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## **The Pastoral Letters of Saint Eugene de Mazenod Bishop of Marseilles**

Thanks to the initiative of Fr. Fernand Jetté in 1975 and several years of work by Fr. Yvon Beaudoin, we have today nearly the whole collection of the writings of St. Eugene de Mazenod. They can be grouped into three categories: the letters, the spiritual writings and the diary whose publication is not yet finished.

Besides these there is a fourth set of texts that have not yet been explored. They are **The Pastoral Letters** that the Bishop of Marseille wrote during his 24 years of episcopate. They are of two kinds:

- The Lenten pastoral letters
- The pastoral letters for other occasions.

Eugene de Mazenod left us 23 **Lenten pastoral letters**, the first dated February 18, 1838 and the last, February 16, 1860.<sup>1</sup> They are for the most part texts that are quite long, intended to be read from the pulpit on the first Sunday of Lent during the instruction at the High Mass and after Vespers. Their main goal is, in principle, to remind the Christians of the requirements of the Lenten season, in particular, the rules on fasting and abstinence and to specify the time for the Easter communion. Therefore, there is usually nothing original or exciting about them.

Eugene de Mazenod left us about **fifty other pastoral letters**, shorter than the previous ones and written for various occasions. They correspond to various diocesan events like taking possession of the Episcopal See of Marseille, the promulgation of a new catechism, laying the corner stone of Notre Dame de la Garde or the transfer of a relic of Saint Lazarus. Some are occasioned by events in the Universal Church like the Jubilee year, the proclamation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception or the request for prayers for the pope exiled in Gaeta. Some have their origin in political circumstances like the 1848 elections or the wars with Italy. Others are in answer to a request from the government, as for example, the birth of the imperial prince. Finally some are occasioned by human dramas like epidemics or wars. Like the Lenten letters they are destined to be read from the pulpit, at the High Mass and at the Vespers.

To be thorough, it is necessary to add **the circular letters** to the parish priests. Less solemn and shorter than the pastoral letters, they are not destined for public reading but give concrete instructions for preaching, or about new and unforeseen events, or ones that raise theological questions.

**The Lenten pastoral letter** has a very precise and focussed literary style that was very popular in the nineteenth century. The bishops engage in scholarly competition, launching into pedantic erudition. The style is solemn and pompous with heavy and never-ending sentences. There is for example the 1844 Lenten letter of the Most Rev. Bernet, Archbishop of Aix and future cardinal. This text was considered in its time as the matchless example of success with this genre. Close to a third of the text, intended to be read from the pulpit, is made up of Latin quotes that are not translated.

The bishops sent their texts to each other, to the Roman cardinals whom they knew, distributed widely the letters of congratulations received, and paid to have collections of their prose printed.

**The other letters** are texts of circumstance, often made at the Government's request. The bishops are asked to abstain from any kind of originality. They are provided with a framework, prepared in advance, that they are content to recopy practically word for word.

Eugene de Mazenod naturally is no exception to the prevailing mode. He shares the literary genre of the times and his letters can, understandably, appear heavy, pompous, and even unreadable as for their style. The plurals of majesty, the imperfect subjunctives, the redundancies, the sentences of 12 or 15 lines are enough to discourage even the most ardent mazenodian enthusiasts.

Some topics appear meaningless to us. For example, how can the letter on "The *Te Deum* on the occasion of the empress's happy delivery" enrich our knowledge of the Founder?

Other topics seem to raise theological concerns of another age. Thus, of what use is it to reread and study a text of 40 pages "On the Good and the Bad Angels?"

Finally, the manner of treating some topics makes us ill at ease. For example, the deion of Islam on the occasion of the transfer of a relic of Saint Augustine is enough to shock today's promoters of inter-religious dialogue.

Then, why read these texts today? Why unearth these letters some of which can appear so dusty and out of date? In our opinion, there are four reasons :

\* First, through the Lenten letters, we can discover what were the pastoral imperatives of the Bishop of Marseille. These texts, which form a continuous catechesis extending over 23 years, show us the content of Eugene de Mazenod's preaching, his pastoral concerns and what he wanted to transmit to his people.

\* Secondly, all of the pastoral letters are not dusty, far from it. If we can overlook the literary style, we are stunned by the theological acuteness of the texts like the letter on the Triduum, the one on the Church, or the one on the Missions. Eugene de Mazenod, a man of his times, is also a prophet. On the meaning of the Church, on the liturgy, on Mary's place, on the bishop's pastoral role, he is clearly preparing the theology of Vatican II.

\* Again, by comparing Saint Eugene's letters for various occasions with similar texts by other bishops, we can discover how original our Founder's thinking was on politics, the economic crisis, on social movements, and even on the disappearance of the Papal States.... These texts reveal his independence from those in power or even the general thinking of other bishops.

\* Finally, while looking honestly at the texts that embarrass us, those that we would wish had never been written, we find a real man, with his qualities and his shortcomings. Eugene de Mazenod was a prophet in some areas, but in others, he didn't understand the issues and rarely prepared for the future. It doesn't decrease his holiness in anyway, but it reveals his true face, with his greatness and his limits. The letters can also teach us to be more modest ourselves when judging the world of that time and humbler in our pastoral practices.

**Before beginning the study of the letters, we would like to make a remark that is only the author's opinion. Some Oblates think that our Founder's pastoral letters were in fact the work of his secretary and future auxiliary, Fr. Jacques Jeancard. It is likely that the final format of some texts was his work. But it is far from being the general case and a lot of these texts reveal a lively pen that is very mazenodian. The independence of the thought, the freedom of the reflection, the originality of the theology show that the basic text cannot come from the somewhat routine classic style**

**that was typical of Bishop Jeancard.**

## **THE LENTEN PASTORAL LETTERS**

We shall not examine all of Eugene de Mazenod's Lenten pastoral letters. It would be boring and of little interest. Moreover the purpose of this study is not to be exhaustive, but to give a look at our Founder's thought as expressed in the catechesis to his people before the Easter celebrations.

