

# AA News of the Assumption



- A JUBILEE OF HOPE
- MGR GSCHWIND: ONE YEAR AS BISHOP
- AN IMMERSION IN THE EASTERN RITE



# Agenda

## Plenary General Council

n° 4 : **June 2-11** (Buenos Aires).

## Ordinary General Council

n° 13 : **Feb. 20-26**

n° 14 : **April 22-30**

n° 15 : **June 12-13**

## Fr. Ngoa

- **Jan. 1 - Feb. 15:** East Africa (canonical visit).
- **Feb. 27 - March 1:** Paris (Council of the Province-Europe).
- **May 6 - June 1:** Andean Province (canonical visit).

## Fr. Benoît

- **Jan. 1-30:** East Africa (canonical visit).
- **Feb. 3-15:** West Africa (session).
- **May 21-23:** Meeting of General Superiors.

## Fr. João

- **Jan. 17-19:** Paris (meeting of JPIC).
- **Feb. 10-14:** Meeting of JPIC in Rome.
- **May 6 - June 1:** Andean Province (canonical visit).

## Fr. Thierry

- **Dec. 27 – Feb. 14:** DR-Congo.

## Fr. Étienne

- in Rome.

### On the cover

A dome in the church of the Orthodox monastery of Bachkovo (Bulgaria), not far from Plovdiv, where a session on the Byzantine rite brought together a dozen religious from the Province of Europe last October (photo Antoine Nguyen Trung Niên). Read pages 14-15

# A New Priest at Due Pini!



It doesn't happen every year, or even during each mandate, that a brother from the General House community becomes a priest! Last November 1st, there was a huge celebration when Br. Dominique Nguyen Van Tho was ordained by Cardinal Lazarus Heung-sik You. As the Prefect for the Dicastery for Religious who better to be a part of this great event! Interestingly, it was his personal hairdresser who the Korean cardinal ordained a priest!

The ordination was a magnificent celebration for all the Assumptionists in Rome, but it was important to a large representation from the local Vietnamese community. Many people also came from Tho's native country, including his mother, his brother and sister-in-law, as well as the pastor of Tho's village who traveled a long distance to be at the event. Additionally, the parish of Santa Maria delle Grazie alle Fornaci (not far from the Vatican), where our brother did his diaconal internship, is run by two Trinitarian religious who are also Vietnamese. It is understandable that both the liturgy and the feast that followed had a distinctive Asian flavor!

While waiting to return to Vietnam, Father Dominique Tho continues his service in the parish mentioned above while still being very busy in the General House. He will be coordinating the welcome of guests, who will be numerous in the house during this jubilee year that Pope Francis has declared.

# “Pray that I convert at least this year”



**Fr. Ngoa Ya Tshihemba**  
Superior General of  
the Augustinians of the  
Assumption

“Pray that I convert at least this year.” These words are from Fr. Emmanuel d’Alzon, in a letter addressed to Fr. Vincent-de-Paul Bailly, in December 1876 – only four years before his death.

Fr. d’Alzon, when he speaks of perfection or of the greatest purity, sets the bar ever higher. Sometimes one has the impression of listening to someone who has already made his way and who only motivates others to follow him. And yet, the same D’Alzon never stops talking about the conversion he still needs.

With this issue of AA-info of the beginning of the year, I would like to mention this wish which is also a prayer of Fr. d’Alzon. The Christmas and New Year festivities are often embellished with a multitude of messages expressing wishes. Many have wished me a happy new year, promising me prayers for good health, peace of heart, success, serenity, courage, etc. Perhaps I would have been surprised, very surprised, in fact, if I had received a message like this: “I pray for your conversion.” And yet I need it.

Yes, we all need to convert somehow. It is not enough to say so. It is perhaps a first step, but why do we not move forward? Father d’Alzon answers this question: *“Most pious people are stopped in their progress toward perfection, because they do not fight their faults energetically enough; and they do not fight them, because they do not have enough horror of the sins into which these faults lead them.”* » (E.S. p. 1233)

Our Founder therefore exhorts us not only to be aware of the need for conversion, but also to have the courage to finally decide to undertake generously the work of our conversion (E.S. p. 1239). I am very sure that we have all tried and it did not work the first and second time, and we have given up the fight. Saint Augustine had the same experience. But he finally got through it. He gives us his secret in a commentary on Psalm 33. While acknowledging that we will never be perfect here on earth, he nevertheless invites us to always try.

Even if we speak of community conversions necessary above all to progress in the ways of peace, justice and fraternity by fighting against what Pope John Paul II called the “structures of sin” present in societies, Fr. d’Alzon often speaks of personal conversions. *“Everyone must be converted personally. Conversion must be done, not in masses, but one by one. Even in those speeches where Saint Peter converted two or three thousand Jews, the Holy Spirit descended on each one individually. It was not a matter of common resolution.”* (E.S. p. 566)

As we enter the Jubilee Year 2025, let us continually open ourselves to Jesus’ call to conversion: *“The time is fulfilled; the Kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the Gospel.”* (Mk 1:15) As our Rule of Life emphasizes, this conversion must be lived daily, especially because we live in community. This is a place that can foster our conversion. But let us not forget that this same community becomes the place par excellence to test our conversion. As in the Gospel, we must learn to cast out our “little demons” and speak new languages of mercy and love. This has always been our desire. There are moments when we express this desire to change, to progress in our relationships with others, to get rid of our old habits, in short, to return to God - but lethargy overtakes us. The sad reality is that we remain stubborn in our ideas, our whims.

But we will not forget that, in its deepest sense, *“conversion is a gift of God, the work of the Trinity”*, as Saint John Paul II said (*Redemptoris missio*, n. 46). Our effort is therefore to open ourselves to this gift that comes from the Trinity. May the mercy and love of the one who truly loves us precede our desire for conversion and accompany our efforts.

May those who are lucky enough to pass through the Holy Door this Jubilee Year 2025, remember to pray for our conversion. Have a beautiful Holy Year 2025 ! ■

# Calls, nominations, agreements...

## ■ TO DIACONALE ORDINATION

Fr. Ngoa Ya Tshihemba, Superior General, with the consent of his Council, has called:

- **Ariel VIDANES**, (Europe) (30/10/2024)

## ■ NEW MAJOR SUPERIORS

Fr. Ngoa Ya Tshihemba, Superior General, with the consent of his Ordinary General Council, has named:

- **Fr. Benard ODHIAMBO YALA**, vice-provincial **Superior of East Africa**, for a first triennium, starting January 1, 2025.
- **Fr. PALUKU LUKENZANO Bolivar**, **Superior of the Andean Province**, for a first triennium, starting on March 1, 2025.

(voir leur portrait opposite).

## ■ OPENING & CLOSING OF HOUSES

Fr. Ngoa Ya Tshihemba, Superior General, with the consent of his Plenary General Council, has given his approval for:

- **the opening** of a parish community at **Dar es Salam** (Tanzania, Vice-Province of East Africa);
- **the closing** of the community of **Conflans-Sainte-Honorine** (France, Province of Europe).

## ■ AGREEMENT FOR THE NOMINATION O

Fr. Ngoa Ya Tshihemba, Superior General, with the unanimous approval of the Plenary General Council, has given his agreement for the following nominations:

- of **Fr. Marcelo MARCIEL** as **Responsible for the Formation for the Andean Province**,
- of **Fr. KASEREKA MASUMBUKO KOMBI Jérôme** as **Superior of the CIFA of Kinshasa** (Province of Africa),
- of **Fr. KAMBALE NZANZU François** as **Superior of the Scholasticate Austin House of Arusha** (Vice-Province of East Africa),

- of **Fr. KATEMBOKAMERA Dalmon** as **Superior of the Scholasticate of Antananarivo** (Province of Madagascar),

- of **Fr. Benoît GRIÈRE** as **Superior of the House of Formation in Lyon** (Province of Europe).

## ■ APPOINTMENT OF RELIGIOUS BROTHERS AS SUPERIORS OF COMMUNITIES

Conforming with c. 588 §2 of the Code of Canonical Law, which was modified by Pope Francis, Fr. Ngoa Ya Tshihemba, Superior General, with the consent of his Council, has named:

- **Br. Robert MIGLIORINI**, Superior of the community of Paris-Denfert (France) for a 2nd mandate, begun in 2022;
- **Br. Milad YACOUB**, Superior of the community of Istanbul-Kadiköy (Turkey) for a 1st mandate, begun in 2023;
- **Br. Bernard ROBERT**, Superior of the community of St-Lambert-des-Bois (France) for a 1st mandate, begun in September 2024.

## ■ EXCLAUSTRATION

- Fr. Ngoa Ya Tshihemba, Superior General, with the consent of his Council, granted an indult of exclaustation from the Institute, to **Fr. Marco Aurélio FLORENTINO GONCALVEZ** (Province of Brazil), for one year, from October 29, 2024.

## ■ TRANSFER TO ANOTHER INSTITUTE

- Fr. Ngoa Ya Tshihemba, Superior General, with the consent of his Council, authorized **Br. Ryan CARLSEN** (North American Province) to enter the congregation of the Canons Regular of the Immaculate Conception for a trial period of three years starting from October 15, 2024.

