



OMI Documentation No. 283 (English)

July 2008

**Saint Eugene de Mazenod (1782-1861)
Bishop of Marseille (1837-1861)**

By Father Bernard Dullier, OMI
to the Bishops of France

For the inscription
of Saint Eugene
in the calendar
of the Universal Church

Saint Eugene de Mazenod (1782-1861) Bishop of Marseille (1837-1861)

(Fr. Bernard Dullier, former provincial of France, wrote these pages for the Bishops' Conference of France, to ask them to sponsor the insertion of St. Eugene in the calendar of the Universal Church.)

On December 3, 1995, Pope John Paul II canonized Eugene de Mazenod, founder of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate and Bishop of Marseille. At the time, this event had a definite impact on the Church in France. Twenty bishops from France were present in Rome. There was an important conference in Aix and a beautiful ceremony took place in the Cathedral of Marseille. Then, one could hope that this new saint, the first non-martyred French bishop to be canonized after four centuries, would arouse some interest. But today, things have fallen into oblivion.

This man is known as a founder of a religious community. He is respected as a missionary "with a heart as big as the world." But as a bishop, he is largely unknown, even though he was one of the great personalities of the French episcopate in the 19th century. These pages are simply meant to do him justice.

Some dates

1 August 1782	Charles Joseph Eugene de Mazenod, son of the First President of the Court of Accounts of the Parliament of Provence, is born at Aix en Provence.
December 1790	He goes into exile (Nice, Turin, Venice, Naples, Palermo)
24 October 1802	Having returned from exile, he resides at Aix en Provence where his inherited wealth and the exciting social life of Aix interest him more than his faith in Jesus Christ.
Good Friday, 1807	He has a mystical experience of the Cross and of the person of Christ.
12 October 1808	He enters the Seminary of Saint Sulpice in Paris.
21 December 1811	He is ordained a priest, almost clandestinely, at Amiens.
1812	He serves as superior of the seminary after Napoleon expels the Sulpicians.
November 1812	He returns to Aix en Provence, pursued by the Imperial Police
1813 to 1815	He begins various ministries: chaplain in prisons, gathering of "street children," preaching in the dialect of Provence among the poorest and most abandoned.
25 January 1816	He founds the Institute of the Missionaries of Provence.
July 1823	He becomes Vicar General of Marseille
17 February 1826	The Missionaries of Provence are approved by Pope Leo XII under the title Missionary Oblates of Mary Immacualte
14 October 1832	He becomes Auxiliary Bishop of Marseille, with the title of Icosia.

10 August 1834	Because of his fidelity to the pope, he loses his French citizenship.
25 December 1837	He becomes Bishop of Marseille.
1 April 1851	He receives the pallium from the hands of Pope Pius IX.
8 December 1854	He participates at the proclamation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception.
24 June 1856	He becomes a Senator of the Empire.
21 May 1861	He dies at Marseille.
Mission Sunday 1975	He is beatified by Pope Paul VI.
3 December 1995	He is canonized by Pope John Paul II.

Circumstances of his appointment as a bishop

A worn-out and sick fighter

At the age of almost 55, the man who, in 1837, succeeded his uncle in the diocese of Marseille, was a worn-out fighter who, after many trials, looked forward to one thing alone: a bit of rest. He wanted to have no more responsibilities and wished to retire in an Oblate community to live there like the others and at the same pace as the others.

“At the beginning of my ministry, I went at a mad dash and my speed kept me from seeing the dangers scattered along the way. I scarcely thought and I was afraid of very little. Today, I take small steps. I count the all the problems one by one. The brambles snatch me everywhere. The thorns prick me deeply. Illness weakens me. Infirmities exhaust my spirit.”

Furthermore, he was sick. In November 1836, he began to spit up blood for several weeks. He hung between life and death. After these warning signs, he had to take several weeks of rest and did not return to Marseille except to respond to the cholera epidemic that was rampant there.

An episcopacy that he did not want

When he accepted to become a bishop “in partibus,” with the title of Icosia, in 1832, he did so at the request of the pope, in order to affirm papal authority before the king of the French who was claiming the right to name bishops. He had resolutely decided to

never become a residential bishop and he considered himself simply the auxiliary of his uncle Fortuné de Mazenod, the titular bishop of Marseille: *“I do not owe myself to anyone. No one has the right to demand service of my ministry. Whatever I do is has been inspired by love. In a word, I am free.”*

When he heard it said, in 1833, that he might succeed his uncle, this prospect *“crushes him and saps his courage.”* In the course of his reflections, he came up with a whole series of reasons to refuse: the desire to dedicate himself entirely to his religious family, his advanced age, his bad health, his desire for repose in order to prepare for death...