We shall dwell on the most significant texts, either because of the new elements which they reveal about the spirituality or theology of Saint Eugene, or because of the questions which they raise concerning the relevance of his thought.

That is why, in the choice which we have made, we shall examine the most remarkable texts as well as those which trouble us most. We thus hope to remain objective.

### ***A trial run : the 1838 pastoral letter***

Eugene de Mazenod took possession of the See of Marseille at Christmas of 1837. His first Lenten pastoral is thus that of 1838. He seems a little uncomfortable in this rather new genre. What is there to say about Lent other than recalling the obligation of the fast? That is what he does from the first lines and throughout his text:

*"As we address you on the occasion of the holy time of Lent, we recollected ourselves in front of the Lord to draw from his divine light the inspiration to instruct you properly on the obligation of the fast and abstinence."*

He speaks at length about man the sinner, deploring

*"the neglect of the holy laws of Lent into which the present generation has fallen. How indeed not to recognize that this law of fast and abstinence is one of the most sacred and most respectable?"*

The bishop does not have much else to say. He goes on and on about the obligation of these two, using bombastic sentences like:

*" God forbid, our very dear brothers, that giving in to human considerations, we, like a cowardly minister, should fail in our duty and despair of the obedience of our flocks when it concerns the salvation of their souls!"*

Hollow sentences abound and the Scriptures are always quoted in Latin, without any translation.

This text appears devoid of originality and pastoral meaning. Let us not linger here. Its only interest is to help us understand where our Founder started from to arrive, bit by bit, during the course of the successive Lents, at the extraordinary text which will conclude this series, during the Lent of 1860.

### ***A pastor with a heart afire: the Lenten pastoral letter of 1839***

Eugene de Mazenod does not need much time to adapt the literary genre of the "Lenten pastoral" to his strong personality and to use this very academic medium to evangelize his people.

Right from the pastoral letter of 1839, the tone becomes much more personal. Eugene de Mazenod reviews his first year as bishop and speaks about his joys and difficulties as bishop. He recalls the pastoral visits which he made and he speaks about what seemed important to him:

"In these apostolic trips, our solicitude was extended with pleasure to the tender children that we catechized, and to the poor people that we evangelised."

With that as a starting point, he does not keep to generalities but speaks personally to every community he had visited, using some pauline expressions to greet each of these local Churches.

*"Inhabitants of the Aygalades and you, dear people of the parishes of Saint-Louis, Saint André, Saint-Joseph, Saint Antoine, Saint-Marthe, the Cannet and Crottes, all of you who have been favoured with the grace of the Mission, may you be blessed! What we wish is that you always remain unshakable in the faith as you do today, that you walk in the ways of holiness. May many others imitate you."*

It is indeed the shepherd who is speaking to his flock, a people that he is already beginning to know and whom he calls by name. All can feel touched by the words they hear, especially when, dropping the usual distant formality of the bishops of that time, he opens his heart to them.

It is a true dialogue that begins when he challenges his children and speaks to them of his big suffering: the religious indifference of so many of them. Then, his letter becomes a prayer and he turns to God:

*"Lord, you increased around us a multitude of your children for whom you gave us a father's heart. We love them all with feelings of the purest charity. Nothing that concerns them could be foreign to us. Their interests are ours. Their happiness will be our happiness. There is not one among those whom you gave us that we would not want to save at the cost of our life. But, Lord, how many are there who want to know you, to love you, to serve you? Alas ! They are not many and that is what on so many occasions saddens our soul and fills it with the most bitter sorrow."*

Before this indifference, the time of Lent is no longer presented as a time of laws and prohibitions but as a time of testimony.

*"Also, by observing the time of Lent, by sanctifying this holy time, the faithful will bear witness to these stray sheep and permit them to find again the path of salvation."*

The entire twenty-one pages of this second letter, from which Latin has practically disappeared, is filled with an extraordinary spirit because

"it is only the glory of God, it is the salvation of all our flock, poor and rich, that touches us and pastoral zeal that fills our heart."

**Anger blowing like a mistral: the 1841 pastoral letter**

Even though we may not have read it, many of us have heard about the letter entitled "On Spectacles." The exaggerated and even extreme character of some expressions and the condemnation of every and all forms of "spectacles", whether they be dance parties, dramas, operas or even simple concerts, leave us with a deep feeling of uneasiness. We hardly feel at home today with this letter and we would undoubtedly prefer that the Founder had never written it. Before rejecting it outright, let's look at it a bit closer.

This text is above all a big venting of anger. It is the irritation of a father who is afraid and who suffers before the dangers that threaten his children. Let's not forget that we are under the reign of Louis Philippe, a reign marked by a strong return of the thinking of the "Age of Enlightenment." The battle rages against the Church around the University and new laws have just been passed which aim to strictly control the bishops' freedom of speech. At the same time, the bourgeoisie which is growing rich enjoys itself. The salons become places where morality is crushed and where the family is questioned. The spectacles display scandalous relationships. George Sand flaunts himself as a Chopin, Musset, or Liszt. Stendhal writes the *Red and the Black*. Verdi begins making Europe sing about adulterous courtships. The younger Dumas becomes the idol of these worldly salons thanks to his novels which damage domestic morality.

