered by the Commune’s defense, which included executing Archbishop Darboy.³⁵ When the city finally fell, Versailles killed tens of thousands indiscriminately.³⁶ d’Alzon watched from both southern France and the First Vatican Council in Rome, hearing vindication from Pope Pius IX who had long and loudly decried the birth of modernity and condemned “the cult of modern freedom” and its insistence that “The Roman Pontiff can, and ought to, reconcile himself, and come to terms with progress, liberalism and modern civilization.”³⁷

Yet, the Third Republic proved irreversible. It was the final victory of a moderate and stable liberalism—and, importantly, the restriction of anything more radical. This liberal journey of the long 19th century brought with it equality before the law, civil liberties, parliamentary democracy, and ever-increasing bourgeoisie profit. It brought a new “middle class” and their “fruit of liberalism, or, if one wishes, liberty realized”: universal happiness and indefinite progress promised by the Enlightenment.³⁸ After a failed monarchist coup and the under aegis of a new pope more sympathetic to liberal individualism, Emmanuel d’Alzon died in 1880. He had lived to see the heights of Catholic practice in the 1860s, which was now on permanent decline; an inverse correlation to the rise of the liberal-capitalist individual and attendant democracy.³⁹ This was the

³¹ Ibid, 10, 135, 213; Haine, Thackery & Findling, 110-111; Goubert, 112-113, 253. Price, *The French Second Empire*, 193. McPhee, 197.

³² Ibid, 184; Goubert, 261. Price, *The French Second Empire*, 11, 34, 185.

³³ Goubert, 262-264. Roger Price, *Religious Renewal in France 1789-1870: The Roman Catholic Church Between Catastrophe and Triumph* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 405, 412, 428.

³⁴ Haine, Thackery & Findling, 454; John Merriman, *Massacre: The Life and Death of the Paris Commune* (New York: Basic Books, 2014), 30-37. Ibid, 30-33; Magraw, 93.

³⁵ Haine, Thackery & Findling, 118-119; Merriman, *Massacre*, 99, 108, 111.

³⁶ Merriman, *Massacre*, 252-253; Roger Magraw, *France 1800-1914: A Social History* (Abingdon: Taylor & Francis, 2002), 92-94.

³⁷ Ibid, 79-80. Pope Pius IX, *The Syllabus of Errors* (1864), 19, 20, 24, 41, 42, 43, 44, 54, 55, 63, 76, 77, 78. <https://www.papalencyclicals.net/pius09/p9syll.htm>

³⁸ Merriman, *Massacre*, 253; JPT Bury & Robert Tombs, *France 1814-1940* (Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2003), 117-119. Price, *The Second French Empire*, 299, 318.

³⁹ Emmanuel d’Alzon, *Day by Day Part I - January - June: Quotations from his Writings*, ed. Jean Paul Périer-Muzet, trans. John Franck, Thomas O’Brien, Oliver Blanchette, Joseph Fredette, Philip Bonvouloir, Claude

rationalization of the Divine Right, sovereignty shifted from king to individual. Just as Augustine watched Roman order decline into feudal order, d'Alzon believed he was watching feudal order decline into some new, alien democracy. He believed he was watching a barbaric shift, the old world sinking beneath the waves, just as had his patron.⁴⁰ In modernity, we stand in similar transition. The liberal-capitalist Keynesian order and its competing Soviet ideology have now both collapsed, coalescing into the Neoliberal, Washington consensus which has functionally governed Earth since the 1970s and 1980s. We recognize something alike to what d'Alzon noted, that we have all been "paralyzed by personal interest..."⁴¹ What does it mean to live at the changing of the guard? He observed the hope of liberalism and the disillusionment of proletarianization; we have observed the promise of privatization, automation and globalization of the 80s, as well as the financial precarity that follows in 2000, 2008 and 2020. The Roman empire collapsed to its last, ignoble gasps and was reorganized into feudalism. Feudal monarchies were eventually exhausted, their contradictions attenuated, and brought kicking and screaming into modern liberalism. Now liberal democratic individualism faces crisis after crisis as its own contradictions exacerbate. From such a changing of the guard, what did d'Alzon and his political theology have to offer we who live today within his our own twilight years? Do we retreat to the illiberal "before"? Can the liberal project survive its own works? Should it?

3 EMMANUEL D'ALZON'S CRITIQUE OF LIBERAL CAPITALIST DEMOCRACY

Emmanuel d'Alzon was born breathing two airs, two times, two ages. It would be both easy and obvious to say his love for the old and fear of the new emerged from where it most often does: his birthright. His aristocratic material interests predisposed him to sociological distance from those middle-class liberals and proletarian urbanites who fueled revolutionary fervor.⁴² It is only natural for us to prefer the familiar. This is only attenuated by the French origin of liberalism being particularly anti-religious. It rejected that which was most essential to d'Alzon. Catholicism stood condemned for its millenia of collaboration with the injustice of the feudal order. Thus, he understood the idea of popular sovereignty to be Reformation seedlings come to full fruit. The revolution rejected every form of the "supernatural order" and hierarchy through which Divinity communicated "social principles" to humanity.⁴³ It was the spirit of Isaiah's Lucifer, d'Alzon warned, that urged

Grenache, Donat Lamothe, Richard Lamoureux, Norman Meiklejohn, Paul Henry (Rome: Bayard, 2006), 208-209. Accessed March 29, 2022: <https://www.assumption.us/oldaa/about-us/virtual-library/47-virtual-library/408-fr-dalzon-day-by-day-part-i-january-june> Gibson, 234.

⁴⁰ d'Alzon, *Foundational Documents*, trans. Richard Richards (Milton: Assumptionists, 2010), 48. <https://www.assumption.us/oldaa/about-us/virtual-library/47/335-foundational-documents>

⁴¹ Emmanuel d'Alzon, "To Educators at Assumption" ed. & trans. Fr. Richard Lamoureux (New London: Twenty-Third Publications, 2009), 85. <https://assumptio.com/about-us/virtual-library/47-virtual-library/417-emmanuel-dalzon-to-educators-at-assumption>

⁴² d'Alzon, *In His Own Words vol II*, trans. Fr. Eugene V. LaPlante (Rome: Bayard Press, 2007), 233.

⁴³ Emmanuel d'Alzon, *Circular Letters 1874-1875*, trans. Robert Fortin (Worcester: Bayard, 1981), 34-35. Accessed March 31, 2022: <https://www.assumption.us/oldaa/about-us/virtual-library/47/400-circular-letters-1874-1875> d'Alzon, "Letter to Marie Correnson, December 4, 1869", *Day by Day Part 1*, 225-226. d'Alzon, *In His Own Words vol I*, 111-112. Gibson, 23-26. Emmanuel d'Alzon, "Further Study Program", *The Spiritual Writings of Emmanuel d'Alzon*, trans. Robert Fortin and John Franck (Worcester: Bayard, 2020). Accessed

people to rebel: “The fifty or sixty thrones that have fallen during the last century are the result of [Satan’s] latest efforts to overthrow the throne of the Vicar of Christ on earth, because Satan is powerless to overthrow the throne of Jesus Christ himself in heaven.”⁴⁴ The Revolution’s claim that rights came from man, rather than God’s hierarchical gift, was merely the ongoing drama of the militant Church against all: Emperors, Arius, Islam, Luther. Religious individualism’s half-life is political individualism, the “radical denial of the rights of God”.⁴⁵ Of course, the cruelties and oppression of the feudal order would be difficult to fully appreciate for an ultramontane aristocrat like d’Alzon, who saw them as individual aberrations in an otherwise perfectly-ordered social hierarchy. To the warring tyrant kings, the exploited peasants, the persecuted of many stripes by a rigid and unequal social hierarchies, d’Alzon responded by appeal to divine stability: “obviously in human governments the threat of tyranny can be very real. Yet... When abuses do arise in such [feudal] societies the chances are they will be minimized.”⁴⁶ Nevertheless, when the liberalism of 1848 was kinder to religion, in contrast to the 1790s, d’Alzon was much more willing to cooperate. The heart of d’Alzon’s democratic anxiety was not to be found here, in its mere alien or hostile nature.

Most salient to d’Alzon’s warnings were the contradictions at the heart of the liberal project, which we place here under three headings: *the obsessive self-destruction of individualism* (‘disobedience’ or ‘anarchy’), *the loss of any transcendent, unitive purpose for the well-being of humanity* (‘falsehood’ or ‘immorality’) and *the absolute control inevitably acquired by selfish capitalist markets*, incentivized by pure self-interest alone (‘hatred’ or ‘egoism/self-deification’). D’Alzon saw all these symptoms as developing from one heart of the liberal revolution: “Non serviam—I will not serve! This phrase was proclaimed before the creation of man. Emblazoned on the banner of every rebellion, it began by causing dissension in heaven itself!” for in denying all higher meaning and obligations, “what else is there to live for?” Life merely becomes selfish pursuit: “eat, drink and be merry—let us drown our sorrows in pleasure. Let us crown ourselves with garlands and enjoy life while we may—because tomorrow we will all be dead.”⁴⁷ Liberalism is hedonism; the argument

March 31, 2022: <https://www.assumption.us/oldaa/images/stories/Books/spiritual-writings.htm# Toc39747567> Gibson, 37-38.

⁴⁴ d’Alzon, *Foundational Documents*, 45.