## FR. PALUKU LUKENZANO BOLIVAR, NEW SUPERIOR OF THE ANDEAN PROVINCE



Fr. Bolivar was born in Butembo, D.R. Congo, on December 26, 1976. Son of Seraphinus Kambale Kimimbi and Basiliane Kavira Katembo, he has nine brothers and sisters. A postulant as of 1996 at the Kindugu House, he entered the Charles-Lwanga novitiate in 1997 and made his first profession on August 27, 1998, in Butembo. Appointed to Chile in 2001, he joined the Manuel d'Alzon community in Cerro Navia, for his theological studies at the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Santiago. He made his perpetual profession in 2004 in Santiago and was ordained a priest in 2007 in Butembo-Kitatumba.

His successive apostolates have been:

- in Chile: youth ministry, formation of postulants and professed in Chile, popular pastoral ministry at the Población Robert Kennedy in Santiago, chaplaincy of the Institute and service at the sanctuary of Our Lady of Lourdes;
- in Argentina: Formator of the CIFA in Buenos Aires;
- in Ecuador: superior of the community of Our Lady of Chimborazo and parish priest of the parish of San Pedro de Lican in Riobamba, as well as coordinator of family pastoral ministry and indigenous pastoral ministry in the diocese.

On 1 March 2025, Fr. Bolivar will succeed Fr. Juan Carlos Marzolla, who has completed three trienniums.



## FR. BENARD ODHIAMBO YALA, NEW VICE-PROVINCIAL OF EAST AFRICA

Fr. Benard Odhiambo Yala was born on 8 September 1977 to Vitalice Yallah and the late Janet Migaya, in Kamalumbé (Kenya), the third of ten siblings.

As an aspirant to the Assumption in 1998, he obtained a degree in philosophy in Nairobi and Arusha (Tanzania). He then completed his postulancy in the Democratic Republic of Congo in 2001 and his novitiate, concluding with his first vows on 16 September 2003.

He studied theology at Tangaza College in Nairobi until 2007, then obtained a diploma in education at the Catholic University of East Africa. Ordained a priest on March 3, 2011, he was a member of the African Province Council as soon as 2009, then Provincial Assistant of Africa from 2015 to 2018.

Treasurer of Emmanuel House (Nairobi) until 2016, he was then superior of the community of Njiru. After a stay in the Province of North America for a master's degree in education, he was appointed in 2020 to the St Mbagu Tuzinde Postulate while being deputy principal of Assumption High School in Katua; in 2021, he became Superior of the Postulate, and in 2023, Master of Postulants. He was also appointed Principal of Assumption High School, a position he held until his appointment as Vice-Provincial of East Africa for a first three-year term, succeeding Fr. Henri Kizito Vyambwera on 1 January 2025, who had completed two terms.



# Together towards hope!

The 3rd session of the Plenary General Council was held in Rome in December, under the dual sign of synodality and the Jubilee.

The members of the 3rd CGP session, in the chapel of Due Pini.



We can see a coincidence or a wink from Providence: it was in the aftermath of the Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on synodality, and on the eve of the opening of a Holy Year in Rome, that the CGP met for the 3rd time of this mandate. Suffice it to say that its agenda had a universal dimension from the outset, which did not prevent it from dealing with many subjects very specific to our religious family!

\* Let's start with **synodality**: the Council first took hold of it by receiving the assessment of the major process desired by Pope Francis over four years and in two assemblies, in order to redefine the way in which the Church organizes itself to fulfill its mission of evangelization today. We thus had the joy of welcoming again the Under-Secretary of a Synod, Sr Nathalie

Becquart: this French Xavier nun, who had already come to explain the synodal process at the previous Council two years ago, came this time to draw the main lessons to extend it:

- Synodality is a "path of spiritual renewal and structural reform to make the Church more participatory and more missionary", capable of walking with each person in the light of Christ. The challenge is to articulate the diversity of these particular relationships with an overall dynamic, through decentralization and taking into account cultures, as well as through better attention to victims and the poorest.

- This synodal conversion must affect *the way decisions are made in the Church*: listening to all, valuing diversity – in particular complementarity and reciprocity between men and women –, a culture of transparency and accountability.

- *Religious life* is a privileged place for this challenge: for male-female relationships, but also within the people of God, in tension between charismatic and hierarchical poles (read further the references of the final document of the Synod on Consecrated Life).

\* The key to synodality is **the formation** of a people of missionary disciples: it will come as no surprise that this dimension was, once again, at the heart of the work of the CGP. In addition to the annual report of the Secretary General for Formation, Fr. Vincent Leclercq, and shortly after the meeting of formators in Nîmes (read page 17), this session notably finalized the presentation of the admission files submitted to the GGO and improved the transmission of information between formation centers. Five new formators have also received their approval (see page 4).

\* The same Father Vincent also presented his annual report as **Postulator General**. He has in particular the obligation, for the beatification of Father d'Alzon, to present to the Holy See a well-supported case of miraculous healing, which requires: a public prayer that can attest to the intercession of Father D'Alzon (hence the importance of naming the people for whom we pray through the intercession of our Founder) and a solid medical file. Furthermore, the Postulator expects to be informed of all forms of graces obtained, even if they do not fit completely in what the Holy See is expecting (1)

\* Another recurring topic of the CGP: **economic issues!** As at each December session, we hosted the Economic Council of the Congregation (CEC, formed by the provincial treasurers) for two days to validate the budgets of the Generalate and interprovincial solidarity for 2025, and to update the Medium-Term Real Estate Plan.

Special attention was paid this time to the financial autonomy to be developed by the youngest entities of the Congregation, by moving away from a mode of support that is too paternalistic to develop local initiatives, enhance the resources already available, ensure good monitoring of projects, good control of expenses and the pooling of assets, both within the communities and the Provinces.

Among other files, no less important, the CGP also:



Relaxing evening with the Generalice community.

- updated, as usual, the list of key positions of the Congregation (which each Province was able to complete with its own) and, for the first time, that of the *mobilizing works* (read page 9);

- examined requests for *opening or closing communities*, or even projects for longer-term foundations;

- took note of the new edition of our *Small Canonical Directory*, after the numerous modifications made by Pope Francis to Church law;

- took stock of the program of the next *international sessions*, etc.

And what about the Jubilee? It has not been forgotten since, on the occasion of this Holy Year 2025 placed by Pope Francis under the sign of hope, Father General asked for the advice of the CGP to invite the Congregation, at all its personal, community and provincial levels, to take action in this direction!

**Fr. Michel KUBLER (Rome)**  
with the contribution of the “red thread” written by Fr. Benoît Bigard



### Solidarity campaigns in the Assumption

Fr Alex Castro, General Treasurer; updated the CGP on the current campaigns:

- ▶ In 2023, it was intended to renovate the Nasandratrony presbytery in Madagascar: the campaign is still ongoing to complete the budget.

- ▶ In 2024, the choice fell on aid for the construction of a dormitory for 50 boys at Assumption High School in Nairobi (East Africa): the required amount has not yet been reached.

- ▶ For 2025, the CGP has chosen to contribute to renovating the roof of Kambali College in Butembo (Province of Africa). The expected contribution of the campaign is USD 41,292 in order to complete the planned budget. We appeal to the generosity of the entire Congregation!

(1) At the dedicated email address: [postulazioneassunzionisti@assumption.org](mailto:postulazioneassunzionisti@assumption.org)

# Synodality also applies to our consecrated life!

**In addition to the work of this assembly (read p. 6-7) the Council devoted a significant amount of time to the perspectives opened up by the Synod of Bishops for our religious life.**

**D**uring this CGP, group work focused on possible synodal conversions for our congregation: governance, formation, relationship with other actors in the Church... and of course, lay-religious collaboration. The work is only just beginning with the concrete implementation of the Synod as far as we are concerned and a regular assessment to be planned of the progress made...

To help us, here are some extracts from the final document of the synodal assembly (1).

9. The synodal process does not end with the end of the current assembly of the Synod of

Bishops, because it includes the implementation phase. (...) We ask all local Churches to continue their daily journey with a synodal methodology of consultation and discernment, identifying concrete means and training paths to achieve a tangible synodal conversion in the various ecclesial realities (parishes, institutes of consecrated life and societies of apostolic life, associations of the faithful, dioceses, episcopal conferences, groupings of Churches, etc.). It will be necessary to provide for an evaluation of the progress made in matters of synodality and the participation of all the baptized in the life of the Church.

65. Over the centuries, spiritual gifts have also given rise to various expressions of consecrated life. From the beginning, the Church has recognized the action of the Spirit in the lives of men and women who have chosen to follow Christ on the path of the evangelical counsels, dedicating themselves to the service of God in contemplation and in multiple forms of service. Consecrated life is called to challenge the Church and society with its prophetic voice. In their centuries-old experience, religious families have matured proven practices of synodal life and common discernment, learning to harmonize individual



Sr Nathalie Becquart, a French Xavière and Synod under-secretary, presented the final document to the CGP.



gifts and the common mission. Orders and congregations, societies of apostolic life, secular institutes, as well as associations, movements and new communities have a special contribution to make to the growth of synodality in the Church. Today, many communities of consecrated life are a laboratory of interculturality that constitutes a prophecy for the Church and the world. At the same time, synodality invites – which sometimes constitutes a challenge – the pastors of the local Churches, as well as those responsible for consecrated life and ecclesial associations, to strengthen their relationships in order to give life to an exchange of gifts, at the service of the common mission.