Named to the See of Marseille on April 9, 1837, he found out that his uncle had played on him a “dirty trick” in resigning and in having him named against his own will. *“My plan was completely otherwise. This was not to my taste and not to my liking. I have always avoided such pastoral responsibility. It fell upon me with all its weight.”*

He wrote to his faithful friend, Doctor d’Astros: *“The dignity, the role of a pastor is staggering in the eyes of faith... For me, I am overwhelmed when I think about it and I must place my unlimited confidence in God’s goodness...just to find a bit of calm.”*

Theology of the episcopacy for Eugene de Mazenod

In the 19th century, the theology of the episcopacy was rather deficient. The Gallican crisis and the successive concordats often looked at the role of the bishop as a sort of “a

deputy of those in power.” The Ultramontane reaction was to reduce that role to “deputy of the pope.” The role of the bishop was not clear.

In that context, the notes written by Eugene de Mazenod in May 1837 during the retreat he made in preparation for taking possession of the See of Marseille are fascinating. Bishop Matagrín, who has studied them thoroughly, sees in Eugene de Mazenod a precursor or Vatican II.

Bishop Matagrín points out that these notes are not a theological treatise but a meditation, rooted in a life and a spiritual experience of contact with Jesus Christ and with the Gospel. Nevertheless, he remarks, the words and terminology presage what will be found in the constitution *Lumen Gentium*.

The sacramental character of the episcopacy

Contrary to the opinion of many at that time, for Eugene de Mazenod, it was clear that the episcopacy was a sacrament. *“The episcopacy, which up to now I could not imagine as anything other than the fullness of the priesthood...has today appeared just as it is in the constitution of the Church: a sacrament given through the working of the Holy Spirit and imparted by the imposition of hands.”*

Paragraph 21 of the Constitution *Lumen Gentium* uses the same vocabulary: *“...by means of the imposition of hands and the words of consecration, the grace of the Holy Spirit is so conferred, and the sacred character so impressed, that bishops in an eminent and visible way sustain the roles of Christ Himself...”*

The apostolic character of the episcopacy

For Saint Eugene, the episcopacy flows from its roots through Christ, the unique and supreme shepherd: *“The Church was founded on the apostles and is governed by the bishops, their successors. They have been instituted by Jesus Christ, following the apostles, to shepherd souls.”* *“Placed in charge of the sheepfold by Jesus Christ, and given the same authority as Jesus Christ, I must represent him in the midst of this portion of his flock.”*

The same idea is found in paragraph 21 of the council text: *“In the bishops, therefore, for whom priests are assistants, Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Supreme High Priest, is present in the midst of those who believe.”*

The pastoral character of the episcopacy

Considering the way in which those around him looked upon the bishop, Eugene de Mazenod notes: *“Today, they relegate the bishop to the back of his office to give out dispensations and to write letters; if occasionally he shows up in a parish, it is to administer Confirmation which one can receive only from him... The bishop is, for many people, a man dressed in purple, exercising ecclesiastical authority, that is to say, who gives orders to the priests.”*

But according to him, it should be something all together different.

► The bishop must first of all teach.

Chapter 4 of the Second Letter of Timothy makes clear to St. Eugene what his mission was: *“I must do all that is in my power to instruct my sheep, to encourage them, to turn them away from evil, to urge them on in the practice of virtue, to be an example to them so as to assure their salvation and lead them from the sheepfold of earth into heaven. Instructions in the various parishes, catechism lessons, taking turns visiting the sick in all the neighborhoods of the city, that will be the most efficacious way to work for their well-being and to teach Jesus Christ.”*

This primacy of teaching can be found in paragraphs 24 and 25 of *Lumen Gentium*: *“Bishops... receive from the Lord...the mission to teach all nations and to preach the Gospel to every creature...”* (24) *“Among the principal duties of bishops the preaching of the Gospel occupies an eminent place.”* (25)

► The bishop must sanctify.

Eugene de Mazenod believed that the second task of the bishop is sanctification, his own and that of his people: the two are bound together. *“It is necessary that my existence, my life, my whole being must be dedicated to my people, that I have no other thought than for their well-being, no other fear than to not do enough for their happiness and sanctification. In a word, by working diligently for the sanctification of my sheep, I should want to sanctify myself to a large degree.”*

Lumen Gentium says the same thing in paragraph 26: “The bishops...are the stewards of the grace of the supreme priesthood... by praying and laboring for the people, make outpourings in many ways and in great abundance from the fullness of Christ's holiness.”

► **Finally, the bishop must govern.**

It's only in the third position, as a consequence of the two others, that Saint Eugene placed the task of governing. “*I shall have to struggle against self-centeredness, personal interests, lack of zeal, routine, the inaction of those in charge. All that*

won't be done without opposition. But it must be understood that it is the bishop's role to govern. It is completely a question of never doing anything except in order to please God and to carry out worthily the duty that he has given me.”

Vatican Council II says the same thing in paragraph 27 of *Lumen Gentium*: “Bishops... govern the particular churches entrusted to them by their counsel, exhortations, example, and even by their authority and sacred power, which indeed they use only for the edification of their flock in truth and holiness...”