In Eugene de Mazenod's eyes, all this constitutes a grave danger for the Christians' faith, and, if this does not justify the extreme nature of his language, it at least allows us to explain it and understand it.

As a young priest, he had noted the devastating effects of the thinking of Voltaire on the youth of Aix. The triumphal return of these same ideas in higher education seems to him to be a very serious danger for the youth of the 1840s and he doesn't hesitate to treat this teaching as a "stinking pulpit."

To understand this extreme denunciation of the spectacles, we quote Fr. René Motte: "To support his thesis, Bishop de Mazenod calls upon history by quoting some classic authors. Then he appeals to the authority of the Fathers, without noting clearly that their concern was with plays composed by pagan authors, who did not respect Christian morals. Already Saint Cyprian excluded the actors from communion. Bishop de Mazenod quotes one of his predecessors in Marseilles who lambasts the impurity evoked in a hidden way by the expressions of profane love, which form the subject of the majority of the plays. Then he notes with accuracy that there is in some literature an elegant manner of making fun of what is good: 'one laughs at the expense of virtue'." <sup>2</sup>

It is obviously regrettable that Bishop de Mazenod generalizes without nuance. It is impossible for us to today to accept without distinction his criticisms.

Let us try to understand. Writing this, he remembers what he experienced as a youth, when he was an ardent enthusiast of stage performances:

*"How to get enough of the pleasures which the charming town of Aix presents me? Besides the Odéon, which we do not call the Odéon any more, but the Circus of Sextius, where we gather twice a week to sing and dance, we now have the comedies."*

He knows from experience the influence the theatre has on the sensitivity of a human being and when he carries on about dancing, is this not again the memory of his youth in Palermo or in Aix? Today, our mentality is far different than the thinking expressed in this letter and we can wonder whether Fr. Rey is not exaggerating when he writes that "this publication made a very great impression not only in Marseilles, but in the whole of France."

"While we cannot deny that the spectacles, under all their forms, exert an unquestionable influence on the senses, it is however obvious that Bishop de Mazenod did not find the style, nor the words which could have warned against the danger in them for Christians. While he

usually prefers to teach rather than to condemn, he did not know how to apply that principle here." It takes a Fr. René Motte to make such a well qualified judgement on Eugene de Mazenod.

### ***A very beautiful pastoral text: the 1844 pastoral letter***

It is in the line of the pastoral and paternal concern of Eugene de Mazenod for his people that we must place this great pastoral letter of 1844 entitled "On the Missions," not the missions *ad extra*, but clearly the parochial missions for the evangelization of the diocese. This text of 24 pages has no less than 35 biblical references. As for Latin, it has disappeared.

After the observations which he had made in the first years of his episcopate and of which the 1839 pastoral letter gave us a glimpse, Bishop de Mazenod launched out on a great programme of proclaiming the Gospel throughout the diocese by the means of the parish missions. In this way he hoped to reach all the parishes of his diocese in five years. He used the Oblates, of course. But he also called upon the Franciscans or on other preachers like the famous Fr. Loewenbruck who led the missions in the parishes of Saint-Joseph, Saint-Martin, Saint-Lazare and the Grands Carmes.

Bishop de Mazenod was personally involved in all of these missions, doing the confirmations and closing ceremonies himself.

In this sustained missionary context, this Lenten Letter becomes an additional pastoral tool. Eugene de Mazenod starts like Paul by giving thanks to God for the life in Christ of his listeners:

"When we see grace acting strongly among you and spreading both light in the minds and charity in the hearts, when the infinite mercy of the Lord manifests itself with splendour within our flock and the lost sheep which we believed lost are brought back to the fold and returned to our love, then our jubilation is great and we can say like Saint Paul that we are overjoyed (2 Cor. 6:4) because our heart joins the transports of joy which fill Heaven for sinners who are converted."

Let us note in passing how from the first pages of the letter, Eugene de Mazenod is influenced by Scripture. In addition to the verses from Paul, which he quotes directly, the allusions are numerous. He shares the jubilation of Paul writing to the Colossians in chapter 1 verses 3 to 5 which De Mazenod repeats practically word for word. He comments at length on the parable of the lost sheep of Luke chapter 15 verses 4 to 7. Two paragraphs are entirely made up of quotations from Paul, one after the other. They are drawn from the second letter to the Corinthians and the second letter to Timothy.

Two major themes run through the entire text. First of all, that the Word of God is fertile and effective from the very moment when it is announced with faith and enthusiasm. The second one is amazement at the Spirit of God who acts in and through the missionaries:

*"The Holy Spirit was upon them to make them evangelize the poor."*

And again:

*"It is the Spirit who acts upon your hearts and opens them to receive the Word."*

Thus, Eugene de Mazenod links perfectly the Son, Word of God, the glory given to the Father and the action of the Holy Spirit. Here we have, in my opinion, the largest Trinitarian text of our Founder. It is not a treatise of theology. It is about the Trinity in action. It is the knowledge of the Father and the glorification of his Name that is at the origin of any

missionary work. This work can succeed only if it is the proclamation of Jesus Christ, the Word of the Father, the only one who allows us to know the Father and who leads us to Him. This proclamation is not possible except through the Spirit who acts in the missionaries and who precedes them in the hearts of the faithful.

Considering the action of the Spirit in this way, Eugene de Mazenod rediscovers a theology which reaches back across the centuries to that of the Greek Fathers and forecasts that of Vatican II. The Spirit precedes the proclamation of the Word and consequently grace and, very often, it precedes the administration and the reception of the sacraments.

*"It is not rare that the perfection of the contrition has won Heaven's forgiveness even before the minister of the sacrament pronounced the words which justify."*

He is also amazed at the *"mysterious ascents"* which occur in the heart of *"the simplest"* believers and which he has seen himself.