72. In a synodal Church, priests are called to live their service in an attitude of closeness, of welcome and of listening to all, opening themselves to a synodal style. (...) They are called to live priestly fraternity and to walk together in pastoral service. Priests who are members of Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life are also part of the presbyterate, and enrich it with the particularity of their charism. The latter (...) help the diocesan clergy to open up to the horizons of the whole Church, while local priests help their other confreres to inscribe themselves in the history of a specific diocese, with its traditions and spiritual riches. In this way, a true exchange of gifts for the mission also takes place in the presbytery.

99. If the synodal Church wishes to be welcoming, accountability must become a habitual practice at all levels. However, those in positions of authority have a greater responsibility in this re-

gard and are required to give an account to God and his people. If over the centuries the practice of giving an account to superiors has been preserved, we must rediscover the dimension of the accountability that authority is called to give to the community. The institutions and procedures consolidated by the experience of consecrated life (such as chapters, canonical visitations, etc.) can be a source of inspiration in this regard.

118. We recognize the capacity of institutes of consecrated life, societies of apostolic life, as well as associations, movements and new communities, to take root in the territory and, at the same time, to connect different places and environments, even at the national or international level. Often it is their action, together with that of so many individuals and informal groups, that brings the Gospel to the most diverse places: hospitals, prisons, homes for the elderly, reception centres for migrants, minors, marginalised people and victims of violence; places of education and training, schools and universities, where young people and families meet; places of culture, politics and integral human development where new forms of life together are imagined and built. We also look with gratitude to the monasteries, places of convocation and discernment, a prophecy of a “beyond” that concerns the whole Church and guides its journey. It is the specific responsibility of the diocesan or eparchial bishop to animate this multiplicity and to watch over the bonds of unity. Institutes and associations are called to act in synergy with the local Church, participating in the dynamism of synodality. ■

### **Mobilizing Works**

It was the 32nd General Chapter (2011) that created this “label” intended to mobilize the entire congregation to support a few significant works of our charism, these in turn having to mobilize the entire Assumptionist body on their reason for being. In 2023, the 34th General Chapter requested a review of the list of these works. Of the seven that had previously been provided with this label, it maintained five, to which a new one was added.

The new list of mobilizing works is therefore as follows:

- Assumption University (North America),
- Université de l'Assomption au Congo (Africa),
- Bayard (Europe),
- Centre St Pierre – St André de Bucarest (Europe),
- Réseau des écoles de brousse & Collège Mgr Canonne (Madagascar),
- Notre-Dame de Salut pilgrimage works (Europe)



(1) The full text of this document, in our three languages, can be found at this link: [https://www.synod.va/en/news/final-document-of-the-xvi-assembly.html?fbclid=IwY2xjawHXbq5leHRuA2FlbQIxMAABHdCVwi2PUfPRbje0lm-OipHSe\\_B2v0AmPT-1Ca1AuFHe\\_FfXsFrJWKLYSg\\_aem\\_XH\\_opdO4jcSTIPFc-QqnA](https://www.synod.va/en/news/final-document-of-the-xvi-assembly.html?fbclid=IwY2xjawHXbq5leHRuA2FlbQIxMAABHdCVwi2PUfPRbje0lm-OipHSe_B2v0AmPT-1Ca1AuFHe_FfXsFrJWKLYSg_aem_XH_opdO4jcSTIPFc-QqnA)

# “Join the procession of builders”

Excerpts from the closing speech of the 3rd session of the Plenary General Council by Father General.



## “Join the procession of builders”:

I heard this expression last Saturday while watching the video of the speech by French President Emmanuel Macron at the reopening ceremony of Notre-Dame Cathedral in Paris. It always brings joy when we find what seemed to be lost or that was in the process of being lost. (...)

This event particularly touched me, especially since we were in the middle of the CGP. It's not that I had the impression that our Congregation was burning and that I dreamed of seeing it rebuild itself to regain the splendor of the past. No, we are not there yet. It was mainly because I saw as if our CGP was there precisely to ensure that such a thing does not happen, but also if a catastrophe does happen, to face it together.

The effort of the CGP has been visible for a long time and remains so. Yes, there have been “small fires” here and there; but, thanks to the spirit of the body and the fraternity that no longer need to be demonstrated, the solutions have been found. Let us not disdain any help. If we must return to the image of Notre-Dame Cathedral, we all agree that for its reconstruction, the electricians alone could not do anything, even if we talk about the lights. It also took a helping hand from the masons, scaffolders, carpenters and all the others. Yes, everyone contributed.

The round table of the Provinces and Vicariates gave us the temperature of the congregation. The diagnosis is not very frightening. As I said, we are not facing ir-

reversible realities, but as they always say, prevention is better than cure. We must not forget that reconstruction is the fruit not only of the will to do something, much less of the simple availability of the materials we need, but it is also the fruit of a job well done. Our CGP has stressed this requirement. Ideas, strategies must be put in place to move forward in this direction.

When we talk about the openings and closings of communities, this reality, far from being perceived as something that speaks of death here and life there - this reality simply tells us that we are not giving up, because life and the mission continue here and there. And that we are all called to join the procession of these workers of the Kingdom that we need here and there.

Joining the procession of builders of the Kingdom means not only knowing how to be, or knowing how to do, but also knowing how to become. This knowing how to become requires us to know how to anticipate. On this point, we must provide more efforts. There are construction sites on which we seem not to move and we risk being caught up by our sin of omission or negligence. (...)

My brothers, I leave you with this note of hope: *“Those who put their hope in the Lord find new strength”*, this is the first reading of this day. But before finishing, allow me to reiterate to you all my sincere thanks for your truly active participation in this CGP. A special thank you to our two brothers who are at the end of their mandate (Juan Carlos and Kizito). You have certainly benefited from these meetings. This will serve you for life and the mission which of course continues in the Assumption.

Fr. Ngoa Ya Tshihemba  
Superior General



# A Congregation mobilized for hope

**On January 2, Father General wrote this letter to all communities, calling on them to mobilize for a gesture of hope.**

Dear brothers and sisters,

The Jubilee Year 2025 was officially launched on December 24, 2024, with the opening rite of the Holy Door of the Papal Basilica of Saint Peter.

So it is with the joy of the Nativity and the New Year that I write to you today. A year and a half ago, we celebrated our 34th General Chapter. It has set us all on the path of hope, letting ourselves be moved by the Spirit who never ceases to whisper in our hearts, reminding us that “the Kingdom of God is already among us”. It’s a question of remaining daily attentive to the signs of the Kingdom and discovering its many treasures, so that we can commit ourselves to responding to its urgencies. It will never be too repetitive to remind ourselves that the General Chapter makes a vibrant appeal to us, one that effectively corresponds to the charism of the workers of the Kingdom: “To live and proclaim the hope of the Gospel”. I am fully convinced that it is in this way that we will be able to walk the path of holiness proposed to us by the Venerable Father Emmanuel d’Alzon.

We’re going to taste even more of the joys of this grace of sanctification/holiness during this Jubilee Year 2025, which the Holy Father has intended to be a Ju-

bilee of hope. In the Jubilee Bull of Indiction, “Hope does not disappoint”, Pope Francis returns to the fundamental elements of the Jubilee: a powerful moment when believers, in the course of their journey to meet the Lord, nourish and strengthen hope within themselves by experiencing more closely the divine “face of mercy”.

For believers, the Jubilee is also a time to rediscover the signs of hope in today’s world, paying attention to the good that is being done in the world so as not to succumb to the temptation of despair.

The Pope asks us to accompany our jubilee prayer with concrete gestures of hope. These include simple gestures such as making peace in our living environments, encouraging young people to transmit life, creating solidarity networks for a better world, helping the unfortunate (prisoners, the sick, migrants, displaced persons, refugees, exiles, the elderly or disabled, etc.).

At the last Plenary General Council, we considered how, in Assumption, we can concretely live the Jubilee event in communion with the Church and as an extension of our General Chapter. The members of the CGP were convinced that hope rests in the heart of each person as a desire and expectation of good.

They felt that the celebration of the Jubilee Year merits our religious family making gestures of hope in favor of populations in distress.

I am writing you this letter to ask the communities, works and lay people of the Assumption to identify, in your respective contexts, geographical or existential peripheries and simple, quick-to-implement and evaluable gestures that you can carry out locally. Our first thought was for prisoners in certain parts of the world, migrants and all those in situations of forced displacement. However, the door remains open to local (community or regional) initiatives, depending on the specific situation. At each level, we will take care to write a brief article on these initiatives (no more than one page) for publication in the Congregation’s newsletters. Don’t forget to include illustrations. (no more than 3 photos)

Dear brothers and sisters,

I can’t close this letter without returning to the importance of the solemnity of Christmas in the history and life of our little family. It is the day of our birth as a religious family within the Church. We’ll be renewing our Assumptionist commitment wherever we celebrate, making our vocation in the world and in the Church even more interior: “Adveniat Regnum Tuum”.

