

BROTHERS WITNESSES OF HOPE

5- BROTHER ALPERT-JOSEPH OXIBAR
(PIERRE)
(1882-1979)

"Little Brother, the Clown of God"



THE FIORETTI OF A LITTLE CLOWN BROTHER OF GOD



"The most remarkable trait of Brother Alpert's character was his Originality and Eccentricities. Concerning that the Superiors, worried, had to watch over him constantly. He often managed to slip through the net and escape. He took pleasure in amu, sing all his neighbors with his gestures and movements. But, even without doing it on purpose, he could not do anything like everyone else: he always invented a path never trodden, following the compass of his heart."(Memory of Br. Hubert Libert =HU 26)

Bro. Alpert, or "Allepert," as he pronounced it with his Southern French accent, even at the age of 90 was a child of the Gospel. He could appear Extravagant, Original, Disrespectful of Conventions, and Allergic to Exteriority, and yet wherever he appeared, the Rainbow of Good Humor arrived. "He brought us, in that rather serious and somewhat gray environment, moments of sunshine and joy" (F. Elias Sainz. In Vidas Menesianas: F. Alèerto Josè Oxibar = Sa, p. 23). He was not easy to catch, because he traveled his free mountain paths to reach the goal. But in truth, he was always at the heart of the Gospel: he was a clown of the Holy Spirit. In him we find the atmosphere of the Fioretti of St. Francis, filled with the supernatural which becomes simplicity: it was the naivety of the Gospel lived to the letter.



PART ONE:

THE TIMELINE OF A LITTLE BROTHER'S LIFE

ORIGINS

Pierre Oxibar was born in the Mountains of the Basses Pyrénées (now Pyrénées Atlantiques). His small village, Camou-Cihigue, lies in a Verdant valley, surrounded by Meadows and Forests, and crossed by several Streams. Pierre was always drawn to vast horizons, life in the Open Air surrounded by Nature, and the company of Wild and Domestic Animals.



Camou-Cihigue, Native Village

The Small Village was located between the Atlantic Coast and the Hautes Pyrénées, near the Towns of Mauléon and Tardets, about fifty kilometers from the Spanish Border. Basque was spoken, even if Education was given in French and Spanish was understood.

Camou-Cihigue was tiny - barely 300 Inhabitants - but their families were large: eleven children. It was a very Christian family: Father Jean-Pierre went to the Church of St-Pierre at the head of his children. Among the Oxibar sons, three would become Priests of the Sacred Heart of Betharram (one would go to Argentina, one to Spain, another to Siam, present-day Thailand); two daughters would become Nuns in Bayonne; the last, Pierre, would



Village Church



Camou Parish

join the Brothers of Christian Instruction. The Oxibar family was held in Great Esteem in Camou-Cihigue. Even today, trails and places bear his name.

The family cultivated small plots of land, but the main resource was raising a Large Flock of Sheep and Goats. Leading the flock to pasture was the task of the younger children. Speaking of his childhood, Bro.

Alpert would say: “When I was very young, I would go with my brothers to take the flock to graze in the Meadows; yes, I kept the habit of running and jumping, yes, as much as you like, since for three years - from 10 to 13 years old - I looked after my Parents' Flocks and Goats!” (Letter to Bro. Hubert=L.). A very good preparation certainly for Manual Work and knowledge of Nature, but not as favorable to Personal Education. As he was one of the youngest in the family, he was entrusted with that responsibility to allow the others to undertake studies. It was a Free and Natural Life that he loved, but which did not allow him to dedicate himself to studies. He wished he had had a better Education, but his student career had been very poor: “During that time (as a Shepherd), I did not study for the Certificate, nor did I know about the Certificate, at that time.”



THE TRAINING YEARS

We find Pierre Oxibar at 14 years old at the Juniorate of St-Jean-de-Pied-



St Jean-Pied-de-Port

de-Port, where he began his Formative Years. Perhaps he would have liked to become a Priest like his brothers. But he was too far behind in his studies and had not been encouraged to undertake a Regular Academic Path.

And yet he wanted to serve God in Religious Life. He had breathed a strongly Christian atmosphere in his family, in the Parish, in the contemplation of God's Works, in the Short Catechism he had followed at the Parish and in the Primary School he had attended, even if it was irregularly.

In his Region, a Congregation of Religious had been established for some years that seemed perfectly suited to him: the Institute of the Brothers of Christian Instruction, founded by the Venerable Jean-Marie de la Mennais. There were only Brothers, without the Priesthood, they devoted themselves to children in Schools; many of them dedicated themselves to Manual Work; to enter it, Higher Education was not necessary. Our Pierre was endowed only with Good Will, the Generosity of his Heart, his Hands available for All Kinds of Service. Qualities that would have compensated for his inadequacy in School Instruction. In his Commune, a boy had already undertaken that path and had entered that Congregation: Brother Eliphius Bassaber, who would become one of the Valiant Founders of the Province of Spain.

Let us follow Our Aspirant to the Religious Life of the Brothers in his Training Journey.



Lavacan

He then returned to the Juniorate of St. John of Pied-de-Port: for a year and a half, he perfected his French and learned the Basic Elements of the Main Subjects. At 16, he had to move on to the Novitiate. In the Province of the South, he was

established in Lavacan, a Commune of Pavia. But it had been closed in 1891; the Novices were transferred to Brittany, to Ploërmel, where there was the Canonical Novitiate. In 1898, the Young Novice Pierre went to Brittany: he joined the Institute and received the Name Brother Alpert-Joseph. He spent the year of the Novitiate with the Master Brother Longin Torlait of venerable memory, who would become Master of Novices in Canada: he followed the Directives of the New Superior General, Brother Abel Gaudichon: "Form men of Prayer and Sacrifice." Br. Alpert was not always able to follow the Theoretical Lessons "I didn't understand much of it", but he learned more easily the Wisdom of the Little Ones of the Gospel. After the Novitiate, he went to Josselin to do "a Small Scholasticate of 9 and a half Months!... full of gaps" (L 6-1-69). The Director was Br. Antel-Joseph Louédin, then very young, who would go to Canada at the dispersion of 1903. He had a very Maternal Attitude, which somewhat compensated for the Brevity and Inadequacy of the Courses.