⁴⁵ d’Alzon, “Twenty-Ninth Meditation,” *Spiritual Writings*. d’Alzon, *Circular Lettesr*, 33-34; d’Alzon, “Fifth Meditation”, *Spiritual Writings*; d’Alzon, *Foundational Documents*, 48, 60, 85. Jean-Paul Périer-Muzet, “The Birthplace of the Assumption: 19th-Century France”, *The Assumptionist Spirit According to Emmanuel d’Alzon* (Rome: 1993), 19. Accessed March 31, 2022: <https://www.assumption.us/oldaa/about-us/virtual-library/47-virtual-library/523-the-assumptionist-spirit-according-to-emmanuel-dalzon> d’Alzon, “The Seventeenth Meditation” & “Satan and His Offspring”, *Spiritual Writings*. Wilfrid Dufault, *Emmanuel d’Alzon: Apostle for Our Time* (1994), 10. <https://www.assumption.us/oldaa/about-us/virtual-library/47-virtual-library/565-emmanuel-dalzon-apostle-for-our-time> d’Alzon, *Foundational Documents*, 21-22; d’Alzon, *In His Own Words vol I*, 85.

⁴⁶ Emanuel d’Alzon, *Mary, Our Mother, Our Model and our Queen: Scriptural Meditations*, trans. M. Angeline Bouchard (New York: New City Press, 1988), 65. Accessed March 31, 2022: <https://www.assumption.us/oldaa/about-us/virtual-library/47/396-mary-our-mother-our-model-and-our-queen>

⁴⁷ d’Alzon, “The Revolution: Enemy of the Church, The 26th Nîmes Lecture, December 11, 1870”, *Spiritual Writings*.

for rights without love. It is the “need to believe in nothing in order to affirm the right to do anything.”⁴⁸ Is d’Alzon right? Let us turn to his first concern.

When individualism is made totalizing, wherein oneself is the highest end and one’s own liberty the absolute *telos*, the core of our humanity is dissolved. Citing approvingly from Tocqueville, d’Alzon spoke of the United States as exemplar. He argued a failure to recognize communal obligation meant one could have only the threats and violence of law: “Having left England without knowledge of civil laws, they had recourse to Mosaic laws.”⁴⁹ The pursuit of individualist happiness was not enough to make a truly human society. d’Alzon spoke with eerie prescience of the 1980s neoliberals Thatcher and Reagan, warning that for such a mindset, “society...it’s only a word.” There can be no fight for “great truths, principles, or fundamental laws”⁵⁰ for “solidarity no longer exists” and “everyone is looking out for his own interests...egoism elevated to its highest power.”⁵¹ Liberal philosophy had argued that individualism would be ultimate dignity by self-direction, but d’Alzon differed. This freedom was of a crass sort, it created no dignity and offered no achievement. Self-interest melted away the relations and obligations that made living as a human fulfilling and good. Individualism absolutized made for acidic self-destruction. It made life an alienated, competitive rat race for amassing temporary, individual satisfaction, no matter the cost. This is a world of psychic anarchy.⁵² Humans, only whole when together, were now driven apart—and driven mad, into self-consumption, without solidarity or society.

To the second point of falsehood and immorality, d’Alzon argued liberal individualism absolutized would not only decimate individual happiness, but would undermine the very possibility of societal happiness. Ironically, for d’Alzon, the very revolutionary means undermined the possibility of the utopia revolutionaries sought. He warned that “many are just not interested at all in discovering what is true or what is false...above all, they insist on being left alone. Don’t talk to them about anything but their interests.”⁵³ The liberal subject, though born of deep philosophical consideration, is in practice quickly reduced; compelled by living as an atomized individual among individuals. Everything comes to be judged by and for one’s own good and interests, because there is quite literally no time for anything else. One is racing merely to survive on your own means. This generates a “kind of fatalistic march” that neither “hopes for heaven nor fears...hell.” There can be no consideration of whether they are “doing good or bad...it doesn’t really matter, so long as it is useful or enjoyable and brings profit or pleasure.”⁵⁴ D’Alzon argued older human social orders emphasized, for good or ill, the wholeness of a community and the obligations therein to some higher good. This emphasis was materially reinforced by various social rituals—such was the role of Catholicism and its sacraments in medieval Europe. Meanwhile, the liberal subject, ground down by the material forces around it, may acquire a certain kind of liberty, a “freedom-from” positive obligation. Yet, it possesses no “freedom-for”. D’Alzon foresaw this odd paradox: democracy, with its grand and unitive visions of humanity happy and

⁴⁸ d’Alzon, *Foundational Documents*, 73.

⁴⁹ d’Alzon, *Day by Day Part II*, 234.

⁵⁰ d’Alzon, “The Seventeenth Meditation”, *Spiritual Writings*.

⁵¹ d’Alzon, “Thoughts for the Summer Vacation”, *Spiritual Writings*; d’Alzon, “The Sixth Meditation”, *Spiritual Writings*.

⁵² d’Alzon, “Thirty-Sixth Meditation”, *Spiritual Writings*.

⁵³ d’Alzon, “The Seventeenth Meditation”, *Spiritual Writings*.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

unbound, gives birth to individualism, and that individualism, when fully grown, turns to smother democracy and all shared, grand visions. Individualism totalized comes to democratize everything, even knowledge, truth, and goodness, until there is no longer any sort of “shared universe” that makes possible a common good or democratic project. All that remains is a slow, diversifying heat death. In words that might be spoken by Americans today, d’Alzon wrote that, “I am disgusted with politics, which I consider to be a dead end. There is no life there, only death convulsions, powerless attempts to organize, vain efforts...” Without solidarity and common obligation, all was to become tortured performances of individual morality for individual satisfaction—the neoliberal end, spoken of in our introduction.⁵⁵ Here, d’Alzon actually made odd bedfellows with his socialist adversaries’ critique of liberalism.

Indeed, socialism is presciently mentioned, for d’Alzon’s third fear of liberalism was of the rising capitalism of his age, which today has functionally become our only conception of civilization. What problem slumbers here? That greed, fear, and selfishness, systematized and incentivized in a capitalist order, was all that remained to fill the new liberal vacuum. If there is no greatest good, then your ego is self-deified, shaped and formed by market competition for profit alone. For d’Alzon, this is a sort of hatred of one’s fellow man. You must hate him, in ill-treating and using him, so that you may compete and survive. Business becomes but “one vast system of carefully organized theft” defined by the greedy speculative investment of those at the very top, whose example inspires the rest of society—who are lacking the access of the new wealthy capitalists—to live in a miserable, fearful, envious grind for it. d’Alzon might as well be describing the central contradiction of liberal capitalism, Marxian class conflict, when he writes of the “haves”, defending everything they possess by any cost necessary, while the “have-nots” long to possess the obscene wealth acquired by the thieves above them. As d’Alzon argues:

“Once we cease to think in terms of everlasting life, what is left? The unbridled desire for pleasure, the bitter hatred of those who have not for those who have, and the resulting series of catastrophes which, unless God intervenes to prevent them, will add up to brutal atrocities and wholesale slaughter such as the world has never yet seen.”⁵⁶

D’Alzon here seemed almost to predict the unbridled, violent horror of competing European bourgeoisie in World War 1. This war was driven by competition for markets, resources and colonies, even if it meant a century of warfare, suffering, and inequality in its aftermath. d’Alzon’s concern was not merely for ever-present human greed but for this new capitalist system that incentivized, encouraged, and rewarded that greed by demanding insatiable competition or death. There is nothing else that can fill the ethical vacuum but the laws of the market: self-interest, competition, and exploitation. Liberal thinkers—such as Jefferson and Madison in America—had hoped that their great project of aristocratic, liberal democracy would be guided, as Athens had fancied itself, by those men of enlightened intellect, benevolent virtue, wise property and patriotic character.⁵⁷ But what d’Alzon

⁵⁵ d’Alzon, “Letter to Alphonse de Vignamont – 28 March 1835”, *To Educators at Assumption*, 62-63.

⁵⁶ d’Alzon, “The Seventeenth Meditation”, *Spiritual Writings*.

⁵⁷ Madison: “In England...if elections were open to all classes of people, the property of landed proprietors would be insecure. An agrarian law would soon take place.” Thus, “our government ought to secure the

recognized with fear was just what Hamilton saw with hope. The virtue-less were rewarded by the market with greater wealth, that wealth determines power, and power would stabilize society to acquire more wealth. Divine right was transferred not just to the individual, but to the individual possessing wealth, land, and the productive means. Divinity was overthrown in favor of the financial and the corporate.⁵⁸ Thus, in the final count for d'Alzon, liberalism's highest value and final virtue was only ever a dwindling individual liberty. Thus, altogether, d'Alzon argued that (1) individualism fails to satisfy the connected nature of humanity and so sabotages each individual's happiness. Then, (2) by increasingly abstracting from us all our neighbors and society, liberal individualism impoverishes any vision of common goods and justice, starving any will to sacrifice for some democratic cause. This means (3) the world is left in a state of mutual usury, where the haves and have-nots are constantly warring to acquire the greatest share of wealth possible. It was for all these reasons that d'Alzon saw his mission as extinguishing the "sea of flames ignited by the Revolution...with love". For d'Alzon, bourgeois democracy sought nothing higher than its own potential-to-act and so failed its promises.

4 D'ALZON'S REFUSAL TO RETREAT TO ILLIBERAL INTEGRALISM

After all of this, one might rightly believe d'Alzon to have been the legitimist of legitimists, chief of all integralists, and a domineering theocrat. The church must rule to instill orderly purpose and predictable unity among the people, no? It must be nothing less than Dostoyevsky's Grand Inquisitor! d'Alzon is oft-quoted by the integralists of our own day, for "if the Church was mistaken for so long a time on so important a question as the union of Church and State, what becomes, from the human point-of-view, of the promise of divine assistance to be with us "always until the end of the world"? But if she was right then, why would she not be right today?" Indeed, d'Alzon often reminisces on the history of "favored"

permanent interest of the country against innovation" that will "protect the minority of the opulent against the majority." And so the Senate "ought to come from and represent the wealth of the nation...the more capable set of men." (Jonathan Elliot, *The Debates in Several State Conventions: On the Adoption of the Federal Constitution as Recommended by the General Convention at Philadelphia in 1787* (Philadelphia: JB Lippincott Company, 1907), 45. It was not as if his great opponent, Hamilton, disagreed with this liberal fundamental: "All communities divide themselves into the few and the many. The first are the rich and well born, the other the mass of the people. The voice of the people has been said to be the voice of God; and however generally this maxim has been quoted and believed, it is not true in fact. The people are turbulent and changing; they seldom judge or determine right. Give therefore to the first class a distinct, permanent share in the government. They will check the unsteadiness of the second, and as they cannot receive any advantage by a change, they therefore will ever maintain good government." Alexander Hamilton, *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton, vol. 4, January 1787-May 1788*, ed. Harold C. Syrett. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962), 195-202.

