



Michel Courvoisier

**The Origins of the
Missionary Oblates
of Mary Immaculate
1812-1818**



Missionarii OMI

Studia 5

Oblatio

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Supplemento a Oblatio, IV-2015/2

Direction / Editor / Editor: General Service for Oblate Studies - Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate.

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Registrato presso il Tribunale di Roma

Finito di stampare nel mese di dicembre 2015 dalla Tipografia Città Nuova
via Pieve Torina, 55 - 00156 Roma

Imagine cover: The old Carmel in Aix, when the Missionary Society was borne
(sketch of Fabio Ciardi)

Oblatio Studia

1. Yvon Beaudoin, *Fernand Jetté. Un guide sage dans un temps de crise*, 2012, 156 p.

English pdf version: <http://www.omiworld.org/oblatio/studia.asp?STID=8>

2. Paweł Zając (Ed), *From the French Revolution to the New Evangelization - Eugene de Mazenod and his charism between XVIII and XXI century / De la Révolution française à la nouvelle évangélisation*, 2013, 280 p.

3. Joseph T. LaBelle, *Truly Apostolic Men. Apostolic Life in the Early Ministry of Saint Eugene de Mazenod*, 2014, 204 p.

4. Abel Nsolo Habel, *Notre Mère. Marie Immaculée dans la vie et les écrits de saint Eugène de Mazenod*, 2015, 284 p.

5. Michel Courvoisier, *The Origins of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, 1812-1818*, 2015, 276 p.

PRESENTATION

The Society of the Missionaries of Provence, which would later become the Congregation of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, was born in Aix-en-Provence in 1816. The initiative for the foundation was that of a young priest of this town, Eugene de Mazenod. Thus, he is rightly given the title of Founder.

But it is good to take a closer look and to first consider both the political and Church context. The fact that we are in the period of the Napoleonic Empire which followed the French Revolution is not without consequence. Pope Pius VII, who had been held under house arrest in France, freely returned to Rome in 1814. That same year, a Bourbon king was restored to the throne of France, opening the so-called Restoration period. As for the diocese of Aix, the death of Bishop Cicé in 1810 deprived it of an archbishop. A successor would not arrive until 1819. The restoration in 1823 of the two dioceses of Marseille and Fréjus will finally define its limits.

Abbé de Mazenod returned to Aix in the fall of 1812, less than a year after his ordination. His undeniable apostolic zeal, especially among the youth, met with many obstacles. But he is torn by conflicting desires and hesitations, as evidenced in his notes and correspondence. It will take *a strong impulse from outside* before he can finally take some decisions. Having obtained the approval of the diocesan authorities, he goes in search of collaborators and buys the former Carmelite convent. With the Abbés Deblieu, Tempier, then Maunier, and also Icard and Mie, community life was begun at the beginning of 1816, according to a regulation made by mutual agreement. Other collaborators will join them, especially younger ones...

We can try to know better who these men were, or also how, through successes and difficulties, they built up a sound institution that looked out to *the whole world*. Furthermore, we can certainly try to understand what Pope Francis called for in the Year of Consecrated Life: *the will to look to the past with gratitude, to follow in the footsteps of past generations in order to grasp the high ideals, and the vision and values which*

inspired them... to see how the charism (was born), the creativity it has sparked, the difficulties it encountered and the concrete ways those difficulties were surmounted.

A rereading of the sources is the essential way. Much of the material is available in French in our libraries, beginning with the early biographies (Jeancard, Rambert, Rey ...), the publications in preparation for the beatification (Leflon...), as well as the collection *Oblate Writings*. I would like to express my special gratitude to Fathers Jozef Pielorz and Yvon Beaudoin. Other documents that merit being made more accessible and studied are in the archives, mainly in Aix and Rome. There was no time to do so. The work that I offer today is based on what is currently published at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

When we read these sources, we ask ourselves questions that our predecessors ignored. I point out a few. What theology of the Church inspired our forefathers? What idea of Jesus the Savior and the salvation of men guided them in their commitments? They said they gave priority to the poor; concretely who were they for them? They wanted to revive religious life; how did they see it? Similarly, how did they view community life? How were the Rules, which were only handwritten, made known? How were they referred to in everyday life? How did the Superior General govern? What about local superiors? What were the criteria for admitting young men? What was formation like? Finally, of what decisions and difficulties is this history, our history, the fruit? The study is endless.

The Province of France has made this work available to the Oblates over the past five or six years in its publication, the *OMI-Documents*. I thank the translator for making it available in English. More work would have been needed to unify the successive publications. At the expense of what remains to be done, the choice was made to maintain unchanged the text already published. Please forgive the unavoidable repetitions.

The book considers a specific period: from the return of St. Eugene de Mazenod to Aix-en-Provence after his ordination to the composition of the first Constitutions and Rules.

This is then a first step: to collect the writings of Eugene de Mazenod and his first companions and to recall this history, as it can be written today. We are invited to meditate on the conversion they were led to live

and to see how they were faithful to it, a conversion – to paraphrase the letter to Tempier (October 9, 1815) – made *at the foot of their crucifix, being imbued with the state of religion around them and looking into their hearts*. Once this working basis is established, what then needs to be done is to highlight the various dimensions of the charism, to follow in their footsteps, and to courageously walk the same paths as these apostolic workers who have left us such fine examples.

Marseille, August 2015
Michel COURVOISIER, OMI

Chapter 1

RETURN TO AIX AND FIRST YEAR OF MINISTRY 1812-1813

PRIESTLY ORDINATION

December 21, 1811, Eugene de Mazenod was ordained a priest in Amiens. In correspondence with his family, he repeated that he did not feel ready for the priesthood. *“The closer I get to that moment, the more I am tempted to postpone it, certainly not for want of desire, as it is the goal of my desires, but because the closer the mantle of light comes, the more I see in the brilliance of its rays the disproportion there is and the deformity of the person who is to be clothed in it...”* (To his mother, Dec. 1, 1810, OW 14, 165-166) *“Not out of any fear of possible difficulties that may arise in a diocese shorn of its pastor, but because I am struck by my unworthiness...”* (To his grandmother March 3, 1811, OW 14, 182) He writes again to his grandmother on July 24: *“What a fight I had to put up! Luckily for me, a reason existed against which no argument could prevail, for as to pleading personal unworthiness, that would not hold up if obedience said one should not hold back.”* (OW 14, 197)

The reason is that in the summer of 1811 the Emperor Napoleon had demanded that the Sulpicians leave the seminary. The task of formation was therefore handed over to a team of young priests, of which Eugene would be part, and this new responsibility required that he be a priest. At the National Council convened by the Emperor (June-July 1811), Eugene met the Bishop of Amiens, Bishop Demandolx. He had been vicar general of Marseilles at the same time as Eugene’s great-uncle Andrew and knew well the Mazenod family. So Eugene had recourse to him. He will speak later of the *“little slight of hand”* that allowed him to escape the archbishop-elect of Paris, the notorious Cardinal Maury, of whom the Pope had many reasons not to recognize the appointment

by Napoleon. “*Frankly, I was in no way eager to be ordained a priest by that Eminence.*” (Quoted by Leflon I, p. 390, note 1).

We know little about his activities at Saint-Sulpice during this school year. It was pretty easy for him, in the fall of 1812, to leave the post that was only temporary and to take the road for Aix as he had always envisioned. The letters to his family during his years at Saint-Sulpice keep coming back to this topic. The reasons given are the same. Besides the obvious needs of his diocese of origin (to which he belonged although at the time it did not seem to have much weight), there are family reasons. He still hopes to bring back his father and uncles from Sicily. He is also greatly concerned for his mother who will be alone. Ninette is now married, grandmother Joannis had died in August 1811, and cousin Emile was also getting married soon.

AT SAINT-SULPICE, PLANS FOR AIX

We recall the letter of June 29, 1808, in which he told his mother of his decision to enter the seminary: “*As the Lord is my witness, what he wants of me is that I... devote myself especially to his service and try to reawaken the faith that is becoming extinct amongst the poor; in a word, that I make myself available to carry out any orders he may wish to give me for his glory and the salvation of souls he has redeemed by his precious blood.*” (OW 14, 56) Where had he seen that faith disappearing among the poor, if not in Provence, in St-Laurent-du-Verdon, and especially in St-Julien-les-Martigues, where he often stayed with his grandmother, or in the countryside of Aix, where he had taught catechism? Aix remains his constant focus. This concern is expressed in the letters of February 4 and 13, 1809 (OW 14, 95 and 98). After speaking of catechism classes entrusted to him at Saint-Sulpice, he adds: “*I want to familiarize myself thoroughly with its modes of procedure, statutes, etc., so as to set it up at Aix where the catechetical classes are going about as badly as they could and in consequence of this failure one does not see a single child persevering after first communion, while here it is quite the opposite.*” Later, on the 13th, he writes: “*I get a real insight into the method of conducting catechism classes which has enjoyed a lot of success at St. Sulpice for more than a century, with a view, God willing, to setting it up at Aix where they really have no idea what*

catechism is.” February 28 (OW 14, 103), he laments the deaths of two priests of Aix, and continues: *“As you see, the ranks are getting thinner every day, soon the Church will be at a loss to know to whom she might confide her children, and one would have to be slothful indeed not to burn with the desire to come to the aid of this good Mother in her well-nigh desperate plight.”*

In the letter of March 23, 1809 (OW 14, 111), concerning the St. Laurent property, he said: *“I have not become a cleric to work the lands of this world, but to cultivate the vine of the Father of the household. These concerns are incompatible...”* Then, in a long letter on Easter Tuesday and Thursday, April 4 and 6 (OW 14, 117-118), he expresses himself very decisively: *“Do you believe that a man strongly moved by God’s spirit to imitate J.C. in his active life... that such a man who had a clear vision of the needs of the Church and who, despite the attraction God gives him to work at helping her, and other signs of His will, yet opted to sit back with his arms crossed, sighing softly to himself about all these evils, but not raising a finger to awaken even in the least degree men’s hardened hearts, would rest in all good conscience? What an illusion.”* Further on he adds, *“I repeat again it is in Aix and within the diocese I shall be working, and as I am quite resolved never, directly or indirectly, to make the least move towards becoming a bishop, in my whole lifetime I will not be budging anywhere, except to go and spend some months on the mission in the countryside, which will be my summer holidays.”*

He foresees very concretely the life he will have in Aix, whether it concern clerical garb, or especially his schedule. In June 1809 (OW 14, 127): *“It strikes me that his Grace the Archbishop could easily intend to appoint me an honorary canon when I am ordained priest. If that were to happen, I would not need to have a surplice, for the canons do not wear them.”* For example, the Abbé de Quélen, future archbishop of Paris, who preceded Eugene by a few years at St. Sulpice, was appointed an honorary canon on the very day of his ordination by the Bishop of St-Brieuc. He was 28 years old. To justify his choice to extend his intellectual formation in Paris, Eugene writes on April 14, 1810 (OW 14, 156): *“I can’t see His Grace the Archbishop being ready to leave me a lot of time to spend on studying.”*

The two months of holiday spent in Aix (August and September 1810) certainly allowed him to clarify his plans for the future, especially with regard to his family, but also with the Capitular Vicars, Dudenaine and Guigou, as the Archbishop of Aix, Bishop Champion Cicé, had died August 22, a few days after Eugene's arrival. Since there are no documents referring to these matters, we can only guess what they were. A sentence in the letter to his mother dated November 11, 1810 (OW 14,165), therefore after his return to Paris, suggests that the stay in Aix was not without its problems. He writes: *"No one is a prophet in his own country and least of all in his own family."* The context suggests a difficult relationship with his *uncle*, Roze-Joannis, but maybe not just with him, for he adds: *"Plenty of meekness and consideration (I noticed during my stay that we are weak on this point), no bad-tempered witticisms, good manners to the fore."* The "we" of "we are weak" is to be noted.

Now, the plans for Aix become clearer. For example, on December 1 (OW 14, 166): *"I take the liberty of asking you to consider, when you are making a visit to the Enclos, having some plane trees planted there. You know it is the hermitage I have decided to live in and you would be upset if I were to be deprived of the shade I so long for in the summer heat."*

June 7, 1811 (OW 14, 190), he insists on the limited time he will devote to his family, once back in Aix: *"A priest who wishes to do his duty, as I plan by God's grace to do mine, has not a moment's rest; whatever time is not spent in the tasks of the holy ministry belongs by right to study or other good works. It is one thing to spend two months holidays at home, quite another to be there on a permanent basis."* He writes to his grandmother on July 24 (OW 14, 197), that he will celebrate Mass for her in the small chapel of the Saint-Julien chateau: *"So I will be your chaplain, and you will have no need to go to strangers to nourish your piety; you will find within your family, – for are you not my mother? – a minister who is always at your call to fulfill his sublime functions."* The death of his grandmother Joannis on August 15 upset those plans, especially since Madam de Mazonod now found herself alone.

The year 1811 marks a turning point for the Diocese of Aix with the appointment by the Emperor of Bishop Jauffret as archbishop. He

was a Provençal, then aged 52. He was vicar general of Cardinal Fesch, Napoleon's uncle, first in the Diocese of Lyon, then at the Grand Aumonerie. Becoming bishop of Metz in January 1807, it is said that he gave himself fully to his ministry. Even Fr. Rey, who is usually severe, praised this bishop whom he calls the "restorer" of the diocese of Metz. But in 1811, the Pope was in a conflict with the Emperor and no longer giving the canonical approval for the bishops appointed by Napoleon. Bishop Jauffret is not inclined to accept. Eugene presents him to his mother (Letter of November 6, 1811): He "*will soon be our archbishop when he receives his Bulls.*" He encourages her to visit him upon his arrival. Jauffret came to Aix only on November 21, 1811 and it was the Chapter that gave him the powers of capitular administrator. "*He never took any other title than that of Metz and merely administered the vacant diocese..., giving evidence of a loyalty without pretense.*" "*During the thirteen months he spent at Aix*", writes Leflon (I, p. 405) "*he had proved himself a zealous, patient, and skillful administrator.*" He left Aix in February, 1813 and never returned. Eugene had certainly met him, if not at Saint-Sulpice, at least at the National Council, where Eugene acted as master of ceremonies. But we have no record of what they could have spoken about.

The letter to Madam de Mazenod of October 14, 1811 (OW 14, 205-210) is important. After telling her that he cannot "*relieve you of all responsibility in business affairs,*" (the management of the Saint-Laurent property) he insists, "*If I want to be of some use in the ministry, I still have a lot of studying to do... and in my position, as I have said many times before, I am obliged to be better instructed than most others.*" He explains that he will still be in Paris for awhile. But he especially wants to warn his mother that he might bring a servant home with him. This letter deserves to be quoted at length: "*Before finishing this letter, I want to share an idea with you for which I would like to have your consent, however reasonable it may be in itself. You know I have always wanted to retire to the Enclos for a multitude of reasons that it would take too long to go into here. Our mother, tender as always, often told me that she planned to stay there with me; and perhaps you would have become the third hermit when you came to see all the charms of this happy retreat. As a part of the arrangements for this establishment, it was clearly understood that I should take on a manservant, who*

was needed to perform a variety of services that could not be done by women. In my own case as a cleric there are special reasons, of permanent validity, not to have women in my service. The canons prescribe a certain age. And the resolution I have taken never to let one enter my bedroom, let alone my bed, means I must resolve to look after myself all my life or take a man into my service. As well as that I shall probably have a chapel where I shall be saying Mass practically on a regular basis; I need a man too for this service. If God in his goodness wants to make use of me to do some good in the direction of souls, I will be hearing men's confessions at home; again a man will be needed for them to contact for I could never endure having a woman coming and prowling around my apartment while I was engaged in the ministry with men who today like less than ever to have indiscreet confidants as parties to their acts of religion. In short, there is nothing for it but for me to have a manservant. But there are two difficulties. First, you have to pay men more and they are more demanding than women; and they are often lacking in virtue, etc. Secondly, one can foresee having problems when one has servants of different sexes in the house. I accept each of these points, but at the same time it cannot be denied that one can have the kind of manservant who, through the work he carries out in a house, does the work of two women, and who through his acknowledged exemplary behaviour does not give rise to any concern on the score of difficulties coming from his living with servants of the opposite sex under the same roof; and as well as that one can set one's mind completely to rest on that point by engaging along with him women of a certain age only. Now, if this manservant can do the work of two maids, do things even that no woman could do, is honest, discreet, gentle, of outstanding piety, the difficulties vanish; only the advantages remain. And that is precisely what I have in mind for when I return to Provence. There is at this very moment in the house where I live a man as gentle as a lamb, a man of foresight and meticulous habits, with the piety of an angel, instructed in the arts of linen-keeping, a job he used to have in the community where he was a Brother, for he is a religious, and fervent, able to turn his hand to anything and never wasting a minute; in short, I could not have a better man in my service and one would be hard put to find his equal. The question now is to find out if you would have any objection to my engaging him as from the time I leave. I have already

sounded him out; he would not be displeased to come with me. As to his wages, I would undertake to pay any extra you think it would cost you out of my stipend.” And then Eugene adds: “I think he is familiar with working in the countryside and could help us to make a go of our country estates.”

On November 6, he returned to the question, then again on the 28th, and finally his mother agreed. The person in question is a man called Timothy, who was sought by several clergymen. “*The trouble is that there is no way to win him with promises, since he is so unselfish he does not want any pay. I have explained to him that if he is in my service, when I die, I will think of him in my will... But he is 35 and I am only 30. In short, if I do not succeed in having this brave man, it will not be my fault.*” Another part of the letter talks about the stole offered him by his cousin Emile Dedons as an ordination gift. “*It will be two-sided for use in baptisms. The question is for whom shall I use it first, for a child of Eugenie or for the first child of the donor?*”

AFTER ORDINATION, THE PLANS TAKE SHAPE

The first three weeks of December are devoted to his ordination retreat in Issy then in Amiens. Unfortunately the notes he kept say nothing of his future plans. The ordination on December 21 made him “*a priest of Jesus Christ.*” The intentions he notes for the Christmas Masses (OW 14, 230-231) indicate his concern “*for a life wholly and solely employed in his service and for the salvation of souls,*” including “*even martyrdom or at least death while tending victims of the plague.*” He asks for “*a holy freedom of spirit in God’s service..., the grace of showing me his holy will as to the kind of ministry I am to take up.*”

In his diary on August 31, 1847 (OW 21, 277-278 [French edition]), Bishop de Mazenod recalls that he had “*(refused) the invitation of Bishop Demandolx, who ordained me, the honor to stay with him as his vicar... I can still see the window where the good bishop urged me to accept his kind offer. He argued as a friend of the family, that we were compatriots, and that he would be so happy to have me with him. I would free him from a painful servitude. He felt the weight of the influence exerted on him by one of his vicars and also by his general secretary.*” The latter was the Abbé de Sambucy who in Amiens and then in

Rome, had caused enormous trouble first for Julie Billiard, founder of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, then for Madeleine Sophie Barat, founder of the Sisters of the Sacred Heart, both canonized saints. Bishop de Mazenod continued: *“Promoting myself was the furthest thing from my mind. While thanking him profusely, I apologized and insisted on my duty to return to the seminary of Saint Sulpice, where I held the position of Director... Yielding to this consideration, (he) told me with a sigh: that’s different, I do not insist...”* He had already noted this in his *Diary* at Easter of 1839 (OW 20, 85 [French]): *“I refused to give in to such a touching sign of his goodness so as not to be turned away from the vocation that called me to devote myself to the service and to the happiness of my neighbor whom I loved with the love of Jesus Christ for all people.”* In the meantime, Eugene maintained contact with Bishop Jauffret, to whom he sent greetings at the beginning of 1812 (See OW 15, 3, note 5).

As the time for his return to Aix approaches, his letters are naturally more precise. Thus on April 22, 1812 he talks about his mother’s *“tiresome business affairs.”* (Published in part in OW 15, 4) *“I myself will never be able to get involved, even if it means being reduced to eating nothing but stale bread... Every moment not employed in prayer, study or the exercise of the holy ministry would be so much time robbed from Him to whose service we are wholly consecrated... My whole way of life has been thought out in advance, and nothing will make me change it... People may say I am uncivilized, a scoundrel even if they like; it’s all the same to me, provided I am a good priest.”* In the same letter Eugene speaks of the preparations to put his library at the Enclos. He added that she must forget about Timothy, whom he had planned to bring with him. On May 1, there is a hint of another servant, *“a tall young man of my age.”* It will soon become clear that this is Brother Maur.

Leflon (I, p. 401) notes a letter to Bishop Jauffret, in which Eugene announces his return in the near future. The latter replied in very promising terms: *“It was a pleasure to learn from your letter of May 6 that nothing will prevent you from returning soon to this diocese. The principles and sentiments you manifest assure me that in the present state of things you can be of real service to the Church of Aix. I know your zeal, and I shall be delighted to furnish you with the opportunity to practice*

it in the works of the ministry. I shall deem it a pleasure to guide you in the first steps of your career.”

On May 8, he could tell his mother that he would return to Aix after the seminarians’ holidays. This date will not allow him however to attend the wedding of his cousin Emile with Miss Demandolx, niece of the bishop, whose wedding was planned, as he wrote on June 26. In that letter he presents his future servant: *“You’ll be very glad surely; you are not used to being served by such gentle people; he is also very attentive and caring. Though here he earns 250 francs, he comes with me for 200 francs. It is true that I promised to give him a little something if he would remain in my service until I die; moreover, he will be available for everything in the house, we get everything from kind people through kindness. He can write, so I think he can help with the haying, etc ... Even though I told you that he must be occupied with me in the morning, it does not prevent him from sweeping, etc. since both his day and mine start early; I say Mass at five, and he attends; he is therefore up at 4:30; when one is so early, one can do many things in the day.”* A little further, Eugene expresses his intention to sell some of the poor furniture he has in Paris, since he wants *“to settle permanently in Aix”* and adds: *“I do not want to live in my beautiful room in Aix that is no longer in line with my tastes and the simplicity which I hope to observe my whole life.”*

In the letter of July 30, he continues presenting his servant, whose name he reveals for the first time. *“I discover every day new qualities in Maur, he is a perfect young man, very clever, very intelligent, he plans everything and forgets nothing; I had not done justice to him when I considered Timothy whom I do not regret at all. I was able to see that he cooks well for the day when the community is in the countryside, and we are forced to stay in town to prepare the children for first communion and confession. He is as pious as an angel; he receives communion twice a week. From all of this you can see how exactly he discharges his duties.”* A bit further on he writes: *“I’m very interested in the trees at the Enclos, which is why I ask you to give me some news: the limes are expected to do well, try to plant a few, for the shade, I implore you, for the shade. I prefer the shade to the fruit regardless of how good it might be, because with a few coins, I can get all the fruit I want and all the money in the world could not give me the pleasure of having*

shade where there are no trees. I'm really sorry that we did not want to understand this sooner. While we're on the topic of rural economy, I recommend white wine to be used in the Holy Sacrifice... When I am in Aix, it may be appropriate that I procure this material, for example if I asked at the minor seminary (I mean the old Visitation) as is quite likely, then I would not be a burden to them, because of their limited resources..." Then he asks for clarification about the books available: which edition of the Conferences of Angers, the Treatise on Prayer by (Louis de) Grenada, History of the Emperors by Lebeau, what volume we have of the letters St. Teresa... From a letter to his Piedmont friend Collegno, we know that he asked him for some theological and pastoral books in Italian: Benedict XIV, Gerdil, Leonard of Port Maurice...

On September 24 he writes: *"I do not concern myself yet about the apartment where I will stay, but I would like you to think a bit where you will place my good Maur. Remember that he is a religious and therefore it would be inappropriate for him to live in a room where a woman might pass, and that the woman might have to go through his room. On the other hand, that hovel on the 4th floor is not presentable; you have to keep it for the soldiers. I do not know where you will put him, because if I have to stay on the second floor, it is precisely in the office that I want to sleep, leaving the living room as a living room and the bedroom for an office and library. It may be necessary to empty the attic behind my room on the fourth floor, but so much to move! I wanted to warn you because you perhaps may not have noticed that being a religious and one of a very austere Order, it is not proper to place him in a room adjacent to that of a woman, no matter how old she may be. I already have noted several traits of this brave man that make me like him. Several people have made attempts to get him, although he has not been interested, but lately the Countess of Bavaria had others approach him and she herself made some very earnest overtures, making him all sorts of offers to induce him to break his word to me, not only for greed, but also by seeking to make him dislike the region that she said was awful, where he was heedlessly going to join a priest who perhaps would not have the money to pay him, let alone provide him with the same benefits that she would make him, a priest who promised something even after his death. None of that has been able to shake him, and he still wants to come with me, although I would let him go back on his word if he wanted to*

acquiesce to the tactful little Countess' proposals. I discovered that he can sew. He has recently made himself a vest. I hope he can get used to the climate, he will really suit us all."

Eugene then insists on his vocation that requires a lot of freedom (See OW 15, 10). *"I must be left to follow the rule I lay down for myself in line with my duties and obligations as I see them, both with respect to my relations with third parties, and the use I make of my time, the time I get up, how and what I eat, but especially I have to be as free from entanglement in temporal matters as if we did not have any lands or houses; this last stipulation is so important I would rather forsake everything than surrender it. After the first week or fortnight, nothing else can claim my time but my studies and my neighbour's spiritual good. Were I to come up against any obstacles to these two things, I would be obliged in conscience to flee even the family home, the diocese, the country, the very empire, and keep on running in a word until I found a place where I might freely exercise these two capital points of my vocation; I wanted to tell you something of this before my arrival so you will not be too surprised to see me taking up a way of life and following exercises that are not very common in these days of laxity and lukewarmness."* The postscript is worthy of note: *"Mr. Guigou was to bring you my letter. As he will not leave before a fortnight, I unsealed it to remove the one which was enclosed there."* The contact with the vicar general has been maintained.

RETURN TO AIX

Leflon (I, p. 401) writes : *"Meanwhile, Eugene finished out the year at Saint-Sulpice, and spent the entire vacation with the students at Issy. When classes reopened on October 12, the resigning director, freed of all his obligations, was then able to return to Provence... Not until October 22, therefore, did he finally make his way to Aix in a second-hand carriage. The carriage made it possible for him to say mass every day of the journey. He planned to sell it when he reached Aix."* Did he travel with Maur who may have served him as coachman? We do not know. He wrote to his mother: *"I intend to stop three or four days in Lyons and two days or at least one in Avignon..."* We do not know any

more about this journey that had to take a good ten days. Presumably he arrived in Aix in early November.

Father Rey cites some of the letters he received. How did Eugene know the Duke of Rohan-Chabot, who later became a widower and entered the seminary of Saint-Sulpice and died as the Cardinal Archbishop of Besancon? One can think of some links in the Congregation or through the secret office of Mr. Emery. Nevertheless, the Duke describes at length his visit to Pope Pius VII who was a prisoner at Fontainebleau. He concludes his letter: "*I send you a medal indulgenced by His Holiness... I take the liberty to offer one to your mother and your sister knowing how worthy they are.*"

The letters received from colleagues and friends at the seminary reflect the quality and depth of Church relationships experienced in this house. For example the letter from Teysserre, who later followed Félicité de Lamennais to ordination, "*I always look upon you as part of the seminary... All your children love you, miss you and want to write you a letter together...*" (Rey I, p. 141). Mr. Duclaux's letters will be quoted later.

Let us dwell a bit on the situation he finds in Aix, both in his mother's house as well as in the diocese.

His cousin Emile Dedons de Pierrefeu, who had lived at Papassaudy Street since childhood, had just married Amélie Demandolx on September 29. The young couple now lived in Marseilles. His marriage frees the apartment in Papassaudy, the street where Madam de Mazenod, who is now 52 years old, lives alone, with probably at least one servant. Eugene thus gives up his plans to live at the Enclos and will reside at Papassaudy Street, accompanied by Brother Maur. Ninette, who married the Marquis Armand de Boisgelin, lives at the Boisgelin mansion a few hundred yards from his mother's house. Their eldest daughter, Nathalie, is two and a half years old. Caroline will be born in January 1813. During the summer of 1812, Madam de Mazenod received a letter from her husband, the first since 1807 (See OW 15, 11, note 13). The distance between the two persists even though the contacts, at least by letter, have started again.

Thanks to the research of Father Jean-Marie Larose, published in the article *Etudes sur l'origine des Frères convers chez les Oblats* [Studies on the Origin of Lay Brothers in the Oblates] (*Etudes Oblates*,

Volume 12, April-June 1953, p. 66-69), we know a little more about Brother Maur during his three years not only as a servant, but also as a companion in the life and prayer of Eugene. His name was Martin Bardeau. He was born July 4, 1784 in Mont-St-Sulpice, in the Yonne region. He was thus two years younger than Eugene. He entered the monastery of Grosbois in the Sénart forest, which is now in the towns of Yerres and Boissy-St-Léger southeast of Paris; he began his novitiate there on August 1, 1808. The buildings were those of a former Camaldolese monastery occupied in the eighteenth century by hermits. Some former monks of the Grande Trappe, joined by others, had reconstituted a community there in 1807, but without the permission of the imperial administration. The Bishop of Versailles, wanting to regularize their status, placed them under the responsibility of the Abbé de Lestrange, a former monk of the Grande Trappe, who tried hard to keep the Trappist lifestyle throughout the years of persecution. It seems that they considered themselves Trappists at Grosbois even though they were called Camaldolese. Napoleon, a son of the Revolution, did not like monks, and began to disperse them. This obliged Brother Maur to resume secular life. Eugene, by asking him to accompany him to Aix, allowed him to respond at least partly to his religious vocation. In 1815, after almost three years together with Eugene, he left Aix to enter the Trappist monastery at Port-du-Salut in the Mayenne, which had been restored at the beginning of the year. He died there April 12, 1845.

We have already spoken briefly about the Diocese of Aix. By the Concordat of 1801 it had inherited territories from seven dioceses of the Old Regime, which made it quite extensive: the present departments of Bouches-du-Rhône and Var, plus the district of Grasse, now in the Alpes-Maritimes. Bishop Champion Ciccé, Archbishop of the reconstruction period, died in August 1810. The Emperor had appointed a successor in the person of Bishop Jauffret, Bishop of Metz. But the conflict between Napoleon and Pope Pius VII prevented any recognition of that appointment by the pope. Canonically Bishop Jauffret was just an administrator delegated by the Chapter. He left Aix early in 1813 never to return. The diocesan authority was entrusted, by delegation of the Chapter, to three vicars general, including Canon Guigou, who was more specifically in charge of the former diocese of Aix. This was the situation that Eugene found after four years of absence.

The fact that later Eugene, even as Bishop of Marseilles, recalls several times these choices of 1812, shows his awareness of their importance. He needed courage, and even daring, to respond to what he perceived as his vocation. Thus, during his retreat in May 1837 as he prepared to succeed his uncle as Bishop of Marseilles (OW 15, 234) he writes: “*The episcopate... appears to me today as it is in the Church’s constitution under its pastoral aspect, namely, as the heaviest burden that could be imposed on a feeble mortal. I always had a singular fear of this kind of responsibility even in the lower order of the priesthood, that is why on entering into the clerical state, I took up the missionary career, and nothing on earth could have persuaded me to become a parish priest.*” We need to understand his view of the parish priest’s responsibility: having to answer to God for the personal salvation of all the souls of a parish.

On Easter Sunday, March 31, 1839, looking back over his life in his diary (OW 20, 85-86 [French edition]), he recalls the proposals of the Bishop of Amiens who had ordained him and then adds: “*I refused to give in... so as not to be turned away from the vocation that called me to devote myself to the service and to the happiness of my neighbor whom I loved with the love of Jesus Christ for all people. It was this same sentiment that determined my choice when, on returning to Aix the Bishop of Metz, who was the administrator of the diocese at the time, asked me what I wanted to do. There was not a hair on my head that wished to take advantage of my social position to give in to the pretensions that everyone at the time would have found reasonable. *Elegi abjectus esse in domo Dei mei* (I preferred to be put aside in the house of my God.) was my motto... I thus responded to the Bishop of Metz that my whole ambition was to consecrate myself to the service of the poor and the youth. I thus started out in the prisons, and my first apprenticeship consisted of gathering around me young boys whom I instructed. I formed a large number in virtue. I saw up to 280 grouped around me... ”* Later, on August 31, 1847 he notes in his diary (OW 21, 278 [French edition]): “*I then returned to the diocese of Aix where I requested that I not be given any position, wishing to consecrate myself to the service of the poor, of prisoners and of young children. The path of wealth or of*

glory still did not lie there. In regard to wealth, I did not have any need of it, in regard to glory, I did not want it."

The behavior of two of Eugene's quasi-contemporaries is in stark contrast to his and sheds light on his choices. For example, the Abbé de Quélen, the future archbishop of Paris, was also formed at Saint-Sulpice and directed by Fr. Duclaux. Fr. Emery advised the new priest (1807) to engage in preaching in his native Brittany and to leave everything entirely up to his bishop. *"The souls of the people in the diocese of St-Brieuc are as dear to God as the souls of the Parisians; and although there is less pleasure working with the simple people of the countryside rather than the ladies of the Faubourg St-Germain and the people of the world, experience shows that there is more consolation."* The Abbé did not linger in Brittany and returned to Paris. *"Attached to the Grande Aumonie, he passed much of his time preaching, directing some lady penitents, and helping his aunt with all her good works."* As for Charles de Forbin-Janson, ordained in Chambéry on the same day as Eugene, he spent some time in this diocese as vicar general; he was even briefly, superior of the major seminary. *"How long was he at the head of this seminary, asks his biographer? Obviously, he did so just in passing,"* and quickly launched himself into parish missions.

Eugene de Mazenod's biographers emphasize the decisive character of this period. Thus Fr. Rambert (I, p. 105): *"Mr. de Mazenod, who felt the innate vocation to devote himself exclusively to the salvation of the most abandoned souls, and already as we have said, had taken in his heart the motto "Evangelizare pauperibus misit me" was far from decided on the type of ministry in which he could respond to this vocation when he arrived in Aix. He knew only one thing, and it was a deep-seated conviction, a conviction matured before the altar, and submitted as all the movements of his soul to the approval of his director, that he was not to accept any kind of parochial post but to keep his full independence to engage totally in the kind of work that he was sure God would not fail to indicate when the time came. Also the only request that Mr. de Mazenod made to the administrators of the Chapter upon his arrival at Aix was that they leave him the right to freely devote himself to the service of the most abandoned souls. God allowed the vicars general to grant this request, despite the acute shortage of vocations at the time, and the outstanding qualities of the new priest, who, by his name,*

position of wealth, and talent, could fulfill the highest positions of the diocese and render the most brilliant services. Bishop Jauffret, while still administrator on behalf of the Chapter, even blessed effusively this new apostle of the poor, wishing him all the blessings from above, all the heavenly support he would need to do a ministry as difficult as it was sublime.”

Leflon makes similar remarks, but in different terms (I, pp. 403-404): *“His apostolic spirit and his desire for total self-renunciation led him to seek the humblest of ministries, and for that he had the whole-hearted approval of Father Duclaux who had discerned the supernatural character of this attraction. He had no intention, therefore, either of taking part in the administration of the diocese or of joining the metropolitan chapter, as his uncles had done. Nor did he intend to limit his activities to those of a Concordat parish, since they seemed too restricted and too poorly suited to a life of conquest for God. Instead, he wanted to be free to devote himself to what we today call the works of the ministry. With an astute appreciation of the religious situation, the young priest clearly realized that the Church of his day was not sufficiently answering the actual need of a post-Revolutionary era; that it was barely reaching practicing Catholics who had remained faithful to the Church and was doing very little beyond that. Besides, Bonaparte, by concluding the Concordat, had no intention of re-Christianizing France, but simply intended to placate those who had kept the faith. It was not that the clergy lacked zeal, but, reduced in number and grown old, it was burdened with an overwhelming task on the one hand and, on the other, knew nothing but outmoded pastoral methods. With his youthful and dynamic temperament, Eugene aspired to greater initiative, and, in spite of his loyalty to the Ancien Regime, he was keenly aware of the changes that had to be made.*

It now remained to be seen if the authorities of his diocese, where so many parishes were without pastors, would not want to utilize him in filling part of the void... He easily gained Bishop Jauffret's approval of his plan... Taken by itself, his desire to work in the most abandoned places was nothing but praiseworthy, especially since Father Duclaux fully approved it. It may be that, secretly, the vicars breathed a great sigh of relief over this ready-made solution, since this noble, who was

such a dynamic individualist, would not be easily regimented; better to keep him out of the ranks.”

TWO RETREATS: AUGUST AND DECEMBER 1812

Enlightened by these reflections and interpretations, we must return to what Eugene said at the time. The letters written from the seminary told us how he saw his priestly life in Aix. The notes from the two retreats in August and December 1812 describe again this plan, at least in part. The August retreat (OW 15, 5-7) focuses on “*all the obligations my vocation imposes.*” He must get out of a “*slothful tepidity*” if he does not want to “*increase the number of priests who bring down harm on the Church by their lack of awareness of the evils she suffers, who are themselves in a state of torpor and dampen down all the flames of divine love which they should be lavishing among the faithful, for whom they are the Lord’s organs and instruments of his mercy...*” “*The more I have been and remain a great sinner, the more must I strive to love God and bring others to love him, since notwithstanding my profound unworthiness God has not ceased to pour out on me some of the greatest graces it was in his power to confer, and I can show my gratitude for so many blessings, such great mercy only by doing all in my power to love him to the limits of my capacity, and in reparation for the glory and honour I have taken from him by my most serious fault, I must use all my strength, every means at my disposal and all my inner resources to bring others to love him.*”

November 22, 1812, Fr. Duclaux wrote (Rey I, p. 143): “*You are now in the bosom of your family; you know how much I want you to be happy, and you certainly will be with the principles and strength of character that I know you have. I cannot remind you enough of what I told you so often, because your example will make a great impression on all the priests and pious faithful of your diocese; do not present yourself as a reformer, but as a very good priest, one zealous for all the rules of ecclesiastical discipline; look neither right nor left, but see God and religion in all your actions...*”

With these guidelines in mind Eugene made his retreat in December at the seminary of Aix with which he had established contact. *Ob- late Writings* (15, 11-29) have published the rules of life Eugene set for

himself at that time. We also have a previous undated example (OW, 15, 7-10). One can only wonder at the little time left for ministry. It is true that Eugene is not yet decided on the services he will be called upon to give to the Church of Aix...

Significantly, he starts with a quote from St. Ephrem: *“In 50 years the Fathers made no changes to the rules they set for themselves.”* We see that his first concern is the importance of giving himself *“a fixed and invariable rule,”* an *“unbending strictness.”* This rule *“will keep alive these promises and oaths as a monument to the solemn pact which was made between the soul and its God.”* This is in order to *“attain perfection”* and *“remain in it.”*

After having stressed that *“the life of a priest should be a life whose every day is full in the Lord’s sight,”* he goes on to say: *“That is why I must really grasp the sublimity of my ministry and of the holiness it requires of me, and that I be really convinced that it is piety alone, and the most extensive piety that can help me to reach my end... I will take as model of this worship that I owe God, his adorable Son Jesus Christ our lovable Saviour, for whom I will try to have the tenderest of devotions and the most ardent love... I will meditate on Jesus my love in his incarnation, his hidden life, his mission, his passion and death; but especially in his Sacrament and Sacrifice. My chief occupation will be to love him, my chief concern to make him loved. To this I will bend all my efforts, time, strength...”* Concerning mortification, he adds: *“that it flows through all my actions, and into every circumstance of my life, reminding me that the whole life of Jesus my model was a perpetual cross and a continual martyrdom,”* as is written in the *Imitation*.

Having given himself some rules for penance, he does the same for prayer, and then more at length for the Mass, *“the most excellent of all the prayers,”* the Divine Office, *“reciting it at the different times set out for it”* and oraison that *“must be the daily bread of the priest,”* and for self-examination and confession, *“at least once a week.”* Neither the presence of his mother, nor of Brother Maur, is mentioned, not even in passing.

Another undated page (OW 15, 27-28) briefly reviews these points and a few others. I note these: *“Hospital and prison visitation, the workhouse. Access easy. Fixed day for confession. Much charity, gentleness, compassion in this work... Avoid not only every mortal sin, and even ev-*

ery deliberate venial sin... Occasionally let fall from my lips that word that is so difficult for me to utter: I am wrong, I have made a mistake... Take J.C. as model in his interior and exterior, in his hidden life and in his public life."

It is difficult to describe the "Rule of life" (See OW 15, 7-10) which dates from the same period. Everything is set: prayer, study of literature and theology, and even in the evening a "*fun and recreational reading*." It is unclear how this rule leaves room for the work of ministry... Similar remarks can be made for the rule he decides on in December when he was on retreat at the seminary. Fr. Beaudoin, who publishes it in *Oblate Writings* 15, remarks in footnote 14, p. 11: "*In this rule, certainly unfinished, Eugene speaks only of his duties to God, nothing concerning his neighbor.*" It is true that at the time it was said again and again that a rule approved by a director and strictly obeyed, was the major condition, if not the unique one, to be a *good priest*. External works (external to what?) must not disrupt it... It is difficult for us two centuries later to understand this view. Fortunately, there is zeal for the salvation of souls... Eugene's pastoral commitments will upset this framework that is unsuitable for apostolic life.

THE FIRST WEEKS

For the first four months in Aix, we have very few points of reference. A letter from his friend Tharin (Rey I, p. 140) suggests that Eugene celebrated some first Masses in various churches of the city. He takes back Father Denis as confessor. He puts his experience as director at Saint-Sulpice in the service of the major seminary where he seems to have had the role of spiritual director and where he founded a pious association. We also know that on January 26, 1813, he baptized his niece Caroline Boisgelin who had been born the day before. On the other hand, we have no details about his visits to the prisoners.

This suggests that after some time spent in his immediate family, he gives himself a period of observation, of rediscovery of the ecclesial situation, and also a time for reflection in prayer. He experiences then what he will describe later in the first paragraphs of the Preface of the Oblate Rule: that the Church is in a sorry state, that few ministers are up to the calls and challenges, and so for himself an even renewed commit-

ment in the service of men for the glory of God. The Lenten sermons at the Madeleine and the Youth Association in March and April will be the first fruits of this commitment.

The letter to Charles de Forbin Janson, February 19, 1813 sheds a little ray of light. (It is among the first of those preserved from this period. See *Missions*, 1962, p. 120-122 and OW 15, 33-34). Eugene repeats some urgent advice to his friend, which somewhat mirrors his own questions. *“What you do, I rejoice over as if we had done it together. But, dear friend, will you please listen to me for once in your life? You have to put limits on that zeal of yours, if you want it to be both more productive and more enduring... You must give sufficient time to sleep and not deprive your stomach, which needs more nourishment than most people’s, of what is needed to keep going a body as active as yours; oil is needed to lubricate these wheels that turn continually with a frightening rapidity; you must not stay on your knees for hours on end... There will perhaps come a time when I will indeed say to you: “Come, let us die now, we are no longer good for anything else. Let us press on to the death!” Good-bye. Let me have a double dose of your prayers.”*

A few days later, he received a long letter from Mr. Duclaux, dated February 23 (Rey I, pp. 131-133). The advice of his director lets us guess at what he had written. The answer is worth citing at length. *“I saw Bishop Jauffret, administrator of the diocese, who has been appointed as the Archbishop; he was kind enough to give me your last letter. I could not talk to him privately, I hope to see him in a few days and then we will talk about what concerns you.”* (Fr. Rey reports in a footnote that Bishop Jauffret did not return to Aix, as is confirmed by other documents.)

“I am very satisfied with what you have written, that you’ve been to the seminary for your retreat... I highly approve that you undertook to give some instructions in one of your parishes during Lent. I hope you will succeed well by preparing them with care, that is to say, by making them clear, strong and pious, you will attract a lot of people and you will bear much more fruit than most sermons. Thus you will convince the priests and the faithful that you have no intention of being idle, but that you propose to work when you can and as best you can. I suggest you apply yourself very specifically to instructing the people...

I am delighted with what you write about your way of life... I am very happy to hear that you have joined with some holy priests for conferences and conversations on the duties of the priesthood. Take the life of St. Vincent de Paul, read the Saint Lazarus Conferences which were held every Tuesday, the first of which deals with the priestly spirit. If you can make these conferences a regular thing, you will have rendered the greatest of all services to the city of Aix. I say the same for the young people to whom you want to give instructions every Sunday. This too is the choicest of works; Give it all your attention, use all your zeal to form them well. Give them a rule...

In your relations with ecclesiastical superiors, act with honesty in all respects and with all the deference that you can. If they were to offer you a post, say that you are disposed to do what your superiors will prescribe because you look upon them as the instruments of God's will for you, but that you ask them to give you some time to think before God on what they offer; then you will share your comments, but once you have made your observations you will obey. This conduct will glorify God; maintain the subordination among the priests, infinitely honor your ministry and you will attract the blessings of God and man..."

Thus, Eugene established a first program of activities: Lenten instructions for the people, and conferences for the youth. However, the attempts to gather the priests seem to have failed. There is no trace of it. Finally, note the insistence of Duclaux that Eugene take care to have good relations with the diocese. It was perhaps not unnecessary.

LENTEN PREACHING IN PROVENÇAL

Eugene observed, he reflected and asked for advice, he prayed... The months of March and April 1813 will see the first actual achievements. They show a real spirit of innovation, at least in Aix. Eugene tries to reach those social groups that the established Church (parishes) seems to have trouble reaching. Is it even concerned? They are the little people of the city and surrounding areas whom he will reach out to with his preaching at the Madeleine. It is the rural parish of Le Puy-Sainte-Réparate. It is the youth of Aix who are left to themselves, if not to the anti-Christian currents. There are also the prisoners. He firmly implements these projects, endorsed by Duclaux, his director, at the risk of

upsetting many ways of thinking about the Church and living in the Church. We will look at these various works.

In the year 1813, Ash Wednesday fell on March 3. Duclaux, probably using Eugene's expression, spoke of "*instructions for the people.*" He recommended that they be "*clear, strong and pious,*" adding: "*You will attract a lot of people and you will bear infinitely more fruit than most sermons... I suggest you apply yourself very specifically to instructing the people...*" and with a well-constructed catechetical plan.

The church chosen was his parish church, the Madeleine, "*better suited to receive a large audience,*" according to the biographers. Fr. Rambert notes "*its location in the center of the most populated districts.*" The parish clergy, headed by the pastor, Thomas Isnardon, welcomed the project. In his preaching, Eugene tactfully attributes the initiative to him. "*Your pastor has provided...*"

Notice was given to all the parishes in the city. There would be, writes Rambert, "*talks in the Provençal language, intended only for craftsmen, servants and beggars.*" Rey writes: "*for the poor common people, workers, servants, beggars.*" In his letter of April 1813 to Forbin Janson, Eugene designates them as the "*low class of society.*" We will never give too much importance to the choice of these social categories (each worth considering), and to the choice, probably unusual in the city, of the Provençal language and the early morning schedule. One could speak of a "*social dichotomy*" in Aix, marked by three distinct neighborhoods: "*one of nobles, the old working class area and the new bourgeois area.*" One statistic indicates that 17.6% were servants, 23.6% were farmers and day laborers; workers, artisans and merchants made up 30.1%. This could be compared with the 23% of people who had done some studies. The statistic, it is true, is from 1834, but changes were slow in Aix.

Rambert (I, p. 126) calls attention to the attendance: "*The crowd was immense; there was a rush to go and hear some clear, understandable, friendly, sweet and at times vehement talk. The people, especially, were delighted to have their own orator, clearly their own since he spoke their language... The crowd was so great at the fourth conference that the humble missionary felt obliged to thank his audience.*" Almost 50 years later, in the Funeral Oration for Bishop de Mazenod, Jeancard recalled this in an oratorical style that gives us a glimpse of the popularity

of these instructions: *“Soon the whole population was there in crowds and the large building could not contain this influx of people eager to hear simple language that crept into the hearts with all the charm of the mother tongue... The effect of these sermons that were given every Sunday was immense. The indifference of the multitude was defeated, the poor, the simple, and the ignorant had their substantial share of the bread of the Word...”*

In April Eugene gives his friend Charles de Forbin Janson a summary of his apostolic activities. Here is what he says of his preaching: *“Each Sunday in Lent I have preached in Provençal at 6:00 am, in the Magdalene church for the instruction of the people. As you can imagine curiosity brought lots of others besides country-folk; but the latter and the low class of society, whom I had principally in mind, turned up in such numbers that I had reason to hope that it will in his goodness have redounded to God’s glory. When I think how easy I found it to express myself in a tongue which I have never made great use of, as I have scarcely lived in the place, I am tempted to see in this a kind of miracle. There is nothing to be surprised at, however, as I used to ascend the pulpit as I descended from the altar, and you know that I did not forget to beg the Master present to speak himself by my mouth. The fact is that on Saturday evening, as I was thinking over what I had to say, I found I could not string together three words in Provençal.”* (OW 15, 49) It should be stressed that if Eugene ascended the pulpit after coming down from the altar, it meant that he had preached while still fasting.

It is difficult to know what the reactions were in the good society of Aix. Rambert writes (I, p. 123): *“There was great surprise, especially in the high society, to which the speaker belonged. Some praised such a pure and generous zeal, many others blamed him for forgetting, as they said, his status, and for neglecting the good that he seemed called to offer the ruling classes, in favor of people who certainly would not benefit from his efforts; all doubted seriously his success. Among the clergy, there was much suspicion about this seemingly compromising novelty; several were not afraid to call it reckless and inappropriate...”* Leflon is shorter and does not indicate any source (I, p. 412). *“The success of these early morning Lenten sermons for the common people proved how wrong were the biased and ill-willed predictions that had been made, and the cynics of the Aix drawing rooms had to swallow their*

words.” Then he quotes Roze-Joannis of whom we will speak later. It must be remembered that these are Eugene’s first sermons in Aix at a time when sermons had a great social importance.

However, some sensitive issues remain concerning the content and also the date of the first sermon. Luckily, Eugene’s handwritten notes, written in French, have been preserved. Rambert (I, p. 124) presents them as follows: “*(It is) a canvas. Mr. de Mazenod wrote in French, just jotting down some notes he proposed to develop in the pulpit, counting less on his ability to improvise than on the inspirations of his ardent faith and deep piety.*” Tavernier, one of the first members of the Youth Congregation says (*Quelques Souvenirs...* pp. 20-21): “*His eloquence was natural, broad, polite without pretense, strong, lively, and sustained. It is from within his soul that he drew the treasures of his word; in the impulses of his heart he found the secret of moving people and in the ardor of his faith the constantly renewed fire for his action. A remarkable thing! He did not need preparation. The more his improvisation was sudden and unexpected, the better it was, more vigorous was the effect, the more success was assured; and even as he discovers himself as an accomplished speaker, the day he needed to be, his talent was at its best when he had to overcome a sudden difficulty. All genres suited such a rich nature... He never wrote what he had to say publicly; any speech that he would have had to follow, recite or repeat, was for him an obstacle to the abundance of his ideas, a hindrance, and some colorless thing that could never match what the need of the moment made him feel to give life to his images and examples...*” His handwritten notes should be seen as just notes and not as the preached text. They have been partially published in OW 15, 35-47.

Another question arises as to the date of the first sermon. Rambert (I, p. 123-124) says that Eugene de Mazenod “*resolutely ascended the pulpit of the Madeleine, as he had announced, on the first Sunday of Lent.*” Rey (I, p. 153) is also affirmative, speaking of “*the opening on the first Sunday of Lent.*” Leflon (I, 410) uses the same information. Eugene, in his letter to Forbin Janson, wrote that he preached “*every Sunday of Lent.*” However, for this first Sunday of Lent, the handwritten notes indicate and develop the theme of penance, fasting and abstinence. What was the place then of the so often quoted notes on the dignity of the poor “*in the eyes of faith*”?

Charbonneau, in *My Name is Eugene de Mazenod* (p. 44, note 2) bases himself on the notes for the 5th Sunday: “*At the beginning of this holy season, we saw you crowding around these sacred precincts to receive from our hands the blessed ashes which we placed on your foreheads.*” He concludes that the first instruction was given “probably” on Wednesday, March 3, Ash Wednesday. In *Oblate Writings* (15, 35), Fr. Yvon Beaudoin, took that date without hesitation and placed it at the beginning of the notes, though it is not included in the manuscript. In his view, Eugene would have given a “*preliminary instruction*” on that day in which he may have talked about the dignity of the poor. But no historian seems to mention such a preliminary instruction. It is not included in the chronology studied by Fr. Pielorz (see *Missions*, 1956, p. 203). So, was it Wednesday, March 3, Ash Wednesday, or Sunday, March 7, the first Sunday of Lent? Even if crowds of people had received the ashes Wednesday morning, which was a working day, it seems unlikely that there would have been a gathering with a long sermon. Might there have been imposition of ashes on the first Sunday after the sermon? This is more likely.

In fidelity to the early historians, I rather think that these notes on the Christian dignity of the poor served as an introduction or even discrete but repeated references throughout the sermon for the first Sunday on the topic of penance and fasting, and perhaps on the following days. The notes for the fourth Sunday seem to allude to this (OW, 15, 39-40). Eugene mentions his fears, given his “*lack of familiarity with the Provençal language*” when he “*ascended this pulpit, dedicated as it is to truth, for the first time.*” He then adds, “*But called by my vocation to be the servant and priest of the poor to whose service I would like to be able to devote my whole life, I cannot help being touched when I see the eagerness of the poor to hear my voice; but what fills my cup of joy to overflowing is that this abundant concourse is clear proof that there are still in our town a considerable number of true Israelites who have not bent the knee to Baal, Christians who still love their religion, love to receive instruction, want to practise it...*”

A LENT FOR THE POOR

Let us go back to the handwritten notes, that are without a well-defined plan in terms of the dignity of the poor, but that are much more ordered and developed for the five Sundays. The outline of these notes, and therefore probably the sermons, is fairly standard and in keeping with the custom of the early nineteenth century. For the first Sunday: fasting, abstinence, penance. The second: proofs for the existence of God, the truths necessary for salvation: Trinity, Incarnation, Redemption. Third Sunday: description and gravity of sin, a call to the sacrament. Fourth Sunday: the sacrament of penance. Fifth Sunday, called Passion Sunday: a synthesis... Analyzing the content of these sermons is beyond the scope of this work. I'll just give some highlights, drawn mainly from the first part of the manuscript before the first Sunday sermon.

Eugene indicates his intention in a few strong phrases. *“The Gospel must be taught to all and it must be taught in such a way as to be understood. The poor, a precious portion of the Christian family, cannot be abandoned to their ignorance. Our divine Savior attached such importance to this that he took on himself the responsibility of instructing them and he cited as proof of the divinity of his mission the fact that the poor were being evangelized, pauperes evangelizantur.”* Therefore Eugene chooses a language comprehensible to the *“poor and unlettered.”* On the fourth Sunday he is more precise: *“We have not come with the elevated discourses of a human eloquence and wisdom, no, we have not used human wisdom as we talked, but the simple word of God stripped of every ornament, placed so far as possible within the grasp of the simplest...”*

The presentation of salvation as *“the one and only thing”*, too often neglected but that merits attention, was nothing original for this period. On the other hand, Eugene puts at the center of his notes the assertions on the dignity of the poor *“in the eyes of faith.”* *“We will begin with teaching you what you are, your noble origin, what rights it gives you, and what obligations too it imposes on you, etc... Come now and learn from us what you are in the eyes of faith. Poor of Jesus Christ, afflicted, wretched, suffering, sick, covered with sores, etc., all you whom misery oppresses, my brothers, dear brothers, respected brothers, listen to me.*

You are God's children, the brothers of Jesus Christ, heirs to his eternal kingdom, chosen portion of his inheritance; you are, in the words of St. Peter, a holy nation, you are kings, you are priests, you are in some way gods, Dii estis et filii excelsi omnes." That Eugene speaks so much of "dignity", and puts "rights" before obligations, can surprise us still today.

Eugene then moves on to the exhortation: "*So lift up your spirits, that your defeated souls may breathe, grovel no longer on the ground.*" He makes an urgent appeal to a new way of looking at life. For this he dwells on the contrast of how the world views them, sketching a social analysis that we find nowhere else in his writings. Servants, you are exposed to contempt... Peasants, you are valued only for the strength of your arms... Poor beggars, the world sees you as the dregs of society... Yet that is the master that you have chosen... So, leave this master and look to heaven...

Fittingly, Oblate tradition gives great importance to these sermons, and especially to what the notes say about the dignity of the poor in the eyes of faith. Eugene is totally original. No one, it seems, has noted a text similar or even close to this among the preachers of the time. Not even St. Vincent de Paul seems to have addressed himself so directly to the poor. Leflon refers to Bossuet and his *Sermon on the Eminent Dignity of the Poor*. That dignity is affirmed, but Bossuet is addressing himself to the rich, unlike the preaching at the Madeleine, where the poor are the direct recipients of the evangelical word. In the notes for the fourth Sunday, cited above, Eugene thanked his listeners for responding in such large numbers. He says he is encouraged in his vocation "*to be the servant and priest of the poor to whose service I would like to be able to devote my whole life.*"

Eugene's *uncle*, Roze-Joannis, was touched by the impact of this sermon. Leflon (I, p. 413) cites his letter dated March 13, where he says: "*on learning of the admirable effects of zeal which were produced by the Christ-like spirit which inspires you. The graces He communicates to you so abundantly are not for you alone but are also meant for the welfare and salvation of many. The Church, today more than ever before, has a great need of ministers who, by their teaching, will rekindle the Faith that has been extinguished, and, by their example, will serve as models for the flock and awaken pastors from their apa-*

thy. I am fully convinced that God has raised you up among us for that double purpose. By practicing as well as teaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ, as you are doing, you will prove to certain doubting Thomases that you have entered the Sanctuary not through any human motives, but through a God-given vocation."

Fr. Rey (I, p. 154) adds a note which is interesting. *"During these conferences, Father de Mazenod met a man from an Aix Society that claimed to be atheist. In his zeal, he undertook to bring the most necessary truths to the attention of this poor man."* So he had someone inquire of the Abbé Frayssinous, a famous speaker in Paris, about the procedures to follow and the writings that should be read. The priest replied saying, *"it was difficult to give an absolute line of conduct, and the procedure should be determined by the previous conferences, the mindset of the speaker... Besides, he added, tell Father de Mazenod that it is a waste of time to want to convert an atheist, because atheism presumes a twisted mind, a depraved mind..."* It is unfortunate that we know nothing further about this.

ANY FOLLOW-UP?

We also lack information on the follow-up of these sermons. What pastoral contact did he have with these "poor" who had come to listen to him? Did the parishes take over? We know that on the Monday after Pentecost, Father de Mazenod preached at the First Communion Mass for children from the countryside. It was in Provencal, in the chapel of the Hospital of Charity. Eugene had therefore re-established some links to catechism work. Rambert notes that on the four Sundays of Advent, he preached again in Provencal at six o'clock in the morning at the Madeleine, but without specifying the content. There is no doubt that it was in agreement with the parish priest, or possibly at his request. But conflict will soon arise with the priests of Aix concerning the Youth Congregation.

A letter from Eugene to Forbin-Janson, dated April 9 (OW 15, 48-50, full text in *Missions*, 1962, p. 122-126) tells very briefly about the ten day mission he gave at Puy-Ste-Réparate, a village about fifteen kilometers north of Aix. The Friday before Palm Sunday he lost his voice. *"I asked God in his goodness to give me back the use of my*

throat for the next day, for I was to leave for Le Puy on that day; something that would never be allowed in the state I was in. The remedy worked and the next day I fled more than made a normal departure, promising myself to look after myself properly on my return, in view of what I would be doing during the ten days of my mission. Now I shall hold my tongue, for at Le Puy I spoke or yelled all day and coughed all night.” There are few details on this mission, except that he walked, clambered over the hills in search of the sick, teaching, confessing, baptizing, doing the Holy Week and Easter services... A few months earlier he had written to his mother that he planned to preach missions “as a way of vacationing”.

In the same letter, he says that he is aware “that you do more in 24 hours than I do in 8 days... I have been tempted several times to write to the Bishop of Chambéry (where Charles was vicar general), that he temper your zeal, which does not seem very wise to me. I am displeased with the prelate that he let you ruin yourself...” Eugene’s account of his Lenten sermons was quoted above. He adds: “On Sunday too, I used to go to the prisons to give an instruction to those unfortunates in French, after which I went on to the confessional to hear the confessions until 6:00 p.m. of those of the prisoners who presented themselves. Before and after the instruction, some hymns are sung. I finish up by giving them evening prayer. From there I hurry home, where is gathered together the finest flower of masculine piety in our poor town. After various exercises, I again give a small instruction, quite simple, in conversational vein, which God in his goodness sees to seasoning, and there you have it all.” Further on he says: “Let us urge one another on to do good; God knows how long we will be able for it. Life is short. Yesterday again I was called to a poor woman who had dined well and was in her agony just a few hours later...”

