1804

To his father, in Palermo[[1]](#footnote-1).

3:XIV in Oblate Writings

He finds everything at Aix repellent. Loneliness.

Mazenod C.A. de

Aix,

March 9,1804

I am ashamed to have let such a long time go by without writing to the Princess of Vintimille[[2]](#footnote-2), but I am becoming lazy beyond words; I find everything repellent, except for writing you. I could stay at this forever, in my imagination present with you and my dear uncles. I often go on walks alone[[3]](#footnote-3) and pretend to myself, and could almost believe, I am chatting with you, as you are the ones I hold my conversations with. I am becoming misanthropic, and can say in all truth that nothing gives me any pleasure. I have a heavy case of aversion to this part of the world, but my reaction is quite the opposite of what I see in others; they are always complaining about a lack of manners, while they have no mind to be polite themselves; of a lack of friendliness, and of egoism, while they have no love for anyone except themselves; of gossip-mongering, while they have no idea how to pass their time except by having their noses in other people’s business. In front of other people I simply say that it is the same everywhere, but what I am thinking and saying to myself is that I will never be able to get used to this place. Perhaps if you were here, I would manage it in the end.

To his father in Palermo.[[4]](#footnote-4)

4:XIV in Oblate Writings

Eugene’s interest in the Church at Aix. Holy Thursday devotions.

Mazenod C.A. de

Aix,

March 29, 1804

I have received the document I asked for from Fortuné; please give him my thanks. He was in my thoughts this morning at Mass when I saw the enormous Florens[[5]](#footnote-5) call out the oil of catechumens; this was in his capacity as head of the Chapter, *dignior,* that he was responsible for policing the rite. Father Martins,[[6]](#footnote-6) former provost of Marseilles, was assisting the Archbishop[[7]](#footnote-7). We are going to set up a seminary; we have summoned M. Roux, a man of worth, from Avignon, to be its director[[8]](#footnote-8). I would not know if there are many postulants, although this is the only seminary serving ourselves and our suffragans. On Saturday we will ordain a priest and a deacon; some 45 or 50 have died during the year. I do not know if I told you that Father Tertian is on the list of the dead; the day before yesterday we buried an honorary canon called Lieutand.[[9]](#footnote-9) After Easter I am going to the Carmelites[[10]](#footnote-10) with news of Fortuné. I am sure of a good reception. *Salutem ex inimicis nostris,* etc., were Father Pin’s words to me when I told him the news about his Society[[11]](#footnote-11)…

I will be the only one writing to you today; at this very moment I am alone *in casa,* as my sister, who makes everyone jump, made them all go out *subito dopo pranzo*[[12]](#footnote-12) to go and visit some churches before the service. As for me, night-bird that I am, I will be quite happy to do them after *tenebrae*, and I have come and shut myself up to finish off the letter I began this morning before Mass. From my room I am following the noisy and glittering parade with you, for I remember how the whole of Palermo is out on the streets at this time; and when Palermo is on the move, it makes a bit more stir than we do. Ah well, it is just one of my little pleasures, to imagine that at the moment I am talking with you, I can be sure that you are doing such-and-such a thing; I carry the illusion to the point of believing I am by your side. Fortuné, I say to myself, is perhaps staying at home, let us go and keep him company. However, the moment has come to bring the illusion to an end; I have run out of space for writing, and with deep regret I put my pen away. So now I am going straight away to the Church to ask God in my prayers to reunite us soon. In expectation of that longed-for day, affectionate greetings to everybody.

To his father, in Palermo.[[13]](#footnote-13)

5:XIV in Oblate Writings

Some news of the Carmelites, the Sisters of St. Thomas de Villeneuve and clergy dress. Boredom. Plans for the future.

Mazenod C.A. de

Aix,

April 12, 1804

I have passed on to Mother Julien[[14]](#footnote-14) the part of your last-but-one letter that concerns her. She was delighted to be remembered by her dear father[[15]](#footnote-15) and charges me with passing her respects on to you all. The Sisters are 12 in number, soon to become 15. They are happier than words can say. They are perfectly at one and this makes them very happy. To conclude, they lack nothing. Mrs [de] Pinczon[[16]](#footnote-16) also has charged me to remember her to Fortuné; she has gained entrance to the hospital with eleven of her Sisters, all in habit and following the rule of the Hospitallers that is theirs,[[17]](#footnote-17) they are overloaded with work. M. Combe[[18]](#footnote-18) too, parish priest of St. Esprit, charges me to convey to Father all the affectionate regard he still has for him. You see that I am loaded up like a donkey; so I lose no time in discharging my burden. Our priests are all in soutane, petit collet, cincture, sometimes in long cloaks, and usually wearing the clerical hat, which is very striking, *percaire*![[19]](#footnote-19)