⁵⁸ Decades after d'Alzon's death, similar was recognized by the likes of President Wilson: "the world as a market" for trader and manufacture, so "the doors of the nation which are closed must be battered down...concessions obtained by financiers must be safeguarded by ministers of state, even if the sovereignty of unwilling nations be outraged in the process. Colonies must be obtained or planted, in order that no useful corner of the world may be overlooked or left unused." (William Appleman Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* (New York: WW Norton & Company, 1972), 72.) Madison's recognition of "stock jobbers becoming the praetorian band of government...at once its tool and tyrant" is quoted in Alan Jones, "Republicanism, Railroads, and Nineteenth-Century", *Liberty, Property and Government: Constitutional Interpretation Before the New Deal*, ed. Ellen Frankel Paul and Howard Dickman (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 241.

France, from Clovis to Martel to Charlemagne and Saint Louis, all with admiration.⁵⁹ He would not have objected to the fundamentals of Pius X, in the 20th century, who decried:

“A certain Democracy which goes so far in wickedness as to place sovereignty in the people and aims at the suppression of classes and their leveling down...by ignoring the laws governing human nature and by breaking the bounds within which they operate...” “Has not every community of people, dependent and unequal by nature, need of an authority to direct their activity towards the common good and to enforce its laws?”⁶⁰

This is the essence of the illiberal or post-liberal reaction that has become evident from Hungary to Brazil, from the United States to Poland, Islamic fundamentalists to Italy; from those that worship a transhumanist, unrestrained corporate technofeudalism⁶¹ to those integralist, fascist-adjacent theocrats, who smuggle themselves within pre-Vatican II like a carapace to coherently reject modernity on their own terms.⁶² All are retreats from modern, liberal democracy to a supposedly superior world of clear hierarchy. Now one may wisely argue, of course, to what extent “liberal democracies” have ever actually existed. One might say that “democracy” has never meant the equal power of individuals, but rather the freedom of some racial, propertied, or capital-class to dominate the political sphere in an advanced and technical form of feudal relations, guised in democracy. But nevertheless, even the theory of democracy that does exist is rejected by the illiberal reactionary. In the end, they say, you cannot have both democracy’s majoritarianism and liberalism’s concern for particular rights and property. It is better to join around some national, religious, or racial vision that can create order within, precisely by expulsive conflict against those “without”. These are always longing for a new Clovis or Constantine, seeing a savior in such charismatic leaders. For the integralist, a vision of religion that does not involve the knight, crusader, or king fighting forth their religious banner over others is incomplete—and they cite d’Alzon approvingly in their service.⁶³

⁵⁹ d’Alzon, *Circular Letters*, 39.

⁶⁰ Pius X, *Notre Charge Apostolique (Our Apostolic Mandate)*, 1910. Accessed March 31, 2022: <https://www.papalencyclicals.net/pius10/p10notre.htm>

⁶¹ James Pogue, “Inside the New Right, Where Peter Thiel is Placing His Biggest Bets,” *Vanity Fair*, April 20, 2022, Accessed May 9, 2022: <https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2022/04/inside-the-new-right-where-peter-thiel-is-placing-his-biggest-bets> ; Olivia Goldhill, “The neo-fascist philosophy that underpins both the alt-right and Silicon Valley technophiles”, *qz.com, Quartz*, June 18, 2017, accessed December 13, 2022, <https://qz.com/1007144/the-neo-fascist-philosophy-that-underpins-both-the-alt-right-and-silicon-valley-technophiles>

⁶² Kathryn Joyce & Ben Lorber, “White nationalists get religion: On the far-right fringe, Catholics and racists forge a movement”, *salon.com, Salon*, May 12, 2022, <https://www.salon.com/2022/05/12/nationalists-get-religion-on-the-far-right-fringe-catholics-and-forge-a-movement/>

⁶³ Brother André Marie, “In Praise of Triumphalism”, *Catholicism.org* (April 21, 2010). Accessed March 31, 2022: <https://catholicism.org/ad-rem-no-131.html> ; Gary Potter, “Thy Kingdom Come—Venerable Emmanuel d’Alzon”, *Catholicism.org* (Jan 17, 2006). Accessed March 31, 2022: <https://catholicism.org/dalzon-potter.html> Carol Rittner, Stephen D. Smith and Ireana Steinfeldt, *The Holocaust and the Christian World* (Jerusalem: Yad-Vashem, 2000), 83-86. James Diddams, “Integrate Church and State? Steubenville Panel Ponders Postliberal Future”, *Juicy Ecumenism: the Institute on Religion and Democracy* (March 29, 2021). Accessed March 31, 2022: <https://juicyecumenism.com/2021/03/29/integralist-new-polity/> ; Jim Morris, “Report: Over 600 Bodies

But while it is no doubt true that d’Alzon would have preferred the thesis of a Catholic-organized society, this does not mean that the hypothesis of the relative circumstances of liberalism were to be condemned. Indeed, d’Alzon spoke of himself and the Assumptionists as “Catholic Republicans” who favored the movement toward democracy, calling it “the most rigorous application of Catholic principles.”⁶⁴ Insofar as the Republic tolerated the church, such as between 1848 and 1852, d’Alzon tolerantly laid aside his ancient preferences: Republicanism was preferable over Gallican monarchism and the capital-drenched years of Napoleon III or Louis-Philippe. The principle of democracy was not, in itself, d’Alzon’s trouble. He himself happily participated in elections in Nîmes— even, at one point, nearly a candidate himself.⁶⁵ He was not unlike the Bishop of Orléans, Félix Dupanloup, who distinguished “between absolute propositions and relative ones” to both condemn a state irreligion while finding willingness to work within liberal norms like “civil toleration” that would win men by “kindly persuasion”. Roman Catholicism may accommodate ‘modern liberties’ in hypothesis by “intrusion of accidental circumstance.”⁶⁶ In the words of d’Alzon, on liberal principles: “Catholics can adopt (amare) and defend them, and will be doing noble and most useful work, if they make use of them, as effectively as they can, in the service of religion and of justice.”⁶⁷ In this sense, then, were we to anachronistically apply d’Alzon to *Dignitatis Humanae*, using Thomas Maas’ four categories of response, we would not find him simply under the progressive joy or integralist disgust at supposedly repudiating Catholicism’s historical integralism. Rather, what we see in d’Alzon is a combination of Maas’ “radical” and “neoconservative” options.⁶⁸ d’Alzon’s attempt to harmonize emerging freedom of religion with ancient Catholic tradition, comes to a neoconservative understanding not unlike Pope Francis’ 2019 “Religious Freedom for the Good of All”, wherein Vatican II reforms are understood as “a certain maturation of the Magisterium’s understanding” beyond the modernity-rejection of d’Alzon’s day. For “certain ideological configuration of the State, interpreting the modernity of the public sphere as an emancipation from the religious sphere, provoked the Magisterium to condemn freedom of conscience, understood as legitimate indifference and subjective arbitrariness vis-à-vis ethical and religious truth.”⁶⁹ Indeed, this is precisely what we see d’Alzon supporting: freedom, when freedom shared for a common good—and condemnation, when liberalism pretends a false neutrality that hides the enforcement of it totalizing, relative, selfishness.

Let us apply this concept to his virulent attacks on the French Revolution. It was only here, when liberalism laid siege to Roman Catholicism, that d’Alzon’s raged forth to fight an incompatible, competing anti-religious claim. But where liberalism tolerated, he wrote the

Found at the Indigenous School in Canada”, *AP News* (June 24, 2021). Accessed March 31, 2022: <https://apnews.com/article/canada-67da8a8af88efc91e6ffc64630796ec9>

⁶⁴ Gaétan Bernoville, *Emmanuel d’Alzon 1810-1880: A Champion of the 19th Century Catholic Renaissance in France*, trans. Claire Quintal & Alexis Babineau (Ontario: Bayard, 2003), 135. <https://www.assumption.us/oldaa/about-us/virtual-library/47-virtual-library/516-emmanuel-dalzon>

⁶⁵ d’Alzon, *In His Own Words vol I*, 161-162; d’Alzon, *In His Own Words vol II*, 91.

⁶⁶ Maurice Bévenot, “Thesis and Hypothesis”, *Theological Studies* (September 1, 1954), 440. Accessed March 31, 2022: <https://doi.org/10.1177/004056395401500305>; d’Alzon, *Circular Letters*, 40.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 444.

⁶⁸ Thomas Maas, “Can We Hang Together?” *Touchstone, A Journal of Mere Christianity*, vol. 31, issue 6, November/December 2018), 52-57.

⁶⁹ International Theological Commission, “Religious Freedom for the Good of All” (Vatican City Press: Vatican City, 2019), 14-16, 61-64.