THE YOUTH CONGREGATION

Eugene took but a little time to rest because, according to the *Diary of the Christian Youth Congregation of Aix*, the first meeting took place on the Sunday after Easter. Here is what the Diary says (OW 16, 135-136): “On April 25, 1813, Low Sunday, were laid the foundations of the holy Association of Christian Youth. The Director of this nascent

congregation called to his side Messrs. (Seven names are listed.) After presenting them with his plan and showing them the advantages that would accrue to them from it, they began together the pious exercises of the Congregation to the great happiness of all. It was agreed, seeing the unhappy circumstances of the times, to keep to a small number of religious practices which one would be careful to disguise as games. The first session took place in the garden called the Pavillon l'Enfant (at the north gates of Aix). After a short prayer the group plunged happily into games. The day drawing to a close, we entered a salon of the Pavillon, and while the gentlemen rested, the Rev. Director gave them an instruction that was followed by a decade of the rosary. At nightfall we returned to town, sorry that the day had been so short and looking forward already to another meeting that would take place the following Sunday." As far as we can judge youth ministry will be Eugene's central concern and his principal occupation for the next two years.

"Such an initiative was not without risk," says Leflon. We are indeed in the last years of the Empire and the regime is increasingly hostile to any form of association, including religious ones. Leflon (I, p. 414) notes that the Congregation of Fr. Delpuits (which was the first of that century and even the prototype) was dissolved, as was the association known as the "Oeuvre" of Father Allemand in Marseilles.

Noting "*the unfortunate conditions of the times*" Eugene adds that "*one should be careful to disguise as games*" any religious practices. We are shocked at the strong expressions at the beginning of the *Diary* (OW 16, 133). For example he speaks of "*the plan of the ungodly Napoleon and his government.*" Eugene certainly expresses his thoughts and personal judgment. The entire *Diary* is however not a personal aide-memoire. It is indeed intended to be consulted, if not read by the young people. Such a document could therefore fall into the hands of the imperial police. Eugene explicitly foresaw this for his retreat notes in December 1812 (OW 15, 11). Would he risk himself a few months later with such bold words? Yet phrases like "*even if I am persecuted*" have meaning that year. As he did in several passages of the *Diary*, it is possible that he jotted down some thoughts and events more or less daily, and then later went back to make a final draft. The introduction may have been written after the fall of Napoleon. There is much evidence of a subsequent writing in the *Journal of the Association*. For example,

the visit by Forbin-Janson took place September 8th according to Rey (I, p. 156). It is on October 24 that the Diary reports that he “*once had the good fortune to give an instruction.*” The same could be said for the use of the term Congregation which was outlawed at the time. There is need for further study of the handwritten document.

It should also be emphasized, as does *Oblate Writings* 16, that the 82 pages of the *Diary* are written entirely in the hand of Eugene. The *Diary* gives us the point of view of “*the Director*”, almost uniquely, and rarely gives voice to the young people. Already from April 25, it is written, “*The Director of this nascent congregation called to his side Messrs...*”

Based on a very thorough study by Fr. Pielorz, the introduction of *Oblate Writings* 16 notes that “*these young people came from every social class*” and adds in a footnote (p. 124): “*32 from the nobility, 168 middle-class, and 100 young people from the working class.*” Unfortunately, it does not indicate at what date. This was not the case initially. According to Rambert (I, p. 129), they were students at the Bourbon College, thus under the influence of the Imperial University, and belonged to the “*best families of Aix.*” Jeancard confirmed this in his funeral oration (p. 13): “*The Apostle... gathered the children during the intervals between their classical studies.*” It is unclear how the following sections of the Regulations, published in *Missions* in 1899 (see pages 20 and 24) could refer to the working classes: “*When the associates will be in the world and especially when, forced by duty or propriety of their state, they will be in those noisy societies where scandals abound...*” Or: “*They will command very gently those who are subject to them, remembering that servants, despicable as they may appear here below, are none the less called to share one day the immortal crown of glory which was acquired for them as well as for their masters, by the precious blood of their common Saviour and Master.*” The use of the term *associate* indicates that we are at the beginning of the Association.

They are teenagers, students of the College of Aix. Jacques Marcou, part of the first group of seven and who became a Missionary of Provence, was not yet 14 years old in April. Courtès who was admitted in June, was 15 and a half. As for Alexander Tavernier, known for his *Souvenirs* of Eugene de Mazenod, he had just turned 14 when he

was admitted. It is the beginning and situations evolve. But there is an immediately apparent difference with the Paris Congregation of Fr. Delpuits, which was formed mainly of students in medicine and law, and of whom a social commitment is required. This is not the case in Aix. “Essentially,” writes Leflon (I, p. 416), “it was a religious organization aimed at forming a body of very pious young people.” In his thesis on Eugene’s spiritual life, Father Taché makes a similar judgment: “No direct action is mentioned in the Diary. The focus is constantly on personal sanctification, it is a pious association.”

The *Diary of the Association* thus opens with a long introduction in which Eugene explains his involvement with youth. They suffer from the “devilish strategy” of Napoleon who leads a campaign of demoralization, particularly through the colleges and conscription. “The evil is at its height... Must one, a sad spectator of this deluge of evil, be content to bemoan it in silence without supplying any remedy? Certainly not. And should I suffer persecution or be destined to fail in the holy enterprise of raising a barrier against this torrent of iniquity at least I shall not have to reproach myself with not having made the attempt. What means are to be employed to attain success in so great an enterprise? None other than those employed by the seducer himself. He felt he could succeed in corrupting France only by perverting the youth; it is towards them that he directs all his efforts. Very well, it will also be upon the youth that I will work; I will strive, I will make the attempt to preserve them from the evils with which they are menaced, that they suffer already in part, inspiring in them early-on the love of truth, respect for religion, taste for piety, horror of vice... The enterprise is difficult, I am not concealing that fact from myself, it is not without danger... but I am unafraid, for I place all my trust in God, because I seek only His glory and the salvation of the souls he has redeemed by His Son Our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Speaking of Napoleon’s schools in the volume of Fliche and Martin devoted to this period (Volume 20, p. 237) Leflon wrote: “The atmosphere (there) remains godless and more than once the bishops complained rightly about perils for the faith and morals of the students.” Lamennais is much more direct in an article in 1814 on the Imperial University, which had a monopoly on all male secondary education and was maintained by Louis XVIII (*Mélanges religieux et philosophiques*,

I, Paris 1819). Here are some excerpts: *“Of all of Bonaparte’s designs the scariest for the thinking man, the most antisocial, in a word, the most worthy of him was that of the University. When the tyrant thought he had assured the misfortune of the present generation by his many horrible laws, he put up this monstrous edifice as a monument of hatred for future generations, and seemed to want to rob mankind of hope itself. Every year, the French people were decimated by conscription... (But the worse evils) came from the education laws. Let us imagine, if possible, what was to become of a nation whose government placed it between absolute ignorance and the most hideous depravity; and where one watched for the birth of the child in order to hurry to corrupt it, to stifle in its heart the seed of conscience; to teach it from the cradle to stutter blasphemy, to recant the God that its intelligence did not know yet...”* This institution *“was to serve as an auxiliary to assure the success of the battle plan formed by the modern Attila against society. An enemy, by instinct, of civilization...”* *“Instead of religion, which warns man of his duties, a political cult which made him forget them was needed...”* *“The main purpose (of this education), its only goal was to inspire children with a taste for the military and with the military spirit... Each school had the appearance of a barracks.”* Lamennais continued considering the schools *“under the triple aspect of religion, morals and education.”* The article is 25 pages long in the same style. We can only point out the reference, but we can understand that Eugene was not content to remain *“a sad spectator of this deluge of evil.”*

Reading the *Diary of the Association*, the various regulations that are published in *Missions* in 1899 shed some light on the life of the Association which, with the fall of Napoleon, was able to affirm its true identity as a Congregation. In September 1815, when Brother Maur is leaving Aix, the Diary mentions for the first and only time his contribution to the organization: *“Mr. Martin Bardeau... had the happiness of following all the exercises since its establishment, that he had edified with his angelic fervour, that he had even served with remarkable zeal”* (OW 16, 166). When Eugene notes that he had prepared a snack for the young people, we can imagine that Maur was quite involved.

It is mainly the later accounts by the young people that tell us of Eugene’s influence on their education. Thus, the future Father Courtès: *“When he spoke to the young people, his tone was so affectionate, said*

one of them, that it was not so much his mouth that he opened but his heart..." Coulin, who was for some time a scholastic before being ordained a diocesan priest: "*The greatest triumph of the Abbé de Mazenod, I mean the triumph of his piety and zeal, was the success he obtained by the creation and management of the important work of a congregation of young people. Never has a work of this nature had such success... His instructions were well liked... We heard him give a talk one day that brought tears to all, recalling the sudden death of a young member who had abandoned the Congregation to enter a life of dissipation.*" (See Rambert I, p. 132).

Here is what Jeancard said in the funeral oration: "*These young people soon edified everyone, the most solid piety, fervor prevailed in this elite flock, which later was to provide distinguished men for all kinds of careers, and whose spirit of deep faith and religion never wavered.*" The study of other existing documents needs to be pursued. Cf. *Historical Dictionary*, Volume I. Cf. also B. Dullier's *Eugène de Mazenod et ses propositions de foi aux jeunes*, in *OMI Documents* n° 32, April 2002.

THE PRISONERS AND OTHER TASKS...

If the Lenten preaching at the Madeleine and the Youth Association are the best known of Eugene's pastoral activities, his ministry extended to other fields as well. Thus he resumed contact with the prisoners in Aix. Here is what Rey wrote (I, 158): "*He became their volunteer chaplain. He visited almost every day, instructing them, consoling and encouraging them when they expressed a wish to return to the practice of their Christian duties. In this way he brought about a significant change in these degraded souls.*" Rey then quotes from the *Mémoires* of Father Martin that "*he could take consolation from having brought back to God an unfortunate woman called Germaine who had been condemned to death. This guilty woman who had drawn the horror and indignation of the people upon herself because of the enormity of her crimes was so moved by the Abbé de Mazenod's exhortations that she made a complete conversion and showed such excellent dispositions that, contrary to what was usually done at the time, the Abbé de Mazenod permitted her to receive communion...*" Eugene accompanied her to the scaffold.

Unfortunately, the Archives of Aix, which we consulted, has very little documentation about these executions. For this period, there is only one mention of the execution of a woman, *a certain Chardin*, on December 21, 1815. There is no mention of her place of origin, age, or the reasons for her conviction. Could this be the famous Germaine? This execution is noted in an 1860 pamphlet that outlines the history of Aix's ancient Confraternity of Blue Penitents which was responsible in particular for providing a decent burial to the executed. But in 1815 it had not yet been restored after an interruption of more than 25 years. We see that the concern for those sentenced to death was an old Aix tradition that Eugene rediscovered.

Another field of activity was the major seminary. He wrote to Charles de Forbin Janson in May (*Missions*, 1962 p. 127-128.): "*I've incorporated in its entirety*" the rule "*based upon ours which has produced such good results*" that the life and spirit of the seminarians have been renewed. (The reference is to the rule of the Association of Piety at Saint Sulpice. (Cf. Leflon I, p. 407) Speaking of these meetings at the seminary he wrote, "*I assure you that I never leave their little gatherings without feeling a strong desire for my own perfection because of the example of these angels who fill me with their fragrance.*" On the other hand, it does not seem that the project of conferences with the priests, mentioned in the February 23 letter of Fr. Duclaux, ever amounted to much.

We do not have precise information on the "*retreat*" he gave with Forbin Janson in November in Forcalquier, in the diocese of Digne, nor of his preaching during the Advent of 1813 at the Madeleine, again in Provencal. Both works tell us about his loyalty to the kinds of work undertaken and prepare the way for future commitments.

The two letters to Forbin-Janson, already mentioned, are noteworthy. Both men were ordained at the same time. Forbin remained in the diocese of Chambéry, where he received an appointment as vicar general and where he was briefly superior of the major seminary, but not for long. However, Eugene continues to refer to him as a big brother, although Charles is three years younger. The correspondence with Eugene makes this clear. "*You do more in 24 hours than I do in 8 days... I would never be up to doing all that you take on,*" he writes in April. In his May 12 letter, Eugene speaks mostly of the seminary and complains

that Charles took so little time to write. During the summer, Eugene went to spend a few days with his friend at Villedaure in the Vaucluse. Subsequently, Charles went to Aix and spoke at a meeting of the Youth Association. In November, they come together to give the retreat in Forcalquier. 1814 and 1815 will require that Eugene clarify his relationship with his friend.

Also significant are Fr. Duclaux's letters of which Fr. Rey (I, p. 157-159) has preserved some extracts. That of June 1813 refers to letters written by Eugene's opponents. Do they come from priests? Are they aimed at his sermons, or his work with the youth? *"I do not know, says Duclaux, who has taken the liberty to write such imbalanced letters... If I knew who distressed you by such irrelevant writings, I would take them to task and bring them back to wiser and more cautious approaches. Anyway, continue your studies and the good works which you have undertaken."* The September letter stresses the link between preaching and confessions. *"It is you who instructed them, your exhortations that touched them, from the sermon they went to the confessional... During the missions the missionaries confessed much more than even the most virtuous priests... The ministry you have with the prisoners is of the utmost importance... The same is true of the children, the young people to whom you dedicate yourself with so much care."* Later in November he writes: *"I have had the pleasure of seeing our good friend Mr. Charles. You know how eagerly I asked about you and what consolation I had to learn that you joined together to help a parish that had the greatest need of your zeal..."*

DAILY LIFE, FAMILY LIFE

Existing documents give only brief glimpses of his life on Papassaudy Street. There is an allusion to Brother Maur in a letter of May 12, 1813 to Forbin Janson, written in cryptic language: *"Miss Martine Flayosse does not know why you do not write to her either. Have you forgotten her address, No. 2 Papassaudy street?"* There is another allusion in August, when Eugene borrows Maur's mattress to accommodate his sister's family in an emergency. But Brother Maur remains faithful. A resolution in Eugene's retreat in December reads as follows: *"To*

oblige Maur to accuse me of my faults in the morning at oraison.” (OW 15, 60). We can conclude that they are doing their prayer in common.

For the first time in five years, it seems that he wrote to his father (May 1813, see OW 15, 52-54): *“My dear friend, it is high time I found a way of getting my news through to you. I am aware you have had some of it at various times from others than myself... What things I would have to tell you... Eugene’s vocation, elevation to the priesthood, his joy at dashing underfoot every worldly vanity and expectation, the happiness he feels, and that is renewed each day, of offering by the mediation of the holy Victim the prayers of all his loved ones to the Sovereign Majesty of God... People who are subject to be hurt by his decision, one matured over a long period by reflection and after sufficient testing, do not know the gift of God, and can one really call in question that one can be truly happy only where the Master destines us.”* The letter continues with family news. It is surprising that for the christening of Caroline, his niece, he was both the celebrant and the godfather. Another surprise was this note: *“For three years now Fortuné’s farmers have not paid a penny. This year it was necessary to make them a gift of some corn fields so that they should not fall into the hands of moneylenders or die of hunger. That is something to bemoan...”*

In a letter to Roze-Joannis, dated June 28 (see OW 15, 56), he says he will make a brief stay at St. Laurent with his mother and his uncle: *“The air and the waters and our happiness at being together will all contribute to bringing us good health. As for myself, it is not health I shall be looking for in that pleasant temperature; but I could not resist the pleasure of being one of the trio, especially after you had expressed the desire for it to be so. It would perhaps have been more perfect to offer it as a sacrifice and carry on putting in my time at the little tasks of the holy ministry that I perform here with some consolation thanks to the blessings the Lord has been pleased to bestow on it; but, as my absence should not be a prolonged one, I thought I could, without being at fault and without putting the fine children Providence seems to have entrusted me with in danger, give way to mother’s wishes and to yours...”*

It is likely that his mother extended her stay at St. Laurent. Eugene wrote to her from Aix on August 17 a letter that reveals problems with the family of her brother-in-law. *“I will write you only a brief word,*

my dear and good mother, carried by a carter from Riez... We are still faced with the enemy. The will is a masterpiece of iniquity that means little; in the meantime we thought it was essential that Armand and his family should leave at the earliest that den of thieves where they were. We have settled them at the Enclos where they have set up camp. They are comfortable there. Eugenie will get fat there and Nathalie too. This little one is so happy to have free rein to run as she likes; the other is the most beautiful creature that one could see; they only put her shoes on yesterday, she is so cute. Everyone is trying hard. If you had not had the good idea to give me your key, they would have had to go to the inn; my uncle would have had to have his coffee brought in from outside; he would have had to buy sugar, all without money; I took care of everything. I took four sheets from 1807 and two for servants in the closet on the third floor and a dozen towels and two sheets. Maur's mattress and one of Marie's have sufficed. I think Eugenie put them on her bed. I also took a mattress bag that I sent to have filled at the Bastide (by the way I think François will make you happy, because you have almost 45 hp. of wheat), and finally with a few small indispensably necessary things that we bought, they feel at home. We were delighted that you were not here at the time. You would have been exhausted, whereas now you will just have to finish what we started... Uncle... spared no effort for shopping, talking, calculating, etc. I do not know what I would give for him to pass the winter with us. I dare say it will be necessary. Moreover, he promised to return if the case fails; I still intend to prevent Armand from agreeing to anything, to committing himself to anything without first letting me see his plans... I send you two books to give to Miss Fourtoul, without her mother knowing. Greet Maur, I send him two letters I received for him from Paris."

The details of this letter are difficult to interpret. It seems that Armand de Boisgelin and his family were driven from their home at the Hotel Boisgelin by the elder brother and had to be cared for urgently. Previous letters indicate that Eugenie's brother-in-law was little appreciated by Eugene.

The immediate family is not however indifferent to Eugene's activities. We quote this excerpt from the Diary of the Youth Association: November 3 (1813). *"The meeting took place in the dwelling-place of the Rev. Director. To conform to the usage of the country the Director*

regaled the youth with chestnuts and mulled wine; we did not break up until 8 o'clock. All the time that was not devoted to instruction and prayer was employed in games." Even if it is Mr. Director who organized the evening in his residence, one can imagine that Maur, and probably mother, did their part. Also, Roze-Joannis asked Eugene to preach a mission in October in the village of Grans where he was mayor.

DECEMBER 1813, ANNUAL RETREAT

In December, Eugene made his annual retreat, probably at the seminary. The existing notes are very brief, and not even dated. But there is every reason to place them at the end of this first year in Aix. They are published in OW 15, 57-60. *"In the year that is ending, I have been too much at the disposition of the first-comer; this is a misunderstood charity, my time has been wasted, it is my fault; this must be dealt with. So, unless someone has some pressing business to communicate to me, I will keep out of everyone's sight in the mornings... Next year I must take precautions not to be disturbed during my retreat as I was this year; too often people stormed the barriers that separate me from the world, during this brief period of days; should it be for the good, utility of my neighbour, well and good, but is it not just that out of the 365 days there should be ten for me alone?"*

He notes that he gave in too often to his *"dominant failings... self-love, etc., an excessive tendency to speak of the good I do... sensitivity of heart... a veritable laziness in fulfilling my duties of piety."* But from the beginning of his notes, which are particularly messy, he notes: *"I think I have discerned what most harmed my progress during the course of this year, namely, an excessive inconstancy in my resolutions, and a total lack of discipline in my exercises occasioned by my relations with my neighbour, and by the dissipation consequent on it. If I want to progress as I ought this year, it is indispensable that I be stern with myself and let nothing sway me from the exact observance of my personal rule."* Further on he adds: *"The fact is that I have no other means of escaping from the deplorable state of languor into which I have fallen, than to bind myself to the exact observance of my rule."* Many years will be required to find a solution to Eugene's question. It should be noted that he is starting to pose it very clearly.

Thus the year 1813 ended. He has been in Aix for about fourteen months. Each of us can look back over this first year with him, what was accomplished, the questions that remained unanswered. In April, he wrote to Charles de Forbin Janson: “*I await orders for what it pleases [the Lord] to command me.*” Eugene moves ahead with great zeal but he does not yet see clear. The year 1814 will bring him more questions. The fall of Napoleon and the return of the Bourbons, the Restoration of the monarchy, totally changed the political situation, and consequently also that of the Church. Thus, the now liberated Pius VII will pass through Aix stirring up much enthusiasm... For Eugene, there will be the crucial period of the disease he contracted from the Austrian prisoners. Then there will be the response of the same Pius VII to Forbin Janson, indicating missions in France as the first task. Eugene is moving towards new decisions...

Chapter 2

SEARCHING AND DECISIONS 1814-1815

Ordained a priest for a little less than a year, Eugene de Mazenod returned to Aix in early November 1812. After some hesitation, he chose to live with Brother Maur as his servant and companion at his mother's house at No. 2 Papassaudy Street. We know how insistent he was that his family give him the complete freedom that was necessary for his priestly life. He also keeps this freedom vis-à-vis the Church structures in the city and the diocese. Has he resumed contact with Fr. Magy and the lay group of Marseilles? Fr. Rey (I, p. 88) assumes he did so, probably out of kindness, but there is no proof. Father Magy died February 25, 1814, without Eugene even mentioning his death.

The first fourteen months in Aix until December 1813 can be characterized as a time of exploration. Eugene, true to the instructions of Mr. Duclaux, does not present himself as a “*reformer*,” but we cannot suspect him of idleness. His preaching in Lent at the Madeleine in Provençal “*for the lower classes*” was his first public statement. Then there was a mission in the rural parish of Puy-Ste-Réparate about twenty kilometers from Aix, then a parish retreat preached in Forcalquier with Charles de Forbin Janson, and finally the Advent preaching at the Madeleine. He spends time with the seminarians and also the prisoners. It is mainly the young people who increasingly monopolize him with their Association. But there is not yet any clarity about the direction of his life. “*I await orders for what it pleases [the Lord] to command me,*” he wrote to Forbin Janson in April. A little less than two years later (November 1815), he makes decisions that bind him: the purchase of the former Carmel, the future gathering of the small group of Missionaries of Provence, the agreement of the diocesan authorities. Two years, 1814

and 1815, were necessary and effective. Now, he has chosen his path and committed himself to it.

A series of events, more or less favorable, led him to these decisions. There is first of all in March-April 1814, the very serious disease he contracted in the service of the Austrian prisoners. There are at the same time some rapid political developments and their impact on the life of the Church: the fall of Napoleon, the new found freedom for the pope, the restoration of the monarchy – interrupted by the Hundred Days – and the beginning of a new freedom for the Church. There is finally the clarification of his relationship with Forbin Janson, whom the pope has asked to give priority to parish missions in France. Eugene also decides and chooses the same path, but in Provence. “*You would no longer say I have lead in my pants,*” he writes to his friend. The long time of searching has led to strong and decisive commitments.

THE YOUTH ASSOCIATION

In early 1814, the Youth Association is the only activity of Eugene for which information is available. Let’s see what he says in the *Diary* (OW 16, p. 138). The Association has been “*purged of all its questionable members.*” “*This elite society*” where “*daily-growing fervor continues to be displayed,*” has been given a “*Regulation*”. It was drawn up by “*the Reverend Director*”. The congregants approved it and made a solemn commitment to obey it on February 2, 1814.

It is interesting to read the motives for the “*expulsions*” recorded on December 12, 1813 and January 3, 1814. Messrs. Pelissier and Marin are reproached for their “*obstinacy... displayed in their willful persistence in keeping bad company.*” Dubois is expelled as “*incorrigible and better suited to delinquency on the streets than to profiting from the good example of the members of the Association.*” Three weeks later, Chaine and Sallebant are “*expelled*”. They had been “*received a little casually*” upon presentation by a curate of the cathedral. “*They gave little sign of promise when they made an appearance... They have no one but themselves to blame for the shame that a dishonorable expulsion like this inevitably reflects on their persons.*”

The *Diary* notes the approval of the regulation on Wednesday, February 2, 1814, a holiday for the *suppressed feast*. The Association met

at 8 o'clock in the church of the Ursulines on Mignet Street. The congregants came "two by two" before Mr. Director, who, in surplice and stole, sat on a chair placed on the steps of the altar. There was renewal of baptismal promises, consecration to the Blessed Virgin and the kiss of peace, followed by Mass.

According to the *Diary* it is a regulation "to include all the duties that they have to fulfill, both as Christians and as congregants and to furnish them with the means of sustaining their piety, to study as they should, in a word to achieve their salvation amidst all the dangers that surround them on every side." It was "approved by common accord." The text was to be copied into the *Diary*, but it was not, so we may hesitate concerning the formulation of 1814.

The 1899 issue of *Missions* has in fact published three different documents, each of which merits further study. One entitled "First Regulation" (pp. 19 to 25), seems to be the oldest. Here is the first paragraph: "The main purpose of this association is to form a group of pious young men who, by their example, their advice and prayers, help to curb the license and general apostasy that every day makes such rapid and scary progress, as at the same time they work very effectively for their own sanctification."

In *Missions* this document is preceded by another, pages 7-19, entitled "Abstract of the Rules of Life." Here are two excerpts. "The aim of the Christian life is primarily to avoid evil and to do good, but one will never achieve this desirable dual purpose if one does not organize the actions of the day so as not to leave anything to chance or caprice." And a little further: "The duties of the congregants of the Christian youth association concern mainly piety and study. Piety includes everything they owe to God and neighbor. Study is the duty of state of most of them; a small number may have duties to fulfill in society..."

The third document, pages 25-107, is entitled "Statutes of the Congregation." This is certainly the most recent formulation. It is a later edition for groups other than Aix, since it says that to be received one must be "a resident of Marseilles." The printed text is 82 pages with a total of 544 articles. The statute on the "Prefect" of the Congregation alone has 48 articles to which must be added 27 articles on election procedures. I note the following points. The Congregation is "divided into three classes" postulants, probationers and regular members. "Whoev-

er wants to be accepted must have an honorable profession. The same holds for his parents. He must have made his first communion.” “One must be at least 14 years old to be a postulant, 15 to be admitted.” “There will be a general meeting every Sunday morning and evening, every Thursday morning and evening, all nonworking days, morning and evening, All Souls Day, in the morning only, the last day of Carnival, and all the suppressed feast days of which the Church observes the solemnity.” “The fun and games of an honest recreation are regarded as one of the cornerstones of the Congregation. In the Congregation one aspires to go to God in this way as directly as through prayer...” There are articles on the duties to the sick and also “on the poor colleagues,” who will be helped by having recourse to the charity of the members by “taxing” them. That is the word used.

Leflon (II, pp.14-15) makes a few remarks that we can easily make our own. *“This immense regulation might seem as rigorist as it was out of proportion and over-burdened did we not know the temper of the times. Its aim was... to combat indifference and neglect with intensive cultivation and watchful severity. The nineteenth century... formed its youth groups in opposition to a society against which one had to defend oneself... There was a general tendency to isolate these young charges and treat them like hothouse flowers.”* The Abbé Allemand in Marseilles gave the regulation for his youth work *“a form that was far more balanced and concise.”* But Leflon adds: *“Moderation, conciseness, balance; these certainly are not the virtues of youth. Eugene de Mazenod’s devouring zeal and his way of writing hastily without going back over what he had written led him to copiousness. But, he himself was in the first fervor of beginnings, filled with a completely meridional enthusiasm, and a natural and supernatural dynamism... He excelled in imparting enthusiasm, in creating an atmosphere wherein souls expanded.”*

As of the year 1814, the congregants do adoration during the Forty Hours in the churches of the Holy Spirit, St. John of Malta and the Madeleine. It was a way to counteract the excesses of the Carnival or to make reparation in the days before Lent. For Mardi Gras the *Diary* notes, *“an extraordinary session at the house of the Rev. Director after benediction. [He] had seen to the preparation of a tasty little dish that*

was received with joy and gratitude and we went away quite late.” (OW 16, 139). It was February 22.

THE POPE’S VISIT TO AIX

Pope Pius VI’s visit to Aix on February 7 makes us back up a bit. He was exiled from Rome and had been a prisoner since July 1809. In June 1812, Napoleon had set Fontainebleau as his residence, isolating him from all his collaborators. But in January 1814, the Emperor decided to return him to Rome, but by a complicated route that would take him around the Massif Central and everything was done to avoid popular outbursts. However, on his passage through Aix the crowd was “immense”, according to Guigou, the vicar general. Guigou managed to reach the pope’s carriage to talk to him “*as much as it was possible amid the cheers.*” He gave the pope “*a purse full of gold from donations he had collected among the clergy and faithful.*”

In a letter dated February 10 addressed to Forbin Janson under a pseudonym (*Missions* 1962, pp. 131-134), Eugene also expresses his own enthusiasm. Having “*grabbed the door of the carriage that carried the most precious person in the world,*” he “*injured his heel...*” The next day, Madame de Mazenod welcomed Cardinal Dugnani, who followed the pope, like his colleagues, separately, one by one, with a police escort. Rey mentions other letters of cardinals who were in correspondence with Eugene.

EUGENE AT DEATH’S DOOR

For the Emperor, the defeats followed one after the other and pointed to the approaching end of the Regime. To keep the Austrian prisoners of war away from the border, the government had sent them to cities across the Southeast. Aix received 2,000. It is through his contact with them that Eugene contracted typhus, which brought him to death’s door. The disease made him see the precariousness of his undertakings if he continued to act alone. To build something long-term, he needed to work with others...

The prisoners were put in the Forbin barracks. For a city that had less than 20,000 inhabitants, the number 2,000 was considerable. Typhus caused many casualties among the prisoners. Leflon (I, p. 422) says: *“Both the chaplain and the doctors fell victim to the disease, which they contracted at the bedsides of the prisoners. On hearing this, the Abbé de Mazenod volunteered his services to the diocesan administration in order to replace his fellow priest, and, with complete disdain for the danger involved, gave every attention to the most critical cases, consoled them, prepared them to meet their Maker, and administered the last rites to them. It was not long before he himself contracted the disease... Instead of putting a halt to his ministrations... the undaunted apostle refused any care.”* On March 10 he was forced to take to his bed and on the 15th he received Extreme Unction and Viaticum.

We can imagine the emotion of his relatives, and even of the whole city. One can think also of the care given by his mother, his brother-in-law Boisgelin and probably especially Brother Maur, who is never mentioned. In a March 17 letter to Madame de Mazenod, Roze-Joannis blames the diocesan authorities for negligence: *“Without wishing to condemn him, because the principle that made him act so recklessly is also respectable, I am convinced, however, that the most holy bishops of antiquity would have suspended their pastoral duties in such a case.”*

That Eugene was marked by this illness is evidenced by what he wrote forty years later to Fr. Baudrand, superior of the first Oblate team in Texas, who was ill with yellow fever. *“I know what epidemics are, for I was struck down by one in the first years of my ministry. It was prison typhus, and all who were struck by it died except me, whom God did not want, although ever since I had been a priest I had prayed to die that death, every day at Mass. In those days I was alone, and I could make such a vow; you must not do such a thing, for you do not belong to yourselves any longer...”* (OW 2, 60). The letter is dated October 30, 1853. Ironically by that date Fr. Baudrand had been dead a month. The Superior General was not aware of it...

During the weeks of his convalescence when Eugene reflected on his illness he focused on the reactions of his *“dear children.”* Thus in the summary he gives in the *Diary of the Youth Congregation* (OW 16, 139-141) we read: *“Their unease reached its height when they were informed that I had lost consciousness two or three hours after receiving*

the Sacraments.” The young people increased their supplications for him. “*So that the work of mercy that they wanted to do for me would not interfere with their studies, they got up before dawn and went in early morning in spite of the frost to the church where each day they assisted at the Sacrifice that was offered in their name at the expense of their little savings destined for their little pleasures. In the evening after class, they gathered again in the church of the Madeleine to make together novenas that became quasi-public.*” They prayed before a statue of Our Lady of Graces. Their “*prayers which, joined to the others that charitable people made for me, snatched me from the arms of death whose prey I had nearly become.*”

He also speaks about his illness in a letter dated April 23 to Forbin Janson (*Missions*, 1962, pp. 134-137): “*Like you and with more reason than you, I counted on my strong constitution and without the countless novenas... I would inevitably have died.*” At the beginning of this letter we read: “*If you knew the pleasure I have when I am told that in my delirium that lasted all the time of my illness... I talked constantly about God, about preaching, etc., and about you. What! I said, you keep me here doing nothing, while I have so many occupations; everything suffers from my inaction; I dishonor my ministry; I shall never again in my life dare to appear before my friend Janson; what will he say, he who never listens himself and who sacrifices himself for the good of the Church...*” This reference to Forbin Janson in his delirium says much about Eugene at the time. It should not be forgotten.

Let us also quote the letter of June 17 to his father, with whom correspondence has been reestablished: “*The extent of the interest that was taken in me was nothing short of amazing; I am abashed and humbled whenever it comes back to me, and I could never repay it except by the most complete devotion to the salvation and edification of all my dear compatriots.*” (OW 15, 70)

It may be noted that in the same spring of 1814, the Abbé de Quélen, future archbishop of Paris, a young priest at the time, also fell ill serving the prisoners. “*Although ill himself to the point of spitting blood, he carried on in different hospitals in Paris,*” providing spiritual assistance to the sick and distributing alms and clothes. It will be remembered that Eugene had indicated as one of the intentions of his first Mass (OW 14, 230): “*Final perseverance, and even martyrdom or*

at least death while tending victims of the plague, or any other kind of death for God's glory or the salvation of souls." He was beginning to discover that he had to give his life, not in a single act of great generosity, but in the long and patient fidelity to ministry.

Eugene needed a long convalescence which he spent in part at the Enclos, filling his days with Billuart, Alphonsus de Liguori, the Catechism of the Council of Trent..., studying in particular the theological virtues. He had started to say Mass again on April 20. "*Only the genuflections cause me to struggle a bit,*" he wrote to Forbin on April 23 (*Missions*, 1962, p. 135). "*I have pulled through and today, the 24th, for the first time I went out into the street. I'm afraid, but thank God my chest, that so necessary piece of furniture, is better...*"

The *Diary of the Youth Congregation* is taken up again at the beginning of May. "*May 3 (Tuesday) I convoked all the congregants in the Madeleine Church to assist at the Mass I was to say for them.*" His reflection was on "*the duties of love and thanksgiving which were our due to God, Father of mercy, who is never deaf to the prayer of those who place all their trust in him*" (OW 16, 142). May 15 (Sunday), was a day of prayer and games at the Enclos. However, the young people joined their families for lunch and returned in the afternoon.

THE NEW POLITICAL AND ECCLESIAL SITUATION

In a little over two months, Eugene notes (*ibid.*) "*The face of France was changed, and the holy religion of our fathers regaining all its rights under the peaceful rule of our legitimate Sovereign.*" This short sentence that all the young people could read in the *Diary of the Congregation* says well that for Eugene, as for many French, a painful period of 25 years had ended, it was like a new dawn. Roze-Joannis spoke more bluntly: "*The reign of the rabble will now come to an end; no longer will we see regicides flattered and showered with honors and riches.*" (Quoted by Leflon II, p. 5). April 6, Napoleon abdicated. May 3, Louis XVIII, the "*legitimate Sovereign*", made his entrance into Paris.

It is said that everywhere in Aix for several months there were lights, windows draped with white flags, triumphal arches, garlands of greenery, dances, banquets and joyful songs. The Mayor declared: "*The beloved descendant of Saint Louis and Henry IV has regained the*

throne of his fathers.” A register of support was opened, which gathered 1,500 signatures in a few days. We find there alongside the names of priests, those of domestic servants, merchants, and all the big names of the aristocracy...

Bishop Jauffret was still considered the archbishop-elect though absent from Aix for over a year. On April 14, he resigned to become again Bishop of Metz. The Chapter administrators are the vicars general Guigou and Dudemaine; the latter died in June and his successor was Father Beylot, whom Eugene had as confessor before entering the seminary. Eugene informs his friend Charles of this (see *Missions*, 1962, p. 136). *“Our Chapter, without waiting for any other example, assembled on the 14th or 15th... Heated debates, consultations... It took a unanimous decision to retract all that had been done since the first election of the vicars general”* four years earlier after the death of Bishop Cicé. Eugene added that the Chapter took care to have these deliberations approved by the Cardinals who were passing through Provence.

Eugene was not a mere observer in this question of the restoration of the legitimate canonical authority. He took sides and made it known. Speaking of the Canons of Aix who were in favor of Bishop Jauffret he wrote to Forbin Janson (the letter can be dated June 20, OW 15, 65-69): *“People of this ilk [the supporters of Jauffret] come out with it in all its shades. Not when I am around, for they are afraid of me, I do not know why, or rather, I know very well why. This is so true that the Bishop of Metz, according to what they write from Paris, sees me as his most feared adversary, not only in Aix, which might well have some basis, but even in Paris, which is absolutely untrue. Anyway, it is only his principles I contest, as they are not in conformity with the truth and the holy traditions of our Fathers... Let the Roman Church come to realize in truth that these folk and their adherents are the enemies of all its rights and prerogatives... Their stock is very low here, and I am partly responsible for this good work.”* As Leflon points out (II, p. 8), the opposing party *“had good memories; the tenacious opposition that Eugene de Mazenod, as the Apostle of Youth and later as founder of the Oblates was to meet, is ample proof of it.”*

The pastoral letter of Bishop Miollis, a native of Aix and Bishop of Digne since 1806, clearly shows the mindset that Eugene shared. This letter is dated May 26: *“Blessed be the God of mercy, who comforts us*

in all our tribulation... The devastating scourge of war was advancing rapidly towards our homes. The storm which at first had rumbled in the distance was ready to burst over our heads, when suddenly one of those events in which the wicked man himself cannot ignore the finger of God, cleared the horizon. Peace, an object desired by so many, was finally given to us. Everything looks like it will last because it has been strengthened by the restoration of the ancient dynasty, which for so many centuries had been the glory and joy of our nation... Already the capital has enthusiastically welcomed within its walls our legitimate sovereign, the august brother of Louis XVI... Unfortunate Prince worthy of a better fate, soft, bright, true father of the people, we will finally be allowed to shed freely tears on your happiness... ” (Quoted by Ricard, Bishop Miollis, p. 163).

It is under the date of May 15 that Eugene wrote in the *Diary of the Congregation* (OW 16, 142) the phrase cited above: “*The face of France had changed.*” Then he continues: “*The holy religion of our fathers regaining all its rights under the peaceful rule of our legitimate Sovereign, the Congregation had no longer to fear suppression, nor the congregants and their Director persecution. Let us strive to thank the Lord for this mark of favor with a renewal of zeal and application in the fulfillment of our duties. The first benefit that we owe to this happy and unexpected regeneration is being able to carry out our religious exercises without obstruction and in the open, and extend them and give them a more public character.*”

A few days later, he notes that the Congregation had been reestablished in Marseilles. The *Diary* indicates the resumption of regular activities: admissions, installation of officials, and participation in the Corpus Christi processions... The “*chapel of the Congregation*” at the Enclos receives permission from the vicars general to reserve the Blessed Sacrament. Father Guigou comes in person to celebrate Mass on 15 August. The *Diary* highlights particularly the celebration of First Communion, which was carefully prepared, and also Confirmation, but without naming the bishop. The political situation had become favorable again so that these young people could present themselves for the sacraments.

With the new political situation, correspondence is now restored between France and Sicily. For Eugene, concern for the exiles in Palermo becomes central; he insists that they come back to France and find a life more worthy of their state. Their unwavering loyalty to the legitimate Bourbon dynasty should have its reward. He has also not given up hope for reconciliation between his father and mother, now separated for nearly twenty years.

It is Eugene who revives the correspondence. His letter of June 17, already quoted above, gives his father some news of his illness and recovery (See OW 15, 69-70). He seems even to think that the Sicilians are already on their way back bringing some news in person. *“It would have been urgent for you to be here for the general regeneration. Given your position it would have been appropriate for you to ask for some places and although they are excessively hard to get, it seems to me that we have enough friends in Paris to hope to be heard favorably. The King, incidentally, has just issued a very favorable order for former Navy officers and my uncle is eligible to benefit from it. We have a vacant canonry here and whoever we will be given as archbishop, it is quite impossible that he would grant it to anyone other than the Abbé, if he was here. Above all you would have found a way to give every year nearly a thousand crowns to your creditors or to those of your father, and you would thereby make an act of justice which would soften all spirits, while persisting in the system to which you have held so dearly despite all that I have told you, it seems that we have some reason to accuse you of not using the only means you have to repair a small part of the damage your creditors suffered, it would be at least a sign of goodwill to your credit, as it was for others...”* A canonry for the Abbé, a pension for the Chevalier, and for the three of them the ability to begin compensating their creditors, such is Eugene’s plan, to which he cannot see how anyone could reasonably object.

Mr. de Mazenod responds on July 24 (see OW 15, 70, note 37), like an old dad pouring out his heart: *“My son, my wonderful son, Zézé, my dear Zézé, sweet consolation of my days of sadness, stay of my old age; Zézé, my beloved, my hope and my life, I throw myself into your arms, I hold you close to my heart. Do you feel the palpitations of this sensi-*

tive heart? Do you see its agitation?” The letter continues in a prayer of thanksgiving: “*But after having brought my son down, you have raised him up again, after wounding you have healed him, you have let yourself be moved by the fervent prayers of faithful souls who were concerned about his safety. You have given him back to me! With what thanksgivings will I not repay it. O my God, deign to accept them and be pleased to continue to bestow on us glances of mercy. And you, my dear child, receive our congratulations, embraces, share our joy...*”

His father then adds a secret: “*The Chevalier has revealed a secret we did not know. He had contracted a marriage of conscience two years ago with Dona Antonia whom you have seen here, and who was too old to have children... However, I do not have to remind you not to say anything about this matter that would embarrass the chevalier or his wife, for 1. After a done deal advice is taken; 2. As a priest, you should say what your uncle the Abbé said: sin caused by frequentation is removed by marriage; God be praised.*” In another letter to his son several weeks later the President writes: “*For the 70 years I have lived in this world, I am convinced of two truths that have contributed significantly to helping me patiently bear my misfortunes and I urge you to persuade yourself as well: first, is to never judge by appearances, because though they may seem somehow probable, they are almost always misleading; the second is to be wary of all relationships, not rushing to condemn one’s neighbor, and especially never condemning without hearing him...*”

Eugene’s letter on August 25 comes back to family issues. His father’s creditors are insistent; Eugene’s brother-in-law is suing his family. His father in responding comes back to Eugene’s plans for Fortuné (see OW 15, 76, note 45): “*You make me laugh when you say that Father Fortuné is letting slip the opportunity of having a canonry, as if it were natural to believe that one would think of an old priest who had disappeared from the scene some time ago, while thought of a deserving young man who has given proof of his value and is on the spot would not enter into consideration. You are the one to whom it should already have gone. It is not that if one named your uncle to the junior canonry in a chapter in which he has exercised one of the first dignities he would turn it down, although it would be like telling a bishop to become a miller, but he would desire much more that justice be done to yourself.*”

We sense that Eugene's insistence is beginning to weigh on his father, who dares not express the real reasons for their not returning to France. On the one hand, there are the debts and creditors; there is especially the quasi-veto of Madame de Mazenod regarding the three brothers. *"Your personal note disturbs the Abbé and me. It grieves us beyond all expression,"* writes his father on October 19. And a few days later, the President wrote to Emile Dedons: *"Your cousin is a boy full of merit, good qualities and virtues. But you know that he's almost as much a despot as Mr. Bonaparte: when he commands, he not only wants to be obeyed, but he wants to be so immediately and without question."*

We sense a growing misunderstanding, a new gap is widening between Eugene, for whom everything is simple, and his father who is well aware of the difficulties. Eugene's letter to his father on October 29 is somewhat accusatory: *"I have no more voice to call you my dear friends, or reasons to prove it. I have nothing to add except that I am innocent of all the unpleasant and disastrous consequences of a delay that I can not explain. If you still delay and let the work that is already well advanced run out, I also will use as little effort to move you as today I use for persuasion and you use in your slowness to act... It is very difficult to obtain something here on the scene, what do you expect being absent?"* Eugene then speaks about his efforts on behalf of Fortuné with the Archbishop of Reims, the Grand Chaplain, who is responsible for episcopal appointments, and a brother of the Baron de Talleyrand, their friend from Naples and Palermo: *"Can the Abbé be content to limit himself when a career more consistent with his vocation opens before him? Since when are priests trained to give language lessons? We imagine mountains everywhere when we have poca voglia (little will)..."*

In his letter of December 7, Eugene explains the choices he made in fidelity to his vocation (OW 15, 75-77), and emphasizes the *"extreme reluctance"* he has to appear like a solicitor for his father and uncles. *"You cannot imagine what it costs me to seek even the protection of our most cherished friends. If it had been for myself, I would have preferred to beg all my life, rather than have to ask for the slightest thing; but I had to give in to a more pressing duty. I sought, I will seek again, if*

necessary; but every word will cost me a drop of sweat, every step will be a thorn...” The family situation remains at a standstill.

THE QUESTIONS RAISED BY FORBIN JANSON

For us who know the rest of the story, it is clear that alongside Eugene’s youth activities, and in addition to his concerns to provide a better future for his father and his uncles, it is in the complex relationship with Charles de Forbin Janson that Eugene builds his future. Eugene’s correspondence reveals a definite dependence on his friend, who was never lacking in initiatives. Charles was his point of reference; in his delirium while ill, it was to him that Eugene compared himself to express his inferiority, *“I am far from being on a par with him.”* But in a little over a year, Eugene realizes that he should no longer follow but in turn take the lead and set up his own group of missionaries... The letters published in *Missions* (1962) make this very clear.

While the return of the King opens new areas for the Church, and while Eugene recovers gradually from his illness and resumes his work, Charles, who is still vicar general of Chambéry, but has not lost the dream of a mission to China, increases his preaching. We find him in Lausanne, Lyons, Geneva... It is there that he had a decisive encounter with Bishop Padovani, Bishop of Nocera, near Naples. Fr. Rey (I, p. 161) has preserved the letter in which he explains this to Eugene. *“The Bishop of Nocera says that God is asking for a general mission, a universal renewal. He spoke with such strength and spirit of God that I decided to leave and go with him to Rome. I will offer myself to the Holy Father to do whatever he wants of me, either to start missions if he asks for them, or return to Paris where I can be useful to religion, or wait in Rome one or two years, as we had planned. If your health, as I suppose, requires rest and travel, come join me... Ah! If you could come...”* The letter makes a clear reference to a joint stay in Rome, of which we have no other information. Eugene learns only that Charles has left alone, on a whim, to work on this *“general mission of universal renewal.”* Eugene, while noting this, loses no time to say he is *“upset”*.

June 20 is the likely date of Eugene’s letter to Rome (*Missions*, 1962, pp. 137-146; OW 15, pp 65-67): *“I envy your good fortune, my very dear Charles, but there is no jealousy. But I have to say it would*

have been nice if I could have shared it. God in his goodness has not given me that grace, for that is how I would have viewed the chance to visit so many holy places, to find myself among so great a number of precious souvenirs. There is no more to be said. It took only you to get me going. I am just back from my pilgrimage. I do not know how our third companion will take it. Perhaps he will accuse you of inconstancy, and make the trip alone. For my part, annoyed as I am that you went off without me, I excuse you, for I have the feeling that the opportunity was attractive. And, without reproaching you at all, I will give you my commissions and, so as not to forget them, I will begin with them.” Eugene then asks Charles to get him some relics, indulgences and rosaries for what is now the Youth Congregation of Aix.

Then he continues: “I was really overjoyed at all the happiness you have experienced on your journey. This is not ungenerous of me. If I had been with you I would have explained things a little to the holy Bishop of Nocera. It is not time yet for you to go to the next world. When it is a question of asking of a superior, and above all a superior like the Vicar of Jesus Christ, a decision of such importance as that which you were expecting from him, one must be quite candid in setting out the facts.” Charles should also insist that the Pope and the Cardinals take a firmer stance against the complicity of Napoleon and the Church authorities in France. Then he continues: “You did well not to speak of me to the Pope. What would it serve? I ask nothing of anyone except the help of honest prayers to work out my salvation.”

In his letter of July 19 (*Missions*, 1962, pp. 193-196; OW 15, pp. 71-73), Eugene criticizes Charles for his “inconceivable instability in forming plans” and for the danger of forcing his own views on his superiors: “I do not dare continue to indulge the thought that you are still in Rome, my very dear good brother and friend, since in the last letter I received from you, you indicate you will be leaving after the Pontifical Mass at St. Peter. Even so I am chancing this mezzo foglio in the hope you will have changed your mind, something that would not be a novelty with my friend Charles. You really must have accustomed me to this inconceivable instability in forming plans for me to take it in my stride to learn from yourself that those two entire years, which you were to spend in Rome to perfect yourself there, etc., all of a sudden are reduced to a fortnight or three weeks. Where will you be going? Are

you taking wings from the feet of the Sovereign Pontiff for China? Dear friend, have you really given it thought? Is that where what God in his goodness is asking of you? Shouldn't you reproach yourself with influencing with your own views those of the superiors, who would never in all probability have decided that you should, at this moment in time at least, leave the shores of France? Poor France, if everybody who can convince themselves that they have no other desire than the glory of the Sovereign Master and the salvation of souls which have wandered far from the true way, should abandon her, she will be thus delivered over to the plotters of every kind, who beset our princes and devastate each one some portion of the Lord's heritage." (Eugene refers to the intrigues of many to be appointed bishops of the many vacant dioceses.)

Here is another passage worth quoting: *"Not being able to be with you in Rome, I might get a little consolation by following you in spirit on your visits and pious pilgrimages, but you move too fast. The very idea of your lightning outings wears me out. As you are finishing I am just beginning."* Eugene continues to express his concerns about the upcoming nominations of bishops. He asks Charles to procure various books on St. Philip Neri and Blessed Leonard of Port Maurice and a book written for the instruction for young confessors.

The allusion to China indicates that Charles has not yet told Eugene of his decisive meeting with the Pope, a meeting that we can not date precisely. Yet it is that meeting that decided Charles and Eugene to abandon their dream of China and to dedicate themselves to the mission in France. Here's how Rey (I, p. 169) relates it, without giving a date, and referring to Eugene's lost *Mémoires*: *"Before coming to Rome, Charles Janson had the opportunity to meet the Holy Father and present his intentions to him: in his zeal, he offered to embark upon foreign missions, the most remote and the most difficult, to go even to China. The Pope was not interested in his project and answered with these memorable words: 'Your project is good, no doubt, but it is more appropriate to come to the aid of the people around us: maxime autem ad domesticos fidei. France needs especially missions for the people and retreats for the clergy.' These are the very words of the Holy Pontiff."*

Contrary to what Rey says it does not seem that Charles hurried to inform his friend, since Eugene's letter of July 19 does not refer to this matter. However, Rey adds that Charles wrote to Eugene that *"he*

was going to form a society of missionaries who would work tirelessly to evangelize the people. He urged Eugene to join him to start the work they were so fond of and he had no doubt that his friend would respond to his ardent appeal.” (Cf. Rey, I, pp. 169-170)

Eugene had been waiting for a sign indicating in what way God was asking him to meet the many needs of the Church. Now the Vicar of Jesus Christ had spoken and Eugene read this as the will of God. He himself, and the Oblates after him, will always consider the words of Pius VII as crucial to their vocation. *“France needs especially missions for the people and retreats for the clergy...”* For Eugene, the question now becomes how to be a missionary, and especially with whom, while Charles continues to be insistent, asking him to join him.

FORBIN JANSON AND THE MISSIONARIES OF FRANCE

The Church in France is indeed facing the huge task of cleaning up the legacy of twenty-five years of crisis, first of all the Revolution and then Napoleon. Many believe in a Catholic restoration. It is time to rebuild. Yet Eugene does not hide his discomfort with certain attitudes, certain ambitions, both in Aix and on the national level. But he remains rather quiet. Charles, however, takes up again with Father Rauzan and joins him in founding the Missionaries of France.

Father Rauzan is a priest of the diocese of Bordeaux, where he was born in 1757 and ordained in 1782. In his early years of ministry, he was particularly attentive to the youth. Then came the Revolution. He refused to swear allegiance to the Constitution and took up the pastoral care of migrants in Germany and England. He returned to France shortly after the 18th of Brumaire. We find him preaching in Paris and Bordeaux. Cardinal Fesch, Archbishop of Lyons and uncle of the Emperor, who wanted to revive parish missions, appealed to him to help the so-called Society of Chartreux that he had founded in Lyons for this purpose. Thus began two and a half years of missions, at first approved by Napoleon, and then banned by him in 1809. Forbin-Janson had met Father Rauzan in Paris during his seminary years. On his return from Rome, he went to Paris to join him and Father Legris-Duval, who had also been linked to the Congregation, for this revival. The team is gradually reconstituted with several Lyons old-boys. They settled in a

small house at 8 rue Notre-Dame-des-Champs, “*living in conditions of extreme poverty.*”

In 1814, Forbin-Janson presents a *Petition to the King to Establish Missions for France*, in concert with his colleagues and approved by the Grand Chaplain (the future Cardinal de Talleyrand-Perigord, uncle of the famous ex-bishop) who took the nascent work under his protection. Here is a summary by Sevrin in which one cannot fail to sense the similarities with Eugene’s analysis in Aix. “*Missions have always been regarded as a great resource for the people, and perhaps there is no nation whose political and moral state needs their help more urgently than France. The philosophy of the eighteenth century was a mission in reverse, the fatal effects of which are still felt, even in our youth who are rebellious and ungodly. The nation has not understood the miracle of the restoration of the Bourbons. In the midst of this kingdom, one of the finest and oldest heritages of Christianity, God’s name is now utterly forgotten, when it is not publicly insulted; ambition and interest are the gods of France, and the contempt of all duties of state was the necessary consequence of the contempt of all religious duties. The remedy for this great evil can not come from the University, until now so powerless to educate or from the religious Orders that no longer exist, nor from the parish clergy, decimated, without prestige, and which will be slow to recruit. So we need parish missions, a highly popular means, blessed by God at all times. Only they can revive the Christian spirit in the families and in the schools, soothe the hatred of various parties and bring about the union of minds and hearts. What will support the missionaries in their hard work, is the thought that they serve at the same time the best two masters, God and King; win a soul to God is to give the state a useful citizen, is to ensure a loyal subject to the King.*” (Quoted by E. Sevrin : *Les Missions religieuses en France sous la Restauration*, tome I, Paris 1948, pp. 25s). The project got the approval of the vicars general of Paris January 9, 1815; royal approval would follow soon.

CHARLES’ INSISTENCE, EUGENE’S HESITATIONS

Charles’ appeals to Eugene take place in this context. Eugene responds in a letter that can be dated September 12, 1814 (*Missions*, 1962, pp. 197-199; OW 15, pp. 73-75) and sent to Chambéry, which Charles

had already left. Eugene emphasizes the return of his father and uncles that he thinks is near, as a reason not to join his friend: *“I spend my life writing, there is no end to it. The ones with whom I would most like to converse are just the ones I always leave till last, in the hope of having a little more time. So in the end it is precisely with them I have to be brief. I received your letter in Marseilles, where pressing business brought me. Back in Aix, I see I am not going to find you any longer in Chambéry. Even so I am chancing a few lines, so as not to upset you. Why did you not come through here on your return from Rome? One can say more in a few words than in a hundred letters. You might have discovered some missionaries in Marseilles. I am acquainted with one, not the youngest of men, but one who has a lot of experience. [This might refer to Mye.] You might have had a chat with him. Perhaps he would have been suitable for you. I shall send him your way if he decides to go to Paris. There is a younger priest who has the same bent. He is not lacking in a certain facility, but he lacks depth; he has a mawkish manner that would have to be corrected. Others perhaps might have come forward!*

“And what about you, you will say! For myself, I am not thinking of it just now. Apart from the fact that I lack completely what is needed to work with success, especially with priests, I foresee that in the near future my affairs are going to be disrupted. My father and uncles are on the point of returning. On their arrival they will badly need my help. And then I will have to find them places. Afterwards I shall be free, if indeed that is possible, for up to now and for a long time I am everyone’s servant and at the disposition of the first-comer. This is apparently God’s will. I have little taste for this work; I do not know if I will not have to change my vocation. I yearn sometimes for solitude; and the religious Orders that limit themselves to the sanctification of the individuals who follow their Rule and attend to that of others only by prayer, begin to offer me a certain attraction. I would not be averse to spending in this fashion the rest of my days; in all truth, it would be a lot different from what I am doing now. Who knows! Perhaps I will finish up there! When I do not have before my eyes the extreme needs of my poor sinners, I will not be so upset at not going to help them. It could well be too that I am fooling myself that I am more useful to them than I am in reality. In the meantime, however, my time and my attention are theirs.”

Then speaking of his heavy workload, he explains: *“It cannot continue; always everything for others, nothing for oneself. In the midst of all this turmoil, I am alone. You are my only friend, I mean in the fullest sense of the word – for I am not lacking in those friends who are indeed kind and virtuous but who are lacking in many other respects. But what use are they? Can they soften a grief? Can one discourse with them on the good even that one would like to do? For what! All one would get of it would be compliments or discouragement. In the end, though with sadness, I go my way, placing my trust in God alone. Let us love him always more. Goodbye.”*

As of this date (September 1814) therefore, Eugene has not yet the idea of himself gathering some missionaries, since he offers some to Charles. But his friend being far away, Eugene feels alone; this is hard for him, spiritually too. In his retreat notes in December 1814, he writes: *“I must certainly not forget that what made me suffer most at the time I was ill was finding myself in a position where I was acting wholly autonomously, in such a way that I did not know if my works, which lacked the merit of obedience, were agreeable to God.”* (OW 15, 104) Thus, he thinks that when we obey we are sure to do the will of God. Having to decide for himself weighs on him. So what then is God’s will?

The following letter of October 28 (*Missions*, 1962, pp. 199-203) is similar to that of September. However Eugene wants more information on the Parisian projects. For the first time, he says that he is thinking about something similar for Provence. *“Our regions are without help, we must preach in Provençal. Joining you would mean abandoning them.”*

“... I am happy, my dear friend, to see your project going so well. It is up to us now to pray the Lord to give growth and success to this excellent work. Even though you were not able to do it yourself I wish you had charged one of your people to give me the smallest details of everything that happens on this matter; the rules that you follow, the kind of life you lead, etc. Apart from the keen interest that I take in the thing and that makes me want to track its progress, etc., it is unpleasant for me to hear news that I ignore about what you’re doing; no one should be better and earlier informed than me... The king gave you 150,000 francs for your first establishment. When will you form it, and

do you intend to establish it soon? You are then very numerous, since you expect to have two houses. I keenly desire to know your Constitutions, not that I think I will probably come to join you. I still do not know what God wants of me but am so resolved to do his will that as soon as it is known to me I will leave tomorrow for the moon, if I have to. I keep nothing secret from you. So I will tell you without ado that I am hesitating between two plans: either to go off and bury myself in some well regulated community of an Order that I have always loved; or do in my diocese exactly what you have done successfully in Paris. My illness has played havoc with me. I was feeling more inclined to the first plan because, to tell the truth, I was quite sick of living solely for others. It has come to pass that I have not had time to go to confession for three whole weeks. You can see for yourself how tied down I am. The second plan, however, seems to me more useful, given the dreadful plight to which the people have been reduced. Several considerations have held me back until now, the absolute lack of means being not the least drawback in this affair. Those who might be able to join me have nothing at all and I myself have little, for out of my pension of a thousand francs I have to pay my servant who, for that matter, will soon leave me and return to the Trappist monastery. That's a new inconvenience because I was counting on him for our mission house. The community, which in any event, only exists in my head, would be set up in my house. Mother, as far as I can see, would not be loath to yield to me, for the time being, the house by the city gate in which I live alone at present. There is enough room to lodge eight missionaries. We would subsequently look for a larger place, etc. I also have in mind some rules to propose because I insist that we live in a completely regular manner. That's as far as I have got. As you see, it has not progressed very far.

“Now, you will perhaps ask why, since I wish to be a missionary, I do not join you as well as the little band I could bring together. Were I to reply en gascon. [with a neat reply] I would tell you right away that it is because you did not try very hard to have me. Not that this is the real reason since I really think, considering what I mentioned in my last letter, that I am not in a position to be of much use to you. But what must be remembered is that our regions are without any help, that their people offer hopeful signs of being converted and must not therefore be abandoned. Yet abandon them we would if we joined you because

we alone, and not you, can help them. We have to speak in their own tongue in order to be understood by them. We have to preach in Provençal. Should we form a band, nothing would prevent us from affiliating with you if such a union would be for the best. I see no further than that. Despite all, a secret desire could draw me elsewhere.” Then Eugene asked what Charles was able to do about the requests he had made in previous letters, and about the rumors concerning the appointment of the next Archbishop of Aix.

In his letter of November 21, Eugene returns to the same themes (*Missions*, 1962 pp. 204-209). Reasons that can not be disregarded prevent him rowing with Forbin-Janson. *“For once, dear friend, I will not complain that your last letter was scarsa (small); it is, on the contrary, as I like them. The details are satisfactory, and I see with real consolation the great work that is being done. If you meet a few obstacles, unpleasantness, frustrations, the opposition even of those who, by state, should assist your efforts, I would consider the matter well advanced. This may happen. In the meantime, enjoy the calm to sail the boat. I would willingly row with you, except for the reasons that stop me; they are of a nature not to be despised. To those I had previously communicated to you there is now another one, which requires me to suspend any resolution in this regard until spring. My father and my uncles will return after 24 years in exile.”* Eugene then speaks of the possibility for his uncle to be a bishop, and the situation of Aix. *“Our diocese is in a pitiful state.”*

The interruption, or more likely the disappearance of the correspondence of the following eleven months deprives us of much information. The next letter in our possession is October 28, 1815, when the decisions are made. Eugene is now ready to gather the first Missionaries of Provence and buy part of the old Carmel in Aix. Fortunately Rey provides us with other information, including extracts from letters of his beloved Fr. Duclaux to Eugene. On August 24, from Mr. Duclaux: *“I would be delighted for our dear friend Charles if you could meet with him, because nobody knows him better than you and is able to talk to him easily; beseech Him to be more sedentary, to take time to study and not to engage in outside ministry until he has acquired all the knowledge the priesthood requires.”* (Rey I, p. 170) This wish was never answered.