It is again with pauline overtones that he speaks about the fight which the Christian has to wage day after day against sin and which he sees as a proof of the mercy of the Lord, respecting his mysterious action in the heart of the faithful.

As for the last paragraph, it reveals so perfectly the heart of Eugene de Mazenod, missionary, founder and bishop, that, in spite of the very marked style of the text, we want to quote it in its entirety:

*"Our very dear brothers, we will say it with simplicity, if we have always blessed the God of mercies for the good which was done for our flock, we never assisted at these ceremonies which speak so much to our heart of Bishop and father without also offering to the Lord humble thanks for condescending to honour our priestly career by calling us to the ministry of the missions, that we had the happiness of carrying out, and by giving us a holy family and a spiritual posterity of evangelical workers intended for this same ministry. If we were to speak about what Saint Paul called his crown and his joy (Phil. chap. IV, v. I), we would find it in their work as well as in the faith and the piety of our flock. This work is especially our title before the Lord, may He condescend to accept them and bless them like his own work."*

### ***A violent and unjust polemic: the 1845 pastoral letter***

This text, one of the most violent ones ever to flow from the pen of Eugene de Mazenod, is entitled: "On the Attacks Currently Directed against the Church." To understand it, if not to say accept it, it is necessary to replace it in the historical context of the open war which the Church and the State had been waging for several years concerning the University. [Editor's note: "The University" was a body of teachers chosen by the State and imposed for all levels of education.] From the last years of the reign of Charles X, the government intended to have the monopoly over teaching – particularly of the higher levels of education – and the bishops did all that was in their power to delay the application of these laws. In 1844, after several years of ambiguity, the Minister of Justice decided to use force, and to prevent the bishops from reacting too strongly in their pastoral letters, he had all their writings subjected to preliminary censorship. Eugene de Mazenod refused this administrative control of his letters and pastorals,

*"not wanting to demean his very spiritual ministry by letting it be submitted to the critical observations of the secular powers."*

Therefore he writes this long pastoral letter, which obviously he did not present to the official censor before printing it. Let us note in passing the courage of the printer, Marius Olive, who by publishing this text without the prefect's stamp, risked the closure of his business as well as six months of prison and a big fine.

The violence with which Eugène de Mazenod reacts is not surprising given the fact that locally he also has to face a skillfully organized anticlerical press campaign. Pamphlets, naturally anonymous, lash out even at the charitable nuns:

"They make hideous accusations against them, they try to dirty them, they accuse them of taking the substance of the poor for whom they live and die. They even attack the daughters of Saint-Vincent-de-Paul, those heroines of charity."

In his reaction, the bishop has trouble controlling himself, and he becomes unjust himself:

"How to explain the outburst of all passion against the Church? Nothing is overlooked to make her despicable and odious. Its enemies said in their pride: we wanted to leave her a peaceful end and to then give her a funeral with honors, but she refuses the peace that we offer her. Eh! well, we will hasten her ruin and she will regret not having accepted the fate that we offered her. They said it and they set about its execution with an incredible eagerness."

However, in the middle of his text, we find a paragraph on the independence of the Church, which is not without interest.

*"They have no more right to dominate her in the spiritual order than she has to dominate in the temporal order. She proclaims constantly the distinction and the reciprocal sovereignty of the two powers in the sphere of their respective competences. It is on this great principle that she bases her holy inviolability whereas you accuse her of wanting to dominate all, earthly things as well as heavenly things, thanks to a confusion of powers that she has always tried to avoid. When she claims the independence essential to her divine mission, she is accused of wanting to put herself above the laws, as if she did not preach by word and by example submission to the common laws of the country."*

This is something new. We are not far from the separation of Church and State which Lamennais proposed and which was one of the causes of his condemnation.

Unfortunately, Eugene de Mazenod does not draw the conclusions from what he has just written and he quickly returns to simple polemic, without pursuing his reflection.

### ***A grand paschal catechesis: the 1846 pastoral letter***

During the era of the Fathers of the Church, this letter would have been called a mystagogic catechesis. This splendid text is one of the most beautiful catecheses that Eugene de Mazenod has left us.<sup>4</sup>

The reasoning is simple: Lent has only one *raison d'être*, that is to lead us to Easter. The laws on fast and penance, which were the only topic of his first pastoral letter, are mentioned only at the end of the text and only as a means. Because: *"Lent is the journey which we undertake with Christ to die and rise with Him."*

In this catechesis, the quotations are all from Scripture, in French, and numerous. The Gospels are quoted 9 times, Saint Paul 13 times and other books of the Scriptures 10 times. Eugene de Mazenod also calls upon the Greek Fathers, who often come back under his pen. The style of the first two pages is difficult and solemn. We feel that the bishop is still captive of the official style of a pastoral letter. Then, in the course of a sentence, the name of Jesus Christ appears and at once his pen flows:

"It is to unite us with Jesus Christ that the Church proposes we go through the holy season of Lent and arrive at Easter."

- From there, the language becomes simple and clear, and the short and lively sentences create enthusiasm. We have the impression of hearing our Founder preach, like he did in his sermon at the Madeleine. He is especially intent on making the Good News of Easter available to his people.

In keeping with the ancient tradition of the Church, his catechesis on the mystery of the Passion and Resurrection of Christ starts from the liturgical actions. He goes through all the services of Holy Week with his people. From the gestures which are used, he leads them quite naturally into the mystery of Redemption. Thus, for example, after having described the veneration of the Cross, he notes:

"Thus, Jesus Christ is crucified for each one of you and each one of you is crucified in Jesus Christ. That is being a Christian. The Cross of his God receives him just like his tomb does. From the beginning of Lent the Christian spiritually followed in all his steps. Now, he reaches happiness and the glorious end."