It is on this note that I wish you, collectively and personally, a Merry Christmas and a Holy and Happy Jubilee Year 2025, the Year of Hope.

**Ngoa Ya Tshihemba, a.a.**  
General Superior

# 1st Episcopal Anniversary of Msgr. Benoît Gschwind



**Named bishop of Pamiers at the end of 2023, the former Provincial of Europe shares his experience as the first Assumptionist in charge of a French diocese.**

day doesn't go by when I don't think of the workings of the Holy Spirit. My episcopal motto: «Thy Kingdom come! », obligates me unceasingly to follow the exercise of re-reading and paying particular attention to the coming of God's reign in me and around me. It has been several weeks since I have started my diocesan pastoral visits---the perfect occasion to discover and encourage my diocese to work for the coming of God's Kingdom.

**Can you characterize in a few words the realities of your diocese: the population, the socio-economic context, and the religious situation in this area of Ariège?**

-Between Lourdes and Perpignan, to the south of Toulouse, Ariège is a small, rural department with a population of around 150,000. Despite wide plains to the north, it is a territory of mountains that are part of the Pyrenees. Breeding and tourism are the main activities of this department where one also finds several industries of food processing, wood, and aerospace. Zones of aluminum or textiles, once very important, have disappeared. Unemployment is higher in Ariège than in other areas of the country. Young people leave the area to study or to find work. At the same time, because of its rural character, Ariège is a place where people come to change their lifestyles, to get closer to the earth and to find a lifestyle more serious and ecological.

**-One year after your ordination as bishop, how do you live your ministry?**

**Msgr. Benoît Gschwind:** I never dreamed of becoming a bishop. It is a calling that overwhelms me and continues to overwhelm me. It is rare that a call from the Church has given me such a surprise. A successor of the apostles! It is a huge responsibility, and, at the same time, an amazing grace. A





Confirmation celebration  
in the diocese of Pamiers

### **What are the most prominent aspects of your “work” as a bishop? Your joys? Your hardships?**

To watch, to listen, to encounter have been the essential marks of my mission during this first year of my episcopate. The bishop’s mission is guided by three essential principles: to teach, to sanctify, and to govern. Instead of using “govern”, I prefer to substitute the word “guide”, that shows more clearly the mission of a pastor who walks with his people, as a guide and a conductor. There is joy in walking with the people of God, to share in their pain, their joys, and their hopes. The bishop is sometimes taken to task for giving advice... he must constantly strive for communion and avoid dividing the people of God in his positions. It is not easy, since that should not deter him from giving fresh impetus to the growth and advancement of the people of God in his care.

### **What steps are you beginning to undertake regarding episcopal collegiality with your neighbors and across France and beyond?**

Ever since my appointment, I have realized the importance of

episcopal collegiality. One cannot be a bishop alone. Together we are successors of the Apostles. This is lived and affirmed in the work of ecclesiastical provinces and episcopal conferences. It is seen in the work, the discernment, and the collegial decision-making. Like all bishops, I participate in a fraternal group of bishops, which provides a good opportunity for sharing and support for my mission. My 1<sup>st</sup> anniversary as bishop was marked by two events of formation---one in Paris with the new bishops of France and the other in Rome with those from the entire world. We were 300 in Rome! It is remarkable to realize the reality and universality of the Church. The Assumption had already given me the opportunity to experiment and to live internationality.

### **What has changed dramatically in your daily life since you became bishop? And, what hasn’t changed?**

Going from a life in community for 40 years to a more solitary life is perhaps the biggest change I have had to accept. Praying alone, eating breakfast alone, and sometimes even celebrating alone, has forced me to adapt temporal

and spiritual life according to my new mission. I do my own cooking, cleaning, and shopping. Religious life has formed me well! Even though things have changed in my life, there is one thing that remains: it is my attachment to Christ and the Gospel. I live my new mission with this fidelity.

### **Does the fact of being a religious, an Assumptionist, help in the way you carry out your ministry?**

-A man of faith, a man of communion, in solidarity with the poor: this trilogy that stands for what it means to be an Assumptionist, has marked my life for the last 40 years. Life in community, dialogue with my brothers, and the rhythm of religious life with its chapters---local, provincial, and general, have fashioned me and have marked the way I am a bishop. I accompany the people of God and provide service through my decisions.

### **How did you experience the Synod on Synodality? How could it be extended in your diocese?**

The Synod on Synodality has often been understood to be an occasion in which to revolutionize the functioning of the Church. I understand it to be a necessary pedagogy to understand how to be Church. To dialogue, to discern, and to decide are its important steps. The Church is not re-inventing itself: it receives grace and grows through it in a synodality which indicates obligatory passages for God’s people and its pastors, an art of living together listening to the Spirit.

Interviewed by  
Michel KUBLER

# Listening to the East

The Province of Europe organized a session in Bulgaria, allowing brothers in formation to discover the spiritual and liturgical riches of the Byzantine Rite.



Participants visit an Orthodox monastery near Plovdiv.

The event was held from October 20 to 28, 2024 in Plovdiv and Sofia, responding to the invitation of the last General and Provincial Chapters to return to the roots of the charism and history of the Congregation. Among these little-known treasures, the Byzantine Rite occupied a central place, offering the dozen participants, religious in initial formation or future formators, an immersion in a thousand-year-old Christian and deeply spiritual tradition.

## An immersive discovery

It was a true immersion in the Byzantine Rite, with its particularities and spiritual depth, that the session allowed. Thus, Mgr Christo Proykov, Exarch Emeritus of the Bulgarian Catholics of the Eastern Rite, presented the litur-

gical year and the major feasts of the Byzantine Rite. The visit of emblematic places with Fr. Daniel Gillier, the Church of the Ascension in Plovdiv and that of Kuklen, revealed the symbolism of the iconostasis and icons, followed by an introduction to Byzantine iconography by Bogdan Patashev: from the icon of the Trinity by Andrei Rublev, opening a space of deep contemplation on divine communion, to that of the Transfiguration whose divine light transforms humanity. And a series of teachings by Fr. Claudio Molteni on the Divine Liturgy explored its theological and patristic foundations.

## Visits and testimonies

In addition to the theoretical teaching, moments of meeting with local communities enriched

the session. The visit to the Orthodox monastery of Bachkovo, the second largest in Bulgaria, inspired the participants with its 17th century frescoes and its entire spiritual history. The meeting with the Carmelites of the Byzantine rite in Sofia, steeped in choral prayer and contemplation, reinforced this deep spiritual connection with the Eastern tradition.

The testimony of the Assumptionists of Bulgaria, Frs. Claudio, Georges and Daniel, as well as Sister Ana, Oblate of the Assumption, brought intense emotion. Their presence for decades in this land testifies to their fidelity to the call of the Lord. They shared their challenges, their joys, and their daily commitment to young people, parishes and local com-



munities, thus illustrating the legacy of the Mission d'Orient initiated by Fr. Victorin Galabert (see also p. 22f).

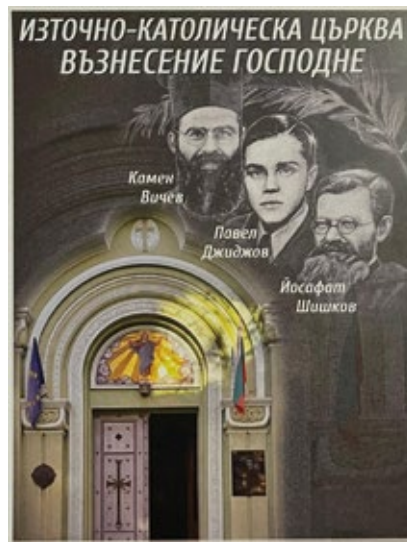
### Fr. Galabert's legacy

A key moment of the session was precisely the conference by Fr. Bernard Le Léanec on Fr. Galabert, an emblematic figure of the Assumption in the East. A doctor who became a priest after his meeting with Fr. D'Alzon, he embodied both its humility and missionary fervor. His commitment, marked by an unwavering faith and an austere life, reflects the spirit of this mission in a complicated context of geopolitical tensions between Russia and the Ottoman Empire. The conference highlighted the central role of the Assumption in this missionary process, a role that continues today through the actions of the Assumptionists in the region.

It was also Fr. Galabert, aware of the need to strengthen his missionary action through female support, who convinced Fr. d'Alzon to found the missionary congregation of the Oblates of the Assumption. Present in the East since their foundation, they have continued to play an essential, even indispensable, role in the Mission to the East.

### A congregation with two lungs

The Plovdiv session was an opportunity for its participants to live a unique experience of the Byzantine rite, which represents an essential dimension of our "two-lung" congregation. This balance of Eastern and Western liturgical and spiritual traditions underlines the importance of drawing on the diversity of the Church to better serve Christian unity. The Mission to the Orient, by continuing the work of Fr. Ga-



labert, remains a living testimony of the Assumptionist commitment to Christian unity and the encounter between cultures.