And more precisely on December 1, in response to questions from Eugene: *“The organization Mr. Janson is starting is excellent in itself and will accomplish great good and you would do well, if you feel so attracted, to associate yourself with it when it is formed and made up of people capable of the good work that is its purpose, which is not yet the case. But in the meantime, you should continue the good work you have undertaken and especially take care of this congregation of young people that you have established and run, and in the free intervals do some missions.”* (Ibid.)

THE YOUTH CONGREGATION

We have focused on what we thought was critical in this period, the relationship between Eugene and Charles. However, Eugene spent most of his time for the Congregation of Youth, which gathered increasingly more young people. The *Diary* (OW 16) presents us some remarkable events.

On February 20, 1815 it notes: *“The number of congregants (postulants) has considerably increased, and among those who present themselves there are many older ones.”* Accordingly, a special section was established for those older than 18. This is an important change for the image of the Congregation, which had hitherto admitted only secondary school teenagers. Also mentioned is the admission of Paul Magallon, the future restorer in France of the Brothers of St. John of God, who was at the time searching for his future.

As the chapel at the Enclos hardly allowed meetings in winter, the Congregation received the hospitality of the Valbelle Mansion on the Cours. Beginning in July (OW 16, 147), adoration of the Blessed Sacrament was begun. *“There will always be three congregants in adoration before the Blessed Sacrament on Sundays and Thursdays... They will relieve each other every half-hour in the order prescribed by the list to be placed at the chapel door.”*

The *Diary* mentions some expulsions. Here is what is said about Casimir Pierre Jacques Topin (OW 16, 155): *“It was proved on his own admission that in defiance of Christian laws and of the regulation of the Congregation, he indulged in visits to the theatre. This single charge*

was enough for the aforesaid Casimir Jacques Topin to be unanimously expelled from the Congregation.”

The *Diary* speaks at length of the illness and death of Victor Antoine Chabot, who was about 13 years old. “*The charity of the Congregation has in this sad circumstance been equal to its duties. Like a tender mother she has neglected nothing to help with all her power the dear son whom she formed in piety.*”

But the major event for the Congregation was the approval given by the pope. Here’s how the *Diary* presents this (OW 16, 148-149). In September 1814, “*As the number of congregants was increasing every day, and piety was making tangible progress among them, the Reverend Director had the idea of consolidating still more the good done in the Association, and encouraging those who belonged to it in the practice of virtue, by petitioning the Sovereign Pontiff to erect this worthy society by his apostolic authority into a Congregation, and to grant it a certain number of partial and even plenary indulgences.*” From the text of the petition we note this: “*Charles Joseph Eugene de Mazenod, priest, having sorrowfully discerned that by a deplorable effect of the baneful influence of philosophism the Christian faith was in danger of perishing in France, conceived the plan of combating with all his strength such a frightful disorder. To succeed in this enterprise, he formed a Congregation composed of young men to whom he gave the necessary means to keep themselves in the fear of the Lord, to know and practise virtue.*” Rome’s response was positive, indulgences were granted for thirty years and the Ordinary was permitted to erect the Congregation... The *Diary* adds: “*We resolved to have ourselves erected by the Ordinary according to the tenor of the rescript, at least verbally, pending further steps to obtain erection by the Holy See directly and without intermediary.*” One may wonder about the absence of the diocese in the petition, and the desire to be erected directly by Rome...

November 21, “*day on which we celebrate in the diocese the feast of the Immaculate Conception*” was the day chosen for the installation of the Congregation. It is said that “*All previously received members having today renewed their consecration, and their reception being legally in force only from today when it has been done in virtue of the pontifical rescript, they will date from this day their definitive entry into the Congregation.*” (OW 16, 152) It was truly a new beginning.

The text of the Act of Consecration made by the youth may be found in Appendix 1.

THE DECEMBER 1814 RETREAT

In December 1814, Eugene de Mazenod retires to the major seminary for his annual retreat. The *Diary of the Congregation* notes that on the 16th and 19th of December, the director and treasurer of the seminary replaced him for the Mass, and the instruction (OW 16, 153). Eugene's retreat notes have been published in OW 15, 77-108.

Eugene begins with a judgment on the past year and describes the state of his soul. *“How badly I needed this retreat! I seem to have forgotten this maxim of the author of the Imitation. It is evident to me that in working for others. I have been too forgetful of myself. This retreat will be particularly aimed at making good the resulting harm to my soul and at taking wise measures to avoid this abuse in the future. The prisoners of war, the illness they gave me, the foundation, the promotion of the youth congregation, all have played their part this year to take me abroad, and the cares that these works have necessarily entailed, the difficulties that had to be overcome, the obstacles, the oppositions that it has been necessary to combat have been the reason that I have quite lost the interior spirit, so that I have often acted on the purely human level, and very imperfectly at that... Instead of reposing all my trust in prayer for the success of the good I wanted to do, how many times have I not had recourse to other weapons? My self-love, wounded when I met with obstacles, didn't it lead me to commit many faults, grumbling, poking fun, showing contempt towards people who doubtless were in the wrong for not supporting me but even so were deserving of respect on account of their priestly character... It would be foolishness to do nothing, I even think when reflecting how the Saints acted that one must give generously of oneself, but at the same time it would be less wise not to make of prayer ... one's principal resource.”*

Once more in this retreat I shall have to lay down an iron rule for my use of time. I acknowledge that I have let myself wander too easily from the order I laid down for myself. No one will deny that it is good to be always ready to serve one's neighbour; but this year this service has been a veritable slavery, and I am much to blame for it. Complacency

pushed too far degenerates into weakness, and its consequences are unfortunate in the extreme, as they end up leading one into time-wasting. I must fix for myself a rule of conduct with my young people. Work on the virtue of gentleness, on mortification in the use of my tongue when I am crossed, on humility, self-love, etc., ... in a word leave no stone unturned, for I need reformation in everything.”

It is during this retreat and on the first day that he mentions his encounter with Christ, “*at the sight of the cross one Good Friday*”. On the fifth day while meditating on the Kingdom of Jesus Christ: “*This generous Prince watched out to save me, he ambushed me at the moment my thoughts were far from him, and binding me once again more by the bonds of his love than those of his justice, he brought me back to his camp... But this time it was for ever, yes for ever, for ever!*”

We know that these retreat notes are in a literary genre common at the time that is very difficult to interpret. In 1814, the notes stop at the 7th day. We do not know whether he ended his retreat or just stopped making notes for the rest of it. We single out two particularly strong sentences. “*To work for the salvation of souls, I must be holy, very holy... If I want to be like Jesus Christ in glory, I must first resemble him in his humiliations and sufferings, like Jesus crucified; let us try therefore to conform in all I do to this divine model.*”

NEW ENTREATIES FROM FORBIN JANSON

From the first days of 1815, writes Rey, Eugene receives new and stronger entreaties from Charles. The letter is dated January 11 (Rey I, pp. 172-173). The formal style [using the French honorific ‘vous’ for ‘you’] is surprising. Is this due to Fr. Rey? It is surprising that Forbin-Janson announces that the Missionaries of France will make a foundation in Aix and Marseilles, where he would readily see Eugene as superior. “*Very dear friend and beloved brother in Christ, I sent you a small package containing the abstract of the Rules and Statutes of our Society, which will be approved by the Government. I have attached a summary of my audience with the King and the draft of the Petition that I will submit to him. I saw Fr. Guigou. I spoke to him favorably about you. I was happy with his appreciation of our work. Now he gives me a subject, Mr. Deluy, and he promised to send us two or three others to be*

trained in Paris. That is how we should understand our work. It is not a local work: it must extend throughout France and soon we will make a foundation in Aix. But we need unity and the subjects must assume our spirit in our Mother House.

“The statutes and rules that you have in hand were composed by MM. Frayssinous, Astros, Rauzan, Duclaux, etc; Messrs. Montagne, Boyer and others have seen them and consider them very wise and good. They believe that this work is the most important of all. So try to influence Mr. Vicar General Beylot in our favor so that he sends us some subjects whom you recognize as fit for our society. It will be easier now than with a new archbishop.

“I’ve always believed that if your likes or family duties were keeping you in Provence, you would make an excellent superior for the establishment in Aix and Marseilles. Fr. Duclaux thinks so. Pray and examine yourself. But in the meantime do not think that you can do anything more pleasing to God than to help us in providing our house with good subjects. In a fortnight or three weeks we will enter into community and we already have a dozen men, really distinguished by their talents and piety. We also hope for twenty or so very good subjects later this year. This is the success that the Lord grants us. Do not think, however, that the problems and annoyances are lacking... But we are making progress... Vale in Christo.”

Forbin Janson therefore continues to call on Eugene. The missionary community that is being formed brings together priests whom Eugene knows and respects. Several times in his writings Eugene explains that he tends to prefer joining the projects of others, he does not see himself taking initiatives, let alone the responsibility of a group... On the other hand, he seems disappointed by what he calls the passivity of his father and uncles, who do not seem to want to move. Several indications suggest that he feels isolated in Aix, that he is beginning to encounter opposition from the clergy. He feels very overworked and wonders if God is not calling him to the monastic life, where the only concern would be his personal sanctification...

Following Forbin Janson’s letter, Fr. Rey adds this long comment: *“How did Father de Mazenod resist the attractive proposals of his dear friend? Is not the society being organized the realization of his apostolic aspirations? To evangelize the whole of France, the King’s pro-*

tection, the support enjoyed by the Abbé de Janson from the Abbé de Montesquiou, Minister of the Interior, who promised legal recognition of the new society, the resources assured to the nascent work, in a word, all the guarantees of a bright and happy future from all points of view, natural and supernatural, what more was needed to capture the sensitive and generous heart of Father de Mazenod? We believe that it is the abundance of resources, the prospect of so much success and so many benefits that scared the Provencal missionary. He knew the enthusiastic imagination of his friend, the brilliant colors in which Mr. Janson knew how to paint the objects of his holy ambitious dreams. Their former relationship inspired him with a discreet reserve and he answered the ardent organizer of the Missionaries of France that his decision had not yet been made and that his work kept him absolutely in his hometown.” On the one hand, there is *enthusiastic imagination*, and *holy ambitious dreams*, on the other *discreet reserve*. Fr. Rey seems to express well Eugene’s hesitation, through which the decision to start a separate society ripens. He thus launches himself into an adventure which was quite foreign to his temperament.

THE HUNDRED DAYS CALLS EVERYTHING INTO QUESTION

A reliable testimony originating in Aix says that Eugene had decided to make a trip to Paris. We can guess for what purpose... It is then that the political landscape is very unexpectedly upset again. Napoleon escapes from his exile on the island of Elba, and on March 1, 1815, lands near Cannes. On March 20, he is welcomed triumphantly in Paris. The king flees in haste to Belgium. The whole of French and even European society is in turmoil. What to expect? What will be the consequences for those who believed more or less in the restoration of the *old regime*, including the status of the Church? Napoleon does not hide his intentions: “*I have come to rescue Frenchmen from the slavery into which the priests and nobles want to plunge them...*” (Cited by Leflon II, p. 23) In fact, all of Europe unites again against Napoleon. On June 18, he is defeated at Waterloo. On the 22nd, he abdicates a second time and is exiled to St. Helena. It lasted only one hundred days. July 8, Louis XVIII returns to Paris.

As these events begin to unfold, Rauzan, Forbin-Janson and their companions are in full mission at Beauvais; it is even their first mission. Father Rauzan, claiming that he is the king's chaplain, follows Louis XVIII to Belgium. Forbin-Janson, we know not why or how, makes himself the Chaplain General of the Royal Army formed in the Vendée to fight Napoleon. He accompanies the soldiers following the Duke of Angouleme, nephew of Louis XVIII, and his wife, the daughter of Louis XVI. In the *Souvenirs inédits d'un conspirateur*, Ferdinand de Bertier writes: "*Some distance from Agen, Father Janson expressed a desire to say Mass. This would not delay us much, he assured me. I also wanted to hear him, because it was Sunday. Mr. Janson, dressed like an English gentleman, was wearing a green hunting coat with big white buttons, a red waistcoat, and tight leather breeches and boots. He commented that it would not be suitable for him to make his entrance into the town where we were going to stop, intending to say Mass in such a suit. In a wink he stripped off his worldly clothes and donned his clerical garb, cassock, rabat, cap, black from head to toe. When the coachman came to receive his fare and open the door for us, he jumped back almost in fright at seeing his English dandy transformed into a cleric; it seemed to him like some kind of diabolical operation.*" The anecdote is about the only one we have about Forbin-Janson, but it reveals well his character. The expedition against Napoleon failed near Lyons. Charles, pursued by the emissaries of Napoleon, fled to Belgium.

Eugene was preparing to preach a mission in Grans, where his uncle Roze-Joannis was mayor. Everything is called into question by the Hundred Days. His letters to his father tell us of his pessimism: "*What a nation we are! Along with faith, it has lost all sense of honour, probity, etc. ... What a despicable people!*" (March 26, 1815). He also expresses his hope: "*My trust in Providence is unlimited.*" He writes to the Duke of Angoulême to offer his services, which he explains to his father: "*Since I cannot serve my King with the sword, I feel obligated to serve him with every means furnished me by my ministry... Within a month we shall have beaten and punished all our enemies, who are also the enemies of honour, public welfare, and religion.*" And with much bragging in July he writes: "*I can say with just complacency that I was the most fearless royalist in my native city... But I will never try to make capital of that. I was simply performing a sacred duty. ... I did it, you*

might say, instinctively... I am a royalist, in the same way that I am a Catholic; by principle." (July 7) Eugene continues this letter wishing for an exemplary punishment for such "*crimes*" and not the "*misplaced clemency, an outrage to public morale*" that Louis XVIII had shown upon his first return. (Cf. Leflon II, pp. 19-24)

It seems that Eugene limited himself to that. In this time of crisis, he did not hide his opinions, a total loyalty to the legitimate sovereign and the white flag, as well as a respect for the legitimate ecclesiastical authority, the vicar general Guigou who was challenged by the opposing clan. But as he wrote in his *Mémoires* (quoted in Rambert I, pp. 161-163.): "*My attention was directed solely to the deplorable state of our degenerate Christians... During my seminary, I maintained the thought of making myself as useful as I could for the Church our mother, for which the Lord gave me the grace to always have a filial affection. The neglected state in which I saw her was one of the determining reasons for my entry into the priesthood...*" It was to win back to the gospel the most abandoned souls. The youth of Aix (they are now a hundred) and the prospect of uniting with others to preach missions occupied him completely.

SUMMER AND FALL OF 1815

We would like to know more about the details of the steps that led Eugene to his decision to found the Missionaries of Provence. But we are faced with an almost complete absence of documents. The correspondence with Forbin Janson was either interrupted or has been lost. And there are few other significant letters.

Likewise, the *Diary of the Youth Congregation* is not very detailed for this period, Eugene probably having other concerns than that of keeping the *Diary* for the youth. However, we learn that at school, those who "*in all classes from rhetoric to the sixth*" won the Award for Excellence were all members of the Congregation. When Bishop de Bausset, future Archbishop of Aix, came to give the sacrament of confirmation in the Congregation's chapel, he stressed "*the thanks they owed to God for having given them the grace of calling them into such a society, setting out for them and having them note what the Rev. Director is striving to do for their happiness and sanctification. He strongly stressed*

that they should have an unlimited trust in him and a more than filial love.” (OW 16, 167).

On September 17, the *Diary* mentions Brother Maur. This is the first time, and it makes us wonder. Maur will leave Aix the next day for the Port du Salut Trappist monastery in Mayenne. The *Diary* notes that “*he had the happiness of following all of the exercises [of the Congregation] since its establishment, that he had edified with his angelic fervour; that he had even served with remarkable zeal, without joining and becoming a member of it; if he has put it off until now to make this request, it is as a result of his profound humility.*” Fr. Director then pointed out to the congregants, “*all the advantages they were going to derive from the communion of prayers and merits which was henceforth established between them...*” (OW 16, 166).

Two letters to his father give us some interesting insights on Eugene and the situation he faces. The first letter is August 8: “*When the malice of men, aided by all that is most refined among the infernal spirits, manages to thwart my plans by upsetting everything around me, I try to find within my character the resources against this misfortune; and far from getting discouraged, by a special grace of God, I redouble my means, and the energy of my soul increases in proportion to the danger. It seems that I strengthen myself with all the courage that abandons most of those around me, or who I meet on my way. I suspected that; I had a secret sense of those inner resources that Providence had given me, and that blossom as needed, but I have become convinced of them in the misfortunes that come to overwhelm us, and of which we are still feeling the sad effects. I would almost say that I was the only one standing in the middle of a bent multitude, crushed under the weight of circumstances that were really disastrous ...*” In the letter of September 15, speaking of Bishop Bausset’s visit (OW 15, 112): “*there is talk that he could become archbishop of Aix. But when are we going to show an interest in religion? We seem to think there is all the time in the world. What clergy we are getting today! Not a man of note among them; we are reduced to the poorest, most wretched, most abject in society. One can only hope that they will make up by their virtue what they lack in other departments, but they will need a lot of it.*”

The *Register of Admission to the Novitiate*, published in *Missions* 1952, p. 7-34 has this brief phrase in the formula of Charles Joseph Eu-

gene de Mazenod: “*We cast the foundations of the Society of the Missionaries of Provence in Aix, October 2 in the year 1815.*” Considering everything, this date is regarded as the turning point, the opening of a new stage, that of working as a group. This means that in a few weeks, Eugene had obtained the consent of the diocesan authorities; that he had sought and soon acquired the needed space, and of course the necessary financing, and that he had established meaningful contact with several priests of the diocese. The first letter to Tempier is dated October 9. As he will explain to Forbin Janson, it took “*like a strong impulse*” to do this. The latter could no longer say that he “*had lead in his pants*”.

This research on Eugene’s return to Aix, his three years of trial and error, finds its first crowning achievement. It will now no longer continue with Eugene alone, but with the small group of Missionaries of Provence.

1812 TO 1815

In October 1812, upon his arrival in Aix, Father de Mazenod wanted to keep his freedom, to better discern what God wanted of him. The intention to put himself totally at the service of the Church, whose condition was deplorable, was clear. He had to find a place and a way to serve. With the Lenten sermons at the Madeleine, Eugene felt the need to address the ordinary Provençal people in their language. The youth of Aix monopolize him entirely, and his illness showed him that if he was alone, there was no hope of lasting. He learned that the return of his father and uncles remained very uncertain, but could only be achieved if he stayed in Provence. He also understood that collaboration with Forbin Janson was strewn with difficulties. It took him “*like a strong impulse,*” confirmed by the diocesan authorities, to in turn take it upon himself to start a group of missionaries for Provence. Who knows if those whom he hoped to count on would not let themselves be tempted by the Paris group, whose reputation was beginning to spread...

The letter to Tempier is on October 9, 1815: “*You are necessary for the work that the Lord has inspired us to undertake...*” The request to the Capitular Vicars General of Aix is the first joint letter, dated January 25, 1816: The undersigned priests: “*deeply moved by the deplorable situation of the small towns and villages of Provence that have*

almost completely lost the faith... convinced that missions are the only means... request from you the authorization to come together at Aix in the old house of the Carmelites.”

Joining together with others was a decisive turning point for Eugene de Mazenod! The word conversion seems the most appropriate, a conversion that opens up a new way of life for himself and for thousands of disciples who will come together in the service of the Gospel. What remains is to reflect on what it means to found, to live inspired by the choices that were those of Eugene de Mazenod and his first companions. That is the call to us also today.

Chapter 3

FOUNDING THE MISSIONARIES OF PROVENCE 1815-1816

TO HELP THE CHURCH IN DISTRESS

The Missionaries of Provence have their origin in the shock felt by some priests before the sad state of the Church, compounded by the shortcomings of the clergy. *“The sight of these evils has so touched the hearts of certain priests...”* The early documents affirm this strongly. Eugene de Mazenod highlights it in the Preface to our Constitutions, which were finalized in 1826. Wanting to call others to share his project, he explains in a few striking sound bites how some priests have come to together to form the community of the Missionaries of Provence, the future Oblates of Mary Immaculate.

This shock is expressed already in 1808 in Eugene’s letters to his mother. Telling her of his decision to enter the seminary he writes: *“What the Lord wants of me... is that I devote myself especially to his service and try to reawaken the faith that is becoming extinct amongst the poor; in a word, that I make myself available to carry out any orders he may wish to give me for his glory and the salvation of souls he has redeemed by his precious blood...”* (June 29, 1808, OW 14, 56) Then in response to Madame de Mazenod’s objections: *“Do you believe that a man strongly moved by God’s spirit to imitate J.C. in his active life of teaching his divine doctrine..., do you believe, I say, that such a man who had a clear vision of the needs of the Church and who, despite the attraction God gives him to work at helping her, and other signs of His will, yet opted to remain with his arms stretched out wide, sighing softly to himself about all these evils, but not raising a finger to awaken even in the least degree men’s hardened hearts, would rest in all good conscience?”* (April 6, 1809, OW 14, 117)

When beginning the *Diary of the Youth Congregation of Aix*, Eugene describes at length the evils afflicting the Church, especially the youth. It is like a cry: “*Must one, a sad spectator of this deluge of evil, be content to bemoan it in silence without supplying any remedy? Certainly not... The seducer himself [Napoleon] felt he could succeed in corrupting France only by perverting the youth; it is towards them that he directs all his efforts. Very well, it will also be upon the youth that I will work...*” (April 25, 1813, OW 16, 134) Then in September 1814 in the Petition to the Sovereign Pontiff for the approbation of the Youth Congregation: “*Charles Joseph Eugene de Mazenod, priest, having sorrowfully discerned that by a deplorable effect of the baneful influence of philosophism the Christian faith was in danger of perishing in France, conceived the plan of combating with all his strength such a frightful disorder. To succeed in this enterprise, he formed a Congregation composed of young men...*” (OW 16, 148-149).

A year later there is the first letter to Tempier. “*Read this letter at the foot of your crucifix with a mind to heed only God and what is demanded in the interests of his glory and of the salvation of souls from a priest like yourself... Dwell deeply on the plight of our country people, their religious situation, and the apostasy that daily spreads wider with dreadfully ravaging effects. Look at the feebleness of the means employed to date to oppose this flood of evil; ask your heart what it fain would do to counter these disasters and then reply to my letter...*” (October 9, 1815, OW 6, 6)

The same approach guides the request to the Capitular Vicars General of Aix dated January 25, 1816 (OW 13, 2), the first official document of the Missionaries of Provence, drawn up in community and signed by all. “*The undersigned priests, deeply moved by the deplorable situation of the small towns and villages of Provence that have almost completely lost the faith, knowing from experience that the callousness or indifference of these people renders the ordinary help supplied by your concern for their salvation insufficient and even useless... have the honour of requesting from you the authorization to come together... convinced that missions are the only means by which these people who have gone astray can be brought out of their degradation...*”

Let us recall here this note from a letter of Eugene to his companions in July 1816: “*I wish you to change the end of our litanies; instead*

of saying Jesus sacerdos, we must say Christe salvator. That is the aspect under which we ought to contemplate our divine Master.” (OW 6, 20). Eugene de Mazenod asked the missionaries to contemplate in Christ especially the One who saves. The people are in danger of death, Jesus is there as Savior. He can not save unless some others commit themselves with him to this task. The missionaries are thus the collaborators of the Christ who saves.

Two years later, the entire project will find its formulation in the Constitutions of the Missionaries of Provence.

In his Commentary on the Constitutions Fr. Jetté calls our attention to the first work published by Félicité de Lamennais while he was still a layman. This work, *Réflexions sur l'état de l'Eglise en France* [Reflections on the State of the Church in France] was published in 1808 and soon banned by Napoleon's censorship. Everything suggests that Eugene had knowledge of it at Saint Sulpice and was inspired by it.

Let's quote some passages: *“Now, if we compare the scattered traits of this grim picture, and we consider the totality of these vast destructive causes, the ever-increasing advances of disbelief, the terrible corruption of morals which resulted from it, the overthrow of all religious and social principles, the weakening of ecclesiastical discipline, the dying faith in the heart of the people, and the zeal of the pastors that has cooled and almost become extinct, everywhere a spirit of independence and rebellion...”* *“Religion is disappearing everyday in France: and this sacred deposit, so carefully preserved by our ancestors for fourteen centuries, will perish in our hands and perish forever, if Providence by a miracle that we can only expect from her does not revive in the pastors and in the people that ancient spirit of zeal, of which today we can find only some sparks...”* *“If anything could reawaken the faith in these hearts which are, alas, so listless, it would certainly be missions... What a field for cultivation! What a harvest to be brought in! One must have witnessed the fruits of sanctification that a few truly apostolic men can produce to appreciate how powerful this means is... We bemoan this multitude of disorders, and it seems that we have done everything when we have moaned... Now, what help would not the congregations be in this respect, as in many others? ... The congregations retain the good that the missions did...”* The texts cited are from the 1819 edition, pp. 70, 109-110, 139-141.

In France, the idea of a group of priests specialized in parish missions was Vincent de Paul's idea. His heart was also touched by the discovery of the sad state of the Church. Thus he drew up the "*Contrat de fondation de la Congrégation de la Mission*" [Contract for the Foundation of the Congregation of the Mission], which dates from 1625. "*The poor people of the countryside still remain abandoned... This could be remedied by the pious association of some ecclesiastics... dedicated purely and entirely to the salvation of the poor people, going from village to village to preach, teach, exhort and catechize these poor people and bringing them all to make a good general confession of their entire past life...*" The Lazarists, the Capuchins and the Jesuits among others were the great missionaries in the period before the Revolution. In Italy, where Eugene lived for ten years, we must at least mention Alphonsus de Liguori and Leonard of Port Maurice, to whom the Missionaries of Provence will refer.

The remarkable work of the French historian and academic Louis Chatellier, *La Religion des Pauvres* [The Religion of the Poor] (Aubier, Paris, 1993), is very interesting on this topic. His study of the history of Catholicism in Europe beginning with the seventeenth century led him to affirm that the *missionaries* (parish missions) are the ones who *changed the direction of religion* by making it *the people's religion*. "*Thus was formed the religion of the poor, from which, in large part, contemporary Catholicism was born.*"

At the end of the Revolution, the idea of missions is taken up again by Cardinal Fesch, Archbishop of Lyons and uncle of the Emperor. Already in 1806 he was thinking about a community of missionaries for all of France. He said he was "*distressed at the shortage of evangelical workers for the progress of religion in France.*" "*My project is vast; it is a house for internal Missions, which become all the more necessary for the Church of France that can no longer find within itself the former means that God had established for the regeneration of principles and morals.*" To preach these missions he founded a house called the Carthusians [Chartreux], with Mr. Rauzan, the future superior of the Missionaries of France, as director.

Our Oblate archives in Marseilles have a very old copy of the *Règlement pour les Missions* [Rule for the Missions] that was published the same year, 1805, by the Archbishop of Aix, Mgr Champion de Cicé.

In the diocese, “*various bands of missionaries will be formed according to the needs of the places and the number of priests needed,*” says Article 1. This is in order “*to provide the dear people of our diocese with the advantage of spiritual missions from which the faithful have always drawn much benefit...*” Fr. Charles Bretenièrre, whom Eugene de Mazenod knew well long before entering the seminary, was put in charge. It seems that the Abbé Guigou, future vicar general, had preached missions within this framework. It is certain that Fr. Mie, a future Missionary of Provence, also had. The ban by Napoleon in 1809 interrupted these efforts. This was because the missionaries were beyond the control of the administration.

But the fall of Napoleon and the return of the Bourbons to the throne of France in 1814 opened a new period in political and social life as well as in the life of the Church. There is first a period characterized by peace: an end after more than twenty years to the endless wars and conscription. For the Church, the period that opens is believed to be a time of newfound harmony (“the throne and the altar”). After the regimes of persecutors, the Church of France found “the very Christian King.” It is a time of freedom, and therefore of possible creativity. In just a few years, the seminaries will be filled; dozens of new congregations will be founded. These are local initiatives, creativity rooted in a place. The Missionaries of France are virtually alone in thinking of the whole of France. The local level, or at least diocesan, is the rule for almost all projects. Each bishop thinks of his diocese, where everything is to be rebuilt. Consequently, he wants to be master in his own house. Agreements between bishops are only occasional and fragile. A fortiori prospects for coordination at the national level are then unthinkable in a France that is not very united and where communications are very slow.

But build according to what models? In the political sphere, some consider the previous 25 years as a painful and even diabolical parenthesis, they look forward to only one thing, a return to the Ancien Régime. The word Restoration is immediately accepted, and it will often seem like a step backwards. In the Church, the trend is often similar. Eugene de Mazenod looks back to the former institutes. A typical example is the presentation he makes of them in the *Constitutions of the Missionaries of Provence* (1818). In the chapter on *the end of the Insti-*

tute he mentions first of all “*preaching the Word of God to the people.*” Immediately after, paragraph 2 is entitled: “*To supply for the absence of religious bodies.*” “*The end of this group is to supply as much as possible for the lack of so many beautiful institutions that have disappeared since the Revolution and have left a terrible void... That is why they will try to revive in themselves the piety and fervor of the religious Orders destroyed in France by the Revolution; they will endeavor to follow their virtues as well as their ministry...*” The reference to the ancient Orders will come back more or less frequently. However, Eugene de Mazenod does not seek to join a former Order like the Jesuits or the Capuchins for example, which might be revived. On a modest level he does something new, formulating in new terms the tasks and rules of life. There will therefore be much trial and error.

For other institutes the search for identity and the ensuing disruptions, the drafting and approval of the Constitutions will require decades... That the Missionaries of Provence were able find their identity and stability in just over ten years (between October 1815, date of the founding, and July 1826, the commitment of all according to the Constitutions approved by Rome) is remarkable. The personality of Eugene has much to do with it: firmness of principles and plans, local roots, leadership more than affirmed and also a decided modesty. The Constitutions of 1826 referred to “*This little Congregation*”. This text was maintained until 1966.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE PROJECT

Before going into the details of the steps leading up to the founding, it is good to transcribe some major documents that tell us about Eugene’s state of mind in these moments of decision.

It will be recalled that in June 1814, soon after the King’s return, Charles de Forbin Janson went to Rome to consult Pius VII about what he ought to do. The answer was: “*In France, we must have especially missions for the people and retreats for the clergy...*” Already on October 28, 1814, in a letter to Forbin Janson (OW 6, 2), Eugene de Mazenod tells him of a fairly specific project. “*I still do not know what God wants of me but I am so resolved to do his will that as soon as it is known to me I will leave tomorrow for the moon, if I have to. I keep*

nothing secret from you. So I will tell you without ado that I am hesitating between two plans: either to go off and bury myself in some well regulated community of an Order that I have always loved; or do in my diocese exactly what you have done successfully at Paris. My illness has played havoc with me. I was feeling more inclined to the first plan because, to tell the truth, I was quite sick of living solely for others. It has come to pass that I have not had time to go to confession for three whole weeks. You can see for yourself how tied down I am. The second plan, however, seems to me more useful, given the dreadful plight to which the people have been reduced. Several considerations have held me back until now, the absolute lack of means being not the least drawback in this affair. Those who might be able to join me have nothing at all and I myself have little for, out of my pension of a thousand francs, I have to pay my servant who, for that matter, will soon leave me and return to the Trappist monastery. That's a new inconvenience because I was counting on him for our mission house. The community, which in any event, only exists in my head, would be set up in my house. Mother, as far as I can see, would not be loath to yield to me, for the time being, the house by the city gate in which I live alone at present. There is enough room to lodge eight missionaries. We would subsequently look for a larger place, etc. I also have in mind some rules to propose for I insist that we live in a completely regular manner. That's as far as I have got. As you see, it has not progressed very far." In one year, the project will have matured well.

Bishop Bausset had been appointed Archbishop of Aix in August 1817. For various reasons, both personal and administrative, he was not installed until November 13, 1819. He knew Eugene de Mazenod but had a rather ambivalent attitude towards him. One month after his installation, on December 16, Eugene writes to tell him the story of the origins of the Missionaries of Provence (OW 13, 35-37). This letter is worth quoting almost in its entirety.

Your Grace, during the course of the year 1815, the Abbés de Janson and Rauzan got together to respond to the Holy Father's views: the Pope wanted missions to be given in France. These gentlemen, counting on my good will, requested me to join them in that holy work. Their insistence was so pressing and the reasons they presented so conclusive that I could not but go along with their idea.

It was with great sorrow, however, that I saw myself almost forced to leave my diocese. From the time that I entered the clerical state, I had in my mind consecrated myself to its service. When I had the happiness of being made a priest, I persevered in that same intention and refused the gracious offers of the Bishop of Amiens who wanted to keep me close to himself as his Vicar General; I followed the attraction which inclined me to work in my own diocese. So it would cost me dearly to leave it and possibly never return.

I was in that state of perplexity when the Lord inspired me with the plan of establishing a society of missionaries at Aix who, as a priority, would undertake to evangelize the poor country people, even in the smallest Provençal hamlets. I shared my idea with the Vicars General who approved it; and immediately I started to put the plan in motion by setting down the foundation of this little society which has worked incessantly for five years for the conversion of souls with a success that is due to God alone and can be regarded as miraculous.

From that time on I could reply to the gentlemen de Janson and Rauzan that it was impossible for me to accede to their invitation because the needs of my own diocese were claiming my services. With some zealous companions I was going to start immediately that same ministry to which they had wanted to recruit me, ministry among the poor abandoned souls all around us. These gentlemen made another attempt, for they thought that I could be of some use to their society. They have never given up asking me to join them, always presenting very good reasons. These reasons do not answer my main argument which is based on the extreme needs of a diocese destitute of priests and full of unlettered poor people who cannot be helped except by missionaries from their own people, who speak the same language and, if need be, are ready to return to them more than once a year to solidify the work of their conversion. So, I persisted in my first plan.

I cannot congratulate myself enough on the interest and confidence that I was shown by the Vicars General on the occasion of this establishment. They took this work under their protection and they continually defended it as enlightened administrators against all the efforts that Satan did not fail to apply and destroy it. I made it a point of principle to submit to these gentlemen that plan that I had conceived in order to

render the service of the missionaries more useful to the diocese. They approved it and it was immediately put into action.

*I took it upon myself to acquire at my own expense the locale which was to serve as a dwelling place for the new community. But the diocese would have to rightfully furnish the missionaries' upkeep. It was determined that this payment would be taken from vacant rectories of vicarial posts, in default of other means, which could have been found in the funds from the revenue of chairs of which the surplus could not have been more fittingly used. The Vicars General preferred to promise me what the deceased M. de Cicé called a *custodi nos* for each missionary, that is, the salary destined for the rector of a vacant parish: but I don't know by what chance, that arrangement was never carried out. I attribute this oversight to the conviction that the Vicars General possibly entertained that I could find the means to support the missionaries in some other way and that it would be that much of a saving for the diocese. At least I thought I understood it that way, and far from taking this in bad humor, I smiled at the thought and to reply to the secret intention that I attributed to them, I did in fact do all that I could to assist the diocese. But now our resources are all dried up..."* The letter continues requesting some help from the diocese. He will also need six bursaries for the novices who will in any event be at the service of the diocese.

We need not be surprised that in a letter to the recently installed archbishop, Eugene de Mazenod stresses the choice he made to serve the diocese of Aix, and the reference to the Vicars General (even if the foundation of Notre Dame du Laus the previous year is not mentioned...). This letter is the most detailed in our possession concerning financial matters and the recourse to the diocese. As the archbishop had made contact with the community on the eve of his installation (See OW 6, 62, note 22), we can understand that he hardly alludes to the part played by his companions. Four years after the foundation, the story remains the same.

Eugene's letter to his friend Charles Oct. 23, 1815 (OW 6, 8-9) obviously has a much more personal tone. We will quote from it at length below. Rambert (I, pp. 161-164) published what he calls the "*Mémoire justificatif de Mgr de Mazenod*". This document has not been preserved and it is very difficult to date (The text was probably reworked

after 1844). This review by the Founder himself, though long after the events, is still interesting. *“... It was only upon coming out of the great crisis in the Church (under the Empire) and the return of our legitimate princes, that we could conceive the hope of fulfilling for the salvation of the French some of the ideas that we had constantly nurtured in our heart... The field was vast and the brambles were not wanting... The Lord raised up a few men whom he filled with zeal for the salvation of souls, and a vehement desire to bring them back into the fold of the head of the household. I tried to follow in their footsteps and the blessings that God has poured out on our ministry, and later the formal approval that the Church has given to our small Congregation, give me the hope that we have responded to our vocation by dedicating ourselves as we have for the greater glory of God, the service of the Church, the sanctification of the most abandoned souls, and the education and the reform of the clergy...”*

“Since my return to France (after the emigration), I was deeply saddened to see the service of the altar disdained, since the Church had no rich stipends to offer the sacrilegious greed of the more or less distinguished families in the world...” Eugene then refers to his choice of the ecclesiastical life, then the decisive word of the Pope to Forbin Janson, and finally to his first commitments in Aix (the youth, prisoners, sermons in Provençal...). *“All these considerations persuaded me that I should not leave our southern provinces and that my ministry would be more useful here than elsewhere...”*

“It was in 1815 that I laid down the first foundations of our little society. My main purpose was to evangelize the poor, the prisoners and the children. I needed some dedicated companions who could share the ideas that God was inspiring in me. We were to devote ourselves to the apostolic ministry, so we needed selfless men who were willing to walk in the footsteps of the apostles in the practice of the evangelical counsels; I could not imagine it possible to do the good that I proposed under any other conditions. It was not easy to find men of this calibre, I did not know any.” Then Eugene de Mazenod says that it was Icard, whose name he omits, who told him of Tempier, Mie and Deblieu...

In a conference to the Union of Superiors General in 1974, Fr. Arupe, Superior General of the Jesuits, made this enlightening reflection. *“History is the teacher of life. It is interesting to observe how and in*

what circumstances the various religious institutes were born, because we can draw important lessons for ourselves vis-à-vis the future. Although the origins of each institute are different, the overall dynamic could be reduced, it seems, to three key elements. The first is to do a specific service for the Church and humanity in a given period of history. The second is characterized by the aspect of conflict that has given birth to some institutes: conflicts not only with the secular society of their time, but also with the religious society, including its higher authorities who were not always open to the prophetic and charismatic spirit of the founders. Finally, the third element is the presence of a man or a group moved by the Holy Spirit and completely docile to its action, who bring their work to completion because of the charism received.” It is in this light that we will consider successively the various aspects of the founding of the Missionaries of Provence: approval of the project by the diocesan authorities, search for a place and funding, the search for companions, and then the actual beginning. The aspect of conflict alluded to by Fr. Arrupe will be more pronounced after 1817.

APPROVAL OF THE DIOCESAN AUTHORITIES

The Abbé de Mazenod, a diocesan priest of Aix, was able to start his project only because of the support of the diocesan authorities. Not only did they release him for this task, but they allowed with relative ease some other diocesan priests to leave their parish duties to join the Missionaries’ project. In 1815, the boundaries of the diocese of Aix are those that were given to it by the Concordat of 1801, i.e. the territory of the two existing departments of Bouches-du-Rhône and the Var, to which the Grasse district was added, and which is today part of the Maritime Alps. After the resignation of Bishop Jauffret (1814) who never received canonical institution, the diocese was under the responsibility of Vicars General elected by the Chapter.

Eugene de Mazenod dealt mainly with Canon Jean-Joseph-Pierre Guigou, who was then 48 years old. He was ordained in 1789, so we know little of his ministry while he was in hiding. It is the Concordat that allows him to carry on more peacefully his parish ministry as pastor of St. Zachary. He was responsible for the restoration of the Sainte-Baume pilgrimage. He must have had an exceptional personality since

the Archbishop, Mgr de Cicé, chose him to accompany him to Paris for the coronation of Napoleon. Guigou himself preached parish missions in the diocese. He strongly supported the foundation in Aix of what will become the Sisters of St. Thomas of Villanova, and he will call several other religious institutes to the diocese. He does not hide his ultramontane feelings, which makes him close to Eugene and will earn him the hostility of the other rather Gallican group whose leader is Flourens, the former Vicar General of Bishop Jauffret. In 1825, Guigou was appointed Bishop of Angoulême.

In his correspondence, Eugene often emphasizes the support that he received from Canon Guigou. For example, in his letter to Forbin Janson of November 21, 1814: *“The Abbé Guigou, whom you know, is a very able man who can get things done. They say he went to Paris to repel the continuous attacks he was getting from the Bishop of Metz (Bishop Jauffret, appointed to Aix without the approval of the pope), who still interferes very much in our affair. Although Guigou, by leaving without telling me, showed some lack of respect and trust that my very pronounced and frank esteem of him should have inspired, I recommend him to you. He acted very well in all the thorny business. He showed himself Roman beyond reproach, and I have always known him to do what is right. He has not been forgiven for having ceased to be a supporter of the intruder (Jauffret), after he appeared to agree with him in the beginning. All this can be explained, but not in a letter. The old guard cannot accept the idea of having a younger priest over them. To hear them you would never say that years bring good sense...”* (Cf. *Missions*, 1962, p. 207) The *Diary of the Youth Congregation* mentions several times the presence of Guigou who celebrates Mass for the Congregation and intercedes on its behalf. It is thanks to him that the Missionaries of Provence come into possession of the Carmelite church, abandoned by the Revolution and restored with public funds.

October 23, 1815, as his project is beginning to take shape, Eugene writes to Forbin Janson: *“Well did I see, my dear friend, that what decidedly cooled the ardour of our Grand Vicars for mission work was the fear of seeing themselves deprived of people truly needed in the diocese. All obstacles fell before the decision I took. The proposal that the missionaries I would band together would not go outside the diocese calmed them so well that they became avowed protectors of our*

enterprise. And I am all the more grateful to them in that not all their priests are of the same mind..." (OW 6, 8)

From this time, in fact, there are already signs that there are some opponents to Eugene's project – if not to his person – among the clergy of Aix. It is true that Eugene is not easy on his clerical colleagues. In the September 15, 1815 letter to his father (OW 15, 112) he writes: *"The Bishop of Vannes, Ferdinand de Bausset, nephew of the Bishop of Fréjus, has just arrived in our town; there is talk that he could become Archbishop of Aix. But when are we going to show an interest in religion? We seem to think there is all the time in the world. What clergy we are getting today! Not a man of note among them; we are reduced to the poorest, most wretched, most abject in society. One can only hope that they will make up by their virtue for what they lack in other departments, but they will need a lot of it."* The January 1816 letter to Forbin Janson that will be cited below is even stronger.

Eugene's letters to Tempier also stress the support received from Guigou. In his first letter (October 9, 1815, OW 6, 7) he writes: *"We will have a certain tactic to follow in respect of the vicars who approve so strongly our initiative that they have written to Paris to make it known through the press."* Then on November 15 (OW 6, 12): *"The manner in which I speak will prove to you that I regard it as certain that they will not put invincible obstacles to our coming together. M. Guigou, whom the Lord has made zealous for this great enterprise, is persuaded that our small number does not suffice; he agrees that we need to be six."* In his letter of December 13 (OW 6, 12-14) he assures Tempier that Guigou *"is completely interested in mission work"* and *"most positively reiterated his assurance that you [Tempier] would be one of us."* Noteworthy also is this remark in a January 1816 letter to Forbin Janson: *"We go forward because we have on our side a Grand Vicar; but woe if he gives in. All would be lost."* (OW 6, 17) The Grand Vicar is clearly Guigou.

Though the *Request for authorization for the Missionaries of Provence* on January 25, 1816 is addressed to the capitular vicars, it is Guigou who four days later will give the official favorable response.

To lodge the missionaries Eugene de Mazenod had first considered the Enclos, a former country house of the Joannis family, belonging to Madame de Mazenod. The Enclos was on the north-western outskirts of Aix. Eugene went there from time to time to rest and he even seems to have stayed there, undoubtedly with Brother Maur. He presents this hypothesis in a letter of October 28, 1814 to Forbin Janson (OW 6, 3). *“The community, which in any event, only exists in my head, would be set up in my house. Mother, as far as I can see, would not be loath to yield to me, for the time being, the house by the city gate in which I live alone at present. There is enough room to lodge eight missionaries. We would subsequently look for a larger place, etc.”*

In the letter of October 23, 1815 to the same friend (OW 6, 9-10), he describes the matter as already well advanced: *“Les Minimes was for sale. [It is a convent adjacent to Our Lady of Seds.] This place suited us perfectly. I thought it should not slip through our fingers and considered my duty was to buy it. To this end, I braved enormous difficulties, but all for nothing. The Blessed Sacrament nuns politely whisked it from me by sleight of hand. In proceeding, I had broached the matter to some priests whom I believed suitable for the holy undertaking and who indeed are so. These did not think the cause was lost when my efforts failed. I would have been ashamed and upset to let their enthusiasm be quenched and tried to obtain the only other place in the city wherein we could set up our community. My overtures were unexpectedly successful. In a single interview the affair was settled and I found myself proprietor of the major part of the old Carmelite convent situated at the top of the Cours with a charming church attached, somewhat the worse for wear, to tell the truth, but which we could restore to use for less than a hundred sovereigns.”*

“So much for my story. But the amusing thing is that all that was done without my being held back by the thought that I had not a single sou. To prove I was not mistaken, Providence immediately sent me twelve thousand francs, loaned to me without interest for this year. Now tell me how to reimburse them. I have made a golden deal since the whole establishment, including repairs to the church, will cost me only 20,000 francs. But where shall I find this sum? I have no idea. In the

meantime the missionaries are on my back. They want to begin tomorrow. In vain I tell them we need time to fix the rooms and make the house habitable. They cannot wait that long... How do you manage at Paris? To which saint do you have recourse? If I remember aright, the house costs a thousand crowns to rent." The next day in the same letter: "Every moment some new difficulty crops up; it is the death of me. How shall we manage without the church? It is all right for you to say it would be fair to let the Carmelites reclaim it. Who will provide them the money to pay for it? The present occupant, who is yielding his tenancy to me, has never put in a claim to have the edifice repaired. The whole roof is dilapidated. The estimate I have obtained for urgent repairs increases the price to seventeen and several hundred francs. The estimate will be sent to Paris and certainly the bureaucrats will shy away from it when it comes up for approval. In the meantime, can I take it upon myself to make considerable expenditures without knowing if the edifice will be ours? In the state in which it is, it can be of no use to us. We will, however, be able to have religious services in the chancel which is ours and which is very large. Here is what M. Guigou proposes: his idea is to ask for the church in order to put it at the service of the people and then hand it over to us afterwards... Would it not be better to hold divine services in it rather than see it used as a warehouse for all the circuses that come through and as barracks for soldiers of every nation? Busy yourself a little with this matter."

It should be noted that the former Carmelite convent, of which uncle Fortuné had been the "superior", had been sold at the beginning of the Revolution as a national asset and therefore belonged to different owners, but the church itself had not been sold, and therefore continued to belong to the Administration. If Guigou could get the repairs done with public funds and the church returned to the diocese, it would be a great opportunity...

The *Diary of the Youth Congregation* (OW 16, 168-169) provides other details. "Its [the Congregation's] choice fell on the former church of the Carmelites where it hopes to settle permanently. As this necessary change must entail some expense, the Council in its session today decided to provide for it by means of a voluntary subscription which has been fixed at one to six francs. This subscription must only be asked of the more well-off congregants... The choir that must serve as chapel

for the Congregation was so profaned during the Revolution that it has been necessary to have it blessed. This blessing took place today [November 21, 1815] very solemnly in the presence of the whole Congregation. Rev. Father Beylot, Capitular Vicar General, then celebrated the first Mass there at which a very large number of congregants had the happiness of receiving communion." There was perpetual adoration of the Blessed Sacrament all day with the congregants taking turns every half hour.

Thanks to the negotiations of Guigou, most of the repairs on the church were done fairly quickly. It was ready for worship on Palm Sunday, April 7, 1816. The diocese turned it over to the Missionaries of Provence sometime later. But it was not until May 1822 that the allocation to the Archbishopric of Aix was endorsed by royal decree. This allowed the diocese to give it to the Missionaries of Provence.

The Oblate Archives in Marseilles have a very valuable book that brings together many copies of deeds concerning the first Oblate houses, from Aix to Vico, and then Calvary, Osier and Montolivet. So, we find there a copy of the papers for the purchase of Aix.

The formal act of purchase is dated December 30, 1815. It fills three pages of the register, in a thin and tight writing (45 lines per page), but it is very legible. *"The lady Victoire Gontier, widow Pascal, a teacher, a native of Paris, residing in Aix at the heretofore house of the Carmelites, sold to Mr. Charles Joseph Eugene de Mazenod, priest, residing in Aix at No. 2 Papassaudy Street, that part of the former convent of the Carmelite religious Ladies that the said Lady Gontier had acquired from the late Mr. Jacques Ginézy, druggist, by deed of 17 January 1810."* All for the sum of 16,000 francs.

In the absence of a floor plan, it is difficult to grasp the exact dimensions of this first purchase, with a ground floor, first and second floor along the side of the church and the adjoining church choir. Madam Gontier reserved *"for herself and her boarding school"* under personal and non-transferable title the use of part of the building for seven years. *"In this sale is included everything that is attached and fixed to the walls from top to bottom, like cabinets, cupboards, woodwork, glass doors and other..."* *"It is agreed that the buyer shall have the right to take water from the well and the pump that is in the courtyard and enjoy on entering and exclusively the arbor which is attached to the south of*

the above named building, as well as the path serving as a walkway below the said arbor...”

The payment terms are complex, especially as the Lady Gontier had not fully paid her debts to the heirs of Ginézy. These debts are now the responsibility of Mr. de Mazenod. There are clauses that indicate what would happen “*in the event of the death of the lady before the seven years are up.*” The contract also provides for the division into two equal parts of the land tax, between Mrs. Gontier and Mr. de Mazenod.

A deed dated March 12, 1816 concerns the payment in the amount 2,962.96 francs to madam Gontier by Armand Natal de Boisgelin on behalf of Mr. Ch. J. E. de Mazenod, his brother-in-law. May 13, 1816, Ms. Gontier renounces the right she had reserved and promises to move out in the course of the week. This results in an advance payment by Mr. de Mazenod. But because of this, the Missionaries now had a home. In 1819, they were able to acquire another part of the old monastery.

THE SEARCH FOR COMPANIONS

The history of Eugene’s contact with those he sensed could be his companions is also complex. Icard seems to have been the first. There was also Hilaire Aubert, Maunier, Mie, Deblieu, and then Tempier, with whom most of the correspondence has been preserved.

Let us acquaint ourselves with each one briefly, referring to the *Historical Dictionary* and the work of Bernard Dullier on *Les Premiers Oblats* [The First Oblates] (*OMI Documents* No. 15, February 1999). The basic research was made by Cosentino and published in *Etudes oblates*.

“*Fr. Icard, an unknown*” is the title of the article by Cosentino (*Etudes oblates* 1957, 321-346). He was born in 1790 in Gardanne (Bouches-du-Rhône), where his father was a carpenter. At the major seminary of Aix, where Eugene de Mazenod may have known him, he was a classmate of Deblieu and Tempier. Ordained in 1814, he was appointed curate at Lambesc. In his *Mémoires* (Cf. Rambert 1, 164), Eugene writes: it is he “*who told me of Tempier, Mie and Deblieu, as men he knew able to enter into my views and assist me mightily in the great work I was about to undertake.*” It seems that it was Icard who took the

initiative to contact Eugene de Mazenod, when he heard of his project. Icard seems to have been an associate of Mie in preaching the Pignans mission (December 1815 to January 1816), just before the group first came together on January 25, 1816. He then took part in the mission of Grans in February-March. Eugene describes him as *unworthy* and he was expelled from the group at the end of this first mission.

In the Archives of the Holy Childhood in Paris we found Eugene's letter to **Hilaire Aubert**, written probably in September 1815. It will be found below. Originally from the diocese of Aix, he was at the time a "*priest-director*" at the Major Seminary of Limoges. Aubert preferred the Missionaries of France of Fr. Rauzan and Forbin Janson.

Cosentino calls Jean-François Sebastian **Deblieu** *fickle* (Cf. *Etudes oblates*, 1958, 152-179). He was born in 1789 in Brignoles (Var) where his father was a baker. He was also a seminarian at the Aix Major Seminary, where he may have known Eugene de Mazenod. He was ordained a priest in 1813 and appointed curate at St-Jean du Faubourg in Aix until May 1815, when he was appointed pastor in Peynier in the township of Trets, about twenty kilometers east of Aix. According to Icard, writes Rey, he was a priest "*passionate about preaching, endowed with all the qualities that make missionaries, good size, strong voice, healthy...*" He later returned to the diocesan clergy. His death notice attributes him with "*a difficult character, a hard and immoderate zeal, and a strict virtue.*" His motto was: "*Know difficulties to conquer them and obstacles to overcome them...*"

In contrast to the *young* Icard, Deblieu and Tempier, Mie and Maunier were "*old men*", 46 and 47 years old respectively. They were therefore senior to Eugene by age – Eugene was then 33 years old – and by the priestly ministry they had exercised during the revolutionary period.

Pierre Nolasque **Mie** (or Mye) is unquestionably the most original of the group. He was born in 1768 in Alleins (Bouches-du-Rhône) into a family of farmers. Fr. Mie's obituary, written by Jeancard, gives us a very good picture of him (See *Missions*, 1866, 428-454). He was in the third year of theology and in minor orders when the Revolution broke out. "*He then left the seminary, to distance himself from the schismatics who had seized it.*" These are the schismatic priests who had taken the oath to the Civil Constitution of the Clergy. He led a semi-clandestine

life and was ordained priest by Mgr de Prunieres, Bishop of Grasse, in Marseilles, in 1797. He was taken in by a tailor in La Fare near Berre-l'Étang. By day he worked as an apprentice, not a talented one, and *“at night he exercised his priestly functions.”* Jeancard presents him as a great connoisseur of Scripture.

After the Concordat, the archbishop appointed him pastor of Puy-loubier at the foot of Mount Sainte-Victoire. *“He lived in the greatest poverty, writes Jeancard. His house lacked everything; his food was of the coarsest quality and his clothing wretched. There he acquired the habit of never having but one cassock and a single pair of shoes. He kept this habit all his life. He kept the little money he had above his fireplace, and that is where he took the money for the poor who asked for alms, and for himself, often the poorest of all.”*

Wanting to devote himself to a life of solitude and penance, he joined Fr. Bretenièrre’s Fathers of the Christian Retreat, with whom he spent six years, but without a commitment or vows. *“The rigorist principles followed by this community could not be reconciled with his natural spirit of meekness and mercy... He was very disturbed by the terror of God’s judgments, which was the motif most often highlighted in this house...”* It will be remembered that during the same period Eugene reassured his mother in a letter from St. Sulpice (March 24, 1809, OW 14, 112): *“I must not keep you on tenterhooks before reassuring you about this. I have never for a single moment thought of taking a step so much beyond my strength and so little to my taste. It would take a quite different kind of virtue than I have to embrace the highest level of evangelical perfection and God has never inspired me with the least attraction to the Retreat...”*

Mie was chaplain at the hospital in Aix when he met the young recently ordained Father Tempier who *“proposed straight off that he join him on a Mission.”* We continue following the account by Jeancard. So *“having received faculties they leave together for Saint-Paul-les-Durance where they give a full Mission for a month or a month and a half.”* It was probably in the spring of 1814. Upon returning, Fr. Mie did supply work in various parishes, a service appreciated by all, that he continued while serving as curate at Salon... *“This allowed him to be a missionary where he wanted. He never tired of instructing, every day*

he was in the pulpit. He taught catechism to the children and confessed a lot of sinners..." Such was the situation in the fall of 1815.

Jeancard describes at length his way of preaching, first in Provençal, then in French, in Laus. *"Few men have possessed to the same degree as he the art of giving solid religious instruction to the ignorant classes..." "The tone could be harsh, and his voice monotonous... But these defects disappeared before the thought that no one had ever expressed in a more original way. This originality was one of an incomparable simplicity... He spoke to the intelligence more than to the imagination. Everything was true and solid in his expressions as in his feelings and his doctrine..."*

François de Paule Henri **Tempier** was born in 1788 in Saint-Cannat near Lambesc, into a farming family. He probably met Eugene de Mazenod when he was a seminarian in Aix. While still a seminarian, he was for a year the well appreciated associate of Mr. Abel, superior of the minor seminary, someone whom Eugene de Mazenod knew well. He was ordained March 26, 1814. Therefore he could preach the St. Paul mission with Fr. Mie. Jeancard writes: *"Father Tempier was thus initiated into the life of a missionary, under the auspices and in the company of one of the holiest priests in Provence, a truly apostolic man, worthy by his virtues of forming with his example men filled with an apostolic spirit..."* The same year, Tempier was appointed curate of the parish of Saint Césaire in Arles. Therefore, confessions, preaching, works of charity, and above all, from Epiphany to Easter, catechism every day. Nothing remained outside his zeal.

It is Cosentino who introduces **Maunier** to us in *Études Oblates* (1958, 219-269). Emmanuel Fréjus Maunier was born in Fréjus in 1769 into a family of civil servants. His father was a commissioner in the navy and deputy mayor. He married in 1787 or 1788 and had a daughter. Within two months, he lost both his daughter and his wife (1790). Nothing is known of his life during the revolutionary period and therefore of his formation, except that he was ordained a priest in hiding the same year as Mie and by the same bishop. Father Jean-Joseph Allemand was also ordained the following year. He carried out his priestly ministry in Marseilles, clandestinely at first, then openly. He was curate first at Notre-Dame-du-Mont, then at St. Laurent, and finally at Notre Dame

de la Palud, today Holy Trinity. Eugene made contact with him in September. He joined the Missionaries of Provence in March 1816.

THE LETTERS TO HILAIRE AUBERT AND TEMPIER

Fortunately the letter from Eugene de Mazenod to Hilaire Aubert and most of the correspondence with Tempier is still extant. Although these texts are available in various publications, the most recent being in *Oblate Writings*, it seems useful to repeat them here. These are the founding texts of the Oblates. Surprisingly, they have not aged. All the spontaneity that much later will be called charisma is expressed in them. The call of 1815 still echoes today.

The letter to Hilaire Aubert is thought to be in September 1815. It is published in OW 6, 5.

No one is fonder than I of the holy Company of Jesus. Its re-establishment has always been to the fore in my wishes and I attach the greatest importance to its growth. However, I would better like to have you here, just now, than with the Jesuits. The good we intend to do ought to remedy the most pressing ills. Those who deal with them dwindle; there is nothing more urgent. It is a matter of some priests banding together and continually preaching missions in all sectors of this vast diocese and surroundings. We wish to do modestly, but not less effectively, what they are striving to do at Paris on a larger scale. We would want to act without commotion but what blows we would strike at hell! Oh, dear friend, if you would be one of us! We would begin in your part of the country where religion is practically extinct as in so many other places. I almost dare to say you would be necessary. Ah! If we could form a nucleus, there would soon cluster round it the most zealous elements in the diocese. Think a while about that before the good God. You know that we must have, in order to do any good in our regions, people of the country who know the language. Oh! Do not doubt that we will become saints in our Congregation, free but united by bonds of the tenderest charity, by exact submission to the Rule we would adopt, etc. We would live poorly, apostolically, etc.

More remarkable is the letter to Tempier (OW 6, 6-8).

Aix, October 9, 1815

My dear friend read this letter at the foot of your crucifix with a mind to heed only God and what is demanded in the interests of his glory and of the salvation of souls from a priest like yourself. Stifle the voice of cupidity, love of comfort and convenience; dwell deeply on the plight of our country people, their religious situation, and the apostasy that daily spreads wider with dreadfully ravaging effects. Look at the feebleness of the means employed to date to oppose this flood of evil; ask your heart what it fain would do to counter these disasters and then reply to my letter.

Well, dear man, what I say to you, without going fully into details, is that you are necessary for the work which the Lord inspires us to undertake. Since the head of the Church is persuaded that, given the wretched state in which France finds herself, only missions can bring people back to the Faith which they have practically abandoned, good men of the Church from different dioceses are banding together in response to the views of our supreme Pastor. We likewise feel that it is utterly necessary to employ the same remedy in our regions and, full of confidence in the goodness of Providence, have laid down the foundations of an establishment which will steadily furnish our countryside with fervent missionaries. These will ceaselessly engage in destroying the empire of the demon, at the same time as providing the example of a life worthy of the Church in the community which they will form. Indeed, we will live together in one house, that which I have bought, under a Rule we shall adopt with common accord and for which we will draw the elements from the statutes of St. Ignatius, of St. Charles for his Oblates, of St. Philip Neri, of St. Vincent de Paul and of the Blessed Liguori.

