1808

24. Prayers [[1]](#footnote-1)

24:XIV in Oblate Writings

a) On rising in the morning; b) while dressing; c) for a perfect conversion; d) against relapsing into sin; e) interior acts; f) for a watchful spirit; g) important truths for living well in the world; h) to offer his sleep to God; i) on going to bed.

Prayers

?

[1808; 1812; 1816][[2]](#footnote-2)

**a) On rising in the morning.**

*Nox praecessit, dies appropinquavit. Abjiciamus opera tenebrarum* (Rm 13, 12)

Open, my God, my heart to your love as my eyes open to the daylight; it is by your grace that I begin this day, do not let me to spend it in empty amusements. Alas! the time you give me cost the blood of your Son, would I be so wretched as not to consecrate it entirely to your service? *Mane astabo tibi, mane exaudies vocem meam* (Ps *5,* 5).

**b) While dressing**.

*Induimini Dominum Nostrum Jesum Christum* (Rm 13, 14).

May these clothes truly serve to keep me mindful, my God, of my lost innocence ... Will what should be source of shame for me be one of pride and vanity?

**c) For a perfect conversion**.

How still imperfect, my God, is my conversion; the root of sin lives on in me; the thoughts and memory of the world are still powerfully at work; the things I have renounced retain their hold on my imagination, and reawaken baleful images. My heart, still weak, is quite disturbed by it, and in the midst of this disturbance it feels all its passions coming back to life; it takes but little for it to be ensnared. Is this what it is to be perfectly God’s? My inconstancy in the little good I do, my God, is no less humiliating for me; full of good desires, I am often satisfied with their formulation, almost all my zeal is used up in the making of plans; I fluctuate between yielding to grace and to my own desires, while time flows by, I journey swiftly towards eternity, and I am always the same. Shall I all my life be the plaything of the enemy of my salvation? Make firm, my God, my inconstancy, wholly change my heart; inspire within me, for my salvation, the same zeal I showed for my damnation. *Sicut enim exhibuistis membra vestra serere* ... *iniquitati* ... *ita nunc exhibete* ... *servire justitiae* (Rm 6, 19).

**d) Against relapsing into sin**.

Have I come back to you, my God, only to burden myself with the greater crime of falling back into sin? In all conscience, is my ingratitude to match the greatness of your love? Am I to meet all your bounty with but a new tissue of sins? My God, shorten the course of my life, rather than permit the demon to re-enter my heart.

Can I hide from myself how awful such a state would be, my God, after what you have yourself made known to us in the Gospel? A sinner who is still unconverted is in the power of but a single demon, but a sinner who relapses lets a legion of impure spirits into his soul.

Even so, my God, I feel within myself a fatal flaw, which while alerting me to my weakness, gives me too every reason to be afraid; I feel that I am carrying in a fragile vessel the treasure of the grace with which you have enriched me; in view of this danger, how can I not be afraid? I turn to you, my God, God of goodness, Father of mercy, remove far from me every evil occasion which has in times past been so fatal; give me the strength to sacrifice to you everything that might bring my passions back to life, close my eyes to all the vanities of the world, make me insensible to those of which I will be an involuntary witness; protect my heart from all the wicked impressions it may receive from the different objects which surround it, in a word, inspire me with indifference, distaste, hatred even, if needs be, for all that could claim a share in a heart that should be wholly yours. Alas, I have come so late to serve you, I have waited almost until the last hour: at least, my God, let nothing in the world have power any more to separate me from you, or deflect me from your service. *Neque mors, neque vita, neque* ... *nulla creatura* ... *potent nos separare a caritate Dei* (Rm 8, 39).

**e) Interior acts**.

1. I believe, my God, strengthen my faith; I hope, affirm my hope, I love you, redouble my love; I detest my sins, increase my repentance.

2. Guide me in my actions by your wisdom; effect the conversion of my heart by your goodness, sustain me in the hour of temptations by the power of your grace.

3. Make me, my God, attentive in my prayers, sober in my meals, exact in my duties.

4. Make me to walk ever in your presence, it is you, my God, who direct my steps; may I never lose sight of you, and if you are always present with me, my God, how can I offend you?

5*.* Convince me thoroughly of the nothingness of creatures, the shortness of time, the length of eternity; by this means, I shall prepare myself for death, fear your judgments; I shall avoid hell, win heaven. Amen!

**f) A beautiful prayer to obtain the spirit of watchfulness**.

A bitter experience has taught me all too well, my God, that dissipation has been for me a source of sin: how many times, led on by this dissipation, have I lost sight of you, my God? How many times have I forgotten my most essential duties; and allowed myself to be lured by the love of creatures; today by the prior intervention of your grace, at a time when I was most unworthy of it, I have come back to you, my God; at last I have left the path of iniquity, to enter in the way of justice; what happiness for me! What good reason for thanksgiving!

But I cannot hide the fact, my God; I am ever the sinner; my passions, ever alive or at least ever ready to rear their heads, forever urge me against my duties, and my still sluggish heart pays them heed. Should the same occasions present themselves, I feel a sense of danger; they may induce me to abandon your service.

Even so on the pretext of a necessary break, I yield too much to my senses, pleasure and dissipation; I allow myself to be led too much by my vivacity; I do not take adequate precautions against my concupiscence, the impressions of the world, the devil’s wiles, I do not watch enough over myself, over the dangers to which I am exposed. A baneful state for salvation. Open my eyes to the danger, my God; reawaken my zeal, strengthen my faith: terrified by the danger to which I am exposed, sustained by the power of your grace, I will bemoan my condition; I will pray with more ardour; I will redouble my vigilance so as to work efficaciously for my salvation. *Spiritu meo in praecordiis meis de mane vigilabo ad te* (Is. 26,9).

**g) Important truths that must be deepened from time to time if one is to live well.**[[3]](#footnote-3)

1. What precautions have to be observed to save oneself in the world?

2. What does religion have to say on the choice of one’s friends?

3. What characteristics must our faith have if it is to make us just?

4. How dangerous is the dominant passion; how is it to be uprooted?

5. What are the necessary dispositions for assisting at the holy sacrifice of the Mass?

6. Progress that has to be made in virtue: in what does it consist?

7. In what sense is every Christian to live a retired life?

8. What means are there of preserving a sincere piety?

9. Uselessness of human supports, seek them only in Jesus Christ.

10. In what does the lax life consist; to what extent is it criminal and how commonplace is it? *Intellectum da mihi et vivam.*

**Short reflections on these truths**.

1. To save oneself in the world, one must frequent it only by necessity; and when one is obliged to enter it, one must judge according to the rules of faith everything that happens there: in this perspective, how frightful the world is. *Mundus totus in maligno positus est* (I John 1, 19).

2. One must always choose as friends true Christians, and Christianly love these friends in God and for God; one will discover such friends if one has an upright heart. *Amico fideli nulla est comparatio* ... *qui metuunt Dominum invenient illum* (Si 6, 15).

3. One’s faith does not avail for salvation if it be not enlightened, submissive and active, if to the small extent that one sounds out one’s own depths, one feels one’s faith to be defective in one or other of these points. Is this not a hard thought?

*Tu fidem habes* ... *ostende* ... *ex operibus.* (In. 2, 18).

4. The dominant passion is dangerous because of the shadows in which it hides itself, and more dangerous again because of the pretexts it suggests for us to allow it to subsist. To fight it vigorously and relentlessly is the only way to conquer it. *Tolle* ... *unigenitum quem diligis* (Gen. 22,2).

5. One must bring to holy Mass an attention that is full of respect and a redoubled spirit of holiness and sacrifice. We offer ourselves therein with Jesus Christ; could we then fail to enter into these holy dispositions? *In omni loco sacrificatur mihi oblatio munda* (Mal. 1,11)

6. Can one not advance continually in virtue, when one reflects that one is a disciple of Jesus Christ and that one must serve as an example for others? The signs of this progress are an evermore lively faith, a veritable desire never to lose sight of God; a perfect detachment from creatures. *Ascensiones in corde suo disposuit* (Ps. 83, 6).

7. God speaks to us in different ways to reawaken our piety; but we hear his voice only in so far as we take care to enter into ourselves; and we will enter veritably into ourselves only to the extent that we distance ourselves from the world and silence our passions. *Non in commotione Dominus* (I Ch 19, 11).

8. To conserve a true piety, one must: 1) take safeguards against dissipation; 2) reflect on the imperceptible diminution of piety; 3) fear the least falling off; 4) pray often, and prefer public prayer to all other. *Videte, vigilate et orate,* (Mk 13, 33).

9. There are no solid supports except those that go to the heart; no creature furnishes us with anything of the sort. God supplies their lack; but we must turn sincerely to him. *Vana salus hominis, in Deo faciemus vurtutem* (Ps. 107, 13.14).

10. The lax life excludes all virtues and leads to all vices, let us not ask in what it consists. We fall into laxity from the moment we love ourselves too much. Lack of mortification and sensuousness are the principles of this vice; eternal damnation will be its end. *Neque adulteri, neque molles* ... *regnum Deipossidebunt* (I Cor. 6, 9).

**h) To offer God one’s sleep**.

My God, who have consecrated man’s rest by taking rest yourself in the course of your mortal life, I offer you the sleep that I am going to take in honour of your resting; grant that in taking it I do not seek to pander to my laziness, but give way only to necessity, and to your ordering and that by it I may live at all times in your presence, and as it were in your sight. *Sive vigilem us, sive dormiamus, simul cum illo vivamus* (I Th 5, 10).

**i). When one goes to bed**.

I perceive, my God, in the rest I am going to take, the image of the death to which I am condemned; a sad memorial, but one that is really needed to mortify my passions; I accept it, my God, with resignation, this judgment pronounced against my sin; I await sleep with this thought in mind, may it ward away evil from my heart. *Memorare novissima tua et in aeternum non peccabis* (Si 7, 40).

Extract from “Conversation avec un janséniste, sur les convulsions.”[[4]](#footnote-4)

25:XIV in Oblate Writings

Eugene sees no hope of converting his uncle Roze-Joannis; the latter, however, is counting on bringing Eugene over to his views on Jansenism.