The deion of the Easter Vigil <sup>5</sup> lets the faithful enter into the glory heaven:

"It is already actually the resurrection of the souls delivered from the death of sin that has taken place. It is heaven here below, under the veil of mystery. The Lord's Passover is presented to our faith as the realization of Heaven on earth. It is the crowning of all the festivals of the earth."

- From there comes the meaning of Lent:

*"The Christian could not understand the meaning of this feast if, in advance, he had not applied himself to follow his Savior in his hard work of Redemption... Would we want to have a share in his glory, to enter into all the joys of His resurrection without having passed through the travails of His penance and the sufferings of His passion? No, that may not be and Easter must give us the reason for Lent."*

In this perception of the Resurrection as the union of man with God, the Easter communion takes on a major importance, because it becomes the realization of our deification.

*"How will you solemnize with dignity the feast of Easter? It will not only be by fulfilling what is rigorously of obligation, but also by faithfully conforming your intention to that of the Church. The intention of this Mother is not that you restrict yourselves to fulfilling the precept of nourishing yourself once a year with the eucharistic bread. She calls you, she invites you during these days to the sacred banquet. It is by this especially that she wants to associate you with these feasts. This is the divine wedding that she celebrates in a holy union with her celestial spouse and she wishes ardently that all her family be allowed to share in the happiness of this ineffable union by taking a seat in the banquet hall."*

*"Christian life is only one perpetual communion with Jesus Christ who wishes with a burning desire to eat unceasingly his Passover with us."*

Participation in the divine nature happens through the concrete participation in the liturgical celebrations which are its manifestation and realization. Eugene de Mazenod invites the faithful, not to attend in silence "private" masses, but to participate in the grand ceremonies of Holy Week by their physical presence, by word and by song.

"The sacrifice of our altars is offered by the ministry of the priest in the name of the Church. But the people offer it with the priest. It is by this sublime cooperation in the mystic immolation of the Man-God that is exercised the Royal Priesthood with which all Christian souls are invested in union with Jesus Christ High Priest.... The relationship between the priest and

the people is never more tangible, the community of action between one and the other is never so great as in the solemn sung Mass. Here, nothing is done in a hidden or private way. The assistants are not content with speaking to God in secret. They are all called to make their voices heard."

Moreover:

*"The devotion which would prefer a solitary contemplation to this solemn cooperation in the Sacrifice would not be true devotion."*

This pastoral letter shows us one of the prophetic aspects of the figure of Saint Eugene. The theology of Vatican II will disown nothing of what he writes here on the liturgy. His interpretation of Lent gives powerful new life to this grand period of preparation for Easter and his perception of the mystery of the Resurrection as our "deification" is in line with the great tradition of the Fathers.

### ***A disillusioned reading of the times: the 1851 pastoral letter***

The life of Eugene de Mazenod knew moments of light and moments of darkness. It can happen that the events of the present moment can preoccupy the mind and prevent it from seeing things objectively.

That is what happens to him at the beginning of 1851. He is almost 70 years old. Tired by the endless fights that he continued leading on all fronts, he longs for rest and peace. He is worried about a world in the process of a new upheaval. Indeed the hopes born during the revolution of 1848, and to which he had to a large extent adhered, collapsed with the bloody repression of General Cavaignac. The shadow of a new dictatorship is emerging with the prince president Louis Napoleon Bonaparte. Pius IX, driven out of Rome by a popular uprising got back his States only thanks to the intervention of a foreign army. Several European thrones were threatened by the new ideas. Everything was going badly.

In this context, the 1851 pastoral letter makes an apocalyptic deion of any society which cuts itself off from God:

*"When one proceeds by revolt in the religious sphere, one ushers in as a side-effect or rather as a necessary consequence, revolt in the political sphere."*

After this introduction, the bishop lashes out against the *"so-called freedom of conscience."*

*"Conscience, it is said, is a law unto itself, that is, it imposes upon itself the beliefs which it wants and the duties which it wants in the religious order as well as in the human order. It is free to believe everything or to believe nothing, to do everything or to do nothing, as it sees fit. This amounts to saying that we are held to nothing in conscience."*

Then, after having affirmed that *"the man who loses God loses himself,"* he adds:

*"We recognize readily the power of social principles. But we say that religion and the only true religion are their necessary base."*

Bit by bit, his anger rises and soon he allows himself a hardly veiled criticism of Louis Napoleon Bonaparte:

*"Woe betide those who govern the people with a purely human purpose, speaking ceaselessly about religion while themselves disregarding its duties!"*

"They no more contribute to making religion liked than to protecting society and the family."

Pushed to the point of disillusion by all the political upheavals in progress, Eugene de Mazenod foresees for the first time that times have really changed. He notes with fear the arrival of a new society, a society without God.

Hitherto he thought more in terms of a return to religious practice and the rediscovery of Christian behavior. But with this pastoral letter, he becomes aware that it is God himself who is attacked and whose existence is called into question. That brings him to a very black reading of the world being born. The shock that he feels is too deep and he is unable to hide his disappointment. He cannot see in this new society signs of the loving presence of a God who continues to save mankind.

### ***A father concerned for his children: the 1853 pastoral letter***

This text takes up many points of the 1839 and 1844 letters. It is above all the text of a pastor impassioned for his people and who wants each of his children to discover that he is loved by God.

- From the beginning, it is the missionary bishop who speaks, comparing painfully the thirst for the Gospel of the peoples who have not heard it yet and the indifference of the Phocaeen town.