### A personal testimony

As a member of the Maronite Church, I had the opportunity to immerse myself in this Eastern spirituality that was familiar to me, but that I had never experienced in this way. Indeed, the Byzantine depth and solemnity made me discover aspects of the Eastern rite that I had not yet fully understood: the solemnity of the liturgical vestments (worn by the celebrants with particular care), the time devoted to preparing the Eucharistic prayer, the celebrant's gestures imbued with profound meanings... Everything reveals a concern for the sacred that is manifested at every moment of the liturgy.

Another striking element of this tradition is the 'royal door': closed for a large part of the celebration, it symbolizes access to the divine mystery. And the iconostasis, separating the sanctuary from the assembly, represents not only a distinction between the sacred and the profane, but also a call to transcendence, to meet God in a reserved space, other than that of our

daily lives. This concept seemed foreign to me at first, but as time went on, I understood the spiritual power of this practice.

As part of the Mission d'Orient, I discovered that one can enter an Eastern church, that is, this religious building, without really grasping its essence if one remains outside of its spirituality. True immersion requires an open mind and heart, allowing this spirituality to penetrate our inner being to bring us closer to this divine mystery.

This experience allowed me to better understand the complementarity between Eastern and Latin traditions. For example, in the Eucharist, it focuses on the humanity of Christ, while the Eastern tradition emphasizes the divinity. This journey has profoundly transformed me. By observing these spiritual differences, I understood that it is not a question of opposing them, but of complementing them. These two traditions are in reality two paths that converge towards the same mystery, that of God, who reveals himself in diverse but complementary forms.

**In conclusion:** this session allowed the participants, from various nationalities and backgrounds, to better understand the spiritual heritage of the Mission to the Orient. By experiencing this immersion in a thousand-year-old tradition, they experienced a true communion of hearts, symbolizing the universality of the mission of the Assumption. It thus strengthened the link between East and West, uniting the members of the congregation in their common mission and for Christian unity.

**Bro. Anthony FARAH**  
(Brussels-Woluwe)

# The Assumption of Plovdiv in the spotlight



[Left]: Fr. Daniel Gillier in archimandrite habit. - Right: Bishop Valov (center), the Assumptionist community in Plovdiv and the leaders of the European Province.

On Sunday, November 10, 2024, the community of Plovdiv celebrated the blessed martyrs Kamen Vitchev, Josaphat Chichkov and Pavel Djidjov with the new bishop of the Byzantine-rite Catholics of Bulgaria, Mgr Petko Valov, who presided for the first time at the solemn mass of this annual commemoration. Two important events marked the celebration: the elevation to the dignity of archimandrite of Fr. Daniel Gillier, and the erection of our church as the official sanctuary of the three blessed martyrs, with Fr. Claudio Molteni as rector.

Thus, following Fr. Petar Ljubas and several other Assumptionists before him, Fr. Daniel received the honorary title of Archimandrite for the service he has rendered for 30 years to the Bulgarian Church in the Eastern Rite Diocese. A recognition that gives prestige and honor to the entire Congregation.

The other significant event, the erection of the Church of the Ascension as a sanctuary of our blessed, now allows us to have a place of prayer and pilgrimage specific to the Assumption. Plovdiv, the cradle of the Mission of the Assumptionists and the Oblates, thus becomes a privileged spiritual place for the

entire Assumptionist family.

Our community of Plovdiv, brothers and sisters, has long desired such a possibility. The new sanctuary confirms the Lord's will that we continue our mission in Bulgarian lands in the service of this small peripheral Church and also for the good of the entire Assumption.

In his homily, Bishop Petko stressed that the bond established since 1862 between the Assumption and Bulgaria is now almost indissoluble. One cannot understand the history of the Eastern Catholic Church in Bulgaria without the Assumption, and at the same time the Assumption cannot understand its history and origin without Bulgaria.

Our bishop also wanted to honor Sr. Ana Dorcu with a diploma in recognition of her 35 years of religious life, 31 of which were in Plovdiv. Finally, he also presented such a diploma to Fr. Gheorghe Hang, for his 30 years of perpetual religious profession. This 10<sup>th</sup> November 2024 thus marked a historic milestone for the mission of Plovdiv, for the Mission of the East in general and the entire Assumption family.

**Fr. Claudio MOLTENI (Plovdiv)**



# Formators at the source of the congregation

From November 3rd to the 10th, those responsible for formation met in Nîmes for the biennial session of formators.

These meetings, scheduled to take place every two years under the direction of Frs. Vincent Leclercq, Secretary General of Formation, and Benoît Bigard, Assistant General for Formation, were marked by two options: hold the sessions at the cradle of the congregation, and bring together provincial and vicarial formators in a single session on the one hand, and those responsible for formation in the CIFA (International Communities of Formation for Assumptionists) and those responsible for the “large houses” of formation on the other. Of the twenty potential participants, only 14 were able to be present (due to visa problems, the war in Israel, and pastoral issues).

There are several significant aspects to this wonderful meeting:

It was the first visit to Nîmes for some formators, for others it was a rediscovery, and we were able to give this **plunge into our roots** a great deal of attention:

- A walking pilgrimage on the steps of Fr. d’Alzon in Nîmes
- A work space in the center of the Lycée de l’Institut d’Alzon (school of the d’Alzon Institute) with several interactions with the director of the Institute, Mr. Yvan Lachaud, and his colleagues—most notably the directors of the different departments of the Institute, paving the way for new collaborations with our educational institutions throughout the world... go

to the Institute site [www.dalzon.com](http://www.dalzon.com)

- A pilgrimage to Vigan, birthplace of Fr. d’Alzon, along with two lay friends who are part of the diocesan commission for the cause of the canonization of Fr. d’Alzon
- Celebrations and times of conviviality with our brothers, our Oblate Sisters, Lay Assumptionists, and parishioners of Sts. Perpetua and Felicity, but also Séguier St., with our Oblate Sisters, near the tomb of our founders

The second aspect of our meetings was the **exchange of experiences from the different formators** in their places of formation; of an evaluation of the implementation of local works resulting from the Chapters (general and provincial); of the organization of the work to be done in the form of priorities to be tackled initially, in order to draw up a local roadmap.

The third aspect of the meetings focused on **deepening some specific points**; on identifying aspects of formation that must be explored further; on new proposals that need to be incorporated; and on a number of questions/propositions to be transmitted concerning the provincial and general councils. To go a little further, small work groups were established to look at the following subjects:



- Re-establish a « Review of formation houses » (with several possible levels of articles and media)
- Better establish the fundamentals of the Assumptionist religious life---Charism and inculturation of the latter
- Organize a « public speaking contest »...
- Pursue language-learning initiatives
- Develop the accompaniment of young priests and deacons
- Work on a review of life
- Take care of the preparation for final vows.

The meetings validated a new way of presenting admission documentation for final vows and for ordination, to correct some of the shortcomings and defects observed in recent years. This new approach needs to be approved at the next CGP.

Fr. Benoît BIGARD (Rome)

(You can find this article and some photos at: <http://www.assumptio.org/fr/nouvelles/2024/11/25/session-des-formateurs-a-nimes>)

# In Turkey, a community refounded

Heir to a glorious Assumptionist past in Asia Minor, the house at Kadiköy, Istanbul, is undergoing a renewal in an exceedingly difficult context.

**W**e like to define our community as one in refoundation, since the members have all arrived recently: it has been five years for Jean-Marie Kahino (D.R.-Congo), almost two years for Thomas Aholou (Togo) and about a year for Milad Yacoub, originally from Egypt. We have inherited a beautiful framework for living and for an apostolate, with scope for strengthening what already exists and bringing in something new. We must not forget a fourth Assumptionist also in Turkey, Msgr. Louis Pelâtre, whom we visit regularly in the retreat house of the Little Sisters of the Poor where he resides.

## A brief history

Founded in 1858 by an Italian diocesan priest, the parish of Notre Dame of the Assumption was transferred to the Assumptionists in 1895. Kadiköy holds the distinction of holding the 4<sup>th</sup> Ecumenical Council, the Council of Chalcedoine that took place in 451 somewhere on the same hill. In 1863, Fr. d'Alzon visited the church and celebrated Mass, and after that he contributed financially to its construction. At the time, an important Christian population lived in this area. Among them, a significant proportion were Byzantine Rite Catholics, whom the parish also served. Very quickly,



The Church of Our Lady  
of the Assumption in  
Kadiköy, Istanbul



around 1895, a minor seminary, a formation community, and a research center flourished: the Institute of Byzantine Studies. A photo taken in 1900 shows a community of more than 60 brothers. The First World War and the end of the Ottoman Empire changed the demographics of all of Turkey, including in our neighborhood, where the Christian presence is much reduced.

### A bit of geography

The district of Kadiköy is on the Asian side of Istanbul, a megalopolis of over 16 million inhabitants. We are the only Roman Catholic parish on this side of the city. Some parishioners live in the district, but others travel almost two hours to come to the parish.