Notes on Jansenism

Aix,

February 17, 1808

Yesterday, Tuesday February 16, 1808, I called as I often do on M. Roze-Joannis, a Jansenist, one of the most zealous, a title he holds in honour and gives himself publicly. He is besides my relative, my Breton style uncle, perhaps my friend, at least he lets me think so, and for my part I have a lot of reasons to be quite fond of him.[[5]](#footnote-5)

In our conversations we always get around to talking about some point of dogma or morality, and frequently, I would go so far as to say invariably, he brings the discussion around to Jansenism, for he is as anxious to get on to this as I am keen to avoid it. The explanation is quite simple, for I have accepted that it is impossible ever to bring back a 50 year old man, with a keen and lively imagination, brought up in the Oratory, who entered that Congregation and remained in it for some time, and so inhaled all the poison of the doctrine that these Gentlemen sought to drum into those deemed fit to advance the work, a man who cannot number Christian humility among his qualities and who after publicly displaying those opinions which made him acceptable to the entire sect, will never recant his errors, short of a miracle.

He, on the contrary, sees in me a young man (steady, it is not my intention to draw a self-portrait here), suffice it to say that he attaches sufficient importance to me not to neglect trying to convert me, even were it to take many year’s of hard work, which he would not regard as wasted were he to succeed; his understanding of my character makes him see in a proselyte like me a veritable “conquest”, to use his own term, and there are no lengths he would not go to bring me to a knowledge of the “Truth”; but up to now grace has been “lacking” to me, and while waiting for it to bring me under its sway, my uncle does not despair of my salvation, provided I ask God fervently to enlighten me and listen with as much submission of mind as I show bodily passivity, so as to understand the arguments by which he wishes to destroy the “prejudices” I am imbued with.

I have wanted to know for a long time what to think about the convulsions I have often heard spoken of in different ways; so I gently brought my relative to admit that he was present at one of those events, concerning which, like Soanen, bishop of Senez, he declined to comment. Here is his account which he began only after protesting before God that he would neither add nor subtract anything.

To Miss Eugenie de Mazenod, in Aix.[[6]](#footnote-6)

26:XIV in Oblate Writings

Eugene is going to enter the seminary. Eugenie is asked to help her mother come to accept this decision. His regrets at not being with the family, although he must soon go away for eight months.

Boisgelin Eugenie

St. Julien,

June 21, 1808

... You saw the consecration,[[7]](#footnote-7) no doubt you were also at the Corpus Christi procession; you have the celebrations all to yourself; we poor hermits here see nothing but sky and rocks, and that’s how it should be you’ll say since our conversation should be in heaven, but before leaving earth I would have liked to spend a period of time with you, and circumstances seem to be against this, for I don’t see any possibility of going to Aix until the Emperor has passed by; you understand that I would have to join the troop,[[8]](#footnote-8) as I would have no reason that would dispense me if I were in the neighbourhood. On the other hand because of the harvest you cannot come and spend some time here, as you have to supervise things around Aix, all of this annoys me a little or, to be more precise, a lot.[[9]](#footnote-9)

I don’t dare write yet to mother on the matter I asked uncle to speak to her about, until I know he has done so.[[10]](#footnote-10) Supposing as I presume that she knows about it when you get my letter, I am asking you to play down anything she could construe as being over-harsh in this decision which is neither premature nor precipitate; to begin with remind her we are all bound to submit to the Master’s will and obey his voice, then have her see that we are not talking about separation but only of an absence of eight or nine months; stress this point which is the exact truth and disposes without more ado of the distorted picture one gets when one sees everything from one single viewpoint. I asked uncle not to speak about this matter except to mother and you. I am asking you the same thing; please, not a word about it in the house. When it has been looked at from all angles, and the moment comes, then will be the time to speak. In the meantime let us speak about it only between ourselves and with God. I will say no more on this topic, we will talk at greater length and to better effect face to face.

I learned at Marseilles that Montaigu is marrying Miss de Pierrevost, the same mademoiselle who was presented to me, and whom I saw in a house where she came while I was there. She is not so terribly ugly as they said, but nobody will be tempted to describe her as beautiful. As for ourselves, dear Eugenie, we will play a little harder to get, I think, and in the next two months, God willing, one or two people are going to very disappointed. When I hinted that we didn’t need to be in such a hurry, you ought to have understood why I said it, if you hadn’t forgotten a conversation I had with you nearly six months ago.[[11]](#footnote-11) We will see our boat come peacefully in, and you will always have a ready excuse to play for time by saying you don’t feel you can decide anything without speaking with me. You have no idea how happy it makes me when I think that, by doing what is God’s will in my regard, I am bringing about a big change in your own position.[[12]](#footnote-12)

Goodbye, dear sister, with all my love and affection, and please pray for me.

Eugene

To Madame de Mazenod, in Aix.[[13]](#footnote-13)

27:XIV in Oblate Writings

Reasons for his decision to enter the seminary. Eugene will always stay in Provence and be more united with his mother than if he were married.

Mazenod Madame de

St. Julien,

June 29, 1808

Darling mamma, before I shared with you the designs the Lord’s mercy has for me, I wanted to ask my uncle to broach the subject with you, to help you to see the thing in its true light and so as not to upset you unintentionally, as I know how tender your heart is. However many pains one may take to explain something in a letter, it is difficult to foresee every objection or even the different perceptions people have. That is why I asked my uncle, a man worthy of appreciating God’s ways, to communicate to you the Master’s designs we are all bound to obey on pain of damnation, to answer any objections you might make, in short, through telling you my reasons, to get your approval for a project that certainly comes from God, as it has passed all the tests required of any inspiration that seems unusual, and it has been sanctioned by all the persons who hold his place in my regard. It remains, my dear, darling mother, for me now to reassure you about the thing that might seem hardest to bear from a natural point of view. God is not demanding here sacrifices beyond our strength. There aren’t going to be any heartrending partings, departures without coming back. As the Lord is my witness, what he wants of me is that I renounce a world where it is almost impossible to find salvation, such is the power of apostasy there; that I devote myself especially to his service and try to reawaken the faith that is becoming extinct amongst the poor; in a word, that I make myself available to carry out any orders he may wish to give me for his glory and the salvation of souls he has redeemed by his precious blood. You can see from what I say, dear mother, that all these things can be done in our own countryside, and that, far from renouncing my family, I mean to remain even more attached to it than if, staying in the world, I established myself in it, took a wife, set up my own home, and had children, all things which, far from knitting together the bonds that bind us, are capable of weakening them; at least it is clear that all these new bonds of affection, which would be of the same order as that I have for you, that is to say equally commanded by nature, could not but take away from the love I wish to keep for you alone.

I do not believe that it means a lot to you to see my name perpetuated in this vale of tears. This vanity did once steal its way into my heart and would have led to my losing all the graces the Lord was reserving for me. Now I do not see, and no doubt you are the same, any other necessity than to see our names written in the book of life.

So what does it amount to, and what is left for us to offer the Lord? A few months’ absence. This means enduring, for the sake of our good God and conforming ourselves to his holy will, the same pain that a thousand forever recurring circumstances compel us to endure every year without any benefit to our souls.[[14]](#footnote-14)

I will not discuss this matter any more with you for the present, we will talk at greater length when I am in Aix. I intend to go when Emile gets here. Then we will all come together in August so as to leave our darling mother as little as possible by herself. In the meantime let us all ask the Lord to deign to disclose to her the full extent of the submission we owe to his sovereign but always paternal decrees...[[15]](#footnote-15)

Resolutions taken during the retreat made on entering the seminary early in October 1808[[16]](#footnote-16)

28:XIV in Oblate Writings

Eugene is unworthy to live among the saints who live in the seminary. Sorrow for his sins, but confidence in God’s mercy, and gratitude. Resolutions: nothing against God, faithfulness in small things, obedience, regularity, fraternal charity, respect for priests, humility, penances and mortifications, struggle to overcome his temperament and self love, poverty and simplicity.

Retreat notes

Paris,

Between October 12 and 19, 1808[[17]](#footnote-17)

I cannot pretend that I am other than unworthy, and every much unworthy, of living among the saints who form this truly heavenly house; I must abase myself profoundly in view of iniquities which should have closed to me for ever entrance into the sanctuary. My sins must be always before me so as never to forget I am last of all in the eyes of the just God who allots each his place with no regard for our breeding, which too comes from his hands, or to the upbringing we may have had. So I must politely and joyfully put up with the little vulgarities, lack of respect, etc., that I may experience, reflecting that the soul of the person upsetting me is infinitely more precious and beautiful in God’s eyes than is my own, and that if we could only see me as I really am, however great their charity, they would not be able to endure me.

But it is not enough to keep my sins before me, morning, noon, and night, this would be a sterile exercise if not accompanied by a sincere, constant, and deep sorrow over having been capable of such frightful ingratitude towards a God, a Father, a Saviour, who has furnished me with so many gifts from my tenderest childhood; yes, I will say to my God, I will indeed go over in my mind all my life’s excesses, but this will be in the bitterness of my heart, with eyes wet with tears, a soul racked with grief*, recogitabo omnes annos meos in amaritudine animae meae* [Is. 38, 15]*.*

Even so these sentiments, just though they are, must not wholly fill my heart, fear of the dreadful judgments of a just God must not so fill it that the trust I must have in his mercy cannot find entrance. Ah Lord, what would become of me, if I dared not approach your adorable heart to consume in the midst of the flames of your love all that must pass through that furnace if it is not to be fuel for the accursed fires of hell. No, no, my sorrow will not be like that of the traitor Judas; after acknowledging I have betrayed, sold, abandoned, crucified the Just One, I will not become my own enemy and flee his holy and blessed presence, I will run to him, I will throw myself at his feet, confess my ingratitude, and he will pardon me: *Dixi: Confiteor adversum me injustitiam meam Domino, et tu remisisti impietatem peccati mei* [Ps. 31,5]. This God of mercy came among us only to call sinners, it is to them he addresses his gentlest words, he pursues them, holds them to his heart, carries them on his shoulders. Ah Lord, I do not ask for that, I will count myself very lucky if you enable me to follow in your footsteps, but above all forgive me, deliver me from the unnumbered host of enemies who are ever set on my downfall, strengthen me at least against their onslaughts, I place my trust in you alone, Lord, hear my prayer *quoniam in te Domine speravi, tu exaudies me Domine Deus meus* [Ps. 37, 16].