"We to whom Divine Providence grants the distinguished honor of bringing the Gospel of peace to far off places, to those whom the Church has never carried upon her breast, would we be so unfortunate as to see the same Gospel remain without fruit for a multitude of those whom the Lord specially gave to us?"

Such an observation tears his father's heart. What hurts him most is to see so few Christians receiving the Eucharist.

*"Having tasted the savour of the spiritual bread broken from the height of the pulpit, of what good is it if it was nothing more for you but intellectual pleasures and sterile religious feelings? It is necessary to go to Jesus Christ in the sacrament of His love, not only to adore Him in the presence of the holy altars, but to nourish yourselves with His flesh and His blood, to possess Him, so that you may live in Him and He may live in you."*

One could attend all the Lenten sermons, participate in all the exercises possible, or do all the penances conceivable, if these do not lead to communion, Lent is of no use.

Then, in the second part, he returns to the quite recent foundation which the Little Sisters of the Poor had just made, in Marseille, at his request. He knows that this foundation was very criticized by the members of the old brotherhoods as well as by the clergy: all were afraid that the Little Sisters would see the money which, until then went to the parochial works, flowing in their direction. Bishop de Mazenod, after having praised their work at length, points out that there is no Lent without charity.

"So that alms may attract graces, they must not be an act of pure philanthropy but an offering to God. This offering is made to the poor, as to representatives of Jesus Christ."

He ends the letter by relaunching the campaign for the construction of Notre Dame de la Garde.

For this he adopts the style of Saint Basil in his sermon on the poor:

*"What! You are tempted to believe that you have too much to give? For heavens sake, how many of you, with the prosperity you enjoy, spare nothing for vanity, for luxury, for pleasure? You like everything to be magnificent, you decorate your houses like temples while the temple of Mary your Mother is immaterial to you, while the poor have to content themselves for their strictest needs with the leftovers which they collect from the table of the rich? Remember that the poor have become the favourites in God's house."*

### ***A dated catechesis : the 1854 pastoral letter***

This text, the longest pastoral letter of Eugene de Mazenod's entire episcopate is entitled: "On the Good and the Bad Angels."

In developing his topic, which is very remote from the questions which worry us today, he borrows from all that Christian tradition has to say about the angels, be it in the Sacred Scriptures or in the Fathers of the Church.

It is presented well, but "angelology" hardly excites us today. In fact this text would have little interest for us except for the last part which deals with spiritism. We know that the middle of the nineteenth century saw the development of a strong interest in all that touched upon the spirits. Numerous circles met around revolving tables and Victor Hugo himself was one of the most famous followers.

Eugene de Mazenod gives a good deion of the phenomenon. He understands that certain persons, in situations of particular distress, are led to give in to this search and to call upon the spirits. So he makes no condemnation of these persons, even though he sees a great danger in this practice. Actually he says: *"Only the Name of Jesus Christ can be legitimately invoked."*

In conclusion, without condemning the persons who have recourse to spiritism, he feels obliged to forbid the practice in all its forms:

*"By our authority as bishop and pastor, and by virtue of the powers that we hold from Jesus Christ, we declare that it is forbidden to the people of our diocese to take part in practices which have calling upon the spirits as their object ....*

*"They must refrain from any method used, be it moving tables or other furniture, or the use of a scientific device or any other serious or childish way, and this, even if it is only out of curiosity and for the purpose of recreation. We are only too inclined to believe, that if the desired effect occurs, the devil has snuck in through these games to come and harm the foolhardy who called him."*

### ***A Marian text without interest: the 1855 pastoral letter***

This short pastoral, very solemn and without soul, aims at introducing the apostolic letter of Pope Pius IX on the proclamation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception. The papal text was to be read from the pulpit, on the first Sunday of Lent, in all Catholic parishes. Since the papal apostolic letter was very long, Eugene de Mazenod did not want to add it.

Having already had several occasions to speak to his flock about the Immaculate Conception, in particular at the blessing of the temporary chapel of Notre Dame de la Garde, he limits himself here to a brief explanation of the papal text.

This Lenten pastoral says nothing to us today and it shows well that Eugene de Mazenod could also write and say nothing.

### ***The love of his predecessors: the pastoral letters of 1840 and 1856***

The Lenten pastoral of 1840 is very particular because it is written some days after the death of Fortuné de Mazenod. The text deals with nothing else but this death:

*"How could I speak to you of other matters in the presence of the coffin, still unburied, and which has hardly been closed upon the precious remains of the holy old man whom we lament?"*

He repeats all the admiration which he had for his predecessor in the diocese of Marseille. Nevertheless these pages remain sober and full of a sense of propriety. They have nothing of the solemn and pompous panegyric delivered by Jeancard in the same circumstances.

The Lenten pastoral letter of 1856 deals with the transfer of a relic of the former bishop of Marseille, the servant of God Jean-Baptist Gault, who died in the odor of sanctity in 1643. The body of this holy bishop, lost for more than a century, had just been found during the demolition of a part of the old Major.

Eugene de Mazenod recounts in broad outline the life of his predecessor as well as the miracles that followed his death. Although discreet as regards the cult to be rendered to this bishop who was not canonized yet, he is nevertheless persuaded of his holiness. That is why he decided to transfer his mortal remains to Saint Marcel's church, which served as temporary cathedral.

These two texts are similar to the pastoral of July 25, 1840, written on the occasion of the translation of Saint Serenus's relics, another of his predecessors.