BROTHER'S EARLY YEARS IN THE SOUTH

From 1899, Brother Alpert began his Teaching Career with a preparation “filled with gaps,” as he put it. It was a Teaching in a series of “Small Schools and Small Classes,” which lasted very little, where he fulfilled the role of “filler of gaps.” Let us try to follow him:



- St-Denis-de-Piles: 1899 “Small Class”, in a Free Section: a Beautiful School, but the Winds of Secularization would close it quite early.
- Corneilhan: from September 1900 to February 1901: New School with 28 Students, in a Mountain Village.
- Lourdes: from February 15th, 1901 to December 3rd, 1901, “Small Class”, very happy to be in the place of the Apparitions of the Immaculate Virgin.
- St-Jean-de-Pied-de-Port: from December 3rd, 1901 to October 1st, 1902, a School with about a hundred Day Students, about twenty Boarders, and 12 Juniors. That time he was a “Supervisor.”
- Prades: from October 3rd, 1902 to December 13th, 1902. That School was located in the Southeastern part of the Pyrenees, near the City of Perpignan. It was noted that there were 8 Brothers for 2 Classes: a Transit Establishment for Spain, given the First Signs of the Persecution of Teaching Congregations implemented by the Combes Government. Brother Alpert was only passing through.
- Toulouse: from December 14th, 1902 to January 29th, 1903. Here too, the same very brief passage, as Supervisor, in the Collège Le Caousou, where the Brothers collaborated with the Jesuit Fathers.

- St-Denis-Piles: from February 28th, 1903 to May 23rd, 1903: he returned to the School where he had started, but that time it was to leave France and prepare for his Expatriation to Spain. Brother Abel, while visiting the Communities of the South, gave the Brothers the Letters of Secularization, specifying that they were valid only externally. From April 1903 the Director gave each Brother 25 francs per Month, plus 80 to buy Civilian Clothes.

(See EM n.47, Annals of the Brothers of the South, FA Aguergaray)

Now the Persecution unleashed by the French Government was being put into effect. To continue in their Vocation, the Brothers were faced with two choices: to continue Teaching Clandestinely in France or to emigrate to other Countries that guaranteed Complete Freedom of Education, such as Canada, Haiti, Egypt, England, the USA, Eastern Europe, and Spain. It was precisely to Spain that most of the Brothers of the Province of Sainte-Marie du Midi in France turned, who wanted to remain faithful to the Institute.

HUMBLE COLLABORATOR IN THE FOUNDATION OF THE SPANISH PROVINCE: 1903-1937

Brother Alpert was part of the First Group of Brothers to arrive in Spain on June 13th, 1903. As always, he appears last on the list in the New Community at Zugarramurdi, very close to the Border. Let us try to follow him as he hoped like his Goats from one Community to another, always with his Spirit of Adaptation and Humble Service.

- Zugarramurdi: June 1903 - November 1903. With the others, he worked on the land, looked after the Cattle, and cooked. The House where the Brothers were staying, in Extreme Poverty, was dilapidated and, what's more, it was considered haunted by Witches. Br. Alpert was not impressed. He went to speak with the people in Basque, had the House Blessed, and the fear disappeared. Upon realizing that the Witches were no longer there, the Owner took back his House, and... The Brothers had to look elsewhere.

- Lujua: November 1903- September 1904. The Brothers worked on a Farm that raised Livestock: those were early days and they had to make a Living! His friend Br. Eliphius went to Bilbao to sell Milk and Br. Alpert still tooked after the Kitchen.



Zugarramurdi

- Bilbao: September 1904- September 1906. The Brothers, with the help of the Illustrious Professor Don Azkue, had opened a Beautiful School, under the Name of “Berrio Ochoa”, in honor of a Basque Bishop Martyred in Tonkin. In September 1904, 93 Boys were enrolled there: Br. Alpert was still given the “Little Class”.
- Bermo: Sept. 1906 - Sept. 1909. “On September 17th, 1906, in an Old Storeroom (13m x 4.50) Brothers Cyrille Dulac and Alpert Oxibar initiated the Two Classes of the Colegio San José de Bermeo” (EM n.48) Enlargements were quickly made. Br. Alpert: “Small Class”.
- Munjia: Sept. 1909 - Sept. 1912. “Brothers François Lapeyre and Alpert Oxibar opened Two Beautiful Classrooms for 75 Students in a Large New Hospital, still unoccupied, under the Name of St-Raphael.” (EM n.48)
- Bilbao: Sept. 1912 - Sept. 1914: he accompanied Brother Lapeyre, who became Director of that Establishment of more than 300 Students; Brother Alpert: still “Small Class”.

That concluded Brother Alpert's Teaching Career: he taught for twelve years: two in France and ten in Spain, always with the Lower Classes. Let's look at the rest of his Career.

- Nanclares de la Oca: from 1914 to 1937(except for the two parentheses at the “Refuge” of 1918 and 1930). The Provincial, Br. Ulysse Baron, had acquired the Vast Property of a Thermal Establishment, intended to become the Training Center for Young People and the Main House of the Province of Spain. It was necessary to



Nanclares of the Oca

adapt the Buildings and Surrounding Land to the New Function. The work was daunting and required a lot of Workers. Br. Alpert became the Assistant Cook of Br. Polyme Drougard. The latter, rather elderly, was a very Cheerful Man, who liked to express himself in verse, very pious, but not very gifted in the Kitchen, (except for the Abundant Doses of Chili). Br. Alpert helped him a lot in the early days and then replaced him in that Position: the two got along well and helped each other in their Originality. “Brother Alpert was the “Accommodating” man who lent himself to everything. He could just as easily help in the Kitchen, take care of the Cows, or help Brother L'Anthoen in the Fields or the Washerwomen to hang out the Laundry to dry or collect it. In the list of each person's duties in 1923, the following text appears: “Brother Alpert-Joseph Oxibar, the Handyman.” (H. Gutierrez)