The soul is great, it can embrace an abundance of objects, it can be moved simultaneously by a diversity of feelings. And so without gainsaying the feelings of sorrow, and at the same time of utter trust in God’s mercy, it must also be employed in the thanksgiving it owes to this good Father for the signal favours he has generously wished to grant it. It must bless him every moment of the day for having generously willed to cast a merciful glance upon it, one of his powerful glances that do such great things; it must offer itself every day as a holocaust to thank him for snatching him from the hands of the devil, from the jaws of hell, it must be melted, emptied, at the thought that not only has this excellent, rich, generous Master displayed his power on it behalf to withdraw it from vice, but he has willed to choose for it a home, to call it to a state which, in bringing it close to J.C., places it in the happy necessity of centring its thoughts solely on this divine Saviour, of serving him with more ardour, loving him without cease, and all the while he brings us to him in the society of the saints, who are willing to abase themselves so far as to call me their brother.

Still it is not sufficient to give thanks for God’s gifts, and be filled with his bounty, I must also dispose myself dutifully to preserve grace, and try by my faithfulness to merit new favours.

These then are the resolutions I take, and will keep, with the help of God.

There is no question of speaking here of what is against God’s law, the mere fact of crossing the threshold of the seminary is a proof of the resolution made never to commit a mortal sin and of one’s horror at anything that might wound in its essence the divine majesty. “Nothing against God” is the wholly indispensable watchword of every Christian however feeble his fervour; a man aspiring to the clerical state must go infinitely further. Horror then, the greatest horror before anything that might be an offence to God in his goodness. But more, I must tie myself down to the most scrupulous fidelity in even the smallest things.

Absolute devotedness to the orders of the superiors, perfect submission to their least command, however puerile it seems to someone who has lived to be 26 in the fullest independence, even as regards piety.

Scrupulous obedience to the rule, even though I may seem over-meticulous in the eyes of my confreres.

A friendly, generous charity towards all my brothers, respect for all superiors, trust in many of them. I will be more self-critical and try to imitate the most fervent, meticulous, interior amongst my confreres. I will show a special respect, at least in my mind, towards those who are already enabled with the priesthood, and in general I will hold this sublime character in the deepest respect, making an interior act of humility whenever I meet a priest, that is, acknowledging and confessing humbly before God that I am unworthy of ever being clothed with a character so awesome at least to a man who has had the misfortune to live for so long in forgetfulness of God.

Humility, above all humility, must be the foundation of the building of my salvation. I will look upon myself as the least in the seminary, and I will often tell myself that this is no game but on the contrary there is an enormous distance between my brothers and myself, since in effect it is impossible that any of them should have so many faults to reproach himself with as I do, and that of them all I am the one who does the least penance although I have the most need of it.

Could I ever have any doubt about my very great need of penance! It is my fond hope (and this is the source of my strength) that O.L.J.C. has restored me to his good graces by ratifying the sentence of absolution given me when contrite and humbled I confessed the sins of my whole life, but I know full well that this very fact of absolution from guilt leaves me to expiate and cancel out the punishment, and must I not be fully convinced that in the light of the enormity and number of my faults, this expiation must be the business and occupation of my whole life.

But what form shall my penance take? It would no doubt be a fine thing to imitate those happy and holy saints who lacerated their flesh in proportion to the indulgence they had shown it. As guilty, even guiltier than they, after imitating and even outdoing them in their sins, it would be desirable for me to follow their example as to the means they took to appease God’s wrath and satisfy his justice.

But this is where all my cowardice stands revealed: this body, unworthy tool of sin, this body which has so often drawn my soul into excesses which turned it into God’s irreconcilable enemy, this body, secretly groaning under the empire that the soul has re-imposed on it by God’s powerful grace, indignantly refuses to become itself the instrument of its own punishment.

Quite the opposite, it does all it can to sever the saving yoke holding it in a submission which will be to its benefit on the great day of the resurrection; in alliance with the evil spirit, together they seem to have conspired my damnation. They stop at nothing to injure me, they leave no stone unturned in their effort to make me fall again. The means I use to go to God are often the very weapons they use to fight me with, the society of saints, the temple of the Most High, spiritual reading, prayer, nothing is sacred to them, everything serves as a battle ground, in a word, it is one continual assault. One must fight from dawn to dusk.

Where the evil is so great, one must of necessity use some remedy, and since I am still too cowardly to dare to strike this vile heap of dust, it will be necessary to find some other way to punish it, in default of the discipline it refuses. This then is what I propose in the expectation that a longer stay in the seminary will show me some new way of mortifying myself.

In the morning, as soon as the cleric authorized to get me up has left my room I will leap from my bed, and not begin the day with an act of laziness, hugging the blankets (to coin a phrase).

During prayer I will stay kneeling down for the two 15 minute periods, however uncomfortable it is; if I need to sit down, I will allow myself this indulgence only when the others are standing.[[18]](#footnote-18)

At dinner I will never allow myself to have a second helping from the same course, even if the portions are very small, in which case, which does not happen often, I will fill up with an extra piece of bread.[[19]](#footnote-19)

As Friday is a fast day for me, I will miss breakfast completely, but as the house regulation forbids me to absent myself from supper, and against my normal practice, I will have to eat something in the evening, I will cut back on something at dinner so that my body feels the punishment inflicted on it.

Light as these penances are, they will do for now; but to follow the advice of St. Francis de Sales who says somewhere that one must overemphasize the punishment of the body, a poor donkey which does not bear all the blame, I will try above all to mortify my spirit, to stifle the disorderly desires of my heart, bring this will of mine into submission; I will do all I can to overcome my temperament, to this end I will make use of every occasion that presents itself, and they will surely not be lacking. I will not forget, that being proud through and through, my sole concern will be to subdue it. So I will give thanks to God that, while during my sojourn in this world I was accustomed to win approval, and was pampered, feted, and respected by all around me, I will give thanks to God, I say, for finding myself here one of a crowd of people who, more virtuous than I, will attract all the attention, or even if they do not attract more notice than I, I will rejoice in this equality that leaves me myself in the shadows.

Independent until my entrance into this holy house, it is inevitable that I will find submission and obedience hard, especially in the matter of choice and of study methods; and so I will try to make a virtue of all these sources of opposition, I will rejoice especially because, enjoying in the world a reputation for intelligence and education, I am going to forfeit this advantage here in applying myself to the studies which will I hope be very fruitful for me, but in which it will be impossible for me to shine, or I may even seem to be weaker than those who are in reality of a lower level than I, with my little or no practise in speaking Latin and never having been constrained to the scholastic method in my studies, and being too old to be able to hope to learn new tricks. This humiliating situation will be very good for me because self-love is not the most mortified part of me. To counteract more and more this self-love, I will not let slip any opportunity to bring it to heel, even indirectly.

And so it is not enough for me to congratulate myself on having disclosed myself to my director for the person I am, and indeed as I used to be which was a great victory that God’s grace gave me (and which my self-love resisted, with many a specious argument) but I must too be disposed to share everything, even the most humiliating things, if my director judges it, I do not say necessary, but even merely useful.

Finally, to punish myself for the creature comforts I overindulged in in the world, and the kind of fondness I had for certain vanities, I shall observe poverty in my cell, and live simply outside it. I will do without a fire so far as I can without excessive discomfort, I will see to my own needs, sweep my room, etc.

In a word, not having, unfortunately for me, imitated St. Aloysius Gonzaga (whom I took as my personal patron from the moment I decided to enter the clerical state), not having imitated him, I say, in his innocence, being too cowardly to imitate him in his severe penance, I will endeavour at least to come as close as I can to his spirit of mortification and abnegation, begging him to be so kind as to intercede for me with O.L. so that, together with the most holy Virgin to whom I dedicate myself in a special way, they may obtain for their poor servant the gift of true penance, a great love of God, an unfailing horror of sin, a holy vocation and perseverance in the good intentions the Lord has been so kind as to inspire me with. Amen, amen, amen.

For Grandmother[[20]](#footnote-20)

29:XIV in Oblate Writings

The seminary is a place of paradise; Eugene’s experience is one of holy and almost continual joy, but he does not forget his family for a single moment. End of the retreat. Meaning of the Feast of the Interior Life of the Holy Virgin. The retreat regulation.

Joannis Catherine

Seminary of St. Sulpice,

October 18, 1808.

If you were in Paris, dear good mother, along with the chosen one of the family, I would be the happiest of men. What a life we have here! The days simply fly by, yet despite their shortness they are full in the eyes of the Lord. Here everything brings us to him, there is not a single moment of the day that is not his. The least thing we do has its value as everything is done with an eye to the obedience we owe him. In a word, the seminary, when one enters into it in the spirit that everyone who is called to the clerical state ought to have, is a veritable paradise on earth. Truly I would savour all its delights, and I would be much too happy, if the thought did not keep coming back to me of the distance that separates me from the people so tenderly dear to my heart, and mingle some bitterness with his holy and almost continual joy that I experience. You must not believe that for some reason I chase away the thought. On the contrary, as this sacrifice of my heart’s feelings is all I have to offer the Lord, all others being as nothing, I enjoy following you in your different occupations. I often accompany them with my little prayer. For example, we are at Holy Mass at the moment you are getting out of bed. Now do you really think for one moment that your child does not ask J.C., who was during his blessed life the most excellent of sons, that your day and entire life may be filled with blessings and graces? And when I have the happiness to receive this God of love, which is very often in this holy house, are you really ready to believe that when I give myself wholly to him to receive him wholly in return, I do not include you too in my offering, so you can have a share in my bargain?

In this way I am continually present with my good mothers. And so that you can follow me too and get a taste in this practice of the consolation I experience myself, I will make sure to send you our daily timetable, when I find out what it is. Up to now I can only speak of the life we are leading during the retreat, which is now unfortunately coming to an end. We are finishing tomorrow with a feast which fills the seminary with its fragrance and is proper to it, it is the feast of the Interior Life of the Holy Virgin, that is to say of all the virtues and the greatest marvels of the Omnipotent. What a lovely feast! And how fully I am going to celebrate with the most holy Virgin all the great things God did in her! Oh, what an advocate at God’s side! Let us be dedicated to her; she is the glory of your sex. We profess that we wish to approach her son only through her, and we look to receive everything from her holy intercession.