Church “desires the downfall of no one. If upheavals do occur, however, she lets them take place and tries to profit from them.” The fall of feudalism and collapse of concordats across Europe was an opportunity: “why should [the church] not attempt, through the use of freedom, to draw all the good she can from a State which will have become relatively better, though less good absolutely speaking?” for, after all, “Corrupt societies will fall, the ties binding the Church to them will be loosened, and she will forge with younger societies new links adapted to their new forms.” Though disowned, the revolutionary, excommunicated Father Lammenais’ influence is clear upon d’Alzon.⁷⁰ So long as the internal hierarchy of the church maintained, and external activity was permitted, she could work “within a society which wants no part of it”:

“Viewed in this way, politics remains on the lofty level befitting religious who are coming together from all parts of the world and hurts the national pride of no one. Our major preoccupation is to proclaim everywhere in the world the rights of God, of Jesus Christ and of his Church. Those who defend these rights are our allies; those who deny them are our enemies. Wherever the Church, the agent of God, allows freedom, we respect each person’s freedom.”⁷¹

Thus, for d’Alzon, the primary problem of a counter-religion formed of Enlightenment liberalism could be resolved by toleration itself; the standing order need not be on the side of true religion, so long as it did not explicitly exclude it. Rather, the contradictions of democracy could be resolved within a new sphere of human relations and secondary institutions that did not hold, themselves, explicit state power. Democracy, as monarchy and feudalism, still belonged to the *civitas terrena* and its self-love, while the love of God, the *civitas caelestis*, could find its home anywhere.⁷² Indeed, it was liberalism itself that reduced the meaning of religious freedom, as if neutrality was not a religious position or that religiosity was irrelevant to liberal citizens. In perhaps his ultimate statement on the matter, d’Alzon pronounced a grand goal: “The bishops of Gaul...welcomed and transformed feudal barbarism; let us welcome and transform democratic barbarism.” d’Alzon’s order: do not regret “vanished grandeur”, give up “useless regret for the past” and recognize that “though power is necessary, it need not be concentrated in the hands of a king.” Thus, the rising tide of democracy left d’Alzon “neither excessively sad nor overly hopeful.”⁷³ Piety can run, as a brook, through new democratic channels and ruts, bringing new ways to elevate the poor, the common, the sick, and the wellbeing of the disinherited.

By the end of his life, d’Alzon concluded that democracy was perhaps even a gift from God and a sort of judgement upon the failures and selfish rule of the *Ancien Regime*. They, he argued, had brought much of the revolution upon themselves by flaws demonstrated over centuries: “both the people and the kings are at fault...”⁷⁴ It was not just the new capitalists

⁷⁰ d’Alzon, *Foundational Documents*, 61.

⁷¹ d’Alzon, *Circular Letters*, 36-37.

⁷² Edgar Bourque and Claude Maréchal, “At the School of Saint Augustine”, *The Assumptionist Spirit According to Emmanuel d’Alzon* (Rome: 1993), 88. Accessed March 31, 2022: <https://www.assumption.us/oldaa/about-us/virtual-library/47-virtual-library/523-the-assumptionist-spirit-according-to-emmanuel-dalzon>

⁷³ d’Alzon, *Foundational Documents*, 48-50.

⁷⁴ d’Alzon, “Letter to Alphonse de Vignamont – 28 March 1835”, *To Educators at Assumption*, 62-63.

who possessed a corrupting love of wealth, but those of d'Alzon's own estate.⁷⁵ It was the July Monarchy he called "only a decrepit machine that was useless and was even dangerous to try to repair it", that "sovereignty did not exist any more in the Palais Bourbon than at the Tuileries."⁷⁶ It was all "laziness, pleasures and debauchery".⁷⁷ To the fall of the second Empire in 1870, he wrote "Thiers believes that the Republic and the Empire are dead, but that we mustn't bury the Republic just yet. As for me, as sad as I am as a Frenchman, I am full of hope as a Catholic... Out of all this will come, believe me, some wonderful apostolic efforts."⁷⁸ All was opportunity for d'Alzon, for "the initiative of church is toward advancing democracy. Kings have gone. Aristocracies have disappeared or are in the process of doing so. The middle class is very weak against the incoming tide" only a worse despotism could stop this change, and so the church "must be all things to all men. That is why we must make every effort to have as much contact as possible with the common people."⁷⁹ It was these to whom democracy was supposedly coming who Catholicism should concern itself with: better a free church alongside the people than a church under domination of the Gallican, imperial or monarchical authorities.⁸⁰ He affirmed a new way: "attach no color to [Christ's] flag; the one that appeared to Constantine was neither red nor white, and yet the former saved the world while the latter conquered it."⁸¹

Rather than call the retreat to order, stability, and domination, d'Alzon recognized that a church no longer politically and militarily ascendant was, perhaps, in some ways superior. Better the French episcopate lose political power but keep its allegiance to the papacy, or the English episcopate to remain in solidarity with the Irish than accept the gold of British rule.⁸² To suffer under power was to be like Christ, "standing outside the Praetorium, covered with insult and injury. If "civil government is having less and less to do with God" then it shall answer with

*"no weapons other than those of Jesus Christ. He chose to fight by being humiliated, by emptying himself, by not deeming equality with God something to be grasped. How can you do otherwise...so let us follow the grand principle of humility. It is the polar opposite of the principle of the City of Satan; it is the force and the power of the City of God. Satan is all pride. Your humility will prove to be his undoing...When will we learn to bring humility to the life of society as the martyrs did when they allowed themselves to be butchered by the axe or burned at the stake? At this supreme moment of death it seemed that they sought nothing but the total gift of themselves."*⁸³

When d'Alzon spoke of a militant church, it was not as the modern integralists dream—all pomp and power and majesty materialized in the traditional gratuitous displays of security against those morally degenerated or foreign threats. For d'Alzon, it was not in

⁷⁵ Ibid, 58.

⁷⁶ d'Alzon, *In His Own Words vol I*, 10-11.

⁷⁷ d'Alzon, *In His Own Words vol I*, 181-182.

⁷⁸ d'Alzon, *In His Own Words vol II*, 221.

⁷⁹ d'Alzon, *Foundational Documents*, 62.

⁸⁰ d'Alzon, *In His Own Words vol I*, 81.

⁸¹ d'Alzon, *To Educators at Assumption*, 63.

⁸² d'Alzon, *Day by Day Part I*, 107.

⁸³ d'Alzon, "The Crown of Thorns", *Spiritual Writings*.

Caesar's palaces, but in the infant's manger that true Christianity was to be found: "who is the greater of the two? Is it the emperor or the tiny babe?...Augustus may well be the master of a portion of the earth for a few years. Mary will be the queen of heaven and earth for all eternity."⁸⁴ Recognizing this was democracy's boon, for d'Alzon. The "*collective deliberation on the principle of full and equal participation*" struck him as a useful tool for peace and consensus; an opportunity for humility. It was this new freedom of which he wrote: "out of the midst of the bad ideas which the Revolutions have brought us, one excellent principles of conduct has nevertheless been given to us...frankness. In social relations, it is what the world needs today...let us face the world with this frankness and freedom."⁸⁵ Dangerous ideas that would have been crushed in an illiberal state should be instead faced with reason and discussion: "not even the strictest supervision can prevent it...we cannot protect our students by wrapping them up in cotton wool."⁸⁶ He welcomed liberal democracy's new space for self-critique and examination, systematized disagreement, and fair hearing for all: Republicanism was "the most rigorous application of Catholic principles":

*"after all, the children of God are equal insomuch as they share the same liberty, partake of the same bread, and dwell in the house of the same Father...We are Republicans because Christianity, destined to triumph over all, must show its mettle under all forms of government and face every kind of trial...Finally, we are Republican Catholics, because if to-day in France, in Europe, two things are made to be united, they are: religion and liberty, God and the people."*⁸⁷

He explicitly received the solution liberal democracy might offer for religious strife. His writings in Republican-leaning newspapers against sectarians were deeply liberal: "The people should defend themselves against scorn for their own rights by respecting the rights of others"—

*"toleration for an opinion or a belief that is different or even hostile to one's own is the necessary exercise of freedom, the sacrifice which is its price...Here is the basis of the peace we are proposing: that modern societies, by developing principles of great breadth, should nurture new relations among citizens within the country...a greater respect for the opinions of others, the rights of all more solemnly recognized...So, full liberty for all."*⁸⁸

In a word:

"We want liberty for you so that we will have it more surely for ourselves...What we are proposing is peace, peace founded on freedom (liberté) of the most honest kind, the most

⁸⁴ d'Alzon, *Mary, Our Mother, Our Model and Our Queen*, 45.

⁸⁵ d'Alzon, "Frankness", *Spiritual Writings*; d'Alzon, *Foundational Documents*, 4.

⁸⁶ d'Alzon, *To Educators at Assumption* 96.

⁸⁷ Gabriel Slater, "A French Catholic on Church and State", *Blackfriars* vol.24, no. 279 (June 1943), 227 (of 226-230).

⁸⁸ d'Alzon, *To Educators at Assumption*, 127. It should be noted that d'Alzon had no direct acquaintance with the writing of Luther or Calvin.

*absolute sort of equality (égalité). May we believe that one day these will give birth in our hearts to genuine fraternity (fraternité)."*⁸⁹

Could one dream more highly of the possibilities for liberal democracy than this? Despite his concerns over the contradictions of the absolutized liberal-capitalist individual, despite that he never accepted the absolute legitimacy of popular sovereignty, d'Alzon was open to what this new world could be. If they could truly leave behind the elite, the lordly, and the kingly, so could we, too, the 'bourgeois spirit'⁹⁰ of financial speculators who were "willing to ruin a hundred people if it will enrich them"⁹¹ and who "want to restore slavery by destroying the bonds of charity that unite everyone like brothers and sisters."⁹² However, d'Alzon was no socialist, though their critique rhymed. He sought to see the transcendent rights established through the work of Roman Catholicism, primarily to the ideal of charity between the rich and poor.⁹³ Yet, he argued one could hardly blame the poor for saying, "We have nothing; you have everything. Very well, we will deprive you of your surplus, and we will win because there are more of us. We'll share everything out. We will all be equally rich; we will all do an equal amount of work; we will all have an equally good time."⁹⁴ It was here, through the benefits of democratic opportunity, d'Alzon believed "certain structural reforms" could empower the conditions of workers and the common man, in this new liberal age. He cites approvingly Catholic industrialists, Catholic workers unions, guilds, clubs and communities for the common persons to express and act,⁹⁵ which resulted in higher wages, greater say over their work, ownership of property, and a sufficient savings. This would form a "loyal collaboration" in this new democracy.⁹⁶ D'Alzon recognized this liberalism came with economic changes that must shape the politics of the church:

*"We want nothing to do with a Bishop, who in his horse-drawn carriage cries out to the poor peasants standing along the street frozen to the bone: 'Blessed are the poor in spirit.' If these good people know their Gospel, they'll no doubt know that his Excellency has abandoned the path to heaven."*⁹⁷

Unlike many liberal thinkers, who sought restriction of suffrage to those with wealth and power, d'Alzon's attention to the poor argued that the common could be trusted with democracy. If liberal democracy were to come, it must come all the way and not cease artificially among those who possessed the wealth, property, and productive means. As he wrote in 1869:

⁸⁹ d'Alzon, *To Educators at Assumption*, 128.