Happiness awaits us in this holy Society which will have but one heart and soul. One part of the year will be devoted to the conversion of souls, the other to seclusion, study and our individual sanctification. I say no more for the moment; it suffices to give some intimation of the spiritual delights we will taste together. If, as I hope, you wish to be one of us, you will not find yourself in unknown terrain; you will have four companions. If presently we are not more numerous, it means we wish to choose men who have the will and the courage to walk in the footsteps of the apostles. It is important to lay solid foundations. The greatest regularity must be planned and introduced in the house as soon as we enter it. And it is precisely for that reason that you are necessary

to me because I know you to be capable of embracing an exemplary rule of life and of persevering in it. For the rest, we will not be bound by vows. But I hope that it will be the same with us as with the disciples of St. Philip Neri who, free as we shall remain, would die before thinking of leaving a congregation for which they have the same affection as for their mother.

When I shall have your reply, I will give you all the details you could wish for. But, dear friend, I conjure you, do not let yourself say no to the greatest good that may possibly be done in the Church. Vicars will easily be found to replace you but it is not so easy to come across men who are dedicated and wish to devote themselves to the glory of God and the salvation of souls with no more reward on earth than much sorrow and all else that the Saviour announced to his true disciples. Your refusal would be incalculably detrimental to our new-born enterprise. I speak with sincerity and reflection. Your modesty will suffer but no matter: I will not hesitate to add that, if I believed it necessary to make the journey to Arles to convince you, I would wing my way there. All depends on how we begin. We need perfect unanimity of sentiments, the same goodwill, the same disinterestedness, the same devotedness - that sums it up.

Keep this a secret. Be sure that confiding in anyone at Arles would only result in being dissuaded from a project of which you will never be able to appreciate the worth until you have begun to execute it. We will have a certain tactic to follow in respect of the vicars who approve so strongly our initiative that they have written to Paris to make it known through the press. We will have to plan the steps necessary to obtain your replacement. The least imprudence would thwart our plans. They would be tempted to think that four of us would be enough when it is certain that we need at least six. They have promised me this number of persons. Who will (not fail to) say that the difficulty is to find them? It is true that we are being difficult because we wish everything to go well and we will succeed if you are one of us. So quickly reply to me affirmatively and I shall be content. Adieu, well beloved brother.

Almost three weeks later, Eugene de Mazenod received the long awaited answer from the Abbé Tempier. It can be found in *Oblate Writings II*, a volume dedicated to the writings of Tempier, pp 19-21.

Arles, October 27, 1815

My dear Sir and confrere,

Forgive me if I have not replied sooner to your lovely letter. You forgot to sign your name, and this forgetfulness gave me a lot of work to discover where it had come from. I seemed to recognize your handwriting, which I know only a little; I also saw that the project of which it spoke to me, if it was really meant, could only come from you, but I was still afraid that someone wanted to make fun of me by writing me an anonymous letter. A friend drew me out of this uncertainty, and I am replying on the very day on which I received his letter.

*May God be praised for inspiring you with the plan prepare a house of missionaries to announce the truths of salvation to the poor inhabitants of our countryside, to those who have the most need of religious instruction. I am in complete agreement with your views, my dear confrere, and far from waiting for further insistence to enter into this holy work which is so in line with my desires, I assure you, to the contrary, that if I had known of your plan, I would have been the first to ask to be received into your society. So, I have to thank you for judging me worthy to work for God's glory and the salvation of souls. It is true that I do not see in myself the speaking ability required of a missionary, but *alius quidem sic alius vero sic* [1 Cor 7:7]. What I cannot do in outstanding speeches, I will do in catechetical classes, conferences, in the confessional and by all other means that are apt to establish the kingdom of Jesus Christ in souls. I find nothing humiliating or distasteful in that. In the meantime, practice will give me a greater facility than I have now. Moreover, I see what you are looking for most in choosing your collaborators: you want priests who do not follow routine and humdrum, as the predecessor of Father Charles used to say; who are ready to follow in the footsteps of the apostles, to work for the salvation of souls without expecting any other reward here on earth than a lot of suffering and fatigue. By the grace of God, I feel this desire in me, or if I do not have it, I want to have it very much; and together with you, everything will become even easier for me. So, count on me completely.*

The only thing that I am afraid of is that the Grand Vicars will make some difficulty about my leaving Arles. Please arrange everything so that I can share in your holy project. It would be desirable to ask for me before Epiphany, the day we start daily catechism lessons, otherwise it will be more difficult, and I am afraid that they might make me stay here

until after Easter when our children receive first Holy Communion. You can imagine the difficulties that they will bring up.

Goodbye, beloved confrere, the postman is hurrying me and I cannot prolong my letter.

Tempier, priest.

The Abbé de Mazenod's answer is dated November 15 (OW 6, 11-12).

God be blessed, my very dear brother, for the dispositions he has put in your good heart. You would not believe the joy I felt on reading your letter. I opened it anxiously but soon was comforted. Be sure that I regard it as most important that you be one of us for the work of God. I count on you more than on myself for the regularity of a house which, in my mind and my hopes, must reproduce the perfection of the first disciples of the apostles. I base my hopes on that much more than on eloquent discourses. Have they ever converted anyone? Oh! How well will you do what must be done! Were you but close enough for me to press to my heart, give you a fraternal accolade that would express better than any letter the sentiments with which the good God has inspired me in your regard. How sweet the bonds of perfect charity!

The manner in which I speak will prove to you that I regard it as certain that they will not put invincible obstacles to our coming together: M. Guigou, whom the Lord has made zealous for this great enterprise, is persuaded that our small number does not suffice; he agrees that we need to be six. So I have begun this morning to let him know in advance, saying that I know you love community life and that our project will offer all you can desire. He has not been adverse to the idea... I expect new difficulties but the good God protects us. I fear nothing. Adieu, I embrace you with all my heart.

Eugene de Mazenod

On December 13 Eugene writes a third letter to Tempier (OW 6, 12-14) in answer to two other letters from him, which have been lost.

My heart felt a presentiment, my dear, good friend and brother, that you were the man the good God had set aside to be my consolation. How can I show you all the happiness conferred on me by the holy state of resolve at which you have arrived? How great the promise I have made to myself to do all that depends on me to contribute to yours! Let me say that as soon as I read your first letter, I surrendered to the sweet-

est of hopes: that I had found the man who lays hold of good, latches on thereto and consequently with the help of grace, succeeds perfectly in effecting it. Your second and third letters confirmed me in the opinion that I had formed and now the thought that we shall succeed, in spite of obstacles, in working together for the glory of God and for our sanctification, sustains me in the midst of all the sorrows that hell has brought upon me since I have positioned strong batteries to destroy its empire. Be as humble as you wish but know, just the same, that you are necessary for this mission work. I speak to you before God and openly from my heart. Were it a question of going out to preach more or less well the word of God, mingled with much alloy of self, of going far and wide for the purpose, if you wish, of winning souls for God without taking much trouble to be men of interior life, truly apostolic men, I think it would not be difficult to replace you. But can you believe I want merchandise of that sort?

We must be truly saints ourselves. In saying that, we include all that can possibly be said. Now are there many priests who thus wish to be saints? Only by not knowing them could we believe that they do. I myself know the contrary. Most wish to go to heaven by a road other than that of abnegation, renunciation, forgetfulness of self, poverty, fatigue, etc. Perhaps they are not obliged to do more or otherwise than they do but at least they should not be so obstructive if some, believing that more is demanded by the needs of the people, want to try to be more devoted in order to save them. The second reason, which made me regard it as a present from heaven the resolution to join us at which you have arrived, is the need we have of a priest who thinks as you do about the interior life of our community. I am so convinced of this that I said yesterday evening to the Grand Vicar that I would not undertake to form this community if you took no part in it. I am so assured that we will always agree that I would not fear to promise never to think otherwise than you on all that has to do with the interior life and its obligations, more extensive than one ordinarily believes, of the priest who wishes to live as his state requires.

It is time that I gave you an account of the conversation that I had about you with M. Guigou. You know that he is completely interested in mission work. I let him know my resolution not to continue the undertaking if I were not sure that you would be one of us. I told him

what I think: that your dispositions and character guaranteed to me the constancy of your resolutions, that I regarded you as the one on whom I ought to count for the love of order and regularity, that I needed to have you as the confidant of my aspirations for good, that in advance we were of one mind; in a word, I repeated that without you I did not feel courageous enough to go further. The Grand Vicar most positively reiterated his assurance that you would be one of us, but he asked as a favour that it be not immediately. This delay was not entirely agreeable to me because I would wish, rather, that you would be one of the first to enter the house, which is quite ready to receive missionaries. This first step is, in my opinion, of the highest importance.

At this meeting we will draw up the Rule which we will have to follow. We will confer on the manner in which we will carry out our good work. We will help each other mutually with advice and with all that the good God will inspire in each of us for our common sanctification. We will then issue our first declaration for the edification of the Church and of the people. This will be a decisive step. I count on having you then. That is what I have not yet obtained.

Write to our Grand Vicars what your formal intentions are. In the meanwhile, do not undertake any task which may last beyond the Christmas festivities for it is following them that I would wish us to meet. We must begin together the year of 1816. We will begin by working on ourselves. After, we will rule on the kind of life we will adopt for the city and for the missions. Then we will become saints.

Even if we were twenty, we would not suffice for the work there is to do. We are requested on all sides. I refer the demands to the good God. Let us hope he will at last look upon these entreaties. Pray to him that he will give me the strength and patience I need. They are terribly over-taxed. Had I not got half this letter done during the night, it would still not be ready for the post. Adieu, very dear and good brother, I embrace you with all my heart and long for the happy moment of our reunion.

Eugene de Mazenod

Tempier's answer was on December 20 (OW II, Tempier, pp. 21-22)

Holy friend and true brother, I do not know how to thank you for all that you have done for my salvation. You are truly the friend who is the most dear to my heart. You were in my affections before, I esteemed you

very highly and I never failed to talk about you whenever I was with my friends; but ever since you cast your eyes on me in order to associate me with your apostolic works and to make me part of the fruits of holiness that await us in our dear Congregation, I cannot but think of you with the deepest sentiments of gratitude and thank God continually for having inspired in you this design of mercy for me. I would only like you to temper in your mind the exaggerated opinion that you have of my so-called necessity, as you call it, so that you will not be misled when you will have the chance to judge it. You will soon recognize that while there is a certain amount of good will in me, there is not much else.

I have decided to leave for Aix the day after Christmas, am quite determined not to come back to Arles and to show all the firmness necessary to impel the Grand Vicars to allow me to join the work of the missions. I wrote them a letter to prepare them for my arrival; it is entirely according to your plan, and I believe that we will definitely carry the day if my sins don't put up a roadblock. I believe we will definitely succeed. Prepare everything for that decisive day.

Goodbye, very dear and good brother: I am shivering here in my room, and my chilblains are somewhat to blame for my scribbling. Let's ask the Lord insistently that all our plans go smoothly, if they comply with His will.

Tempier.

EUGENE DE MAZENOD, SEPTEMBER 1815

Before resuming this history chronologically, it is important to recall the other two major concerns Eugene de Mazenod had at the time. First of all there is the Youth Congregation, which continues to take up almost all of his time. The *Diary* (OW 16, 167) mentions the arrival of Bishop de Bausset, then Bishop of Vannes and future Archbishop of Aix, to “give the sacrament of confirmation to the congregants who were qualified to receive it.” This was probably in the month of October. New members were admitted, including Coulin and Honorat who will in turn become Missionaries of Provence. In December, Eugene insisted on staying with the young Casimir Archange until his death. “The illness was quite prolonged and very painful, but his patience was unflinching. I witnessed his sufferings and resignation, for the child made

it clear to me that he did not want me to leave his bedside, and I spent several days and two nights at his side. He surrendered his soul into the peace of the Lord after fervently receiving the Church's sacraments." (OW 16, 172-173) It was December 17.

Eugene's other major and permanent concern was about his father and uncles who were still trapped in Sicily. In a letter that can be dated January 1816 and published in *Missions*, 1962, pp. 218-224, he asked Forbin Janson to intervene in their favor with the Ministers "*whom you tell me are your friends,*" and he named Alexis de Noailles and Mathieu de Montmorency, who had great influence at that time. Eugene recalls the service records of his father, ("*The place that I ask is his due, he was one of the best magistrates of his time.*") and of Fortuné ("*There is no other priest capable of doing as much good as him.*") and of the Chevalier ("*captain of the king's ships*") of whom a Mémoire recalls the seafaring career. But the return of the exiles will be a long time coming.

Everything suggests that it was during August or early September of 1815 that Eugene overcame his hesitation and began the process described above: at least to get the agreement of the diocesan authorities and to find a locale, funding and companions. The letter to Hilaire Aubert and the first contacts with Icard and Maunier can be dated to this period.

We also know that Brother Maur left Aix on September 18. "*You will not easily find a subject to replace him,*" Mr. Duclaux writes to Eugene. But "*he is bound in conscience*" to return to the recently reopened Trappist monastery. "*It's a sacrifice you owe to God and religion.*" Father Rey, who cites this letter (I, pp. 176-177) says: "*Mr. de Mazenod was prepared for this separation; it was nevertheless very painful for his sensitive heart. His isolation seemed even greater...*"

October 2, 1815 is an important date. "*We laid the foundations of the Society of the Missionaries of Provence in Aix on October 2, 1815,*" Eugene wrote in his formula for admission to the novitiate, which was drawn up some years later. It took "*a strong impulse from without,*" he wrote to Forbin Janson on October 23 (OW 6, 8-9). "*Now I ask you and I ask myself how I, hitherto unable to make up my mind in this matter, suddenly find myself setting wheels in motion, renouncing my comfort and risking my fortune by launching an enterprise of which*

I know the worth but for which I only have a liking negated by other and diametrically opposed views! This is a riddle to me and it is the second time in my life that I see myself moved to resolve something of the utmost seriousness as if by a strong impulse from without. When I reflect on it, I am convinced that it so pleases God to put an end to my irresolution. And in such a way that I am engaged to the hilt! I assure you that in such circumstances I am quite another man. You would no longer say I have lead in my pants if you were to see how I fly around. I am well nigh up to your standard in acting with so much authority I move carefully though I have not a moment of respite and yet proceed nonetheless with a will. It is nearly two months now that I fight on at my own expense, sometimes openly, sometimes discreetly. With trowel in one hand and sword in the other, I am like the good Israelites rebuilding the city of Jerusalem. And my pen is busy. I dare not tell you how much I have written since being involved in this affair, which you are right in calling ours. For I certainly intend that our two enterprises be but one. However at this moment, as we begin, we must appear to have in common only the name, so as not to frighten both our superiors and the missionaries themselves who, with the exception of Deluy do not want to travel or work outside the diocese or who at the most (would go) into neighbouring dioceses where they speak the Provençal tongue. Explain all that to M. Rauzan

That is how matters stand, without going into the whole business – that would take too long.”

“OCTOBER 2, WE LAID THE FOUNDATIONS”

Let us go back to October 2, 1815 mentioned above. In August 1820 it was decided at a meeting at Notre-Dame du Laus to open a register for formulas of admission to the novitiate (Cf. *Missions*, 1952, p. 7-34). Each person wrote his own formula. Naturally, Eugene de Mazenod came first. Number 2, which was given to Tempier is chronologically inaccurate since he did not give his answer until the end of October. But number 2 corresponds to the place he would hold in the Society. Deblieu and Mie have numbers 3 and 4. Number 5 is Icard’s, also in “*October 1815*”. But in 1820, it is mentioned for the record that

he did not write his formula, stating that he left “*immediately*”. Then there is Maunier as number 6, dated March 15, 1816.

It is worthwhile quoting in full these first formulas. Each one is truly personal.

1 / Mazenod / October 1815

I, Charles-Joseph-Eugene de Mazenod, wanting to devote myself in a special way to the service of the Church and the sanctification of my neighbour by giving missions, and recognizing that to succeed in this holy enterprise, it is necessary to walk in the footsteps of the saints and especially to follow the examples of those who have carried out the same ministry, I wrote a few rules, which were approved by the ecclesiastical superiors and adopted by the priests that I had associated with my plans. Animated with the same spirit, they committed themselves together with me, to observe them always, persevering till death in the holy Institute which should help us acquire the virtues proper to the state of perfection which we wholeheartedly desired. Thus we laid the foundations of the Society of the Missionaries of Provence in Aix the 2nd of October 1815.

Given at Notre-Dame du Laus on the 12th of August 1820

Eugene de Mazenod, missionary priest, born in Aix the 1st of August 1782.

2 / Tempier / October 1815

I, François Henry Tempier, invited by Mister de Mazenod to join him to form a Society of priests who would dedicate themselves especially to the service of the Church by the work of missions, I immediately and willingly acceded to his wishes; and although being the last to be called of the four who, with him, formed the beginnings of the Society of the Missionaries of Provence, I was the first one to arrive in Aix, and I was the first one to enter the house which was the cradle of our nascent Society and to which I devoted myself heart and soul to sanctify myself in its bosom and to persevere there till death.

Given at Notre-Dame du Laus the 12th of August 1820

Tempier, missionary priest, superior of Notre-Dame du Laus, born at St. Cannat the 1st of April 1788

3 / Deblieu / October 1815

I, Jean-François Sébastien Deblieu, having been invited by Mister de Mazenod to reply if my feelings about the project of coming together

to carry out the sublime work of missions were still the same as I had made known to him while in Aix, I replied that he could count on me, and all the more readily since he told me that following upon my consent, he would begin the process to buy the premises he had in mind. Indeed, no sooner had he received my answer, he bought the house of the Carmelites, to which I was not able to go immediately, being detained by the care of a parish of which I was in charge. But this delay does not obviate the fact that he has always considered me the first priest he deigned to have join him to serve the Church in the nascent Society of the Missionaries of Provence, in the bosom of which I then decided to live and die.

Given at Notre-Dame du Laus on the 12th of August 1820.

Deblieu, missionary priest, first assistant, born at Brignoles the 20th of January 1789.

4 / Mye / October 1815

I, Pierre Mye, having been invited by Mr. de Mazenod to join him in forming a Society of priests who devote themselves especially to serve the Church in the work of missions, have readily consented to the proposal, all the more since it responded to the attraction that the Lord had given me for this holy ministry. So I wholeheartedly associated myself with the projects of Mr. de Mazenod in October 1815 and I was therefore admitted to the nascent Society of the Missionaries of Provence to live there in observance of the holy Rules of the Institute.

Given in Marseilles the 14th of July 1821

Mye, missionary priest, born at Alleins the 30th of January 1768.

Many remarks could be made about these formulas. We stress the initiative of Eugene de Mazenod. The commitment is until death, except for Mie. We like that “*the service of the Church*” has the first place, while at the time many people spoke in terms of the service of Religion. Obviously, the ministry of missions is central. Some of the four also stress the desire to sanctify themselves in the community and under the Rules. We need to remember that this is 1820, more than four years after coming together.

Later, Eugene de Mazenod, then Bishop of Marseilles, will allude to this date of October 2nd when he writes in his *Diary* on October 2, 1841, that is 26 years later (OW 20): “*I am in Aix these past few days. I*

said Mass at the Mission on the memorable day of the Holy Angels with whose help we formed this undertaking.”

Presumably this date of October 2 – since they had to choose a date – was taken because it was the one on which the approval had been given for the purchase of the Carmelite convent, as suggested in Deblieu’s formula. The deed would be signed only on December 30 and the first four or five members will come together only in the last days of January.

On October 2, there is also a letter from Mr. Duclaux that Eugene copies into his *Diary* in 1843 (OW 21, 113 [French edition]): *“As for me, I can only thank my good Master for all the pious sentiments that he inspires in you. Continue to work with all your strength for the restoration of religion; preach, instruct, enlighten the French about the cause of the evils that weigh them down; may your voice be heard in every region of Provence; the good God waits only for our conversion in order to shower us with his grace. But, above all, form an ecclesiastical spirit among the priests. You will do only very little good, as long as there are no excellent priests at the head of parishes. Therefore, urge all the ecclesiastics to be saints; may they read the lives of Saint Charles and of Saint Vincent de Paul; they will see if it is permissible for a priest, for a pastor to live in tepidness and without zeal. I assure you that I do not cease to think about you and to thank the good God for the courage which he gives you. I hope that you will do much, because you sincerely love the good God and the Church. I embrace you with all my heart and am with all my heart entirely yours.”* Duclaux

OCTOBER TO DECEMBER 1815

On October 9, Eugene writes his first letter to Tempier. *“Read this letter at the foot of your crucifix... Dwell deeply on the plight of our country people... Ask your heart what it fain would do to counter these disasters... It is important to lay solid foundations... And it is precisely for that reason that you are necessary to me...”*

On October 23 and 24, Eugene writes to his friend Charles to brief him on the situation. The letter, published in full in OW 6, 8-11, has already been quoted several times. Eugene begins by speaking of the reservations of Aix’s Grand Vicars: *“The proposal that the missionaries I*

would band together would not go outside the diocese calmed them...” Then he describes his personal commitment: “*It so pleases God to put an end to my irresolution...*” The next point is the purchase of the Carmelite convent, thanks to an interest free loan of 12,000 francs, which he wonders how he will repay. He makes a brief allusion to his relatives in Sicily: “*It is time these unfortunates saw the dawn of better days.*” Then he dwells on the cost of repairs to the Carmelite church, hoping that the diocese will intervene with the civil authorities. Then there is the conclusion: “*I myself am at the end of my tether. If I had foreseen all the nuisance, worry, anxiety and disarray this establishment would throw me into, I believe I never would have had the zeal to undertake it. I ask God every day to sustain me in my anguish of heart and commend myself over this to all the holy missionaries in whose steps we wish to follow. Help me yourself and pray the good God for your best friend.*”

In its October 31 edition, the *Mémorial religieux, politique et littéraire*, edited in Paris, published the following: “*An association of missionaries who intend to travel the countryside to preach the holy word was recently formed in Provence. Father de Mazenod is at the head of this worthwhile endeavor.*”

Tempier’s reply was awaited with impatience. It is dated October 27. “*Count on me.*” When did Eugene receive it? We cannot say exactly. It is surprising that Eugene waited until November 15 to acknowledge it and to express his joy at his future companion’s positive response.

November 8, Eugene wrote to his father in Palermo. He begins with some political reflections. The Hundred Days are not far in the past. According to him, the king has been too soft on the “*misled*” soldiers. Then he says, “*Let’s put politics aside, I do not have much time.*” He then speaks about his foundation. “*It is a foundation of Missionaries whose duty it will be to cover the countryside and bring people back to the religious sense that they have lost... What is good about it is that I am forming it without a penny. We must trust fully in Divine Providence... One has no idea of the peoples’ need.*” He appeals to his father’s friends, “*your rich people of Palermo,*” the Cannizzaros. (Cf. Leflon II, p. 30 and OW 13, 1-2).

We still have a kind of leaflet from this period entitled, “*Prospec-tus for the Missions.*” It presents the project and appeals for contributions. There are several versions and cousin Roze-Joannis made a con-

tribution. (See *Missions*, 1956 pp. 234-246). *“The deplorable state of religion in our countryside, whose inhabitants seem to have abandoned the faith of their fathers, has deeply touched many clergymen who have been able to fathom the depth of the wound, and are determined to devote themselves entirely to the work of the Missions, to try to bring people back to religious principles. Evil appears to be at its height, but yet it is still growing daily...”*

“In this dire situation, it was thought necessary to have recourse to the only means that experience has proven to be almost always effective, the ministry of Missionaries. The most obstinate wickedness finally yields to the special envoys whose mission the Lord usually blesses by sensational conversions that are close to miraculous...”

“The Missionaries did not refuse to face the difficulties of such a great undertaking. But invincible as the obstacles to the work of missions might seem, the clerics who devote themselves to them, have not been discouraged. They look forward to gathering even larger numbers, so that some may devote themselves to prayer, study, and meditation of the sacred truths, while others spread out over the region, to preach the word of God and to revive the practice of the evangelical precepts.”

Then came the appeal for generosity: *“We have no doubt that those who carry in their heart a sincere love for religion, will find it a pleasant duty to sow some temporal goods in order to obtain eternal ones.”* After mentioning the prayers offered for the benefactors, the Prospectus concludes with a *“subscription formula.”* *“I promise to pay every year for... years, in as much, however, as I am able to, the sum of to contribute to the cost of the establishment of the house of the Missions of Provence, based in Aix in the former Carmelite convent.”*

December 13, Eugene de Mazenod writes to Tempier: *“Pray to God that He will give me the strength and patience I need. They are being tested severely.”* At the time, he was spending days and nights at the bedside of the young Casimir Archange, a member of the Youth Congregation.

A letter to Forbin Janson, December 19, stresses the fragility of the undertaking (OW 6, 14-16). *“You will no doubt be surprised, my beloved brother and friend at not yet having received any letters from me. But to have something to write, I would have had to know what was going on and at times I have seen what I was building tottering from top*

to bottom. Everything has been put into motion to bring it down, and I cannot say that it is solidly on its feet. The house was bought a long time ago; the church leased and partly repaired. All is ready on the material side but my men dither, the few that they are.

He on whom I was counting the most is letting himself be deterred by the cackling of the pious hens of his parish. He is convinced there is much good he can do his backyard. He hesitates to leave and I am dismayed by his indecision. [This refers to Deblieu.]

Another who excels constantly in proclaiming the word of God to the people is only partially attached to our mission, being persuaded that he does enough good by himself on his travels to and fro. [This is Mie.]

A third, who is too incensed and vexed with the slowness of the others, threatens to take off by himself if they do not promptly make up their minds. [Icard]

A fourth, who is an angel, and who seems destined to be the joy of a community, cannot obtain permission to leave his vicariate, although he protests that he cannot bear to stay and wants to work only in the missions, etc. [Tempier]

I myself, overwhelmed with worries and cares, wage war listlessly, supported in the midst of this bother only by the supernatural outlook which inspires me, but which does not prevent me feeling the whole weight of my situation and all the more woefully in that I am helped neither by my taste or inclination which indeed are quite contrary to the kind of life which I am leading.

All of this God sends my way for my embarking on such a difficult venture. How can I put up with a priest [Deblieu] who pledges himself with words of absolute devotion and then comes to retract them for the reason that his mother, who has lived separately from him for ten years, cannot live without him – he would regard it as homicide were he not to give her the consolation of eating with her – and more twaddle of this sort? And the only reply of the Grand Vicars to this beautiful argument is: ‘That will grieve Mr. de Mazenod very much; take it up with him’, when what was needed was to repress such weakness, rather than do nothing other than go along with it on such terms. You will understand now why men of this type can hardly make the journey to Paris: ‘he would not have mother at his side and be able to eat with her’.”

Tempier's letter announcing his imminent arrival in Aix, is of December 20. *"I have decided to leave for Aix the day after Christmas, am quite determined not to come back to Arles and to show all the firmness necessary to impel the Grand Vicars to allow me to join the work of the missions. I wrote them a letter to prepare them for my arrival; it is entirely according to your plan, and I believe that we will definitely carry the day if my sins don't put up a roadblock. I believe we will definitely succeed. Prepare everything for that decisive day."* (OW II, Tempier 2, 22)

LAST PREPARATIONS

"True to his promise", writes Rambert (I, p. 174), "Father Tempier left Arles the day after Christmas and arrived in Aix on the 27th. Mr. de Mazenod was waiting for the arrival of the stagecoach. After the first expressions of the warmest friendship (they knew each other mostly through letters), they went together to meet the Vicars General and Tempier says (in his Memoirs) thanks to the precautions that had been taken and to the esteem in which our revered superior was held, but above all else, thanks to the goodness of God who had merciful designs on me, the vicars general gave us a fine welcome. Not a word of censure for my departure from Arles. We could not have been more at ease or happier than we were at that moment.

From that day until January 25th, I only went to my parents for my night's rest; during the day, I was at Mr. de Mazenod's and we happily dealt with all that we propose to do for the glory of God and the salvation of souls, we said our Office together and we did our devotions in common as much as we could, because Mr. de Mazenod was often disturbed by his congregants."

Tempier's parents were farmers in Milles, where they owned a farm. Tempier returned there for the night, spending the day with Eugene de Mazenod, *"often disturbed"* by the youth. One can guess at the content of these daily meetings; it was like a beginning of community life. They also had enough to do preparing the rooms in the old part of the Carmel, where the Missionaries of Provence would live. This was especially Tempier's task. As Rey writes (Rey I, p. 189), *"he then began filling the role of procurator, one that he kept for a long time.*

He watched carefully over the repairs and preparations for putting the premises in order.”

It is about this time, though the exact dates are unknown, that Mie enlisted Icard to preach a mission, as he had often done. It was in Pignans, in the Var, then part of the diocese of Aix, about thirty kilometers south-east of Brignoles.

Writing to his father (OW 13, 5), Eugene sees this mission as “*our first attempt.*” He gives some additional information in a letter to Forbin Janson (OW 6, 15-16) “*Decidedly we are flapping along on only one wing, although two of our missionaries have already done wonders in the town they have just evangelized, where eighteen hundred people came to the sacraments. All the parish priests around were asking for them... He [Mie] preached every day and sometimes twice a day... Pignans is only a small town but preaching there is done in Provençal.*”

December 30, the deed of purchase for the Carmelite convent was signed in the presence of a notary.

Eugene could not finish his December letter to Forbin. He therefore resumed it in January (OW 6, 15-16): “*Decidedly we are flapping along on only one wing...*” After a word about the success of the mission at Pignans: “*We are upset just the same. The one who should have rendered us the greatest service [probably Deblieu] went back on his word; he remains in his parish wherein he stirred up such a commotion with his ridiculous farewells and got the people so worked up that they opposed his departure. I am obliged to warn you not to count on us for the mission at Marseilles. The missionaries are unwilling and I myself am unable. I have had no time to write anything and have not a single sermon. I trust in my ability to preach to a small gathering or to country people but I will never take it upon myself to speak thus in a large city, especially at a mission. I know this decision will indispose you somewhat but no one is bound to do the impossible. I believe that if you were here you could persuade one of our men to follow you to Marseilles because I believe he is full of goodwill and quite resolute but he will not be very useful to you because he only has three or four sermons, at the most. However, he preached every day and sometimes twice a day during the mission at Pignans which he has just finished. Pignans is only a small town but preaching there is done in Provençal.*”

“M. Guigou does not think it possible this season to have the priests’ retreat of which you speak. He thinks it can take place only in summer. I think he will write to you about that. And yet it should be arranged if only to teach priests that it is not permitted to calumniate and that it is hardly Christian to rage at and obstruct the good that others would wish to do. The yapping that goes on amongst them never ceases. Only my presence keeps down the complaints. When facing me, all is well but beware when I turn my back! Our people are a sorry lot, dear friend. I scarcely would have believed it possible!”

No priests are named, says Fr. Pielorz (*Missions*, 1957, p. 115), but he thinks they are Rey and Florens, who will be joined by others the following year. Rey was secretary to Bishop de Cicé and then to Bishop Jauffret. He had Gallican opinions and showed himself favorable to Napoleon (thus the opposite of Eugene’s which were ultramontane and royalist). The same was true of Florens, former vicar general of Bishop Jauffret, and a professor (without students) at the Faculty of Theology. The ideological differences of the past were still there. As for the mission of Marseilles in 1816, we will speak of that later.

Among all the letters to Forbin Janson, we find an undated one (*Missions*, 1962, p. 218-220; OW 6, 17). Its primary purpose is to ask, once again, for the help (the piston!) of Charles and his well placed friends in favour of his father and two uncles. *“If you get nothing at all, I shall say that it’s your fault.”*

Then Eugene adds: *“For goodness sake, be on the look-out for the archbishop they are to give us, so as to put me in his good graces. Otherwise our house will fall to the ground; the wind and tide are against missionaries. We go forward because we have on our side a Grand Vicar (Guigou); but woe if he gives in. All would be lost. I believe that for the good of the cause and considering all the other little benefits I contribute, in spite of many people of the cloth who abhor whatever they do not do themselves, I can without being pretentious aspire to be Grand Vicar, even though I ought not to get mixed up in anything. But I should have a little authority and independence in order to do good, without these continual hindrances which undermine and reduce me to despair. I keep going but do not make half as much progress as I could otherwise. It is pitiful to have to say this and seek after what they would have thrown my way in other times. We are furious here that Father Rey*

has been made a canon. Beware of introducing him to the new archbishop; we would be lost. Adieu, I embrace you with all my heart and I beg you to pray much for me; I'll pay you back a little."

JANUARY 25, 1816

Thus we arrive at the decisive date of January 25, 1816. That day five Missionaries of Provence affix their signature to the request for authorization addressed to the Capitular Vicars General of Aix. We find the text in OW 13, 2-4. The approval from the Vicars General is dated January 29. According to Fr. Beaudoin, the petition has five signatures, those of Mazenod, Tempier, Icard, Mie and Deblieu. Icard's signature was later crossed out. It does not seem to be mentioned in the response. On the other hand we find that of Maunier's in the response. (See OW 13, 2 and 4, Notes 5 and 6).

In a letter to Fr. Mille, January 24, 1831 (OW 8, 11) Eugene de Mazenod writes: *"Tomorrow I celebrate the anniversary of the day, sixteen years ago [an error of one year], that I left my mother's house to go and set up house at the Mission. Father Tempier had taken possession of it some days before..."* In his *Mémoires*, cited by Rambert (I, pp. 174-176), Tempier writes: *"January 25, 1816, on the feast of the Conversion of St. Paul, the day we had fixed to come together, each of us left our father's house and our families for good to take possession of our humble abode and to never leave it... We lived there alone for about three weeks. It was not until mid-February that Mie, a certain Icard and Deblieu came to join us."* In mid-March Icard left under the conditions we already know of, and Maunier joined the small group.

It seems that it was on that January 25 that the first five missionaries met and held their first meeting. They finalized the petition to the Capitular Vicars General and signed it. This petition is composed of two parts that are easily distinguished, the statement of reasons for the request, then the provisional Regulation.

The undersigned priests deeply moved by the deplorable situation of the small towns and villages of Provence that have almost completely lost the faith;

Knowing from experience that the callousness or indifference of these people renders the ordinary help supplied by your concern for their salvation insufficient and even useless;

Convinced that missions are the only means by which these people who have gone astray can be brought out of their degradation;

Desirous, at the same time, of responding to the call which summons them to consecrate themselves to this arduous ministry;

And wishing to accomplish it in a manner as useful to themselves as it is advantageous for the people whom they propose to evangelize;

They have the honour of requesting from you the authorization to come together at Aix in the old house of the Carmelites which one of them has acquired; and to live there in community under a Rule whose main points they now indicate to you.

This is followed by 16 short paragraphs in which the Rule is outlined. It says they will form “a regular community of Missionaries,” which “is subject only to the Ordinary.” “On entering the Society, the Missionaries must resolve to persevere in it until the end of their lives.” And the superior will be elected for life.

“Vicars General and Gentlemen: Such is a comprehensive outline of the regulations that the undersigned priests present for your approval in requesting your authorization to form a community.

Done at Aix, January 25, 1816,

Eugene de Mazenod, Tempier, Icard, Mie, Deblieu. »

The answer was not long in coming. We quote it from Rey (I, 192).

“Approval

We the Vicars General of the Diocese of Aix and Arles, the See being vacant,

Convinced of the usefulness of the aforesaid gathering of priests who are respectable and dedicated to the salvation of souls, full of confidence that the mercy of God will bless their enterprise, recognizing that this is a sign of his infinite goodness to have inspired the aforementioned priests with the generous resolution of devoting themselves together to the instruction and education of their neighbor, living for this purpose in community in the house called the Carmelites of Aix, in the observance of the above Regulation which we have examined and the provisions of which we approve, have authorized Mssrs. Mazenod,

Maunier, Deblieu, Tempier and Mie to come together in community in the house called the Carmelites in Aix, for the observance of the above-mentioned regulation, reserving however, the right to give them a fuller and more formal authorization with rule changes that experience may show to be helpful, if necessary.

*Given at Aix, the 29th of January 1816
Guigou, Canon and Vicar General.”*

It is likely that on January 25th they proceeded to the election of the superior. Here is what Jeancard writes (*Mélanges...* pp. 18-19): “*The first concern of the priests gathered in the house of Aix was to establish themselves as a community by the regular election of a superior. All the votes, as can be imagined, were for Father de Mazenod, who at first refused the burden imposed on his dedication, but he could not resist for long, and had to give in...*” “*In a unanimous and spontaneous voice, writes Tempier, we proclaimed our superior, despite the comments he had made to decline this charge; because I think we would have immediately split up if it had been otherwise.*” (Rambert, I, p. 177)

In his *Mémoires* cited by Rambert (I, pp. 176-177), Eugene describes the living conditions of the first team of three. He had to accept “*the onerous conditions*” of the director of the boarding school: “*She had left us narrowly confined to the rooms she had deeded over to us. To reach the top-floor apartment, which now serves as a library, we had to use the small staircase leading from the outside of the house; we had great difficulty squeezing into these quarters. Thus, two of our group slept in the room that has now become the library, while I myself slept in the narrow passageway leading to it. As we had very little furniture in those first days, we set a lamp on the threshold of the connecting door and it served the three of us at bedtime. The refectory, supposedly temporary, remained poorly furnished for a long time. Our improvised table was merely a plank placed over two barrels which served as legs. The fireplace, where we did our cooking, smoked so badly that it blotted the daylight out of the fox-hole where we ate with great relish the meager portions set before us. This suited the dispositions God had put into our hearts far more than the leisurely meals my mother would have been glad to serve us at her home. We had not lost any of our cheerful-*

ness. On the contrary, as this way of life formed a pretty stark contrast with that which we had left, we often had a hearty laugh about it.”

It is not easy to make sense of the information we have for the next few days. They are later recalls. According to Tempier (Rambert I, p. 177), they were only two at first, while Eugene speaks of three. “*It was not until mid-February that Messrs. Mie, Icard and Deblieu came to join us.*” Mid-February? It was probably a few days before, because some checking leads us to fix the beginning of the Grans mission on February 11. (See Pielorz in *Missions*, 1955, pp. 550-551). In addition, Jeancard (*Mélanges*, p. 19) speaks of an eight-day retreat together; Rambert says “*ten days*”! “*Gathered in the name of Jesus Christ, the members of this community wanted to prepare themselves through prayer and meditation on the divine truths before engaging in the exercise of their new ministry. They made a joint eight-day retreat, which was actually an imitation of the recollection in the Cenacle.*”

Septuagesima Sunday, February 11, 1816, began their first joint mission in Grans, near Salon-de-Provence. Four missionaries took part: Eugene de Mazenod, Icard, Deblieu and Mie. As for Tempier, he stayed in Aix for the service of the church and the Youth Congregation, which then had more than three hundred young people. (Rambert I, p. 183).

The little Society of the Missionaries of Provence was born and beginning to work.

A BRIEF REVIEW

Is it appropriate to add a few remarks to help review this history which is our history? A handful of priests say they are touched by the sad state of the Church and by the lack of responses to it. Their analysis of the situation leads them to form a community that would be at the service of the Church: only parish missions can give the people who have gone astray the shock that will put them back on the way to salvation, only apostolic men can rebuild solidly.

But these core beliefs, although shared, are nothing without a major choice. This choice, Eugene de Mazenod decided to make it for himself and to share it with others. It took him, he said, a strong impulse from outside. This was necessary to accept the loss of independence over his activity and life that had been his hitherto and to bind himself

to a fragile Icard, to a Deblieu rich in qualities but fickle and quite rigid, to an older and more experienced Mie, who lived and worked very well alone. Eugene and his companions undertake to shift from «I» to «we», to work and live together. It is striking that the request to the diocesan authorities places living in community in first place.

Moreover, Eugene is forced to give up his ambiguity, and to bear responsibility for the group — he who would rather be led by joining Forbin Janson and the Missionaries of France. It not only took the strong impulse from outside but also Tempier's participation which was essential. Eugene soon realized that the group would not hold together if the binding force of a community man and a man of prayer was not added to the impetus of the leader. And the group gave itself a relatively well defined horizon, the diocese of Aix and the little people who spoke Provençal.

There may be a shared analysis, a shared enthusiasm, a plan made together, a certain distribution of tasks, but there can be no lasting foundation if there is not on the part of each one an acceptance to live and work with the other, with all his originality, the definition of rules of life more or less explicit and also, I think, a leadership that sees a little further than the others while knowing how to lead with flexibility and patience. Without this commitment together, there is no solid foundation, there is no foundation.

It is not pointless to ask how long Eugene would have lasted had he joined Forbin Janson and the Missionaries of France. Eugene launched out while agreeing to launch the others. He is the Founder. But we can also ask if the group would have existed without Tempier. History, the needs of the mission, problems of temperament, and the arrival of young members will make things evolve. It is only January 25, 1816.

Chapter 4

THE MISSIONARIES OF PROVENCE FIRST YEAR 1816-1817

January 25, 1816 in the former Carmelite monastery in Aix, all five met for the first time. They signed a request to the diocesan authorities, asking to gather as a community to preach missions in the small towns and villages of Provence. They were Eugene de Mazenod, who was elected superior, Jean-François Deblieu, Auguste Icard, Pierre Mie and François de Paule Tempier. Three weeks later, four of the Missionaries of Provence began the mission at Grans, while Tempier stayed in Aix to care for the church and the youth.

GRANS: THE FIRST MISSION

Grans had approximately 1,500 inhabitants. This village is located about thirty kilometers west of Aix, near Salon-de-Provence. Roze-Joannis, Eugene's *uncle*, was the mayor; more than two years earlier he had asked Eugene to preach a mission there. "*This region needs one... I think we can expect some good...*" (Rey I, p, 193). The mission, when finally launched, would last five weeks, from Septuagesima Sunday, February 11th to the 3rd Sunday of Lent, March 17. Two letters from Eugene to Tempier give us a glimpse of the first collective work of the Missionaries of Provence (OW 6, 18-19).

Grans, February 24, 1816

It is absolutely impossible for me to write to you, my good brother and friend. We have no time to eat, nor even to sleep. I should at this moment be at the office of pacification; but I have had to write to M. Guigou (capitular vicar.) I send this to you as an open letter so that you may read it and have it read to our friends. Were I to enter into details, you would be moved to tears. I miss you ten times daily. Religion would be lost in this country without the mission. It is a triumph. Though it be

the death of us, I will not complain. Our work is indispensable and only if we are twelve shall it be able to continue. Plead for recruits in your prayers. I shall regret all my life that you have not been here with us, but God will take into account your sacrifice.

A thousand regards for all friends, great and small I think of them every day in the holy sacrifice. Let them not forget us.

I embrace you with my heart, cherished brother that you are. Adieu, adieu.

P.S. Between us missionaries... we are what we ought to be, that is to say, we have but one heart, one soul, one thought. It is admirable! Our consolations, like our hardships, are unequalled.

Grans, March 11, 1816

[We remain] quite united to our dear and good brother Tempier, despite the sacrifice that we make in putting off for eight days our leaving to rejoin him. Not that we can help it; but, in conscience, we cannot leave our work undone. Enormous would have been the number of men we would have left in the lurch, if we had finished on the intended day. It is for the sake of these men that we are prolonging our work until the third Sunday of Lent. State clearly to our dear friends that this delay annoys me as much as them and even more; but, in the name of God, let them not give me the sorrow of finding them less fervent than I left them. It has been claimed, at Salon, that they were less assiduous; they are mistaken, no doubt, but this rumour has grieved me.

The good work proceeds; blasphemy has been banished from this place. The inhabitants do not know how this prodigy has happened for there had been no other place where it had been more frequent.

As for us, we never stop hearing confessions. We take in every variety; therein consist our prayers, our preparation, our thanksgiving and everything else, day and night. The other day I could not say Matins until six o'clock in the evening. If you do not pray for us, we are in a bad fix. Not until next Monday shall we leave.

I hope that the good God will take into account the sacrifice that we are making for his glory and for the greatest good...

A few weeks later, on May 1st Eugene describes the full success of the mission to his father (OW 13, 4-6): "Our first attempt was at Pignans. It worked marvels; I was not there, but had the consolation of heading the mission at Grans. I had never seen miracles, which now I

cannot say. The people were abandoned and had completely strayed. Faith had died out. They only knew about God to blaspheme his name in the most horrible manner, and that by women and children as well as by men. Needless to say, no one made their Easter duties. The parish priest did not even confess two men; even the women and children had taken the same part, and soon one could have closed the church, so seldom was it used; half the population had not set foot there for 25 years. What more could I tell you? Everything that you could imagine.

Well, the mission changed everything; from the first week, blasphemy was totally eradicated, so much so that the inhabitants informed the people of Salon who passed through Grans and still used blasphemy that they should give up that terrible habit they had or take a different route if they didn't want to be punished for their insolence. The day after our arrival, we set up confessionals for the four missionaries, they were besieged from three o'clock in the morning, I tell you this because it is a fact, and we stayed there for the following 28 hours. Twenty-eight hours, I must repeat it so that you don't think I made a mistake in writing it. As for the details as to what happened during the mission, it is impossible to attempt to tell them. Excessive cold did not stop the church from being full from three in the morning onward. Three hours of religious exercises did not quench the holy eagerness of these good country people; in the evening they hurried back from the fields to take their place...

Forty years later, writing in his diary on September 5, 1857 (OW 22, 121[French edition]), Eugene de Mazenod still feels the need to recall "*the wonders that were performed by the grace of God at Grans.*"

THE IMPORTANCE GIVEN TO CONFESSIONS

The way this mission and those that followed it were conducted would merit a much longer reflection. The studies are numerous but they are beyond the scope of this work. However, one point that can be noted is the time spent confessing – "*28 hours straight!*" And it was often like that.

Little is known about how this sacrament was celebrated, since it is by nature a sacrament that involves secrecy. One can imagine that the missionaries required the most complete confession possible, espe-

cially for penitents who had been away for more than 25 years, and that they also emphasized true contrition and a very firm resolve. Preaching about sin and the threats of hell had an important place at the time. It also seems that the penitents were usually asked to return several times before absolution. And yet the Missionaries of Provence were often blamed for their indulgence or laxity, since they followed the theology of Alphonsus de Liguori, which was much challenged by Jansenism.

The first Constitutions of the Missionaries of Provence (1818) (*Missions* 1951, p. 36-38) provide a good key to understanding this. *“We only preach to bring sinners to the pool... It is beyond all doubt that the ministry of confession is to be preferred to that of preaching, when there is a choice, because the private advice given in the tribunal of penance may supply for the lack of instruction... If grace has touched a soul by the power of the Word of God, it is only in the tribunal of penance that it moulds and justifies the soul.”* After the home visits inviting people to the mission and the visits to the sick, it was in the sacrament of penance that each one could be touched personally by the gospel. We can understand that it was worth spending time for it.

AT AIX

Meanwhile, adds Bishop de Mazenod (OW 22, 122 [French edition]) Tempier remained at Aix: *“Certainly, it was not to stay idle. We had to care for the church, where I had established night prayers in common for the faithful. These prayers were always followed or preceded by points for meditation. Every day many young people of my congregation (over three hundred) met in the choir chapel, or played together in the common room in the house. On Sunday, they attended Mass during which they were given an instruction. In the afternoon, before or after Vespers, they were given a catechism class. Along with all this we also preached sermons to the public. I made it a custom to accompany the young congregants to my Enclos, at the gates of the city, so they could play at their ease. It was also necessary to confess this little flock... The work was really excessive.”*

At Aix, says Rey (I, p. 194), *“Father Tempier worked hard and under his active supervision the choir was completely restored and could welcome the faithful and serve as a public chapel. The Forty Hours*

were solemnly celebrated there for the first time on February 24, and the crowd of pious people showed clearly that there was good to be done as soon as the church would be available to the public.” It would not be long.

The Grans mission ended on March 17, the 3rd Sunday of Lent. The aim of the little Society was to preach missions in Provence to revive the faith, but also to “live in community”. In between missions, “the missionaries will strive in community to acquire the virtues and knowledge proper to a good missionary...” (OW 13, 3) stated the petition to the diocesan authorities. It would be interesting to know how these five diocesan priests lived their first few months together. For the three young ones, Eugene de Mazenod, Tempier and Deblieu, seminary life was still in the recent past. But the Revolution had forced Mie to interrupt his seminary training 25 years earlier. His participation in community life was always, it seems, quite original. For Maunier it was even easier, since he had never gone to the seminary, his formation having been clandestine and on the job. However, it would be inappropriate to apply to the new little group the criteria of religious community life. The early biographers remain very discreet on this point. We must therefore settle for a few brief notes.

“The unworthy Icard had been dismissed as soon as we returned from our first mission,” writes Eugene de Mazenod in his memoirs (Rambert I, p. 187). He is a little more explicit in the novitiate admissions register (*Missions*, 1952, p 10.) *“Major reasons forced me shortly after to tell him that henceforth he was no longer to consider himself part of our Society, which judges him unfit for it. He left immediately and will no longer be able to return.”*

As for Maunier, according to the same register, which it will be remembered was begun in 1820, he left his post as curate at Trinity in Marseilles in March to join the little community. Here is his formula:

“Maunier / March 15, 1816

I, Emmanuel-Frèjus Maunier, priest residing in Marseilles, having a sincere desire to join the Society of the Missionaries of Provence, came to Aix March 18th in the year one thousand eight hundred sixteen, with the intention of living there in the observance of the Holy Rules of the Institute, and I began my novitiate that day.

Given at Aix, the 23rd of August 1820, Maunier, missionary priest

The Superior General authorized Mister Emmanuel-Fréjus Mau-nier, priest, to enter the novitiate on the 15th of March 1816. Signed: Tempier.”

There is no explanation for the slight divergence of the dates.

As concerns Fr. Mie, according to the *Historical Dictionary I*, “*He entered the community in a definitive way only during the annual retreat and General Chapter of 1818.*” Jeancard writes: “*He came to join the zealous Founder and his other colleagues and found himself with them on several missions. During the winter, he would go around the villages of Provence, doing God’s work, and during the summer, the time of year when the Missions were suspended, he continued his ministry in Salon as vicar of the parish.*” (*Missions*, 1866, p. 442).

The little book of Fr. de L’Hermite on Fr. Courtès gives us this information (p. 23): “*Therese Bonneau, a good woman, who is living out the end of a long and Christian life at Aix at this time (1868), moved from the service in the boarding school to that of the missionaries. She likes to tell of the fervor and austerity of the early days. A modest salary of one hundred francs was given to her by Mr. de Mazenod; their life-style was not marked by comfort, say the chronicles, and often Therese, pitying the poor living standard of the community, took from some of her meager resources to add to the dinner she served these mortified men without ever mentioning it, she said.*”

The first biographers give a lot of importance to the Holy Thursday of April 11, 1816. “*Fr. Tempier and I... on Holy Thursday, kneeling beneath the canopy of the beautiful repository we had erected over the main altar of the Mission church, both pronounced our vows on the night of that holy day with a joy that cannot be described.*” (*Mémoires*, in Rambert I, p. 187). Rambert and Rey seem to see this as the beginning of religious life for the Missionaries of Provence. In a note Leflon (II, p. 43, note 26) quotes Jeancard who, “*taking a more restrictive view explained that the two missionaries agreed between themselves to sacrifice their own wills by a vow of reciprocal obedience.*” (*Mélanges historiques*, p. 104). Leflon adds that it is Jeancard “*who comes closest to the truth,*” because the vow of poverty was not introduced until 1818. This reciprocal vow of obedience seemed to have been desired already in their early correspondence. Now, the two friends were giving it a sacred character, although it remained private. Their future relations show

both the strength of this bond and its importance for the history of the Congregation. About the other members Eugene notes: *“I did not find Mr. Deblieu as docile to this good inspiration... I do not know where Fr. Mye was at the time, presumably on a mission somewhere, since he needed to be always in action.”* (Rambert I, p. 187).

During the Grans mission, Tempier assured the ministry at the chapel in Aix. Since November 21, 1815 and the blessing of the premises by Beylot, the vicar general, (OW 16, 169), the services were held in the former Carmelite choir chapel. Concerning the church, Rey (I, p. 194) writes: *“The vicars general gave a more explicit authorization than the one already expressed in the document of canonical institution of the community. The work of appropriating the church was pursued with such haste that on Palm Sunday, April 7, 1816, the former Carmelite church was blessed making it fit for worship by erasing the defilement and desecration of a sacrilegious past.”* From that time the name *“Mission Church”* was given to it by the faithful. Rambert (I, p 184) cites Tempier: *“No doubt almost everything remained to be done for the interior decoration and furnishing of the building; but given the primitive state of its degradation, it was already much to have done the most urgent things and readied it for the celebration of divine worship.”*

There is very little information on the Youth Congregation at this time, since Eugene had stopped writing in the *Diary*, which has *“a gap of 28 months”* (OW 16, 170). Everything suggests that Eugene took up its direction again upon his return from Grans. Among the newly admitted members, we note the name of Jean-Baptiste Honorat, future pioneer of the Canada mission, who was not yet 17 years old. The young congregants and novices will have an important place in the life of the little Society.

SPRING OF 1816

Forbin Janson and probably Mr. Rauzan had requested the collaboration of the Missionaries of Provence for a mission in Marseilles in 1816. Father de Mazenod had declined: *“I am obliged to warn you not to count on us for the mission at Marseilles. The missionaries are unwilling and I myself am unable. I have had no time to write anything and have not a single sermon.”* (To Forbin Janson, December 19, 1815,

OW 6, 16). However, we know that Eugene de Mazenod preached for the erection of the cross near the church of St. Martin on Easter Tuesday (See Appendix 2).

The letter that Eugene writes to his father May 1st (OW 13, 4-6) reveals his state of mind. *“To tell you about ourselves, I would need more time than I have since there would be much to tell... To form an establishment at the bat of an eye, to see its components come together in spite of obstacles which seemed insurmountable to human wisdom, to meet men dedicated to God’s work even though a thousand apparently good reasons might have turned them away; these men, among whom I am the eldest, are producing such surprising fruits of salvation as to silence any calumny and all that before anyone was convinced that the almost unknown plan was a reality: such are the prodigies of which we are witnesses and instruments.”*

What he wrote about the missions at Pignans and Grans has already been cited. *“I wanted to ask you to see the Missionaries of the Redeemer to beg them to send me their Constitutions and Rules, the Office of their holy founder, his life and relics if possible, at least a picture large enough to put in our community room until we can place it in our church. I have studied his works extensively and we have taken him as one of our patrons; we would like to walk in his footsteps and imitate his virtues. Ask for and send me many details about these good Fathers who are his disciples and implore them to pray to the good Lord for us who have a great need for support in the midst of the difficulties and obstacles we are meeting... I have some (of his writings), among others his moral theology which I like very much and have studied in a special way when I had the time to study since at the present time I can do nothing else but be active, and that is very much against my inclination, but since the good Lord demands it, I certainly must do it.”*

This seems to be the first time that Eugene expresses so clearly that he and his companions referred to Alphonse de Liguori. *“We would like to follow in his footsteps and imitate his virtues.”* He says he made a special study of his moral theology and liked it a lot. Alphonsus de Liguori died in 1787. His beatification which was scheduled for 1807 was delayed because of the captivity of the Pope and took place only in September 1816.

It is surprising that Eugene refers to himself as “*the eldest*” of the little Society. Mie was 14 years older than him and Maunier thirteen. Would he have considered them insufficiently committed or unsure? Their formula of admission to the novitiate does not contain the words, “*unto death*” which is explicit in those of Eugene de Mazenod, Templier, and Deblieu.

May 13, by a notarized act, “*the lady Gontier, widow Pascal, declares the surrender as of today of the right to use (that part of the convent) she had reserved... and promises to move out in the course of the week.*” The document specifies the financial conditions and payment schedule. Now the small Society can really feel at home. Moreover, it now has rooms that will allow it to accommodate the young men who want to join. Two are reported in the month of April, Carles and de Bausset of whom we will speak later.

In February Eugene’s father had written that after a very long absence from the sacraments, he had made his confession and had been able to resume the practice of communion. “*God has finally had pity on me and gave me the grace to withdraw myself from the empire of the devil.*” Writing to him July 8, Eugene urges him “*to go often, very often to confession... A very dirty pot in which the dregs have been deposited for a long time, and whose surfaces are all encrusted over, must, after being washed, be rinsed out several times...*”

In the same letter (OW 15, 126-127) he speaks of his excessive workload. “*At present, I cannot do anything else but work, and it is quite contrary to my taste. But since God in his goodness requires it, I must conform. I begin usually at 5:00 a.m. and finish at 10:00 p.m., sometimes 11.00. I am lucky if I have time to say my office properly! It cannot be otherwise; after all, what does it matter? Provided that God is glorified and good gets done, that is all we can desire. That is the only reason we are here. What happiness to serve a master who takes everything into account for you. What folly to yearn for anything other than pleasing him!*”

A LETTER TO FORBIN JANSON: A MERGER OF THE TWO SOCIETIES?

A long letter to Forbin Janson was probably written this same July (Cf. OW 6, 20-22). The full text is published in *Missions*, 1962,

pp. 357-362. After speaking of his workload, Eugene writes that, despite his wishes, it is very unlikely that his small Society will join the Missionaries of France. He speaks also about the opposition of the clergy of Aix.

“I am so far from wanting to make excuses, my dear friend, that I am writing you on my knees, as I have a real sense of having given you offence. If I could have answered you immediately after I received your good, kind, and touching letter of June 22, I would have written absolutely in the same vein; I would even have gone one better than you, but I feel that the length of my silence infects and weakens my cause in any tribunal other than that of your heart. Have no fear anyway that your latest reproaches have struck home. I knew beforehand that I deserved them, and not a day has passed without my making them against myself more than once... The upshot of it all is that I cannot get through all my work. The burden is so heavy that it frightens me sometimes for fear that it may totally overwhelm me. I did not write, because I put it off to the time I thought was coming when I would have an hour to myself to do as I pleased with; and that moment never came. Today, I have taken my precautions. Even so, in the space of this wretched page I have just written, I have had to attend to several people and write three letters. If I told you everything I have to do as a matter of course, it would shock you. And what is killing me is the thought of having to do in the course of the day a score of things over and above what I am able to. In all that I do it causes an involuntary interior agitation which heats up my blood. I think that is one of the chief causes of the ups and downs of my health. Imagine. I see myself reduced to the point of taking some salep. But I am talking too much of my wretched self.

Let us speak rather about you who have done so many fine things for God’s glory. None of the things you told me about have arrived. I have received neither your account nor that of M. Rauzan. All I know is what I have learnt from what is said publicly and through a letter M. Lieutard passed to one of our friends.

Do not think I have disregarded the proposals you have repeatedly made to me on the subject of uniting our houses. I have, on the contrary, been quite busy taking them up with both our Grand Vicars and our members. The constant attitude of the former is that such a union would not be to the advantage of the diocese. My confreres share this

feeling. They are concerned more with evangelizing the poor people of the rural areas than the city dwellers, and I agree with them. The need of the former is incomparably greater and the fruits of our ministry amongst them more assured. However, in wishing to rid myself of the kind of superior status which circumstances have imposed on me, I would ask nothing better than to see this union and, were I to have my way, I would shut myself up in seclusion. But I must not think of that for the moment. Providence wills that I move things forward here.

Not only is hell to be stormed but we must defend ourselves against jealousy and all other mean passions which agitate certain priests, pitiable though they are since they are judged by the public in a manner quite mortifying for them. As happily they have little to say against the missionaries, they have made their attack against the missions themselves with a hypocrisy which could have seduced large numbers had we left their speeches unanswered. A parish priest went so far as to write ex officio a syllogistic letter to one of our group to prove to him that he had compromised his conscience by abandoning the service of his parish in order to become a missionary. It is a curious story which would have entertained you, if the recipient had been here as I write to you. There is not one of us who has not been fired at. I will even say confidentially that only one of the Grand Vicars (Guigou) is on our side; the other (Beylot?) overwhelms me with compliments, but were it not for his being obliged to live in dependence on the other, who is infinitely superior to him in merit, he would have blocked us; we would have been nipped in the bud. This little schemer, whom I was kind enough, not to say virtuous enough, to recommend to you, is our bitter enemy, although in secret because he dares not attack me openly. Our response to all such people is to do as much good as we can; but they are truly pitiable.

To return to the question of uniting, I desire it but do not yet see it feasible since it is no more to the liking of the Grand Vicars than it is of our missionaries. We must not, however, lose sight of the possibility. Both of us would need to be recognized by the government and authorized to receive legacies. A man has just died and left us four thousand francs which it will be much trouble to obtain. I am surprised that you have not made more progress. Our house will always be quite a fine establishment and of major importance for the whole of Provence. I hope

then that the future archbishop will protect it; the difficulty of supplying it with personnel should determine him not to oppose its being united to yours. The same reason should convince our missionaries who (at present) insist that they see no advantage therein for us and for the work as we see it. If we can give them good reasons, it will not be impossible to have them change their stance. For the moment, they absolutely wish to work only in the villages and not leave Provence: one for family reasons; another for reasons of health; another because of an invincible repugnance and another, because he could be sent anywhere save in his own region. We are five in all, a number so inadequate for the work we have to do that we will infallibly succumb, myself especially for whom the time that we are not on missions is not a time of rest. Patience! If I perish alone...

I resume my letter for the hundredth time. Had I begun it six months ago, it would have been finished before you could complain. But enough said about that. You ask if we could do the missions of Arles and Toulon with you. I have proposed this to our little community but they do not think it possible. First, because we have refused to do a mission for two parish priests in Marseilles because we are determined to begin with the villages; second, because after promising to go to Martigues, we withdrew, partly on the same grounds and partly because of our fewness in number; third, because we have also put off to a later date the mission they asked us to do at Brignoles; finally, because we have committed ourselves to some villages for the whole mission season. Particular circumstances oblige us to begin even earlier; indeed we will be setting forth on the first of September. We will perhaps preach underground. Would to God we can make ourselves heard in hell. I do not joke by saying that since we may be preaching underground; we are going to do this first mission in a region inhabited only by miners who spend their lives in the coal pits. I expect we will be obliged to go and unearth them, showing them a light more brilliant than the sun and which will blind them less..."