The community also serves a chapel in the nearby district of Fenerbahçe, a former Assumptionist aluminate and novitiate (then under the Greek name of the place, Phanaraki). Near our parish is St. Joseph School (a Christian Brothers school), the only Catholic school on the Asian side of Istanbul, with which the community maintains close ties.

### Our missions

The texts of the General Chapter and the Provincial Chapter of 2023 inspire us on many levels. What is said about the Mission of the Orient, especially the "humble and silent" Catholic presence, corresponds to our realities. We are motivated by the missionary direction, by the accompaniment of the people of God, by pilgrimages, and by the scope of the JPIC.

The principal mission of the community is the parish apostolate. Jean-Marie is the pastor. Sunday Masses bring together a diversity of parishioners and visitors. Some are from foreign backgrounds---notably students and young African workers, some expatriates coming from Europe, and some Asians and Americans. Of lesser numbers are Turks of Christian origin, descendants of European populations who have settled here for several generations (known as "Levantine").

Other Turks, of Muslim origin, discover the Christian faith as adults. In many of the parish activities is the accompaniment of around ten catechumens and pre-catechumens. This may seem surprising for a country that is mostly Muslim, but religious liberty in Turkey allows for conversion to Christianity if the people involved are not worried about the public authorities. Many Islamic-Christian couples often come to the parish. Some ask for the sacrament of marriage, which is a challenge to prepare them and accompany them. In addition to parish ministry, where the three brothers of the community work in solidarity, we try to reach out beyond the parish.

Thomas works on accompanying the youth and on the pastoral care of migrants. He also works on offering pilgrimages on the footsteps of St. Paul, to the house of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Ephesus and toward the memory of the first ecumenical councils. Several pilgrimages will take place in 2025 on the 1700 year anniversary of the Council of Nicaea.

Regarding solidarity with the poor, the diocese has given Milad a new responsibility as director of the Caritas Bureau of Istanbul, near the Latin Cathedral and on the European side of the city. Many populations are seeking aid: Syrian refugees, migrants of African origin who come in difficult conditions, and some Turkish families.

In addition to its current missions, the community has launched several forward-looking initiatives. Since the departure of the Oblate Sisters two years ago, one floor of the house has been empty. There are a number of avenues to explore: a hostel for students and young people could find synergy with the parish, a welcome for people passing through in connection with the pilgrimage ministry...another thought concerns solidarity, where we hope to develop regular activities, for example, food aid for the neighborhood's most needy.

### A welcoming community

We wish to close by saying that we experience immense joy in welcoming brothers and Lay Assumptionists desiring to make a visit. A few have already done so, including the novices last summer. We are waiting for you, don't hesitate to contact us.

**Br. Milad YACOUB (Istanbul)**

(this article was reprinted from the bulletin ATLPE, n° 44, Oct.-Dec. 2024)

# The new horizons of the Religious of the Assumption

Re-elected last July as Superior General of the Religious of the Assumption, Sr Rekha Chennattu shares her synodal vision of the future of religious life.



## The new General Council of the R.A.

Following the re-election of Sr Rekha Chennattu, from the Province of India, as Superior General for a 2nd term, the 30th General Chapter of the Religious of the Assumption, meeting in Paris from June 29 to July 28, 2024, elected the four sisters who will form its new Council.

From left to right: Sr Françoise MARTIN, from France (Province of France), Sr Lerma Victoria PANGANTIHON, from the Philippines (Province of Asia-Pacific), Sr Rekha CHENNATTU, from India (Province of India), Superior General, Sr Marthe NTUYUMVE, from Rwanda (Province of Rwanda-Chad), Sr Sandra Elizabeth DURÁN PÉREZ, from El Salvador (Province of Central America-Cuba).

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### What was the central issue of your General Chapter? and what is its main result?

The theme of the General Chapter was “Moved by the SPIRIT, in dialogue with our Realities, we discern new Synodal Pathways for our times: METANOIA—PROPHETIC MISSION—CULTURE OF CARING.”

As the theme indicates, the central concern of the chapter was to explore new pathways to becoming more of a Synodal Congregation. Another important task of the chapter was the election of the General Council.

We have realised that a synodal journey implies personal and communal metanoia





and a daring spirit in creating spaces for our diverse realities, experiences, and perspectives. In collaboration with the laity, we have reconsecrated ourselves to our commitment to the Church's transformative mission in these challenging times.

**What consequences will the Chapter have for the life of your Congregation and (if applicable) for relationships within the Assumption Family?**

As a congregation, we want to live a more balanced rhythm of life and be more radical in our commitment to the less privileged and those on the margins. In response to the needs of migrants, we have decided to open a new international community in the Canary Islands, Spain.

We have come to believe that the future of religious life depends on our ability to collaborate with the laity and other Congregations in the Church.

We look forward to more collaboration and reappropriation of our charisms for our times.

**Is there a theme or objective that particularly motivates you, as a re-elected Superior General?**

As I wrote in my report, we live in an era marked by the complexity of the scientific revolution, vulnerability, and uncertainty.

The number of new vocations to religious life is also descending. We are also aware of the changing demography of the Congregation. In this context, we want to continue the search for new forms of religious life by becoming truly a synodal Congregation, collaborating with laity and other congregations and harnessing the power of the latest technologies [including AI] as they constantly interact with our spirituality, way of life, and mission.

My vision for the Congregation includes building up religious communities where there is freedom and space for creativity, communities wherein sisters enjoy inner freedom and quality of interior life to the extent that they prioritise the common good and shared mission, where sisters can follow their personal calls within the larger vocation to religious life.

Joyful detachment and a passion for God's Kingdom would lay the foundations for a new way of living our religious vows. Mutual respect and reciprocity, coupled with shared responsibility and transparency, would become the identity mark of leadership teams. Deeper collaboration and partnership with the laity would make our apostolic endeavours favouring the marginalised more sustainable.



**Sr Rekha Chennattu, RA**

I was born in a Syro-Malabar Rite Catholic family in Kerala, India. I made my first Profession in Assumption in August 1984 and final profession in January 1991. I am passionately in love with the WORD of God and have a PhD in Biblical Studies from the USA. I was a Professor of Biblical Studies at the Pontifical Atheneum of Philosophy and Religion, Pune, India, from 1997 to 2018. I was a Participant at the Synod of Bishops on New Evangelization at the Vatican in 2012. I am currently a Member of the Federation of Asian Bishops Conference – Office of Theological Concerns (FABC-OTC).

# Father d'Alzon and the mission

**“The Spirit of the Order is therefore a spirit of zeal and apostolate,” our founder (1) often recalled. What was his missionary strategy? How can it be updated today?**

Teaching “in the broadest sense of the word,” the publication of books, works of charity with a view to “reconciling the poor classes with the rich classes,” the preaching of retreats in collaboration with the secular clergy and “missions abroad” - coming in only fifth place - are the goals of the Assumption (2). According to Father Jean- Paul Périer-Muzet, the missionary act is nevertheless part of an “original voluntary strategy” of Father d'Alzon (3).

## Two missions abroad: Australia...

D'Alzon began with Australia: it would be difficult to find a more distant country. He thus responded to the requests of Bishop Quinn (1819-1881), the young bishop of Queensland who must have told him how he had pacified relations between Catholics and Protestants in his diocese. Drawing on a still very small number of members, our Founder sent Fathers Cusse and Tissot as well as Brother François Gavète. Embarked in Liverpool on December 7, 1860 on the Douglas Mac Kay, they arrived in Brisbane on May 10, 1861. Two years later, Father Henri Brun and Brother Polycarpe Hudry embarked in Dublin on the *Golden City*.

The Australian adventure would last 15 years (1860-1875). The religious were unfortunately divided between two cities, Ipswich and Maryborough, 300 km apart. Bishop Quinn would never allow them to live together. Nor would he give them canonical existence. Fr. François left the mission to become a gold prospector, then René Cusse asked to be released from his vows: considered a fugitive, he was excluded from the Congregation in 1862 and died in Newcastle in 1866. Fr. Tissot, the last to be recalled to France, returned to Nîmes in 1875. Jean-Paul Périer-Muzet's commen-



**Bishop James Quinn (1859-1881), first Bishop of Brisbane (Australia).**

tary sums up the Australian misunderstanding: Bishop Quinn's probity was not up to the generosity of Fr. d'Alzon. (4)

## ...then the East to conquer Russia.

“If Australia is temporarily left aside because certain commitments have not yet been kept, real good is being done in Bulgaria,” declared Fr. d'Alzon in 1873 (5). He mentions the creation of an apprentice association, a school for 200 boys and the dynamism of the Oblates “who have opened a hospital, a dispensary, a boarding school, schools”. Through the Bulgarian foundation, the Founder has above all in view the “conversion” of Russia. He shares his en-



thusiasm at the Chapter of 1873 and seizes this opportunity to challenge the religious: *“Look, my Brothers, if you want to conquer Russia and bring its abundant harvest to the Father’s granaries”*.