I have begun a letter to the Princess of V[intimille] and intend to predate it by two months. I feel very guilty to have let such a long time go by without writing to her, but you cannot imagine my repugnance when I have to write to anybody besides yourself ... *Che sec[c]atura.*[[20]](#footnote-20)In short, I am scandalously lazy. *Questo paese non me conviene*[[21]](#footnote-21)*,* and this is why I am having a repugnance for everything. Sometimes I am three weeks without going out; I only make exception in the case of La Poire.[[22]](#footnote-22) In general, there is one enormous defect prevalent here, people are distant and very egoistic. *Questo paese non me conviene,* I say it again, and quietly lay my plans to bring about a parting of the ways. Furthermore, it has to be said, this repugnance is also due to the fact that it is not in my character to spend my life planting cabbages. I have the feeling that I am not where I should be, and I get angry when I see the best years of my life draining away in idle obscurity. You can judge yourself if I should be bright and cheerful when you know that these thoughts go round and round in my head whenever I am alone. Goodbye, dear father. I feel a sadness coming on; my letter must be coming to an end; it is always sad to finish. Affectionate greetings to everyone.

To his father, in Palermo.[[23]](#footnote-23)

6:XIV in Oblate Writings

Eugene will get married only when he finds a “very rich and good-natured” bride.

Mazenod C.A. de

Aix,

May 10, 1804

I do not want to pass over the little titbits of advice with which you wind up your letter of the 12th. I have to say that, notwithstanding all the respect I have for you, I could not help laughing. I have to keep repeating them over and over to myself and fix them firmly in my memory: “We urge you to go on fulfilling all your obligations, both towards the [State, and your parents], so that after becoming a good [citizen and a good son], you can one day,”… I was expecting to read “earn eternal life”, but not at all, it goes on you can one day “become a good husband and a good father.” Just like you, my dear father! But are you quite aware that to become a good husband and a good father one must first of all find a suitable wife? The truth is there is not in all Aix a young lady whom I find suitable, and perhaps I am not myself attractive to anyone. Consequently, I shall not get married, and consequently I shall not be a good husband and a good father. This does not mean I do not very much want to have children, but *la moglie*[[24]](#footnote-24)ah! a *moglie* is a fearful thing! On top of that I want her to very rich, *ricchissima e buona,*[[25]](#footnote-25)and someone like that is really hard to find. And so dear father you see the chances are that it will be some time before your dreams come to fruition. Indeed, if they should blossom forth in money, amen to that; one can do what one likes with filthy lucre. I do not know if it is because I hear sermons everyday on how one must be detached from wealth in this world below, but one thing is clear: for some time I have noticed in myself an inordinate desire to have plenty of it. So much for the effect on me of the sermons of women.[[26]](#footnote-26) I would do such fine things with money; you my poor relations would never want for a thing! *Ma perfida sorte,* *tanto favore non me accordasti!*[[27]](#footnote-27)*...*

Extract from a “Miscellaneous” notebook.[[28]](#footnote-28)

7:XIV in Oblate Writings

Meaning of catholicity.

Notebook writing

Aix

May 1804

One of the things that strikes me most in religion is “catholicity”, that communion that exists among children of one same Father who receives on high the intentions they form at the same time in lands so distant and who truly wills to give them in return a merit shared in common.

When I enter a church to place at the feet of the Eternal God my humble supplications, the idea that I am a member of that great family of which God himself is Head, the idea that I am so to speak in that situation the representative of my brothers, that I speak in their name and for them, seems to give my soul an instant expansion, an elevation that it is difficult to express. I feel that the mission I am fulfilling is worthy of my origins; I experience finally a very sweet satisfaction, a profound peace, that gives me the presentiment that my soul, an emanation from the divinity[[29]](#footnote-29), will only be perfectly happy when, freed from worldly hindrances, it can occupy itself solely in the contemplation of its Creator.

On reading the extract of a letter of M. de Chateaubriand, written from Rome, I noticed in it a fervent prayer that he addresses to God in a country chapel dedicated to the Madonna Quintilanea, where he came across a good Christian prostrate before the altar. It is in the same vein as my own thought: “God of the traveller,” he says, “whose will it was that the pilgrim adore you in this humble sanctuary built in the ruins of the palace of some person great in the world, we are but two of the faithful here, prostrate before your solitary altar. Grant to this stranger, who seems so profoundly humble before your Grandeur, all that he is asking of you; grant that this man’s prayers may serve in their turn to heal my weaknesses, so that two Christians who are strangers to one another, whose paths have crossed for but an instant during their lives, and who will go their separate ways never to see one another again here below, may stand astonished on meeting again at the foot of your throne that they are indebted to one another for a part of their happiness through the miracle of charity!”