All three concern his predecessors in the See of Marseille. During his entire episcopate, Bishop de Mazenod often referred to the holy bishops who preceded him, be they canonized, like Lazarus or Serenus, or whom he considered saints like Bishop Gault, Bishop de Belzunce or his uncle Fortuné de Mazenod. He is convinced that it is thanks to their apostolate that the diocese received and kept the teaching of the faith. They are thus the benefactors whose memory must be kept.

Father Motte writes the following about this <sup>6</sup>: "When he receives the responsibility for the diocese of Marseille, Bishop de Mazenod does not feel equal to the task. The awareness of his weakness makes him turn to those who preceded him in this office. Humble and confident, he asks them to help him be a true pastor like they themselves succeeded in being in their time."

"We recognized and venerated the precious remains of our holy predecessor whose memory tells of such high virtues to be imitated and persuades us to believe in a continual protection before God for us and for our beloved flock."

Bishop de Mazenod, who kept Bishop Gault's episcopal ring, adds a particularly moving detail which depicts well his feelings towards his predecessors.

"We are in the habit of wearing it every time we do an ordination. Our thinking is both to honor a memory, which reminds us of the holiness of our ministry, and to obtain the communication of the spirit of zeal and devotion of the holy bishop.... We like to persuade our self that the one who, among our fathers, so excellently possessed this spirit will be always like an invisible proponent of it in all the generations of priests to whom are entrusted the souls acquired by the blood of Jesus Christ."

### ***Alms, the essential work of Lent: the 1857 pastoral letter***

In this short text, the bishop begins by warning the diocese that he will not be with them during Lent because he is detained in Paris by his duties as senator. He regrets it.

"We do not know how to tell you how much it costs us to be deprived, even for a moment, of a happiness which delights our old age which is always so keen to bless you and to help bring about by all our means your sanctification."

Then he notes how the city of Marseilles has developed materially and economically. While this delights him, it is not without raising some questions because this wealth poses serious dangers.

"In the midst of this immense movement which surrounds you and sweeps you up like an almost irresistible whirlwind towards the things of the earth, take care not to devote yourselves entirely and in an exclusive way to the care of your material interests, with no concern for your eternal affairs."

In support of what he asserts, he continues with a funny and candid deion of the race for money:

"We admire the activity and the intelligence which you do not fail to show in your business relations with all the countries of the world. You spare no effort, you are ceaselessly attentive to all the occasions that promise you some success and your attention is never lacking to prevent setbacks, which could compromise your operations. You look after everything at once.... This activity which you bring to bear to building up an ever precarious earthly fortune, we beg you to reserve a part of it to acquire eternal possessions."

In view of this, Lent is above all a time of reassessment, of reflection, of a return to what is essential in life.

*"After these considerations, we come with confidence to describe the time of Lent as the most favourable moment to save all and to redeem all."*

And he ends this short and perfectly well built text, by an invitation to give alms, which is presented as the great work of these holy forty days, above fasting and the other canonical rules.

"If out of sympathy for our weakness, the Church grants us an alleviation as regards abstinence, if because of your health, she exempts you from the fast, she does not dispense you, she cannot dispense you from almsgiving which bears witness to the penance of the heart from which nobody on the earth has the right to dispense you."

### ***An awkward attempt at political reflection: the 1858 pastoral petter***

Here is another text, which can be understood only in its historical context: that of the terrorist attack by Orsini, an Italian patriot who, in January 1858, threw a bomb under the imperial carriage, killing 8 people and wounding 148.

Because of the innocent victims that it caused, this event provoked a profound trauma in the entire population. Eugene de Mazenod could not overlook it in his Lenten pastoral. Before undertaking a political reflection, he begins by condemning this blind act which has just occurred: *"this new atrocity, this infernal bomb which sealed the death of so many innocent victims."*

Then he attempts a political reflection, to which we are not accustomed, on the permanence of political systems. For him, things are clear:

"The conservative or subversive tendency of these doctrines and their happy or unfortunate effect on temporal society are in direct proportion to their correspondence or their opposition to the teaching of the Church."

We see Eugene de Mazenod's political thinking evolve over the years. A fierce opponent of the First Empire, which he considered a regime inherited from the Revolution, he recognized the monarchic restoration of Louis XVIII as the only justifiable regime. But his legitimist convictions are shaken when Charles X, though of divine right and crowned in Reims, claims to govern the Church in the place of the Pope and the bishops. At first opposed to Louis Philippe, who was brought to the throne by the mob, he evolves again by recognizing the Second Republic, it too having arisen from barricades and from the mob.

As the years and events went by, he thus arrived at the thinking which he formulates in this letter: the only criterion of legitimacy or illegitimacy of any regime is whether it favors the Church or opposes it, the form and the conditions which it assumes matter little.

*"To attack the Church, to be set against her in all or in part, to underestimate her essential rights, is to serve the cause of the spirit of disorder."*

This pastoral letter should have had for exclusive subject the announcement of a special Jubilee proclaimed by the Pope. But the Orsini attack and its consequences push the papal proclamation to the background. It is treated only at the end and in a few lines. As usual for Eugene de Mazenod, life takes precedence over principles, even if these last have their source in Rome.

Nevertheless, even if he speaks about it only briefly, the way he treats the opening of the Jubilee is not without interest. He has a particular way of speaking of the communion of saints which deserves to be quoted:

"The solidarity which exists between us and the saints recurs between us and our brothers who are on earth. The prayers and merits of the just who are still alive have the power to be a counterweight for the sins of so many sinners and to divert disasters and punishments which could be imposed on Society."

As for the practical way of "gaining the Jubilee" indulgence, he insists more on almsgiving than on devotional practices:

"We exhort the faithful of our diocese to consider almsgiving as a very effective means to obtain God's blessings."