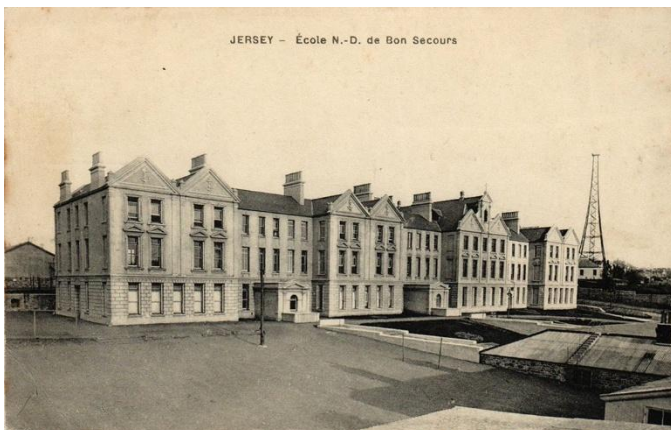
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- Bilbao, “Refuge for the Protection of Children”: 1918-1924. Brothers Escudé and Bassaber had opened a Genuine Social Work at the request of the Civil Administration. That Charitable Structure included: a Refugio for Abandoned Children; a Day School for Boys whose parents worked; a Home for Adolescents entrusted to the Justice System; a Family Home for Apprentices outside Institutions. For six years, Brother Alpert brought to that Refuge the warmth of his Maternal Heart: “He was attentive to everyone, with the Solicitude of a Mother. He showed each one his great affection in a spontaneous and joyful way.” (SAI)
- Nanclares: 1924-1930: return to the Spanish Mother House to replace Brother Polyme, who had returned to France.
- Bilbao, Refuge: 1930-1933, with the role of “Supervisor - big brother” to the children, who had become very numerous.
- Nanclares: 1933-1937, that time he rose in Rank: he became a “Vaquero”; he returned to his younger years as a Shepherd of the Family Flocks. He took care of the Cows and other Animals: Pigs, Chickens... The young people in Training had become numerous and they had to be fed!
- 1937: That was the year of the Spanish Civil War. The young people were sent home. The Brothers, gathered in Nanclares, endured the Trials of the Terrible Conflict. After the Turmoil, they slowly recovered: Rebuilding Schools, New Recruits, and Opening Missions. Brother Alpert was sent to the Island of Jersey, on the English Channel, to serve in the Generalate. The Director of that House was Brother Xavier Ménoret, who had been his Former Provincial in Spain.



Orphans' Home

- Jersey (England):1937-1958 At the Generalate he began with the qualification of “Chamber Musician”: he performed all the Interior Services at the House. Then he worked mainly outside, as a Brother “of Manual Work”. Above all, he was



the person who brought his Spirit of Lightness and Good Humor into the House, both to the many young people in Training and to the Staff of the Generalate, St-Joseph.

- Josselin, St-Martin Clinic: 1958-1979. In 1958, Br. Alpert was 76 years old. He was still in Good Physical and Moral Shape, but his Originality somewhat disturbed the Superiors. He was then sent to the Clinic for Elderly or Sick Brothers in Josselin: there he would not rest, but he would still provide a Thousand Services: “I am always with the Wheelbarrow, the Rake, the Broom, and the Shovel. I will be in Josselin until the end of my days. Amen!” (L.68)

PART TWO:

THE FIORETTI OF BROTHER ALPERT

In the Tradition of the Institute, Br. Alpert remained a Legendary Figure, not for his Great Undertakings, High Culture, Grandiose Apostolic Works, or Ascetic Performances... but for his Cheerful Simplicity. One might say that he lived the atmosphere of the Fioretti of St. Francis and his First Disciples or of the Oratory of St. Philip Neri: Naive Simplicity, Childlike Joy, and Attitudes Dictated directly by the Heart and not by Conventions. He was considered “Extravagant, Eccentric, Original, and Frivolous” (Sai). Nevertheless, those outward signs were the manifestation of a Heart Full of Fraternal Affection and, somewhat Noisy and Disturbing, Communicative Joy. He was allergic to conventions and limitations,



Younger Brother

because he followed the steps of his heart, driven by the unpredictable movements of the Spirit. He related to others, not according to their Role, and Hierarchy, but as brothers of the same family. He expressed himself without calculating his words, but from the abundance of his heart. He was like the children of the Gospel, to whom God reveals His Mysteries, who addressed Him informally and were full of Joy at belonging to His family, happy to be loved and to love. Let us look at some small paintings by those Mennaisian Fioretti.

[NOTE: We owe those Details to the Jersey Archivist, Br. Hubert Libert, who lived with him for about twenty years and who, beyond the “Original and Disturbing” Character of his Colleague, had guessed the dimension of Simple and Evangelical “Holiness” (HU: “My memories of Br. Alpert-Joseph Oxibar”, January 1985)]

1- A BROTHER WHO CARRIED A CHEERFUL CONFUSION

Br. Alpert was in Excellent Health. He worked hard from Morning to Night, but he always did it his own way. He climbed the stairs, often running, three at a time. He had the same gait as his Mountain Goats. With a brisk pace, he would race up and down the Aisles, Singing, Talking, or Laughing Aloud, even when he was alone.

In the silent and serious atmosphere of the Jersey House, with its Strict Rules, he spread a note of Joy and Lightness. Some of the Formators thought he could disturb the Seriousness of the Formation Courses for Young Religious. During that period at the House of Our Lady of Good Help, 150 Young People in Formation were present at the same time, and another 50 for the year of Renewal. The Meetings with Brother Alpert brought Good Humor to all. "We thank Brother Alpert for those Moments of Joy and Sunshine, which he brought to us in that Austere and somewhat Gray Environment for us young people." He enjoyed snooping around the "Grand Novitiate," to bring a smile to the Brothers during their demanding Period of Formation Work. Several times he pressed his Nose against the Slass of the Door of the Study Room or the Refectory, to greet everyone with his big smile. "The Grand Master of the Second Novitiate, the famous Brother Célestin Auguste Cavaleau, kept a close eye on him and as soon as he noticed Brother Alpert's presence, he would give him a stern look. The Curious Fellow would flee at full speed, like a Devil who had been discovered!" (Sa)



The two Brothers were a Nightmare for each other. To prevent the "bad" influence of Brother Alpert, the Serious Grand Master had forbidden him any contact with the Brothers. But ours was too eager to exchange with the Brothers and know the Latest News from their Provinces. In particular, he loved to chat with the Spanish Brothers about the Events in their

Province, where he had lived for so many years. The Grand Master often went into the Allays to catch the Culprit in the Act. If Brother Alpert noticed the presence of the Superior, he would start running, exclaiming: “I burned myself. He caught me!” (Sa) “But, even when he was forbidden to approach the young people, he found a way to amuse them from afar: he would cup his two hands around his eyes, like Binoculars, to watch them play in the Courtyard.” (HU)

In some Evaluation Sheets written by the Superiors of the Communities where he had been, we could read: “Brother full of dedication; but too often got involved in what did not concern him directly and that under the pretext or with the Intention of being of Service” (1939, by F. Xavier Ménoret) That Superior knew him well and he appreciated him: “Spirit of Service and Family, Dedication, Relations with the Brothers: “Very Good”. Br. Alpert felt like a Brother in a Family: he wanted to share with everyone the Various Events, without Secrets and Reserved News.