But you will be annoyed if I do not tell you about my health. It is excellent; and from day one I have settled into the seminary as if I had spent my whole life here. I find it impossible to eat the quantity that is given us, especially at evening time. The portions are huge, so much so that I have never had to go asking for second helpings.

This is how our timetable goes during the retreat. We get up at 5 o’clock, at 5:30, prayer until 6:30; we kneel for a quarter of an hour and stand for a quarter of an hour in alternation, whoever wants to sit may do so. At 6:30 we go down to Mass. At 7, we go back to our rooms, if one has received Holy Communion one may hear, if one wishes, a second Mass. At 8 o’clock, breakfast. At 8:15, the Little Office of the Holy Virgin. In one’s room or in church until 9:15, where one goes to an informal sermon called a talk; after the talk, a quarter of an hour’s meditation on it. Then back to one’s room until 11:45. One emerges to go and make particular examen in common, which is preceded by a reading of two chapters from the New Testament, on one’s knees; each day chapters of the Old and New Testaments are set to be read in one’s room. At the angelus, we go down to the refectory, where we get a fine soup, a main course with plenty of meat, an excellent piece of boiled beef, and dessert; during the meal a chapter is read from the Old Testament, some pious book, and the martyrology. After dinner, recreation until 1:45. Vespers and compline of the Holy Virgin. Back to one’s room. At 3:15, a talk as in the morning, and a quarter of an hour’s meditation on it. Matins and Lauds of the Holy Virgin. (Those who are in orders say the Main Office at the same time we say the Little Office, in another room). After the Office, visit to the Blessed Sacrament (voluntary). We go back to our rooms until 6:00, when one goes to one of the lecture halls to say the rosary. After the rosary, a half an hour of spiritual reading, read aloud by one of ourselves; after the reading, some reflections from the first director, who is incidentally my confessor and, as well as that, a saint of the first class.[[21]](#footnote-21) When the bell goes for supper, he stops, to our regret. At 7 we go on to the refectory, where, while we consume a fine main course of vegetables or herbs, and an enormous meat portion (the first portion is enough for me; I have no appetite left for meat), and dessert, a chapter is read from the New Testament and some other book. After supper, recreation until the bell goes for prayers. After prayers, a few minutes to say goodnight to the good Master. At 9:00 one must be in bed. If you find these details interesting, I have not wasted my time; in any case I have enjoyed having this chat with you, good mother as you are. With my affectionate greetings.

Eugene’s Self-Portrait, for M. Duclaux.[[22]](#footnote-22)

30:XIV in Oblate Writings

Character: lively and impetuous, but generous and just, often overly so; severity; hatred of jealousy; frankness. Childhood tendencies. A feeling heart, adores his family, grateful. Has never had a real friend.

Self portrait for M. Duclaux

Saint Sulpice

October 1808[[23]](#footnote-23)

You will get a better idea of my interior life from the few lines I am penning than from any amount of talk.

I am a lively and impetuous type of character. When I want something I want it very badly, I am impatient of the least hold up and I find delays unbearable. Firm in my resolutions, I chafe against anything that gets in the way of carrying them out, and I would not let anything stand in my way to overcome even the most difficult obstacle. Obstinate in my desires and feelings, I rebel at the mere hint of opposition; if it persists and unless I am really sure that I am being opposed for a higher good, I become heated and then I find within myself new and hitherto unknown resources, I mean I acquire all of a sudden a remarkable fluency in the expression of my ideas which come all in a rush, although in my normal state I often have to dig for them, and express them but slowly. I experience the same facility when I am deeply moved by anything and really want others to share my feelings.

In sharp contrast to that, if instead of standing in my way someone gives way to me, I am completely disarmed and if I see that some embarrassment results for someone who held an unreasonable position against me, far from feeling triumphant, I do not rub it in by pressing home my arguments, I go out of my way rather to make excuses for him.

In either case, if I let slip some ungracious word, I am as upset as if I had committed a felony.

From this you can see that my character is generous, even just, but *often excessively so,* for I am naturally inclined to humble anyone who is too forward, and there is nothing I would not do to extol the merits of someone who is humble.

If I am in the wrong and someone tells me off with a superior or triumphalistic kind of attitude, I will not accept it, and come up with reasons, albeit specious, to cover up my mistake.

But if I am corrected by someone with an air and attitude of goodwill and friendship, I will not say a single word in my defence, and I will frankly acknowledge that I could have done better, been more thoughtful or expressed myself better.

By nature I am inclined to severity, quite determined never to allow myself the least self-indulgence, but at the same time strongly inclined not to suffer it in others too. I cannot accept the least compromise in anything to do with duty. Death, and I mean this literally, death should seem preferable to me to transgressing an important duty.

I hate jealousy and regard it as a vice unworthy of a generous heart. And so I am pleased when others show excellence, even outstanding excellence. If they shine in some field that is new to me, I try to push myself to imitate them. If I can see beforehand that it would be futile to make the effort, I am angry with myself for having wasted my time when I was young and because I am stupidly limited to certain kinds of knowledge only.

I have always been exceptionally frank, and this makes me steer clear of using any kind of flattering compliments that would in any way at all call my sincerity into question. Out in the world, people got used to accepting me as I am[[24]](#footnote-24).

My experience has given me confidence that my judgment is rarely wide off the mark, and I have to be very careful not to speak my mind when there is no need.[[25]](#footnote-25)

I have never been able to content myself with explaining the actions of others on the basis of their apparent intention. Experience has convinced me that a sure way to make mistakes is to presume good intentions in the case of someone whose actions are bad; I prefer to suspend judgment, i.e., not to act on conclusions my mind wishes to draw from appearances. It has been noted from the time I was a child that I easily picked up various nuances that are usually overlooked by people without powers of observation, and it is with the help of these almost unconscious observations that I manage to avoid deception about character, tastes, dispositions, sincerity of the people I live with.

Nature is best observed during infancy when it is evolving artlessly. Thus the absolute, resolute and wilful calibre of my character is deducible from the following traits. When I wanted something, I did not beg or wheedle or cajole. I called for what I wanted in an imperious tone as if I had a right to it. If I was refused I would not cry. Crying was as rare with me as laughter, but I acted up, and tried to take by force what was not given me by consent.

When I was four one of my uncles brought me to the theatre. I was annoyed at the din they were making down below. I am told that standing on tiptoe to find out where the noise was coming from, I sharply addressed the whole audience down below with these words spoken in a tone that brought an explosion of laughter from all in the box: “tout are se descendi”! If I have to come down there!

Nothing was ever to be got out of me by chastisement, you had either to play up to my self love or get through to my heart.

It is hard to understand, given the portrait of myself I have just painted, how sensitive a heart I have, overly so in fact. It would take too long to give you all the stories of my childhood traits I have had related to me and which are really rather surprising. It was quite normal for me to give away my breakfast even when I was hungry to satisfy the hunger of the poor, I used to bring firewood to people who complained of the cold and of not being able to afford to buy it, on one occasion I went as far as to give away the clothes off my back to clothe a poor person, and many, many other stories in the same vein.

When I had offended someone, even if it was a servant, I never had a moment’s peace until I had been able to make reparation for what I had done, with some gifts, or gesture of friendship, or even a hug for the one who had reason to complain about me.

I have not changed over the years. I idolize my family. I would let myself be cut up into little pieces for some members of my family, and that stretches out to quite a long way for I would give my life without hesitation for my father, mother, grandmother, my sister and my father’s two brothers. Generally speaking I love with passion everybody I believe loves me, but theirs must be a passionate love too. So gratitude is the final constituent that goes to make up my heart’s passion.

This feeling is so intense in me that it has never wavered. I have always longed for a friend, but I have never found one, at least one such as I am seeking; it is true that I am hard to please for as it is my nature to give generously I expect the same in return.

Even so I do not spurn some friendships of an ordinary, less exalted kind, although they are not really to my taste. In such cases I give in proportion to what I think I might experience in return. St. Augustine is one of the men (I am not thinking of him here in his capacity as a saint and doctor of the Church) whom I love best as he had a heart of the same calibre as my own, he understood what love means; when I read his *Confessions,* where he speaks of his friendship with Lipius, it was as if he were writing[[26]](#footnote-26) in my name. I like St. Basil and St. Gregory very much. All those stories from history that tell of various similar examples of heroic friendships make my heart sing for joy; at that moment I experience a longing in my heart to meet such a treasure. In short, I need to love and as I know inside me what a truly perfect love would be like, I will not ever be satisfied with those ordinary friendships which are good enough for most people. I aim at a friendship which, to sum it all up in a word, would make but one being where there were two.

There is nothing carnal mixed up with these desires which issue from the noblest part of my heart. This is so true that I have always disdained any relationship with women, for those kinds of friendships between the different sexes find their origin more in the senses than in the heart. A person’s rank in society does not enter as a factor at all into the feeling that brings me to love someone who of a truth loves me. The proof of this is the unbelievable affection I have for the servants who are truly fond of me; I hate being separated from them, it is a wrench for me to leave them, I take an interest in their welfare, and will not overlook anything to secure it, and I do not do this out of magnanimity or greatness of soul, motivations of that kind influence me only when it is a question of people who are cold, but out of feeling, tenderness, really the only word for it is friendship. You must not think on that account that I do not feel called to do anything for anybody except those who love me. Quite the contrary, anyone who is suffering, or needs me, can count on my help.

Far from being in my eyes, as it is for many people, an irksome burden, gratitude is one of the things I like best, for it calls me to love the person to whom I am under an obligation. I am happy when I have incurred an obligation to someone who was moved by affection, and if this is an affection that singles me out and is partial towards me, there is nothing I would not do in gratitude for the friendship rather than for the service.

If someone’s feelings towards me are only of the common or garden variety, when someone does something for me the same as they would do it for anybody, I can only respond as any gentleman would in these sort of circumstances, i.e., with an external show of gratitude, I mean one which does not come from the heart, a disposition to be of service, but in view of acquitting myself of my debt; while in the other case I take pleasure in remaining under obligation. So my appreciation for a trivial service that comes from the heart of someone who puts me under an obligation is infinitely greater than for an infinitely bigger one that is given only because it suits someone to oblige.