The tasks of the bishop according to Eugene de Mazenod

In taking possession of the See of Marseille, Christmas Day 1837, Eugene de Mazenod summed up his episcopal agenda: “*I must attach myself to these children as a father; my existence, my life, my whole being must be dedicated to them; I must have no other thoughts than for their well-being, no other fear than to not do enough for their happiness and sanctification, no other concern than to embrace all of their spiritual needs and even, in some way, their temporal well-being. In a word, I must spend myself for them, be ready to sacrifice my comfort, my desires, my rest, my very life.*”

whom I have the duty to teach and listen to me because they understand me.”

The upper classes, those who would never speak anything but French, complained about this attitude of the bishop. But he paid them no attention.

2. The bishop must teach Jesus Christ.

Eugene de Mazenod was shocked to see how much Jansenist teaching was still having an influence in his diocese. For him, the object of catechesis should be first of all neither the commandments nor the threat of hell, but the revelation of Jesus Christ.

“*How poorly the people are being taught! They are blandly being taught to know the catechism by heart, but it is poorly explained and no one tries to emphasize the goodness of God, the infinite love of our Savior Jesus Christ for humanity. No one is molding their hearts.*”

This was the agenda that he would try to carry out, tirelessly, during the 24 years of his long episcopacy.

1. Above all, the bishop must speak the language of his people.

From his very first confirmation tour, he noted: “*Here, as everywhere, I could notice the close attention of the children and their families when I speak to them in Provencal, and how necessary it is to teach them in their own language. When the bishop speaks to them in French, they cannot follow his reasoning because they do not understand.... Please God that all bishops would grasp this indisputable truth. I would rather have stopped speaking if I noticed that I had lost the attention of my listeners. But adults and children seemed to cling to my words. And that is what happened on the whole tour. How I bless God that I know how to speak the language of those*

At the confirmation in Aubagne, 12 boys did not show up, scarcely three months after their first communion. His fatherly heart was broken: “*There is reason to weep... It is so important to touch their hearts by telling them what is essential: the love that God has for them; and to tell them something that can leave them in awe their whole life long – the love of Jesus Christ for each one of them.*”

This is what he practiced in his own preaching and he took note of the results: “*How is it that*

today again, I saw children as well as grown-ups who were at the ceremony crying? I was not using terrifying words. On the contrary, I focused affectionately on the immense goodness of God and of our Lord Jesus Christ for us... Anyone can say what he wants, but I will not change this method for all the gold in the world... Wouldn't it be wonderful if all bishops did as I am doing?"

3. The bishop must be all things to everyone.

Eugene de Mazenod loved the people put in his charge. There were many witnesses who spoke of this love during the opening of the diocesan process of beatification. "Today again at Marseille, they spoke often with admiration about his zeal... Actually, it was not rare to see him go into the most humble homes to visit the sick, to console them, to help them and to administer the sacraments.

"The bishop did not hesitate to personally bring help to the poor on the streets, to the starving and he would go into the most appalling hovels to bring the sacraments to notorious sinners or to try to convert them. This zeal and this charity were often the subject of conversations in the city."

The journal of Eugene de Mazenod gives an example of his visit to La Clotat, a crowded slum in Marseille: "*After the official dinner, bored as usual, I decided to walk around the city. People had warned me against it and had predicted that I would be subject to all sorts of insults. I decided to go along the dock in front of the cafes where the unemployed and the shiftless hang out. Everyone greeted me. I spoke with a few persons. I was followed by a group of good folks... I kept my course till the factory where they are building a huge steam engine. On the way back from my inspection, I visited the hospital where I authorized them to say the Mass in the rooms.*"

One of these typical days shows his great care for everyone: having arrived at 8 in the morning at a parish after two hours and a quarter in a horse-drawn carriage, he went in procession to the church where he gave a "*short talk in French, in order not to insult people who might be offended.*" Then he conferred the tonsure on a young seminarian from the city. Afterwards,

he celebrated the confirmation Mass with "*a fine instruction in Provençal, maybe a bit long.*" At 11:30, still fasting, accompanied by the pastor who declared himself to be worn out by this pace, he visited a convent of nuns and confirmed nine girls "*who could have easily come to the parish.*" He finished his visit with a short instruction of a quarter hour addressed to the dear sisters. Finally it was lunch time and a moment of repose. But this formal meal went on and on and he quickly left the table, leaving behind the astonished bureaucrats. Then he visited the shops at the port and chatted "*with the workers about their salaries and their conditions of life.*" He visited one of them whose wife was very sick. It was well into the afternoon when he went to "*administer the last sacraments to the elderly women at the hospice.*" Finally, he returned to Marseille. But he took the time to make a prolonged stop at the home of a "*poor man, Mister Jean*" who had just lost his wife to the cholera: "*I could not refrain from crying at the sight of this young widower, of his three children, and of the elderly mother of the young deceased woman.*"

4. The bishop should organize charitable works

During the episcopacy of Eugene de Mazenod, Marseille experienced four epidemics of plague or cholera. Each time, the attitude of the bishop was extraordinary, so much so that twice he received the gold medal from the city.