Eugene ends his letter on an ironic tone of disappointment. Nobody among Forbin Janson's friends has done anything on behalf of his father and uncles... It remains a concern for him.

REST AND RETREAT AT BONNEVEINE

The beginning of July 1816 was one of great fatigue for Eugene. *“His strength, his health were indeed soon exhausted, writes Rambert (I, p. 189-190), because to this crushing work he added the practice of the most severe mortification. He slept only a few hours, usually fasted, slept on the floor, frequently inflicted bloody disciplines on himself, usually wore a hair shirt, sackcloth, iron chain, etc. etc. Nature finally succumbed; he became completely exhausted, and profuse vomiting of blood put his life in danger. We then obliged him, says Father Tempier, to leave the house and the community for a time, and to retire to the countryside. It meant forcing him. However, he resigned himself to it.”* Eugene put it this way: *“Divine Providence, knowing my spiritual needs, has permitted a slight excess of bodily tiredness to cause my health to deteriorate and my brothers’ charity to be unduly alarmed and require me to come into this desert place to take a little rest.”* (OW 15, 129) It was not easy for him to keep his vow of obedience to Tempier.

Eugene came to rest at Bonneveine, a suburb of Marseilles, in the country house of his cousin, Dedons de Pierrefeu. It is located just outside Borély Park and today houses the offices of the Botanic Park. It is from there that he wrote to Aix.

“From the place of my exile, July 1816

On the banks of the Huveaune. I am saddened as I think of our dear mission. Did you really think of that my good brothers, when you chased me from it so cruelly? I am like a fish out of water here. My sole consolation is to follow you in your pious exercises. I am more faithful to them than when I was amongst you.

Since you so wish, I will replenish my health. I would also wish to store up virtue so as no longer to be a subject of scandal in your midst; but the second undertaking is not as easy as the first. I have no great hope of succeeding therein; pray then to the good God to give you grace to enable you to endure me. I beg our brother Maunier to excuse me for not having taken leave of him when I left, it was not all my fault, my flight being so precipitate that I had time to do nothing I would have wished to do.

If the good God heeds me, there will be no priests more saintly than you, my dear brothers, whom I love tenderly in the Lord, our common love.

I embrace our dear novices and pray God that he will grant that they imitate your virtues.

Adieu, pray always for me, all of you.

Your unworthy brother

P.S. I wish you to change the end of our litanies; instead of saying Jesus sacerdos, we must say Christe salvator. That is the aspect under which we ought to contemplate our divine Master. Our particular vocation is such that we are associated in a special manner with the redemption of men; the Blessed Liguori has likewise put his Congregation under the protection of the Saviour. Would that we all endeavour, by the sacrifice of our entire being, not to render his redemption useless, both in regard to ourselves and in regard to those whom we are called upon to evangelize.” (OW 6, 19-20)

Eugene took advantage of his stay in Bonneveine to make a retreat. His notes take up more than eight pages in *Oblate Writings* (OW 15, 129-136). *“I will try to profit from it and seriously examine my interior life, for my pressing tasks impede me, they really do not leave me the time, either when I am in town or on the missions for thinking about myself. And what is the result? That each day I get more miserable, and, never having donned many virtues, I am left with nothing but rags.”*

Eugene then rereads the notes of preceding retreats, starting from the one in preparation for his priestly ordination. But he says that he is still confident.

But I cannot cast off the mental attitude, less again the feeling of my heart, that, as my desire is to win the glory of God and the salvation of the souls he ransomed with his blood, by every means in my power, should it cost me my life, I cannot believe that this good Master will not grant me some consideration especially when I consider that my faults arise precisely from the fact that I am busy, seemingly by his will, with the works of his glory and the salvation of my neighbour... God in his goodness knows that I need this trust to act; this it would seem is why he gives it to me...

The youth foundation and that for missions were mine to do perforce, as God in his goodness had placed me in a position to do them;

but how much better these things would have been, if I had put less of myself into them, if I had been more docile to God's inner voice, worked more for my own perfection, at least in profiting from all that was a distraction to me perhaps, because of my superficiality and dissipation, to make progress instead of going backwards.

I must above all be really convinced that I am doing God's will when I give myself to the service of my neighbour, immerse myself in the external business of our house, etc., and then do my best without worrying if, in doing work of this kind, I am unable to do other things which I would perhaps find more to my taste and seem more directly adapted to my own sanctification. If, e.g., at some time when I am attracted to contemplate the mercies of J.C. in his sacrament, someone comes for confession, I must leave O.L. without complaint and regret to fulfil this duty of charity imposed by his will. Or again, if, tired out body and soul, I want to seek some rest in a good book or in prayer, etc., and the business of the house obliges me to go on some boring errand or make some tedious visits, persuaded that preference must always be given to what God requires over what one would oneself desire, etc., I will not hesitate, and I will do it with such good grace that, supposing I had the choice, I would prefer what the service that God has confided to me requires to what I would have a greater personal liking for. Better again, I will try to arrive at a loving preference for what is conformed to the will of the Master, which alone must rule not only my actions, but even my affections.

If I reach that point, the battle is won. But I am a long way from it as of now, through insufficient reflection and yielding too much to my natural ardour which makes me impatient of a task or, if you like, of an interruption that detains me, when I have something else to do that I regard sometimes as more important, and this happens 50 times a day.

I have to acknowledge that the multiplicity of tasks that overwhelms me, have done infinite harm to the accomplishment of the resolutions I took under God's inspiration. That state of continual involvement I am in is unbelievably prejudicial to my interior life; and the way I carry out my duties is visibly harming my health. So all this must be dealt with. My blood is so excited that I feel doubly brusque, which often makes me fail in charity, etc. I do not possess my soul in peace. The least obstacle, the least opposition provokes me. I repulse, in all too human a manner,

opposition that I should overcome and conquer by patience alone. I gratify nature, moaning about my excessive load, etc. That gets me nowhere. It's because I am wholly carnal, human, and imperfect.

Let's deal especially with the interior side; then we will deal with externals and take good resolutions for my relations with my neighbour."

Eugene noted many points needing attention: prayer, humility, gentleness, patience, Mass, preparation, thanksgiving, visit to the Blessed Sacrament, Divine Office, confession, examinations, interferences in the exercises, health...

Particularly revealing of the conversion that he is undergoing is what he writes about the disturbances that his situation imposes on him, and the last three points on his health.

Interference with the exercises. Since I am so regularly disturbed and it is very often impossible for me, with the best will in the world, to do certain exercises at the prescribed times, and I am even sometimes obliged, to my great regret, to excuse myself, it is indispensable that I find a way to make up for it and obviate this drawback. The only way, I believe, is to act always in a perfect dependence on God's will, in perfect liberty of spirit, in union with God by an interior movement of adhesion to what it pleases him to ordain at that moment, in the persuasion that that is what he wants me to do, and absolutely nothing else. If I act in this sense, the very action that frustrates me, that is at odds with me, will be more meritorious than what I would have preferred. Essential rule: lift up one's heart to God before, during and after an action, act always in a spirit of faith.

Care of the body. Soul and body are too closely linked to discount the infinite importance of regulating the latter's habits in such a way that it does no harm to the operations of the soul through exhaustion, etc. It is more sensible to regulate it wisely and so be able to govern it and keep it always in dependence on the soul, in such wise as to lend it support, etc., than if, by compelling this mule, one were to reduce it to exhaustion, to the point of its lying down on the ground and being no longer in a state to go on walking. I have experience of such a setback. It is tiresome no doubt that the body's energies do not match the soul's activity, but that is how it is and that is God's will. So one has to go along with this way things are structured and get what one can from

the donkey, and not refuse him what is indispensably necessary for him to do his work.

Sleep. So he must sleep and eat; and when he is played out he must rest. It is a great pity I did not understand this a lot sooner. There is still time to get there, the damage is not irremediable; but it would be foolish to delay any longer. Whatever happens, I will get the sleep needed so as not to be all-in when I get up in the morning, as is usually the case. I have been guilty of excesses in this area, going back to my first years in the seminary. I acknowledge I would be culpable not to change my ways, since my health, hitherto unfailingly good, has already suffered a lot in consequence. The saints' example seduced me, but it seems God in his goodness does not ask the same of me, as he seems to be warning me by a lessening of my energy and my health upset. I think I will have to take seven hours' sleep. It's hard, I know, but what can I do, when God in his goodness and the doctors require it.

Meals. I have pretended up to now to have mislaid my stomach, and I have been quite successful in this. I believed an habitual fast, working though I was, was not doing me any harm at all; I was wrong. And so, those meals taken in the twinkling of an eye, all that gets me nowhere. Everything must have its time. That kind of behaviour is a real disorder. If I sleep and eat, I am persuaded my chest will stop paining me. I should balk at nothing for the welfare of this instrument that is indispensable to a missionary. That is enough for that section, it is already too long, but one must give it due attention.

Later he will make *"a summary of the resolutions made during the week I spent on retreat in Bonneveine for health reasons."* It gives many details about how he organized his daily life. This summary, dated May 1818, is published in OW 15, 149-155. There are two pages dedicated to his attitude towards his brothers. We find this comment: *"I will take my meals like everybody else."* And then again: *"Repress absolutely and totally those first movements of impatience, petty acts of bluntness..."* *"Less severity towards my mother, more considerate to do everything I can not to upset her..."*

Upon his return to Marseilles, writes Rey, Eugene gave in to the insistent invitations of the parish priest and the mayor of Grans to do a follow-up of the mission in that parish. His chest pains returned with more intensity. Deblieu expresses everyone's concerns. He wrote to Fa-

ther de Mazenod, who had given him some news, on August 15 from his hometown, Brignoles: *“Think about it! Pace yourself, for God’s sake! Do you want by your own fault to let a work so well begun be lost and destroyed? Because if your humility – give me a term that may make you blush – commands you to believe that another can replace you, we who know how things are, are not so confident... If in essence only God is necessary, then those whom, like you, he calls today for such an important, necessary and yet so neglected ministry, are likewise necessary, at least in the present circumstances...”* (Rey I, p. 201). These thoughts are well worth remembering.

Eugene was back in Aix for the feast of August 15. He attended with much joy the distribution of prizes at the college. The praise given to the most distinguished students for their application and conduct was especially noteworthy because it was addressed to members of the Youth Congregation. A precious encouragement for the Founder, says Rey.

Eugene received other encouragement. First of all there was a letter from Mr. Duclaux on August 21. (Rey I, p. 202): *“My very dear and good friend, I renew all my feelings of the most tender and sincere attachment. I beg you to tell me all about your good works, of your work and the success of your missions. Mr. Janson arrived today from Nantes, the mission there has worked wonders as well as the ones in Angers and Orleans; they have worked prodigiously and despite all his work, I found him well. I hope that our good Master has granted you the same grace and that I will have the consolation of knowing that your health is holding up. Your health and your holiness are the only things that interest me. I embrace you and always love me as you know I love you: how I want you to be a perfect priest and a great missionary.”*

There was also the letter sent by the Vicar General, Guigou, to the Minister of the Interior and of Cults requesting official approbation. (See Appendix 3 for the text.) Finally and probably most importantly there were the young men who in various capacities joined the small community.

THE FUVEAU MISSION

There is not much documentation about the Fuveau mission, the second one preached by the Missionaries of Provence. Only Rambert

has a brief and later account by Tempier. We do not know how this place of about 1,500 inhabitants was chosen, perhaps because of the high expectations and the mayor and the parish priest. At the time, the local coal mines were beginning to gain in importance. There are indications that the Peynier-Fuveau-Gardanne basin produced 16,000 tons in 1810. Around 1820, more than half of the draftees were categorized as *miners*. Many *coalmen* worked the modest ramps they dug under the land they owned, thus constituting a unique social group of *peasant-miners*.

The mission took place from the 1st to the 29th of September, led by Eugene de Mazenod, Tempier, Mie and Deblieu. The mission cross erected as a memorial at that time still stands at the entrance to the village, up by the cemetery. Here is what Tempier wrote (in Rambert I, p 203-204.) *“This mission was tough and hard for us, both because of the heat of the early season, and because of the work the men gave us. Almost all worked in the coal mines and could come for confession only at night, after taking their evening meal, or because the residents of the two neighboring parishes (Gréasque and St. Savournin), who had been long deprived of priests, came to hear the Word of God and confess themselves... Everyone, men and women, presented themselves for confession right from the first days. We could never leave the church before midnight and the morning exercise had to begin at half past three. It was all we could do to keep going...”*

The missionaries received the valuable assistance of a 17 year old seminarian, Marius Suzanne, of whom we will speak later.

Rambert also has a letter from the parish priest to the diocesan authorities (pp. 204-206): *“People in service, forced to earn their bread by the sweat of their brow, made the greatest sacrifices to have the benefit of hearing the Word of God... Our poor coalmen organized their work so as not to miss any instruction... Among the fruits of the mission, the eradication of blasphemy is the most remarkable... The missionaries conducted themselves with so much piety, zeal and charity in the short time of their mission, that they have acquired an immortal right of attachment to the good people of Fuveau...”*

Mie and Tempier stayed ten days longer in the parishes of Gréasque and St-Savournin. Tempier wrote to Fr. De Mazenod (Rambert I, p. 207):

“Fr. Superior, tonight we finished our little mission; the harvest was abundant; without a doubt, I had confessed so well during the week that to absolve all my people it took me from eight o’clock Saturday morning, after my Mass, until eight o’clock Sunday morning; that is no exaggeration, I only left the confessional for a hurried lunch and dinner. After confessing all night, only this morning could I take a half-hour rest on my bed, from half past four to five, yet I regret it, because this half-hour meant I had to leave seven or eight people in the lurch. Communion lasted an hour.

Now they have urged me so strongly to stay until tomorrow to take a little rest that I could not do otherwise than to consent; if not, I would have hurt the parish priest. This annoys me a bit because, besides not knowing if I am doing your will, I languish somewhere out of the house. However, I will try to use this day as best as I can. That, my dear Father, is what I was forced to do against obedience. I embrace you tenderly.

Tempier, missionary priest.”

NEW LETTER TO FORBIN JANSON

Eugene’s letter to Forbin Janson on October 9 (OW 6, 23-25) is interesting because he compares the Missionaries of Provence and the Missionaries of France. The latter had just received the royal decree granting them legal recognition (See Appendix 3 for the text.) Should the Missionaries of Provence merge with them? Hilaire Aubert, a Provençal, whom Eugene had approached but who had joined the other society, could have helped with the merger.

“It was impossible, my beloved brother, to reply to the letter which you last wrote to me. I was on a mission and our missions leave us no time to eat or sleep. They are feats of strength. But here I am, back again, and I hasten to thank you for your kind remembrance. The details that you give me about the avidity of the Parisians for the stations of Calvary, made up for the deprivation which your faithless correspondents inflicted on me by keeping to themselves the stories that you relate to me about the missions of Nantes and elsewhere.

I add to these thanks the compliment that I owe you for the official declaration that we have just read in Le Moniteur: so much for that, you are now recognized. They should subsidize you as well for

the services that we render are somewhat more difficult and useful in a manner other than that of the Vicars, etc. We have considered ourselves very fortunate to be able to extend our hospitality to the good brother Hilaire. I would wish that everyone of your group be of his kind, which is ours too; but I have reason to believe that much has to be done to achieve this. If I were you, I would aim at somewhat less brilliance and I would insist more on soundness.

Of what use are fine speeches if one is conceited? Humility, the spirit of abnegation, obedience, etc., and the utmost in the way of fraternal charity are also necessary for the good order and the happiness of a Society. Not all your people have properly understood that. I attribute this failing to a certain necessity wherein you find yourself to accept men capable of preaching. Here we agree on no such arrangements. We were six. Of these six, one did not have the spirit of a man of the Church. He did poor work. We asked him to withdraw. Our community is very fervent. There are no better priests throughout the diocese.

Hilaire will give our young people a retreat of eight days in preparation of the Feast of All Saints. I hope it will have a good effect. I will see that he does not exhaust himself too much but I warn you about him generally: he does not take enough care of himself. At Marseilles, he preached up to three times a day. He does not have the constitution for that. If care is not taken, he will perish as a victim of his zeal.

While on this subject, I take the liberty of telling you that you would have done well to adopt the use of the crucifix, at least during the conducting of your missions. You would hardly believe the effect it produces and how useful it is. People accustomed to ecclesiastical attire are little impressed; but the crucifix to them is awesome. How often have I seen, even amongst libertines, some who, when they see it, cannot help removing their hats. It gives a decided authority; it distinguishes the missionaries from other priests; and that indeed is good because the missionary should be regarded as an extraordinary man. It is useful to the priest in the confessional and, on the day of absolution, it helps the penitent, in whose hands we place it, to conceive sorrow for his sins, to detest them and even to weep because of them. It must needs be that what we have experienced has at all times been acknowledged since, in other Catholic countries, all missionaries carry it as a sign of authority for their missions etc. I cannot imagine how you have been prevented

by the feeble reasons that those who think you should not carry it have given. This to me is an act of weakness, a shameful tribute that you are willing to give to the philosophy of a small number of persons whose antipathy you should have scorned. It would seem that you are fearful of taking part in the folly of the cross. What shall I say to you? I blame this human prudence. You must be more openly a Christian, a priest and an apostle than you have been in this circumstance. You know that I speak my thoughts frankly. But only to you do I say this. It is not a matter for excuses.

Here I am as displeased as ever with priests who cannot stand hearing the sound of the benedictions that all around are pronounced on our work. There are those who have gone so far as to turn people away who, had it not been for their “charitable” concern, would have been benefactors of our house. They apparently have illusions about their intentions, which might be good. As for me, when they meet me, they are always full of compliments. May the good God change them!”

Eugene adds a few words about his father and uncles. Again, he asks Charles to use his influence with the Grand Chaplain (who chooses the bishops) in favor of Fortuné. Then he writes: *“My regards to Fayet and Mr. Rauzan, who knows me a little, but whom I esteem a lot. I told you I did not receive any of your reports. I would at least like to have your rules and statutes.”*

AT AIX, THE YOUTH AND THE COMMUNITY

We would be omitting a fundamental point of the life of the Missionaries of Provence if we did not speak of young people, the Youth, as Eugene calls them. But the sources are incomplete, of a later date and not totally consistent. It is not always clear whether it is about the congregants, younger and older, the “novices” or the young men welcomed into the community without a commitment. Here we will simply relate what we know for 1816. Identifying sources that are quite disparate would be somewhat unwieldy.

Eugene stopped writing the *Diary of the Youth Congregation* in December 1815 because of his heavy responsibilities, so we have but meagre information. Fr. Pielorz, using the admission records, calculated the number of congregants. The numbers rose from 120 at the end

of 1815 to 200 by the end of 1816. These figures do not fail to raise questions, when we consider the available space... We also know that in February 1815 a section for those older than 18 was established.

When again taking up the *Diary* in June 1818 Eugene writes (OW 16, 170): “*The Congregation took on so to speak a new form, at least its regulation and administration were considerably improved in the light of experience, and of new means I had to engage in good works.*” Are these “new means” the other missionaries, as stated in footnote 44? Maunier, Deblieu and Tempier, but not Mie, were received into the Congregation during the year 1816 and they helped Eugene. But Rey writing about the mission of Grans points out that “*His prolonged absence (Eugene’s) saddened his beloved congregants.*” A certain role was assigned to some members (we mention Tavernier and Magallon for the seniors, and Chappuis for the younger ones) as “*mentors for the newcomers,*” which earned them the title of “*Angels*”.

The statute for “*novices*” is obviously quite different. And we must distinguish between those already priests, like Maunier, and the young men who were beginning their formation. Everything indicates that this title marks the missionaries’ entry into the community. Thus Bourrelier says: “*I received the ecclesiastical habit the same day ... (the one when I was admitted) to start my novitiate.*” The list of admissions, reconstituted later, contains some approximations. In April 1816 there is Casimir Carles, age 17, of whom we know almost nothing, then Alexandre Dupuy on October 3, Jean-Baptiste de Bausset and Hilarion Bourrelier aged 18 and 26 respectively, on November 4. Marius Suzanne begins his novitiate formally on January 21, 1817.

It is difficult to know what being a novice in a Society of diocesan priests meant. Jeancard speaks of an “*initiation to the strong virtues that are necessary for an apostolic man.*” The January 25 request to the Vicars General stated: “*The subjects who present themselves to be admitted to the Society will be tested in a novitiate until they have completed their studies, or are deemed suitable for the work of the missions. The Missionaries will be accepted definitely into the Society only after two years of testing.*” Does this mean that the young men would be received and then that experience would show how to train them?

Fr. Pielorz has studied the correspondence that has been preserved from that period. This analysis “*allows us to determine the meaning of*

the word novice. Were called novices: 1) all those who were studying theology at the major seminary; 2) young people who having entered the Mission of Provence and wore the cassock while pursuing secondary studies; 3) finally, the recently ordained priests who had entered the Mission.”

The official admission to the novitiate seems to have been usually preceded by a rather long period of life in the community. Dupuy says he “*entered the house*” on August 16 and he began his novitiate on October 3. Marius Suzanne “*entered the house*” on October 14, 1816 and began his novitiate on January 21. Today we would call it postulancy or pre-novitiate. The case of Jean-Baptiste de Bausset is revealing, and we will return to it later.

Other young men who did not become novices also lived at the Mission. They probably also took their meals there. “*In this way the Founder hoped to attract them to the Society,*” writes Fr. Pielorz. Rey (I, pp. 199-200) says that in May the disappearance of Mrs. Gontier’s boarding school made more rooms available.

“A new work immediately emerged, he writes... It also responded to the ardent wishes of the zealous Founder. Having priests around him was an urgent and pressing need for his apostolate, but having young people that he could form exclusively for the apostolic life by imbuing them with an apostolic spirit, directing all their thoughts, all their feelings to the apostolic life, that was the dream of his heart, the heart of an apostle; he was able to realize it during the months of May and June of 1816... Five young men expressed their desire to join the nascent Society (Rey says the Congregation). They were admitted to start not a novitiate itself, but a kind of postulancy under the direction of Fr. Mautner. They received the cassock and followed a regulation that divided their daily life between prayer and study. They had been congregants and continued to assist as much as they could the untiring zeal of the Director.”

The lists are imperfect. For 1816 they mention two congregants: Adrien Chappuis and Eugène-Louis David who joined Castellas Paulin, from Grans, where he had come to know the Missionaries, and Paul de Magallon, of whom we will speak later.

One of the first to “*enter the house,*” and that already in April 1816, was Jean-Baptiste de Bausset, born in 1798, a nephew of the Bishop

of Vannes, the future Archbishop of Aix. This is what Fr. de Mazenod writes about him:

“Mr. Jean-Baptiste de Bausset, we can say, kind of escaped from the family home to take refuge with me, without my suspecting that he planned to enter our Society. Special reasons made me resist for a long time his repeated pleas that I should give him the cassock and let him join our group. Defeated finally by his perseverance and touched by his constant exemplary conduct, I yielded and clothed him with the holy ecclesiastical habit on November 4... His fervour redoubled even more when he received this favour...”

Then there was the half-heartedness, the discouragement and the giving up of his vocation. (*Missions*, 1952, pp. 11-12). His uncle, the bishop, wrote a letter of gratitude to Fr. de Mazenod in October 1816; it is published in *Missions*, 1952, pp. 117-119. Here is an excerpt:

“I wish that more of these dear children (of the Youth Congregation) would take the same decision as our dear child... I am convinced that at the age of 18, he will not do anything lightly or imprudently. So I just have to pray the Lord to confirm what he is working in him, and that one day he will make him a worthy minister of the altars, in a word, make him another like yourself, so that by his words, his actions and his example he may spread everywhere the fragrance of Christ.”

According to footnote 28 in OW 16, 160, Adrien Chappuis, born October 6, 1800, was presented to the Association at the end of 1813 and admitted in 1814. He boarded at the Mission from 1816 or 1817. He was then only 16 years old. He studied law at the University. He was planning to join the Missionaries of Provence but became a lawyer in Aix, then in 1825 he went to Paris and entered the Ministry of Finance; he became the Inspector General of Finances. He maintained an extensive correspondence with Fr. de Mazenod and rendered him many services.

The story of Alexander Dupuy is not clear. He was born in Aix, November 29, 1798, *“of unknown parents.”* The Joannis family paid for his nursemaid and his elementary schooling, before he entered the minor seminary of Aix, where he was a classmate of Marius Suzanne.

In his application form for admission to the novitiate, he says that he *“entered the house,”* August 16 and that he was a sub-deacon. (He was not yet 18.) He began his novitiate on October 3.

PAUL DE MAGALLON D'ARGENS

The *Diary of the Youth Congregation* indicates on January 22, 1815 that “*The chevalier Paul de Magallon, a congregant of Paris, arrived and was promptly admitted.*” He was a native of Aix and 32 years old. Circumstances had led him to join the Corps of the Cadets of the King of Prussia. He was later a captain in Napoleon’s armies, and served in the Russian campaign. He was mobilized again during the Hundred Days War, this time in the royal army. Having finally left the army and always in search of his vocation, he spent some time with the Missionaries of Provence. One of his biographers relates the following anecdote, which helps us know a bit what the “*postulancy*” might have been like.

“At Aix, Paul de Magallon often visited the prisons along with their chaplain, Fr. Deblieu, a priest of Abbé de Mazenod’s Mission, to help him in his difficult apostolate. He assisted him very effectively, especially with a young 20 year old parricide. This unfortunate fellow loved his mother much, he said, but in a moment of madness, had murdered her because she opposed his sinful passions. Sentenced to death, he initially refused the sacraments, but upon the caring entreaties of the priest and the former officer, who prayed and mortified themselves constantly to attract the grace of Heaven upon him, he eventually converted. Paul Magallon was deeply impressed: he did not leave this poor man, passed the night before the execution with him, heard Mass at his side, received Holy Communion, both weeping and praying. On the scaffold, the prisoner expressed a poignant repentance of his crime, urged the crowd to learn from the cruel lesson of his punishment, let his wrist be severed without a complaint and died a penitent and a Christian.”

In April 1817, Paul was persuaded to resume his studies and left for Forcalquier College that the Jesuits had just reopened. After many other adventures, he becomes the restorer, almost the re-founder, of the Order of the Brothers of St John of God in France.

MARIUS SUZANNE

Among the young men who entered the Missionaries’ community, Marie-Jacques-Antoine, or more commonly Marius Suzanne, holds a

special place, given the role that he will subsequently play. It is to him especially that Jeancard devoted his *Mélanges historiques* half a century later. Suzanne himself says that he began his novitiate January 21, 1817, but had been “*in the house*” since the preceding October 14.

He was originally from Fuveau and was born February 2, 1799. Jeancard explains: “*His father, already a well to do landowner, was the first to exploit the coal mines and it seems he found the way to dramatically increase his fortune.*” A Suzanne, who may have been the same, was appointed mayor in 1815 and “*solemnly swore obedience to God and loyalty to the King.*” The priest who accompanied him and gave him lessons in Latin was Mr. Flayol, “*a man of God, a holy priest*” according to Bishop de Mazenod who like his uncle Fortuné made him his Vicar General.

Marius entered the minor seminary of Aix, where Tempier was among his teachers. There he took the cassock and was tonsured before the end of his secondary studies. Having completed his rhetoric, he was to enter the major seminary (He was then 17.), when the Missionaries of Provence came to preach in Fuveau. Rey writes (I, p 202.): “*Delighted by what he saw and heard and blessedly infatuated by the zealous Superior whose pious care showed him a hitherto unknown paternal tenderness,*” he delayed his return to the seminary and offered to help. “*Father de Mazenod entrusted him with the task of teaching catechism to the people who needed to be educated on the truths necessary for salvation; he also had him visit the sinners who refused to come to the missionaries, and finally put him in charge of the singing and preparing the decorations for the last ceremonies of the mission.*” He entered “*the house*” in Aix a fortnight later.

We know that Hilaire Aubert preached the youth retreat before All Saints Day. On the other hand we do not have any information on Mau-nier’s role in their formation. Jeancard (p. 27) stresses mostly the role of Eugene de Mazenod. “*These young people were the first students in this holy school. They were especially cared for by Mr. de Mazenod himself, who became the director of their conscience and novice master. The care he gave to their education was total: at recess, on walks (when he had time to accompany them) in his room, in the common room, in the chapel, and finally he tried to fill them with the spirit of God everywhere. Thus we can say that the air in the house was permeated by this*

spirit; it was breathed constantly, and there was no other to breathe. Thus they lived in a totally apostolic atmosphere that was maintained, it must be said, by all the priests of the community... Zeal and abnegation were, with inevitable differences, characteristic of these priests, who all without exception were elite men as regards priestly virtues. The daily exercises were almost the same as today... ”

THE MISSION CHURCH

Need we recall that the former chapel of the Carmelite monastery, now commonly called “*the Mission Church*”, was reopened for worship in April. For many in Aix it became a place of celebration and prayer. Tempier had cared for it while the others preached in Grans. During the Fuveau mission, it was the task of Maunier. Rey writes (I, p. 199): “*Daily devotions had been established there: Morning prayer and especially evening prayer, which was always followed by a reading or a talk; Masses were said at a regular fixed time... There were retreats in preparation for First Communion and Confirmation, etc... A small bell was blessed by the Vicar General, with the sub-prefect as sponsor; it rang regularly for the public exercises at the church... ”* Jeancard adds (p. 24): “*The elite society of Aix attended the services... The missionaries did not receive any fees for their efforts and care; though not a rule, it seemed customary at the time to be content to live off spontaneous offerings.*” Among these offerings were precious liturgical objects...

The beatification of Alphonse de Liguori, September 6, 1816, finally formalized the devotion the Missionaries of Provence had for him. A chapel was dedicated to him in the sanctuary. Two miracles were attributed to him, and Eugene sent the reports to the Superior General of the Redemptorists with a sum of money to help with the expenses of the canonization.

Finally, a royal decree, dated November 20, answered the request of the diocesan authorities. It put “*at the disposal of the Missions of France the church of the former Carmelites’ convent in Aix*” (See *Missions* 1958, p. 92.). Further steps were therefore needed to obtain a correction. Contrary to what the Minister of Finance had written, the Missionaries of Provence were not a branch of the Missionaries of France.

THE MARIGNANE MISSION

It was in this period, precisely from November 17 to December 15, that the Marignane Mission took place with Fathers de Mazenod, Deb-lieu, Mie and Maunier in charge. Tempier remained in Aix for the service of the church and the youth. This mission is the only one for which Fr. de Mazenod kept a diary. The text is available to us in *Oblate Writings* Volume 16, p. 213-234. We will give some excerpts here below.

Before Marignane, the missionaries spent a few days in Grans, visiting for a third time these faithful *“who had been asking for this favour for some time.”* They left Grans Sunday, November 17, at 9 o’clock in the morning and arrived on foot in Marignane, about 25 km away. The *Diary* describes the eager welcome of the parishioners who came with their parish priest to meet the missionaries. It was noted that neither the mayor nor the trustees of the church *“thought it consonant with their dignity to come to meet the ambassadors of Jesus Christ.”* The home visits began on the first evening. Monday at 5:00 there was Morning Prayer followed by an instruction (on prayer that morning), Mass and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, and then the home visits continued. In the evening there was a sermon on salvation, in *“a church that could not hold the crowds flocking in.”* The program was similar throughout the first week, gradually adding confessions for the men.

Particularly noteworthy was the penitential procession that followed vespers and the sermon on delaying one’s conversion, on the second Sunday. *“We had to prepare the faithful for an unusual sight that was going to unfold before their eyes. It is only after the deepest thought, putting it before God and weighing the advantages and drawbacks of the event about to take place, that it was decided on, and the ensuing happy outcome was proof that the inspiration of trying it came from God, as was believed beforehand.”*

It was a question then of explaining that the missionaries, having come in a sense to throw in their lot with that of the people of Marignane, wanted to take part in the penitential procession about to take place in such a way as to be able to draw down, both upon themselves and the people, God’s mercy, which they all needed so badly. It is to obtain this grace that the Superior, on whom rests the main responsibility for the mission, is offered on this day as a victim to God’s justice, like

the man of sin, the scapegoat loaded with everyone's sins, in the hope, through the humility of the deed done this day in union with Our Lord's humiliations, of turning away God's anger, appeasing his justice and imploring the graces of conversion necessary for so many hardened sinners who have wallowed so long in sin and show but little desire to extract themselves from their mess.

These are the feelings that motivated us in taking this step. The thought that the touching sight of this humiliation might make some impression had been quite secondary. That hope by itself would not have been enough to give the courage to defy the obstacles human wisdom suggested and which could yield only to the important considerations set out above.

So, the sermon over, the Superior went up into the pulpit to prepare and dispose minds to look upon what was going to take place with sentiments suitable to the occasion. He stressed the need for a generous expiation, following the example of Our Lord, of a number of saints, Saint Charles Borromeo among others, who, in less calamitous circumstances, since they sought to avert merely temporal scourges while we were seeking to destroy the hideous sickness that devours and damns the soul, had done what the missionaries were about to imitate... Finally, he invited the people to imitate the Jewish people and lay on him all their faults with sorrow in their hearts, comparing himself to the scapegoat which was going to be driven into the desert, burdened with all the iniquities of the people, alone worthy of heaven's wrath which was to exhaust its vengeance upon him. However, correcting himself immediately, he turned towards the cross saying that, even in that abject state, he would place all his trust in it; that he would embrace it and never let it go, and that thus he ran no risk; on the contrary, he had every reason to hope for mercy and pardon."

He then took off his surplice, his shoes and stockings, and received from the parish priest a thick rope which he tied around his neck, took the penitential cross and started leading the procession. It *"traversed the village streets, which were flooded with water, mud and dung; but it seems that by trampling the filth underfoot, there were released the most abundant wellsprings of grace... When the procession, which was conducted in a remarkable spirit of recollection, had re-entered, the Superior handed the cross to an acolyte and prostrated himself at the*

foot of the altar, face down; he continued, in this position, to pray for the people's conversion: he did not rise until after the blessing."

Then the men were dismissed and a meeting was held for the women and especially the girls. It was a meeting where *"there is no beating about the bush and the danger is exposed in the full light of day as all that happens on these abominable occasions (dances) is recalled with horror and the wicked intentions of those who have no other purpose than to seduce them are exposed. One must speak with a lot of authority and much earnestness; it is one of the most important exercises of the mission. On this occasion, success was total, and never was it less expected as up till then the girls had displayed sentiments so contrary to what would be asked of them that the missionaries were beginning to be alarmed. Along with a love for dancing, which is an unrestrained passion in this part of the country, a custom or, to be more accurate, a highly-pronounced determination not to give it up, went a practically invincible prejudice against the congregation and the tiny number of girls who belonged to it; we must add as well a virulent and deeply rooted spite towards the parish priest. So many passions to be prevailed over and the grace of God in his goodness won the day."*

December 2, third Monday. A solemn service for the dead of the parish. Then a procession to the cemetery. *"All present in the church, men and women went along... Having reached the cemetery, a second absolution was given beside the grave that had been opened expressly for the ceremony. After the absolution, the Superior said some words suggested by the place and occasion. He ended by displaying for all to see a skull which he threw into the grave, which will remain open until such time as one of those who were present should come to fill it."*

"Third Wednesday. Conference on restitution. We were not shy on the problem of the property sold by the state; we kept away only from mentioning the word "émigré"; a similar freedom over repayments in promissory notes. Avis on the same topic and on the approach of the day for reconciliation for women..."

"Third Friday. The women and girls arrive an hour before the church door is opened, to get their place at the confessionals, which are constantly hemmed-in by the crowd..." On Saturday, *"Women's confessions were heard all day, the missionaries got away at midnight.*

On Sunday, over four hundred women or girls came up to the Holy Table.”

Sunday after Vespers, procession with the Blessed Sacrament. *“Avarice held back four-fifths of these unfeeling men (they did not buy candles). They were quite happy to watch the procession go by, as if it were a spectacle that was being offered to satisfy their curiosity. The missionaries’ indignation soared, and the Superior was touched to the quick so that on the procession’s return, when from the pulpit he stopped the Blessed Sacrament on the threshold of the church door, he felt he had first and foremost to have the act of reparation intoned that is customary in that situation for the insult that Our Lord had just received through the insouciance of a people who should on that day have been imploring his mercy and made reparation by their acts of homage for past irreverences... Coming down from the pulpit, the Superior said only this: ‘The most beautiful day of the mission has been the one of greatest suffering for my heart’.”*

“Fourth Tuesday. The bell ringer was an hour late; he only woke up at five o’clock. It had been judged necessary to begin with the conference to leave the people free to leave afterwards and get on with their work. This precaution proved unnecessary; and although the conference lasted an hour; everyone stayed for Mass and benediction. Confessions throughout the day, both of women who had not yet been able to come, and of men including some of these too who had not yet come and who came with excellent dispositions. We are more convinced every day that four missionaries are not nearly enough, even with the parish priest’s help, for a population of sixteen hundred persons. It is true we are not falling down on the job. There is scarcely anyone who has not been four times to confession, some come even oftener. We are all convinced that it is better to do less and to do it well than to do a lot and badly. But the fact remains that we are in the confessionals all the time we are not in the pulpit or at the altar; we scarcely give ourselves time off to take our meals; it is only with difficulty that we take a half hour of recreation after dinner, and indeed that time is always employed in the business that the mission involves, making the peace, negotiating, private instruction of those whom one has come across in the confessional, ignorant of the truths necessary for salvation, etc.”

Meeting for the men. *“A great number of the men alone remained. After addressing them some edifying words, we inscribed (in the catalogue of the Congregation) those who were better disposed: it came to one hundred and twenty five.”*

Fourth Saturday. Men’s confessions until midday. After dinner, invitation from the Mayor to go and see the preparations being made to clear, fill in, and sand the place where the cross is to be planted. It is a quite a sight, thirty wagons and two hundred people were engaged in this work. The Mayor, at the head of the workers, is engaged in an activity that would be edifying, if that spot had not been previously designated by him to become the prettiest Cours in the village. The eventuality of the planting of the cross aroused his zeal, which coincided with his intentions, and this has contributed in no small measure to the speeding up of the work. It is moreover at his request that the cross will be planted at the edge of this place which he wants to make a pretty Cours.

While we are on the subject of the Mayor, we may remark that he has not missed a single one of the evening instructions, and that he is extremely courteous and helpful towards the missionaries, whom he has referred to as the ambassadors of Jesus Christ, in an ordinance he issued with the purpose of having the bars closed on the Sunday when the planting of the cross will take place... The missionaries heard confessions until three o’clock in the morning when I am writing these notes.”

December 15, fifth and last Sunday. Communion for the men. Mass at 8 o’clock, the women were not allowed in. *“It really was an imposing spectacle that assembly of so great a number of men... For when the Spirit of God breathes, he makes men make a lot of progress in a short space of time.”* In the afternoon, after Vespers there was the ceremony for planting the cross. There is no description of the ceremony.

The Diary of the Marignane Mission is the only one that has been preserved, perhaps the only one to have been written. Thanks to this document, we have an idea of what these first missions of the Missionaries of Provence were like, the impact on a population of 1,600 people, and the work required of the missionaries.

We have little information about the end of the year 1816 and the first six months of 1817. One mission was preached, the one at Mouriès. There are only brief documents on the services at the Mission Church and the Youth Congregation. Perhaps we should recall that Mie continues to live in Salon and preaches missions alone, that Maunier accompanies the novices and postulants, Deblieu provides care for the prisoners. We guess that Tempier is responsible for the church and that Eugene tries to be present at everything, but especially with the young people of the Congregation.

Mouriès, which is between Salon and Arles, at the foot of the Alpilles, then had approximately 1,800 inhabitants. The mission, which was preached by Father de Mazenod, Deblieu, Tempier and Mie, opened on February 9 and ended March 15. OW 16, 234-235 gives us only two pages about this mission, probably the only ones that Fr. de Mazenod wrote. It is interesting how their chance encounter with a Protestant pastor is presented and Eugene's reflections about it: *"The two ways cannot arrive at the same destination, as they are travelling in opposite directions."*

Rambert (I, p 228) cites a passage from the later memoirs of Courtès, who had not yet entered the Society: *"The Mouriès mission was a constant triumph of grace over the hearts of men. One cannot imagine the enthusiasm and success that accompanied and followed these apostolic journeys. There is no other more consoling testimony than that the work undertaken was blessed by God. These early missions of Grans, Fuveau, Marignane, and Mouriès, have never been surpassed."* Rambert adds a letter from the parish priest of Mouriès that bears witness to the fond memory that people kept of the missionaries. It seems that this mission was followed in March by a *"follow-up of the mission"* in Marignane, of which we have no other information.

As for the Mission Church, we have already noted the steps taken by the diocesan authorities, and the royal decree of November 20, attributing the church to the Missionaries of France. To obtain the necessary rectification, Eugene de Mazenod presented a new request. Backed by the diocesan authority, it was sent to the Minister on December 30. It was above all a request for approval of the new society. *"These good*

missionaries, it says, are constantly occupied with the most edifying and beneficial work. The care they take of the city's youth, who previously lacked any such institution, has miraculously renewed this generation. On their apostolic rounds in the countryside, they bring back to God and the King all those whom the unhappy events of the revolution had distanced. It is not only good people who give this testimony, it is rendered to them by the very people who only think humanly. We receive evidence of this daily." (Cf. *Missions*, 1958, pp. 93-94). Unfortunately, January 2, 1817 a law on religious congregations was enacted. A law and therefore a favorable vote from both the Chamber of Deputies and the House of Lords were now required for the approval. All the procedures had to be redone.

The *Diary of the Youth Congregation* for this period was written later (See OW 16). In July 1816, it notes the admission of Mr. Maunier, "missionary priest." Near the end of the year among others Hilarion Bourrelier, Deblieu, and Tempier are admitted. Dupuy will be in March 1817. It is hard to explain why Suzanne was not admitted until December 1817, more than one year after his entry into the house.

February 2, three young men are "sent away" because of "their scandalous conduct," without any further precision. For three others it was enough to "strike off their names." The illness and death of Alfonso de Saboulin deeply touched everyone. "He had always led an angelic life and been exemplary in virtue in every situation he encountered," especially during his years of legal studies. Only 21 years old, he was about to take his place at the bar in the court at Aix. On Easter Sunday, April 6, we read: "The congregants went to fulfil the Easter precept in their respective parishes at the 6 o'clock Mass and then came back to take part in the High Mass 'in Congregation' at 9:30."

A memorable event was the celebration of Confirmation at Saint-Sauveur Cathedral, May 18, 1817. We quote from the *Diary*, redacted later, it must be remembered, by Father de Mazenod himself (OW 16, 178-179). "The young congregants who were to receive the sacrament of confirmation went on retreat in the house of the Mission three days previously, in the usual way. They were quite numerous and the Congregation deserved sufficient consideration to have His Lordship the Bishop of Digne come and confirm them in the Congregation's chapel, as he raised no difficulty over going indeed to the workhouse. Truly

pitiful reasons, which I flinch from putting on paper out respect for his person, deterred this Prelate from accepting the invitation made him by the Director with the agreement of the Rev. Capitular Vicar General. So we had to go to the metropolitan church where the parish priest of St. Jean so far forgot himself as to insult publicly the Director who happily managed to contain himself and not react to his insults so as not to give rise to a dreadful scandal on such an occasion. The grievance of the Rev. Parish Priest of St. Jean was the refusal of the Director to send the congregants to the parish to join up with the street-corner scamps hurriedly assembled not without a certain amount of difficulty on the occasion of the confirmation. The Director had refused only after consulting the Vicar General; he was therefore acting perfectly correctly and had no reason to expect to find himself accosted in this shocking way right in the choir of St. Sauveur packed with children from every parish who were waiting for the moment to be confirmed. The Director, after the good Parish Priest had said at the top of his voice that he would jolly well teach him his duty, that he would summon him before the Promotor and other such pleasantries, - the Director, assisted by a special grace, made no reply and passed on, but as there was an oversight and no place was provided for the congregants although he had taken the precaution of giving advance notice the night before, he spoke directly to the Vicar General asking him to be so kind as to see to it. The Rev. Vicar General had them placed around the altar where these youngsters who had been prepared with such care presented an enchanting picture of piety that was in strong contrast with the scandalous dissipation of all the other children who could only kept quiet with a few slaps and cuffs. This shocking behaviour went so far that half-way through the Prelate's Mass, the Rev. Vicar General who was assisting him turned round towards the priests and told them out loud to control their children and put an end to the noise. As soon as the congregants had received the sacrament of confirmation, they retired behind the High Altar and stayed there until the ceremony was over. The Director addressed them from time to time to raise their hearts to God and steer them away from the distractions the uproar in the church could have occasioned. But it can be said that this help was practically unnecessary, so intent were they on being recollected of their own accord, so attentive either in prayer or in reading the book we had taken the precaution of having

them bring. I can affirm that on that day they surpassed themselves. The Director thanked the Lord for it as a compensation that helped him put out of his mind the unpleasantness the morning's events had brought him. We must not omit mentioning that the congregants were practically the only ones who had the happiness of taking communion at the Bishop's Mass. The gentlemen came back to the Mission two by two accompanied by the Director and another missionary. Their retreat continued until the evening."

The *Diary* then devotes a page to the procession of the Blessed Sacrament on June 17, the day of the Sacred Heart. "*It is made up of the Congregation of the Sacred Heart and the Youth Congregation who vie with one another, as it were, in piety and recollection.*" Fr. De Mazenod was the organiser, writes Rey (I, p. 206): "*The most distinguished and most recommended people were invited to carry the canopy and follow the Blessed Sacrament candle in hand. The Road Menders' Association reserved the right to form the honour guard. A military band took part in the solemn march that took place along the city's avenue...*"

We know little about the life inside the small Society. In January Marius Suzanne entered the novitiate, then in March a certain François Dalmas, born in Marseilles and only 15 and a half years old. It is reported that Dom de Lestrangé, who maintained a kind of Trappist lifestyle during the difficult times and later restored the Order, had stayed for fifteen days "*in the house.*"

LETTERS FROM THE BEGINNING OF 1817

Some letters from this period that reveal Eugene's feelings complete our information. We transcribe them almost entirely.

Letter to M. Duclaux (OW 13, 7-9)

Aix, January 1, 1817

Oh! How this New Year's Day comes at the right time, my dear Father, to help me out of my embarrassment; I no longer knew how to write to you, being so greatly ashamed of having not done it for so long, and what is comical is that I only kept putting off this duty from day to day in order to better fulfill it; I wanted to write you at length, going into details which would interest you very much, and never having the time before me (that is the literal truth) that I needed for it, I kept

putting it off to the morrow without succeeding any better on that day. Today, I am changing my system, taking up my pen even if only for five minutes, to take it up again as many times as I will be forced to lay it down. Yesterday I could only put on the date, it's always like that, you will at least see that today's coming and going did not stop me from thinking of that good Father whom I will never forget and will always love wholeheartedly.

I don't know where to start to bring you somewhat up to date on the marvels that the good Lord is working here through our ministry. We truly see repeated before our eyes the prodigies of Christianity's early times and God shows us at every moment that we are nothing but the trumpet he uses to awaken and bring souls back to life, so evident and direct, I'll say, even miraculous is his working.

April 21. I am still obliged to put off the details which it would have been a pleasure for me to give you about the works that it has pleased God to confide to me; but since days would have to have more than 24 hours for me, I cannot at this moment do otherwise than remind my dear Father of myself and ask very insistently for his prayers. This letter will be remitted to you by one of our Congregation members who is going to Paris on some business, a military man, a good Christian whom I recommend to you. If his departure had not been so hurried, I think I would have made the trip with him, since I feel I will be obliged to such a measure; I am terrified by the thought of it as it is so difficult to detach myself from here where my presence still seems necessary, because you will scarcely believe that, having only good in view, I will say more, really doing good with God's grace, I must nevertheless struggle against a continuous persecution on the part of a certain number of priests whose efforts are however rendered ineffective by the position in which it has pleased God to place me; I pretend to ignore their underhanded dealings and, strictly speaking, I defend myself only by my good bearing and by the continuation of all that the good Lord wants me to do in spite of them. It seems to me that the saints would do the same in my place and my whole ambition will be to try to be like them; I do their works while waiting to acquire a small share of their virtues. We believed to have recognized that the Lord is protecting us by the very abundant blessings that he is showering on what we are undertaking for his glory. That more than compensates us for all the pain that these

false prophets would like to inflict on us, all the while pretending to be unconcerned.

*At this time as I have the pleasure of talking with you, I feel how much I regret not being able to do so more often or as long as I would like to; but to give you some idea of my life, imagine that having gone to bed at midnight as usual and gotten up at 5 o'clock, at this moment of writing to you I have not finished my meditation from which they drew me out this morning and that I have not finished Matins even though it is almost 9 o'clock. If I did not continually recall that passage from Saint Paul *nos autem servos vestros per Jesum*, I could not hold on, but that thought seems to lighten everything. However, I experience great loss in not being able to spend enough time on myself... So pray that the good Lord might grant me the means to think more about my poor soul.*

My ambassador is going to leave, so I close by pressing you to my heart which is yours in Our Lord.

Eugene de Mazenod, priest, missionary.

Letter to Forbin Janson (OW 13, 9-10 and Missions 1962, pp. 365-368)

Aix, January 16, 1817

Were I to write you only two lines, very dear friend and good brother, I would do it so that no unfitting norm be established, something that would be inexcusable from both sides. I am starting even though I certainly do not have more free time; but, by hastening my lunch, I will get it done; it has not yet happened since my return from our last mission that I ate even once with the community. And today, the time I steal is for you and Collegno. I am leaving a letter to my father on my desk begun on the 3rd of this month, one for M. Duclaux, begun on the 1st and others which I will probably never finish. I know, very dear friend, that you are not dead, because the newspapers keep us up to date on your doings and activities, but you are not aware that I am still alive, I, a miserable, obscure missionary, who preaches [to] people who don't know how to read and write.

January 21. Before going to bed, and while everyone else in the house is sleeping, and even before saying Vespers, for which I scarcely have time anymore, I will again speak briefly with you, very dear friend. I am grieved by your silence and your brevity when you do break it. I

have no sweeter pleasure than to receive your letters. Soon they will be reduced to an Easter duty, once a year. If your missions were like ours, that is to say that you were always in the confessional when you were not in the pulpit, I would understand it. But, according to what Hilaire told me, that is not quite the case. Why then don't you write me in the intervals? I am numbering this deprivation among my sacrifices. Myself, I have no time for anything. My work except for preaching is almost as [great] in the city as on mission. I am sometimes tempted to think that people abuse my good will somewhat. But I do not give in to that thought which is contrary to a sentiment which seems to be deeply engraved in my heart, namely that we must be servants of all. I was confirmed in that resolution in meditation today. It is a painful obedience for nature, but if we know how to do [it], it will be very meritorious. What costs me most at this time is that this forced and constant service hinders me from going to Paris, where family matters and those of our house call me; but how can I abandon so many neophytes, poor young people of 20 to 25 years who daily come to throw themselves into my arms to reconcile them with God and return them to the right road. The hours which must be spent with them set back my work and throw me into desperation. You could have spared me half my cares if, being on the spot, you had been willing to budge a little for me. But you have never followed up on any beginning. And so you also have gained nothing. You had told me however, at the outset, that everyone was in your favour. I ask you nothing any more for my uncle the knight, who was made a rear admiral, nor for my father since that would give you too much trouble... But for my uncle the priest, I find it hard to excuse you because you had almost nothing to do, being in frequent contact with the Grand Chaplain and having his ear... I can not accept that my friends do not do for me what I would do for them. However, I love you none the less, though I have to blame you for it...

Ourselves, we are still five in all, really killing ourselves; especially myself, for whom the stay in the city is never a rest, far from it! When I die, they will say: What a pity! He killed himself!' while the assassins are those who refuse us indispensable help.

Goodbye, dear friend, pray hard to the good Lord that I have time to merit heaven before I die.

To Madame Roux, a benefactor from Marseilles (OW 13, 12-13)

Aix, June 15, 1817

Now, I thank you for the promptness and grace that you put forth to give us help. God will take it upon himself to return you a hundredfold for these 425 francs which came exactly at a moment they were least expected, but I assure you that we will ask in our weak prayers with even greater promptness, for you and yours, that the Lord enrich you with a great many virtues and spiritual blessings. On the feast of the Sacred Heart I offered the holy sacrifice for that intention; so you see that you were not mistaken when you counted on a special remembrance on that day. Besides, you know that you and your whole family will be from now on participants in all the prayers, fastings, sacrifices and whatever good works that are done by all the members of our little society, with the condition that you pray for us too, and I willingly add especially for me who have more need than anyone.

A LOOK AT THE SITUATION ON THE EVE OF THE TRIP TO PARIS

It seems appropriate at this time to review the situation of the small Society in the early summer of 1817, almost 18 months after the beginning of life in common. The letters quoted above express hopes, without hiding the difficulties.

The Missionaries preached four missions, Grans, Fuveau, Mari-gnane, and Mouriès, which admittedly renewed these parishes. There were many requests. December 25, 1816 Eugene wrote to the parish priest of St-Rémy-de-Provence (OW 13, 6-7): *“It is very hard for me, who have consecrated myself to preaching missions solely to come to the aid of good pastors who wish to bring their people back to the religion that 25 years of revolution have caused them to abandon, not to be able to reply to their requests addressed to me except with good wishes and vague promises. It is a heartbreaking experience of every day, but what can we do who are only four poor missionaries and you are the twenty-second parish priest who has called on us... If we could be two bands of which one would rest while the other was active... God willing, we will come to that but it will be when the Lord has inspired in a few men the necessary zeal and disinterestedness to worthily carry out our holy ministry and in ecclesiastical superiors enough courage to allow them to follow their vocation. While waiting I am reduced to be-*

ing unable to satisfy a quarter of the requests made to me...” The task is exhausting for the Missionaries and they need real rest periods. It is difficult to explain, however, that after Mouriès in February-March they accepted no other mission in 1817, except in Arles where at the end of the year Deblieu and Mie joined the Missionaries of France. It is likely that Mie did some alone, maybe also Deblieu.

Service of the Mission Church continued daily. All, no doubt, shared the load, except probably Mie. Tempier seems to have carried most of the burden. Our archives in Rome have a *Directory of the Church of the Mission*, dating from 1817. We noted that, according to the biographer of Paul de Magallon, Deblieu cared for the prisoners. We do not know of any another allusion to this ministry.

The Youth Congregation must have been very demanding. It seems that it was the main work of the house at the time, and especially for Eugene de Mazenod. The figure of 300 congregants, mentioned several times by Eugene, must refer to this period. It gives us much to think about. The following year, Eugene notes in his *Diary* (OW 16, 170-171): *“The Congregation took on so to speak a new form, at least its regulation and administration were considerably improved in the light of experience, and of new helpers I had to engage in good works. Obstacles and contradictions also increased in proportion, but the arm of the ever and infinitely merciful Lord has not grown shorter over those whose only end in all their endeavours, all their operations, is his greater glory, the building up of the Church and the salvation of the souls whom he redeemed with his blood, and the obstacles and contradictions served only to give more strength to a work he protects and which, on the face of it, should have had as its sole adversaries impious and bad Christians. Even so my patience was cruelly tried, and it took nothing short of the conviction of the good being done in the Congregation through a felt and daily working of grace, and the certainty of the ravage that the enemy of our souls would have wrought in this chosen flock, if I had abandoned it, to restrain me from renouncing it permanently or even from never wanting to do the least good ever again in a town for which I had sacrificed myself and where I had been made to drink the cup of bitterness.”*

Fr. Pielorz introduces us to a letter dated May 23, 1817. It is from some correspondence between some people of Aix: *“What the devil*

interest do these children find in this congregation that thwarts the interests, passions and amusements of their age? The said Father has the dreadful talent of making himself loved and feared by all those little antichrists. If one unfortunately falls into his hands for a few minutes, it is all over for him, he is lost. He has the secret of fascinating them... It is true that he knows so well how to captivate them... If one of these children falls sick, he wants to see only Father de Mazenod, who has even the secret of snatching his last breath; because he never leaves him, and if he dies, he dies in his arms..." (Pielorz, *Vie Spirituelle de Mgr de Mazenod*, p. 189.)

We mentioned earlier the incident of May 18 during the confirmation at the cathedral. The conflict with the priests of Aix gets worse. In early July, Eugene wrote them a rather aggressive letter, which did not help matters. We will come back to this issue in the next section.

Eugene and the little Society of Missionaries feel quite fragile. Among the vicars general, only Guigou supports them, probably not without reservations. The diocese of Aix has been vacant for seven years and is still waiting for an archbishop. Nobody knows who will be appointed by the King, or whose side he will take.

Eugene is also aware of the internal weaknesses. Deblieu claims a great importance. In his formula for admission to the novitiate (*Missions*, 1952 p. 8), he notes, "*Mr. de Mazenod always regarded me as the first priest he deigned to have join him to serve the Church in the nascent Society called the Missionaries of Provence...*" Mie continues to reside at the presbytery in Salon and preaches alone. Neither his nor Maunier's formula of entrance into the novitiate speak of a lifelong commitment. Only Tempier's does so. But he is very discrete. We must add the younger members. Only two of those admitted during this period will persevere: Dupuy and Suzanne. Their relationship to the person of Eugene seems as important to them, if not more so, than their link to the Society.

Eugene de Mazenod wrote to Tempier in December during the Marignane mission (OW 6, 25-26): "*Busy yourself with our Statutes. We need not take much from those of Paris since they concern a Society composed of several houses whereas ours will never have more than one. Spend two hours every day at this occupation. I see that the Minister's intention would be that we form but one society together with*

that of the Missionaries of France. Read again St. Philip of Neri and the Petition that we have presented to the Vicars General..." We must believe that there was not much progress.

The legal situation, too, remained unresolved. The group remained under the January 29, 1816 temporary authorization of the Capitular Vicars General. Initiatives to obtain government permission had petered out. But under the Concordat regime, it could only give force to the canonical authorization, which remained at the mercy of the diocesan authorities, themselves provisional. A formal decision would have permitted the little Society to receive legacies, which would have been helpful. Without that status, it did not qualify for some of these legacies. After the Vincentians and the Holy Spirit Fathers, the Missionaries of France had obtained this status. (See Appendix 4.) Why not the Missionaries of Provence?

A letter from the Minister of the Interior to the diocesan authorities, dated April 15, 1817, urged them to send the Missionaries of Provence to Corsica. *"The work is worthy of the Society whose authorization you are seeking at this moment, and worthy also of its Superior. Success would be sure to hasten that authorization."* (Cf. *Missions*, 1958, p. 99). So, the small group was of interest to persons in high places. Why not take advantage of this favourable climate?

For some time, in fact, Eugene had been thinking of making a personal trip to Paris. This was with much reluctance, given his personal commitments in Aix, especially with the youth. Besides the steps foreseen for legal approval, if necessary, Eugene was thinking about the long awaited appointment of an archbishop for Aix. His relationship to the Grand Chaplaincy (ministerial authority responsible for appointments on behalf of the King) could tip things in the desired direction. And Eugene did not forget uncle Fortuné. It seems he was the only one thinking about him. Eugene therefore set out for Paris on July 9.

Chapter 5

ATTEMPTS TO CONSOLIDATE THE WORK 1817-1818

We recall the previous steps:

- November 1812: Eugene, ordained the previous December, returned to Aix
- March 1813: Lenten sermons in Provençal at the Church of the Madeleine
- April 1813: the beginnings of the Youth Congregation of Aix
- February 1814: Eugene contracted typhus from Austrian prisoners
- Fall 1815: Eugene seeks companions and buys the former Carmelite monastery
- January 1816: with the approval of diocesan authorities, five priests gather to form the Society of the Missionaries of Provence: Mazenod, Deblieu, Tempier, Mie, Maunier

IT IS HOPED THAT THE INITIATIVES TAKEN IN PARIS WILL HELP TO CONSOLIDATE
THE WORK

Writing to his friend Charles de Forbin Janson on January 21, 1817, Eugene de Mazenod expresses regret at being overworked and added: *“What costs me most at this time is that this forced and constant service hinders me from going to Paris, where family matters and those of our house call me.”* (OW 13, 10) *Family matters* is the financial future of his father and uncles, still exiled in Sicily and without sure resources. A pension from the government would allow them to return to France and to live in keeping with their rank. Who knows if it might not be possible to have Fortuné put on the list of candidates for the episcopate? Eugene hopes to use his connections to advance these causes.

As for the missionaries’ *house*, it badly needs to be consolidated. The number of priests – they are five – has not changed for over a year,

and Mie remains marginal. A better established status would reassure young people, many of whom are reluctant to make a commitment. The Government approval would give a legal status to the Society of Missionaries; it would be authorized to receive legacies, very useful for financial stability, several of which had been lost. Furthermore, the future of the small group remains tied to the decisions of the future archbishop, whose appointment is impatiently awaited. Eugene also hopes to meet his friend Charles de Forbin Janson and to clarify relations between the Society of the Missionaries of Provence and the Missionaries of France, which is officially recognized by the government. Does not Eugene's *celebret*, signed by the Capitular Vicars General, give him the title of "*presbyter civitatis Aquensis, superior Congregationis sacerdotum Missionis Gallo-Provinciae (Priest of the city of Aix, Superior of the Congregation of the Priests of the Mission of Provence)*." (*Missions*, 1952, 120-121).