Fast days, communion days and “of perpetual memorial.”[[27]](#footnote-27)

31:XIV in Oblate Writings

My fast days, as approved by my director, with some changes.

[October-December 1808][[28]](#footnote-28)

MY FAST DAYS, AS APPROVED BY MY DIRECTOR, WITH SOME CHANGES.

1. Every day appointed by the Church. On these days I must have just one meal and, unless it is really necessary I will eat nothing at all in the evening. This must be understood as referring only to single days like those of quarter tense or vigils, for during Lent the collation with bread will be permitted except on Good Friday.

2. I will fast every Friday throughout the year. For the present I am relaxing this fast, and permit myself a piece of bread and a pear, or an apple, or a small bunch of grapes, or some other fresh or dried fruit of that kind that is available, on the clear understanding that I must make do with only one of these things.

3. The vigil of certain devotional feasts, or certain special days, my fast will be as on Fridays as I have just described. These vigils and days are as follows:

in January: the 28th, vigil of St. Francis de Sales.

in February: the 1st, vigil of the Purification of the Blessed Virgin.

the 23rd, vigil of St. Matthew, Apostle.

in March: the 18th, vigil of St. Joseph, my patron (unica commestio).

the 24th, vigil of the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin.

in April: the 30th, vigil of St. James and St. Philip, Apostles.

in May: the 25th, vigil of St. Philip Neri.

in June: the 10th, vigil of St. Barnabas, Apostle.

the 20th, vigil of St. Aloysius Gonzaga, my chosen patron (unica commestio).

the 23rd, vigil of the Nativity of St. John the Baptist.

the 28th, vigil of St. Peter and St. Paul, Apostles.

in July: the 1st, vigil of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin.

the 24th, vigil of St. James the Greater, Apostle.

in August: the 1st, my birthday, vigil of the anniversary of my baptism.

the 23rd, vigil of St. Bartholomew, Apostle.

in September: the 7th, vigil of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

the 28th, vigil of St. Michael Archangel.

in October: the 14th, vigil of St. Teresa.

the 27th, vigil of St. Simon and St. Jude, Apostles.

in November: the 3rd, vigil of St. Charles, my patron.

vigil of anniversary of my taking the ecclesiastical habit (collation with bread).

the 20th, vigil of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

in December: the 2nd, vigil of St. Francis Xavier.

the 7th, vigil of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

the 20th, vigil of St. Thomas, Apostle, anniversary of my priesthood (collation with bread).

26th, vigil of St. John the Apostle, Evangelist.

4. Every Wednesday, Friday and Saturday in Advent.

Note. On devotional fast days I will not go to great lengths to observe abstinence at dinner, unless I am alone at home and perfectly free to do as I like.

5. When any of the feast days coincide, I will deprive myself of dessert at dinner.

SO FAR AS REGARDS COMMUNION DAYS they will depend completely on the will of my Director. Therefore the days I fix here will always be subject to his approval.

As well as the communions fixed by my Director on a regular basis for each week during the year, I will communicate every first Friday in the month, the days the Church celebrates the feasts of the Saints in honour of whom I have kept a vigil fast. Clearly this is without prejudice to major feast days, or even second class feasts which the Church celebrates. In a word, I must strive to reach as soon as possible the condition of being a daily communicant in accordance with the mind of the holy Church, and to dispose and prepare myself for the time, which I yearn for with so much ardour, when I will be able to celebrate the Mystery of the death of O.L. daily by offering the holy Sacrifice.

Nota

The three last days of Carnival and Ash Wednesday as well as the last day of the year will also be days of communion and fasting ... I will receive the Body of J.C. firstly in reparation for all the outrages that the divine Majesty endures at the hands of men during these days of folly, days given over to the devil. Secondly, to supplicate the Lord to look upon me with eyes of compassion, to graciously accept the penance, all too little though it be, that I am going to do in union with the whole Church, and to pour out on me more and more the effects of his immense mercy. Thirdly, to thank God through his son J.C. for all the graces he has deigned to grant me in the course of the year, offering him this expiatory host to obtain the forgiveness of all my faults committed during this year and in the course of my whole existence, begging him not to withdraw his graces from me because of the bad use I have made of those has already so liberally granted.

MY PERSONAL FEASTS AND DAYS OF PERPETUAL MEMORIAL.[[29]](#footnote-29)

1789 August 1: my birthday and August 2, day of my baptism.

1808 November 4: anniversary of my taking the ecclesiastical habit

1808 December 17: anniversary of my entry into the clerical state.

1809 May 27: anniversary of receiving the Minor Orders of Porter, Lector, Exorcist and Acolyte.

1809 December 23: anniversary of receiving the Subdiaconate.

1810 June 16: anniversary of receiving the order of Diaconate.

1811 December 21: anniversary of receiving the Priesthood.

To Madame de Mazenod, in Aix.[[30]](#footnote-30)

32:XIV in Oblate Writings

Prayers for Eugenie. Joy at her marriage and sadness at missing it. Spiritual advice for the future bride.

Mazenod Madame de

St. Sulpice Seminary.

November 19, 1808

... So Tuesday[[31]](#footnote-31) is to be the day Eugenie will begin a new life, one that will be a source of blessings for her, if she is faithful to the graces God has given her from infancy and will go on giving her in abundance. Not only have I been praying, I am and will be praying, all of which may not contribute a great deal to her welfare, but still have had others pray that the Lord will uphold her and help her to walk in this new way. Several of my confreres have already offered their communions for this intention, and on Tuesday evening at quarter past eight in the evening prayers will be asked for her personally at community evening prayer. I assure you that we have among us a large number of powerful intercessors. And so, while you are busying yourselves with preparations for the wedding, etc., we shall be engaged at that moment in praying O.L.J.C. to deign to be present himself at that wedding and to shower it with all the graces his holy presence always brings. I am going to be there too in spirit, and I do not have to tell you that I will fully share your joy. That said, with regard to the distress I am feeling and will be feeling especially at that precise moment, through not being able to express my feelings face to face, etc., etc., that will be something between me and the good Lord; and when I consider that he left heaven to become man and die on the gallows, I will not feel any temptation to complain about the fact that he has seen fit to make me a sharer in a small way in the bitterness of his cross. Besides, I am not letting any of you off from filling me in with a few details of the events of that day.

To end up I urge Eugenie to stand firm over the matter of the play. Her sister-in-law is going to be suggesting it, her sister-in-law’s friends are going to be using all their wiles to corrupt her over this. Without going into too many big arguments about it, I only hope she will take such a firm stand as to dispel right from the start all hope of changing her mind on the matter. This is more important than one may imagine. In Eugenie’s position it would be a clear signal that the whole edifice of her piety is about to collapse in ruins. This would be a source of scandal for all persons of goodwill, and the subject of taunts from the wicked; in short, it would be a dreadful calamity. I recommend she read the book of Tobias where she will find excellent precepts for the living of a holy life within matrimony.

She ought to go often to receive the sacraments, it is a sure way of avoiding many marital faults. Lastly, she should certainly not see her state in life as a state of complete independence incompatible with a really deep piety, but on the contrary as a way in which she has to journey with ever greater zeal towards perfection as it is the way God has prescribed for her and by which she must come to him. But now I am calling a halt, as my time has run out. Dear mother, accept my congratulations. I shall write and convey them to Eugenie personally. I offer them too to Grandma, and I hold you all close to my heart, which is wholly yours, my dear and tender mothers, who on so many counts are deserving of all my love.

For Mama.[[32]](#footnote-32)

33:XIV in Oblate Writings

Ceremony of renewal of clerical promises. His sister Eugenie’s marriage.

Mazenod Madame de

Paris,

November 21, 1808[[33]](#footnote-33)

I have already sent a little greeting to grandma and promised a description of the ceremony which is to take place today, the day of Our Lady’s Presentation in the Temple. The cardinal or, to speak more respectfully, His Imperial Highness and Eminence Cardinal Archbishop of Lyons,[[34]](#footnote-34) chaplain of France, etc., is going to come and perform the function and renew his clerical promise at the foot of the altar, along with several bishops, parish priests and other priests, and the whole community, that is to say all the ministers of the Lord, no matter what different order they belong to, will dedicate anew to the Lord their liberty and life, and reiterate the solemn promise to choose him as their lot and only good. Oh! how gladly I make the resolution, although I feel more than a little regret at not being able to present myself like them and promise out loud what secretly I shall be vowing a thousand and a thousand times; but next year my turn will come, and if I had known that this was going to take place, I would have pleaded to receive tonsure before this feastday.[[35]](#footnote-35) *Adioucias.*[[36]](#footnote-36)

I am not forgetting what is to take place tomorrow at Aix,[[37]](#footnote-37) and I will be recalling it even more intensely at 9 o’clock, when I will have the happiness of possessing the Master of the world and Sovereign Dispenser of graces. And tomorrow again, I will receive communion expressly to draw down ever more and more on our dear Eugenie the blessings of the Lord, and that she may be ever faithful to the great graces God in his goodness has given her throughout her life.

To Madame de Mazenod, rue Papassaudy, isle 56, n.21, near place St-Honoré, in Aix.[[38]](#footnote-38)

34:XIV in Oblate Writings

Eugene will receive tonsure at quarter-tense in Advent. He asks for prayers.

Mazenod Madame de

St. Sulpice

December 3, 1808.

While I’m not on the subject of church furnishings, I’m not wandering off my topic in letting you know that I have my dimissorials to receive holy Tonsure.[[39]](#footnote-39) It will be on the Saturday of quarter-tense this month that I will have the happiness of being admitted among the lower ranks of ministers of the sanctuary, but the lowest place in the Lord’s house is better than the highest in the tabernacles of sinners. I do not have to remind you that, the quarter-tense fast being chiefly established to ask God to deign to give his Church ministers according to his heart, your penance and all our friends should be directed in a very special way to implore Almighty God’s graces for me. On this occasion I am asking for the prayers of the family, of the Grey Sisters, the Carmelites, auntie’s and her community’s,[[40]](#footnote-40) those of all our holy fathers to put it briefly, and still others you may contact for me. You have no idea how powerful the prayers of the just are; I have obtained more graces from their intercession than from those of saints already enjoying the glory we all aspire to.