In a letter of May 1865 to Cardinal Pitra, D’Alzon nevertheless admits that the Bulgarian initiative was not his: *“I had expressed to Bishop Howard the intention of buying the Cenacle in Jerusalem. He dissuaded me and pushed me, in concert with Bishop Lavigerie, to deal with Bulgaria. He put me in touch with Bishop Simeoni, Secretary of Propaganda, who spoke to the Pope about this new project.”* (6)

### A Bulgarian “plot”

When Father d’Alzon arrived in Rome in June 1862, Bishop Howard, Bishop Lavigerie and Bishop Talbot did everything, in fact, to direct his missionary ambition and his fortune towards Bulgaria. He had significant financial resources at his disposal, having just inherited his mother’s fortune (7) . He was initially surprised by their request, because he had already made a commitment to Cardinal Barnabo, Prefect of Propaganda, to help the Syrians. Also, in order not to *“appear as a frivolous man”*, he would only change his plans at the express request of the Holy Father or Propaganda. From then on, everything would happen quickly, to the point that some spoke of a “Bulgarian plot”.

Bishop Howard suggested that Father D’Alzon adopt the Rule of Saint Basil and offered him biritualism *“according to whether we were in the East or the West”*. On 4 June, D’Alzon met with Bishop Simeoni, Cardinal Barnabo’s secretary, who had in fact already reported to Pius IX Barnabo’s objections as well as Father d’Alzon’s commitment to opening a Ma-

ronite seminary on Mount Zion in Jerusalem (on the very site of the Cenacle). Pius IX is said to have replied on several occasions: *“E se io dico che lo voglio”* (8) . The Pope having finally expressed his preference for Bulgaria, all that remained for d’Alzon was to consider the modalities of such a foundation.

His proposal to Simeoni to send a religious there was accepted. On the morning of 6 June, he was received privately by Pius IX in his personal library. The Pope explained to him that he knew everything and approved of the idea of a college, *“in order to prepare the Bulgarians for the return to the Catholic faith (9)”* .

The Founder’s second idea was to join forces with a Polish congregation (10) . Pius IX gave him his agreement, on condition that Propaganda validated the project (11) . D’Alzon finally requested a house of studies common to the two congregations in Rome: the Pope agreed *“on condition that it be found”*. That same evening, Cardinal Barnabo received Father d’Alzon and asked him to send two religious, one to Bulgaria and another to Constantinople. Also conforming to the will of the Holy Father, he immediately provided the necessary letters of recommendation.

### ***“A clergy that is not worthy is incapable of fulfilling its mission” (ES 1452)***

Fr. d’Alzon’s main goal for the mission in Bulgaria is to provide a quality “non-schismatic” clergy. *“Instinctively,”* he explains, *“the faithful are little disposed to receive doctrine from these ignorant or dishonored lips.”* For him, loyalty to Rome is the best guarantee of an honest and competent clergy. To ensure this training, he wants missionaries on site. But *“men will not be enough”*: he also



Fr. Victorin Galabert, to whom Fr. d’Alzon entrusted the Mission of the Orient.

1) ES p. 647.

2) ES p. 649-550. Notes for a Draft Constitutions dating from 1849-1850 (First Rules).

3) Jean-Paul Périer-Muzet, in *The Assumptionist Missionary Adventure*, B. Holzer ed., Proceedings of the Colloquium on History of the 150th Anniversary of the Congregation, coll. “Assumption Research” n°1, p. 102.

4) Périer-Muzet, *ibid.*, p. 103.

5) Instruction at the closing of the General Chapter of 1873, ES p. 185-186.

6) Siméon Vailhé. Emmanuel d’Alzon, T. 2, p. 147

7) Jean-Daniel Gullung, in *Moments remarquables du chemin de sainteté du Père d’Alzon (Cahier du Bicentenaire n° 12, p. 51-52): “After the death of his sister Augustine, then of his mother in 1860, he remained the sole heir to his mother’s fortune, with his sister Marie de Puységur. However, at the end of 1861, the amicable division had just been made between Marie and him: he found himself at the head of a large fortune [...] that he would have to sell little by little. In Rome, it was known that he would have a sum of 400,000 francs intended to buy back Palestinian sanctuaries and*

wants women, seeing in the 19th century the one in which women were given a greater place in the Church. He cites the missionary enthusiasm of the Sisters of Charity or the Sisters of Sion...

For this female help, he suggests to Mother Marie-Eugénie to create a third missionary order, but the project falls through. Hence the idea of founding the Oblates of the Assumption. He entrusted their recruitment to Father Hypolite Saugrain, who established them in the Rochebelle district in Vigan, in a house rented for nine years and nicknamed "Little Bulgaria".

D'Alzon entrusted their initial formation to Marie Eugénie, who chose one of her best sisters, Mother Marie-Madeleine, who would carry out her role admirably. May 24, 1865 was retained as the date of the founding of the Oblates, but the first would not make profession until after the foundress, Mother Marie Correnson, who committed herself on April 18, 1868. The first five missionaries made profession the next day and left immediately for Bulgaria.

On November 17, 1869, the Founder shared his enthusiasm with Mother Correnson: *"Behind the Bulgarians, you have the great agglomeration of schismatic Slavs, of which the Bulgarians are only one branch; you have at least sixty million to convert. [...] Do you know one of the current aspects of Rome that moves me the most? It is meeting the bishops of all countries [...] And in all these countries there are immense conquests to be made and they are almost everywhere Mission countries where the Oblates can work. (12)"*

### The concern to explain and communicate

During the prize-giving ceremony, in front of the parents and



Our house in Kadiköy in Constantinople (today Istanbul), the land was purchased by Fr. D'Alzon to create the byzantine rite seminary.

teachers of the Collège de Nîmes, D'Alzon was already dreaming of a Catholic patriarchate in Constantinople. He stressed the importance of extending the use of French in Turkey and the advantages of economic development of France in this region of the world. For him, Catholic influence and French influence were not incompatible, provided however "that they were not confused and above all that we never forget to serve the interests of the faith". The Schism must end: "The resurrection of the Orient can only come from a word coming from Rome, and carried by the wings of France." (13)

Invited by Bishop Brunoni, apostolic vicar of Constantinople, D'Alzon himself went to Turkey from February to April 1863 to preach Lent there. He took the opportunity to advance the project of a seminary for ecclesiastical studies on land located in Kadikoÿ (the former Chalcedonia) and to found a school in Philippopoli (today Plovdiv in Bulgaria) whose promotions would number between 120 and 200 boys. On his return, he sent religious and Oblates to Adrianopoli (today Edirne), a city half Greek and Bulgarian. The young Assumptionists would be chaplains to the sisters, visitors to the



sick and in charge of the religious instruction of the girls. Finally, he launched the project of an agricultural orphanage and a boarding school for children from more affluent families and entrusted the entire work to Father Victorin Galabert, superior of Adrianopoli and visitor of the Philippopoli mission (14). The instructions are clear: "to train in the Slavic rite the young religious whom we are going to raise to be priests" (15) and thus guarantee their autonomy as much with regard to the Patriarchate of Constantinople as to the Russian Holy Synod.

### "Our goal is Russia" (16)

Russia became Emmanuel d'Alzon's major concern. On 2 May 1877, he was received by Pius IX and secured his blessing once again. He envisaged a seminary for the conversion of Russia in the Caucasus (17), or even in Odessa, on the condition that "*the Russian language in all its purity*" could be learned there (18).

Why was he so interested in Russia? First, he was worried that the weakness of the Orthodox Church would prevent it from countering the socialist ideas that were gaining ground. Then, he noted the impoverishment of the Orthodox clergy "*since the sons of priests were no longer forced to become priests themselves*". He also predicted the dismantling of the Russian Empire in the medium term, which he hoped would see the advent of a parliamentary regime and freedom of worship. According to him, what Russia did to free Christians from the yoke of the Turks, it will have to repeat for Catholics on its own territory (19).

As we can see, Fr. d'Alzon did not disdain geopolitics when it came to considering the mission of the Congregation. He was also pragmatic and knew how to adapt

to contexts. His enthusiasm for Odessa (currently in Ukraine) remained cautious because this establishment would serve as an outpost for Russia. "*Sooner or later,*" he wrote, "*Russia will open its doors to us, even if we have to grease the locks and hinges with our blood.*" (20)

### Informing oneself, becoming inculturated and persevering

D'Alzon researched Russia thoroughly. He read extensively and maintained an impressive correspondence with many interlocutors in the field and experts. Nothing escaped him: the decadence of the landowners, the alcoholism of the freed serfs, the contradictions of Russian society... "*Ah, how sad! Yet there is some good in it, and since they are baptized and Our Lord died for them, it is useful to try to convert them.*" (21) The very year of his death, he wrote another long article on Russia which was published in the first three issues of the (then monthly) magazine *La Croix*.

Since the Orient was entrusted to him as a mission, Father d'Alzon "*gave it his all*" and he would do so until his last breath (22). He did not let himself be discouraged by any obstacle or impressed by any local rivalry. He also knew how to temper his ambitions: some, like the installation of the Assumption in Russia, would not see the light of day until after his death. He negotiated the progress of the mission step by step and carefully planned each stage. His concern for inculturation was manifested through his request to speak the language well, his deep respect for the Eastern rite and the fact of having traveled to the East himself.

