



**PROMINENT ASSUMPTIONIST** Fr. Antoine Wenger, A.A. (1919-2009) was born into a working class family in the Alsatian town of Rohrwiller in 1919, only 2 miles away from the village of his predecessor as editor in chief at La Croix, Fr. Émile Gabel. After completing his secondary studies at Assumptionist seminaries, he made his first vows as an Assumptionist in 1937, then studied philosophy and theology. From all accounts he was a brilliant student who caught the eye of most of his professors.

Ordained a priest in 1943, he was directed toward scholarly research. He pursued studies in history, literature, and theology at the Universities of Paris and Strasbourg, as well as l'École pratique des hautes études and the Institut national des langues orientales, before joining in 1946 the prestigious Institute for Byzantine Studies founded by the Assumptionists and teaching Oriental theology at the Institut catholique of Lyon.

Displaying a passion for the Greek Fathers, the young religious did not take long in showing himself to be a renowned specialist. To confirm this status, one need only call to mind his remarkable doctoral dissertation on the Assumption of the Virgin, in which he brings to light ancient Byzantine references, and his publication, widely noted, of eight previously unpublished catecheses of St. John Chrysostom, which he discovered himself in 1955 in the storerooms of Mount Athos: a discovery which brought him international acclaim.

However, even though these works had barely been published, his superiors called him to assume other responsibilities. When Fr. Gabel left La Croix, it was this 37 year old Byzantine scholar who was asked in January 1957 to take up, alone, at the time, the reins of our newspaper, having received orders from the Vatican — publish papal documents and denounce the Communist threat... Then there arrived on the scene John XXIII, Vatican II, and Paul VI: figures and events that, together with the War in Algeria and the turmoil of May 1968, spawned

in this historian an incurable passion for journalism.



Editor in chief, he would be at once, sometimes inseparably, witness and actor of international and French politics as well as the life of the church in France and abroad. Thanks to the efforts of Bishop Villot and of Paul VI, he would become the only journalist admitted to the sessions of Vatican II (his chronicles of the Council are to this day still considered to be the standard reference), would visit China on the Pope's behalf, would contribute to the historic encounter between Paul VI and the Patriarch Athenagoras... As far as Rome's relationship with La Croix was concerned, he was held in the highest respect and trust. He understood this confidence and safeguarded it.

For 12 years he was the sole commander-in-chief of the newspaper. Finally in 1969 he turned the vessel over to joint editors, Fr. Lucien Guissard and Mr. André Géraud. He left for Strasbourg to throw himself once again into his first love, study of the Fathers of the Church, all the while serving as a weekly commentator in La Croix. Four years later he was named the an

ecclesiastical consultant at the French embassy to the Holy See. For ten years, his vast knowledge of national and international affairs, both religious and political, allowed him to make much appreciated contributions..

Having reached the age of retirement, he could not sit still. He was entrusted with special missions by the French government and the Vatican to Russia, whose people and culture he loved. It was of these experiences that he would write some of his last articles in *La Croix* and that he would convert into his last masterful works characterized as much by their fervor as their rigor. What held his life together was a single love at the service of the Church and men.

Fr. Wenger died on May 22, 2009.

## Writings

- \* *L'Assomption de la Sainte-Vierge dans la tradition byzantine* (1956)
- \* *Catéchèses inédites de saint Jean Chrysostome* (1957)
- \* *La Russie de Khrouchtchev* (1960)
- \* *Chronique de Vatican II* (4 vol.) (1963-66), English edition incomplete
- \* *Le Défi du siècle aux Églises* (1968) – *Rome et Moscou 1900-1950* (1987; Russian translation, 2000)
- \* *Le Cardinal Jean-Marie Villot (1905-1979), secrétaire d'État de trois papes* (1989)
- \* *Les Trois Rome, l'Église des années soixante* (1991)
- \* *Catholiques en Russie d'après les archives du KGB, 1920-1960* (1998)
- \* *La persecuzione dei cattolici in Russia. Gli uomini, i processi, lo sterminio. Dagli archivi del KGB* (1999)

Articles notably in the *Revue des études byzantines* on the history and the thought of the Christian East.