In July 1837, he was away when the epidemic broke out. Without hesitating, he went back to his episcopal city while the civil authorities had fled to the countryside. "*I had a duty to fulfill: I had to plunge myself into that infected atmosphere. My first thought was to go and pay my respects to Our Good Mother at the shrine of La Garde.*"

But prayer does not dispense one from acting. He brought together all of the religious congregations of the city and asked them to take care of what was needed.

"*The mayor, he will do what he wants.*" (In fact, he did nothing!) "*What the Church was able to do had an immense effect in consoling and edifying the people of Marseille. Throughout the*

city and in the newspapers of every stripe, there was universal appreciation and everyone praised a religion that by itself was able to inspire so much charity."

When the epidemic was over, he cared for those who had been reduced to desolation. He created orphanages and a congregation to take care of them: "the Sisters of the cholera." He asked religious institutions to accept gratis the poor children; he began again the Saint Vincent de Paul associations and reiterated: "*Charity does not wait.*" Then he denounced the scandal of the forfeiture of charitable funds collected in the parishes and turned over to the municipality: "*We do not know what happened to 60,000 francs collected by the mayor's office... In the meantime, the poor come to the bishop's house and we will soon have to sell our blankets to help them because we have not received a thing from these philanthropic collections. There is a sole cry in the city over this decrepitude.*"

Undoubtedly, with such pronouncements, he did not make a lot of friends at the city hall.

Another example is what he did in favor of the construction of a military hospital for quarantined patients. He had to battle for several months against the slowness of the military administration. It makes him lose sleep: "*To hear these sick people, so close to me, in my diocese, beneath my windows, and not be able to help them... it tears me to pieces. I am inconsolable. Although for two days I have been moving heaven and earth in order to reach them, I am upset that I have not been able get moving all that needs to be done. I am going to bed. I will sleep if I can.*"

But his stubbornness will prevail and he will end up getting what he wanted.

5. The bishop must have a heart.

In spite of the many works he created and over which he continued to be vigilant, Bishop de Mazenod was not an administrator but a father. He stayed close to the people of his diocese because he loved them. One day, while visiting Marseille with the bishop, the Archbishop of

Lyon was astonished to see that Eugene de Mazenod greeted by name most of the people he met, "even the fish mongers at the Old Port and even, I believe, some prostitutes!" He asked about their health and their family.

"If one knew what it is to be a bishop, one would be less surprised to see him approach his sheep when they are suffering or sick or dying. I love these people and I must say, they love me in return."

The sophisticated people were surprised to see him weep and wear a sign of mourning for the faithful Dauphin, porter, sacristan, and bell-ringer at the bishop's house, who died of cholera in just three days. He told them: "*Yes, I love with genuine and sincere and tender affection and I am not ashamed of it. I weep at the loss of all those who are dear to me. I am shocked by the egotists and the unsympathetic who take everything for themselves and give nothing in return. The more I study the heart of Christ, the more I meditate on his actions during his life, the more I am convinced that I am right and they are wrong.*"

6. The bishop must know how to innovate

In taking possession of the See of Marseille, he noted, a bit disappointed: "*Everything is routine; the point is to never do anything new. The 'same old things' seem to suffice. In the light of the difficulties that exist, one could become discouraged, turn around and retreat! Nevertheless, we must move forward!*"

"*We must move forward,*" he writes to his vicar general, Canon Cayre, who was a bit bewildered by the ever new ideas of his bishop.

"There are definitely reforms to make and I would certainly be remiss in carrying out my charge if I let myself be intimidated by considerations that are all too human. I shall need to struggle against self-centeredness, self-interest, lack of zeal, routine, the apathy of those in charge, that is to say, the pastors, and insubordination in their regard on the part of their vicars... All of that will not happen without conflicts."

He will move forward in the formation of seminarians by introducing the moral theology

of Saint Alphonsus of Ligouri, and in increasing the courses in Sacred Scripture and Patristics.

He will move forward in the parishes by demanding that the priests, pastors and vicars live together under the same roof, in order to help one another and to give witness of fraternal life.

He will move forward in financial matters by introducing the sharing of surplus funds in dispensing diocesan finances, evenhandedly, according to the real needs of each parish.

He will move forward in liturgical matters by requiring ceremonies that are beautiful, well-prepared and capable of touching the minds and the hearts of the people of the diocese, by introducing processions through the towns, and by introducing the “Forty Hours.”

He will move forward in fostering the participation of the laity by increasing, in each parish, the confraternities which were lay persons grouped according to their professions and their social classes.

He will move forward in relation to foreigners who were beginning to pour into Marseille by creating chaplaincies according to languages: Italian, German, and Middle-Eastern.

He will move forward in instruction by increasing religious schools, primary and secondary, for boys as well as for girls, for the rich as well as for the poor.