### ***At the zenith of mazenodian spirituality: the 1859 pastoral letter***

In this relatively brief letter which has no particular subject, the Scriptures have first place with 19 explicit quotations and more than a dozen allusions, all taken from the discourse on the bread of life in chapter 6 of Saint John.

Eugene de Mazenod gives the people of his diocese a great spiritual meditation on the union of the faithful to Christ, the central idea being that this union is possible as of now and that it is realized by the Eucharist.

Detained in Paris by his duties as senator, he begins by letting his heart speak: his only concern is the sanctification of his flock who are his beloved children:

"We are greatly concerned about the means of assuring your sanctification which is, before God, what we have most at heart, because besides our paternal affection for you and the love

of Jesus Christ that drives us, your sanctification is the will of the one who placed us with you so that we may contribute to it with all our strength.”

Then he shows his regret:

“We will not celebrate Easter with all those who are called to take part in it.”

It is for him the heartbreak and the deep pain of a father who sees his children ruining their life:

“Oh, what anguish! We see a multitude of sheep who perish, they wander in the desert and we who are sent for them, we cannot hope to gather them all in the pastures of the Lord. They are as if they did not belong to His flock. But we will not cease calling them until they return or until our voice dies out.”

There is no threat in this text , but an assertion which runs through the entire letter:

“God loves us with an infinite love. As a mark of his love, he gives himself to us. We can answer his love by loving him in turn, by answering his invitation when he said I wish earnestly to eat this Passover with you.”

Even if the Church prescribes only one communion a year, Eugene encourages the faithful to return to the ancient practice of receiving Holy Communion at every Eucharist:

“Thus, supernatural life is communicated to the soul which receives the Son of God. In Holy Communion, the closest union between Jesus Christ and us is established, it is such that he says to us: ‘the one who eats my flesh and drinks my blood lives in me and I in him.’ And as the divinity of Jesus Christ is inseparable from the humanity, the Father and the Holy Spirit are likewise inseparable from the person of the Divine Word and accompany Him in whomsoever Jesus Christ lives and who remains in Jesus Christ. Thus the union between the Creator and the creature is, in communion, the most perfect that it is possible to conceive.”

Why do Christians hesitate to realize now what they are destined to be?

“We do not understand how a Christian can refuse this union and remain turned in on himself, humbled, tied down to the earth when he can reach up to God!”

The end of the letter opens with the Church seen as a people. Communion is not an individual act, a sort of each for himself, but it builds up the Church.

“The Church, forming only a single body of which Jesus Christ is the head, those who do not receive the life from this head are dead members, they are no longer bound to the body by the links of divine love.... Whoever does not come to sit down at the divine banquet breaks union with those who form a mystical whole with their Redeemer. They can no longer, as the disciples of Emmaus who recognized their Master in the breaking of the bread, see a Christian, that is another Christ, in the person of the one who does not eat the heavenly bread and does not drink from the cup of the Lord.”

These recommendations seem so important to him that the parish priests must not be content to read it only once at the Sunday High Mass, as they do the other pastoral letters:

“We recommend that during the holy forty days they insist on the object of our present pastoral instruction, that they return to it often and do not tire of begging their auditors to carry out this duty.”

### ***An innovative ecclesiology: the 1860 pastoral letter***

This letter is the major text written by Eugene de Mazenod on the Church. It can only be understood within the political context of the reunification of Italy and the battle about the independence of the Papal States. During the revolution of 1848, the pope was driven out of Rome. To avoid Austria, hereditary enemy of France, from intervening in Italy, Louis Napoleon Bonaparte took the initiative of sending his armies to restore the temporal authority of the Sovereign Pontiff.

But deep down, Napoleon III is favourable "to the noble cause of Italy." After the victory of Magenta, June 4, 1859, which freed Italy from Austrian domination, he wrote to the Pope "to encourage him to sacrifice his revolted provinces and to entrust them to Victor Emmanuel." Pius IX is filled with an "unspeakable anger" and treats the Emperor "as a liar and cheat." The French bishops take sides with the Pope, in terms often very violent. The two "tenors" of the episcopate, Bishop Dupanloup of Orleans and Bishop Pie of Poitiers, rival each other in vehemence and Roman zeal in their 1860 pastoral letters. Pie goes so far as to berate the Emperor with "Wash your hands, Pilate!"

Bishop de Mazenod, like the other bishops, wanted to be a defender of the Papal States, thinking that they guaranteed the spiritual independence of the Pope. But he refused to join this crosier brandishing group. "Not to go along at that juncture with the wave of indignation which was sweeping the entire episcopate required truly great courage on his part."<sup>7</sup>

Compared to the enraged French episcopate, Bishop de Mazenod's pastoral letter raises the debate to the spiritual level. "This text is an act of faith in the divine reality of the Church. He is well above the political problems. The temporal authority of the Holy See does not overwhelm his thinking. The Church is a divine reality," notes Fr. Motte.<sup>8</sup>

*"How would it be possible to separate our love of Jesus Christ from the one that we owe to the Church? These two loves merge, to love the Church, is to love Jesus Christ and vice-versa."*

Quoting the Greek Fathers, Eugene de Mazenod begins with the theme of the Church that became the Spouse of Christ on the Cross:

"We love Jesus Christ in his Church because she is his spotless spouse who came from his opened side on the Cross like Eve came from the first Adam.... This union between the children of men and Jesus Christ was contracted on Calvary."

Then he develops the Pauline theme of the Church, Body of Christ.

"Jesus Christ had to join mystically to himself the children of men to be one with them, leaving intact however the personality proper to those who would be united. And since there is only one person in Jesus Christ, all Christians had to form one single body with Him, of which he would be the head and they the members."