The Government's request for priests for Corsica seems to offer an opportunity. These missionaries, says a report by the prefect of Ajaccio, "*would preach obedience to the law and love for work; they would denounce murder and would cause stilettos to be deposited at the door of the confessional... But they must be truly apostolic, free from ambition and vanity, accustomed to the huts of the poor man, willing to share his poverty and able to make themselves understood in the language of the country...*" (Leflon II, p. 61, note 8) We found the text of Vicar General Guigou's response to the Minister of the Interior: "*The Abbé de Mazenod, leader of the Missions of Provence, welcomes with joy the proposal we made on behalf of Your Excellency, to give missions in Corsica; but only one of his current cooperators is in a position to accompany him. We as well as Mr. de Mazenod are busy recruiting five or six other good priests, able to answer the wishes of Your Excellency by giving glory to God and the spiritual and social conversion of those to whom they will preach.*" (*Missions*, 1957, p. 300).

The appointment of bishops is imminent. This had been dragging on since the return of the King in 1814 and even since the conflict between Napoleon and Pope. The King had initiated secret negotiations with the Holy See in order to obtain a new concordat to replace the one of 1801. It was close to being concluded. The new agreement was even initialed June 11, 1817. It provided for a reorganization of the dioceses,

with appointments of the corresponding bishops (more than 50 were expected). The Grand Chaplain in charge of these appointments on behalf of the king is Archbishop Alexander de Talleyrand-Périgord, the brother of a friend of the Mazonods in Naples and Palermo and also an uncle of the famous diplomat.

Thus Eugene sets out for Paris on July 9. He writes to the community on July 19 (OW 6, 27) to give news of his *“happy arrival at Paris without mishap other than having shivered all the way from Lyons to here, while from Aix to Lyons, we could not breathe because of the heat.”* On the same day he writes to his mother: *“I slept so well in the carriage that I was not at all tired. I arrived the day before yesterday at three o’clock in the freezing cold that accompanied us constantly on the road from Lyons to Paris. But I protected myself from it thanks to my invaluable cape, which was equal to the best, as it was so useful to me...”*

THE CONFLICT WITH THE PRIESTS OF AIX

At this time, Eugene can not ignore his conflict with the priests of Aix, which was very acute. Fr. Pielorz has studied it carefully (cf. *Études Oblates*, 1960, pp. 147-171 and 328-367, and 1961, pp. 39-60).

It will be remembered that Bishop Champion Cicé, Archbishop of Aix from the time of the concordat, died in August 1810. Napoleon appointed the Bishop of Metz, Mgr Jauffret, to Aix but the canonical institution was not granted by the pope, who was at the time a prisoner of the Emperor. It would furthermore never be granted. Bishop Jauffret stayed in Aix just over a year, with the title of Capitular Administrator, before resigning and returning to his diocese of Metz. But this was followed by a split in the clergy of the diocese, some wanting his return, while others were absolutely opposed, and this division continued. The authority is now in the hands of three Capitular Vicars General, of which only one, Guigou, supports the Missionaries of Provence. All waited impatiently for an authentic archbishop to arrive.

At first, Eugene’s relations with the priests of the city were very cordial. The parish priest of the Madeleine sent him several college students for his youth congregation. But as time went on the climate deteriorated. Leflon (II, p. 45-46) clearly explains this deterioration.

“There was a sharp contrast between Father de Mazenod and the local clergy...” In addition to ideological and personality problems, Eugene’s attitude attacked the authority of the parish priests. The youth were gradually growing away from the parishes, or at least the parish priests feared that this would happen. Was it acceptable that young people make their first communion or be confirmed outside their parish? And the opening of the Mission Church for worship in April 1816 attracted more and more of the town’s people. However, this church was exempt from the jurisdiction of the parish priest by a decision of Guigou. Its small bell is seen as competing with those of three neighboring churches, and in 1820 it will have seven confessionals!

Eugene’s letters to Forbin Janson describe the mounting bad tempers. Already in January 1816: A retreat *“would be necessary, if only to learn that priests are not allowed to slander and that it is unchristian to rage against and impede the good that others want to do. There is no end to the gossip among them. There is only my presence that dispels their quiet muttering. In my presence, all is well: but beware when I turn around! What a poor brood is ours, dear friend; I would never have believed it.”* (Missions, 1962, p. 217). Then in July of the same year: *“Not only is hell to be stormed but we must defend ourselves against jealousy and all other mean passions which agitate certain priests.”* (OW 6, 21) And then in October: *“Here I am as displeased as ever with priests who cannot stand hearing the sound of the benedictions that all around are pronounced on our work. There are those who have gone so far as to turn people away who, had it not been for their ‘charitable’ concern, would have been benefactors of our house. They apparently have illusions about their intentions, which might be good. As for me, when they meet me, they are always full of compliments. May the good God change them!”* (OW 6, 24-25) He writes in the same vein to M. Duclaux on April 21, 1817: *“My presence still seems necessary here, because you will scarcely believe that, having only good in view, I will say more, really doing good with God’s grace, I must nevertheless struggle against a continuous persecution on the part of a certain number of priests... I pretend to ignore their underhanded dealings.”* (OW 13, 8)

The incident during Confirmation at the Cathedral on May 18, mentioned earlier, is indicative of these tensions. The quarrel starts up again

in early July with a problem concerning First Communions. The parish priests require that both the preparatory exam of the children as well as their First Communion be done at the parish. Eugene has recourse to the capitular vicars, who require the parish priests to give the necessary approvals in response to any request Eugene makes. That is what he does. In response he receives a joint letter dated July 3 from the pastors: *“Your request which is a recognition of the principles and rules which determine the rights of pastors over their sheep and the duties of the sheep to their pastors should have, it seems, been accompanied by a list of the boys you had prepared so that we might know which of our young parishioners are to satisfy this sacred duty. Of course another year you will take care to send us those whom you have had the charity to prepare and whom you believe ready to be admitted to First Communion, so that we have the consolation of seeing them come to edify those we have ourselves prepared at the time to be designated and of which you will be informed... We beg you to regard this concession on our part as proof of our trust, our personal esteem and the confidence we all have that you will make every effort to see that our sheep fulfill every one of their parochial duties prescribed by the laws of the Church.”*

“This letter,” writes Fr. Pielorz, “conceived in cold polite terms as to the form, but in fact provocative, deeply wounded the heart of Father de Mazenod.” Whereby his answer: *“I had to read the signatures on your letter twice before I could convince myself that the pastors and rectors of Aix were capable of such a malicious acknowledgement of a courtesy I was willing to show them. You should have reflected, Gentlemen, that in the courteous and considerate letters I wrote you, I was not asking for any personal favor nor did anything force me to make a request which did not concern me personally; that it was, therefore, the height of folly for you, on this occasion, to give me a lecture whose language was as intemperate as the lecture itself was uncalled for; it would have been more fitting, had you thanked me for the care I wish to take of a precious part of your flock which was beyond the reach of your crook but which, through my solicitude, has returned to the fold and, with the help of Divine Grace, remains there. It was for you to decide whether or not you would willingly grant the permission I asked of you on behalf of the children I have instructed. Nothing further was necessary. Whatever else you added can be regarded only as a personal*

insult, which is as unfitting for you to permit yourselves as it is unfitting for me to endure without expressing my complete indignation.” (*Études Oblates*, 1960 pp. 347-348; Leflon II, pp. 56-57) A few days later Eugene left for Paris.

That month the Minister of the Interior received an anonymous letter, whose author was conceivably one of the pastors of the city: *“Your Excellency must be informed that Father de Mazenod, a self-styled missionary priest of Aix, who left a few days ago to see you, has very strong principles in the matter of hierarchy, that he is an extreme ultramontane, that he teaches right in his catechism classes the infallibility of the Pope, that he is openly at war with all the pastors of the city of Aix, that the latter have often registered complaints against the undertakings of the said Mister de Mazenod with the vicars-general who have never paid any heed to them, that at this very moment the head vicars have in their possession a request presented by the said pastors aiming to seek reparation for a grave insult committed against them by Mister Mazenod, that the said vicars-general who are protecting him have allowed him to leave for Paris without saying anything to him, so that they might thereby dispense themselves from giving any decision, etc. The despotism of the vicars-general is such that anonymity must be maintained; but Your Excellency will not be deceived. The pastors dare not appeal to the king, but if Your Excellency insists upon their speaking, they will be compelled to do so... Finally, Your Excellency can consult the procurator-general who will surely give him a report of the despotism of the vicars-general. It is frightful that subjects of the king should be afflicted to the extent of not daring to speak out in self-defense.”* (Cf. *Missions*, 1958, pp. 100-101; Leflon II, p. 63, note 14) There were other anti-Mazenod writings circulating in Aix at the time. Pielorz writes: *“The Minister of the Interior, although a convinced Gallican, indignantly rejected this denunciation. He reproached the pastors for their lack of moderation and, as he should have, sent the whole matter back to the Capitular Vicars General tribunal.”*

FIRST CONTACTS IN PARIS

Eugene arrived at Paris on July 17, after a one-week trip. He was welcomed at the Missionaries of France, rue Notre-Dame des Champs,

where he intended to meet his dear friend Charles de Forbin Janson. The latter had him visit Mount Valerian, near Suresnes where he wanted to make a place of pilgrimage and a center of spiritual retreats for the laity. Eugene shared this visit with Tempier but without any of the usual comments. Is he hiding some disappointment? He was certainly disappointed a few days later, when Charles makes a hasty departure for the Middle East. *“His journey was decided on the spur of the moment, without even a thought about it the day before,”* wrote Eugene to his mother on August 1st. Charles accompanied his cousin, future restorer of the Louvre Museum, who was in charge of an archaeological mission. This trip that lasted more than a year will bring Charles to Constantinople, Damascus, Jerusalem, Cairo... It was probably a missionary journey for Charles, who preached a mission at Smyrna, among other places, but no doubt Eugene easily drew the conclusion that it was impossible to build something with such an unpredictable friend.

In his letters to Tempier (See OW 6, 11), Eugene says little of the Missionaries of France. But the regret of being away from his brothers in Aix, which he expresses in almost every letter, suggests that the atmosphere in Paris was not that of Aix. The missionary, and especially the community, choices are not the same. Tempier writes: *“Our opinion remains the same: we consider it much better for our country places that we do not join them. Two of our members would absolutely refuse.”* (OW II, *Tempier* 2, p. 27 note 13). The prospect of a union of the two societies will be therefore definitely abandoned.

FREQUENT CORRESPONDENCE WITH MADAM DE MAZENOD

A good number of the letters that Eugene writes from Aix have been preserved. Ten are addressed to his mother, first of all to reassure her of his health, which therefore concerned his relatives. For example on July 29: *“As for me, you will not recognize me when I return to Aix, I am getting visibly fat, I sleep, I eat, I walk while doing or not doing my business... I’m making others jealous.”* Then on August 21 (Cf. OW 13, 15): *“You are quite mistaken to worry yourself on my account. I am leading a life very suited to putting on weight and giving rest to my body from all its fatigue, but my poor soul is also feeling its effects.”* Then again on September 10: *“My health, which is what interests you most,*

is perfect. I am delightfully well, I sleep, I eat much more than I should, certainly much more than I have in my life. I will probably pay for all this in purgatory; at least, calm yourself for this earth. Those who see me and would hear you worry about my health might be tempted to laugh..." Further on in the same letter he writes: *"I have just seen myself in the mirror. It's horrible. I dare not show myself again in Aix. My cheeks are no longer sunken; I'm fat as a quail. I am ashamed."*

While a future (at least financial) seems to be taking shape for his father and uncles, Eugene insists to his mother (August 21, partially quoted by Leflon II, p. 65, note 20): *"There is one thing which will cause me endless regret, and that is for having paid too much heed to your repugnance and, in order not to go against your prejudices, for not having insisted that my father and uncles return to France. We are now being punished for having cruelly neglected our duties. My uncle the priest might now be the bishop of Perpignan or even perhaps of Marseilles while, because of his absence he will not be able to be anything. As bishop, he could have taken care of his elder brother; the younger brother has a pension of 100 louis and needs no help from anyone. However, I did make this observation while there was still time, but it was not able to banish your alarms, and I had the weakness to yield to the fear of distressing you, especially when Eugenie came and told me that this thought was the cause of all your ailments. Now the opportunity is lost, everything is said for life... In this batch of fifty bishops, I was assured and I even had the word that he (Fortuné) would be included. My bishop uncle, his brother would retire with him in his diocese, and he would have found with his brother some way to give something to his creditors. The opportunity is lost for ever; it takes virtue to console oneself. Try at least to draw the conclusion that you should not always oppose my ideas, which are often worth more than those of many others..."*

Eugene continues to be concerned for the family of his sister. *"Try to get Eugenie to decide to wean her son (Louis de Boisgelin), everyone mocks me here when I say she still feeds him"* (July 29). *"As for Armand's affairs (his brother-in-law), take a stand once and for all; tell yourself that he will have nothing (of the family heritage), patience. His wife will have enough to give bread to their children. That's enough, forget it."* (August 21). September 4, he writes about little Louis: *"I*

could not forgive myself if my nephew was hunchbacked or scrawny. Neglect nothing to stop harm from making progress. As for Natalie, I cannot hide my fears from you... Watch her more for fear she fall into depression." About the estate at St. Laurent du Verdon: "You're too tired to go to St. Laurent, eh! Well don't go. But our property is wasting away... Let it waste away... If it is for me, what do I need? The others will take care of themselves and their business when they believe that it is convenient for them. Meanwhile, give up a portion of the household care to my sister, while supervising her a little in the beginning, because I do not think she knows much about these things." And September 10: "It would be useful for Armand to assist at the elections as your son-in-law; it would be one more vote for honest people, I am afraid I thought about it a little late."

Then on September 16: "It is true that I stay too long in Paris, but it is certainly against my will, because I'm bored to death and would already like to be on my way back. I'm wasting my time, in the sense that I am not taking care of the affairs of my ministry, because I have been quite successful in all I have undertaken, it is true that God has done more than me... (This is the future of his uncles and his father that he thinks is finally settled.) I shall be satisfied when you tell me that my sister is determined to wean her little Louis. This child exhausts her and it is not good for him. Some good soups and fish and even some meat would do him more good than the milk of his mother; I can not stand his stubbornness on that. If she breastfed him for 15 or 18 months, she would not feel it at all... Give me the progress of Louis' disease. You cannot believe the pain that the news of this cloud has caused me. I shudder at the thought that he might become hunchback or dyspeptic, I who saw him jumping and frolicking in front of me, turning out well as we all are in the family... Armand continued the letter you started. This was needed to give him the idea to write to me. I am sure he remained a quiet spectator of all the hassles that have been going on during my absence. An alliance in civilian life, as in the affairs of the Estates, is a reinforcement that we give ourselves; we did not have this advantage in our family; when they tore me apart, slandered and denounced me, he did not budge an inch; they could crucify me under his nose and he would let them be. It is rotten luck to have only one brother-in-law and one of this caliber. But what can be done? We will not change his char-

acter: God willing, I will not be like that towards his children.” And in a postscript to his letter on November 1st: *“I embrace our children, their parents and grandmother.”*

CORRESPONDENCE WITH THE COMMUNITY

Of the letters to the Aix community that have been preserved, two are addressed to all, several to Tempier and Maunier, the largest number to Tempier alone. Neither Deblieu nor Mie seem to be mentioned. The same themes taken up in the letters to his mother are touched upon in these letters. Here we will simply look at what he says about his regret of being away from his brothers. The account of his initiatives in Paris will come later. July 19 (OW 6, 27-28), he speaks of his journey: *“the company was passable but not able to arouse me from a kind of musing which brought me back ceaselessly to you whom I had left so regretfully. It is to be hoped that it will not be long... I am only inclined to speak of you, of our good novices... I celebrate today our Feast with you, at least in spirit. May our holy Patron communicate to us something of his spirit! Let us love one another in God and for God and for ever. Eugene.”* There are two points to note: the small society had chosen Vincent de Paul as patron saint, and according to Rambert, this letter is signed simply “Eugene,” which is very unusual.

“I am sad indeed to find myself two hundred leagues from my dear, my very dear friends, from my family, my children, my brothers and especially from you who are unique to me; but one must bear one’s exile with patience and resignation.” (To Tempier, July 25, OW 6, 28) On August 12, also to Tempier (OW 6, 31-34: *“My very dear friend and brother... I am bored when separated from you and pine for my return. Nothing on earth is worth being kept from dwelling pleasantly in our holy house with such good brothers as yourselves. Never have I appreciated so much quam dulce et quam jucundum habitare fratres in unum This strikes me all the more in that I see with my own eyes that it is not given to all communities to taste this happiness, harder to find than one thinks in this world below.”* Again to Tempier on August 22 (OW 6, 34-35): *“Do you not know that I regard myself as exiled in Paris, that I cannot live long separated from my dear family, and that my sole consolation is to converse with you and about all of you?”*

The same day he writes to all the missionaries (OW 6, 36): “*Has it now been proved that I love you more than anything, my dear friends of the city of my birth? No, nothing has been able to seduce me. I have sacrificed for you what is called in the world one’s fortune and I am well pleased. I am not referring to the two positions of Grand Vicar in the provinces for they were not worth counting or comparing with our holy mission and our dear Congregation, but to something more (the possibility of a bishopric). And how could I consent to live two hundred leagues away from what is most dear in the world? I did not have the strength to acquiesce to that idea. The refusal might have seemed surprising but was not displeasing; such was the respect for my motive. So much so that I shall still have the happiness of living amongst all that I love. Let us pray God that this will always be for his greater glory and our salvation...*”

ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURES

Eugene makes use of his stay in Paris to renew many contacts and to establish new ones. His writings mention a few: M. Duclaux, who was his spiritual director at Saint Sulpice; the younger Portalis, a State councilor, soon to be directly involved in the complex negotiations of the Concordat; Bishop Alexander Talleyrand-Périgord, who had been recently named a cardinal and Archbishop of Paris; Eugene is received by his family, where he also meets the “famous diplomat,” says Rey. Eugene will later pride himself on not having requested an audience with the king, or even attempted to meet the Duke of Berry, the king’s nephew, who had been his swimming companion in Sicily. He chose to not put himself forward.

The administrative procedures cause him much concern. Immediately after his arrival, he requested a meeting with the Minister of the Interior and Religious Affairs. “*He has Corsica on his mind more than anything else,*” Eugene writes to the community on July 19 (OW 6, 24). Tempier replies to this on the 31st of the same month: “*After reflecting on it, I don’t see why we would refuse. It seems to me that such a place would give us a wider base, which is what we are looking for... We could in time establish a house there... and while waiting we don’t have to commit ourselves to go there now. We have some right to that*

territory. *Saint Vincent de Paul sent some of his children there; Blessed Leonard of Port-Maurice tilled it himself and even watered it with his own blood since he traveled barefoot from one place to the other. Think about it seriously.*” (OW II, 2, *Tempier*, p. 24).

He fairly quickly gets a hearing with Minister Lainé, who explains that for the approval of a religious society, a law is needed, and therefore deliberation by the Chambers. On this issue the Restoration maintained administrative rules similar to those of Napoleon and even of the Constituent Assembly that was opposed to corporations and even associations. The waivers granted the preceding year were no longer possible.

Eugene is insistent. On July 31, he writes a long letter to Minister Lainé, which is reproduced in OW 13, 13-15: *“I view the little known ministry which I have undertaken as being of the greatest importance in the present circumstances, not only for the good of religion but for the service of the King and public order; and I must truly be imbued with this thought for I willingly sacrifice for it every advantage that other available and possibly enticing careers offered me... But I do not want to hide from Your Excellency that, in order to bring about the immense good assured us by the first success Providence has granted us, I must be invested not only with the confidence of ecclesiastical superiors, such as they have granted me without restriction up to the present, but also with the approval of the Government for which I have been working as efficaciously as I have been for the Church. Everyone knows that I have come to Paris to obtain approval for our establishment, which is nothing other than the gathering of several priests who devote themselves principally to the service of country people whom the lack of pastors has caused to fall imperceptibly into degradation, and to the instruction of the city’s youth in the sole aspect of morals and religion... I will limit my request at this time, what, I almost dare to say, I claim as a recompense for my zeal, is that the King can at least, by a provisional ordnance and until a law definitively determines the manner of this establishment’s existence, authorize the Abbé de Mazenod to join with several priests of good will in the former house of the Carmelites at Aix in order to devote themselves to the religious instruction of youth and to travel from there into the parishes of cities and especially of the countryside which are calling to their ministry for help.”*

The Minister, who had not taken into account the anonymous letter sent from Aix, answers him personally on August 4: “*You can, while waiting for a time that might not be too far off, continue with your esteemed collaborators the work you have so auspiciously begun.*” Eugene immediately makes this known to Tempier stressing that the letter is addressed to *Mr. de Mazenod, superior of the Missions of Aix*, which he sees as a kind of official recognition (OW 6, 29-31). “*You can let it be known throughout the city, my dear friend, for the consolation of worthy people and to the despair of the wicked, that we are recognized by the Government...*”

On August 21, the municipal council of Aix gives a positive opinion for the approval of the Missionaries of Provence, an opinion quickly contradicted by one of the deputies, who also writes to the Minister taking the side of the parish priests, “*All commendable for their uncommon piety, their edifying conduct and knowledge, it is impossible to find men more worthy of public veneration and more capable of directing the consciences of the faithful...*” (Cf. *Missions*, 1958, 107-115).

In the August 5 letter to Tempier cited above, Eugene shared the rumors about the new concordat and the appointments that will follow. Indeed, the king, and even more so the ultra-royalists, were very embarrassed to have to use the Concordat of 1801, signed by Bonaparte. How could they grant it any legitimacy? In the spirit of the Restoration, the king urged the Holy See to return to pre-1789 rules. Complex negotiations had been engaged in secret; an agreement had been initialled on June 11. For bishoprics, it was expected there would be a gradual return to the Concordat signed in 1516 by Leo X and Francis I.

But how to make public an agreement hitherto kept secret? Was returning to 1516 a desire to restore the three Orders of the Ancien Regime, led by the clergy and the nobility and the Third Estate? Was not making friends with the Pope giving in to the ultramontane party and abandoning the so important *Gallican liberties*? How to deal with financial costs in an impoverished France? The king had acted rashly. He had to take back his signature. To quote a recent historian, “*this case, conducted moreover with a remarkable clumsiness, ended in abject failure.*” This explains the long wait of more than five years for the See of Marseille and several others to be formally restored, and the appointment of uncle Fortuné to be published officially.

Still, Eugene thinks he can write: *“The concordat is abrogated, that of Leo X is re-established. The organic articles are destroyed. Seven more archdioceses, 35 dioceses. The present dioceses are reduced. Aix will bear also the title of Archdiocese of Embrun but is reduced to the arrondissement. Marseilles is re-established, Arles also, and Fréjus. We will have as suffragans only Fréjus, Digne and Gap. Bish-
oprics, chapters, pastors and seminaries will be endowed... We will know the bishops within two days. It is certain that ours is Archbishop de Bausset. He will not have a vast diocese.”* (OW 6, 30-31) Then on August 12: *“The list of bishops is not yet public. I could have been included if I had not preferred the obscure life of our holy community and the kind of ministry to which the Lord has called me in favour of youth and the poor.”*

UNCLE FORTUNÉ APPOINTED BISHOP OF MARSEILLES

Eugene’s August 22 letter to Tempier (OW 6, 34-35) suggests another bit of news, of *“an unexpected grace of which the consequences will be so felicitous for our holy house.”* Further on he explains, *“All that is very enigmatic for you. This is not yet the time for me to explain. I shall not delay in associating you with my gratitude...”* On August 28, in a meeting with Bishop de Latil, a member of the nominating committee, whom he did not know, Eugene obtained the expected confirmations. Father Besson, pastor of St. Nizier in Lyons having recused himself, the See of Marseilles that is to be restored is free. The same day, Eugene sends a letter to his father and his uncles (OW 13, 16): *“I am reopening my letter, my very dear friends; I was too late in getting it off to you yesterday. The reason I’ve re-opened it is to tell you, but under the strictest secrecy, that the king has just appointed my uncle, Charles Fortuné, to the bishopric of Marseilles. I am still filled to overflowing with gratitude to God. Without my uncle’s having even thought of desiring it, the Lord has given him the most coveted bishopric in all France. Its location, resources, perfectly disposed people and excellent clergy all make it so. And while Father de Sinéty for example, while Chaplain (to the Count d’Artois, brother of the king) is relegated to Gap, an awful, miserable, helpless, ill thinking country, my dear uncle is in this*

earthly paradise. It is Providence which has done it all. Digitus Dei est hic (The finger of God is here, Ex 8, 19)."

"What enormous good we are going to do! Provence will be regenerated. All the Bishops of the province will be of but one mind; I know them all. The Society which the Good Lord has confided to me is becoming astonishingly strong; I am preparing choice troops for the Bishop of Marseilles. There are beautiful days ahead for the Church..." Eugene continued his reflection on September 6, in a longer, if not the longest letter he ever wrote (OW, 13, 16-20. See full text in *Inquisitio historica*, 28-36). Eugene piles on the arguments: *"My uncle is obliged in conscience to accept... If ever the will of God was evident in human events it is surely now... Refusal, even a delay...the King would see it as a crime, an outrage against his concern for the Church's well-being, and he does not want to hear of it... I will be with you, and others as well, as zealous as I can be; and if, later on, your infirmities increase, no one would cause any difficulty to giving you a coadjutor and the choice would most likely not fall on anyone you don't know. And here I must again tell you that of all the dioceses of France Marseilles is the most favored by God. The population is the opposite of what it was at the beginning of the Revolution. Everyone, rich and poor alike, ardently want a bishop. You will be welcomed there like an angel of God. All the authorities are good friends of ours... The clergy is perfect... I must add that in my community you will have true Oblates who are ready for all good things and who will renew your villages... Your acceptance is necessary for the future of our work..."* Eugene insists even more: here is a unique and unexpected opportunity to repair at least in part the injustice of non-payment of debts to grandfather Charles Alexander's creditors and to ensure "a decent retirement" to his brother, Eugene's father. After insisting again, *"Come as soon as possible,"* he ends this very long letter with: *"Adieu, my good father and dearest uncles, I embrace you. I chose the Chevalier's address because it sounds better and is more imposing."* The letter of September 16 (OW 13, 21) expresses the same thoughts and ends with a significant postscript: *"Take courage, I will be your other-self."*

In his September 7 letter to Tempier, Eugene says that he informed Maunier first. *"I have sent word to M. Maunier that my uncle is named bishop of Marseilles... With regard to all this, I assure you I consider*

only the greater good of our work, and that I am not thinking merely of the honour that can accrue thereby for my uncle; and that is so true that I would not stir an inch to have him named elsewhere. My rejoicing over his nomination was only because of the great advantages that our undertaking would derive from it. I regard them as incalculable. So have prayers said lest, if I do succeed at this end, I fail with my uncle who could be quite unwilling. I have written volumes on that aspect, I have elaborated excellent reasons ad infinitum, God alone can dispose hearts persuasively... If my uncle ends up as bishop of Marseilles, I think that you will believe that I have employed my time well enough for our work, for it is the happiest thing that could happen in its favour. We will be assured of being able to do good in the diocese of Marseilles.” (OW 6, 37)

This correspondence raises some difficult issues of chronology, given a certain imprecision in the dating and the time for the mail to go back and forth. Moreover it seems that all the letters have not been preserved. Is it any wonder that we have the first mention of a response from Sicily in the letter of Eugene to his mother on September 18? The latter, it must be remembered, has no desire to see the three brothers return, especially not to Aix. Eugene writes: *“My father and my uncle finally answered all my letters. The conclusion is that they are returning. The Abbé, after a good cry, and a lot of moaning, etc., was obliged to submit to the decision of all the theologians and directors. He will accept the bishopric, but do not talk about it, because he must wait until his appointment is official and there have been some difficulties. I hope that my father will get a good pension in January. The Minister of the King’s House is so intent to comply with my request that he asked for information from the Embassy of France in Naples and responses were friendly. The Chevalier can only assert his rights by being on the scene. Given that the particular position of my uncle, the Abbé, could make his stay unpleasant at this time, I thought like you, that they could stop in this city (Marseilles); but this is not possible due to the Abbé who can not remain in a city where public opinion, based on powerful motives, has made him Bishop, while he has not received yet any official notice. So I think that if they arrive before me, my uncle, the Abbé, should go to the mission house until my return and my father and the Chevalier to the Enclos. I do not need to remind you, my dear mother, to welcome all*

of them. You would have no excuses in the eyes of God or man, if you caused distress to such respectable figures that the misfortunes and the years have made vulnerable and who have so much right to our respect and our affection.” He concluded: “Farewell, dear mother, I hope we will have a thousand crowns a year for my father. Do not mention it, he will give it to his creditors and everyone will be happy. You should be happy too. I embrace you all.”

All that remained was a response from Fortuné himself, who was “already informed” by many of his acquaintances. He wrote to his nephew on October 9: “So, my dear nephew, all is consummated. I will obey, since I must, but throwing myself first into the arms of Divine Providence, whom I implore to have pity on my extreme need... So why, on the brink of my grave, have you snatched me from my solitude, where I was sheltered from so many dangers, to launch me onto a stormy sea and one littered with shipwrecks? Did you really reflect on the awesome responsibility you were taking on yourself before both God and the Church, and before the King and men? The Lord is my witness that far from desiring any rank among the clergy of France, I have always trembled at the very thought of it. Once, when Madame la Baronne de Talleyrand asked me on behalf of her brother-in-law, the Cardinal, what I should like, I asked only that I be given a pension which would enable me to spend the rest of my days a little more comfortably... I submit albeit in fear and trembling; and if I have the happiness to do some good in the diocese of Marseilles, I will be the most convincing of proofs that the Lord has no need of any of his creatures’ talents and can make use, when he likes, of the weakest and vilest instruments to do his holy work and manifest his glory... Remember that after God you are my guide and right arm...” (Quoted by Leflon II, pp. 78-79. Cf. also OW 15, 139, note 18).

Three days later it is his father who writes to Eugene about Fortuné: “His spiritual daughter, the pious Carmelite Sister Hilarion Julien wrote to him, but knowing the kind of man he is and suspecting that he might be hesitant, she accompanied her congratulations with an earnest entreaty expressed in the most persuasive language, not to hesitate for a single moment to accept the nomination, pointing out that if he refused it, he would at one and the same time be failing the clearly marked Will of God and the command of the king. She also reminded

him of everything he himself had once told her in order to oblige her to accept the post of Prioress of the Carmelites.” And on October 27: “It is well for you to know that Fortuné wants to be guided in everything... by his vicar general, Charles Joseph Eugene, to whose instructions he will conform himself... He will need all your attentions. He is counting on them absolutely, unreservedly. Already you can see that in his pastoral letter he has quite definitely not forgotten to mention some dear and respectable rural missionaries, and how they will be sustained, encouraged and defended by him. Their leader will be in a position to do even more good than in the past...”

We find Eugene’s reply to his uncle, dated November 17, in Rambert (I, p. 241 and OW 15, 139): “Yes, yes, my dearest uncle, I take all the responsibility on myself, and I beg the Lord not to be harder on me, so far as concerns the personal account that I have to render him, than I have to fear from his justice for this new “endorsement.” I wish you could begin tomorrow to exercise this great ministry, as your merits would begin all the sooner. Would to God there were many bishops of your quality! But, though in general the choices are good ones, still they will not all be up to your standard. We will take St. Charles, St. Francis de Sales as patrons and models; our house will be a seminary in its regularity; your life, an example to your priests. Every moment of the day will be spent in doing good, guiding and sanctifying your flock. Horror of pomp, love of simplicity, economy so as to have more for the needs of the poor... and all else that can serve to inspire your goodness of spirit, your excellent heart. How many marvels will flow from such an admirable way of life! The devil has already measured, weighed the extent and effect of all this good; which explains why he sought to place obstacles, and the difficulties he raised which, I hope, will soon be dissipated.”

The news of the appointment was known in Marseilles and had reached Fortuné even before Eugene could tell him. The *Journal de Marseille et des Bouches-du-Rhône* published it September 24. But it had nothing official. The questioning of the Concordat was delaying everything. The wait will be long.

EUGENE REFUSES OTHER PROPOSALS

One of the reasons why Eugene dreaded the trip to the capital was the fear of not being able to escape the offers that would not fail to be made to him. The government was looking for personalities to fill the gaps in the episcopate. Was he not at risk of attracting attention to his own person? That is how he explains his choice not to present himself to the Duke of Berry, nephew of the king, whom he had known in Sicily thirty years earlier. As Bishop of Marseilles he recalls this in his diary: "*Is it believable that he could have offered me nothing, if I had made myself known to him, or that he could have denied me the favours which I would have been able to request of him? But, thanks be to God, I nourished other thoughts in my heart and it's precisely in order to not be anything in the court that I refrained from appearing there. Nevertheless, this is the way that some bishops have been appointed as chaplains of the king.*" (OW 21, 278-279 [French text], August 31, 1847) He also sought to avoid the Grand Chaplain, Bishop Talleyrand, recently appointed cardinal and Archbishop of Paris. He could however not refuse an invitation from him.

The documents that we have at hand suggest that he was offered some posts as Vicar General, a step prior to the episcopal responsibility; it has been spoken of as a real training camp for the episcopate, especially since this was exercised mostly outside one's diocese of origin. Two dioceses are mentioned: Amiens and Chartres. His answer remained the same. The works undertaken at Aix, namely the youth work and the society of missionaries absolutely required his presence. He mentions it six or seven times in his letters to Tempier and his mother. Thus to Tempier August 12 (OW 6, 34): "*The list of bishops is not yet public. I could have been included if I had not preferred the obscure life of our holy community and the kind of ministry to which the Lord has called me in favour of youth and the poor.*" On August 22 (OW 6, 34): "*Oh I fear not to sacrifice the happiness of living with her (my dear family) whom they call in the world good fortune.*" The same day he writes to the entire community (OW 6, 36): "*How could I consent to live two hundred leagues away from what is most dear in the world? I did not have the strength to acquiesce to that idea. The refusal might have seemed surprising but was not displeasing; such was the respect*

for my motive. So much so that I shall still have the happiness of living amongst all that I love. Let us pray God that this will always be for his greater glory and for our salvation.” The evening before he had written to his mother (OW 13, 15): *“I steadfastly refused everything that would have taken me away from Aix. By doing so, I have, as the world expresses it, sacrificed my career. I don’t know if those at home would approve of my preferring to work in obscure places for the spiritual welfare of my fellow-men rather than in the places of prestige which were offered to me and which could have led me to the very top. Too bad if they cannot appreciate my devotion to duty...”*

THE NEW ARCHBISHOP OF AIX, MGR DE BAUSSET

On several occasions, the name of Bishop Ferdinand de Bausset-Roquefort was put forward as Archbishop of Aix. He was born in Béziers in 1757 into a Provence family. He was a canon of Aix when in 1808 he was appointed Bishop of Vannes. He knew Eugene de Mazenod. In July 1815, he administered the sacrament of confirmation to the Aix congregants in their chapel at the time in the Grandes Maries church. Moreover, his own nephew, Jean-Baptiste, had in the words of Eugene, *“escaped from his mother’s house to take refuge”* with him. His uncle the bishop welcomed this. Jean-Baptiste had *“taken the ecclesiastical habit”* at the Missionaries of Provence in November 1816, thus becoming a novice (Cf. *Missions*, 1952, p. 11-12).

August 5, Eugene can write to Tempier that *“the appointment is certain”* (OW 6, 31), although not yet official. It would be on the 8th, but for a smaller diocese, since the dioceses of Fréjus, Marseilles and even Arles were to be restored. It is understandable that Eugene absolutely insisted on meeting the new archbishop and so he prolongs his stay in Paris. This will also help with the appointment of Fortuné to Marseilles.

It seems that the initiative for the meeting had come from Bishop de Bausset. Eugene mentions this to Tempier in a letter of October 9 (OW 6, 37-38): *“He had written to me himself to congratulate me over the nomination of my uncle. He told me in this letter that he had written to his nephew, the Prefect of Marseilles, to felicitate him. He added that he considered my uncle as infinitely more suitable for the archbishopric*

of Aix than himself, etc. I go to see him and he receives me with open arms, goes into a thousand details with me about the diocese and finishes by telling me that he proposes to make a clean sweep and name me as his grand vicar together with another person whom he indicated to me. That was something to be glad about, I believe, for that was all we needed, not that I want to be a grand vicar; for me that is of little moment and would even be burdensome; but the advantage for our work was incalculable and I only envisaged it from that point of view. Apparently since then our enemies have set in motion all their machinations and must have succeeded in changing the mind of the archbishop; I am at least constrained to think so, judging by his subsequent attitude towards me. In the five or six times that I have been to see him, I have met him only once. We came together in fact at Issy but not the least little sign of confidence, not a word about the diocese, about his projects and I came to the conclusion that I am irksome to him personally for, after he has made so many overtures to me, he dares not overcome the opposition that they have shown to him. There, my dear friend is where we stand. I shall wait a little while longer and, if he continues to act in this manner, I shall really see to it that I have an explanation.”

The October 19 and 22 letters to Tempier and Maunier (note the recipients) are decisive. We will quote them at length. *“I must not leave you ignorant, my very dear friends and unfailingly good brothers, that our cause... I needed a very special grace not to quarrel openly with the Prelate for letting himself be influenced to the point of being drawn into the maelstrom of the passions of men who for a long time now have impeded and persecuted us... This is perhaps the greatest sacrifice of my self-love I have made. Twenty times in my discussion with the Prelate, I was tempted to jump up... But the Mission, the Congregation, and all those souls who have yet to be saved through our ministry held me back, nailed me to the hard cross which my nature could scarcely put up with... He gave me all the blame and vindicated the parish priests... If I showed the Prelate some surprise at being so badly rewarded for my unstinting devotedness, his Lordship interjected Scriptural passages to prove to me that one must count solely on eternal reward, that one must sincerely say, like the prophet: *elegi abjectus esse in domo Dei, (Ps. 83:11)* that I must beware of pharisaic pride which loves to be saluted in public places, take the first seat, be adorned with beautiful*

stoles, that he was free to make or not make me his Vicar General... In all this, I certainly find only this last assertion reasonable but it was a quarrel about nothing since it was not I who had asked him to make me his Grand Vicar; that it was he who had broached the matter to me and if I had not refused, it was because I was inclined to believe that this title would be useful to gain more respect for our holy work... We parted good friends, that is to say, he embraced me two or three times as if the wounds which rent my heart could be healed by passing a sponge over my face.

I beg you, my dear friends, to join in finding out before God what we must do. Put aside all that is human, consider only God, the Church and the souls to be saved. I will go by what you decide. I am ready to drink the chalice to the dregs. Note that the humiliations are for me; there never was any question about yourselves in all the words exchanged. The Archbishop seems fairly favourable towards the missions but we will have to expect that he will harass us from all sides. He will only let himself be advised by our enemies of whom he is afraid.

My first natural impulse was to leave him in the lurch, but I shall, with the help of God, do exactly the opposite. I have refused to be Grand Vicar and theological advisor of the bishop who is most influential, who in a few years would have made me bishop and I refused new offers made to me the day after I received this cruel setback... The fact is my conscience forces me not to consider my personal interest in the policy I have to follow... God will be our judge; I am not afraid to appeal in his court against all the injustices of men. That is the extent to which my intentions are pure and my views are upright. So now, see for yourselves and decide. I feel courageous enough if supported by your virtue, encouraged by your resignation to endure all the outrages which are still in store for me. You will be my strength and we will mutually console each other when the wicked have their way. The piety of the young plants which grow about us will compensate us for our sorrows. I will be very humiliated, myself, because it is supposed that I take much to heart what I have undertaken; this humiliation will be useful to me otherwise for I am so little attached to what I have undertaken that in this moment the greatest act of virtue that I can do, the greatest victory that grace can gain over nature is to be steadfast and bear the brunt.

Certainly, one's unregenerate nature that has to be crucified would revel in this circumstance if, with a haughty tone proportionate to the outrages that I endure, I went and notified His Grace the Archbishop that I want nothing more from his diocese, that I will take back my house to do what I like with it, that I let the youths go free and that I let fall all the bane of the measures that the indignity of this business determines me to take, on those who are the authors thereof and that, in order that there be no mistake about it, I am going to publish all that I have done for the good of my country and the obstacles that self-interest and jealousy have never ceased to oppose to it, etc... But God would hold me to account. I shall not do it unless you do not wish to put up with it anymore. In this case, it would not be my choice so I would no longer have to give an account before God. So there you are, in possession of the facts and positions. Reply to me immediately. Your response will be the rule of my conduct. But you must lose no time. Adieu, dear friends; when I wish consolation, I think of you whom I love with all my heart."

On October 22 to the same recipients (Tempier and Maunier): *"Although I wrote you at some length the other day, my dear friends and good brothers, I take up my pen today once more to speak to you about my dispositions and reassure you properly concerning myself. I am perfectly at peace and disposed with all my heart to continue the good work begun. I am disposed not to leave the Midi where our ministry can be most fruitful and I entirely refuse Chartres whose bishop I have avoided seeing, precisely not to be impeded in my determination.*

If it is absolutely impossible to reach an agreement at Aix and if the Archbishop deludes himself to the point of depriving his diocese of all the good we could do there, we will go elsewhere. It would cost me dearly to abandon Aix but the sacrifice would not be in vain. Nevertheless I think that we ought not to decide this except as a last resort; the Archbishop will decide. M. Duclaux, whose saintliness you well know, is much inclined to think that we should do our best to remain at Aix; but does not wish them to leave us short of any amenities that we have a right to demand. I assure you on this score that I will not be difficult; I will never ask for anything beyond what is necessary for us to be able to do good. I believe, for that matter, that it would be better to practice

patience and bide our time while things work out for the best. Let us stand together; let us be for God alone, and we will be strong.

You will have received my letter of the 19th which perhaps disquieted you somewhat; take heart; I will say to you as Saint Paul did to the Ephesians: Peto ne deficiatis in tribulationibus meis pro vobis, quae est gloria vestra. (Eph 3:13 “So I beg you, never lose confidence just because of the trials that I go through on your account: they are your glory.”) It is quite simple, the devil wishes to do us evil because we are doing it to him. Please God we will do him still more by snatching away from him, if possible, all the souls he is dragging into hell. He would certainly want to seize back those of our youths at Aix; ought we to deliver them to him? God would hold us to account for them.”

From Aix, Frs. Tempier and Maunier answered in the same letter, which is partially preserved; it is dated October 23. Tempier writes: *“We have to admit that God is treating us with a lot of goodness since He lets us share in the same gifts that He gave His Son when the latter was on earth. Permit us to suffer with you, even though it seems that these humiliations were meant for you personally. With the few things that we have done, how did we ever merit this grace to share in this way in the precious cross of God’s son? I am all confused and feel that I am far from meriting this favour. It is a grace of predilection that God gives only to his saints; how could we possibly complain about it?”*

May it please God that Providence always treat us in this way, and above all, that we respond to it! Our poor family, deeply humiliated and greatly despised, would soon become completely holy and then what fruit would we bear! Tempier then refers to St. Francis de Sales and another saintly priest of the seventeenth century, Mr. Boudon. He adds: *“How could we not follow your example? Grace has certainly overcome the cries of fallen nature, but with that I stop. Father Maunier will acquaint you much better than I with all the other things.”* (OW, II, 2 Tempier, pp. 28-29).

Only one paragraph of Maunier’s letter has been found (OW 6, 43, note 35): *“In God alone we place our confidence and, in consequence, we could not be blamed. To endure being reproached for having wished to do good, such glory is too much for us, let us admit, at least for me who am only a midget in the Church. But since it is God alone for whom we act and for whom we ought to act, let us always do what we can,*

let us not flinch from this hard road which lies before us, let us not lose sight of our divine Master who goes before us, carrying his cross and who deigns to invite us to follow him..."

Eugene felt encouraged, as evidenced by his letter of October 31 (OW 6, 43-44). This letter contains a dozen quotes in Latin from the second letter to Timothy. Paul's trials and hopes are his. *"Well do I recognize you, dear and good brothers of mine, from the letter you wrote me on the 23rd. Very well! I shall be worthy of you. It is God for whom we suffer; we shall not let ourselves be disheartened... It would indeed be foolish for anyone to desire to do good but not experience opposition... Saint Paul was subjected to it everywhere but nevertheless was helped through it by the Lord. Let us be firm in our confidence that it will be the same for us."*

Bishop de Bausset will be installed as Archbishop of Aix in November 1819. The least we can say is that he will not make the task of the Missionaries of Provence easier.

AT AIX, A SMALL BUT FERVENT COMMUNITY

We unfortunately have very little information on the daily life of the small community of Aix, where the lives of the young and old were obviously not reduced to the correspondence with Eugene de Mazenod. In a letter to his brother, March 15, Fortuné, returning from a short stay at Marseilles, says how he was welcomed in Aix *"by Eugene as well as by the other missionaries, novices, boarders and congregants."* That tells us what groups made up the community.

What do we know about the young people in the summer and fall of 1817? The 200 or 300 congregants must have taken a lot of space and required much time. At this time, we can count seven or eight young men in formation with the prospect of becoming Missionaries of Provence; they were the formally recognized *novices*. There were likely some other young men, simple residents or boarders, more or less postulants. In a letter to Father de Mazenod, Maunier refers to them as *"our inner family."*

During Eugene's absence, the *Diary of the Youth Congregation* was not kept up. It is only mentioned that it is *"Mr. Maunier, priest of the Mission, who will lead the Congregation during the absence of its*

superior.” (OW 16, 183). The youth activities therefore continue with two major gatherings every week on Sundays and Thursdays. These two days are busy since the exercises begin at 7 a.m. and they retired at 9 p.m. in the evening; the meals were always taken in their families. The former Carmelite choir seems to be where the main gatherings were held. There are no indications of other sites.

Another major activity is the care of the Mission Church. The first Mass is celebrated daily at 5:30 in the morning. A great number of faithful gather for the morning and evening prayers together. There are also the confessions, spiritual direction... The collaboration of Fortuné from January 1818 will be highly appreciated.

The *novices* of the Missionaries of Provence attended classes at the major seminary, while the younger fellows finished their secondary education at the Aix college. We do not have the exact list. A number of them did not persevere. On the other hand, it seems that a small number lived already with the community before formally becoming novices. This included wearing the clerical habit. We know almost nothing of Hilarion Bourrelier, from Grans, or Dalmas from Marseilles, or Jean-Baptiste de Bausset. Concerning Casimir Carles, and a certain Lalande, we only know their names.

The only thing worthy of note is the entrance into the novitiate of Jean-Joseph-Hippolyte Courtès. He was born in Aix January 1, 1798, into “*a fairly wealthy family.*” He was a 15 year old schoolboy when he was admitted to the Youth Association. Eugene writes (OW 16, 204) that he was “*one of the first of the congregants, one who was raised in her bosom, who grew up in her shade, one who was formed in her school.*” He was at the major seminary of Aix when a Jesuit came to “*talk of the merit and beauties of the apostolic vocation.*” The young seminarian joined the novitiate of the Company, then in Montrouge near Paris; this was in December 1816. Health reasons forced him to leave and return to Aix. The community of the Missionaries offered him a place for convalescence... So he officially entered the novitiate of the Missionaries of Provence October 15, 1817. Courtès, who is 19, joined Dupuy and Suzanne, both slightly younger. We know that Eugene will work hard to build his Congregation on these three novices. Soon Moreau, four years older, will join them.

We find the letter of Eugene to Courtès from Paris in Rambert (Cf. OW 6, 42): *“You say nothing to me about your health as if I must be indifferent about the condition in which you find yourself... What I would not give to see you well! So help yourself a little, do not leave it all to the doctor to do... You do not wish that I hope you shall close my eyes? It would nevertheless be a consolation for me... I believe you follow the exercises of the house. Continue, my dear child, to give the good example of regularity, of modesty, of obedience and of all the religious virtues. It is only by such means that we will be able to overcome the efforts of the enemy of all good...”*

We have two letters from Maunier to Father de Mazenod who was detained in Paris. (Cf. *Études Oblates*, 1958, pp. 235-239) The first is from September 4: *“My dear Superior, our dear brother Tempier has always had the privilege of being your correspondent, at least today I have the same, although I had occasion to insert a few lines for you in various letters he wrote to you. Those that you send us become increasingly interesting for us... What regards you personally will always be pleasing news for your adoptive family.”* Then there is mention of one of Eugene’s creditors who recommends a young man, asking that *“you would admit him into your community.”*

Maunier continues: *“Our congregation is starting to thin out because of the college vacation that began on Sunday or Monday, but we are still satisfied with those remaining, thanks to the Lord. I presume that shortly some latecomers for First Communion will be accepted, we are ready for them.”*

“Let’s talk about our inner family. In general we are happy with their behavior. The one who gave us some concern seems more reasonable; but without depreciating the others, I want to say that Bourrelier and Dalmas give me reason to bless the Lord for their regularity and perfect docility. I confess that I would be very happy if all the others were just like them. Our dear Maria (Who is he? Attempts at identification have failed.) is back for a week, we will send him to Grans to help our brother Deblieu with his First Communion work. This worthy subdeacon is of the caliber of the two that I just mentioned. You know we often wished that our dear novices would not enter into conversation just before the Offices, and you even wished that they could enter the choir by a different door than the congregants; I saw that this abuse

only increased, so after conferring with our dear Mr. Tempier, we established the custom of meeting in the corridor of the novitiate, as the last bell rang for the Office, and we went from there to the sacristy, only novices and your servant, walking two by two in silence, dressed in our surplice, and as I suggested, reciting in a low voice some verses from the Psalm Miserere, thus making our way to the sacristy, avoiding the inconvenience of being hooked by some congregant on our way, and thus assuring that the silence was strictly observed, but we believed that it was enough to recommend it. It is on the day of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin that we started this practice, which aims, in accordance with the recommendation made to us by the Holy Spirit, to prepare ourselves for prayer and to sing with more reverence and piety the praises of the Lord. We did all this without your approval. I realized that this well-ordered and decent pace going to the Office had a good effect and the congregants were edified. Please let me know if we can continue like this. Our brother Tempier will write to you. I greet you with all my heart. Maunier, missionary priest.”

The second letter is on October 1st. “My dear Father Superior, we are always counting the days hoping to receive one of your letters and as soon as one arrives ‘Ah!’ we cry, ‘finally here!’ Although you usually fill them, it seems that you have not written much, and that you should have many things to say. Your last one especially, written the day on which you intended to begin your retreat, was really very short, and, as you said, you were somehow trying to avenge the fact that our dear brother Tempier did not enter into enough details in his. However the pages are not usually empty, so it seems that we have the same complaints against each other. When your business, or rather ours, will allow you to return to your adoptive family, all these complaints will cease. In the meantime, stop trying to get revenge by your silence; you are in a position to say more than we here can, since we are not like you at the source of the transactions that are likely to interest us. Everything here in the country is about as when you left, it is the regular routine, we look forward to the results of the Concordat and the reopening of the Chambers, and we carry on from day to day. There has been a lot talk these days that the establishment of ten dioceses will be delayed and among them Arles and Marseilles. To tell you the truth, this news distressed me as much for Marseilles as for us; nothing is known about this

yet in the city, where it is expected on the contrary to have your dear Uncle, and where he is being congratulated in the hope of having him. You know better than us what we should believe of all these rumours.”

“We still have quite a number of young people on Sundays and Thursdays for the Congregation’s exercises despite the season of absences occasioned by the sad time of vacations; while there are some whose parents live in the villages or small towns, there are several from Aix who left to go live in the country, and yet with all these desertions, I realize that there are more here than last year at this time. Those admitted to First Communion in the course of the year form a kind of reinforcement and contribute by their conduct to maintaining the zeal to attend the Offices. Catechism continues Thursdays and Sundays for those who aspire to be admitted later, and Sundays for those who have already made their First Communion. These catechism instructions are short because of the season, and we continue them so that they do not lose the habit of coming and to give them more instruction. However we still give a few verses to recite and we slip in a little explanation that we sometimes ask them to do themselves. The probationers are the smallest in number now, but on the other hand the postulants form a kind of battalion composed of several individuals who act as if already admitted.”

We began a novena in honour of the Holy Angels at evening prayer on Monday, the day of Saint Michael, and it seems to me that the next day the number of faithful who came had increased. These kinds of exercises are useful, and if we had the option to end with the Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, I am sure we would have a greater attendance as we did during the novena of St. Francis Xavier when you were on mission at Mourières.

“I realize in turning the sheet that it cheated me letting some of the ink seep through; I do not know if you can decipher what I will put on this side. I want to talk a moment about our dear novices who are well, thanks to the Lord. Our dear brother Tempier has perhaps told you that our dear Bourrelier was very distressed by the death of his father and has gone home to console his mother in her loss. He left on Tuesday the 23rd of last month with Mr. Deblieu and dear Maria, and he had to set out again for Grans the following Friday, the day on which he received the distressing news from his mother who was waiting for him. We con-

tinue to be pleased with them in general, and hopefully with the help of God, some of them will correct certain faults which may be a source of merit for them in combating them, but which could be detrimental to the good order and the spirit of fervour that must prevail in a community, if they are not helped to get rid of them, even though they are not capital faults. Since you want us to inform you of everything and even of our health, I will tell you that for more than two weeks, I have quite often felt lightheaded to the point of sometimes being afraid of falling while walking; I was forced several times to stop to regain my balance. Today, thanks to the Lord, I am better than before, but I plan to go sleep at your country house at the Enclos so that I can get a little exercise and to breathe the air of the fields for a few days. I will come early in the morning to say the Holy Mass, and then take some milk, which I started today and, God willing, I will return in the evening with a companion.”

“I am mortified to leave you for various reasons. But do not be angry with me, because I have to. I embrace you with all my heart. Please accept my devotion and respect with which I have the honour to be your obedient servant and brother. Maunier, missionary priest.”

Just like the letters of Maunier, Tempier’s letter of November 11, 1817 (OW II, 2, Tempier, p. 30) sheds light on the relationships within the small society and its everyday life. *“In my letters, I always talk to you in the singular and not in the plural, so as to be less uncomfortable; but since your letters are for all of us, you should always see the replies in the same way. We want to thank you in a special way for having written a blow-by-blow account and that almost two days in succession; above all for what you tell us in your last letter, which is very compact, crammed full, in a word, perfect in every way. You already know how we receive your letters, when you give us some spiritual advice which concerns the whole community. We got together in the common room and respectfully read your letter, not only what you told us in the last one but the edifying things you told us in the other preceding ones as well, whether to freshen the memory of those who have already heard, or to teach the newcomers what the spirit of the house should be and what you expect the novices to be. These novices, by the way, are filled more and more with good will, and I hope they will become saints. This reading was accompanied by some explanations and advice. The effect*

was perfect, and I noticed that both priests and novices were deeply struck by what you said to us and by what we were able to add to this topic. Young Suzanne, even though only a postulant, was not excluded from this meeting, since it was not a conference suited only for novices; besides, there were some things which concerned him; this cleric always has lots of piety, he follows exactly all the community exercises.”

SPIRITUAL DIRECTIVES

Eugene’s letters to the Aix community are important from another point of view, which will later be called the charism. Up to this point, the only formulation of it that was a little developed was the Petition to the Capitular Vicars General of January 25 1816. Yet in Eugene’s 1817 letters, there are many glimpses of his hopes for the future of the small society. The following year, he will write the Constitutions of the Missionaries of Provence. We are therefore in an intermediate period of clarification. The quotes will therefore be quite abundant.

His July 19 letter (OW 6, 27-28) shows that St. Vincent de Paul is the patron of the small society. It concludes with these words: *“Let us love one another in God and for God and for ever.”* July 26 (OW 6, 28-29) writing to Tempier, Eugene insists they care for their health: *“I call attention to your health and to that of the whole of our dear family. Pay attention to any indispositions from the moment they begin. Watch out for the lungs of our young men. Give me news of each one in particular. Let them get lots of rest; be willing to let them remain an extra hour in bed. During vacations, when they no longer have the daily exercise of going to and from the seminary, have them go for a walk two or even three times a week. ... Let fervour be sustained, interior life, love of abnegation, of mortification, solitude, assiduity for study... Almost every evening I am with you before the Blessed Sacrament when you are saying your evening prayers.”*

The letter of August 12 (OW 6, 31-34) makes extensive reference to Paul of the Cross, founder of the Passionists, then “a Venerable” whose life Eugene was reading. *“For the love of God never cease to inculcate and preach humility, abnegation, forgetfulness of self, disdain for worldly esteem. May these be ever the foundations of our little Society which, combined with a truly disinterested zeal for the glory of God*

and the salvation of souls, and the most tender, affectionate and sincere charity amongst ourselves, will make of our house an earthly paradise and will establish it in more solid a manner than all possible orders and laws. Hold firmly the reins of discipline, for this is the way to ensure perseverance. Slackness, as I see it, is the beginning of destruction. Insist that dissipation not enter by all the doors and windows that our ministry prevents us from closing. It will be more virtuous to be faithful to the rules when observed in spite of the obstacles that ceaselessly occur...”

Then he quotes from Paul of the Cross who said: *“It is by prayer that foundations are born.”* Then he continues, *“And thus with nothing he accomplished many things. If we knew how to pray better, we would have more courage. I cannot express how much I would wish that our little community might raise up in full view of the Church the fervour of the religious Orders and regular Congregations from which sprang such shining virtue in the first days of their establishment... It seems to me that, although few in number, we could do still more good, console the Church for so many plagues that consume her on all sides, and sanctify ourselves in the most consoling and happy manner... Dissolute or bad priests are the great plague of the Church. Let us wholly exert ourselves to mitigate this cancerous growth by keeping ourselves aloof both in conversation and conduct; we must not be afraid to be thought singular in that respect. Were we to behave like them, they would be our friends. On those terms, I prefer to have them as adversaries and calumniators... Long live Jesus Christ who gives us strength to suffer all manner of grief for his love! When matters seem the most desperate is when they are on the point of succeeding... The saints always went on their way, they prayed and let others say what they would. Let us do the same!”*

He continues with some advice for the novices’ relaxation and rest and adds: *“If some priest wished to join us, he should do so at this time... However we ought never to decide to receive doubtful candidates whose virtue has not been well tried... One must moreover be greatly attached to the house. He who only looks on it as a hotel where he only passes through would do no good therein. One must be able to say like St. Thomas: haec requies mea [Ps. 131, 14: It is ever my place of rest; I will dwell there...] for the whole of one’s life. I see that com-*

munities where this spirit reigns the most are those which do the most good and where one lives the most happily. May God give us the grace to be imbued with this truth and let us neglect nothing to instil it in our young people...”

Here is the letter of August 22 (OW 6, 34-35): “We are, or we ought to be, holy priests who consider themselves happy and very happy to devote their fortune, their health, their life in the service and for the glory of our God. We are put on earth, particularly those of our house, to sanctify ourselves while helping each other by our example, our words and our prayers. Our Lord Jesus Christ has left to us the task of continuing the great work of the redemption of mankind. It is towards this unique end that all our efforts must tend; as long as we will not have spent our whole life and given all our blood to achieve this, we having nothing to say; especially when as yet we have given only a few drops of sweat and a few spells of fatigue. This spirit of being wholly devoted to the glory of God, the service of the Church and the salvation of souls, is the spirit that is proper to our Congregation, a small one, to be sure, but which will always be powerful as long as she is holy. Our novices must steep themselves in these thoughts, which must sink deep in them and be often meditated. Each Society in the Church has a spirit which is its own; which is inspired by God according to the circumstances and needs of the times wherein it pleases God to raise these supporting bodies or rather it would be better to say these elite bodies which precede the main army on the march, which excel it in bravery and which thus obtains the more brilliant victories.”

We have already quoted extensively from the letter of October 31 (OW 6, 43-44): “It is God for whom we suffer; we shall not let ourselves be disheartened... So let us continue to strive like good soldiers of Jesus Christ... It would indeed be foolish for anyone to desire to do good but not experience opposition.”

On November 4 (OW 6, 44-46) he repeats again to Tempier “that it is not my ambition to be in command,” that he is fully disposed to obey another but he “quite insists on order which cannot exist where there is no subordination.” Then he continues at length about the young people: “As the number of young people who belong to the house has increased exactness and regularity must grow in proportion. This is the time to form the spirit of the house which I have discussed with you in another

letter. You have to beware of frivolity, of self-sufficiency, indiscipline independence... I quite insist that all give a good example at the seminary... They ought not to forget that we are a Congregation of regular clerics, that we ought in consequence to be more fervent than simple seminarians, that we are called to replace in the Church the piety and all the virtues of the religious Orders, that all their actions ought to be done with the dispositions in which the apostles were when they were in the Cenacle waiting for the Holy Spirit to come and enflame them with his love and give them the signal to go forth swiftly and conquer the world, etc. They ought to be more holy than the pupils of the Fathers of the Retreat who have only their own sanctification to think of while ours must make provision thereof doubly, both for themselves and for those whom they will have to lead to the knowledge of the true God and to the practice of virtue.” Then Eugene gives some directives for the student novices “*until we decide what must be added to the Rules.*”

LOOKING BACK ON THE LIFE OF THE SMALL COMMUNITY

We know of fourteen letters that Eugene wrote from Paris to the Aix community or to one or the other of its members. Two are listed as having been written to the entire community (i.e. including the youth), three to Tempier and Maunier, eight directly to Tempier and one to the young Courtès who was entering the house. Such is at least the breakdown according to our sources (Rambert, Rey, Yenveux), since the originals were not kept. We would like to know what has been omitted and the reasons for these omissions... But this breakdown of recipients gives pause for thought especially on the respective roles of Maunier and Tempier.