And we could go on and on with this list. Canon Cayre noted in his memoirs: “Each day, or almost each day, the bishop would announce the beginning of some new religious or charitable work or a new initiative to promote piety and devotion.”

It is thus that he set up five groups of men and seven of women, the “Apprentice” apostolate for youth coming out of prison. He wanted there to be charitable workrooms in each parish, as well chaplaincies in the prisons, hospitals, and military barracks.

7. The bishop must encourage religious life

For Eugene de Mazenod, religious life was an integral part of the pastoral plan of a diocese. Under his episcopacy, congregations of men grew from 2 to 11 and those of women from 8 to 27. He invited contemplatives and apostolic communities to come as he tried to cover every aspect of evangelization and charitable works.

He kept special watch over the well-being of the contemplatives. For example, he had a new convent built for the Carmelites and he wrote: *“These dear daughters are bursting with joy over the healthful and comfortable new convent of which they are taking possession.”*

He enjoyed spending time with “his dear Capuchin sisters” with whom he usually celebrated the anniversary of the episcopal ordination: *“Their joy was equal to my consolation. Most of these holy women wept during the short talk I gave them before beginning the Sacred Mysteries... If all of my sheep were like these, one could never say that my burden is heavy. They are angels on earth.”*

He was likewise attentive to each of the Congregations he had invited, visiting them as often as he could, agreeing to preach retreats and days of recollection for them, and presiding at their vow ceremonies or ordinations.

He intervened with the Prefect for the restoration of a building of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. He invited the Jesuits to come and he vigorously came to their defense when they were in danger of expulsion, threatening to sleep in the doorway to keep the police from entering. This did not keep him from scolding the sons of St. Ignatius when they were doing things that went against the sense of his pastoral plans: *“I love the Church, and even more than the Jesuits; even though I hold this Order in high regard, I expect them to obey when it regards my diocese.”*

When the Jesuits were expelled from Rome in 1848, he offered the Superior General and his Council more than three years of hospitality in his episcopal palace.

8. The bishop should keep his diocese open to what lies beyond it.

His pastoral sense kept him naturally open to the reality of the Universal Church. Many bishops from all over the world passed through Marseille on their way to Rome or on their way back. He met with them, he discussed with them, and he passed that on to his seminarians and his priests, as well as in his pastoral letters for the whole diocese. He developed the

Propagation of the Faith in his diocese.

Several times, he spoke to his people about needs of those well beyond the confines of France, appealing to their generosity for Martinique in 1839, for Guadeloupe in 1843, for Syria in 1860. This was a great thing for the bishop of a poor diocese where the financial needs were immense. But in this way, he opened the people of Marseille to the dimension of the Universal Church.

The presence of Eugene de Mazenod in the life of the City

When he became Bishop of Marseille, Bishop de Mazenod knew that he would have to become involved in all the interests of the people of Marseille, both the spiritual and the temporal.

During his episcopacy, the population of Marseille tripled. It became an industrial and port city, attracting a rural population that thought they could find work and decent living conditions there.

The bishop paid close attention to this huge change taking place in his diocese. We have already seen that he worked hard for the development of works of charity, such as hospices and hospitals; he worked for the education of children by adding new schools. But he was also attentive to other problems affecting the material well-being of the members of his diocese and of the industrial development of Marseille.

The water reservoir at Palais Longchamp

He carefully studied several reports from the Academy of Medicine in which it seemed that the installation of running water in the large cities could be an important factor in stopping the spread of epidemics. He intervened again and again at the City Hall until he convinced the elected officials of the importance of the construction of a water reservoir which would progressively furnish running water in the city.

On July 8, 1847, he wanted to be present for the inauguration of this water reservoir – the famous Palais Longchamp. He wrote that very evening in his journal: *“The inauguration is one of the most beautiful days in the history of Marseille. The magnificent structure is something which*

will greatly improve the destiny of the people of Marseille, a destiny dear to us.”

The Saint Charles train station

The people of Marseille had given only lip service to the Revolution of July 1830. Therefore, with animosity toward this disorderly city, King Louis-Philippe decided to deprive it of the railway and a station. Bishop de Mazenod understood how important the railway could be; it was indispensable for the development of the city. Therefore he defended the city and wrote to the king: *“How happy I would be if my comments were to convince the King to modify a project so harmful to our city! No one could be unaware where this help is coming from – from the bishop, whose care must extend to everyone, if only he can get this for his people. The ungrateful would profit from it as much as the others.”*

When the king refused to change his decision, the bishop wrote to Queen Marie Amélie whom he had known for more than 40 years. The queen intervened. The king changed his mind. The railroad came to Marseille and the city, in recognition, invited Bishop de Mazenod to bless the station and the ten first locomotives on January 8, 1848. Since there was no prayer for the blessing of locomotives, he wrote an entirely new ritual and Fr. Lacordaire, a witness of the ceremony, expressed his admiration for the liturgy prepared by the prelate.