⁹⁰ d'Alzon, *In His Own Words vol I*, 44-45.

⁹¹ d'Alzon, *Day by Day Part 1*, 206-207.

⁹² Ibid, 229; d'Alzon, "the Theme of the Kingdom," *Spiritual Writings*.

⁹³ d'Alzon, "The Fight Against the Secret Societies", *Spiritual Writings*.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ d'Alzon, *In His Own Words vol II*, 164; d'Alzon, *Foundational Documents*, 72-75.

⁹⁶ d'Alzon, "The Fight Against the Secret Societies", *Spiritual Writings*.

⁹⁷ d'Alzon, *To Educators at Assumption*, 126. d'Alzon, "December 14, 1869 to Mère Correnson", *Spiritual Writings*.

*“My very great conviction is that, for the conversion of people in this era, aristocratic forms, above all else, must be cast aside. We are approaching a democracy whose requirements will be awesome... Those for whom the Council is intended are “the friends of God,” the poor and the forgotten. Believe me, the future belongs to them. If the world we live in is to be saved, it will be saved by poverty and lowliness.”*⁹⁸

In summary, d’Alzon undoubtedly missed the *Ancien Regime*, but just as undoubtedly, had the early Revolution not been so explicitly anti-Catholic, d’Alzon would likely have accepted liberal democracy even more than he already did. He accepted fully the condemnations of anti-religious modernity by Vatican I, but he also foresaw in liberal democracy what Vatican II would perceive.⁹⁹ He saw the church free of governmental control altogether, able to partner with a newly emancipated people who might find greater dignity and security. He saw where the church might suffer alongside them, and where divisions that had plagued the medieval age with violence might be resolved by mutual toleration. Catholicism must “accept freedom straightforwardly and loyally for a period of undetermined length, and finally to point out to democracy all that Christianity has given the world from the point of view of fraternal and universal equality.”¹⁰⁰ And so in our age, as liberal individualism faces crises after crises, Father d’Alzon would not sound the retreat to illiberal domination out of fear, as so many do. As he put it so succinctly: “A single sentiment of love is worth more than 10,000 sentiments of fear.”¹⁰¹ Yet, still, he worried over modernity’s empty “freedom-from”. He foresaw the fruits of individualism’s absolutizing seeds. He saw obsessive self-destruction of individualism (*disobedience* or *anarchy*), the loss of any transcendent, unitive purpose for the well-being of humanity (*falsehood* or *immorality*) and the absolute control inevitably acquired by greedy and selfish capitalist markets, incentivized by pure self-interest alone (*hatred* or *egoism/self-deification*). Watching these seeds take root, he would argue quite alike to Pope Francis, 140 years later. Self-consumptive liberal “freedom-from” is not enough. We require a “freedom-for”:

⁹⁸ d’Alzon, “December 14, 1869 to Mère Correnson”, *Spiritual Writings*. d’Alzon, “Twenty-Ninth Meditation”, *Spiritual Writings*.

⁹⁹ Kenneth Himes, “Vatican II and Contemporary Politics”, *The Catholic Church and the Nation-States: Comparative Perspectives*, ed. Paul Christopher Manuel, Lawrence Reardon, Clyde Wilcox (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2006), 26-27. Vatican II and Paul VI, *Lumen Gentium* (Vatican City: Vatican City Press, 1964), 8, 32, 36. Accessed March 31, 2022: https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html Vatican II and Paul VI, *Gaudium et Spes* (Vatican City: Vatican City Press, 1965), 17, 24, 26, 28, 31, 7. Accessed March 31, 2022: https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html Vatican II and Paul VI, *Dignitatis Humanae* (Vatican City: Vatican City Press, 1965), 1,2. Accessed March 31, 2022: https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651207_dignitatis-humanae_en.html Vatican II and Paul VI, *Nostra Aetate* (Vatican City: Vatican City Press, 1965), 5. Accessed March 31, 2022: https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html

¹⁰⁰ “Equality of birth, which those who deny the unity of race can never hope to enjoy; equality, no doubt, in original sin, but also equality in redemption; equality in adoption; equality in the nourishment of the Eucharist; equality in the call to perfection”. d’Alzon, *Foundational Documents*, 62; Dufault, 58.

¹⁰¹ Gibson, 253, footnote 52.

“Fraternity is born not only of a climate of respect for individual liberties, or even of a certain administratively guaranteed equality. Fraternity necessarily calls for something greater, which in turn enhances freedom and equality...[otherwise] Liberty becomes nothing more than a condition for living as we will, completely free to choose to whom or what we will belong, or simply to possess or exploit.”

Indeed, in words that d’Alzon could have penned:

“Individualism does not make us more free, more equal, more fraternal. The mere sum of individual interests is not capable of generating a better world for the whole human family. Nor can it save us from the many ills that are now increasingly globalized. Radical individualism is a virus that is extremely difficult to eliminate, for it is clever. It makes us believe that everything consists in giving free rein to our own ambitions...”¹⁰²

But we write too long. What then is d’Alzon’s non-integralist answer to the problems of individualism? As he reminds, *“We hear endless moaning about the progression of evil. I question what people are doing to stop it.”¹⁰³*

5 EMMANUEL D’ALZON’S ANSWER IN EDUCATION

Father d’Alzon argued that we no longer have a “knightly” spirit, but what could barely be called spirit: “utilitarian, mercenary, egoistic, and materialist...paralyzed by personal interest.” What must be done about this? We must utilize liberal democracy to “give teaching a higher goal...”¹⁰⁴ It was by education, not domination, that d’Alzon hoped to quell the contradictions of our “democratic barbarism”. He envisioned a “true source...that gives life to people”¹⁰⁵ for to be a “good teacher [knowing] how to attune her teaching to those who are actually listening... you must put new clothing on ancient truths.”¹⁰⁶ The problem, for d’Alzon, was simple. Liberalism nurses apathy, ignorance, and indifference, as individualism is fully indulged: “passions draw people away from what is god, I believe above all that people are ignorant”¹⁰⁷ that is, “We love too little and our knowledge is so deficient.” It is only when our stone hearts and confused minds are softened and cleared can there be “One feeling growing in me...love for my fellow man”—the only true resolution to the infernal nadir of individualism amidst which we moderns spend our days.¹⁰⁸ Yet what kind of

¹⁰² Francis I, *Fratelli Tutti* (Vatican City: Vatican City Press, 2020), 105. Accessed March 31, 2022: https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html ; Gibson, 103-105, 163-169.

¹⁰³ d’Alzon, *Circular Letters*, 2-3.

¹⁰⁴ d’Alzon, *To Educators at Assumption*, 85-86; d’Alzon, *In His Own Words vol I*, 53.

¹⁰⁵ d’Alzon, *To Educators at Assumption*, 87-88. d’Alzon, *Day by Day Part 1*, 147.

¹⁰⁶ d’Alzon, “The Revolution: Enemy of the Church, The 26th Nîmes Lecture, December 11, 1870”, *Spiritual Writings*.

¹⁰⁷ Dufault, 36-37. As he says, “What is to be taught? Before all else, the Catholic truth, all of it, in its full majesty, its immensity, if I dare say, its infinite horizons, its powerful affirmation of the rights of almighty God, the explanation of the mysteries...” (38-39)

¹⁰⁸ d’Alzon, *To Educators at Assumption*, 4.

education makes this possible? Must the education d'Alzon speaks of be specifically Catholic proselytization? After all, d'Alzon seemed to think that teaching religious equality is quite dangerous,¹⁰⁹ that Catholic "doctrine and holiness" is the purpose of all education,¹¹⁰ and that the center of unity must be the Pope himself, "whom the Holy Spirit has appointed to rule the Church of God."¹¹¹ He saw education as war upon unbelief by doctrine, rationalism by authority, naturalism by beatitude, and socialism by charity. Does this dogmatism not decimate a Rawlsian "overlapping consensus" for public reasoning? The answer from d'Alzon is forthright:

*"I ask myself this question: is it your role to work directly to bring about the re-Christianization of society? No, from the point of view of human politics; yes, from the point of view of reforming and re-Christianizing social behavior... Just as a stone is no more than an agglomeration of many particles of dust, so society is an agglomeration of many particles of living dust made up of human beings."*¹¹²

The goal is not a political re-Christianization or the recreation of a Christian order enforced in educational space, but rather to bring the transcendent concerns of religion to all spaces. That is to say, education must change the *aim* of the people, though it does not guarantee the final destination; it must direct human reason *through* created things towards Ultimate things, that is, "knowledge of divine things."¹¹³ These are found in all disciplines, as "what is there to study except God, the universe which he made, and the laws which govern it?"¹¹⁴ All educational disciplines, therefore, serve transcendent purpose. All angles of education, if properly presented, approach God, the religious object, even if they are not explicitly Catholic:

*"from God's point of view...truth becomes synonymous with God himself, and so does beauty... and it is in the contemplation of his own infinite beauty that the infinite happiness of God subsists.... It is, at the moment of his creating other beings, the moment when they begin to exist, that they too become beautiful, with a beauty relative to and derived from his own"— "Whatever exists has its purpose, its place in the universe, and, therefore, its own kind of beauty... what is beauty, but the expression of goodness and truth?"*¹¹⁵

Yet, still, should not this all be done as Catholic, the integralist might ask d'Alzon? In his own essential words: *"to be Catholic is more to seek the truth than to think of defending it as one's own, but it is first and foremost to preserve the bond of love. And on this level, the champions have not all been Catholics!"*¹¹⁶ And there you have it: the pursuit of truth, goodness, and beauty as an ecumenical enterprise. The public justification for a common

¹⁰⁹ d'Alzon, *Day by Day Part 1*, 80-81, 180.