I still do not know what Bishop will perform the ceremony. I will pass on all that news to you.

I believe there will be no more than two deacons for promotion to the priesthood; there is good cause to bewail ...

To Madame de Boisgelin, nee Mazenod, at her residence, place Fontaine des Quatre Dauphins, in Aix, Department of Bouches du Rhóne.[[41]](#footnote-41)

35:XIV in Oblate Writings

Greetings on the occasion of Eugenie’s marriage. Thanksgiving for benefits received and duty to remain faithful to the Lord. Avoid going to the theatre and dancing. Marriage and piety go well together. Receive communion often. Pray, read good books of piety, fly from occasions of sin. How to conduct herself in society: with great reserve. Request for prayers before tonsure.

Boisgelin Eugenie

Seminary of St. Sulpice,

December 4, 1808, sent on 8th.

My dear Eugenie, it is high time I conveyed my congratulations to you personally, and they will certainly be the most sincere of all those you receive; as you will not have any doubts on this score I will not waste time proving it, nor telling you how distressed I was a finding myself 150 leagues away when I longed to be in your arms; I confess that it was in this instance the greatest sacrifice I could make; you know my two reasons for taking this decision, and when I see how well the one turned out that was really only secondary although it did at the same time form part of my plans, it makes me very happy and gives me some consolation for having put your advantage ahead of my personal satisfaction.[[42]](#footnote-42)

So now you are Madame de Boisgelin. It means that God has granted us what has been our deepest desire for so long. Called to the marital state, you wanted, and so did we all, to meet some genuine fellow whose character would give you an assurance of happiness; wealthy enough to shield you and your children from the painful anxiety so often felt by those who want to give a decent education to the fruits of their conjugal love but lack the wherewithal; you owe it perhaps to me that we decided we wanted someone of a social class and standing that could match our own; lastly, we wanted someone from the same town as ourselves. First and foremost and above all else he had to be a Christian, or at least not stand in the way of your continuing to be one. And now all of this has come to pass just as we wanted it! I have reminded you of all this with the sole aim of having you acknowledge the wonderful workings of divine Providence, and make you aware of the motives you have for being grateful, which tie you by the sweetest bonds, those of the heart, to lifelong fidelity to him; the charge of ingratitude you would incur were you to sadden in the least way possible a God who has done so much for you, the mere thought of such black ingratitude will have you draw back with horror, whenever it is a question of weighing the world’s ways and prejudices against God’s immutable laws, that God who has shown himself so generous towards you.

You are perhaps surprised to see me broaching seriously a subject I could go on talking about for a week without exhausting it, but you are too familiar with my tenderness towards you to fail to grasp the motives that spur me and you are too intelligent not to understand its importance.

Keep in mind that on your conduct hangs God’s glory and the honour of virtue. You are no child entering the marital state, some obscure person whose entry into the world’s vanities and surrender to its deceptive and polluted pleasures would be a matter of no concern. You have entered marriage after spending twenty-two years in the practice of every virtue.

The eyes of all are on you to see if one is to attribute to constraint and hypocrisy the life of piety you led under the influence of a solidly Christian mother. You yourself will give the answer to this question. If you adopt an easygoing attitude and listen to the false and feeble arguments that people will not fail to put to you to prove that to be a Christian one does not have to do this, that or the other, or abstain from this or that; if you are foolishly affable and let yourself be persuaded that one must obey one’s husband even when he demands what neither seems to be nor is conformable to conscience, and therefore for example it is alright to put in an appearance at the theatre so as not to cross him over something he thinks very important, if I say you fool yourself to such an extent as to give way on so important an issue, you are lost, you are convicted, it is the signal for hell’s victory over grace, the very foundations of your virtue has been undermined, the house of your salvation that God’s Mercy was pleased to construct little by little, and with ever new enrichments of grace and holiness, stands in ruins; you might think it still stood although there is nothing left but a shell. The persons who contributed to your downfall would be the very ones who would loudly ridicule you, congratulating themselves like the fiends they are on having given the lie to a virtue that seemed unassailable. And even if you wanted afterwards to repent of this first transgression, your example would be worthless as people are wary of such seesaw virtue which they have every right to suspect of being fake.

It might seem perhaps to someone who did not have an accurate understanding of the Economy of Salvation that I am a little severe in thus making the salvation of an otherwise virtuous person depend on a visit to the theatre, or a waltz, or something else like that and equally foreign to the spirit of Christianity; but in your case you have too clear an idea of the sanctity of our vocation, the purity of the law of J.C., not to be aware that the cowardly abandonment of a single point of that heavenly teaching entails the consequence that the practice of the rest becomes futile, the renunciation of the reward promised to those alone who have fought the good fight. In short, it is to set oneself apart, turn one’s back on J.C. and hold out the hand of friendship to Satan.

And so, dear Eugenie, do not let yourself be gulled under any pretext, no matter what it might be, for the first step you take towards the world will infallibly be followed by a notable diminution of grace, and the next result of both the one and the other of these evils will be an unhappy fall that would drag you down to the level, and even lower, of the generality of worldly people. And should you be found in the company of this horrid brood, who can tell whether God, justly angered that in contempt of his graces you have blasphemed his name, who can tell, I shudder to put this into words, if he would not condemn you to come to the same ending as the one to which, to judge by appearances, they are destined for.

Heart of mine, you understand very well that in imagining such things, I am far from supposing that they will happen; I have every expectation of seeing you resist courageously all the world’s allures, honouring the virtue of which you have always made profession and setting an example of Christian perfection in the midst of the host of the enemy of J.C. To live in this perfection, you will have several things to observe: as your brother and a cleric I have a twofold title to spell them out for you. I have not the slightest doubt that you are disposed to follow them exactly, and it is in their faithful practice that you will obtain each day new favours from God who will help you to overcome all the obstacles which will all too often be put in your way.

In the first place, you have to tell yourself a thousand times a day that your situation is quite special. The life you led before marriage is a powerful commitment that you made with God to be faithful to him all life long; far from being a reason for tempering in any way your first fervour, you must spur yourself to serve God with ever more zeal, if it is possible, as the dangers have grown and the obligations prodigiously multiplied. Marriage is holy, therefore it cannot be an obstacle to holiness, consequently any suggestion made to you on this ground as a reason for toning down your piety would be thoroughly false; besides, you have countless examples of persons who have successfully combined these two things, marriage and the exercise of the highest piety, and putting aside the saints and without delving into the past, I simply point to Madame de Sannes whom you can take as a model. By your change of state, of necessity you are thrust into the world and obliged to live in the midst of that corrupter, you therefore need to embrace the cross of J.C. even closer than you did in your hidden life, you must go and draw from the well even oftener the graces of the Saviour in the perennial wellspring of his adorable sacraments. I have often said to you and I repeat it with even more reason today, you do not go often enough to Holy Communion. St. Francis de Sales, that great teacher of the spiritual life, said openly that those who go but once a month to communion are doing the mere minimum of what must be done if they do not want to be counted among those who neglect and entertain no concern regarding their salvation. Avila, Rodriguez, Scupoli,[[43]](#footnote-43) the author of the Imitation of J.C., all those in short who have been the best writers on this subject and in line with the Church’s teaching, are all united in making perfection depend on a lively sacramental life, rather than making reception of the sacraments depend on perfection. I will say no more on this subject as you understand it well enough, and you know that it is only the Jansenists who have raised doubts about this truth. And so, I repeat, go to the sacraments, each communion will serve as your preparation for the next, and remember you will never learn to love J.C. worthily except in the sacrament of his love; emerging from this heavenly banquet one finds oneself ready to take on all hell’s minions, and one no longer fears any danger, but it is the daily bread that one must renew very frequently in one’s soul. Read and reread St. Francis de Sales’ “Introduction to the Devout Life”; you will find on this topic all you could desire, and besides excellent rules of conduct for all the circumstances of your life. I have always admired this book but my admiration for it has grown even more since I have studied it in class in the seminary and heard one of our saintly Directors explain it. I will say no more on this subject, I will simply remind you that we live in bad times, it is clear God has given hell a long leash, and we can save ourselves from its deadly reach only by drawing ever closer to the cross of J.C., and uniting ourselves with him so often that we become one with him; it is by this means alone we will live from his Spirit, and we will see falling at our feet the arrows that the enemies of our salvation shoot at us.

I see that I have gone on too long on all these matters, but I can assure you that I have said only a fraction of all that is buzzing in my mind. The haste with which I am obliged to write forces me to let my pen flow or better to write as my heart dictates without paying too much attention to the order of my ideas, or the choice of suitable language, but between brother and sister one does not have to be too scrupulous. So I will sum up all I have said in a few words: constancy and perseverance in good resolutions made before marriage, resolute steadfastness in not yielding a jot when it is a question of something that concerns religion in even the smallest way, even only exteriorly, flight from all situations that might tend to weaken your fervour. Therefore my advice is that you never go dancing, and be assured that, in your position, it would be difficult not to consider as mortal sin your appearance at the theatre because of the dreadful scandal, etc. Constancy in prayer, and in reading good books of piety, among which you give preference to those which speak to the heart, rereading amongst others St. Francis de Sales until you know it off by heart, that is to say throughout your life. Dear God, what a lot of things I would like to say on that subject. But I have said enough for you to understand that in these troubled times, more than ever Christians will only stand firm against the veiled persecution they are subjected to, for the most part without them being aware of it, if they identify themselves in some way with him who wished to hide himself beneath the species of bread only to show us that our souls have as much need of his precious body, so as not to die, as our bodies have of bread, and that just as it is necessary to have frequent resort to material bread to restore our machinery, in the same way it is necessary to repeat with great frequency participation in his most holy Sacrament to give strength to our souls which must face simultaneously so many enemies. If you adjudge that my letter is legible and makes sense, show it to your confessor, let him know your desire to act in conformity with it, (for J.C., jealous of our love, wants to be desired); if he opposes your wishes, your confessor I mean, I pity him and you too.

It has just occurred to me that the holy Council of Trent, which says somewhere that one must make use of this heavenly food often, that it wished all the faithful might communicate at every Mass they hear, etc., in another place calls this divine sacrament a medicine that delivers us from venial sins and preserves us from mortal ones. So one does not have to be so perfect as certain people would have us think to approach it since the Council, which is infallible, teaches that venial sins are not an obstacle to the grace of the sacrament, I would add that a person would have to be stupid not to approach it often since it is a potent antidote (remedy) to preserve us from the only evil] we have to fear in the world, I mean mortal sin.