The general elections of 1848

In April 1848, for the first time in France, the parliamentary elections were with universal suffrage. Eugene de Mazenod sent all the people

in his diocese a letter in which he explained the duty of voting. He did not tell them how to vote, but he asked simply that they go to the polls. Then, in order to allow everyone to do their duty as citizens, he added: *“On the Sunday of the general elections, the faithful will not compromise their duty of hearing Mass with their duty of casting their vote. Those for whom this would be impossible are dispensed from the obligation of hearing Mass because of the great importance of their electoral duty.”*

Now the day for the general elections, April 23 1848, was Easter Sunday!

The quarantine hospital on the Isles of Frioul.

On November 25, 1850, Bishop de Mazenod blessed a new public hospital that had been built, thanks to his numerous interventions with the civil and military authorities, on the Isles of Frioul, to serve as a quarantine center. *“The cooperation of human and supernatural resources (religion), is a need that is particularly evident when it is a question of halting contagions that can attack a whole country.”*

He spoke to all the caregivers: *“Here, the sick person must not be treated as something contemptible, a mere “thing,” but he must be treated as a being made in the image and likeness of his Creator. It is only in that way that we practice true charity.”*

Housing for the workers

Bishop de Mazenod fostered whatever would make easier the life of the workers who often

labored under terrible conditions and whose jobs were insecure in the port and soap factories. Therefore, he was concerned about their housing which was often unhealthy. He founded an organization for the improving of workers' lodging and, in 1850, he blessed and placed the first stone in a model home constructed by this organization.

In 1858, he encouraged the construction of the first workers' city, La Ciotat, *“...rising out of the earth with the aim at furnishing a decent home for workers in the navy yards.”* In blessing it, he spoke passionately against the exploitation of the poor and insisted on *“the true dignity of the worker which goes far beyond the work that he accomplishes.”* This talk earned him a censure by the Prefect at the Ministry of the Interior.

The 76 year old bishop had lost none of the energy of the young missionary who had, 45 years earlier, spoken the sermon at the Madeleine when he denounced *“the wicked exploitation of house servants by their unjust masters.”*

One of the last acts in the public life of Eugene de Mazenod was the blessing of the new Commerce Exchange, September 27, 1860. Many were surprised to find him in such a place. He answered: *“We pray over the things of this earth so that they might serve man for his temporal well-being without losing sight of the goal which is infinitely superior; his supernatural vocation.”* *“I have come to bless, not the money, but the charitable uses to which it can be put.”*

Eugene de Mazenod: bishop of God's Mercy

If one were to judge by the extremely detailed study done by Canon Sevrin on the Age of Restoration and by the book of Cardinal Poupard, *“The Nineteenth Century, Century of Graces,”* it appears that Eugene de Mazenod, in his double role of founder of a missionary congregation and Bishop of Marseille, played a preponderant role in France's distancing itself from Jansenism and its practices.

As an enthusiastic proponent of the moral theology of Saint Alphonsus, he required

it not only in his diocese but also in his congregation.

Helping those condemned to death

The practice in France at the time was clear: one should not give communion to someone condemned to death. Eugene de Mazenod, on this point, opposed other bishops, because for him, *“it is a shameful abuse that should be wiped out wherever it still exists.”*

Coming to Gap for an ordination in July

1837, he learned that the superior of the major seminary refused communion to someone condemned to death. Furious, Bishop de Mazenod told him he had committed a grave sin in acting that way and he himself was prepared to offer the man communion. He wrote to him: *“You are thick with petty local notions. Act according to God’s mercy without asking for some sort of authorization. If you do not follow this advice, it is you who will be in the state of mortal sin and I will refuse you absolution if you come to confess to me.”*

The pardon of sins

This is another point on which Eugene de Mazenod departs from the Jansenist tradition of the time. Certainly he did not take the gravity of sin lightly. But he takes even more seriously the sinner who repents. Contrary to what was the usual practice at the beginning of the 19th century, he forbade priests from making the penitent come back seven or eight times before giving absolution *“as if God could refuse his pardon!”* And he imposed this manner of action on all his clergy.

Eugene de Mazenod: the builder-bishop

Bishop de Mazenod wanted his episcopal city to benefit from religious buildings worthy of the importance of the city. On this subject, we refer to the excellent number 179 of the review *“Marseille – Revue culturelle.”* It is the only serious study, to our knowledge, that has been done about Eugene de Mazenod, builder of churches.

One finds there especially the care with which he chose the architects, oversaw the drawing of plans and the progress of the work, and modified what he did not like. For him, the stone church had to be a place of beauty, a place filled with symbolism, a place of catechesis.