We must not forget the age and length of priestly life of each. Maunier was then 48 years old. He had been a priest for 20 years. Eugene was 35, and Tempier 29; they had been ordained for six and three years respectively. Deblieu and Mie are barely mentioned.

According to OW 6, 37, it is first to Maunier that Eugene announced the appointment of Fortuné. (The letter has been lost.) In the Diary of the Youth Congregation, it is said that it is he who “*must lead the Congregation in the absence of the superior*” (OW 16, 183), but nothing seems to be said about the novices concerning whom Eugene

usually writes to Tempier. It is not for nothing that Maunier begins his letter of September 4, cited above, by this sentence that says it all: “*Our dear brother Tempier has always had the privilege of being your correspondent, at least today I have the same, although I had occasion to insert a few lines for you in various letters he wrote to you.*”

Tempier feels the need to specify in a letter of November 11 (OW Tempier II, 30) cited above: “*In my letters, I always talk to you in the singular and not in the plural, so as to be less uncomfortable; but since your letters are for all of us, you should always see the replies in the same way... You already know how we receive your letters, when you give us some spiritual advice which concerns the whole community. We got together in the common room and respectfully read your letter, not only what you tell us in the last one, but the edifying things you told us in the other preceding ones...*”

The only references to Deblieu and Mie are to report on their work outside of Aix. There are between five and ten novices and they seem to form a separate community. Fortuné rarely mentions them in the correspondence that he will soon begin. The year 1818 will see the acceptance of a foundation at Notre-Dame de Laus and the drafting of the Constitutions of the Missionaries of Provence. Approval by the small group will be difficult. Everyone will be obliged to renew and clarify their commitment.

THE ARLES MISSION

The Arles mission for which, at the request of Mr. Rauzan, the Missionaries of France sought the collaboration of two Missionaries of Provence (Mie and Deblieu) is the only one mentioned for the fall of 1817. In his work on *Les Missions sous la Restauration* (Vol. 2, pp. 71-75) Sevrin devotes four pages to this mission, which lasted from November 2 to December 21. At first the welcome was far from encouraging. “*Most people were wondering what the missionaries had come to do,*” and if they had the gift of miracles to bring people back to the doctrine and ideas of another age. Such indifference did not last long and the miracle happened; the faith had remained alive in the depths of their hearts. The change was felt right from the first week. After the turn-about, the missionaries and the clergy of the city spent up to 15 and 18

hours non-stop in the confessional. Tempier was able to write to Father de Mazenod: “*After Father Mie’s sermons the men did fitting penance in the church wearing a rope around their necks.*” (OW II, 2, Tempier, p. 30). Two thousand men received communion and the women were even more numerous. The planting of the cross, on December 16, was a triumph, with a procession and a gathering of around 5,000 people. Rambert (I, p. 307) quotes a subsequent letter of Mr. Rauzan: “*The two men that the Abbé de Mazenod was willing to give us for Arles worked wonders of zeal and gave us some good lessons.*”

“*It is impossible, says one witness, to describe the change that has taken place in the behaviour and the Christian reform which, somehow, made a new people of the people of this country... How to express all the good that they did: the numerous restitutions, the enmities they calmed, the divisions they have healed, not only in families, but among the citizens; the peace, unity, and harmony they so happily restored!*” And another witness says: “*The spirit of peace, charity, order and compassion that reigns in the city today astonishes and delights all those who are its witnesses.*”

Rey (I, pp. 220-221) has transcribed the letter of the superior of the Missionaries of France: “*My dear Monsieur de Mazenod, I have just embraced your good missionaries as they left the city of Arles. It was not possible for me to write to you and thank you for the powerful assistance you provided to our mission by giving us Frs. Mie and Deblieu. They have done wonders in the parishes of the Majeur and Trinquetaille, particularly in the latter where they mainly evangelized. We wish we could take Mr. Deblieu to Grenoble. Perhaps it would be useful for him to do a few missions where he would be forced to preach in French, but he did not dare to do so without your consent. There will be another time to send him for this mission and as missionaries are very bold in their demands and in their undertakings, we ask you yourself to come to Grenoble... You’ll laugh, and make fun of me, but I assure you that you would do an infinite good if you were open to our views. Farewell, my dear brother... I want to repeat and I will never be able to say enough how much we enjoyed working with your holy missionaries. Accept the assurance of my respectful and sincere attachment. - Tarascon, December 22, 1817 - Rauzan.*”

Eugene's retreat notes that are presented in OW 15, 141-142, are most likely from October 1817. *"But I must not forget that to work efficaciously for others' salvation, I must apply myself very seriously to my own perfection, and I must take care not to dissipate myself while consecrating myself to the service of my neighbour. I will make it an irrevocable rule of conduct that nothing on this earth shall constitute a habitual threat to my own progress in the spiritual life. For this I must establish some key points as pivots of the rest of my life. 1. To live in great dependence on God and follow in everything I can the rule of the house so as to set an example and subjugate my will. 2. Since my outside affairs often deflect me and made it impossible for me to follow this rule in every detail, I must make it a special obligation never to dispense myself, on any pretext, from certain of the most essential points of this rule. So, rise with the community, (at 5 o'clock or 4 ½) oraison, prepare for and make thanksgiving after Mass. Adore the Blessed Sacrament for at least a quarter of an hour in the afternoon; at least one hour's study during the day, etc., read Holy Scripture. To this end, there is absolutely no time to waste, and what is left over after the day's business must be well used. I will never come near it unless I vanish for a few hours during the day... Perform all of my actions before God without losing for an instant his holy presence, be very careful to offer him all the upset plans my service of neighbour occasions."*

Eugene left Paris on November 24 to return to Aix, a journey which at the time required a good week.

What results could he show for these five long months of absence? His trip to Paris did not accomplish much for the little Society of the Missionaries of Provence. Relations with the Missionaries of France were clarified. There is no longer a question of joining them; there will be limited occasional collaboration, each society remaining independent. Nothing has advanced as regards the government except some encouragement and the persistent idea of Corsica. As for the newly appointed Archbishop of Aix, there is only much disappointment; he will not support the Missionaries in their conflict with the parish priests of the city. One piece of good news – a quite unexpected one – was the appointment of Fortuné to the restored See of Marseilles. But Eugene

is not sure what his commitment to be a close collaborator of his uncle will entail. Fortunately, no one could imagine that it would take a little over five years for the decisions to be carried out.

On the other hand, Eugene felt completely supported by Maunier and Tempier. Their solidarity remained strong. They shared his outlook for the future of the little Society. During the Founder's absence they assured the works with understanding and fidelity: support of the Youth Congregation and service at the Mission Church. In addition, the young "novices", whom Maunier calls "*our inner family*" were a great source of hope. Less is known about Deblieu and Mie, except that their collaboration in the Arles mission was highly appreciated.

As regards family matters, Eugene senses that he will meet with new and difficult problems. It was with great difficulty that he convinced Uncle Fortuné to accept his appointment and thus to organize his return. He will be joined by Eugene's father and another brother of the latter, the Chevalier, accompanied by his wife Tonia. But Eugene knows that his mother is not at all in favour of the return of the Mazenod gentlemen. Family matters will be very tough, whether it be to find them places of residence or even more resources, for which Eugene got nothing more than promises in Paris. Aged respectively 73, 68 and 67, they are old men for the times, who will struggle to adapt to a French society that is very different than the one they left over 25 years before. All four will land in Marseilles on December 27, after a crossing as "*dangerous as it was long.*"

The writings of Eugene show no trace of his feelings in these days of reunion after more than 15 years of separation. We only know that Madame de Mazenod insisted on keeping her distance. "*Your mother simply did not want her brothers-in-law, or her husband near her,*" wrote his father in 1805 (See Leflon I, p. 249). This attitude persisted in 1817. The President who was about to return to France, wrote to Eugene on November 10: "*A wife separated from her husband for 20 years should naturally find some satisfaction in seeing him again. If mine is of a different opinion, I will try with my sweetness, and my patience, to inspire her with other feelings...*"

The President, his brother and sister-in-law thus remained in Marseilles, in a modest rented house at number 53 rue des Petites Maries. Fortuné, whose appointment was known in Marseilles, left them af-

ter 20 years together and was welcomed at Aix by the Missionaries of Provence. All were yet to experience some difficult years.

THE BEGINNING OF 1818

Existing correspondence informs us pretty well about the second half of 1817. The first seven or eight months of 1818 have much less written information since Eugene is back in Aix, where he enters into the daily life of the community. But in January 1818 Fortuné, who had come to the Missionaries' house, began an extensive correspondence with his brother who remained in Marseilles. It tells us a lot about the life of the Missionaries of Provence. We will quote extensively from it.

We can imagine that upon his return, Eugene took back more direct responsibility for the community. He lets his brothers preach the mission of Puget (Var) in January 1818 because his presence is required in Aix, where he has been absent so long. For the small Society, it is a time of maturation, without any major event until an unexpected letter requires a whole reorganization of minds and regulations. The letter, dated August 16, 1818, written on behalf of the Bishop of Digne, proposes that the Missionaries of Provence take over the shrine of Our Lady of Laus, in the Hautes-Alpes and preach missions in the region. Is it appropriate to establish a second house, moreover one outside of Provence? Is it not in contradiction to all previous plans? Eugene thinks that only a positive response will provide a future for the small Society, which is facing challenges in Aix, and therefore a future for the young people in training, while as for Marseilles no progress is being made. He also believes that to maintain unity, the drafting of constitutions, which will introduce religious vows, is essential. This proposal will be the source of a serious internal crisis. It will open up a new period for the Missionaries of Provence.

THE YOUTH CONGREGATION AND CARE FOR THE MISSION CHURCH

The paucity of information that has been preserved on the Youth Congregation for the years 1817 and 1818 should not obscure the importance of this work and the time that the Missionaries of Provence

dedicated to the youth of Aix. A lack of time led Eugene to interrupt writing the *Diary* between June 1816 and June 1818, but it was in those years that the Congregation numbered about 300 young people, as Eugene and even Fortuné often recalled.

Eugene begins writing in the diary again on June 18, 1818 (OW 16) at the request of the congregants who he says, “*have made it known that they would like to see a continuation of the history, so to speak, of the Congregation, and that it would be a disfavour to them not to consign to writing the memorable events, edifying traits, that might serve as a model and be a means of persevering in good*” (pp. 186-187). Great importance is still given to the liturgical or semi-liturgical celebrations. We note the celebrations of Holy Week in March. “*Blessing of Palms. Procession on the Place des Carmelites. The Holy Week Services followed carefully by the congregants. Holy Thursday. The Mandatum.*” (p. 186). There is also the Mass celebrated at the Mission Church on the Thursday after Easter by the Bishop of Digne, Mgr Miollis, who “*conferred the sacrament of confirmation on several congregants who had been prepared for it according to our customs*” (p. 186). The celebration of the feast of St. Aloysius Gonzaga is reported at length in the *Diary* (pp. 188-190). It started at 6:30 am with the Office, followed by the ceremony for the admission of a number of applicants as probationers. “*Communion was almost general although each is free to take it or not, and it is here again that one tries in vain to portray the whole edifying, ravishing, spectacle, one worthy of the Angels who surely were in transports of joy so great was the piety, modesty, spirit of faith animating and accompanying to the holy table all these fervent Christians who are worthy to be compared with the first faithful whose virtues they imitate perfectly. I have never seen the like, I must confess, not even in the seminary*” (p. 189)

Among those admitted or the probationers, we note the names of Marius Suzanne, Marius Aubert, a priest, and Noël Moreau, a deacon, who will become Missionaries of Provence. There were also some expulsions. (pp. 192-193): “*The Council of the Congregation gathered for the approval of the accounts and deal with a number of items of business. The Messrs. Zealots reported that certain members who had been absent for some time deserved to have the Council examine their far from edifying behaviour, they concluded that they should be expelled*

or at least struck off the list. It was decided therefore to strike off the probationer Master Casimir Vernet and Master Augustin Pontier. The former is a child who has let himself be led by bad example, but who cannot even so be excused, in view of all the steps taken to bring him back to well-doing over the period of months; the other, by far more culpable, can be seen as a real apostate from piety and religion. His age, - he is 19 -, his status as a received member; the trust the Director had shown in him over more than two years, the posts the Congregation had entrusted him with, the supervision and correction that was his responsibility with regard to the youngsters, which by giving him the task of recalling others to their duties gave him too the chance to come to a better realization of their importance, - all tend to aggravate the inexcusable wrong of his scandalous defection. Before going to the length of rejecting and cutting off this gangrenous limb from the Congregation, the Director had bided patiently a whole year during which he on his part stopped at nothing in an effort to bring him back to his initial disposition... But all this attention was to come to naught confronted by the perversity of a corrupted heart, lured by the seduction of bad company, youngsters extraneous to the Congregation from whom it was impossible to detach him... Let there be no further mention of him and may God overlook his trespasses and show him mercy as we forgive him his ingratitude and all the grief he gave us."

Ministry at the Mission Church (a diocesan document designates it as "*the church of St. Vincent de Paul*"), occupies the Missionaries daily. Upon his arrival, Fortuné makes a valuable contribution, especially for confessions. In August 1818, the feast of the recently beatified Blessed Alphonsus Liguori was celebrated there for the first time.

ADMISSIONS TO THE COMMUNITY

In the community, the number of those who are designated as "*novices*" is steadily growing. Their number exceeds ten. Is it appropriate to put at the top the first three Eugene called to the General Chapter of October to switch the majority: Alexandre Dupuy, Marius Suzanne and Hippolyte Courtès? By statute, they are on a par with the others who do not persevere. We have already pointed out Bourrelrier Hilarion, 17, François Dalmas, from Marseille, age 16, and especially Jean-Baptiste

de Bausset who in July 1818 “*lost courage*” in his vocation, but continued to stay at the Mission while studying law.

There are some new ones like Lalande “*who received the cassock and the title of novice after much persuasion*” and remained in the house about fifteen months. There is also Marcellin Giraud, who is the subject of a notice that it is difficult to interpret in the admissions register (*Missions*, 1952, p.16): “*If there was ever hope for a subject, it is for this one. He lived in our house eighteen months; and during the sixteen months leading up to his departure, he was consistently an example of the most exact regularity and of the most sustained fervour. Had he been more humble he would have persevered, but puffed up by some vain science that his bad judgment let him take the wrong way, he attempted to scrutinize the Majesty and was oppressed by the Glory.*”

One wonders where to place Gabriel Carron who “*entered the house*” on March 1, 1818 while he was not yet 14 years old. He was born in 1804 in La Tour d’Aigues, in the Vaucluse, and was not yet 13 when he was admitted as a postulant in the Youth Congregation. What place could this young man have in the house? Were they already organizing a kind of juniorate? In any case, he “*took the ecclesiastical habit*” in 1819 at the age of 15.

There was more promise for the future with the entry into the novitiate of deacon Noël François Moreau (or Moureau), on April 22, 1818. He was born in 1794 in Tarascon. Fortuné describes him as “*an excellent candidate*” (April 28), who will be ordained a priest in September. Moreau will thus be the first Missionary of Provence priest of the new generation and will be a very close disciple of Eugene de Mazenod.

It is more difficult to speak about Marius Aubert, already a priest, who participated in several missions, but to whom the *Historical Dictionary* has not seen fit to devote a notice. He joined the Missionaries in early April. According to Fortuné (letter of April 10), he is “*a valuable acquisition for the institution and will be a great help because of his talents and virtues. Please God that two or three more like him would come!*” Here is what Eugene de Mazenod wrote of him in the novitiate Admissions Register (*Missions*, 1952, p.17): “*Mr. Marius Victor Aubert, a priest who left the Father Charles Retreat (a community in Aix already mentioned in Eugene de Mazenod’s past), came to ask me to join our Society because, he says, he felt some aptitude for announcing*

the Word of God and that he could no longer bear to see his ministry restricted to instructing some holy young women at the Retreat. The good opinion I had of this young priest, combined with the extreme need to which we were reduced, made me disregard the article of our Rules (Eugene commits an anachronism here, because the Rules of the Missionaries of Provence postdate this admission) which forbids us to admit subjects that have belonged to other groups. His apparent good will, the exaggerated idea that I had formed of his selflessness and zeal, the expressions he used to let me know how much he appreciated the regular and common life, in a word everything led me to make an exception in his favour. I made it clear to him that he should not even try us, if he was not firmly resolved to persevere until death in the Society; he positively replied that this was his intention.” The disappointment will be great.

In a letter of April 1818, writing about the reception of a Spanish Capuchin “*just returned from the missions of the Levant,*” Fortuné speaks of the Mission, that is to say, the Aix house, as “*an inn for all the destitute*” As we have already remarked, we would like to know more about the common life in the house and the place held by the cook whom Fortuné refers to as “*the wonderful Thérèse... the only servant for about twenty people, a model of virtue and work.*” (Letter of July 13).

It is true that in his *Mélanges historiques* Jeancard speaks at length of the first community in Aix. We quote from pages 26 and 27. “*The Society did not yet exist but in embryonic form... a mustard seed that was to become a tree whose branches spread much further than had then been imagined. While following the holy inspiration to look everywhere for priests who were willing to sacrifice everything to God and to come together as a congregation to work with him for the sanctification of souls in missionary work, Mr. de Mazenod had thought also about forming around himself something like an apostolic school, which would continue the generous undertaking and be the element by which it would develop. The young people I mentioned above were the first students in this holy school. They were especially cared for by Mr. de Mazenod himself, who became the director of their consciences and their novice master. The care he gave to their education was all pervading: during recreation, walking (when he had time to accompany them),*

in his room, in the conference room, in the chapel, finally everywhere, he tried to fill them with the spirit of God. So we can say that the air in the house was permeated by this spirit; they breathed it constantly and breathed nothing else. Thus, they lived in a fully apostolic atmosphere that was maintained, it must be said, by all the priests of the community... The zeal and devotion were, with inevitable differences, characteristic of all these priests, without exception, elite men with respect to the priestly virtues...”

What Jeancard wrote was the common thinking among Oblates until the research of Leflon. His testimony is still interesting for us, but we must not forget the literary genre. It dates after 1861 and its hagiographic character is obvious. Note that Jeancard, a native of Cannes, which was then part of the Diocese of Aix, entered the major seminary of Aix in October 1818 and gradually came into contact with the Mission house.

THE PUGET MISSION

The last mission preached by the Missionaries of Provence was that of Mouriès in February-March 1817; only Deblieu and Mie had taken part in the Arles mission. Only one mission is mentioned for the first six months of 1818, that of Puget, a town of 1,300 inhabitants near Fréjus in the Var. Eugene accompanied the Missionaries to the Puget mission and launched it on January 3, 1818. He then returned to Aix and let Frs. Tempier, Deblieu and Mie continue. The mission lasted four weeks. Maunier came to join them.

We have a letter from Tempier to Fr. de Mazenod dated January 13 (OW II, 2, *Tempier*, p. 31): *“I must let you know that a number of men did not seem to be disposed to approach the tribunal of penance. Our dear Fathers Mye and Deblieu judged that the expiatory exercise ought to take place here as elsewhere and, since it could be very useful to these individuals, we must not deprive them of it. In this case, you would have agreed, and that is what determined us to do this act of penance. Father Maunier insisted that he, being the most guilty, had to carry the cross. He wanted to repair the scandals that he said he had given in this region. (He was a native of Frejus.) We were afraid that he would take sick. However, by God’s grace, he didn’t experience the least*

fatigue. He had bare feet and a rope around his neck. This ceremony made a deep impression and men as well as women were sobbing. Since that day, the men hastened to fulfil this duty which seems so difficult for those who have not done it for many years."

Regarding Eugene at this time, our sources show that he was very tired. So much so that the vicar general, Guigou, had to intervene after the Puget mission. He postponed the missions of Eyguières (Bouches-du-Rhône) and Tourves (Var) that had been planned. The pastor of Salernes also got a negative response (OW 13, 22). The next mission will be that of Barjols in November.

FORTUNÉ AND HIS CORRESPONDENCE

With Madame de Mazenod already giving hospitality to her Boisgelin children and grandchildren at Papassaudi Street we can understand that there was no space to accommodate her husband. Eugene's father, his uncle the Chevalier, and his wife Tonia, are in Marseilles. Fortuné lives with the Missionaries of Aix. We owe an extensive correspondence between Fortuné and his brother to this separation, which was painful for them. Of Fortuné's letters 237 have been preserved; they deserve special attention. The originals were entrusted to the Oblate Archives in Rome. It is thanks to Fortuné's 237 letters and to the President's responses that we have information about the family as well as of Eugene and the Missionaries. This correspondence, which will cease with the death of Eugene's father in October 1820, has been presented and analyzed by Fr. Yvon Beaudoin in three articles in the *Vie Oblate Life* magazine in December 1985 (pp. 291-330), December 1986 (pp. 411-446), and December 1989 (pp. 443-466).

Fortuné tells his brother about the big and small events; he describes the ups and downs of family relationships, sometimes quite directly. President de Mazenod and his brother feel neglected, even abandoned. They are not welcome in Aix and it seems that their family in Aix, Madame de Mazenod and her daughter, only visited them once or at the most twice in three years. According to his father, Eugene passes through Marseilles "*like a cat on hot coals,*" when he does come. The promised resources (government pensions) are long overdue and are far short of the promises and even their needs. It is poverty, a state of

distress, they write. Furthermore, dependence on Madame de Mazenod, who manages the small remaining portion of their income, is rather humiliating. *“We must always be under guardianship.” “Coming here, we expected a long act of patience and it is just beginning.”*

As for Fortuné, his appointment to the See of Marseilles remains unresolved. For him too the lack of resources is painful. He wrote in January to the Baroness de Talleyrand, stepsister of the Cardinal: *“Having returned to France with the certainly well-founded idea to be the Bishop of Marseilles... I found only misery of which I would feel the rigors if it were not for the charity of the poor missionaries.”* Hence, they regret having left Sicily, where they received a small pension from the English government. So on April 10: *“Ah! Sweet and fair Sicily, I will never forget you and you will always be my true home...”* Having received a letter addressed *“To His Eminence the Abbé de Mazenod, Bishop of Marseilles,”* he says, *“You see by this odd greeting, dear friend, that if revenues do not arrive, the titles will abound and fall like hail and soon I will be overwhelmed. I know that in these times people are crazy about all this nonsense, but as for me who am of older times, I would prefer a little hard cash. Hopefully, it will finally come.”* (03/20/1818) One word sums it up: *“We left the certain for the uncertain”* and that uncertainty drags on.

His resignation and his trust in Providence come back in almost every letter, as if he needed to reassure himself. For reasons unknown at the time, the new Concordat was not working well and no one knew what would happen. The papal bulls confirming the appointment of new bishops were blocked in Paris without explanation. The situation was very difficult for the 30 or 40 bishops whose appointment had been made public but who awaited confirmation. Accordingly, Aix, among other dioceses was still awaiting the installation of its Archbishop-elect who, tired of waiting, went back to his family. And it was unclear whether or not the See of Marseilles would be restored. After months without a stipend, the nominated bishops would receive a modest pension. But Fortuné has only oral promises and is forgotten on the lists. This gives rise to many thoughts on the situation in France. Needless to say, they are often very pessimistic. *“What an abominable age we live in!”* he exclaims on June 19.

It seems appropriate to insert here a few brief biographical notes on Fortuné de Mazenod. Born in 1749, he is four years younger than Eugene's father. He studied theology at the Sorbonne, as a seminarian from Saint-Sulpice, along with Talleyrand. He was ordained at Beauvais in 1776 by the local bishop, Mgr François-Joseph de La Rochefoucauld, who with his brother the Bishop of Saintes were victims of the September massacres in 1792. (They were beatified in 1926 with many other martyrs.)

Fortuné's ecclesiastical career until the Revolution deserves to be studied more. What were his responsibilities when he was one of 15 vicars general of the Archbishop of Aix, Bishop de Boisgelin, taking the place of his uncle André? He recalls that he was once an appreciated superior of the Carmelites. He was one of the clergy delegates to the States of Provence, prior to the States General of 1789. When the Archbishop was going to Paris for the States General, he chose Fortuné as administrator of the diocese in his absence. This was a difficult period as can be imagined; even his life was threatened when he was shot as he carried the Blessed Sacrament in the Corpus Christi procession in 1791. As a result he went to his family who had fled to Piedmont. Another stay in Aix in 1797 lasted only two months, and he was forced to flee again.

Then followed the long exile in Naples and Sicily with his two brothers and his nephew Eugene, which forced him into what Fr. Pielorz describes as *a peaceful inertia*. It is from this inertia that Eugene tried to draw him out.

The uncertainty and insecurity cost him five long years of patience, which undoubtedly had a good effect on his episcopate. Fortuné felt perfectly welcome in what he called "*the house of the Mission*" or "*the missionaries' house*". He learned a lot there. As regards Madam de Mazenod, he wrote to his brother, "*I made up my mind to follow your example and let your wife say whatever she wants, without interrupting or opposing her. Amen to all her ideas, all her proposals, that is my usual answer. In this way we get on wonderfully and I will never give up this salutary method. By the grace of God, I do not worry about anything anymore and I thank him every day for giving me the gift of patience of which I so often have need.*" Fortuné must also accept that Eugene handle the business of his appointment as bishop, "*a terribly messy*

affair.” This leads Eugene’s father to write: “*You’re in the clutches of Zézé (Eugene) that do not easily let go of their prey.*” (January 17). Again on May 8: “*My dear child sometimes has opinions that are not very accurate and once he adopts them, he is too stubborn in supporting them; trying to dissuade him causes him real distress...*”

PRAISE FOR THE WORK OF EUGENE AND THE MISSIONARIES OF PROVENCE

In this work we will limit ourselves to what, in these letters, directly relates to Eugene and the Missionaries of Provence. While Fortuné points out some difficulties, his view is always one of admiration. Here is his description of the work of the Missionaries of Provence in a letter to the Baroness de Talleyrand: “*The Missions are producing incalculable results everywhere, and I think that’s the only way to revive the heyday of the Gallican Church here. That of Provence, founded by my nephew has had a prodigious success and if the number of apostolic workers was greater, our region would soon be transformed into a land of saints. What will surprise you is that until now they are only five in number and they are fighting the devil at their own expense, with no remuneration from the government or the church budget. In addition to the missions, three years ago they established here, despite all the efforts and the rage of the minions of hell, a congregation attended daily by 300 young people, who are the example and admiration of the city, while they would have become its scourge, as in the past, without the zeal and ardent love of these fervent ministers of the altar.*” (May 5, 1818)

From the very first letters Fortuné expresses his admiration. For example on January 6, 1818, three days after his arrival: “*I am more and more amazed by Eugene’s establishment. It is truly wonderful and I continue to bless God. His church is frequented morning and evening by the first ladies of the city who have the devotion of angels. In a word, the good he has done and continues to do every day with his worthy colleagues is incalculable.*” The next day on January 7: “*He is a rare heart and all good people are crazy about him. You’re blessed to have such a child!*” And on January 10: “*You have no idea of the work he has here alone (the others are on a mission in Puget), and with what wis-*

dom and gentleness he rules his house. I heard him give some lectures and I was delighted. He speaks of God like an angel."

EUGENE'S HEALTH

Eugene is "overwhelmed with business and work" (January 20). On January 30: "*Eugene, despite the enormous weight of his duties, is well. At the moment he is bothered by nothing other than passing some blood because of hemorrhoids. I never cease reminding him how essential it is in all respects to moderate his zeal and to save his strength for the long haul, but it is often like talking to the wall. I consider it a miracle that I was able to persuade him to postpone the Eyguières mission until after Easter. If he had undertaken it in Lent, certainly neither he nor his colleagues could have finished it.*"

The question of Eugene's health comes back in almost every letter. Thus on February 17: "*Eugene continues to get better. He was able to say Mass yesterday and today and he is starting to regain his strength, exhausted by work and fasting, thanks to a regimen the doctor prescribed and which he has accepted, not without difficulty. We insist on it and he will have to obey.*" And the next day: "*Eugene has had nothing more and continues to get better, limiting his zeal and taking more food and sleep. I feel it worries him a little and upsets the ideas he has on piety. But he has to put everything in its place and not seek to be wise beyond measure, as St. Paul says. Otherwise, before he is 40, he will become useless for the Church and fit only to occupy a sickbed.*" On February 25, he urged his brother: "*Spare yourself the trouble of making long sermons to him that go nowhere, and do not answer me on this topic, I beg you, and for good reason.*" February 27: "*We let him lament that he can not be involved during Lent and we force him to obey and submit to the laws of common sense and reason, of which he has little in this matter. You can easily imagine the trouble he gives me and his poor mother. I told him very clearly that it was unnecessary for him to make me leave Sicily to witness his exaggerations and that I would leave the mission unless he changed his conduct in this regard.*"

March 1: "*Eugene did not have mumps as was first believed, it was only a swelling in the neck caused by the tension of the nerves whose tension is also felt strongly enough in the feet to prevent him*

from walking. It has diminished much in recent days and his physical condition has improved significantly. No more indigestion, insomnia, no more fasting, in a word he is better and admits that he was imprudent. It was no little effort to persuade him to take more food, rest and sleep, but finally with the grace of God, we have succeeded. We will do everything we can to help him with his work; yesterday I wrote for him all day until close to midnight. It is because we want you to keep this wonderful son that God has blessed you with and who is loved and revered by all good people.” And then again on the 7th of March: *“Eugene has become more reasonable, he sleeps and eats more, does not burden himself with work, takes something in the morning and evening and sometimes comes to warm himself and rest at my place. Thank God for this miraculous conversion, and beg Him that it will last.”*

We can add the remarks of Mr. de Mazenod on this topic. For example in his letter of January 31 to his brother he writes: *“Everyone I’ve seen so far, while not without praise for my son, are all in agreement in complaining that he does not take care of his health and may well shorten his days by too much work. This is not what God requires of him. Excess in doing good is very objectionable and although the Lord does not need him to accomplish His divine will, he must spare himself as much as possible, to cooperate as long as he can with the designs of Providence... Instill this truth in him. If necessary use the authority that your age, your status as an uncle and a bishop give you over a stubborn nephew, who must know that obedience to his superiors is more pleasing to God than his dedication and sacrifice...”* And on August 16: *“I fear that details of the Blessed’s (Liguori) austerities have stirred up Zézé’s imagination a little too much and I charge you to keep an eye on him. He is a young man who could do no better than to surrender completely to your direction and advice and to sometimes listen to mine...”*

THE MISSIONARIES’ WORK

From time to time these letters give us some insights into the work and life of the Missionaries. Already on January 7, Fortuné alludes to their opponents: *“I had the visit of the biggest opponents to the Mission, including Mrs. Albert, who still loves you very much, and I think this is*

the first they have set foot in this holy house.” On January 28, the topic is Mr. Laboulie, Advocate General to the Royal Court (now the Court of Appeals). *“This young magistrate is an example for the whole city by his virtues and he is one of the great protectors of the Mission of which he appreciates all the benefits and that he frequents with the most edifying regularity.”*

In his letter of March 7, after the lines about Eugene’s health quoted above, Fortuné writes, *“I flatter myself that the terrible Eyguières mission will not take place, because three quarters of the missionaries are overworked and physically unable to undertake it, let alone to finish it. It is a region full of people with no morals and no principles, about 4,000 souls who would require ten to twelve of the strongest missionaries, and they are only four, all of them worn out by previous work. I also make use of any means possible so that they do not undertake it this year, and I do not doubt that I will win. If necessary, I will ask the vicars general, as I have already done, to moderate Eugene’s excessive zeal and force him to take care of his health. I would very much like to see them disperse after Easter and spend twelve or fifteen days in the places where last year they have carried out so well their apostolic ministry, since the parish priests desire this to consolidate the good work. This trip would not be tiring and it would produce very much good. However, I have the doctor on my side who speaks very clearly about this and has told them that they could not take on any new missions for awhile without killing themselves.”*

March 23: *“Our missionary was not too tired by all the work that his zeal leads him to do and his colleagues took up a good part of it to help him. Among other things they took charge of the sermons on the Passion and the Resurrection that would have overwhelmed him. Our church was extremely busy and all the services were done wonderfully.”* In April, Fortuné spent several days with his brothers. On his return, on the 7th, he wrote: *“I found your wife at the Mission, busy preparing your son’s packages and whatever was needed for the road... I could not see Eugene but in passing and I hardly had time to embrace him, because he was surrounded by a crowd of people who had to talk to him; he was upset that the vicars general disrupted his plan for reasons too numerous to mention, forcing him to be away for more than a*

month, while he had planned to stay away no more than a fortnight. His health is still good despite the amount of work he has.”

The letter of April 9 describes this work: “We have heard from our missionaries with the return of the coach that had brought them. Their trip was very pleasant; after dining at Salon, they slept at Eyguières where upon arrival your son preached to the great satisfaction of all. As this place was not the object of their apostolic labors, on Tuesday he sent two of his colleagues to Arles and the same day he himself went to Grans with Father Tempier, his close friend, to begin his work of bringing every spiritual help to a large parish, which was without a parish priest or a vicar. From there he will go to Mouriès, which is also without a priest, and since this will be much more tiring, the missionaries sent to Arles will join him. That is the terrible situation in which the vast diocese of Aix finds itself, and it is certainly not the only one... What will surprise you even more is that the poor missionaries go to war against the devil at their own expense and do not receive any stipend from the church budget for the price of their labors.” Then on April 12: “Eugene is doing well despite the fatigue of his apostolic journeys. He stayed only a few hours at Grans, though he was to have spent a dozen days there, because the mayor of Mouriès came to take him away in the name of and because of the greater demands of his entire community, which absolutely wants to have missionaries whose charitable help they had experienced last year. Moreover, the inhabitants are without a priest and almost no one was able to make their Easter duty. This is horrible and brings me tears of blood.”

In March, Bishop Miollis (who would soon call upon them for Laus) spent a few days in Aix, his native place. “I saw the venerable Bishop of Digne who was very kind to me. He came here, despite the inconvenience, for the ordinations and blessing of the holy oils of which the Var, the Bouches-du-Rhône and the Vaucluse would have been deprived.” And a few days later: “The Bishop of Digne came Thursday to say Mass at the Mission and to confirm some congregants. After the service, he came up to my room for some hot chocolate. He absolutely wants me to be the bishop of Gap (restoration of this diocese was being considered) which is now united to his See, if Marseilles does not get a bishop, and assured me, despite all my protests, that he would write to the Cardinal. I will never accept it, first because it is a region filled with

Jacobins, and secondly because you can only get there on horseback and with my hernia this would be unbearable.”

Eugene is very close to the youths when they are ill as we see in this letter of March 25: *“Eugene is not doing badly, though he does not remain idle. Since early yesterday morning he has been at the side of a young man from Montpellier named Portalès, the only son of a millionaire family, who has been struck with a deadly disease and who without him would be deprived of the sacraments. He had the good fortune of administering them with deep faith and religious spirit while the youth was fully conscious; this brought great comfort to him in his suffering. The patient has so much confidence in him that he wants him to remain at his bedside and he listens to him with unimaginable satisfaction.”* And then on the 28th: *“The young student who had been so confident in him in his last moments and wanted to have him at his bedside, died as a saint and yesterday there was a magnificent funeral for him, the likes of which have not been seen here for a long time. His body was embalmed and will leave Monday for Montpellier accompanied by a priest from the Mission. The parents of the deceased, who have befriended Eugene, urged him to take responsibility for this sad task, which would have softened their deep sorrow, but he apologized politely as Easter time does not allow him to be away. They are in awe of what he has done for their son and they speak very highly of him. His zeal and charity in this sad circumstance drew to him another law student, who struck by the death of his friend, came to ask him to direct him on the paths of salvation. Would to God that there were many more, because these young people are usually very bad people and the plague of the city.”*

Deblieu is the one who was sent to Montpellier. Note that this is the only time, it seems, that he is mentioned in connection with the youth. Here’s what Fortuné wrote on May 15: *“I knew that Deblieu had made a speech when giving the pastor of Montpellier the body of the young Portalès, but I did not know that it had been printed. When I spoke to your son about it, he told me that he was aware of it because the parents had the kindness to give some copies for him to Mr. Martigny and that since he had neglected to send them, Eugene had not seen fit to ask him for them. Though I argued that was fine for him to hide his own works out of humility, it was not permissible to do the same for those of his colleagues, especially when it was for the edification of the public and*

the good of the mission house. As usual, I could not persuade him, and there is a great probability that we will be deprived of this little work. That's what happens to me every day with Eugene, whose obstinacy in everything and for everything adds to my grief and makes my painful situation worse."

Eugene went to great pains to organize a procession in honor of the Sacred Heart in the city. Here is what Fortuné wrote on June 2: *"Your son runs all day long to invite all the powers and principalities to his big procession; may God grant that we do not have a rain like today's."* On the 7th Fortuné reports: *"The procession of the Sacred Heart was a success beyond all description. It has never been as beautiful and uplifting, and even the less devout were impressed. It was very well attended and there was an admirable order. The mayor, the deputy prefect, the former president of the Royal Court, another president of the Court of First Instance and the first gentlemen of the city were honored to attend and to carry the canopy. Two beautiful and extremely high altars had been set up near the house of Du Poet and the Iron Gate. When I gave the blessing, especially at the latter, the view was as beautiful as it was touching to see an immense crowd kneeling the length of the Cours and worshipping our Divine Savior to the charming military music of the gunners. When I gave the blessing at the Du Poet house, there was a deep silence among all present, including even the Café des Garçons, the usual refuge of all the unbelievers, before which I was careful to hold the Blessed Sacrament a little longer in amends. The whole family was there with candles, the wife, the daughter, the granddaughters, the son-in-law and the servant. The women and girls who had been received into the Congregation of the Sacred Heart marched under their rich banner. I had your son's wonderful cope and two assistant priests beside me. All the clergy from St. John's served as the choir, deacons and sub-deacons. Only one priest came from the Magdalene and not even one from the other parishes, though Eugene had invited them. The devil wanted to create some trouble, but God overcame it."* The procession lasted two hours.

A few days later Fortuné added: *"Concerning our beautiful procession, I forgot to tell you how the soldiers themselves, who had been quite unruly in other processions, behaved with dignity and religious respect, which caused the admiration of all present. Such is the power*

of good example. When someone asked the mayor, Mr. Bourguet, why he was in the Mission procession, he replied: to worship God and to give the Abbé de Mazenod a token of my gratitude for all the good he does in the city of Aix. It is true that your son is revered by all those who still have some sense of religious and moral principles, especially by the fish mongers and sellers (women at the market) who would tear to shreds anyone who dared to speak ill of Eugene."

The letter of June 23 briefly recounts the celebrations in honor of St. Aloysius Gonzaga: *"I was extremely touched last Sunday by the admirable way in which we celebrated the feast of St. Aloysius Gonzaga, one of the patrons of the Congregation established here at the Mission. That day we admitted a number of young people whose religious demeanor was delightful, and your son spoke to them like an angel. Nothing stops him when it comes to doing good and he is really the impavidum (the man without fear) whom Horace describes. I can assure you that by the special grace of God, his health has not suffered from so much work, but that it has even improved in the past two weeks because he eats and sleeps more than before. He has a heart that is kind and charitable to others but hard on himself. All decent people respect him and love him madly. Bless God constantly for having given you such a son."*

On July 18 Fortuné writes this about the feast of St Vincent de Paul: *"We expect the arrival in a few hours of the eulogist for St. Vincent de Paul who will attract many more people tomorrow than the church can hold. I have no doubt that from noon almost all the seats will be taken, and many people will postpone their dinner until after the service, because there are still some of the faithful who hunger more for the Word of God than for bodily food."* And the next day: *"Yesterday's celebration was as grand as it was edifying. The Abbé Sardou (a priest from Marseilles) gave a beautiful eulogy of St. Vincent de Paul that the entire assembly received with great pleasure. He is also an excellent man who with exaggerated honesty did not want to accept anything, not even the cost of the coach from Marseilles and back."*

Fortuné writes at length about a miraculous healing of a friend and benefactor of the Mission. Fortuné had given her an image of Blessed Liguori. The cure was instantaneous. Eugene promised to send a formal report to Cardinal Mattei, dean of the Sacred College *"with whom he*

was in correspondence” and to the Superior General of the Redemptorists in Rome.

It’s almost in passing that Fortuné gives his brother some news about the young people. He notes the presence of Paul de Magallon and also the pilgrimage of all the novices to Sainte Baume with Tempier (August 11). In July, Jean-Baptiste de Bausset, nephew of the newly named archbishop, left the novitiate, but remained as a boarder. Fortuné credits his mother with “*the blunder of withdrawing him.*”

Many times he speaks of the benefactors, and more often about the benefactresses. It’s often about Ms. Bausset “*the most generous benefactress of the Mission house*” (July 20), or Ms. Servan from St. Remy de Provence. Eugene’s letter of thanks to her can be found in OW 13, 23-24. “*By contributing, as you propose to do, to the education and upkeep of members who devote themselves to the work of the missions, you are acting more meritoriously than you may think, for this temporal charity has a direct relationship with the spiritual aid which is given to the most abandoned souls: without it they would remain in their sin and probably miserably perish therein.*” On August 20, Fortuné wrote, “*We have lost a great young priest who was director at the seminary, whose death was like his life, that of a chosen one. He loved your son and left him a thousand francs for the work of the Mission which exists almost miraculously since it does not have a single penny of income.*”

AN ARTICLE IN L’AMI DE LA RELIGION ET DU ROI

In his letter of August 25, Fortuné transcribed for his brother an article in the publication *L’Ami de la Religion et du Roi* of the previous August 12th. We do not know the author, but this text summarizes well the two and a half years of working together. Here is the text: “*The need for missions was felt in Aix as much as it was elsewhere and the extent of this great diocese was one more reason to establish such a powerful aid. A group of missionaries was formed there three years ago. It is not large yet, but it has already had successful results and promises more. Many parishes were visited by these tireless men. Their presence has revived religion and morals. People so diverse in thinking, and who throw themselves headlong into various parties; others knowing no bounds who indulged to excess in ways disastrous for their families or for the*

order of society; those who had not even the rudiments of Christianity, or the natural moral, have been changed in an amazing way. They could not resist the zeal of apostles who, animated by a generous dedication, go confine themselves to a poor village, condemn themselves to a most difficult ministry and to rigorous deprivation and who live with ignorant and rude people for the sole purpose of winning them to God. This is due to the Abbé de Mazenod who supports this work out of his own pocket and who works at it with courage.

He does not even limit his concern to this. While providing for the needs of the countryside by the missions, he also provides a noteworthy service to this city by another kind of work. He trains in virtue and the practice of religion many young people already launched in society or who are finishing their studies. It is a touching sight to see these youths, who with no concern for human respect, profess the Gospel openly, shun secular entertainment, frequently receive the sacraments and who also distinguish themselves by their application and success in different careers in society. He prepares for our city a generation of heads of family, who are religious, worthy, industrious, enlightened, and fulfill their duties out of principles of conscience and will serve God and their prince well.

Mr. de Mazenod assiduously cultivates these young plants whose daily progress amply compensates for his trouble and are a great source of consolation for pious souls. The Diocese also takes pride in the blessing of two excellent works which, embracing both city and countryside, give some hope of closing, little by little, in this country the wounds inflicted upon it by the Revolution and by impiety.”

EUGENE’S RETREAT (APRIL – MAY 1818)

Our review of these first months of 1818 would be incomplete if we did not mention the week of retreat Eugene made in the last days of April and early May. It was at Aix, most likely at the seminary, where he usually did it. *Oblate Writings* (15, 143-149) have published his retreat notes. They reveal much of the spiritual journey of an apostle. We transcribe part of them here.

It was high time I thought of extricating myself from that innumerable throng of tasks of every kind that overwhelms me spiritually and

physically and came on retreat to apply myself seriously in the matter of my salvation by carefully going over all my actions and passing severe judgment on them according to the standard of the sanctuary before I must render my account to the Sovereign Judge. The need was pressing as my spirit is so confined, my heart so empty of God that the exterior cares of my ministry, which throw me into continual dependence on others, preoccupy me to such an extent that I have come to the point of no longer having any of that interiority which previously constituted my consolation and happiness, although I have never possessed it other than very imperfectly because of my infidelities and constant imperfection. I function as a mere machine in everything that concerns me personally. It seems I am no longer capable of thinking once it touches me personally. In that case what good can I do for others? This way a thousand imperfections creep into my regular relations with my neighbour and make me lose perhaps all the merit of a life entirely consecrated to his service...

I am horrified at the state I am in. It seems I only love God by fits and starts. For the rest, I pray badly, meditate badly, prepare to say holy Mass badly, say it badly, make my thanksgiving badly; in everything I have a sense of repugnance to recollecting myself although my experience is that once I have surmounted this first difficulty I rejoice in the presence of God. All these disorders proceed, I think, from the fact that I am overly-involved in exterior works, and also from the fact that I am not careful enough to do them with great purity of heart.

I have just read over the reflections I made in July 1816. I was surprised at their accuracy, and I dare say edified by the sentiments they contain, but if I did not amount to much then, I am now worth a lot less still. Affairs, difficulties, far from diminishing have just gone on multiplying since then, and thanks to failing to read over these fine resolutions grace inspired me with, I have not carried them out. So I do not find any more within me that sweet sense of security that is so well expressed in those reflections, which I have read over twice with genuine pleasure. The state I find myself in is an extraordinary one and calls for prompt treatment. It consists in an absolute apathy to all that concerns me directly; it seems that when I ought to move on from service of neighbour to consideration of myself, it seems I say that I have no more energy, I am completely exhausted, dried up, unable even to think...

The thought that engaged and beguiled me throughout my thanksgiving, is that I must be a saint, and what is surprising, this seemed so easy to me that I did not doubt that it had to be; a glance at the saints of our time like Blessed Leonard of Port Maurice and Blessed Alphonsus Liguori, seemed to give me encouragement and strength. The means one must take to achieve this, far from frightening me, confirmed me in this confidence, so easy were they. I saw the life of religious perfection, the observance of the evangelical counsels free from the difficulties I had hitherto found in them. I asked myself why, to the vows of chastity and obedience that I have made up to now, I did not add that of poverty, and running through my mind the various obligations that evangelical poverty would entail, there are none that make me draw back...

I felt the need of leading a still more mortified life and I ardently desired to do it. One thing alone distressed me and that is the fear that it will meet with opposition and my Director will take advantage of the vow of obedience I have made to him to put obstacles to what seems to me evidently God's will.

God forbid that I would want to give up the service of neighbour! Far from it! I would like, if it were possible, to do still more for him than I have done hitherto, since without doubt the Lord is glorified by it, precisely as it pleases Him to be more so, but I will be better advised, and in serving my neighbour I will no longer forget myself as I have done; I will not persuade myself so easily that the exercise of charity towards him can take the place of everything, serve as my meditation, preparation, thanksgiving, visit to the Blessed Sacrament, prayer, etc. That is an excess that threw me into the state I saw myself in yesterday. It will not be an easy thing to change. God knows that if I give myself up to exterior works, there is more of duty than of liking in it, it is obeying what I believe the Master demands of me; that is so true that I always do it with an extreme repugnance from my lower nature. If I followed my taste, I would attend solely to myself and content myself with praying for others. I would spend my life in study and prayer. But who am I to have a will of my own in this respect? It belongs to the Father of the Family to fix the kind of work it pleases him to have his workers do. They are always too honoured and too happy to be chosen to cultivate his vineyard. The essential thing is to combine things in such wise that

nothing suffers, and that in service of neighbour I do not forget myself to the point of becoming tepid."

In addition to these retreat notes, Eugene renews many of the resolutions he had taken during his retreat in 1816 at Bonneveine. They are published in Volume 15 of *Oblate Writings* pp. 149-154. These resolutions remain along the lines of what he had decided at Saint-Sulpice: holiness requires regularity, loyalty to the rule that has been set. But how to combine this pattern with the apostolic service and the community of which he is superior? The coming drafting of the Constitutions of the Missionaries of Provence will move him towards a more unified view of the missionary vocation.

A REVIEW OF 1817-1818

Two and a half years have now passed since January 25, 1816, two and a half busy years. And yet the Missionaries are still only five, the first five from the beginning. Three of them, Eugene, Maunier, and Tempier, maybe even four, if we include Deblieu, who is hardly mentioned at this time, reside at the Mission of Aix. Mie continues to be vicar at Salon, joining his colleagues for the work of the missions.

In 1817, Eugene and his colleagues expected significant progress from the steps taken in Paris: to get legal status from the government, to be able to rely on the archbishop that Aix expected would be appointed soon. Neither of these had obtained anything but fine words, and no action. The only success, the appointment of Fortuné as Bishop of Marseilles, remained bogged down in the Parisian red tape. Fortuné, like Eugene, sometimes wondered if there was still hope. He wrote to his brother on May 15, "*Your son is now so discouraged that he thinks I shall not get Marseilles... You know how pleasant that is and how it contrasts with his repeated requests to force me to leave Palermo...*" The outcome is more than disappointing. Everyone's patience is being put to the test, especially since Eugene's health appeared fragile. Both his father and Fortuné struggled to make him be reasonable on this point.

The ongoing latent conflicts with the pastors of Aix, as well as the more than reserved attitude of Bishop de Bausset, served nevertheless to test the strength of the small group and its commitment to

Eugene. In October, he was close to breaking with the archbishop-elect. However, he writes (OW 6, 39): *“But the Mission, the Congregation, and all those souls who have yet to be saved through our ministry held me back, nailed me to the hard cross which my nature could scarcely put up with...”* It must be noted that Eugene speaks of *“our ministry.”* Maunier and Tempier respond by stating their total solidarity with him. The retreat notes of 1818 confirm this orientation. *“If I followed my likes, I would attend solely to myself and content myself with praying for others. I would spend my life in study and prayer. But who am I to have a will of my own in this respect? It belongs to the Father of the Family to fix the kind of work it pleases him to have his workers do. They are always too honoured and too happy to be chosen to cultivate his vineyard.”* (OW 15, 146) The people’s need for salvation requires an urgent response and a response by many. The experience of Eugene and his colleagues daily show this necessity.

In addition, many of the novices were disappointed and left. The fidelity of the older ones like Suzanne, Dupuy and Courtès remained exemplary, even during the long absence of Father de Mazenod, who was replaced by Tempier and Maunier. The recent arrival of Moreau gave hope to the younger ones.

That is the situation when in early August 1818 the Missionaries of Provence are offered a foundation at Notre-Dane de Laus, near Gap, outside the boundaries of the diocese of Aix. This will require some major choices, in a word, to choose the future. Eugene will take the opportunity to guide the group toward the religious life. The step in this direction will be difficult but decisive. It will happen in a few months.

Chapter 6

THE PROPOSED FOUNDATION AT LAUS AND ITS CONSEQUENCES 1818

AN UNFORESEEN REQUEST

“In the second half of August 1818, writes Rambert (I, p. 278), a letter was received at the Mission of Provence house which caused great excitement, and by its consequences was a significant event for the small family.” Here is the text:

Digne, August 16, 1818

Reverend Father Superior,

In the first days of July, a deacon of the diocese presented himself to you for the purpose of being received into your association. Upon his return, he told me of his plan and of the result of his journey. He expects to meet insurmountable resistance from the Bishop. The desire to assist his pious design and to cooperate at the same time for the good of the two dioceses, leads me to make the following overtures that you will weigh before God, and be so kind as to answer me by mid-September.

You have heard of Notre-Dame-du-Laus? A beautiful group of buildings, once inhabited by five or six priests of the Sainte-Garde mission, which could still accommodate several retreatants, has been purchased by donations with the surrounding property in order to be restored to its original purpose. The bishop, who is responsible for setting up the house, would be glad to have you take charge of it. You could at first send two of your priests; he also will give you two: Mr. Touche, who will be ordained a priest, and another who we would hope to find in a short time.

The means of livelihood for your two priests would not be lacking, and much less their work. In the winter months, when the place is not accessible, they would join some well intentioned priests that we would

assign them, and they would give missions. In the summer, they would be in a solitude where everything inspires piety, and would confess the many pilgrims who abound daily. In the course of time, there would be a close communication between your two houses. I think it could also be in your interest to have two houses under your direction to make changes in personnel as certain circumstances may require. To be involved in two dioceses is not a bad thing; if relations with one diocesan administration became strained, one could take refuge in resorting to the other.

To these reasons, allow me to add a very important one: it is desirable that the good your association does in the diocese of Aix spread to the neighboring regions. If the wishes I have for this project come true, one of the most valuable benefits for me will be to see the relations between us draw closer, something for which I could not but be edified.

I have the honor, etc.

Signed: Arbaud, Vic. gen. of Digne

Notre-Dame-du-Laus is in the Hautes-Alpes, now in the territory of the commune of Saint-Etienne-le-Laus, about twenty kilometers southeast of Gap, or about 160 km from Aix. Eugene de Mazenod and his missionaries situate the place in Dauphine, thus outside the boundaries of Provence. The altitude is 900 meters, but the nearby mountains are over 2,000. The shrine has its origin in the appearances of the Virgin to a shepherdess, “*a naive girl, with a heart of gold,*” Benoîte Rencurel (1647-1718). Mary told her: “*I have chosen this place for the conversion of souls: many men and women sinners will be converted here.*” The construction of the shrine was completed in 1670. Until the Revolution, it was cared for by the Fathers of Sainte-Garde, a society of priests founded in the diocese of Carpentras. The Concordat of 1801 abolished the dioceses of Gap and Embrun and then combined the two departments of the Hautes-Alpes and Basses-Alpes into one diocese, that of Digne.

Since 1806, the bishop is Mgr de Miollis, whom Victor Hugo made famous by making him the Bishop Myriel of *Les Misérables*. He was a native of Aix, and knew the Mazenods well. He came quite often to the diocese of Aix, which was without an archbishop, for ordinations and confirmations. He even confirmed some of Eugene’s congregants in the Mission Church. As for François Antoine Arbaud, he is from Manosque

and attended the major seminary in Aix. Bishop de Miollis had made him his vicar general for the Hautes-Alpes. When the diocese of Gap was restored in 1823, he will be chosen to be the bishop and will be consecrated in the same ceremony as Fortuné de Mazenod. But we are in 1818 and it is he who undertook to write on behalf of the Bishop of Digne.

The bishop had bought the Laus church in 1810. In 1816, the clergy organized a collection to repurchase the monastery adjoining the church; 76 priests participated. Father Peix, pastor of Gap, who was the legal owner, then advised the bishop to appeal to the Missionaries of Provence.

WHERE DO THINGS STAND FOR THE MISSIONARIES OF PROVENCE?

At the time this letter reaches Eugene, the little Society of the Missionaries of Provence remains extremely fragile. It continues to be exposed to the hostility of the parish priests of Aix. The Missionaries know that they can hardly count on the newly appointed Archbishop who is not yet installed. They were of course counting on the support of Fortuné, anticipated to become the Bishop of Marseilles. But the nomination had been stalled for almost a year and nobody knew when it would happen, nor even if it would be confirmed.

In two and a half years, only one priest, Marius Aubert, had joined the group. Mie keeps his duties as curate in Salon, and continues to reside in the parsonage of the village. However, there is real hope among the oldest “*novices*”, namely Dupuy, Suzanne and Courtès who have been joined by Moreau.

Since March 1817, the Missionaries of Provence have preached only one mission, the one in January at Puget. There have been repeated requests from the Ministry of Interior regarding Corsica, but the small group does not seem to be able to respond. The Youth Congregation of Aix appears to be the major work, as well as the service of the Mission Church, where Fortuné provides a well appreciated help.

Let us quote Leflon (II, p. 156): “*Established at the cost of much labor, recruited with difficulty, comprised of a mere handful of members of unequal and, on the whole, rather mediocre talents, strongly opposed by the pastors and certain drawing room cliques of Aix, denied royal*

approval, the Society was extremely frail. Only through sheer energy did the Founder sustain it, ardently struggling against enemies from without and dynamically retaining authoritative control over his five collaborators, far less gifted than he and far less aggressive. Father de Mazenod wondered, therefore, whether they would continue to follow him if, contrary to what they originally envisioned, he were to change the essential character of the Society [by introducing religious vows]... The antidote he wished to prescribe for a future evil could very well bring on an immediate crisis, and the Society could fall apart, to the supreme delight of its enemies and to the detriment of the poor and lowly who were in such dire need of evangelization. Under such circumstances, was it not better to follow the safer path, to remember that it is sometimes better to leave well enough alone?"

The documents we have emphasize especially the perplexity of Eugene de Mazenod before a totally unexpected request. As vicar general Arbaud points out – and he seems to be well aware of the situation in Aix, of which his bishop likely informed him – to have an establishment in a second diocese would avoid total dependence on a single diocesan authority. Eugene senses without daring to say it that such an undertaking will not be viable for the Society unless the internal bonds are strengthened. Strengthened by the commitment of religious vows? Is this possible for secular priests attached to their diocesan status? Can he call into question the basic guidelines agreed upon together in 1815 and 1816? *"We will not be bound by vows,"* he wrote to Tempier on October 9, 1815 (OW 6, 7). Then again to Tempier in December 1816: *"Our society will never have more than one house,"* (OW 6, 26). And what will the diocesan authorities of Aix say?

TOWARDS A DECISION

We will quote Rey then Rambert. *"To overcome the uncertainty, Father de Mazenod resolves to consult the companions that God has given him. He gathers the six priests (six including himself) that make up the small society, reading slowly and stopping at the most significant passages of Mr. Arbaud's letter and urges them to give him their opinion. He is careful to point out that the acceptance of this foundation will result in big consequences, including that of the transformation of*

the Society which will cease to be diocesan, and which may exist only if all members commit to it by the vows of religion. This proposal does not frighten anyone, says Suzanne (absent from this first meeting, since he was not ordained), and all gave their assent with enthusiasm to the foundation of the house of Notre-Dame du Laus. This first meeting was followed by a second...” (Rey I, p. 228). Note that Mie appears to have been informed only in October, and by letter (See below).

For what we believe to be this second meeting, Rambert (I, p. 282) cites Eugene de Mazenod’s *Mémoires* : *“I felt that I should summon to an extraordinary council, all those who then comprised my little band, even the younger members who were not yet in major Orders. I wanted to convince them that if we were to answer the call to another diocese to establish a new foundation, we should have to broaden the Rule we were following, draw up more extensive Constitutions, tighten our bonds and establish a system of hierarchy; in other words, coordinate everything in such a way that we should have but one mind and one code of action. They all felt as I did and urged me to devote my time earnestly and immediately to the task of drafting the Constitutions and Rules that we should have to adopt. I left immediately for Saint-Laurent du Verdon...”*

Even if we know of this double meeting only from later accounts – and their accuracy is not the best – it is important to note that the young members were consulted with the priests before the answer to Arbaud. Leflon writes (II, p. 158-159): *“The Council meeting, surpassing all his hopes, approved his plan unanimously. The unanimity, however, resulted from ambiguity. Everyone approved the proposals but not everyone discerned their real implication... Notwithstanding this apparent agreement, based upon a misunderstanding which obscured sharp differences, the root of the problem still remained untouched. That would be grappled with later.”*

Eugene could thus give an affirmative response to Arbaud on August 23 (OW 13, 25): *“I have no other desire than to do a little good; thus, if you think that the plan you have thought of might gain some glory for God and contribute to the salvation of souls, I am totally disposed to offer myself for all the arrangements which are compatible with my commitments in this diocese and the duties of my position in our little Society. In matters like this things do not go well by letter. I*

was undecided whether I should accompany our deacon to his ordination but your letter resolved my uncertainty; I will go with him to Digne, where I will have the honour of seeing you and discussing this matter with you. We will put our ideas together; thus, I will have the double pleasure of renewing your acquaintance, and of showing you my good will in support of your truly untiring zeal.”

EUGENE AT ST-LAURENT DU VERDON

Jeancard’s *Mélanges historiques* (published in 1872) show what the Oblates of the time said about the fundamental episode in their history, which was Eugene’s stay in St-Laurent du Verdon. Jeancard seems to have been the only source for Rambert (1883) and Rey (around 1900). These early biographers were unaware of Fortuné’s letters to his brother and of the details they give us. Pielorz, on the other hand, used them for his article, *Le Séjour du Fondateur à St-Laurent et la rédaction de nos Règles* [The Founder’s Stay at St-Laurent and the Drafting of Our Rules], published in *Missions* in 1957.

Fortuné was aware of the true motives of Eugene’s trip, but he was bound to secrecy. He merely notes Eugene’s need for rest to his brother. This point of view, let’s say external, does not in any way lessen the interest of these letters. The reason given was all the more plausible because Madam de Mazenod was staying at St-Laurent with her granddaughter, the eight year old Nathalie de Boisgelin.