### The mission is the love of the Church

Emmanuel d'Alzon has a taste for the universal Church, whose

*to found a Maronite seminary."*

Today, such a sum would be close to 2 million euros.

8) "*And if I say that I want it.*"

9) ES p. 1450.

10) These are the Resurrectionists, founded in Paris in 1836 to assist the communities of Polish emigrants. Father Jerome Kajziewicz, Superior General, hoped to establish himself in Constantinople thanks to Father d'Alzon and promised to provide Slavic priests capable of learning Bulgarian quickly. But for the start of the mission, the material contribution would come from the Assumption.

11) The Pope knew the difficulties of the Resurrectionists. Their apostolate among the Slavs was complicated by their political disagreement with the Russians. Propaganda had already received several complaints on this subject.

12) Letter of November 17, 1869 from Fr. d'Alzon to Mother Correnson.

13) ES p. 1455.

14) On December 20, 1862, Fr. Galabert had been sent by Fr. d'Alzon to precede him to Constantinople.

15) ES p. 1457.

16) ES p. 1459.

17) Mrs. Fricero, a Russian aristocrat, but French by marriage, illegitimate daughter of Tsar Nicholas I and converted to Catholicism, had offered Father d'Alzon to settle on her lands. Cf. Antoine Wenger, "*Who is the 'Russian Lady' of Father d'Alzon's letters*" in AA info, no. 5 September 2006, pp. I-XII.

18) ES p. 1458.

19) ES p. 1458.

20) ES p. 1459, Letter to Father Galabert, 29 August 1876.

21) ES p. 1460 Letter to the Countess d'Escures.

22) J.-D. Gullung p. 54.

23) In a letter to François Picard dated July 15, 1850, D'Alzon intended him for the missions after theology studies: "*It is obvious that we will one day send*



Fr. Galabert among the students: Andrinopoli 1868

missionary impetus he was able to measure during the First Vatican Council. His love of the Church allows him to see further and, above all, wider. The missions come from his obsession with unity (23) : between his request to the Bishop of Nîmes in 1835 for a ministry dedicated to the “conversion of Protestants”, the Australian essay in 1860 and the birth of the Mission to the Orient in 1863 for the “conversion of schismatics”, there is great continuity, coherence and an unwavering love of the Church.

For the missions, D’Alzon is ready for anything and does not shy away from any sacrifice. For Bulgaria, he offers Father Galabert (24) who, with his double doctorate in medicine and canon law, is undoubtedly the most educated of his religious. He spends a large part of his fortune on the mission to the Orient. With the same generosity, he collaborates with other actors, even if it means

having to then let them manage what he has created.

In order not to repeat Australia’s mistakes, D’Alzon has taken great care of the Mission to the Orient. He ensures the support of the ecclesiastical authorities and is very clear-sighted about the diversity of points of view: the vision of Rome, wishing to open a Bulgarian seminary and promote the united Churches, was quite different from that of Bishop Brunoni in Constantinople, who wanted to work more broadly for the development of communities in the Orient, particularly Greek and Romanian, against the “Photian schism” and... pay off his debts (25) .

Finally, he takes care to regularly explain the Mission to his religious and takes care of his external communication. His goal: to find new collaborators and of course to solicit benefactors. But above all to love and serve the Church.

**P. Vincent LECLERCQ**  
Postulator General



Fr. Vincent LECLERCQ, General Postulator

*to the Missions, either to the Cape among the Kaffirs and the English colonists, or to England, or to Poland, or even elsewhere; but for that we must prepare ourselves.”*

24) It is with this religious man alone that D’Alzon claims to have founded in Bulgaria. “*It has been spoken of, and not without reason, as a real myth,*” writes J.-P. Périer-Muzet (“*Les grandes lignes*”, p. 102).

25) To counter the Photius schism and stop Russia’s march on Constantinople, Turkey must be strengthened by bringing its Orthodox subjects back to Catholicism and creating Eastern Catholic Churches. Cf. Vailhé. t. 2, p. 154 ff.

# The Kingdom of God, a « beautiful ideal” from which Christians are often far removed

In questioning our need to “build small kingdoms”, Fr. Dominique Lang proposes a critical reflection on the engagement of Christians in the world.

**Dominique LANG**  
*Alors tu es roi ? Petite théologie du royaume de Dieu pour aujourd’hui.*  
 Ed. L’Escargot, 194 p.,  
 18,50 €.

Look for a king. The proposition, in a republican France, may seem anachronistic. Don’t we regularly see fantasies of restoring a Christian regime? On the other side of Europe, aren’t we seeing a massive manipulation of our Christian faith to justify and encourage the war against Ukraine?

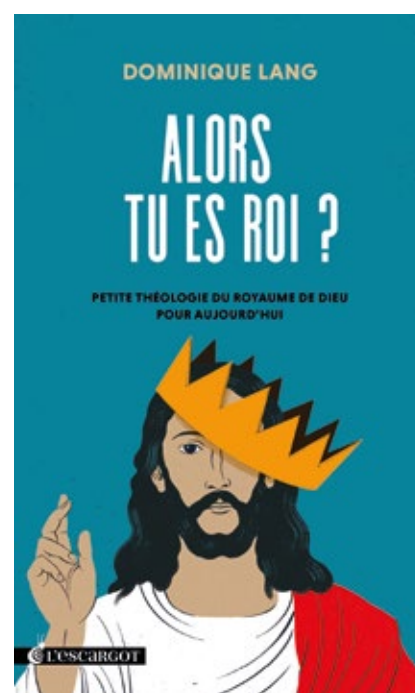
For Dominique Lang, a journalist at the Pèlerin (a weekly published by Bayard, the group that also includes La Croix) and also an Assumptionist priest, the question is certainly not obsolete. Faced with the instrumentalization of religion by political power, and the temptation of power and might, he defends the urgency of reclaiming the “theological affirmation” of the Kingdom of God. Within 30 short chapters, that waver between reflection and meditation, the book questions the vocation of Christians in the world.

The Kingdom, explains Dominique Lang, invites Christians “to assume their role in the incarnation---of active solidarity with this earth that we have been given--- while at the same

time opening them up inwardly to the processes of radical transformation taking place there.” A beautiful ideal, even though it is a long way off. For the priest, whose observation is sometimes difficult, this Kingdom does not permeate our lives and commitments. Believers would have given in to “a collective blindness”, accepting the worst injustices, or getting caught up in the polarization of the most superficial debate.

At the collective level, Dominique Lang questions a habit that Christians have developed, both in their commitments and in their ecclesial patterns, of following “the social organization in place”. In his opinion, evangelizing “a mundane reality” will never save it from its “internal contradictions.” Contrary to the teachings of Jesus the refusal of all power and “all forms of power”, our existences would consist in “building, again and again, exclusive little kingdoms on our own terms”. Little kingdoms that make the world a more bearable place, but which distance us from God’s plan.

What to do then? For Dominique Lang, the Kingdom liberates us of power, its attractions and pressures, to act in the world by “renewing the bonds that save”, notably considering crises---social, human, and eco-



logical. It insists on “a decisive character” of “a glass of water given” or “this visit to the most forgotten places of humanity”. That’s where Christians belong, in that “ever-new in-between” that appears at the crossroads of two realities: the little kingdoms and the empires that have an expiration date, and “the Gospels that endure.”

**Théo MOY**  
 (this article appeared  
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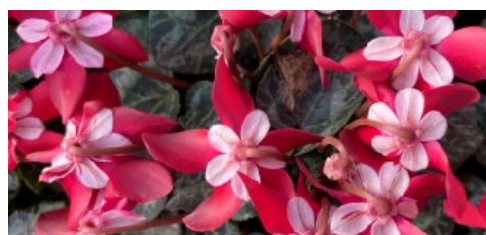
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# Our deceased brothers



† Fr. **Marcel CATTEAU**, of the Albertville community (Province of Europe), died on November 17, 2024, in Albertville (France). His funeral was celebrated on November 20 in the chapel of Notre-Dame des Vignes, followed by burial in the cemetery at Chiriac. He was 96.

† Fr. **Michel TASSIN**, of the Bruxelles-Woluwe community (Province of Europe), died on November 24, 2024, in Ciney (Belgium). His funeral was celebrated on December 2 in the chapel of the Séniorie of Ciney, followed by a burial in the cemetery of Saint Gérard. He was 92.

† Fr. **Roland IMHOFF**, of the Albertville community (Province of Europe), died on November 28, 2024, in Albertville (France). His funeral was celebrated on December 3 in the chapel of Notre-Dame des Vignes, followed by burial in the cemetery of Chiriac. He was 106.

† Fr. **Roland GUILMAIN**, of the Brighton community (North American Province), died on December 2, 2024, in Worcester (United States). His funeral was celebrated on December 10 at St. Anne's Church in Fiskdale, followed by burial in St. Anne's Cemetery. He was 98.