Two monuments built by Eugene de Mazenod still give shape to the view of Marseille: the Basilica of Notre Dame de la Garde and the Cathedral which the people of Marseille call “the Major.” While he did not have the opportunity to see these works finished, since he died before that happened, Eugene de Mazenod wanted them

God – Beyond the sacraments

Even more innovative was the attitude he developed on the occasion of the taking of Constantine (Algeria) by French troops. The king wants a service celebrated for the dead. Several bishops of France refused because these soldiers surely did not die in a state of grace! Eugene de Mazenod did not even wait for the king to ask for the celebration. He stated: *“I prefer to sink in the ocean of God’s mercy... I offered the Holy Sacrifice for all the military personnel from all the camps who died on the battle field. God is infinitely merciful; it is no one’s job to measure his mercy, much less to keep God from granting his mercy for the salvation of souls which his divine Son Jesus Christ has purchased with his precious blood.”*

And in his letter for Lent, 1844, he develops a very daring theology: *“It is not rare that an act of perfect, loving contrition gains the pardon of heaven without the minister of the sacrament pronouncing the words of pardon.”*

just as they are today, down to the last detail.

The Basilica of Notre Dame de La Garde, thanks to a beautiful restoration, has acquired all its original splendor: “a beauty to take your breath away” say some when they enter the upper basilica.

As for the “Major,” it was the fashion, for a long time, to treat with disdain this 19th century building. Today, they are beginning to appreciate this vast and well-lit space, to discover the symbolic meaning of the façade where the saints of Provence lead into the celestial Jerusalem, and to let oneself be touched by the harmony of the totality. Some treated Eugene de Mazenod like a barbarian for having demolished the nave of the old Romanesque cathedral to construct the present building. They forget that half of the nave had been demolished by the canons in the 18th century. They forget too that Eugene de Mazenod had wanted to build the new cathedral on the pivotal point of the Canebière, above the

Old Port. The mayor was against that; there was no other solution than to demolish the rest of the nave to make enough space for the present cathedral.

On the other hand, besides La Garde and the

cathedral, Eugene de Mazenod built 22 new churches in his diocese and repaired 15 others. He erected 27 new parishes, reconstructed the Major Seminary, created the Minor Seminary and the Choir School, as well as many parish schools.

Eugene de Mazenod and his clergy

In paragraph 28, *Lumen Gentium* speaks of the dual responsibility of bishops in relation to their priests: “let the bishop regard his priests as his co-workers;” he must take care that they be “bound together in intimate brotherhood.”

These two ideas dominate the attitude of Saint Eugene toward his clergy. The priests are his co-workers, joined with him in his pastoral responsibility: “*It is the clergy that will complete my flock. Will I be able to share with them? Will I be able to find in them the sincere cooperation that I have a right to expect?*”

This concern is evident thirty years later when he says to his priests, at the end of his life: “*O my sons, my dear co-workers, may God give you a hundredfold of the magnificent consolations you have given to me.*”

He wanted to see brotherhood within his clergy and he asked that pastors and their vicars live in community. The lack of harmony among his clergy discouraged him: “*I say nothing here about the less than satisfying situation in the parish of Aubagne vis-à-vis the quarrels that exist between the pastor and his vicars, and the vicars among themselves. I will seriously look into that during my pastoral visit.*”

His desire to have the clergy of the same parish live together did not please everyone. Still today, some of the clergy of Marseille blame him for having made the common life a condition “sine qua non” in the life of a parish, so much so that he wrote to one obstinate pastor: “*No common life! No vicar!*”

Eugene de Mazenod loved his priests and he wrote to them, not only when he took possession of his See, but also in his last testament: “*The priests of our diocese, whatever be their*

rank, will always find in us the sentiments they have, for so long a time, loved to come here to experience. Our heart will always be open to them. We will always share all of their sorrows and all of their consolations... It will always be our pleasure to be able to lessen, if not entirely eliminate, all the difficulties of their demanding ministry.”

But was he, in return, loved by his clergy?

Those priests who did not want to change their way of doing things, those who wanted everything to continue as always, detested him and some rejoiced on the day of his death.

But most of them, those who burned with zeal for the Good News, those who loved their parishioners as a shepherd does his sheep, they loved him deeply, in spite of his abruptness and his outbursts of anger. When he was in a stormy mood, they stayed away and waited. And Canon Caire added: “When he had let off some steam, a great calm settled in and the bishop was the first to ask forgiveness and to embrace them. When you knew him, his angry outbursts were not at all frightening.”

Abbé Timon-David, who had to endure any number of angry blasts from the bishop, wrote in his private diary, on the evening of the death of Eugene de Mazenod: “I just heard the bells of Notre Dame de la Garde tolling the news of the death of the bishop. My heart is broken and I cannot keep from crying. It is a great misfortune for all of us, his priests. We are losing a friend, our protector and our father. He never made us feel that he was superior to us, except in the good he did.”

Eugene de Mazenod and Rome

Eugene de Mazenod was tenaciously Ultramontane, and thus he was going contrary to a large part of the Church of France which was still Gallican. For him, the pope was the successor of Peter: it was not to be discussed nor questioned for any reason whatsoever.

That was obvious from his time at the seminary where he resolutely sided with Pius VII against Napoleon I. He even refused to be ordained a priest by Cardinal Maury *“a creature of the Emperor who has not received the endorsement of the Pope.”*

Nevertheless, his absolute fidelity to the successor of Peter did not keep him from having personal feelings regarding the personality of the different popes that he knew.