The first letter that speaks of this trip is on August 16. *“Your son is very thin and in need of rest, which he will never do as long as he stays in Aix. I wholeheartedly approved the plan he has to accompany to Digne a deacon of the Mission (Moreau) to be ordained during the Ember days of September. This means he will have twelve or fifteen days of relaxation which will be infinitely better than all the remedies in the world to fortify his stomach that digests very slowly. We have however persuaded him to take some chocolate and wine from Cyprus or Malaga and to get more sleep.”* His father’s response is dated the 19th: *“My son’s thinness and his weak stomach give me much worry. I am continually concerned about him and I did not need this. He does not want to spare me these worries; he will neither restrain himself nor listen to me. Patience! The fathers of this century no longer control, it*

is the children to whom they must submit. I will not however misuse my authority and I will reserve it only for what concerns his health, willingly relinquishing to him my other powers. He does not want to give me this consolation, patience again, I do not love him less, but I am very distressed.”

On August 26, there is an allusion to a visit made to Vicar General Guigou: *“The visits with your son, and many others since, have not been in vain for his establishment and have helped us to strengthen his work, which we are sometimes tempted to worry about. I even hope to get from the Grand Vicars some financial assistance that they need, and I’m happy about this.”* Again in the same letter: *“Your son hopes to leave for Digne early next month. He will not make the trip in one go but will stop a week at St-Laurent to rest a few days from the rigors that increase here so heavily every day. His mother is forewarned and waiting with great impatience. After the ordination of his deacon, to be held September 19, he shall make a trip in the area of Gap, for something that primarily concerns the house of the Mission, and he will be accompanied on this tour by his new priest and Father Tempier; his friend, who will join him in Digne after the feast of the Blessed Virgin. This way he will be away from here for almost a month and I have no doubt that his health will recover.”*

On the 28th: *“Your son is overwhelmed with work on the eve of his departure... He is waiting for the coach from Riez to Marseilles, which will be here tomorrow evening, to make his final arrangements and if he can find three places, because in addition to the deacon, he will take with him another young novice (Suzanne); I would not have wanted this because he is not ordained and will cause him embarrassment and expense. He will likely leave Monday or Tuesday. In any case, all this is also contingent on the arrival of the coach from Riez, whose days are not fixed.”* A little later, Fortuné speaks again of *“the third travel companion that your son brings with him out of charity, in the hope that the change of air will restore his health, which is not the best.”*

On September 1st Fortuné writes: *“Your son set out for St-Laurent this morning at 11:00 with his two companions in the coach to Riez that will take them to Allemagne, where tomorrow at noon he will find horses that his mother is to send him, according to the notice we took care to send her. In the event that she would not have been warned in enough*

time, it will not be hard for him to get some in Allemagne. He has the pleasure of traveling to Gréoux with Mrs. Régusse and her younger son who go to Valensole to see one of her married daughters there. He will remain in St-Laurent 14 or 15 days and leave sometime before the ordination that will be on the 19th, and I am confident that the change of air and the tranquility will restore his health that is exhausted by so much work. You can imagine the joy of his mother who has urged him for so long to come visit her.”

Eugene writes to his uncle on the 4th (OW 13, 26-27): *“Our trip, very dear uncle, was very agreeable, very good and not at all tiring. We arrived at St-Paul with enough time to make our adoration at the church, while our dear family [the Aix community] took a refreshing walk; we said our rosary walking on the main road while they ate supper and the next day we were already on the road while they were still sleeping, so that they could have said ego dormio et cor meum vigilat [I sleep but my heart keeps vigil] since they had been very much present and part of our feeble prayers. We arrived at Gréoux at 8 o’clock; I had the joy of saying Holy Mass, and we left again at 11 o’clock; we were only three in the carriage which dropped us off at Allemagne where our horses had been waiting since morning. It was full daylight when we arrived at St-Laurent. Mama came to meet us. I found her in good health.”*

“First of all, our good Moreau wants me to remind you to pray for him to the good Lord; he expects the same service from the community and the congregation; though I assured him that this would not be forgotten he finds it better to take extra precautions. So, you are all well and duly notified: for your part, be assured that he will do the same for you.”

“We must not neglect our two items of business with M. Guigou. It is essential that the ordonnance [definitive approbation of the Society] mention the approval given to our Statutes and regulations.”

“Our two Fathers [sic Moreau and Suzanne] and I present our respects and, what is more, I embrace you with all my heart.”

“Our Fathers at Aix are always present in our thoughts and in our solitude we make our religious exercises in union with theirs.”

We will mention in chronological order the other concerns of Fortuné and his brother. On August 28 there is the announcement of the im-

minent fourth birth for the Boisgelins: *“Your daughter arrived from the countryside. I just saw her, she is doing well and the gang of kids too, but she is so big that she cannot put one foot before the other. God grant that she does not give birth during the absence of her husband, mother and brother. I would be in an awkward position.”* And on September 12: *“What you and I had expected, dearest and good brother, is exactly what happened. Your daughter gave birth yesterday morning, but very easily after about an hour of little labor and with all the assistance needed in such cases. While I was celebrating the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass to obtain from heaven a quick delivery, she gave us a beautiful daughter who is the portrait of the late Mrs. de Boisgelin. With the permission of the vicars general who continue to shower me with kindness, I had the consolation of baptizing this charming little niece after dinner, assisted by the pastor of St. John, who was so kind and attentive to my needs. He insisted, despite my objections, on putting into the act of baptism qualities that may never be realized. At the request of your daughter, I named this beautiful angel Marie Charlotte Césarie... You easily understand all the hardships that I had yesterday, but I was fortunate enough to get through them all, because the Lord has destined me for an active life and not a contemplative one, granting me sufficient energy to fulfill my vocation...”* Fortuné had in fact taken care of notifying both the baby’s father, who was away at St. Martin de Pallières where he was mayor, the grandmother and Eugene at St-Laurent... and made the first steps at the city hall... It was expected that Mr. de Mazenod would be chosen as godfather.

Another incident is also revealing. In Marseilles, Mr. de Mazenod as well as his brother and sister-in-law still have very limited resources. During the illness of the latter, there was not enough money to pay the doctor and medications. Fortuné had entrusted the letter announcing the birth to the grandfather to two members of the youth congregation who were going to Marseilles *“to see this beautiful city they did not know”*. On the 14th, Fortuné writes: *“I am annoyed that the two congregants have neglected, despite their most solemn promise, to bring you my letter of the 12th on Saturday evening... I am infinitely more stunned that these two scatterbrains did not even bother to go to you yesterday morning and that even at the departure of Mr. Gregory you still did not know of Ninette’s delivery that I had the pleasure of announcing to*

you as soon as possible. I am awaiting their return and I'll give them a scolding they will long remember. They are even less excusable because your son is very fond of them and they are always at his heels, to the point of not giving him a moment's rest." The letter of the 18th states: "*Carpentier and Le Blanc got the earful they deserved Wednesday night... They are two scatterbrains who have no common sense...*"

It is difficult to know the schedule of Eugene and his companions at St-Laurent du Verdon. This stay was originally planned as a time of rest that he needed. The request concerning Laus changed the situation. It was necessary to seriously think about the future of the Society and to draft the statutes that would become the Constitutions that would give structure for the future and be acceptable to all members. Fifty years later, Jeancard describes Father de Mazenod working on the manuscript, sitting at his desk, or even on his knees... "*The drafting is a work done entirely in the chateau of his ancestors.*" (*Mélanges...* p. 98) Jeancard therefore has every reason to speak of a stay of about two months, a period required for such a work. But Fortuné's letters clearly indicate that this stay of rest (?) or of work (?) lasted only 13 days. We will return later to the text of the *Constitutions*. As noted in Eugene's *Mémoires* (see Rambert I, p. 283), it was "*the main articles of the Rule,*" that were drafted at that time. Everything seems to suggest that this work had been long prepared. In addition, Eugene was able to do it in the course of October, before presenting it to the other Missionaries. Existing documents do not allow us to know how much the others took part in this writing: Suzanne and Moreau, the companions accompanying him, and Tempier to whom the task had been assigned.

Jeancard also reports that Eugene took charge of the Sunday sermons at the little church of St-Laurent. He explained the Creed and parts of the Decalogue in the Provençal language. On the last Sunday, he continued speaking way beyond the usual time. It was a sung Mass. The parish priest, impatient at this length, rustled his cassock, looked at his watch and whispered almost aloud in protest of this talk which did not end. Finally, unable to restrain himself: "But, Monsieur, finish, otherwise we will still be here at midday. – Another minute, Father, another minute, I said." The minute was becoming too long, so the priest got up, went to the altar and intoned the Credo covering the voice of the preacher, who resigned himself to come down from the pulpit...

September 14, Fortuné gives his brother some news about Eugene: *“The air of St-Laurent was very good for him and he intended to leave on Wednesday to go to Digne and then on to Gap. Father Tempier, who will join him by the end of the week, will bring him a winter coat that with his wool cassock will protect him from the cold of Upper Dauphine.”* On the 18th: *“Father Tempier leaves tonight for Digne and I gave him my dispatches for your son so that he will see that I have not neglected his business.”* And on the 21st: *“Your wife and Nathalie are back since Saturday (the 19th)... They gave me the most satisfying news on the health of your son, who left Wednesday to go sleep in Riez, where he stayed with Mr. de Castellane Majastre, son-in-law of Régusse, his former classmate. He was welcomed splendidly and after a great meal he left on Thursday morning in a carriage with his deacon and two other people he knew for Digne where I hope he will arrive safely. Father Tempier brought him his coat... I told him to try to get a carriage, knowing that a horse would be uncomfortable because of his hemorrhoids, not to think about fasting, to cover himself well and not to travel long each day, since his return is not necessary here where everything goes wonderfully. Please God he will heed my advice and not destroy all the fruit of his stay in the countryside by an unenlightened zeal.”*

Let us return to Fortuné’s letters that give us other news, for example on the 23rd: *“The parish priest of Gémenos, who left Digne during the night of Sunday to Monday, left your son in good health and ready to make the trip to Gap with Father Tempier and the new priest. He has not written to us because he was weighed down with important business for the work of the missions. Everywhere he went he was received with respect mixed however with great concern, out of fear that he would empty the parishes of their best subjects and make them missionaries, because in this matter he is very much the proselytizer.”*

Rey (I, p. 231) has preserved extracts of a letter from Tempier to Fortuné, also dated the 23rd: *“We are in the capital of the Hautes-Alpes. You will easily share my astonishment when I tell you that this country is not as terrible as we imagined. The avenues and exteriors are lovely, the roads are as beautiful as those from Aix to Marseilles and unquestionably there are fewer hills than in our Low-Provence. The people*

are very honest and very respectful to the priests, to the point that when going around the city one has almost no time to put his hat on his head, because here we do not meet people without being greeted.” The small group was even able to go to Notre-Dame du Laus on the 24th and get to know the place.

On the 27th, Fortuné writes: *“Your son does not write to us... As we know indirectly that he enjoys good health, it does not matter since his letters tell us little or nothing; he has become ridiculously brief.”* The news is more abundant on the 30th: *“Your son wrote to me from Gap that he was feeling very well, that he has happily completed all the affairs of his congregation, that he will leave on the 26th to go and stay over at Sisteron; the next day, Sunday he will go to Fontienne near Apt (in fact, near Forcalquier) to Mr. Fontbelle’s who married our cousin Callamand, where he was expected with great eagerness and where he will rest on Monday; he will set out again on Tuesday to get here today. Behold he is now superior of a new house at the famous shrine of Notre-Dame du Laus on a mountain two leagues from Gap, that the Bishop of Digne and the individuals who repurchased the place gave him together with four good missionaries of the diocese and some income to provide for their subsistence. Your son has accepted it very readily because irrespective of the great good that can be done there they will care for him more here, lest he go off with all his colleagues to the new facility. He praised highly the prefect of the Hautes-Alpes who could have impeded his work.”*

Eugene was back in Aix on Wednesday the 30th. Let’s quote Fortuné’s letter dated October 1: *“I announce the safe arrival of your son yesterday at noon. He is well, despite all his recklessness while returning from Gap; to save the costs of a carriage for a journey of thirty leagues – and what leagues! – he did 22 on foot with his travelling companions, who, though much stronger and younger than him, were exhausted and did everything possible to stop him. To protest in such matters is a useless waste of time and I advise you not to talk to me about it in your letters; simply commend him strongly to God, that He may keep him and change the rigidity of his character that is always inclined to extremes. You understand that I could not see him even a few moments privately, to tell him about your money or the baptism and the many other things that interest us. The pests take hold of him from*

morning until night. And today he began confessing both the novices and the congregants... ”

This last letter requires some explanation. We can easily guess that it is about the baptism, or more precisely the *whole array of ceremonies* for Césarie, who had been baptized and for whom Mr. de Mazenod was suggested as godfather. The money issue is more complex. In most of Fortuné’s letters he comes back to the question of resources for his brothers in Marseilles. They could not pay for the doctor or the medicines when the sister-in-law was ill. Madam de Mazenod managed her husband’s and his brother’s income. It seems that Eugene was not any more accommodating. Fortuné writes on September 12: *“I have not failed to write again to your son that her convalescence (the sister-in-law’s) would be very long, that the doctor’s visits and the use of medicines would necessarily continue and that this illness was ruining your health and your purse; so they are notified in advance of the compliment that I prepare to make them. Besides, you have nothing to protect yourself from the cold of winter, and they would like nothing better than to let you clothe yourself with your money. I spoke with your daughter who complains about it.”* At various times, Fortuné speaks of *“our two governors.”* They are certainly Mrs. de Mazenod and Eugene. For example on September 14: *“I tell you, you will be dressed appropriately for your age, even if I have to make a terrible fuss. But I think too highly of our governors to believe there will be obstacles.”* Another letter advises the father *“not to fear the censure of your governor.”* On the 30th: *“I think you will do well to write your son a little letter to outline your needs and to tell him frankly that when you ask for these 500 francs from the 1,200 he holds on deposit, it should not trouble him to send them to you, because your welfare depends on it, which should be dearer to him than all the world’s goods, especially when you ask him only for what belongs to you. It would be too cruel to spare your capital and your money and wind up making you lack what you need and thus hasten the time of your death.”* And the next day: *“I urge you to write him the little letter I mentioned, with great cordiality, but at the same time in a way to let him know that the supervision must end and to remember that you are the father, especially when you use that authority with such moderation and patience.”*

Eugene de Mazenod had returned to Aix with his companion on September 30. Although the sources do not say so, we can assume that the Laus foundation was the topic of many conversations in the small community. It seems on the other hand that Eugene was very discreet about the statutes that he was charged to write and did not reveal the contents until the annual retreat which he led at the end of October. No doubt he used the little time available to complete the drafting.

For the month of October, the *Diary of the Youth Congregation* (OW 16, 195) is more than succinct. It only indicates the expulsion of a postulant “*expelled as being incorrigible,*” a few first communions (Sunday) the 18th, and thirteen confirmations the following Sunday, with no mention of the confirming bishop nor of the place of the ceremony. We do not know how to interpret the brief notice on November 1 about Marcou, “*a zealot of the third section,*” who was one of the first congregants; it is said that he is to be replaced because he “*entered the clerical state.*” This probably refers to his entering the Aix seminary, because he will be presented as an “*acolyte*” when he enters the novitiate in 1821.

As for the *novices*, we know that Courtès accompanied Marius Aubert to Marseilles for a retreat at Father Allemand’s Youth Work (May 1818, see Rey I, p.227). Two admissions to the novitiate are noted in the register of entries for October 1818. One is on October 8, Jean Joseph Touche, who presents himself as a “*missionary priest.*” He was born in the Hautes-Alpes (Diocese of Gap) at Seyne February 22, 1794. He was ordained a priest at the same time as Moreau the preceding September 19. His joining the Missionaries had been approved by his bishop, as part of the Notre-Dame du Laus project. On October 20, Jean-Baptiste Honorat, aged 19, took the habit. He was born at Aix May 7, 1799 and is presented as a “*missionary acolyte*”; his father was a candle maker in Aix. We know that he will be the superior of the first team to Canada in 1841.

Rey (I, p. 232) has preserved a letter from Eugene to Fr. Mie (OW 6, 49), dated October 1818. “*We have formed an establishment at Notre Dame du Laus thus bringing ourselves into direct relations with the dioceses of Gap, Digne, Embrun and Sisteron. We have become the*

guardians of one of the most celebrated shrines of the Blessed Virgin where the good God is pleased to manifest the power that he has granted to this dear Mother of the Mission. More than 20,000 souls flock there every year to renew themselves in spiritual fervour in the shelter of this truly impressive shrine and which inspires one with something indefinable but which marvellously draws one up to God. From there, after having preached penance to these good and faithful people and after having shown them the grandeur and glory of Mary, we will spread throughout the mountains to proclaim the word of God to these simple souls, better disposed to receive this divine seed than those who live around us, corrupted as they are.” The restoration of all the former dioceses (Gap, Embrun, Sisteron ...) is being considered in the plan for a new concordat. But as we said, this letter raises questions about the relationships within the small Society. That Mie, who was part of the first team, is informed of the Laus project more than six weeks after the question was raised, and that he was not involved, so it seems, in the decision is something really surprising for us.

Leflon’s account (II, pp. 166-169) of the presentation of the new statutes drafted by the Superior and the reactions of the Missionaries seems the best. We will quote it entirely.

“The most important problem, however, was yet to be settled: persuading the members to accept the Rule, particularly that part of it which concerned the vows. Impatient as he was to see it done, Father de Mazenod felt it wiser to move slowly, convinced that rushing things could imperil a step upon which the entire future of his Society depended. The better to insure success, he waited for the annual retreat which was scheduled for the 24th to the 31st of October, since he felt that nothing could better further the acceptance of his ideal than recollection and the graces gained from the retreat exercises. The few weeks preceding the retreat would allow him time to dispose them favorably and might even enable him to guarantee beforehand whatever support he might need to neutralize the opposition and win over the hesitant.

“Events proved otherwise. On October 24, the Founder gave a reading of the Rule he had redacted at Saint Laurent, to the six priests of the Society, Fathers Tempier, Mye, Moreau, Deblieu, Maunier and Aubert. They readily adopted the first part relating to the aims of the Society and suggested a few minor changes to which the Founder agreed.

The second part, on the contrary, that is, that section of it dealing with the vows, met a resistance that gave every indication of being insuperable. Only Tempier and Moreau approved the Superior General's proposals; the others formed a block to reject them. In spite of the guarded language of the official records, of eye-witnesses and of Oblate historians, one gathers that the reaction was rather spirited. On coming to live at the former Carmelite monastery, the members had no intention of embracing the religious life or of vowing themselves for life to the Society. On the contrary, they had come with the understanding that they were completely free 'to remain or withdraw whenever it would please them.' (Rambert I, p 286. It will be recalled that the statutes approved January 25, 1816 spoke of a commitment for life.) Furthermore, it was agreed when they entered that the Society would not be anything more than a simple association of secular priests living in common for the purpose of devoting themselves to the missions. Now everything was being changed and doubts began to arise concerning the Founder's good faith.

"The situation then became extremely serious. If the four dissidents remained adamant, not only would the Superior be obliged to renounce the foundation at Laus and cancel the arrangements made with Bishop Miollis, but the Society he wanted to reinforce would very likely disintegrate. His personal authority which, until then, had kept the embattled and fragile Society together would be given a stinging and devastating rebuff. Everything would fall apart from the one blow.

"It was at that crucial moment that the Founder went into action. Having failed to win over the opposition with arguments and entreaties, he now resorted to more forceful measures. Under guise of explaining the Constitutions to the three scholastics in minor orders, who were full-fledged members of the Society, he summoned Brothers Dupuy, Courtes and Suzanne to the Council, knowing that they wholeheartedly favored his plan to change over to the religious state. None of the three failed him. After "hearing the Rule read, they unanimously agreed to accept it and assured the Founder, as they had already done privately that they approved the proposed vows." So states the official record. If, as Suzanne assures us, Father de Mazenod wanted to prove by this maneuver that these commitments were not frightening to the other members of the community, and that he hoped thereby to bring

about a general adhesion, the experiment must have failed, for, in order to reverse the majority, he had to go still further by giving each of the three scholastics a deliberative vote. Thanks to these added votes, the contested articles were passed by the thin margin of 6 to 4.

“Just how proper was the procedure on that occasion? The Acts of the first general Chapter, which Suzanne drew up eight years later in 1826, admit that this session of the Chapter was “the only one at which non-ordained members were present.” However, as it was noted in the Acts, the Constitutions had not as yet come into force. Furthermore, it was declared only ‘just’ that the three scholastic brothers, who were full-fledged members of the Institute, should have the right to express their opinion at a moment when a decision of the greatest importance was being made, since it affected not only the future of the whole Society, but their individual futures as well. The fact still remains, nonetheless, that on this occasion they had played a deciding role, and that their opinion won out over that of the Fathers.

“This debatable intervention could easily have caused the Fathers who had been put into a minority to adopt a cool attitude toward the Founder who had instigated that intervention in order to assure success and toward the simple acolytes who had reversed the situation in the Founder’s favor. The truth of the matter is that everything was arranged for the best. The elections to the positions prescribed by the statutes gave instant proof that in spite of the momentary dissension, unity and charity still prevailed. Acting as *“a constituted society, gathered in General Chapter according to the terms of the Rule which had just been accepted, the assembly unanimously requested Father de Mazenod to continue in his position as Superior General. Then, as proof of the affection which everyone felt toward Father Deblieu, in spite of his refusal to bind himself by vows, the assembly almost unanimously elected him First Assistant-General and Admonitor to the Superior-General... Father Maunier was chosen Second Assistant and Secretary-General, Father Tempier Third Assistant and Father Mye Fourth. Brother Courtes was elected Bursar-General.”*

“This clever apportioning of positions meant at one and the same time approving Eugene de Mazenod’s firm determination to make his plan for religious life prevail and proved to those who had opposed

it that they still enjoyed everyone's esteem. Certainly they must have been deeply affected by such delicate thoughtfulness.

"The retreat conferences, given by the Superior General himself, completed this rapprochement of minds and hearts. His appeals for total self-sacrifice were stirring and effective. He begged the retreatants to make the same decisions they would favor were they at the hour of death and about to appear before the Supreme Judge. Maunier and Mye then decided to follow the majority and pronounce their perpetual vows. Aubert asked to be allowed to take only temporary vows; Deblieu no longer refused outright but requested a year's grace to give himself time to reflect; in 1819, he, too, made his religious profession like the others.

"It must indeed have been a time of great satisfaction for Father de Mazenod. On November 1, 1818, after receiving the necessary authorization from Guigou, he pronounced his vows of chastity, obedience and perseverance and during the Mass which followed he accepted the vows of Fathers Maunier, Mye, Tempier and Moreau and of the scholastic brothers Dupuy, Courtes and Suzanne."

The accounts add that "the Superior then blessed the crosses of the three young professed and gave them to them himself." It should also be noted that at this date, Fortuné was with his brothers in Marseilles, contrary to what the biographies say.

Here is Eugene's oblation formula that is published in OW 15, 160:

"Aix, November 1, 1818

In the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ, in the presence of the Most Holy Trinity, the Blessed Virgin Mary, all the Angels and all the Saints, all my brothers here assembled, I, Charles Joseph Eugene de Mazenod, profess, promise to God and vow perpetual chastity and obedience; I swear and likewise vow to persevere until death in the holy institute and society of the Missionaries known as Missionaries of Provence. So help me God.

It is not appropriate to interrupt the narrative. However Eugene de Mazenod's notes from his personal day of retreat, October 30, published in OW 15, 156-159 ought to have a place here. We retain this:

“On the eve of engaging myself in a great commitment for the rest of my days, I enter into myself to humble myself before God for the small progress I have made in the ways of perfection, bitterly to lament the difficulty I am experiencing in getting out of the habitual state of tepidity I have fallen into since my duty has obliged me to focus my attention on others and I have been almost entirely forgetful of myself.”

“In the forefront of my mind is the thought of death and the awesome account to be rendered to God for so many graces he has given me and which I have abused and still do so every day.”

“It is not without fear that I consider the enormous obligations the Lord imposed on me when he assigned me so extensive and important a ministry. To think of it! On my fidelity in responding to God's grace, —for this help is always in proportion to needs— depends perhaps the salvation of a multitude of souls. If I am fervent the community at whose head I am placed will grow in fervour and whole populations will feel the influence of this growth in zeal and love. If on the contrary I am lazy, the community will thereby suffer a great loss, and the people will be the victims, and since it was my duty to bring down on both the former and the latter an infinity of graces of perfection or conversions on the day of judgment they will all rise up against me to ask for an account of the treasure I deprived them of by my fault.”

“I confess that this thought is so terrifying that I would have been tempted to succumb to discouragement and renounce working for others' salvation. But I became convinced that this was not the surest approach, since as the Lord has shown me his will both through the voice of superiors and by the successful results with which, notwithstanding so many obstacles and oppositions, he crowned all the works he assigned me, I would not escape the condemnation I fear by fleeing the field and returning to the peace and quiet I yearn for.”

“So what is the alternative? I must go on entirely renouncing my preferences which would lead me to a life of retreat, devoted principally to study and like pursuits of a solitary life; let me devote myself anew

and forever to my neighbour's service, but with less neglect of myself, let me be more watchful over my inner self, and not let myself get entirely absorbed by works of exterior zeal, i.e., in a word, let me work at one and the same time both for the salvation of others and for my own sanctification."

On November 13, the vicar general, Guigou, by a second order, confirmed the provisional authorization of 1816. We quote from Rey (I, p. 234): "*We, the Capitular Vicar General of the Diocese of Aix and Arles, the See being vacant, and given our provisional authorization dated January 29, 1816 to Mr. de Mazenod and his companions to gather in community and to live under the observance of the Regulations submitted for our review the provisions of which we approved...; acknowledging the regularity and harmony established and maintained in their community, the blessings God in his goodness has deigned to shower on the efforts of their zeal, the recognition of the families whose children they instruct in the fear of God and the love of duties; recipients of the satisfaction and happiness of the faithful they have already evangelized; wanting to consolidate as much as we can an institution so useful to religion and that several dioceses seem to have taken recently as a model by forming similar ones, we have authorized and hereby authorize, in what concerns us, the above-mentioned establishment to carry out the aforesaid works and engage in the above-named functions and to live in observance of the rules that we have provisionally approved January 29, 1816 for the greater glory of God and the edification of souls. Given at Aix Nov. 13, 1818. Signed: Guigou chan. Vic. gen. cap."*

The Society of the Missionaries of Provence was finally founded. Note however that this decision only confirms that of 1816. Nothing is said of the new Constitutions or of the vows taken on November 1st.

THE CONSTITUTIONS AND RULES OF THE SOCIETY OF THE MISSIONARIES OF PROVENCE

The text of the first manuscript of our Constitutions was published in *Missions* 1951, pp. 1-160, as well as an off-print. These two editions include a facsimile reproducing the first page of the register. It is in the form of notebooks sewn together to form a single volume of 58 pages. Each page is divided into two columns, the text is to the right and the

left is reserved for annotations. Some pages have been left blank for any additions. The manuscript, completely in the handwriting of Father de Mazenod, is preserved in the Oblate General Archives in Rome.

In keeping with the rules we have adopted for this work, which was to include the maximum number of original texts, we publish here the Table of Contents and long extracts from the Constitutions, namely what it seems that we can attribute to Father de Mazenod himself.

*CONTENTS OF THE CONSTITUTIONS AND RULES OF THE SOCIETY
OF THE MISSIONARIES OF PROVENCE*

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Chapter Two: 1. Qualifications Required for Admission / 2. The

Novitiate / 3. Oblation [The Foreword included a No. 4: The Lay Brothers. This page was blank.]

Chapter Three: Reasons for Dismissal from the Society. Those Having the Authority to Do So. The Manner of Exercising this Authority

SOME MAIN PASSAGES OF THE CONSTITUTIONS AND RULES OF THE MISSIONARIES OF PROVENCE

Foreword.

If the priests to whom the Lord has given the desire to unite themselves in community so as to work more effectively for the salvation of souls and for their own sanctification want to do some good in the Church, they must first of all imbue themselves deeply with the end of the Institute which they wish to embrace, with the greatness of the ministry to which they are called, and the immense fruits of salvation which are capable of resulting from their labours, if they conduct themselves fittingly.

To achieve such a desirable end, they must also apply themselves with the greatest care to take the means most apt to lead them to the goal they propose, and never deviate from the prescribed rules in order to ensure the success of their holy enterprise and maintain themselves in their holy vocation.

The example of the saints and reason itself make it amply clear that the success of such a holy undertaking as well as the maintenance of discipline in any society make certain rules of life absolutely necessary for unity of thought and action among the members. Such unity is a body's strength, keeping up its fervor and insuring that it lasts.

Preaching the Word of God to the People (copied almost word for word from A. de Liguori)

The end of the Institute of the Missionaries of Provence is first of all to form an association of secular priests living together and seeking to imitate the virtues and example of our Savior Jesus Christ, principally by devoting themselves to the preaching of the Word of God to the poor. That is why the members of this Congregation will work, under the authority of the ordinaries on which they will always depend, to provide spiritual aid to the poor people in the rural areas and to the

inhabitants most deprived of spiritual goods in the country villages. They will supply to these needs by missions, retreats, the teaching of catechism or other spiritual exercises.

Supplying for the absence of religious groups (Proper to the Missionaries of Provence)

The end of this association is to make up for, insofar as possible, the marvelous institutions that have disappeared since the French Revolution, and which have left a terrible absence that the Church realizes more each day. That is why they will try to bring back to life in their own lives the piety and fervor of the religious Orders destroyed in France by the Revolution; they will strive to replace the virtues as well as the ministries, and the most holy customs of the regular life, such as the practice of the evangelical counsels, love of solitude, contempt for worldly honors, withdrawal from frivolities, abhorrence of riches, practice of mortification, the public recitation of the Divine Office in common, assistance of the dying, etc. Furthermore the members of this Society will hasten also to instruct youth concerning their religious duties; to divert them from vice and vain allurements; to prepare them to fulfill whatever obligations the Church and civil society have the right to confide to them in the state of life for which they are destined.

Reform of the clergy (Proper to the Missionaries of Provence)

An equally important end of their Institute, to which they will strive to arrive with as much zeal as for the principal end, is to reform the clergy and repair, insofar as they can, the evil perpetrated and which continues to be perpetrated by evil priests, who ravage the Church by their lack of concern, their avarice, their impurity, and their sacrileges, their crimes and evil-doing of all kinds. At first, the missionaries because of their youth, can not undertake to heal this deep wound but indirectly by their gentle insinuations, their prayers and good example, but in a few years, if it pleases God, they will make a frontal attack on all those horrible vices; they will bring the probe, the iron and the fire to this shameful canker that devours everything in the Church of Jesus Christ. They will give retreats to priests, and the Mission house will always be an open refuge and like a healthy pool where these foul and festering souls can wash and start a new life of repentance and reparation.

Nota bene (Proper to the Missionaries of Provence)

What more sublime purpose than that of their Institute? Their founder is Jesus Christ, the very Son of God; their first fathers are the Apostles. They are called to be the Saviour's co-workers, the co-redeemers of mankind; and even though, because of their present small number and the more urgent needs of the people around them, they have to limit the scope of their zeal, for the time being, to the poor of our countryside and others, their ambition should, in its holy aspirations, embrace the vast expanse of the whole earth.

The Church, that glorious inheritance purchased by Christ the Savior at the cost of his own blood, has in our days been cruelly ravaged. This beloved spouse of the Son of God at the present time hardly bears for him but monsters. The ingratitude of humans is at its peak; apostasy is nearly generalized, except for the fact that the sacred deposit of faith will be preserved intact until the end of the world, practically nothing remains of Christianity but the traces of what it was. So much so, that one could truly say that because of the malice and corruption of today's Christians, the state of most of them is worse than that of the Gentiles before the cross destroyed the idols.

In this deplorable condition, the Church calls to her aid the ministers to whom she has entrusted the dearest interests of her divine Spouse, and it is most of these ministers who further make those evils worse by their damnable behavior. The true end of our Institute is to remedy these evils, to correct as far as possible all these disorders. To achieve success in this holy enterprise, we must first investigate the causes of the depravity that now enslaves men to all their passions. They can be reduced to three main ones: 1. The weakening if not the total loss of faith; 2. The ignorance of the people; 3. the laziness, indifference, and corruption of the priests. This third cause must be regarded as the main one and as the root of the two others. It is true that for a century there have been efforts to undermine the foundations of religion in the hearts and minds of men by infernal maneuvers. It is also true that the French Revolution has contributed enormously to advancing this work of iniquity. However, if the clergy had been constantly that which it ought never have ceased to be, religion would have been sustained, not only would it have survived this terrible shock, but it would have triumphed

over all these attacks and would have come out of the combat more beautiful and glorious.

These causes being known, it is easier to find a remedy. This requires forming apostles, men deeply conscious of the need to reform themselves, who would labor with all the resources at their command to convert others. And as we have seen that the real source of the evil was recklessness, greed and the corruption of the priests, if these abuses are reformed, the others will cease. Have zealous priests, selfless and firmly grounded in virtue, and soon you will bring back the people who have strayed from their responsibilities. In a word, use the same means our Savior employed when he tried to convert the world; you'll get the same results.

What did our Lord Jesus Christ do? He chose a number of apostles and disciples whom he himself trained in piety, and he filled them with his Spirit. These men he sent forth, once they had been schooled in his teaching and the practice of virtue, to conquer the world which, before long, was to bow to his holy laws.

And what should we in turn do to win back for Jesus Christ the many souls who have thrown off his yoke? Strive seriously to be saints. Walk courageously in the footsteps of the Apostles who left us such splendid examples of virtue while carrying out the ministry to which we like them are called; wholly renounce ourselves, striving solely for the glory of God, the building up of the Church, and the salvation of souls; constantly renewing ourselves in the spirit of our vocation, living in a state of habitual self-denial, seeking at all times to reach the very summit of perfection, by working unremittently to become humble, meek, obedient, lovers of poverty, penitent, mortified, free from inordinate attachment to the world or to family, filled with zeal, ready to sacrifice all our goods, talents, ease, self, even our life, for the love of Jesus Christ, the service of the Church, and the sanctification of our neighbor; and thus, filled with unbounded confidence in God, to enter the combat and to fight even unto death, for the greater glory of God.

How vast the field! How worthy the undertaking! The people are caught up in crass ignorance of all that pertains to their salvation. The consequence of their ignorance has been a weakening, if not almost the annihilation of the faith and the corruption of morals. Thus, it is imperative that we lead the multitude of lost sheep back to the fold, that we

teach these degenerate Christians who Jesus Christ is, that we rescue them from Satan's slavery and show them the way to heaven, extend the Savior's empire and destroy the dominion of hell, to prevent millions of mortal sins and establish the honored observance of every virtue. We must lead the people to act like human beings, first of all, and then like Christians, and, finally, we must help them to become saints. We must go deeper still, enter into the sanctuary; purge it of so much filth that defiles its entrance, the interior right up to the steps of the altar where the Holy Victim is sacrificed; to rekindle the fire of pure love, which is no longer maintained but by a small number of sacred ministers, who carefully preserve its last sparks, which will soon be extinguished with them, if we did not hurry to gather around them and there, with them, offer to the living God, in lieu of so many crimes, the homage and the most absolute devotion, the total sacrifice of our whole being for the glory of the Savior and the service of his Church.

EXCERPTS FROM CHAPTER THREE: THE OTHER EXERCISES (PROPER TO THE MISSIONARIES OF PROVENCE)

Preaching: ... We will not reach this goal without totally forgetting oneself, by renouncing our own personal glory... In a word, unless like the Apostles we preach Jesus Christ and him crucified, unless we make it evident that we are penetrated with what we teach, and that we have begun to practice, before attempting to instruct others.

Confession: ... It is only in the tribunal of penance that the work begun in the pulpit is completed. If grace has touched a soul by the strength of the Word of God, ordinarily it is in the tribunal of penance that grace molds and justifies it. Preaching, indeed, has no other end than to lead sinners to the pool of salvation. What would become of those whom the Lord is drawing to himself by his grace, if there were no one to plunge them into the healing waters, where their first innocence is restored by the cleansing away of the shameful leprosy that gnawed on them... It is beyond all doubt that the hearing of confessions is to be preferred to preaching, when there is room for choice, because the private direction and admonition given in the tribunal of penance may in a measure supply the place of instruction and preaching...

The Direction of Youth: The direction of youth will be considered an essential duty of our Institute.

Prisons: We are never to forget that one of the principal ends of our Institute is to help the most neglected souls. For this reason, the unfortunate inmates of prisons have a rightful claim upon the charity of the Society.

Second Part: Particular Obligations of the Missionaries

According to the spirit of our Institute which is a spirit of reparation, we would be inclined to offer compensation to God for this vice (greed) by adopting voluntary poverty as the saints have practiced it before us. Reasons of circumstance have diverted us, for the moment, from this thought... In the meantime, we will try, without binding ourselves by vow to adopt the spirit of this precious virtue, to love and practice it so well that more discerning people may be mistaken.

The virtue of chastity being most dear to the Son of God and most necessary in a laborer for the Gospel, the members of our Society will be most diligent in their efforts to preserve it.

The members of our Society make profession to obey the local Ordinaries... They will observe likewise an exact obedience to all the Rules and Constitutions, to which they will be very faithful; secondly, to all the orders and decisions of their superiors...

Besides the vows already spoken of, the members of our Society will make the vow of perseverance.

It has already been said that, as far as human nature allows, the missionaries ought to imitate in everything the example of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the chieffounder of our Society, and that of his Apostles, our first fathers. Imitating these illustrious models, the missionaries will give one portion of their life to prayer, recollection, and contemplation, while living together in the seclusion of God's house. The other portion of their life they will zealously devote to the works of the exterior ministry... Whether out on the missions or at home, their chief concern will always be to make progress in the way of religious perfection.

Their only distinctive mark will be the crucifix, which is proper to their ministry... This crucifix will serve as the credentials of their

ambassadorship to be carried out by them among different peoples to whom they will be sent.

Qualifications Required for Admission into the Society

He must have an ardent desire for his own perfection, and a great love for Jesus Christ and his Church, a burning zeal for the salvation of souls; he must have a heart that is free from every disordered attachment to the things of this world, a great detachment from parents and the place of his birth, a disinterest which goes as far as a disdain for wealth; the will to serve God and the Church either in the missions or in the other ministries embraced by the Society, and have the intention of persevering until death in fidelity and obedience to the holy Rules of the Institute.

It is to be desired that those seeking to enter the Society have an aptitude for higher studies, if they have not already done them, that they have good sense, intelligence, sound judgment, good memory, strong will...

The novitiate lasts two years for members who are not in Holy Orders, one year for those who have received the sub-diaconate, and six months for priests...

On the day fixed for the oblation... the novice, being assisted by the master of novices, and surrounded by the whole community, will read aloud in a clear voice the formula of his oblation, written by himself and signed by him... When the superior ... has finished the Mass, he will give the cross to the new oblate... (These last texts are for the most part proper to the Missionaries of Provence.)

A MAJOR TURNING POINT FOR THE SMALL SOCIETY?

This work tries to stay as close as possible to the life and thought of Eugene de Mazenod and his companions, which is why their writings, when we have them, are quoted extensively. Care is taken accordingly to avoid simplifications and quick interpretations, as well as expectations. For example, there is a desire to give due place to the various Missionaries of Provence, including those who eventually left. That being said, it is necessary to draw attention to one point or the other,

especially since 1818 is often rightly described as a major turning point for the Society of the Missionaries of Provence.

Major decisions were indeed taken in October 1818 in a meeting that has been designated as the first *General Chapter*. The unexpected letter from vicar general Arbaud offering the Missionaries of Provence to take over the shrine of Notre-Dame du Laus led the small Society to cross borders, geographical and ecclesial, as well as those of the Diocese of Aix and even of Provence. It crossed the psychological and ultimately far more restrictive limit of having only one “house”, thus admitting the possibility of other foundations and the establishment of a Congregation. Neither the foundation of Calvary in Marseilles in 1821, nor those that followed will pose a difficulty on this point. In 1818, the Missionaries of Provence agreed to open themselves to the future.

On this occasion, the small community soon realized the need for more elaborate statutes. Until then, it seems, they held to the framework developed on January 25, 1816 and then approved by the diocesan authorities. In drafting the long manuscript that he called *Constitutions and Rules*, did Eugene de Mazenod exceed the mandate entrusted to him? We know well the difficulties encountered before an agreement was reached. We must return to this major turning point for the Missionaries of Provence.

We know that in his work, De Mazenod relied heavily on the Constitutions of the Redemptorists, founded in the previous century by Alphonsus de Liguori, first under the name of the Institute of the Most Holy Saviour. Quantitatively, this is correct. Many items, notably those related to the details of the missionaries’ life, are copied from the Redemptorists, often word for word. Note also that the section “*special rules for the missions*” owes much to Leonard of Port Maurice, the great missionary of Corsica in the eighteenth century. But with the exception of the first paragraph on “*the end of the Institute,*” which is almost the same as in Liguori, most of the inspirational texts (the ones we chose to quote above) are from Eugene de Mazenod. His earlier writings, and his letters when he was in the St-Sulpice seminary, already contain many expressions that are identical or very close. A thorough study has yet to be done. However, some probing indicates that in these texts Father de Mazenod is often inspired by Ignatius of Loyola and especially Vincent de Paul.

Let us quote Abelly, who knew Vincent de Paul very well and wrote his *Vie* [Life]. (It appeared four years after the saint's death and was long considered the official biography.) Our archives have an 1835 edition, from the old library at Lumière, certainly close to the one Fr. de Mazenod had. Abelly describes the situation of the Church in France at the end of the wars of religion.

“France, which had hitherto been one of the most successful monarchies on earth became like a scene of horror; where violence and profanity led to strange tragedies: churches were destroyed everywhere, altars torn down, the most holy things profaned, priests massacred; and the greatest and the most fatal of all these evils, was an almost universal overthrow of all order and all ecclesiastical discipline; as a result in most provinces of the kingdom, the people were like poor sheep dispersed, without spiritual food, without sacraments, uneducated, and with almost no outside help for their salvation...” p. 15.

“... We saw and still see long after, several major defects among the clergy; that was why the priesthood was without honor... From this lack of virtue and discipline in the clergy came another great evil, that is that the people, particularly those of the countryside, were not educated or helped as they should have been in their spiritual needs; the teaching of catechism was hardly known... One could see everywhere Christians who spent their lives in such a profound ignorance of the things concerning their salvation that they hardly knew that there was a God... God knows what the state of their conscience was in such ignorance of the things of their salvation, and what kind of faith they had, since there was almost no one who cared to teach them what they ought to believe.

“As for the people who lived in the cities, even though with the benefit of preaching in the parishes and other churches they had more knowledge and light, that knowledge was generally barren, and that light without heat; there was almost no sign of the true love that is known through works...” pp. 16-17.

“Such was the state of Christianity in France, when God, who is rich in mercy, seeing the great needs of the Church in one of its main parts, wanted to provide for it by raising up, among other great and holy men, his faithful servant Vincent de Paul, who animated by his spirit and strengthened by his grace, endeavored with tireless zeal to

repair these defects, and to apply suitable remedies. First of all, as one of his major works he aimed to do everything possible to provide the Church with good priests, men who would labor faithfully and effectively in the Lord's vineyard; that was the aim of the spiritual exercises for ordinands, the seminaries, clergy retreats, and the spiritual conferences... of which he was the author and promoter...

To his zeal for the good of the priesthood he added a very ardent charity to provide education and spiritual assistance to the souls in need, especially the poor in the rural areas, whom he saw were the most abandoned, and for whom he had a special affection. It is impossible to say how hard he worked to free them from sin and ignorance, catechizing them, and preparing them to make general confessions.” (pp. 18-19).

Another point that received much attention was the introduction of religious life and vows. In his first letter to Tempier Eugene wrote: “*We will not be bound by vows.*” (October 9, 1815, OW 6, 7) And he referred to the Oratorians of Philip Neri, who were not religious. However, in his *Mémoires*, cited by Rambert (I, p 187), on an unknown date much later after the events, Eugene de Mazenod wrote: “*My thought was always that our little family should devote itself to God and the service of the Church by the vows of religion. The difficulty was to give my first companions a taste for this doctrine that was a bit harsh for beginners, especially at a time when all traces of this tradition had been lost at the end of a revolution that had scattered and, I would say, almost destroyed all the religious Orders.*” Eugene then made reference to Tempier’s consent and the mutual vow of obedience they made on Holy Thursday 1816. But these were private vows, which bound only he and Tempier and about which, it seems, they had not informed their companions.

Certainly Eugene de Mazenod and his companions felt strongly the absence of the “*many fine institutions, the religious Orders that were destroyed in France by the Revolution.*” But can we specify which ones he is alluding to? The Jesuits were suppressed in France in 1766. At that time, none of the future Missionaries of Provence was yet born. According to a study made twenty years ago, there were about 180 men religious and 280 nuns in the city of Aix in 1790 out of a population of around 20,000 people.

On the men's side, which interests us more, we find societies without vows like the Oratory, religious who were teachers and hospital workers, the vast majority being Brothers, and finally Orders with solemn vows such as the Augustinians, Carmelites, Dominicans, Capuchins... It is worth noting that during the revolutionary period the perseverance of religious was no more exemplary than that of the secular priests. Statistics seem rather to suggest the opposite.

We are thus led to understand as rather general and vague this expression of the new Constitutions: "*they will try to bring back to life in their own lives the piety and fervor of the religious Orders destroyed in France by the Revolution; they will strive to replace the virtues as well as the ministries.*" For ministries, we obviously think first of all of missions and the Christian education of the youth. As for the virtues, from the very first letters to Tempier, the insistence is present: "*We must be truly saints ourselves. In saying that, we include all that can possibly be said.*" (December 13, 1815, OW 6, 13). The letters he writes from Paris in 1817 underline the indispensable requirements for the training of novices. Thus on August 22, 1817, he writes to Tempier (OW 6, 35): "*This spirit of being wholly devoted to the glory of God, the service of the Church and the salvation of souls, is the spirit that is proper to our Congregation, a small one, to be sure, but which will always be powerful as long as she is holy.*"

One of the recurring topics in these writings is the reference to the shortcomings of the clergy, to the point that we are shocked by his views and his language. After insisting on the necessity of the pursuit of holiness, he writes to Tempier in the December 13, 1815 letter: "*Now, are there many priests who thus wish to be saints? Only by not knowing them could we believe that they do. I myself know the contrary.*" Just before that he had written: "*But can you believe I want merchandise of that sort?*" And again on August 12, 1817 he writes to Tempier (OW 6, 32): "*Dissolute or bad priests are the great plague of the Church.*" The 1818 text speaks of "*this shameful canker that devours everything in the Church*" and the "*evil perpetrated and which continues to be perpetrated by evil priests*" as the main source of the evils afflicting the Church. He seems to rediscover and even go beyond the words of Vincent de Paul. We understand that he wants something else that is really new. For him, and probably for Tempier, and even more so for the

younger members that “*something else that is really new*” can only be religious life by a commitment through vows.

The statutes of 1816 require the common life in a regular community, a commitment for life, obedience to the superior... They even mention the tendency of most of them towards the religious life. How then must we understand the opposition of the majority of the elders? My hypothesis would be this. Although it is explicitly stated that the group is a gathering of secular priests (the expression remained in the Constitutions of the Oblates until 1928, the year of the adaptation to the 1917 Code of Canon Law), and that it remains under the authority of the Ordinary, the elders (Mie and Maunier have already been secular priests for 21 years) were afraid of the word *vows*. Fear of being entrapped? The younger members did not feel the same fear and wanted to take the step.

Can we say that Eugene de Mazenod was determinately moving in this direction under the influence of Alphonse Liguori? The latter seems more and more to be replacing Vincent de Paul as a point of reference for Eugene and his missionaries. The Vincentians are not religious, the Redemptorists are. Alphonsus was beatified in September 1816. We have already noted the importance of the devotion to the new Blessed at the Mission Church. At the time, Mr. de Mazenod, at the request of Eugene, spent much of his time translating the life of Alphonsus de Liguori by Tannoia from Italian. Fortuné’s letters often refer to this work, which Eugene was reading very carefully. On the death of Mr. de Mazenod, Jeancard takes over. This biography, which was published in Marseilles in 1828, was the first to be published in France. The influence of Alphonse de Liguori led to the choice of a less rigid moral theology and a model of religious missionary life.

Thus by All Saints day in 1818, with the exception of Deblieu, who requests a year for reflection, and Aubert, who commits himself for a year, all the others, including Mie and Maunier take vows of chastity, obedience and perseverance until death. Certainly, the absence of the vow of poverty prevents the Missionaries of Provence from being considered as full religious. But the direction is taken.

Cosentino, who did an extensive canonical study, draws this conclusion: “*Before the papal approval in 1826, the vows of our first Fa-*

thers were simple private vows and not public vows.” (*Etudes oblates*, 1953, p. 19).

Note also the work of Bernard Dullier, *Les Missionnaires de Provence passent à la vie religieuse*. [The Missionaries of Provence Move into Religious Life].

OPENING OUTWARD

We are at the end of 1818. The little Society of the Missionaries of Provence is well established. Its missionary service is recognized in both the dioceses of Aix and Digne-Gap. Some young people have asked to join the group. Their contribution was decisive for the acceptance of the beginning of a religious commitment and the Constitutions that define this commitment. Especially, by agreeing to settle outside the boundaries of Provence, the Society has given itself an unexpected opening. Expanding further becomes part of their program.

Other crises will occur, causing ruptures. The more serious one will occur after the appointment of Eugene de Mazenod and Tempier as vicars general of Marseille. The delicate question of belonging to the diocesan clergy, and therefore a degree of autonomy from the bishops, will be settled by recourse to Rome and the approval obtained for the whole world.

In 1830, the dream of going to Algeria cannot be realized. The foundation in Corsica in 1835 will prepare the milestone of 1841: the departure for England and Canada... Expanding further is now part of their daily lives. The Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate have acquired their identity.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX 1: ACT OF CONSECRATION OF THE YOUTH CONGREGATION

The Oblate General Archives in Rome retain a manuscript, in Eugene's handwriting, of the Act of Consecration, which each of the members in Aix signed one after the other. Here is the text:

Consecration and declaration that must be approved, ratified, and signed by each member of the Aix Youth Congregation on the day of his reception.

We, the undersigned members of the Congregation of Christian Youth in Aix, established under the patronage of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin, do hereby certify that, as members of that Congregation, in order to strengthen more and more the bonds that unite us to God, our Creator, Savior and Sanctifier, and to separate ourselves as far as it is possible from the corruption of the world and the people among whom we are obliged to live, we consecrate ourselves in perpetuity to the Most Holy Trinity, offering it this homage we make with all our being through the hands of the Blessed Virgin and Immaculate Mary, our Mother and Patroness, to whose service we also dedicate ourselves with all our heart.

We profess to want to live and die in the bosom of the Holy Roman Catholic Apostolic Church to which we vow a filial love as the one who really brought us to life in Our Lord Jesus Christ.

We do hereby also profess openly that we recognize O.L. Jesus Christ as our Saviour God, sovereign Lord and Master, of whom we want to be faithful disciples all our life.

And to prove that this will to be totally His forever is effective, we freely and voluntarily renounce with all our heart and soul Satan, our hateful enemy, his pomps and his works.

We promise to separate ourselves completely and flee forever from dangerous company. We promise never to go to profane shows, nor to the theater under any pretext whatsoever.

Finally we renounce and we pledge never to be members of an illicit Assembly, never to belong under any title to any secret society either of Freemasons or others.

We furthermore agree, as a sign of the perfect union which exists between us and to help each other mutually to work for our salvation, to offer to the Most Holy Trinity for our common sanctification, the prayers, fasting, almsgiving, vigils, communions, and generally all the good works that each of us can do during the course of his life, so that there is a full and unreserved communion of all these good works, as a common treasure where each member either during his life or even after his death will have equal rights.

In witness whereof we put our signatures to these presents, under the date of their acceptance and ratification by us.

Dated April 25, 1813, we can read after the handwritten words “*I approve and ratify*” the signatures of Eugene de Mazenod, priest, of Marcou, of Courtès, etc.

APPENDIX 2: THE 1816 MISSION IN MARSEILLES

Non-Oblate sources are not without interest to describe the climate of this mission. We allow ourselves some long citations. Mr. Rauzan’s biographer speaks of “*a small mission.*” Sevrin dedicates one paragraph to it in the second volume of *Missions religieuses en France sous la Restauration* [Religious Missions in France under the restoration] (p. 478).

“A first mission was given (in Marseilles) during the Lent of 1816 by two Missionaries of France. Unprepared perhaps, in any case lacking sufficient means, it seems that it was not a great success, despite the presence of the authorities at the procession of the Cross and the Blessed Sacrament procession. It even occasioned some serious improprieties in the major church of St. Martin (now destroyed, but then serving as the cathedral). It was the only church where the services were held, and at night it was very dark due to insufficient lighting. The prefect recalls in early 1820 the easy exploits of these malicious persons: Sometimes

they lit firecrackers in the church, sometimes they cut women's dresses; they even sometimes went as far as to throw dead or live cats into the middle of the crowd. It was also noticed that these night services had particularly favored certain moral disorders: the church had become a place of rendezvous."

Also of great interest is the account of an observer, Julie Pellizzone, whom we find again at the 1820 mission. Her *Souvenirs. Journal d'une Marseillaise. 1815-1824* have been published. Here are some excerpts (tome II, pp. 119-122).

"Winter is endless this year. It still continues on this 4th day of April (1816) and it began very early. In the memory of man there has never been such a long one in Marseilles, and this combined with the bad times in which we find ourselves makes the misery almost general. Taxes are exorbitant; commerce is without activity, industry without work, the poor without bread and the earth without produce because the cold has burned all the grasslands that should be abundant at this time of the year. You pay one penny for a small leek and three for a lettuce, etcetera, never a year more unhappy than this one. But, to console us, we have good preachers and missions in all the churches. Lent was very devout and the sermons well attended. Only the young people made some jokes in the churches and to avoid this we were forced to separate the sexes, that is to say that there are churches designated for women where men do not enter and others designated for men where women may not enter. The local police provide detachments to enforce this order, which is rigorously followed.

Concerning the young people of Marseilles, I want to dedicate this page of my notebook to give an idea of their conduct at the theater throughout the winter so that we can judge their conduct in church... It has long been known that the young people of this region are rather rude, but since the revolution, they have become worse. However, in the past it was only in the lower class that we found bad subjects: now it is the young people of the best families who pride themselves on being rowdy, arrogant, dishonest, irksome, etc. This is the latest vogue..."

She then turns to the Mission: *"On the third day of Easter (Easter Tuesday) April 16, 1816, with all the fanfare possible, there was the ceremony of the planting of the mission cross."* The National Guard was present, then a long procession from the parish church of St. Mar-

tin with a colossal cross carried on a litter. *“When the cross came to the middle of the Cours (now the Cours Belsunce at the corner of the Canebière), the litter was placed on a sort of large table... One of the missionaries named Mr. Desmares (whom we will find again in 1820 in Marseilles and Aix) got up on it and gave a speech. I could not hear all of it, but it was easy to guess the meaning from the very expressive gestures of the preacher who spoke with great warmth and enthusiasm, kissing from time to time the foot of the crucifix. He first blessed the assistance and the place which was in great need of being blest because it is there that many atrocities were committed during the Revolution, and during the Ancien Regime it was where criminals were executed. Often the gallows and the scaffold, not to mention the guillotine, were set up where the cross of the Savior now stood. At the end of Mr. Desmares’ speech all shouted: Long live Jesus! Long live the cross! Long live the King! The ceremony was very edifying... The cross was placed near St. Martin’s church on a kind of Calvary built for the purpose. When the procession arrived there, another missionary, named Mr. de Mazenod made another speech... Anyway, it is said that this mission produced good results, it brought about many reconciliations and, more importantly, many restitutions. But I have not seen any...”* In fact, the narrator recovered nothing of what she had been robbed. There is no other evidence of Eugene de Mazenod’s participation in the Marseilles mission, in which Hilaire Aubert also took part.

APPENDIX 3: LETTER FROM VICAR GENERAL GUIGOU
TO THE MINISTER OF THE INTERIOR AND CULTS (AUGUST 31, 1816)

The content shows that Eugene de Mazenod was involved in the drafting of this letter. (in *Missions*, 1958, pp. 182-183)

“My Lord,

We have the honor to beg Your Excellency to request royal authorization for an institution whose importance for the sake of Religion and the State is proven and recognized.

Touched by the deplorable neglect in which the shortage of priests left the inhabitants of the countryside who are deprived of the consolations of religion and even of any instruction or who receive it only insufficiently, we welcomed with joy and alacrity the request of some

generous and zealous priests who desired to devote themselves to the difficult work of missions. Their early work was rewarded with so much success and admiration that they had the selflessness and the courage to form a community in a former monastery of this city, which they acquired at the price of their personal sacrifices and with the aid of some charitable offerings. That is where they prepare themselves through prayer, meditation and study to bring the most precious blessings to the country regions. The most neglected parishes which they have already evangelized have completely changed; this is the testimony that we have by what we see and from the mayors who have had the pleasure of having them. They are also requested everywhere by the parish priests and mayors. Their small number does not allow them to meet all the needs and requests, but they give themselves to their arduous work with a zeal that we need to moderate. Even the time they spend here in their house, and which should be a time of rest, they dedicate to the Christian education and direction of the young children of this city. Their many meetings, under the eyes of these gentlemen to whom they go in between their studies after college, the exercises of piety, which the gentlemen have for them on holidays and feast days, keep these children away from dangerous dissipation, bad habits, and can only prepare for Religion and the State a generation of obedient and faithful subjects. The parents of these children share in the influence of their good education; it is neither without consolation and emotion nor without becoming better themselves that they see the good habits their children bring to their families.

These considerations lead us to hope with confidence that Your Excellency will show a special interest to obtain from the King the authorization for the Congregation of the Missionaries of the diocese of Aix to form a community in the convent of the Carmelite nuns, which was given up during the revolution, and bought by these missionaries with their own funds. They are now five in number: the Abbé de Mazenod, distinguished by his birth, his zeal and regularity, is the leader. The authorization of the King, giving this useful establishment the necessary structure, will inevitably determine other subjects to join the gentlemen to share the work and increase the good that results from it. This good is such in this vast diocese, whose boundaries are those of Provence, that all those who witness it and are concerned for the interests of Religion

and the King acknowledge it, bless God for it and with us request this authorization of His Majesty.”

The Minister responded in an administrative style asking for clarification from the diocesan authorities and also questioning the prefect. Fr. Pielorz, on whom I rely, published a long account of these initiatives in *Missions* 1958, p. 87-119. The issues raised relate to the resources, the property of the convent, the reputation of the persons and the work. It was a semi-failure, which forced Father de Mazenod to go himself to Paris in 1817.

APPENDIX 4: ROYAL DECREE OF APPROVAL OF THE MISSIONARIES OF FRANCE (9/25/1816)

(In Sevrin I, p. 32-33)

Louis, by the grace of God, etc.

The small number of priests attached to local churches not sufficient for the needs of the dioceses of our kingdom, and the society of new missionary priests called the Missions of France, offering a powerful help to the parishes and attached churches deprived of pastors...

Article 1 - The Society of the Priests of the Missions of France is authorized. The ministers of this association will exercise their ministry under the authority of the archbishops and bishops of our kingdom, in accordance with the statutes annexed to this decree, which are approved and recognized.

2 - Establishments of the said society cannot be made but at the request of the bishops of the dioceses where they are to be placed, and after our authorization.

3 - The Society of the Missions of France will enjoy all the benefits granted by us to religious and charitable institutions; it may receive, with our authorization, bequests, donations, foundations and constitutions of annuities that will be made to it in accordance with the same rules as for charitable institutions and organizations.”

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THE AUTHOR - Father Michel Courvoisier, O.M.I., was born in 1931. He entered the novitiate of the France-North Province and pronounced his first vows in 1951, did his studies at the International Roman Scholasticate, and was ordained a priest in 1957. He was then sent as professor and formator to the French Scholasticate in Solignac. He went on to other ministries (pastoral, leadership, formation...) in France and on other continents. In 1986, with others, he published a work presenting the Oblates as *Daring for the Gospel*. From 1991 to 2000, he was called to Rome as director of the Oblate Information Service. Now, he is the archivist of the Oblate province of France. At the same time, he continues working to know and make known St. Eugene de Mazenod and the almost 15,000 Oblates who were and are religious missionaries at the service of the salvation of the world.

THE BOOK - In spite of numerous publications, St. Eugene de Mazenod remains more or less little known. There has not been enough attention given to the events of his daily life. How, moved *as by a strange strong shock* did he come to found the small society of the Missionaries of Provence? It was necessary to affirm his independence in relation to the invitation of Forbin Janson, to obtain the approval of the diocesan authorities in Aix, to purchase the former Carmelite property and, finally, to seek out companions and make them a part of his project. On January 25, 1816, the five diocesan priests signed a petition asking for authorization to *join together to live in community..., and work with one another in the ministry of preaching parish missions... and give to one another the means of practicing religious virtues...* In 1826, having become the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, they agreed not to restrict their charity to a small part of the world. They chose, not without some hesitation, to have the whole world as the object of their ministry. This book attempts to re-visit those initial choices of daring in service of the Gospel.

