



Fr. Julio Navarro, postulator for the Cause of Beatification of Fr.d'Alzon,.writing in "Signs of God,N.4", agrees with this saying applied to our founder by Fr. Andre Seve,a.a. in his book " Christ is My Life.".Our founder's holiness, like that of other saints, is deeply rooted in his family history of nobility,one so faithful to God and King and steeped in the culture and history of his people of Southern France, profoundly marked by the bloody French Revolution. Still our founder "made his own honey." If ever a saint became, through his cooperation with God's grace, his own best self it might well be Emmanuel d'Alzon. And because of this the best way to really get to know him and "feel" his holiness is to use our Chriitian imagination. Not the mind alone but the imagination too is needed to help us grasp the meaning of a man so steeped in the blood of his ancestors, so animated by the warm, sometimes hot passions of his people, but a man finally driven by the grace of a God to whom he surrenders his own strong passions and will in order to put them at the service of that God he loves and all his children too, as he gives his life for the Kingdom of God. With that in mind here are a few snapshots of the life of one Emmanuel d'Alzon.

"I am adoring". With these words the little boy Emmanuel d'Alzon, peeking on tiptoe through the keyhole of the door of the chapel of the family Chateau of Lavagnac, unwittingly took a stand for God and against the worst of the French Revolution as it chose just a few years before to honor , as supreme, on the very altar of Notre Dame of Paris and in the shadow of the guillotine,, the ideal of Reason. rather than God.The life of our Founder will be nothing less than the cofirmation of this stand.

Emanuel, now 22, writes to his friends::" Do I frighten you wearing a black casock? Well, I have thought it over carefully." He had indeed successively thought of a military career,becoming a lawyer,or politican, always as a way of defending religion and the rights of God..But,finally, he fully believed that he was called, as the best way of fulfilling this call, to give himself totally to God in the priesthood.

Always in search of the best preparation for the priesthood, Emmanuel soon finds himself in Rome, only to face there, on the eve of his ordination, possibly the greatest crisis of his life. He was an admirer of the then famous Felicite de Lamennais, a man who seemed to hold such promise for helping the Church enter the modern age. Indeed, Lamennais had guided much of Emmanuel's studies in preparation for the priesthood, and the latter truly admired and had, even as he prudently kept a certain distance between them, held him in deep affection. Now, unfortunately, unjustly, it seems, attacked by many of the political forces of the day, and possibly lacking in humility, Lamennais no longer seems guided by his faith but rather by political aspirations in his pursuit of the needed updating and adaptation of the Church. So it happened that, just before his ordination, Emmanuel was asked by the Pope to sign a document agreeing with the Pope's encyclical which censured Lamennais' fundamental philosophical positions. Emmanuel signed immediately, choosing his faith and his Church above any political positions. The Pope was pleased by Emmanuel's unhesitating response, but the young seminarian was hurt by the apparent lack of trust on the part of the Pope. He wrote that very day of December 1834 to his Father: "It is rather distressing to attract the satisfaction of the Pope in such a way." Yet, this test of his faith led the now young Fr. d'Alzon to formulate his well known axiom: "Always with Rome, sometimes without Rome, never against Rome."

By early 1835 Fr. d'Alzon is already back in Nîmes, having deliberately choosing to belong to the diocese of Nîmes, surely moved in part by his loyalty and love for his homeland in Southern France. The whirlwind of activity for the sake of the Coming of the Kingdom of God is about to begin. His Bishop will say of him, now vicar-general: "He will leap forward and I will hold him back." Once while meeting with a group of priests he will mention that at one time he had thought of becoming a Carthusian recluse. There was laughter as one of them exclaimed: "You, a locomotive in a living-room!" I can do no better in this brief article, while trying to give you a picture of his extraordinary activity than to quote Fr. Andre Seve a.a., in his book about Fr. d'Alzon, "Christ Is My Life." "He preached non-stop, wrote the way one breathes (some 2,000 letters published, possibly 40,000 written) He administered the diocese of Nîmes as vicar-general, meanwhile supervising his vast properties at Lavagnac, directing the College of Nîmes and guiding his Congregation. He kept up with the development of his Mission in the Near East (for which he founded our Sister Congregation, The Oblates of the Assumption) he fought for freedom of education and sat on the Council of Public Education. He launched programs and drafted spiritual writings; he was a journalist, great traveler, a spiritual director, and a zealous awakener of vocations!"

Understandably, he was accused of activism, of dispersion of energy.. But after the French Revolution everything had to be started all over again. More important, d'Alzon was also a man of profound prayer. One day, returning from Lavagnac, he dropped in to see his friend Canon Henry Galeran in Montpellier. He seemed tired, sad, worried. "My son", he said, "I stopped here because I must take up a serious matter with Our Lord. I'm going into your chapel, behind the altar. I don't need anything; just let me stay there alone. Upon entering the chapel he prostrated himself before the altar. I left. An hour and a half later, he emerged, totally changed. His face

was happy, and there was a smile in his eyes which were filled with the tears of tenderness he must have shed. " My good friend, " he said, "what a good Master we serve. We have reason to call him "Infinite Goodness."

It's November, 1880. At any moment government agents may come to expel Fr. d'Alzon and his community. Religious are being sent into exile by the French Government who sees men living in community with vows of poverty, chastity and obedience as a crime against the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity of the French Revolution. But now Fr. d'Alzon is dying in his small, plain room. Providentially, thanks to the appeal of Bishop Besson to the President of the Republic, a temporary reprieve is granted to our religious in Nîmes. Fr. d'Alzon can die in peace. He will remain lucid and serene to the very end. Asked if he had wishes to express, he replies: " I want only the will of God. Heaven is my only desire." Still he finds the strength to add: "I'm going, but my heart will be with you. I will protect you as much as I can." Then this last recommendation, so simple, yet so full of meaning: "Be good religious." On Sunday, November 21, at the stroke of the noon angelus, he departed this world. His last words: My Jesus."

Perhaps we can now more readily accept these words of Fr. Aubain Collette a.a., former Postulator of the Cause found in "Signs of God" N.4. "... Fr. d'Alzon's influence over hearts went further, in greater depth; he reigned over people's hearts. They loved him because they felt loved by him.... He was seen more than once tending the sick with his own hands ...The poor... would tell, as they shed tears of gratitude, how this holy priest had made himself a nurse to wash and treat their wounds...And they would say: "a true saint!". We feel that same sense of gratitude today in the words of so many people from France, but other countries too, who have received all kinds of favors after praying through the intercession of Fr. d'Alzon. Tonight, as I finish this article, I think of our three Congolese Assumptionists kidnapped several weeks ago and of whom there has been no word. I think too of Fr. Roger Syayipuma Kasereka, with whom in the 1990's, I had the pleasure of living with in 2 communities in East Africa where he was the Superior. Fr. Roger has only recently been named to a new and exciting Mission in Goma in the Congo. Sadly, as the media has been reporting, for some time Goma is a very endangered city, a pawn in the hands of a vicious guerilla group and even of Congolese troops as such! The plight of this new community at this moment is very precarious. Fr. d'Alzon as he was dying, promised he wanted to protect us. Please join us as we pray for this protection for all these Congolese Brothers and for our Assumptionist Mission in the Eastern Congo.. And may that in turn encourage us to want to pray for the miracle so needed through the intercession of our Founder if he is to be beatified, something that could but increase his power of intercession, his power to protect his sons and daughters (for the Oblate Sisters who preceded us in Goma, were also founded by Fr. d'Alzon). And all this for the Coming of the Kingdom as Emmanuel d'Alzon would want it to be.

Fr. Oliver, A.A.