¹¹⁰ d'Alzon, *To Educators at Assumption*, 95-97.

¹¹¹ d'Alzon, "Concerns of Fr. d'Alzon 1869-1871, To the high school students at Nîmes", *Spiritual Writings*.

¹¹² d'Alzon, "The Theme of the Kingdom From November 5, 1870, to March 20, 1871", *Spiritual Writings*.

¹¹³ d'Alzon, *To Educators at Assumption*, 65.

¹¹⁴ d'Alzon, *Circular Letters*, 18-19.

¹¹⁵ d'Alzon, "Struggles: the Fight Against the Revolution", *Spiritual Writings*.

¹¹⁶ d'Alzon, *In His Own Words vol II*, 201-202.

good is convergent in nature, for d'Alzon. It does not belong necessarily and strictly to a Roman Catholic perspective. Education can use 'overlapping consensus' to draw the heart and mind beyond individualism: "Why are there so many systems? Why so many religions? What is the source of this hidden energy that compels the human spirit toward the unknown? Why? Because one wants to know truth... the truth that dominates them all."¹¹⁷ This means education must be aimed toward transcendent purpose—what is truth? Goodness? Beauty? Even facts themselves cannot be liberally individualized, isolated, and kept from religious and philosophic infection. There is no space in the "liberal arts" for that individualizing dominion, Marx's "sorcerer [who] is no longer able to control the powers of the nether world whom he has called up by his spells", who chooses their own reality for maximal profit.¹¹⁸ Education is precisely that which draws all disparate perspectives back into communion, in order that we might investigate what truly is and be saved from self-interest by insistence on some real object of Truth, Goodness and Beauty to which we owe ourselves and our obligation.

Thus, d'Alzon's "university is a Christian republic." Freedom of disciplines serves a fundamentally theological aim, for d'Alzon, as "a center that gives light and to which they pay tribute."¹¹⁹ Truly, "A Catholic university should have a Catholic foundation"; yet, this principle is useful for all liberal education. By demanding students look beyond themselves in the context of community, their pre-assumptions, expectations, and social-dissolving individualism are challenged. The development of the student's world in relative to the Whole, rather than simply the raw accumulation of the pragmatic knowledge to be good cogs and managers, must be the emphasis of every paper, every test, every grade. This republic has better than toleration, for d'Alzon. It has a real love of wisdom. It tolerates by not "[wrapping] students in a cotton cocoon", but it also loves by challenging students with all manner of contrasting ideas, forcing them to refine their habits of mind and heart towards something beyond them. The student must be respected by not imposing on them "some farfetched ideas on the pretext that they're mysteries"¹²⁰, or even mere Catholic reproduction, for "God does not want to reign over slaves, but over free souls" and so we must "aspire after the freedom and independence that come from the absence of material preoccupations."¹²¹ This is the meaning of the oft-repeated Pauline line: "You are my children, and you put me back in labor pains until Christ is formed in you."¹²² And here, again, in d'Alzon's words, "the champions have not all been Catholic!" Thomas Aquinas drew a distinction between the virtues infused by grace and those theological that lead to beatitude. Those former could be acquired by habituation, by secondary causation, insofar as reason can apprehend the common and shared social good: convergence again reappears, to publicly justify a liberal education. Liberal education here comes to its own, without reduction to proselytization, illiberal consensus, or domineering requirements for

¹¹⁷ d'Alzon, *Day by Day Part 1*, 137-138.

¹¹⁸ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, "The Communist Manifesto", *Marx/Engels Selected Works vol 1*, trans. Samuel Moore (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1969), 98-100.

¹¹⁹ d'Alzon, *To Educators at Assumption*, 88-89.

¹²⁰ d'Alzon, "Nineteenth Meditation", *Spiritual Writings*.

¹²¹ d'Alzon, *Foundational Documents*, 58.

¹²² d'Alzon, *Circular Letters*, 41.

ideological allegiance.¹²³ The only requisite ideology for education to save liberalism from itself is that liberalism is not an end in-itself, but one tool to bring humanity closer to Truth, Goodness, and Beauty, which education pursues and virtue enacts as justice.

A related question follows: whether this sort of education is possible in a public, state-organized system. After all, it was the state-run schools of France that d'Alzon so vociferously opposed. But it is essential to recognize, as we have described, that it was not so much the state-run organization that d'Alzon opposed, but rather the pretending of that system at neutrality, as if it existed just to teach only a "smattering of Latin, Greek, history or physics?"¹²⁴ We should not take away that d'Alzon would have a public system of education simply abolished and replaced by an impossibly complex network of isolated schools and ideological preferences. As ever, he was concerned with substance: what did these schools teach? Did they merely affirm "democratic barbarism" and its destructive absolutized individualism, by teaching mere skills and indifference? Or could it attend to student's holism? After all, d'Alzon did not exclude "contact with the pagan authors."¹²⁵ A state-wide system is powerfully important precisely for its universality, its provision for even the poor and outcast, and thus its unitive possibility. The state is most fundamentally that which creates the framework of confidence for the taking of daily risks of trust in a society—and though he might've idealized otherwise, d'Alzon saw value in the separation of church and state. State-run institutions do not need to either proselytize (as the illiberal desires and the liberal fears) or indifferently ignore issues of philosophy and religion, of human meaning, goodness, and ultimate purpose (as liberal individualism eventually must, whittled away as it is by profit and individualistic relativism). Public education could, without domination, help guide students to consider the meaning of their being, beyond themselves, and to facilitate true open-minded pursuit that is not merely a "freedom-from" something, but a "freedom-for" something. In d'Alzon's words:

*"The open mind seeks to see things in themselves; the narrow mind sees everything in relation to itself... The open mind devotes itself to a cause, the narrow mind is devoted to itself whatever the cause; the open mind endeavours to hover on the heights, while the narrow mind digs holes for moles and is quite happy to find shelter in a hole. Because the main goal of the narrow mind is not to commit itself, that's what it calls prudence."*¹²⁶

How can education avoid empty, individualized ends? A world of non-commitment, under which we suffer? It is precisely by teachings those humanities like philosophy and religion, most maligned. For under absolutized liberalism, education cannot claim such obligation applies to everyone—there is only life, liberty, and one's private pursuit of happiness. Education comes only to be pragmatism (acquiring the essential tools necessary to work for others) or specialism (education as the accumulation of technical knowledge, by which one might specialize in managing abstractions): only these works of education

¹²³ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Online: Kevin Knight, 2017), I-II.55.1-4, I-II.56.3, I-II.63.2-3.

¹²⁴ d'Alzon, *Circular Letters*, 45.

¹²⁵ d'Alzon, *In His Own Words vol II*, 118.

¹²⁶ d'Alzon, *Day by Day Part 1*, 88.

produce capitalist profit. Neither are the education of which d’Alzon speaks. Education can never be mere pragmatic transference of knowledge. Education regards happiness and the holistic wellbeing of the human being. There are few things correlated more with health, happiness and prosperity than a general education, which finds its most common fruition in the holistic concerns of a liberal arts education.¹²⁷ While one cannot put forth a study demonstrating a link between education and the pursuit of the transcendentals, one can demonstrate it is correlated to social connectedness and well-being.¹²⁸ Yet the gravitational force of individualism always drags education towards minimal standards for extraction of labor or specialized knowledge for overseeing it. The end point of a commodified education system is in making good specialists or good slaves, rather than good people. This neoliberal end has been perhaps best revealed by a recent tweet from US Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona: “Every student should have access to an education that aligns with industry demands and evolves to meet the demands of tomorrow’s global workforce.”¹²⁹ Education as the pragmatic servant of industry, which has, in Marx’s words, “drowned the most heavenly ecstasies of religious fervour...in the icy water of egotistical calculation.”¹³⁰

In contrast, for d’Alzon, the essence of education is to instill in students a pursuit of the “supersubstantial bread” of truth, goodness, and beauty, to entreat the soul to “fall in love” with beauty. Only by this can there be a claim established upon our lives beyond mere liberal toleration and towards a common good of love and justice.¹³¹ Education is thus, fundamentally, the self-sacrifice of love. From the internal confusion and pain of giving up self-conceptions as the student comes to truly and studiously “know thyself”, to the sacrifice of the teachers who pour themselves out for their student’s good: the point of education is to draw students into genuine commitment. True education must lead the student to self-transcendence, away from the natural ease of privileging one’s own experience over that of others, and into true solidarity, empathy, and co-feeling. This conquest of concupiscence supersedes the isolating liberal dictum to “do no harm”. For d’Alzon, education’s pragmatic aspect need not play into democratic barbarism. It need not be mere egotistical calculation in a classroom. He answers:

“Why does Europe no longer exist? It is because solidarity no longer exists. Everyone is looking out for his own interests; everyone is staying at home. This is the universal motto which is nothing other than the motto of egoism elevated to its highest power. Do you want to combat this evil? Begin by destroying egoism in yourself...While fighting tooth

¹²⁷ Bill Hathaway, “Want to live longer? Stay in school, study suggests”, Yale News (February 20, 2020). Accessed March 31, 2022: <https://news.yale.edu/2020/02/20/want-live-longer-stay-school-study-suggests> ; Cory Stieg, “From the best major to finding a purpose in life—how going to college affects your happiness”, CNBC (August 17, 2020). Accessed March 31, 2022: <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/08/17/does-getting-a-college-degree-make-you-happier.html> ; Noah Berger and Peter Fisher, “A Well-Education Workforce is Key to State Prosperity”, (August 22, 2013). Accessed March 31, 2022: <https://www.epi.org/publication/states-education-productivity-growth-foundations/> ; Max Roser and Estaban Ortiz-Ospina, “Global Education”, *Our World in Data*, <https://ourworldindata.org/global-education>

¹²⁸ OECD, “Indicator A6: How are social outcomes related to education?”. Accessed March 31, 2022: <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/a1c80ede-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/a1c80ede-en>

¹²⁹ Cardona, Miguel. Twitter Post. June 16, 2022, 2:15 PM. <https://twitter.com/seccardona/status/1603831119962570771>

¹³⁰ Marx & Engels, “The Communist Manifesto”, 98-100.