1. Orig.: Aix, bibliotheque Méjanes, papiers Boisgelin, B.69 In the part of this letter that is omitted, Eugene says he has received from his father the papers needed for his amnesty and that of his brothers but, like his mother, he does not dare to produce them to the authorities for fear of creditors; he goes on to speak of vague marriage prospects for Eugenie. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Eugene mixed with the Vintimille family while he was at Palermo. The Princess, née Leonora Moncada a Branciforti, was the Duchess of Cannizzaro’s sister. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Mr. de Mazenod replied to these reflections on May 3: “... As for you dear friend, I want you to find some distraction, some amusement, to chase away your boredom and misanthropy, to stop taking your walks alone, as this but serves to feed your melancholy. Haven’t you found some likable and decent companion whom you could take as a friend, an agreeable lady whose company would be a distraction? I do hope that you will not be sent this year to twiddle your thumbs at St.L[aurent], or at least that you will not be kept there all alone ...” [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Orig.: Aix, biblio. Méjanes, papiers Boisgelin, B.69. On the first page of this letter Eugene reflects on his father’s letter of February 23, which touched on the Cannizzaro family and what might have survived at Aix of the President’s works and Fortuné de Mazenod’s property. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Jean François Florens, canon and vicar general. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Jacques Martin-Compian, vicar general. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Jerome-Marie Champion de Cicé, Archbishop of Aix, Arles and Embrun from 1802-1810. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. The major seminary was re-established in 1804 and confided to the Sulpicians as before the Revolution, with M. Jean-Baptiste Roux as director. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. François Bremond Lieutaud. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Fortuné had been their chaplain before the Revolution. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Canon Pierre Pin, former Jesuit. The Society, suppressed in 1773, remained in existence in Russia. Some Fathers had now obtained permission to establish themselves in the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies. The President passed on the news in his letter of February 23: “... Since you mention the Jesuits, I can tell you that their General, who has his residence at St. Petersburg, is at this moment in Naples, armed with the strongest of letters of recommendation from the Emperor of Russia and according to whose tenor four Jesuit houses will be set up in Naples and one in Palermo ... Whoever would have thought that it would be from far away Moscow that the Jesuits would make their comeback. God turns everything to his purpose, and the ways of his justice like those of his mercy are always impenetrable and marvellous. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Immediately after dinner. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Orig.: Aix, bibl. Méjanes, papiers Boisgelin, B. 69. In the first three pages of this letter Eugene replies to that of his father dated March 15 in which the latter copied several letters from the Cannizzaros. Eugene’s reflections on the Cannizzaros and on the tangled affairs of the de Mazenods in Provence. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Prioress of the Carmelite community at Aix. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Fortuné de Mazenod. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Madame Pauline-Louise de Pinczon du Sel (1752-1820), foundress of the Hospital Sisters of St. Thomas of Villeneuve. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. She established herself at the hospital of Saint-Jacques in 1802: cf. Roux-Alpheran, *Les rues d’Aix,* 1848. II. p.487. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. M. Antoine Combe (+1827). [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. A Languedoc expression of pity or endearment. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Italian: “what a bore”. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Italian: “this is no place for me.” [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. La Poire: surname of the Marquis Boniface de Périer, childhood friend of President de Mazenod. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Orig.: Aix. bibl. Méjanes, papiers Boisgelins. B.69. Reply to his father’s letters dated April 5 and 12. The first two pages were Eugene’s reflections on Fortuné’s illness and the financial affairs of the de Mazenods at Aix. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Italian: “wife”. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Italian: “very rich and good-natured”. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. His mother, aunt and grandmother. As to them President de Mazenod replied on June 14: “Your desire to be not so poor as in fact you are is very natural, especially in view of your former expectation of wealth. It has my approval all the more as I know that your every wish is governed by submission to the law, wisdom and moderation. It comes as no surprise to me that the sermons of certain lady doctors who preach to you incessantly on detachment from the goods of this world have so little effect; for they do not practise what they preach. One never cuts a very good figure when one is reduced to saying: do as I say, not as I do. But as I am in the same situation in many areas where my thinking has been better than my actions, I accept my neighbour’s weaknesses, and in an effort to conciliate all views, my advice to you is: be satisfied with the little you have, but do not give up the quite justifiable ambition to obtain the increase you can aspire to on the basis both of your merit and of the trust and justice both of your fellow citizens and of your government. You seem to despair of finding the wife you want, while I keep alive the fond hope that one will turn up who, while bringing you ease and happiness, will be the consolation of my old age. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Italian: “But, O perverse destiny, you have not accorded such favour to me!” [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Orig.: Rome, Postulation Archives, DM II 5a: Miscellanées, pp. 44-45. See also doc. 38. In 1802-1804 Eugene copied or analysed in this “Miscellaneous” notebook, the literary articles that J.-F. Geoffrey published weekly in the *Journal des Débats* (Rey I, p.68). At page 44 is found the text published here, entitled: “Le Sage dans la solitude” by Canon Pey, May 1804. The text is followed on page 45 with a citation of Chateaubriand. The first part of this text seems to be Eugene’s own work, it is loaded with ideas, in his usual style, and the confidence has a personal character.

    Eugene wrote about the communion of saints on many occasions between 1804 and leaving the seminary, cf. E. Lamirande. *E, de Mazenod, catéchiste* ... in *Etudes Oblates,* 16 (1957), pp. 20-36, especially p.29. This present text, one may say, itself bears the hallmarks of that selfsame grace and personal encounter with supernatural realities: a “sweet” satisfaction and “profound peace”. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. One must understand the word “emanation” here in a broad sense. Eugene uses the same expression in a letter to his father dated September 15, 1806. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)