But let us speak of other things, it takes nothing less than the occasion of a change of state of life and the sight of the numerous dangers that alarm my fraternal tenderness to excuse such a long moral harangue. I would really like to say something about how you should behave yourself in Society where from my place here, my poor child, you seem so out of place, but I have run out of space. As a general rule, be very reserved in your speech, say little until such time as you have acquired a little experience; the children of light are simple and bear no malice, but the children of darkness interpret everything according to the corruption of their hearts and the evil disposition of their minds. One has to be careful even how one smiles, for in the world it is only too often taken in a bad sense. There is no harm if you get the reputation of being serious and a bit taciturn, there is always time to reverse that, whereas it is far from easy to wipe out the bad impression a few careless words can leave and which can make you seem less bright than you are and even sometimes an imbecile; as a general rule do not venture anything you are not sure of, never admit in so many words that you are ignorant of this, that or the other, do not let on that you are just finding something out or learning it for the first time, get used to adopting a pose that will make people think you are well-up in what you do not know, when it comes to factual events, I mean, or any other thing touching on education, for with regard to what is evil, out of place, double-meanings, you must behave quite the opposite, for often you will have to feign not to understand what you really understand all too well, or to hold back your smiles, for sometimes it can be a sin to smile when it can be taken for complicity change the subject, or if you cannot do that, show by the expression on your face that that kind of thing disgusts you. I cannot tell you how I suffer at not being able to be at your side as you take your first steps in the world, but such is God’s will; I have written to Madame de Jouques to ask her to keep an eye on you; show reserve even with her, but be especially mistrustful of men, and especially of Charles, father’s friend’s eldest.[[44]](#footnote-44) They will all come sniffing around you and follow at your heels until they have made you let drop some chance remark they can make use of to mock you with, so I repeat: great reserve. I am sorry I have to give you such a negative idea of the world, but I must tell you that you have to be wary of everyone you come into contact with, as if they were enemies; the best thing is to mingle as little as possible with people. We will have more opportunity to talk about all this in the next holidays; arrange for everyone to be at Aix, as I will not have enough time to go traipsing around the countryside ...

P.S.

I have just received the letter your husband has been so kind as to write. Please thank him for all the nice things he says, I wish I could thank him personally but I am swamped with work just now, as it is the eve of my retreat to prepare myself to receive in the least unworthy way possible holy Tonsure, the first step in a clerical career and one that it is important to make properly. I ask for your prayers and those of all who have the interests of the Church at heart; you all know how important it is in the present situation to draw down an abundance of graces on Ministers of religion ...

Now I’m off full speed to St. Sulpice, where we are celebrating with all solemnity the feast of the Immaculate Conception of the Holy Virgin.

I am back from St. Sulpice, it is nearly 8:00 p.m., I am closing my letter as I take off my surplice to go for supper. Goodbye, I send my affectionate greetings, and I urge on you a devotion to the holy Virgin conceived without sin. Goodbye, goodbye, the vestibule is packed.

To Madame de Mazenod, nee Joannis, in Aix, Department of Bouches au Rhóne.[[45]](#footnote-45)

36:XIV in Oblate Writings

Gratitude and reflections on the meaning of tonsure and the soutane.

Mazenod Madame de

Saint Sulpice

December 18, 1808

My dear, good, excellent mother, the retreat we made before yesterday’s ordination prevented me answering your letter dated the 3rd and posted on the 5th of this month. I hasten to take advantage of the first free moment I have to let you know what happiness it gave me ...

I do not intend to treat you to a description of the ceremony of my admission into the sanctuary. It would take me too far afield, for a man is apt to talk a lot when he is on a subject he is full of. I will just tell you that the Lord is rich indeed and above all very generous, for indeed he amply repays us for the poor little deeds we offer him. What does the world amount to? Indeed, far from setting any value on the sacrifice we make of it to God, ought we not to count ourselves most blessed that he lets us strip ourselves of all that is contemptible, abject, perilous, to receive in exchange all that is greatest, most consoling, in a word his very self.

If men but knew the gift of God! But how could their minds, besotted in the mire of vice, rise to such lofty thoughts? So let us thank the Lord for deigning to glance mercifully at us, and try to deserve the continuation of his kindnesses by the humble conformity of our wills to his, and by the ardour with which we place ourselves more and more at his service and win over others to it too.

I hope you will be really at one with the whole Church in asking God to give his Church ministers apt for his service in these unhappy times. Judging by the consolations God was pleased to give me at that happy moment when I chose him as my inheritance, I am compelled to believe that the prayers of good Christians have been really fervent. How true is the saying that one moment passed with faith in the tabernacles of the Lord is better than years of false joy one tastes or thinks one tastes in the tabernacles of sinners. Poor worldlings, how they are to be pitied when they feast their eyes on such futile things as are all those which this deceiving world, aided by its prince the devil, offers them for their damnation. A single glance, fixed with courage on God and on all that God contains, would undeceive them to their great advantage. Unfortunately, they dare not raise their eyes to see the light that shines in every direction. How they are to be pitied and how much should not charity impel us to beseech God to deign to grant them a grace that perhaps they are less unworthy of than ourselves.

Stop, stop! there will be no end to it if I am to speak of the various feelings that awaken in me when I talk of these matters. I was right not to want to enter into this matter; you see where it has brought me, and although I write post-haste, I cannot hold back the clock and posting time. I hate to see I still have some space unfilled; may I not use it to linger a moment longer with my good mother? See how three months have passed already, August has drawn that much nearer. What joy will be ours when we are in each others’ arms! By the way, I must tell you something that will make you laugh. Just imagine, people have taken it into their heads to compliment me on my soutane; people insist on saying it suits me; I will take some convincing. We joke about it sometimes with the Superior who laughingly told me what Madame Portalis never had the courage to say. I have come to be quite fond of this soutane, but this is not because it suits me, it is because I see it as the livery of the Church of J.C., and its colour reminds me that I must die to the world and to everything that lives according to the world’s spirit; it is because it is a kind of shroud under which, if God so desires as I hope, are buried all my sins, and also for many other reasons too. For the rest, you will have the opportunity to judge for yourself if the opinion of the Parisian ladies is well-founded, as I intend to wear no other form of dress in our scarcely Christian city ...

To Mrs. de Mazenod, in Aix.[[46]](#footnote-46)

37:XIV in Oblate Writings

Reflections on the Christmas mystery. Eugene’s affection for his mother; their separation makes him suffer. Tonsure does not involve any commitment, but he remains determined to pursue his “holy career”.

Mazenod Madame de

St. Sulpice,

December 25, [1808]

... Dearest Mother, do you really think that I was not beside you last night? How could I fail, meditating as I was on the holy Mother of God, who had just been filled with consolation on giving the world its Saviour, and at the same time had to experience so vividly the poverty, weakness and misery to which she saw her Divine Master reduced for love of men, how could these tender sentiments fail to draw me close to you? Indeed yes, darling mother, we spent the night together at the foot of the altar, which for me represented the crib in Bethlehem; together we offered our gifts to our Saviour and asked him to come to birth in our hearts and strengthen us in all that is weak, etc. You know my heart all too well, since it was formed from your own, so you will have a very clear understanding that it is as active and goes through the same feelings as your own. So we have to strive, each one of us alike, not to stifle it, which God does not want, but to hold it in check, so to speak. Scarcely a day has passed since I left you that I have not had to take myself to task for being too indulgent towards it; it is clear that it becomes a real temptation, since it afflicts and excessively saddens the soul that should enjoy unfailing peace. For the rest, it is an evil that I must bear with patiently, as it does not seem likely to ever go away. As well as that, I like it so much that I am really afraid that the doctor may not agree with the patient. So let us offer God in his goodness all these travails; and, as we consider that J.C. left the bosom of his Father to clothe himself in our flesh, that in a way he banished himself from heaven to live among us, let us go on patiently putting up with a separation that is costly to us both.

Let us often look for one another in the heart of our adorable Master, but above all share often in his adorable Body; it is the best way to bring us together, for, as we each of us find our common identity in J.C., we become but one thing with him, and through him and in him we become one thing with one another. Last night my thought was you would have wanted to honour the coming of this blessed Child, born for us, by laying him down in your heart. As I had the same happiness at practically the same time, I united myself to you with all my soul. Do you not wonder at the greatness of our soul? How many things it takes in at the same time! What an immense extent it covers in a flash! It is ravishing. I was adoring J.C. in my heart, I adored him in yours, I adored him on the altar and in the crib, I adored him in the heights of heaven. Worldlings, how you are to be pitied for closing your hearts to such sublime thoughts!

In an interval between exercises His Grace the Archbishop of Aix’s nephew brought me your letter of December 11.[[47]](#footnote-47) You can imagine how happy it made me, in the light of what you have read above, that I had written just before. How grateful I am, good mother, for the trouble you’ve taken to write to me at such length, but against that what a wonderful experience of joy a long letter brought me! How can I put it into words?

You do not make mention of my letters. Does this mean you have not received anything since the one the Archbishop delivered? That hurts me. I am also upset that you did not ask this Prelate what kind of dimissorial he sent me. One word would have sufficed to remove all your fears; you would have seen it was only a question of taking tonsure, and you are aware that the holy ceremony does not commit one to anything. I cannot tell you how much the misunderstanding hurts me, it has made you suffer a lot of annoyance all for nothing. In God’s name, darling mother, try not to let yourself get upset so easily; it is bad for your nerves and keeps me constantly on edge. If you had stopped to think for just a moment, you would have realized that I would have to go mad to commit myself in holy orders without telling you in advance. All that has happened then is that I have received tonsure, as I told you in several letters, and the most that will happen is that I will receive minor orders in the course of the year, which likewise leave me uncommitted. As to what you say about my father, I do not merely long to write to him about this matter but it will be with you that we will always talk these matters through. So you are going to see me in the coming holidays as free as when I left, but also determined to pursue this holy career that God’s mercy calls me to...