¹³¹ d’Alzon, *Circular Letters*, 48-50. d’Alzon, “Closer of a Retreat” & “Nineteenth Meditation”, *Spiritual Writings*.

and nail egoism and egoists, show your generosity, be selfless men, steep yourselves in a spirit of sacrifice. Get involved in those endeavors that will forge your soul in zeal for charity and in the pursuit of noble ideas based on lofty ideals."¹³²

This is what it means to “resolve everything at the level of religion”, contrasting with Marx’s materialism.¹³³ Education is for investigating the transcendence of a Reality that isn’t reducible to any one of us—to meet, explore, and struggle with what is asked of us by merely being alive. The illiberal would teach only their answer, that is, the *right* one. A common liberal education in most schools today would teach avoidance of indifference toward the question, or at least, one that centers the individual as arbitrator of the question. Whereas a truly liberal education would teach the long library of human answers to the question of transcendence, in philosophy, in theology, in religion. All of these, to balance out the individual and self-consumption tendency of liberal democracy, without destroying its goods. But then, one may ask, if education is merely about this transcendence, is it not mere abstraction? Something that makes one a specialist in some mental realm alone? Indeed, precisely by education’s capability for human elevation, it has often served more to *divide* and *individualize* humanity further, rather than unite it toward a *communis bonum*. This brings us to our second trouble: by abstraction, does education not merely create new elitisms? New technocrats who induct their members into the cultural mores of the higher classes? Manufactured gaps between human beings—class, race, gender, and so forth—tend to be magnified by education. To avoid this, d’Alzon argues that education must be, first, affordable, present, and common, and second, it must be community-building. Only in these two ways can the abstract element of education avoid becoming a further tool of alienating individualism.

To the first, then, only when education is common and affordable, a right of being human, can it also be fully loving, unifying and elevating.¹³⁴ Education is not for seeking out those fabled meritocrats, those philosopher-kings pulled from the rabble. Rather, it must be for those who *Gravissimum Educationis* urged special and particular matriculation. It must not be to make aristocratic elites, but to truly humanize everyone, together. Education must bring down the lofty and elevate the lowly alike.¹³⁵ Sadly, modern currents of privatized education run against this. We could speak of when Governor Ronald Reagan cut California’s funding for fear of “campus radicals” and “educated proletariat.” This work inspired neoliberal education for the rest of the United States.¹³⁶ We could write endlessly of the ongoing student loan crises, as social mobility required an education and a market-based loan solution filled an ever-increasing gullet of profit-driven education. Without any mechanism to make lower tuitions, higher education has spent decades bloating from infinite infusions—not from providing better education, but better facilities, administration, and secondary goods. Some schools have famously begun to take up gambling

¹³² d’Alzon, “Thoughts for the Summer Vacation”, *Spiritual Writings*.

¹³³ d’Alzon, *To Educators at Assumption*, 62.

¹³⁴ d’Alzon, *To Educators at Assumption*, 139.

¹³⁵ *Gravissimum Educationis*, 10.

¹³⁶ Jon Schwarz, “The Origin of Student Debt: Reagan Adviser Warned Free College Would Create a Dangerous ‘Educated Proletariat’”, *The Intercept* (August 25, 2022). Accessed August 31, 2022: <https://theintercept.com/2022/08/25/student-loans-debt-reagan/>

sponsorships.¹³⁷ Better education would be more teachers, equipped with the time to dialogue with student assignments and work toward constant improvement, rather than assign marks and move on. Education is an enterprise guided by values beyond profit and naturally suffers in a world of absolutized liberal-capitalist competition. d'Alzon would be scandalized by education today, overseen by boards drawn from predatory capital investment management and profiteering CEOs, who look mostly to what growth and success means under capitalist logic. The issue of overpriced education must be resolved at its heart—not merely by debt jubilee, but by actual communal attention to subsidizing the cost of holistic education for all. d'Alzon reminded many of his colleagues, fearful of recruiting from the poor “that Jesus Christ, our model, set up the first seminary, of which he was the Superior, with very poor and uncouth artisans.”¹³⁸ Education must especially attend to the poor and enable the necessary material circumstances that will make it “easier to be good”—that is, “to alleviate the conditions that afflict the poor, exploited, oppressed, and orphaned”, and, quite simply, give the modern worker as much time as the medieval peasant did, to pursue social goods that the peasant did not have, like education.¹³⁹ In d'Alzon's calculation, after the workers will come the middle class who “despite their greater vanity” are no less in need of the higher, transcendental concerns of human life to which education aims.¹⁴⁰

In doing this, then, we reach the second point: by drawing together peoples from across the most significant boundary of all, class, education protects from mere abstraction and elitism by the creation of a new community. This is the great secret of equality: it cannot come from mere liberal toleration, at a distance, but only from the interrelating experience of self-gift, risk, and mutuality that comes from relationship. As Dr. Adam Seligman argues, liberal toleration and pluralism ironically tends to isolation. We keep power over each other, by determining when, how, why, and where our encounters with difference will occur: “*Experiencing difference* is leaving your neighborhood to have a meal in Chinatown; *living with difference* is having a Chinese neighbor...whose cooking smells are constantly wafting into your home.”¹⁴¹ Only then do humans begin to feel the reward for possessing a shared reality and a common good. Only then do they taste the relational and moral fruits of a shared life, together, rather than the crass buffet offered by absolutized individualism. The journey of education together toward whatever is True, Good, and Beautiful creates the felt experiences of unity and connection among students and teachers, forming actual *trust*, over

¹³⁷ Jamal Rich, “Free college was once the norm all over America”, *People's World* (September 11, 2020). Accessed March 31, 2022: <https://www.peoplesworld.org/article/free-college-was-once-the-norm-all-over-america/>; The Scholarship System, “The real reasons why college tuition is so high and what you can do about it”. Accessed March 31, 2022: https://thescholarshipssystem.com/blog-for-students-families/the-real-reasons-why-college-tuition-is-so-high-and-what-you-can-do-about-it/#The_Single_Most_Important_Factor_Increasing_College_Tuition;

Hilary Hoffower, “College is more expensive than it's ever been, and the 5 reasons why suggest it's only going to get worse” *Business Insider* (June 26, 2019). Accessed March 31, 2022: <https://www.businessinsider.com/why-is-college-so-expensive-2018-4>

¹³⁸ d'Alzon, *Circular Letters*, 51.

¹³⁹ Bernoville, 100-101, 111. Selection from Juliet Schor, *The Overworked American: The Unexpected Decline of Leisure*, published at Massachusetts Institute of technology. Accessed May 15, 2022: https://groups.csail.mit.edu/mac/users/rauch/worktime/hours_workweek.html

¹⁴⁰ d'Alzon, *Foundational Documents*, 76.

¹⁴¹ Adam Seligman, Rahel Wasserfall, David Montgomery *Living With Difference: How to Build Community in a Divided World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016), 2-6.

and against a liberal world of mutual suspicions due to competition.¹⁴² This is the fraternal life lived together, with people of all kinds, freely pursuing the meaning of human being. The journey itself is unifying, for it is there that we discover, co-experience, and share that sense of belonging. Here, our individual “irreducible quality” finds its place in a larger whole that, though made of differences, is unified by shared loves. We cannot be “free” alone. We cannot be “free” as individuals. We can only be “free” together, moving toward that which is universal for all of us in a mutual, rather than domineering and illiberal, way.¹⁴³ It is by creating relational space that education leads students to really feel and perceive their connection to everyone else, beyond even their localized campus-sphere. It leads to the knowledge that, without executing their individuality, they must come to recognize the self’s excess: that they do not exist merely for themselves, but for the Whole of life, and everyone else, for them, in return. “Everything begs to be taught. And we must keep on teaching it”, for education must demonstrate our inextricable web of relationships, even with those furthest from us.¹⁴⁴ Abstract education is costless observance, rather than genuinely unitive. Students there compete for superiority, rather than training in what d’Alzon called a human “team spirit.”¹⁴⁵

Thus, a vision is cast: education need not be reduced to proselytization, nor does it need to be taught only for private interests indifferent (or even hostile) to human meaning. While both pragmatic and abstract by nature, education cannot merely be either. Pragmatism is answered by the development of a whole human person, rather than specific skills alone, while the elitism of abstraction is answered by education becoming a right of the poor and rich alike, in an atmosphere that creates community and relationship. It is here that the transcendent pursuit of truth might meet the hearts of students and draw them out from liberal usury and lonely alienation into the genuine democratic project of common good. This is to refuse the illiberal retreat from liberal modernity, while also treating the diseased contradictions that individualism births in the contradictory heart of liberalism. So what does Father d’Alzon recommend for making this reality? The d’Alzonian answer is a challenge: the educator must embody all these virtues in themselves.¹⁴⁶ Father d’Alzon urges all—faculty, teachers, support staff and every level of administration that enables education—to continually self-interrogate whether we are bringing liveliness, patience, attention, reliability, edification, and *life* into education. He urges us to demonstrate it as what it truly is: preparation for death. The death that is constant in a “sincere gift of self to another.”¹⁴⁷ There, we find that since we have acted by and for love, we are not emptied out, burnt out, wasted or used, but rather full. He warns, therefore, that administration must know that teaching cannot be “just a job.” Educators of all levels should be compensated well and supported such that they do not turn into what d’Alzon called “mercenaries,” hired merely to accomplish a task rather than be given the resources to resolve the wellbeing of

¹⁴² d’Alzon, “Struggles: The Fight Against the Revolution”, *Spiritual Writings*.