In Another Assessment of the New Superior, Brother Chrysante, we read: “Original, talkative, liked to make young people laugh with his Eccentricities.” What was a fault for some Superiors, “was for us young people a Ray of Sunshine and Joy.”

2- A CLOWN BROTHER TO ENTERTAIN GOD AND HIS BROTHERS



As a child, Pierre Oxibar lived surrounded by Nature: Lush Valleys, Mountain Slopes, and the Pastures of his Herd. He loved the Freedom of Wide Open Spaces and Life in the Great Outdoors. That Free Spirit remained with him and made him particularly “Natural” and Original. He was very sensitive to Feelings, Sincere Communication, People, Practical Service, and the Spirit of Contemplation. At the same time, he was quite Allergic to Conventions, Regulations, and Timetables.

He was assigned to the cleaning of the St. Joseph House, where the General Administration resided. Br. Hubert recounted his First Meeting with Br. Alpert: "I saw a Brother, quite Old, in a Cassock and Black Apron, who was



finishing sweeping a Corridor. At his collected air, at his modest attire, I was filled with both Compassion and Admiration... but I am was that Br. Alpert had already eyed us all, even before we noticed his presence." (HU) He especially loved working outside. With the agility of a

Squirrel, he climbed Trees to cut Dead Branches. But he had to be stimulated, because he lost himself in the contemplation of his Work. After Lunch, he would take a nap, but he would arrive at Work after the scheduled time: "then he would sneak out. A short time later, he would be Heard Singing, Laughing, or Talking Loudly" (HU). "He was a very happy Man and made everyone happy!" (F. Kernaflen)

Although he caused some trouble for the Superiors, he was sought after by the young people in Formation and by his Fellow Members of the Community. On Feast Days or at the Brothers' Meetings, he was invited to sing in Spanish or Basque: he didn't need to be asked twice and he produced a Tenor Voice. As an Actor, he reached his peak when he was asked to recite La Fontaine's Fable: "The Wolf and the Lamb." He placed himself at the Center of the Audience: with Gestures, Variations in the Tone of his Voice, and Actor's Facial Expressions, he earned Enthusiastic Applause and Resounding Laughter. That Recitation had become Famous in the Institute and he was asked to repeat it everywhere: which he did with Pleasure and Enthusiasm.



“The most remarkable feature of his Character was his Originality and Eccentricities. In that respect, his Superiors had to keep a constant eye on him. He often managed to slip through the Net and Escape. He took pleasure in amusing all his Neighbors with his Gestures and Movements. But even without doing it on purpose, he could not do anything like everyone else. It was natural for him.”(HU) He was not sick with Conformity and he spread a Great Spirit of Freedom among the children of God. As the young St. Carlo Acutis said: “All are born as Originals, but many die as Photocopies.” Br. Alpert remained Very Original.

Other moments of relaxation where he could express himself at leisure were Outings and Walks. When the whole group of Young People went out for a Picnic to the Seaside, they would find him already there. “He was in his Bathing Suit, on the Beach, performing a thousand Pirouettes before taking his Second or Third Bath: Naturally he unleashed the gaiety of everyone.” (HU) A Brother described him that way: “For a happy man, he was a happy man. The more I lived with that Brother, the more he became sympathetic to me. He had a heart, he was helpful, he was charitable... and he had many other Virtues that were appreciated here.” (F. Kernaflen, Director of St-Martin, Josselin)

3- WITH HIS OTHER BROTHERS

Our Brother held his Membership in the Religious Congregation dear. He was closely linked to each Brother, regardless of their positions and roles: he considered them his true brothers in the Family. He had a venerable respect for Brother Célestin-Auguste, whom he always called “The Grand Master,” who placed quite a few Restrictions on him: he obeyed him, but at the same time he went beyond his Prohibitions with the Evangelical Spirit. Moreover, The Grand Master was full of admiration for his little Brother’s Heroic Spirit of Service outside the lines. And for his part, Brother

Alpert appreciated him a lot, concluding the Letters he addressed to him: "Yours very affectionately in WYD, Br. Alpert Jh".

In his familiarity, he could afford to give Nicknames to everyone, even to the Authorities of the Institute, according to the Gospel saying: "Do not call anyone with the title of Father or Master, because you are all brothers." Then Br. Alpert called Br. Etienne (Superior General) "The Great General"; Br. Hippolyte-Victor, Assistant: "The Little General" and Br. Louis-Arsène: "The Big General."



Brothers, together

Despite his Spirit of a Creature of the Wind, he was submissive to the Authorities, or at least he put all his Good Will into it. He asked his Superiors in 1931, at the First Signs of the Civil War: "If circumstances oblige us and what could be done, I would like to make my submission in order to remain in Bethany..." ("Submission" underlined). "Submissive, at least usually. Indeed, the will to ignore it was too strong. So he used trickery, pretending not to have heard or misheard" (HU) However, since Brother Alpert was always available, the Director Superior Brothers felt in a position to demand a lot of Chores from him. "He didn't dare refuse them anything; and sometimes they abused their Authority a little." (HU) Brother Alpert went about his work without bitterness, turning everything into Noisy Joy. When he was made to change his Job from Chamber Musician to that of responsible for Domestic Animals, he coined a famous expression: "Before I was in charge of the High Court, now I am in charge of the Low Court". He dispensed his judgments with a touch of Fraternal Humor, even on the Superiors General: "Br. Gustave Hemery was a Sun that warmed, while Br. Etienne was a Sun that burned" (more severe). (His)