1. Orig.: Rome, Postulation Archives: DM V 7b. A notebook of eight pages all seemingly written with the same pen and on the same occasion: the lettering on the latter pages however is less well-formed and shows signs of being written in haste. While prayers a, b, e, g, h, i, might have been taken from some book, others are clearly composed by Eugene himself, e.g., c, d, f. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. It is difficult to date these texts with precision. Some expressions, where the influence of unstilled passions is still apparent, (c, d, and especially g), and the fear of lapsing “if the same occasions of sin arise” suggest that these prayers might have been written in 1807-1808, after the Good Friday experience of 1807 but before entry into the seminary, for example during a few weeks’ holiday taken during the summer with his grandmother at St. Julien. On the other hand, we find practically the same language being used in the retreat notes of 1812-1816, during the first years of ministry at Aix. It might date, for example, to the period of his convalescence in 1814 (cf. f: “a necessary break”). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. These truths are applicable to the laity. Eugene could have written them in 1807-1808, but also after 1812 to give them to the members of the Youth Congregation. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Orig.: Rome, Postulation Archives, DM II 6a: Notes on Jansenism. We publish only the paragraphs at the beginning of this 5 page text in which Eugene gives a description of his uncle whom he sees frequently, and affirms that in all their conversations they speak about dogma and morality. The account centres especially on a séance of convulsionaries at which Roze Joannis was present in Paris in 1782 or 1784. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. He was Madame de Mazenod’s advisor and confidant from the time of her return to France in 1795. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Orig.: Chateau Boisgelin, St Martin des Palliéres. We omit the beginning of the letter: Eugene complains of his sister’s laziness in not writing. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. On March 25, 1808. Bishop Champion de Cicé ordained Bishop F. de Bausset-Roquefort, Bishop of Vannes and future Archbishop of Aix, in the cathedral of Saint-Sauveur, Aix. Corpus Christi fell on June 16 in 1808. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Napoleon had passed some months at Bayonne and was busy with Spanish affairs. He was confidently expected to return to Paris by way of Marseilles, Aix and Lyon but, in July-August, he went by way of Toulouse, Bordeaux, La Rochelle, etc.

   We have a declaration of the Mayor of Aix, dated August 1, 1808, in which we read: “M. de Mazenod is a member of the guard of honour ... in the cavalry section.” Orig. Postulation Archives, DM VII 4a. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Eugene spent May and June at his grandmother’s in St. Julien. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. A little before June 14, Eugene disclosed to Roze-Joannis his decision to enter the seminary and charged him to inform Madame de Mazenod, cf. Eugene’s letter to his mother, June 14, 1808. The letter to Roze-Joannis has not been located. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Thus Eugene’s decision was taken at the beginning of 1808 and Eugenie was aware of it. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. A search had been underway for some years for a husband for Eugenie. There had already been negotiations with several families who judged the dowry too modest. Eugene’s entry into the clerical state will allow Madame de Mazenod to increase her daughter’s dowry. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Orig.: Rome, Postulation Archives, FB I7. We omit the last paragraph of the letter, where Eugene speaks of his grandmother. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. In the preceding letter dated June 21, Eugene invited his mother to come to St. Julien, but foresaw that this would be impossible in the coming month; and, to accustom his mother to the idea of separation, he added: “We are having a run of bad luck in the family, not a year goes by without us spending five or six months apart from one another.” [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. His grandmother was hurt by Eugene’s decision but accepted it with resignation. She wrote to Madame de Mazenod in July 1808: “It has really been a wrench to be separated from our dear Eugene, his company was really sweet and agreeable to me, his virtues make me love him more than I can say. He did right to go to you. When he has explained what he wants to do, you will want to see him and have him do some reflection that a plan of this magnitude requires. A strong vocation is necessary for so holy a state ...” Madame de Mazenod too came to accept her son’s departure, but it was only some year’s later that she really accepted his vocation. M. de Mazenod learnt of it only in 1809, see letter 56 in Oblate Writings. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Orig.: Rome, Postulation Archives, DM I VI. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Eugene entered the seminary on October 12, 1808 (Eugene to his mother, February 28, 1809). According to the letter to his grandmother, dated October 18, the retreat ended on the 19th, the Feast of the Holy Virgin’s Interior Life. J.H. Icard, in *Traditions de la Compagnie des Prétres de Saint ulpice* ... (Paris, 1886, p.39), writes that the retreat at the beginning of the academic year lasts six to eight days and ends on a feast day. Eugene’s notes were probably written between October 12 and 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Ms. deleted: “At breakfast I will be satisfied with the piece of bread that is given me, without asking for a second piece, as the first is quite enough to keep me going until dinner.” [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Ms. deleted: “In the evening, one helping of the first course will be enough for my supper; I have been following this diet since the first day I entered the seminary; I am keeping well on it in body and soul alike.” [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Orig.: Rome, Postulation Archives. FB 16: a letter from Eugene to his grandmother

    Catherine Elizabeth Joannis, née Bonnet. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Antoine du Pouget Duclaux (1748-1827). [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Draft ms.: Rome, Postulation Archives. DM IV4. The first page of this notebook is omitted. On it Eugene copies out a text of Bourdalou (*Retraite selon les exercises de saint Ignace*) headed: “Why did God create me?” [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Eugene could write a lot of pages in a short space of time. This portrait must have been composed during the retreat of October 12 -19 or a short time afterwards. Actually, in his Retreat Resolutions, he speaks of his character and says that he has made himself known to his Director as he really is. One is led to think by the opening line of the present text that he did this chiefly in writing. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. The following lines are crossed out:

    “I must be on my guard against making rash judgments, for I have a strong propensity to pass judgment on all and sundry; led to do this by a certain talent I have had since I was a child to judge with ...

    “I have never been able to be content with explaining people’s actions on the basis of their intention, for it is my practice to pick up various small aspects of an action which escape the notice of most people, and which give me a well-nigh infallible clue to the person’s intention. I am hardly ever mistaken in this. So I am not very trusting, and attach little weight to the protestations of friendship and esteem of three quarters of the people who would have me believe they are fond of me.” [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. “Rash” is crossed out. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. “of me” is crossed out. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Orig.: Rome, Postulation Archives. DM IV-I. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. This list of fasting and communion days must have been drawn up in the first months of Eugene’s life at the seminary. It was still, it seems, the fruit season: pears, grapes, etc. He had written in his retreat resolutions, before mentioning some mortifications: “This then is what I propose in the expectation that a longer stay in the seminary will show me some new way of mortifying myself.”

    His watchful eye and decisive spirit must have permitted him to “discover” and choose without delay these “new ways” of mortification.

    It is easy to see however, by the colour of the ink and the quality of the pen, that certain additions were made during the seminary period and as he began his priestly life, e.g., November 3, anniversary of taking the habit; December 21, anniversary of the priesthood and, at the end, the list of his “personal feasts and days of perpetual memorial”.

    Page 4, entitled: “Chapters from the Scripture and the Imitation to be read by each one in private during the retreat”, is omitted.

    The date of this retreat is not indicated; the ink’s colours and the tonality of the script of this page differ from those of the other three. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. We are in possession of another page entitled “Memorable days” (Postulation Archives. DM IV-7), where we find these further dates:

    October 1 (1832): anniversary of my promotion to Icosia

    October 14 (1832): anniversary of my consecration

    October 23 (1837): anniversary of my nomination to Marseilles. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Orig.: St. Martin-des-Pallières, château de Boisgelin. We omit the first paragraph in which Eugene declares that he has written to everyone in the family. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Tuesday, November 22. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Orig.: St-Martin-des-Pallières, chateau de Boisgelin. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. A long letter begun on November 10, continued on the 12, 21 and 25, concluded and sent on the 26th. Eugene says he has unpacked his trunk and speaks of his health, his need for money to buy a soutane, surplice, waistcoats, etc., and of Eugenie’s imminent marriage. We publish only this extract of November 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Cardinal J. Fesch. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Eugene took the soutane on November 4, feast of St. Charles, and received tonsure on December 17. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. A Provencal word: Goodbye. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Eugenie’s marriage with Armand Natal, Marquis of Boisgelin, took place in Aix on November 21, at midnight, according to the custom prevailing in Provence at that time. Eugene is thus correct to speak of the 22nd. Cf. Madame de Mazenod’s letter to Eugene on December 8. On October 24, she had written: “It must be admitted that the marriage arrangements have gone through very quickly. You were the first one to get the idea.” [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Orig.: St-Martin-des-Pallières, chateau de Boisgelin. A letter begun on December 1 and ended on December 3. We omit the earlier pages in which Eugene expresses his thanks for details on Eugenie’s marriage contract, declares his health to be good notwithstanding the Paris climate which is “the sum of all the worst elements nature has to offer,” and speaks of the purchases he must make: a woollen blanket, surplice, etc. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Madame de Mazenod learned from the Archbishop of the sending of the dimissorials. She was very surprised and hurt at seeing that Eugene was going to take this important step although he had made a promise that he would not commit himself before two year’s: “I am in a state of dreadful disquiet”, she wrote on December 8. “As a gesture for my sake, do not enter into any commitments yet, and do nothing without letting me know first.” [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Madame de Mazenod’s cousin, the Ursuline sister. Cf Oblate Writings XIV letter. 12, n.53. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Orig.: St-Martin-des-Pallières, chateau de Boisgelin. We omit the end of the fourth page and the fifth page: Eugene complains that he is getting no news; he does not even know if the marriage took place, he gives his own news. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. The two motives mentioned here seem to be, firstly: to respond to God’s call; secondly, and secondarily to facilitate Eugenie’s marriage by making it possible for Madame de Mazenod to increase the dowry. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Lorenzo Scupoli, a Theatine ascetic writer (1530-1610). [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Charles de Périer. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Orig.: Rome, Postulation Archives. FB I7. We omit a section of the first page in which Eugene is happy to learn that a little trip has settled his mother’s nerves, and page 4 where he talks about commissions and business matters. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Orig.: Rome, Postulation Archives, FB I‑7. We omit the beginning and the end of this letter that was terminated on the 26th. Eugene says that he has written to his uncle and takes the opportunity to send the present letter; he talks about a number of religious ceremonies, the cold weather, some errands for Eugenie and thanks his mother for her lengthy letters. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Archbishop Champion de Cicé’s nephew. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)