He greatly loved Leo XII (1823-1829) and wanted the Oblates to keep *“in everlasting memory”* the one who had recognized the Congregation.

His relationship with Gregory XVI (1831-1846) was difficult. This pope called him to the episcopate in 1832, but then did not defend him against the attacks of Louis-Philippe, especially when the king deprived him of his French citizenship, precisely because of his fidelity to the pope. *“The Holy Father is putting my obedience to the test in asking me to leave France. But I believe it is my duty to do that, in order to obey the voice of the Sovereign Pontiff who is asking me to leave. I will do so while sacrificing my own honor. But the Holy Father has no idea of the sacrifice he is asking of me.”*

This obedience did not prevent his great disappointment: *“I leave everything and I abandon myself to Divine Providence. I would like to add: to the good will of the Holy Father, but I don't harbor much hope on that score.”*

On the other hand, he had boundless admiration for Pius IX (1846-1878). He went so far as to propose Marseille as a place of welcome for the pope when he was chased out of Rome in 1848. The two men wrote to one another and met several times. Nevertheless, their relationship would experience a chill when, for political reasons, the pope postponed the naming of Eugene de Mazenod as a cardinal.

The fidelity of the Bishop of Marseille would be severely tested with the condemnation of Félicité de Lamennais whose ideas he found interesting. When Lamennais, who had been abandoned by the bishops of France, finally left for Rome to defend himself, he passed through Marseille. Eugene de Mazenod asked him to give some conferences at the seminary and in several churches. He wrote several letters of recommendation for him to different Roman cardinals.

But when the papal condemnation was given, his position was clear and he accepted it: *“My principles are simple: I consider the authority of the head of the Church as my rule.”*

But although Eugene de Mazenod distanced himself from the ideas of Lamennais, he remained faithful to his personal friendship to the very end. He refused to be associated with a letter signed by 50 bishops of France, asking for his excommunication. He even said one day to the historian Henrion: *“I maintain that, in spite of his errors, he has not been able to uproot the faith from his soul.”*

When he learned of his old friend's death, he wept and immediately went to pray for the eternal repose of his soul.

Eugene de Mazenod and the Virgin Mary

Eugene de Mazenod, founder of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, loved the Virgin Mary; that much is evident. Nevertheless, it would be good to once again show how modern he was in this.

First of all, for him, Marian devotion must not

forget its real object. The letter he wrote at the time of the blessing of the new statue of Notre Dame de la Garde is very clear: *“You come to venerate the Mother of God and to pray in front of this new statue. But your trust rises to heaven and does not stop in front of a material image*

that in itself has no power. It is not the image that intercedes for you. It is the Holy Virgin herself who will obtain for you the help whose origin and goal is God."

In no way should Mary take the place of Christ. She is a creature and not the Creator.

She leads us to Christ who is the final object of all worship. During his parish visits, he severely reprimanded any abuse he noticed in this regard: *"The pastor was overjoyed to show me the beauty of the Holy Virgin's throne for the month of May, with the statue of Mary placed on the altar where the Eucharist is kept. I do not believe we can tolerate that. Little by little, the external worship given to the Holy Virgin becomes greater than*

that given to our Lord... I am shocked by this incongruity and it should not continue."

His very Christocentric spirituality, tied to his discovery of the Cross of Christ, shows us that in this regard too, he took the position of Vatican Council II which placed the text on Mary within the Constitution on the Church. That was evident during his participation at the proclamation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception at Rome in November and December, 1854. For him, this was not a Marian dogma but Christological and that was why it was important to proclaim it: *"In proclaiming the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary, it is the consequence of the salvation by the Cross of Christ that they are proclaiming and of which Mary was the first to benefit."*

Conclusion

What bishop would not agree with these words that summarize his episcopal agenda? *"I would like to be a good bishop. I would like, from the very beginning of my episcopacy, to do my duties properly. In a word, I would like to work effectively for the sanctification of my sheep, to sanctify myself to a high degree of perfection as is required by the loftiness of my character and its eminent dignity."*

His program can be summed up in these words: *"To be a bishop: it means doing the work of an evangelist!"*

But he believed that this program must also be that of all the baptized who were his co-workers and he used the language of the Fathers of the Church to tell them that: *"We call upon all of you, our very dear brethren, to cooperate in the divine work that has been given us. If you help us, as we hope ... you will be the source of edification for your brethren who will walk in your footsteps; you will be a source of consolation for your father in Jesus Christ who asks for nothing other than your happiness in the love of God who will bless you."*

Bernard DULLIER, omi - Lyon - 21 November 2007

OMI DOCUMENTATION is an unofficial publication
of the General Administration of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate
C.P. 9061, 00100 ROMA-AURELIO, Italy
Fax: (39) 06 39 37 53 22 E-mail : information@omigen.org