Br. Alpert was bound to the Brothers of his Community by a true brotherly love. A very close friendship bound him to the Archivist, Br. Hubert Libert, who understood him and esteemed him greatly, beyond his Eccentricities. He maintained a close correspondence with him, when he was transferred to Josselin (about Twenty Letters each). In one he wrote: “We cannot forget Dear Brother Hubert-Marie, that very Dear Kind, Devoted, Intimate, Selfless, that Incomparable Companion, throughout the War and all the time after. Thank you very, very much, very Dear Brother Hubert. In the Refectory during the War we were next to each other and never a Single Word, even the Slightest Bit Derogatory, touched our Lips, always a Serene Sky, between you and me... what’s more, you managed to convert the Wolf into a Lamb, biba! Yes, it’s because Dear Brother Hubert-Marie did Good without Noise: “He suffered everything – he believed everything – he hoped everything – he supported everything... in Silence! Biba, Good luck... Thank you for your kind memory of me, I don’t deserve so much...!” (L 13-1-1964): a Letter inspired by the Words of St. Paul. He also spoke of the conversion of the Wolf (Br. Alpert) by the Lamb (Br. Hubert): the Superiors feared the bad influence of the Wolf, but the opposite happened, being also Br. Alpert a “Lamb in Wolf’s Clothing”.



***Brother Ange
Eyherabide***

Among his Great Friends, in addition to Br. Hubert, we must also place Br. Angel Eyherabide. Basque like him, he had Great Patience with Br. Albert. The Latter respected him and followed him and, as he was Master of Novices, he had Great Influence over him. Moreover, as the Official Nurse of the House, he often received visits from his Original Confrere, especially after some indigestion. In Jersey, there was a Good Team of Brothers who lived their Faith in the Simplicity of the Little Ones of the Gospel. Br. Donat, a Tireless Worker, in his Printing Shop: he

teased and greatly esteemed Br. Alpert; Br. Jean Didaiiller, always full of enthusiasm, encouraging the young people during those times of change;

Br. Hubert, the Lamb who “converted the Wolf”; Br. Marie-Bernard, tall and strong, always working in the Garden (“Every Blade of Grass was an Act of Love towards God”); Br. Cyprius, Former Missionary in the Rocky Mountains, in his perfectly Cleaned Paths; Br. Clémentin, Eternal “Under”: Undermaster, Undermanager, Under-Manager...; Br. Paterne on his Tractor; Br. Angebert, the Athletic Tailor; Br. Angel, “My Great Friend”.

He was entrusted with the Infirm Brothers, especially the most difficult ones. He cared for them with the Tenderness of a Mother.

“When, at the end of the War, it was necessary to take care of a Sick Brother, who had lost his mind and who no longer controlled himself, Brother Alpert became his Day and Night Nurse, washing him and cleaning his clothes several times a day and, if necessary, sleeping next to him. That was to the great admiration of Brother Célestin-A. Who had offered him that task” (HU). He would repeat that “Profession” of Voluntary Nurse several times, such as “washing an old



man who had become doddering several times a day” (HU). In Josselin he was the Night Nurse. “Sometimes he was called several times by Brother Louis-Arsène, who had lost his head. If the calls were repeated too often, he knew how to kindly correct his Old Superior: A few years ago it was you who corrected me; now it is up to me to correct you. Stay calm and accept to be treated by me!” (His) He wrote to Brother Donat: “Now there are two sick people. Both unconscious. Every Night I sleep in a Large Armchair, at the Door of the two Sick People, in the corridor. Brother Evariste, darling, did not move, slept almost all the time and when he woke up, he looked at you with his eyes wide open, but did not speak. The other one, Brother Ludovic, does not know anyone either, but made a hell of a Racket, he shouted very often... during the day it does not matter, but at night he

really bothers us!” (L. 20-4-1958) At that time, Brother Alpert was 76 years old!

He was a Brother in the truest sense of the Word. He wanted to see only good around him; he could not tolerate malice. “He was very Charitable. Never a word of backbiting against his neighbor... I never heard him utter a word of murmuring against others:” (HU) In his Letters, spoke of the Brothers, he painted them as Wonders and ended with his usual expression: BIBA, BIBA! He could truly sing: “Oh, how good and joyful it is that Brothers are United!”

4- A LITTLE BROTHER ON DUTY

Br. Alpert was listed as a “Jack of all Trades” on the Staff List. The peak of his Teaching Career was: “Lower Class”; then: Supervisor, Manual Labor, Chamber Musician, Farmyard Worker, Employee (for everything), Cowherd, Volunteer Nurse... He had become a Brother to Teach, Trained by his able-bodied Fellow Citizen, Br. Lapeyre, one of the Founders of the Spanish Province. He had taught (Lower Class) for the First Twelve Years of his Religious Life. Afterwards, he was always in charge of Manual Labor, deemed unsuitable for teaching. Indeed, he had difficulty doing that Work and had been poorly prepared for it. As a child, in Primary School, he divided his time between School and looking after his Father’s Flock; from the



age of 10 to 13, he had lived in the Open Air in the Mountains, far from any School. His preparation had been brief and superficial. “During that time I could neither study nor prepare for exams. At 14, in the Juniorate, it was already too late! At 15 in the Novitiate (I understood little of it); a Few

Months of Scholasticate, full of gaps and immediately to the Work of Supervision, here and there and that was all in fact of Instruction! Fortunately it is not like that anymore! BIBA!” (L. 1968).

Yet he was not lacking in understanding and especially in common sense. Let us remember that his family produced Three Priests (of the Sacred Heart of Betharram) and Two Nuns; he himself had not been encouraged to continue his studies, also because of his frivolous character and not because of any incapacity: “On the other hand, he had Very Careful Handwriting, he wrote in French and Spanish perfectly correctly, despite the considerable difficulties of spelling, especially in the French Language, he used appropriate and very expressive words.” (Sai)

[NOTE: Among other things, his Letters were a spectacle in themselves: they were filled with Ellipses, abound with Exclamatory Points (2, 3, 4...), the words are underlined several times, Words were written in Large Letters, gone over, put in quotation marks: it seemed as if he saw himself speaking his messages aloud!"]