¹⁴³ d’Alzon, *To Educators at Assumption*, 139; Seligman, et al, *Living With Difference: How to Build Community in a Divided World*, 11-14; d’Alzon, “Struggles: The Fight Against the Revolution”, *Spiritual Writings*.

¹⁴⁴ d’Alzon, “Practical Guidelines: Entertainment”, *Spiritual Writings*; d’Alzon, *To Educators at Assumption*, 98.

¹⁴⁵ d’Alzon, *To Educators at Assumption*, 139.

¹⁴⁶ Emmanuel d’Alzon, *Directory of the Augustinians of the Assumption*, trans. Patrick Croghan (Worcester: Bayard, 1969), 65.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 66 and 84-85.

students' humanity.¹⁴⁸ In return, once so enabled, the educator must have a spirit that is not, itself, "vile and self-interested, limited to pay and promotion" or the dignity of their office.¹⁴⁹ For d'Alzon, "Education is not pure speculation; it is, before all else, a practical training that takes place at every moment of every day...Jesus Christ bears witness to two [teaching] characteristics: a supernatural spirit and selflessness."¹⁵⁰ In this way, education must always be a form of virtue ethics.¹⁵¹ It is the passing on from instructor to pupil the love of pursuing good, truth, and beauty as part of a whole. Thus, "Saint Thomas Aquinas calls [love] a 'unifying force'...creatures have to love something other than themselves, because no creature is by nature self-sufficient."¹⁵² d'Alzon urges us to reflect on what we embody. Are we just making tests or are we making people? Are we just imprinting temporary knowledge or inspiring indelible character? Are we forcing students through the motions of performance, or are we generating true inspiration and love for a discipline, in relation to a whole? Few students will recall our words, but they will recall the sense and feel we left with them, none deeper than love: "Words move—deeds compel."¹⁵³ So the educator must strive to be: "all things to all people through charity," wherein "One no longer appropriates the good for oneself...One draws benefits from science, study and work in order to assimilate for oneself the progress of the human spirit."¹⁵⁴ In this, d'Alzon makes liberal modernity alive to itself. In this way, education is virtue ethics, social building, the creation and instillation of trust, and universal solidarity—and educators are the curators, presenting these aims towards forming hearts made human.

6 CONCLUSION: TO FEEL ANOTHER AS YOU FEEL YOURSELF

"How do you feel when you give your mother a hug? You love her so much that you long to identify yourself with her": Thus d'Alzon once showed that though we exist apart, our longing is always for mutual identification and reunion.¹⁵⁵ It is a mysterious phenomenon, he wrote elsewhere, "concerning man's existence and his perfection" that produces the "ineffable relationship" of friendship, intimacy, and love. These things which do not originate in us complete our being. Only in looking "up at the sky" that we perceive our place is beyond ourselves.¹⁵⁶ We were faced with many problems in our introduction: a hyper-individualism that can only process the world in relevance to itself, leading to superficial and uncritical engagements. We were faced with loneliness and alienation and precarity and distrust. Problems like COVID-19 to climate change seem impossible. From Trumpism to Hungarian integralists, illiberalism is resurgent, and an even more rigid individualism rises up to insufficiently meet it. D'Alzon was not alone in foreseeing the broad strokes of these

¹⁴⁸ d'Alzon, *To Educators at Assumption*, 98.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, 110.

¹⁵⁰ d'Alzon, *Circular Letters*, 42-43.

¹⁵¹ d'Alzon, Foundational Documents, endnote 2.

¹⁵² d'Alzon, *Day by Day Part 1*, 128-129.

¹⁵³ d'Alzon, "The Revolution: Enemy of the Church, 26th Nîmes Lecture, December 11, 1870", *Spiritual Writings*. d'Alzon, *Foundational Documents*, 79.

¹⁵⁴ d'Alzon, "Twentieth Meditation", *Spiritual Writings*. d'Alzon, *Foundational Documents*, 26.

¹⁵⁵ d'Alzon, "The History of the Church", *Spiritual Writings*.

¹⁵⁶ d'Alzon, "Our Threefold Purpose" & "Meditation on Friendship", *Spiritual Writings*.

problems, which are born from atomizing individualism. None less than Dostoyevsky predicted the self-destruction of liberal individuals in cannibalistic self-consumption and retreat back to domination by the powerful—

“Freedom, free thought and science, will lead them into such straits and will bring them face to face with such marvels and insoluble mysteries, that some of them, the fierce and rebellious, will destroy themselves, others, rebellious but weak, will destroy one another, while the rest, weak and unhappy, will crawl fawning to our feet and whine to us: “Yes, you were right, you alone possess His mystery, and we come back to you, save us from ourselves!”¹⁵⁷

Is this the only possible way it can end? In illiberal destruction of one another, the fascistic quest for domination and death, the final order? Or is it ever-more-fervent neoliberal identity individuation, wounding ourselves in shame and cynicism as the “enfeebled, excessively self-aware” Last Men of Nietzsche?¹⁵⁸ The power of d’Alzon’s warnings against individualism are significant: atomizing the human spirit (*disobedience/anarchy*), closing out the possibility of any unitive common, democratic goods (*falsehood/immorality*), and the absolute control inevitable acquired by the wealthy, who are most practiced in the work of self-interest, which will degrade everything to a commodity in a competition of all against all (*egoism/hatred/self-deification*). We are faced with nothing less than “Every one for himself, every one in his own house.”¹⁵⁹ We are faced with “Anything and everything, all of the time”, as artist Bo Burnham puts it—the chaotic, atomizing, paradoxical loneliness of modernity. We are faced with having achieved so much, to be surrounded by such luxury and possibility, but be left with so little satisfaction. To have all the “freedom-from” of liberalism—and nothing transcendent to be free-for. And yet, that is what we long for the most, to “identify” with each other. To be “rooted”, Simone Weil reminded, is “the most important and least recognized need of the human soul.”¹⁶⁰

It is here, torn between an illiberal rejection and abyss of individuation, that, for d’Alzon, education enters as a mission of love. It is education that can do more than mere liberal toleration. It can instill love and recover “democratic barbarism” from within. By directing students beyond themselves, education transcends the contention that the ultimate happiness of human democracy, of human dignity, is solely individual freedom. The happiness of humanity is found, rather, beyond any individual and their will. It takes education as a unifying, transcendent-directing, accessible and ecumenical enterprise to accomplish this. Whereas the corruption of education teaches bare indifference. It teaches mere facts about the world to be employed for pragmatic purpose. But this secularity, this agnosticism, is not neutrality but a clear position of indifference, that only furthers the inner disease of alienation. The answer is not to dominate it by the unquestionable commands of a singular orthodoxy, but rather, to seduce it out of itself and into the journey towards the Truth, Goodness, and Beauty that is, at once, beyond any of us—but is also precisely what makes us what we are. The answer is not to give into the competitive spirit of mutual usury,

¹⁵⁷ Dostoyevsky, 257-258.

¹⁵⁸ Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is there no alternative?* (Winchester: John Hunt Publishing, 2009), 7.

¹⁵⁹ d’Alzon, *Day by Day Part 1*, 168-169.

¹⁶⁰ Simone Weil, *The Need for Roots*, trans. Arthur Wills (London: Routledge, 2005), 40.

but to demand some greater, more humane end to the tools of liberalism, rather than the maximal liberty of profit and capital. To either leave our students bereft of the tools and love of investigating such things, the neoliberal answer, or to dominate them with thoughtless dogmatism, the illiberal answer, is to do them a disservice. The aim of education is true human solidarity that can link all great pluralities. Education can become the “site for reconciliation of abstract citizenship with very different communities of trust, belonging, and meaning” and enable all of us to “live together, differently” in a cohesive way.¹⁶¹

D'Alzon would demand to end on a word from Augustine. The old teacher of Hippo desired much more of an integralist relationship between the City of God and the City of Man. Even the limited open-mindedness of d'Alzon's day would be too much for Augustine to accept. And yet, even he still believed that our terrestrial existence could be united by a common love of shared virtue for the thriving and flourishing of the humanity made in divine image.¹⁶² The pains of others must be our pain: their hunger, their thirst, their sufferings, their aimlessness, their bombed-out fear, their exploited labor—the world is not of individuals, but of wholes. Here is the hope that can build together the shared and communal goods of “temporal peace, such as we can enjoy in this life from health and safety and human fellowship, and all things needful for the preservation and recovery of this peace...light, night, the air, and waters suitable for us, and everything the body requires to sustain, shelter, heal, or beautify it”¹⁶³ A true common-wealth was what liberalism promised, but also what has been thwarted at every turn by its individualist-capitalist logic. It is the educators, d'Alzon argues, to whom it falls to seize the means of human production from the inhuman mind of liberal “freedom-from”: both the ideological purpose of education and the material resources necessary to make it possible. Here, we can look up from our own work, see the great end of solidarity to which our journey is working out, and actualize a fundamental, common good for all—and find, then, that we are not, and never were, alone.

¹⁶¹ Adam Seligman, “Introduction”, *Religious Education and the Challenge of Pluralism* (Oxford: OUP, 2014), 18-20.

¹⁶² Augustine, “The City of God”, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers vol 2*, trans. Marcus Dods, ed. Philip Schaff (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co, 1887), XIX.17

¹⁶³ *Ibid*, XIX.13. CoG, XIX.13