We could know his true abilities as a Teacher: he was certainly rather untidy and improvised a lot. When he was asked to Teach Spanish to his fellow students, it was a waste of time because of his confusion: “he was a Very Bad Teacher!” (HU)

Nevertheless, we found a page from his “Career” as an Educator that was particularly significant, which showed us that Br. Alpert used an Educational Method based on his Heart: “Education was a thing of the heart” (Don Bosco). That was when he was placed in Bilbao, with “Los Niños especiales del Refugio de la Protección a la Infancia”: “That Mission

gave him the opportunity to give his Affection, Kindness and Heart Full of Tenderness. In fact, under a rather Original Mask, he contained a particularly Charitable Soul.” (His) Even several years later, he willingly reported Episodes of that experience that had greatly affected him and that he had experienced twice.

Basically he was reserved for Manual Work, at the complete disposal of his Superiors, always according to his style: he was very fast and on the move, but with his Own Schedule. He was always Running Around and... he was



always Late. “He got very tired, because he didn’t know how to organize himself and he proceeded in a Disorderly Manner.” (His) “He didn’t refuse any service, and didn’t

hesitate to get his Hands Dirty. All the Humble, Dirty and Disgusting Jobs fell on him. He always and cheerfully accepted all the Chores, for example twice a day removing the Kitchen Waste, Carrying Manure from the German Stables, pulling a *Cart in the Streets of the Town of St-Hélier*, *washing* several times a day an old man who had become senile...” (HU) His Jobs were many, especially when he was looking after the “Farmyard”. “He usually started by emptying the Kitchen Waste for his Pigs, or by cutting the Greenery for his Rabbits. Then he worked outside: what a pleasure for him to be in the Open Air, far from Home!” Naturally his outfit was adapted to his Good Nature: “He wore Work Clothes that were repulsively dirty. When it came to “getting his Hands Dirty” he was the first to run.” (HU) In Josselin he would make the comparison with his stay in Jersey: “Here, in Josselin, complete tranquility; no running around, BIBA! There in Jersey my hands were always Black! Despite the Soap; here the hands are white like the hands of a little darling”. (L.1958) But in Josselin too there was no shortage of Work. “In Jersey I was always with the

Wheelbarrow, in front of the Kitchen, in the Vegetable Room, at the Furnace of Dear Br. Donat removing the Clinker, the Ashes and in the Henhouse with the Cabbage Trunks, the Manure etc. Here it is the same thing; I am always with the Wheelbarrow and the Little Cart, the Coal, the Wood, the Cider, the Bottles, in the Cellar, the Broom, the Rake...etc... It never ended! There was no time to be bored even 1 Minute!" (L.20-1-1961)

Brother Alpert's Confreres recognized his many and colorful performances. We could see an echo of that in the Speech for the 50th Anniversary of Religious Life in 1948, celebrated in a Minor Key, but with Humor by Brother Donat-Alphonse. Here were a Few Small Highlights: "The beginnings of your New Duties [as Cook] were not without some Incidents, but there were no Deaths and no one held a grudge against you!... The Superior General served a rather Elderly Brother, Discreet, Active, Friend of Cleanliness, Order and Silence. He believed he had found in you the man



he was looking for!!!... From then on you were seen, successively and simultaneously, in the Henhouse, Hutch, Cellar, Kitchen, and Garden, on the Streets of St-Hélïer and at Bon-Secours (Novitiate). Thanks to your aptitude for

Languages, you were able to hold conversations with the German Cooks, who greatly facilitated the problem of feeding thirty Rabbits in times of restriction..." Then in a tone of True Admiration: "It was impossible for me to explain your Heroic Charity towards that Poor Colleague. God alone could assess its merit. Now you have resumed your Customary Work with the same enthusiasm, always Joyful, and Helpful. Age (66 years) does not seem to diminish your activity and agility in any way. Who could count all your steps during a single day! The Good Lord, who does not leave unrewarded a glass of water given in his name to His Little Ones, was

doubtless preparing a Beautiful Crown for you in His Kingdom” (Speech of Brother Donat-Alphonse, 1948)

5- THE FAITH OF A CHILD OF THE GOSPEL

Contrary to appearances, Brother Alpert was a man of Prayer and Contemplation. His Confreres could testify: “In Jersey, he left the Memory of a Sincere Faith and a Profound Religious Life. That Little Brother from the South, Original and Nervous, edified us in the Chapel with his Intense Recollection; he spent a lot of time on his Knees and without moving. Outside of times of Common Prayer, he was often seen in the Chapel reciting the Rosary or doing the Stations of the Cross.” (His) We knew that he was always running, with his Agitated Rhythms, but “he was Sincerely



Pious, even if he usually arrived at the Prayer Exercises at the Last Minute or Late. The best proof of his piety was his Perseverance despite the Persecution in 1903, a Hard Foundation in Spain and twenty other Trials,

when he was very young (20 years old). He was sometimes seen in the Chapel, or at Common Exercises, for the Rosary and the Stations of the Cross, which he did while moving.” (HU) He did not have an Overly Intellectual Faith; he had difficulty concentrating and was often distracted during Meditations and Sermons. “So he would ask his Fellow Workers to repeat the Points of the Prayer or to share their Spiritual Readings with him during walks on days off.” (Sa)

In his Devotions he was very fond of External Celebrations and Solemn Ceremonies: he could express his Devotion with feeling and participation,

putting his Whole Soul into it: Novenas, Processions, Eucharistic Blessings, Decorations of Flowers for Corpus Christi or on Altars, Lenten Penances, Solemn Masses Sung in Choir... It was his sorrow, at the time of the first after the Council, to see the setting aside of External Liturgical Manifestations to which he was very fond and in which he participated with enthusiasm and sincere commotion, BIBA!

He complains about it with disgust in his Letters: "Now everything was modernised! There was no more Corpus Christi Procession; no more Lent, no days of Fasting, no Blessing of the Blessed Sacrament on Thursdays... How could we replace all that? How could we increase "Faith"? (Underlined)" (L. 1969) "How could we make Progress... with so much Modernism and so much Secularism!!! Everything was suppressed, under the Pretext of being Obsolete, Outdated, Out of date, Outmoded!! That was not how we were going to make Progress!!" (L. 1970)

He personally, in his simplicity, had found the true way to "Progress." In reply to Brother Hubert, he wrote: "I offer you the Magnificent Wishes of Happiness in God, of Health and Peace, which you offered me, so that I may "Progress" (sic) more and more in Holiness... which was the duty of every Religious! BIBA!" (L. 1970)

6- HUMILITY AND SIMPLICITY OF A LITTLE BROTHER

Perhaps the most obvious, yet also the most difficult to understand, characteristic was his Humility. His Originality could be equated with a desire to be the center of attention. "In that regard, his Superiors, worried, had to keep a constant watch over him. He often managed to slip through the net and escape." But here was the reason: "He took pleasure in amusing all his Neighbors with his Gestures and Movements." (HU) Obedient and considerate toward his Superiors, he prayed for God's Blessing on their Heavy Responsibilities. But at the same time, he had a Brotherly attitude toward them. On the one hand, they were disturbed by his Extravagances; on the other, he gave them the Gift of Joyful Laughter

in the midst of their worries. He carried the Cheerfulness and Unpredictability of the Wind of the Holy Spirit, from which one could know where it comes from and where it goes. He himself saw himself as a Little Child in the Arms of God. He made it a point of honor to show his Ignorance and his Lack of Brilliant Qualities. He replies to Br. Hubert who had sent him a Letter of Congratulations: "I received your Grandiose and Fantastic Letter (which I did not expect), thank you for having raised Br. Alpert's hare ... May God bless you ... What high-flown phrases and what Sonorous Words you tell me ... Now you know very well that there was nothing true in all that you tell me, but continue, as long as one says that, the fly does not bite ... If I had done some studies, one could perhaps believe that there was something true, but in my childhood [...] For 20 years you have seen that I was nothing - that I had nothing - that I was worth nothing - that I was capable of nothing, but BIBA, BBBIBA! Dear Br. Hubert! (L. February 1968) Accents which bring Our Little Brother closer to the Spirituality of St. Therese of the Child Jesus. And these were not, not False Words. He was not capable of telling lies. He was convinced of being unimportant, a "Little-Brother-of-Nothing", to be at total disposal, to plug the holes, to bring his Joy where Obedience called him. He felt like the "useless" Servant of the Gospel who simply did what he had to accomplish. Moreover, if he was not there [in Jersey], it was almost better for everyone: "I did well to leave Jersey, You see that after my departure everything was working out wonderfully! Now there was a Gas Water Heater at the Scalding Stove: no more Coal, no more Dust, no more Running at six in the Morning, no more Accidents! No longer "bitten by the fly" [Himself] ... all these little new changes were not to be despised ... And, finally, the biggest: no more need to "exorcise" Alpert, neither in the Corridors, nor in either of the two Novitiates... what Peace, Tranquility, Silence, and what Happiness everywhere! I would also like to see the New Washing Machines...BIBA!" (L.20-1-1961)



Jersey

He realized that he had a very simple mentality: he did not know how to develop grand plans or make complicated arguments. So he asked to be enlightened - in his own way: "Dear Brother Donat recommended to me several times: If any of you

lacks Wisdom, let him ask God for it... I asked God... but I did not win!" Yet in his simplicity he issued very Judicious Sentences, the fruit of his experience and his Fraternal Observations. Examples: "When two old Brothers lived together, they end up infallibly quarreling! In Community one must never stand up alone against everyone, because one was always wrong in the end" (HU, who concluded "many times I have seen the truth of that"). The same goes for his observations on the situation of the Church: "In 1905 the French Government voted for the separation of Church and State. Until then, on Sundays, at High Mass, at Communion, everyone sang very loudly, at the top of their Lungs. Domine salvum fac and I too, with them and like them... at the top of their Lungs. In 1905, at the vote, it stopped. Now, in 1970, it was for the Pope (Paul VI): Domine, salvum fac, servo tuo Paule et exaudi nos in die, qua invocaverimus te." He adds a Family Intention: "And for the Chapter. "Domine salvum fac servos tuos, Elisée-Rannou et Chapitre et exaudi nos..." I continued that every day until Easter. I saw in a book: "And Prayer, what Power!" (L.2-2-70)



Brother Alpert had several ways of presenting himself. He was the "Little Devil" whom the Superiors had to exorcise. He was the Little "Nothing" who knew nothing. He was the "Troublesome Fly" who didn't know how to sting. He was the "Wolf" who set a bad

example, but who spread his Joy everywhere. He was the Jester in the hands of the Father for the Joy of his Brothers. Br. Hubert, his great friend, wrote to him shortly after he entered the St-Martin House: "You write to me: The fly no longer bites! Is it crushed? It was a good sign: it proved that you are advancing in perfection and that you are going to become a Saint! Saint-Oxibar! So much the better, dear friend, let us sanctify ourselves, because time was pressing and we have only a short time left to spend on this Earth!... I am delighted that you have resumed your Profession as a Handyman that was to say, as a man ready to be of Service to all, especially to the Sick and the Venerated Elderly around you. "All that you do to them, you do to Christ!" (L.HU

1958) was the same thought of Br. Alpert: "You offered me Magnificent Vows... so that I could progress more and more in Holiness, which was the Duty of every Religious." (L.1970)

7- AN EVANGELICAL KID'S "HOLINESS"

Certainly, Br. Alpert interpreted Holiness in his own way and, alongside his Generosity in Service, Fraternal Spirit, Contagious Joy, and Fervor in Prayer, he did not miss the faults as with everyone. For example, "he ate enormously and it was necessary, since he was always running, spending the whole day on the move. He even ate between Meals. But then his excesses tired him out a lot and he was often indisposed. Fortunately, Br. Angel and the Infirmary were not far away." (HU) Br. Hubert humorously noted that, after his departure from Jersey, "we no longer found any

Volunteers to clear the Dishes, the Doors closed more quietly, Peace reigned in the House, the Superiors were no longer on the lookout to prevent a few small Revolutions! But also, when we needed a Service, we look around us: no more Br. Alpert!" (L. HU May 1958). And then from time to time he had Fits of Anger, especially when his Sincerity was questioned. Accused of having stolen an Egg, he no longer wanted set foot in the Kitchen. When the German Soldiers stole the Rabbits he had raised for the Christmas Feast, his Words against the Thieves were not gentle! When his Missionary Brother in Argentina, missed the Meeting with the Superior General, Br. Gustave, he sent him Biblical Curses! "That my Brother did not

deign to respond to the Invitation of the Reverend Brother! That was a bit strong! Damned Occupations! Damned Hindrances! Damned Cowardice! Damned Carelessness! Damned Ill Will! How could I make amends? That was too strong! I told him all that like that! We would see what he would say! His Pretexts!!!" (L.1951) It was the Holy Anger of the Innocent, who couldn't bear Injustice and sees everything with clear



eyes and without malice.

He spread Good Humor in his own way. "He talked a lot while walking (but little in the Refectory), often repeating the same things. He was Cheerful and gifted with a certain Humor. He liked Puns and Jokes, but his own were rather dull. A little slow-witted, he sometimes had to ruminate for several hours to understand a Witty Remark or Joke from a Colleague; when he had understood, he would burst out laughing, in the Evening or during the Night" (HU). Like the time he had to guess the difference between St-Malo and a Sow: "St-Malo was a Seaport and a Sow was a Mother of Pigs!" It was said that he could be heard laughing for a good part of the Night!

Certainly, Br. Alpert was very similar to the children of the Gospel who danced and cried in the Square, who climbed Trees and shouted at the Top of their Voices: Hosanna to Jesus, who continually saw the Face of the Father, to whom God revealed the Mysteries of the Kingdom, who were the First to enter Heaven... "A Brother testified that Br. Alpert had the Soul of a child and precisely the Kingdom of Heaven belonged to those who are like children, to those who are Simple, to those who are Humble. His commitment to the Service of God and his Brothers was the Summary of the Law and the Prophets." (Sa)

An Episode could well illustrate that Statement. Here it was: "He was in the Community of Josselin. He would like to sew a button on his Shirt, but he had no Thread. Since he did not want to disturb the Nuns, he thought of going to buy it in a Store in Town. The Problem was that he had no money. He did not get discouraged. He went to the garden, picked a Beautiful Ripe Pear, rapped it nicely with paper and went to the Store. He simply explained what he needed and proposed that exchange in kind. The Merchant, at first surprised by that naivety, immediately understood and admired the Ingenuity of that "Holy Little Brother" and accepted the "Deal". Br. Alpert, God's Boy!

As a child, he went beyond conventions and treated everyone as fellow Human Beings. During the War, when the English Island of Jersey was occupied by the German Armed Forces, he was not afraid to frequent the premises where the "Enemy" Soldiers resided, especially the Kitchens. "He often prowled around the Kitchens because of his Job. People did not like to see him in conversation with a German Soldier (the two understood each other, one not knowing the other's Language!) He brought with him the Kitchen Scraps, or the Manure, pushing his Cart through the Streets of the Town. On occasion, he accepted with obvious pleasure from the German Cook a Good Piece of Meat, which he devoured on the spot!" (HU) "Be Cheerful, I repeat to you: always be Cheerful." And also like Don Bosco: "Holiness consists in being very cheerful and in doing Our Duty."

8- A BURNING DESIRE FOR HEAVEN

Brother Alpert spent the last years of his life (21!) in the Nursing Home for the Elderly or Sick Brothers. He was well there, as he was found himself



well everywhere: for him, the St-Martin House was “an Earthly Paradise!” Thanks to his Iron Health (supported by a more than abundant diet), he provided an incredible number of Services. Brother Hubert wrote: “I

am delighted that you have resumed your Job as a Handyman, ready to be of service to everyone.” He replied: “Here, in Josselin, I am always with the Wheelbarrow, Coal, Wood, Bottles, Broom, and the Rake...: it never ends!” Or again: “I am always doing Odd Jobs, everywhere; so I don’t have time to be bored, not even for a minute! Like in Jersey, I still run (at 82 years old!) and I still jump, and I climb the Stairs “Brincando”. Still, it’s going very well, but how long will it last?” (L.1972)

During those long years he spread his Good Humor among the Brothers of the House, often sick or tired, after a life spent in the Education and Instruction of Children and Young People. He had the great satisfaction of being able to meet, after so many years, his Family of Origin and the Brothers of the Province of Spain. He made Trips of which he spoke enthusiastically: to Camou-Cihigue with his Family, to Bayonne and Lourdes with his Missionary Brothers and his Religious Sisters; to the Spanish Communities, where he had lived his young years of Religious Life. It must be said that he had a Great Love for Spain: he loved to speak

Spanish, he inquired about News from the Province, and spoke with the Spanish Brothers who arrived in Jersey or in France. He launched his “Battle Cry” everywhere: VIVA ESPANA, VIVA, VIVA! He wrote it according to its Pronunciation: BIBA, BIBA! And he made it resound everywhere: it was his sign of recognition.

As the years passed, his Iron Health began to show signs of weakness: Cataracts, Prostate Surgery at 90... but he was always on the move. He was well aware that Heaven was approaching for him too. Noting the deaths of the Brothers he had known in his long life, he concluded: “That’s what we are! I’m nothing more than an Old Rococo of 87. My time was already up and I ask God every day: an Ardent Desire for Heaven... a True Desire for Heaven... But for when? For the



in Josselin

moment everything was going wonderfully well... Biba! But it took so little for misfortune to happen!” (L.29-10-1968) in announcing the Death of his Missionary Brother in Thailand, he wrote: “After the Intestinal Operation, all that remained was for him to prepare to die generously as he had lived. It was on the Evening of Candlemas that Our Lady came to seek him out and take him away.” (L.19-2.1964)

Our Lady also came to take Brother Alpert: it was on May 9th, 1979, in the Month dedicated to the Blessed Virgin. He surely went up to Heaven running, climbing the steps three by three, in the company of his Camou-Cihue Goats which climbed the Mountains. In Heaven, God and the Saints were waiting to laugh with him, who did not know how to do “anything important,” but who spread a ray of happiness everywhere he went. The

source of this happiness was found in his Heart: "He was a man, a Religious Man, a happy Brother. Cooking, Cleaning, Raising Pigs, Chickens, providing the most Repulsive Services... those were Occupations commonly considered humble, reserved for people of little importance and somewhat



In Josselin for his 80 years of Religious Life

simpletons." (His) Brother Alpert positioned himself beyond Conventions, Careers, Hierarchies, and Appearances. He went straight to the heart, like children who are full of wonder, like the Little Wise Men of the Gospel, like the Clowns who unmask what was false, like the Servants who were the True Kings, because in the Kingdom the Greatest were the Smallest, like Children, that Jesus placed at the Center. There was an Acronym that Br. Alpert put at the end of his Letters: "JMJ", which meant: Jesus, Mary, Joseph, which was to say the people of the Gospel that he had imprinted in his heart.

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