

LETTER TO FATHER JOSEPH BOURGET

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Joseph Bourget made his novitiate in 1848. He left for the African mission with Father Boulanger, arriving at Dakar in 1850, where he was ordained a priest. Two years later he returned to France and was subsequently sent to Mauritius. He left the Congregation in 1873.

71

Father Libermann severely reprimands a priest for his unbecoming conduct.

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Dear Father Bourget:

[Your Letter Was Unworthy of a Priest]

Your letter of last July caused me profound grief; yet, it left me some hope that you would send me another in which you would attribute the first letter to a momentary fit of ill humor and excitement, stating that it was this that had made you say things that were as wicked as they were false. I would then have replied giving you proper advice.

I have waited in vain these seven or eight months and now think it necessary to reply to you, for my soul is weighed down with sorrow and anxiety in regard to your eternal salvation. I only hope that after you had sent me that letter which was the product of an overheated imagination, you forgot all about its contents. So I send you a copy of it to let you see for yourself how wrong you were in writing that way. It is my hope that, next time, you will do your best not to yield to your impetuous spirit and will keep your harsh temperament under control.

SPIRITUAL LETTERS OF FRANCIS LIBERMANN

How is it possible for one with your faith, for one who is always in the midst of danger, at least to a certain extent, to give in to such wicked sentiments—to feelings that are so greatly opposed to the spirit of Our Lord Jesus Christ? Not only are they contrary to His spirit but they are contrary to the elementary principles of religion.

Suppose even for one moment that all you told me in that letter is true. Is a Christian allowed to indulge in that kind of haughty indignation which you so forcefully expressed in your letter? And you a religious and a priest! Writing to your superiors in that manner! The things you consider so very black and horrible [in their conduct] are in fact very plain and conform in every respect with our rules and the spirit of the Gospel. I won't explain them here because I prefer to leave that explanation to Bishop Kobès himself.

*[You Have Gone to Preach a Message of Joy With
Bitterness in Your Heart]*

How does it happen that without knowing the things of which you speak, you see them in such a dark light? Isn't it because your heart is not right, because it is radically opposed to charity and humility? And you are a missionary of Jesus Christ and claim that you are sacrificing yourself for His glory!

If those sentiments had been aroused only momentarily by the things you mention in your letter, I would have believed that this was only a passing disturbance or a misunderstanding; but I see now that you had those sentiments in your heart even before you left Europe. You went to announce the Glad Tidings to the pagans, the Gospel of peace and love, and you approach those souls with an embittered heart! Do you think that when the Apostles dispersed after receiving the Holy Ghost, it was with that kind of disposition in their hearts?

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You have pronounced a severe judgment; you have condemned your superiors. Do you think that this is in keeping with the Holy Gospel which you went forth to preach? Is it like the spirit of Jesus Christ and in conformity with the most elementary notions of Christianity? Why did you judge and condemn your superiors? If you examine the matter carefully you will see that it was more because your pride was hurt than because your superiors had done the wrongs you attributed to them.

[You May Have Sown Discord in the Community]

One other thing worries me too. While yielding to the temptation of the devil, it is possible that you might have communicated to others the wicked judgments you pronounced in your mind, and in this way you would have added scandal to your faults against justice, charity and religion. Remember what the Savior said about those who judge and condemn their superiors.

Let us pass judgment on ourselves instead of judging our superiors. Recall what Our Lord said about those who are a source of scandal. We have already a heavy enough burden of our own faults. Our shoulders are too weak to take on the load of others as well. It is a millstone that we then hang on our neck and we sink with it, not in the sea but in the malice of the devil. This sort of scandal caused in a community is infinitely more serious than when caused in the world. It introduces disquiet in the minds, disorder in the religious family, and distrust of superiors. It arrests the flow of divine graces, keeps away God's blessing from our works, and, in a word, causes disorganization and makes the devil victorious over the servants of God. The Heart of Our Lord Jesus Christ must of necessity condemn and curse the man who sows cockle in the field of His servants, because he completely ruins the work of Christ's grace and mercy.

SPIRITUAL LETTERS OF FRANCIS LIBERMANN

I adjure you by the faith that is in you and by your desire to please God, to enter into the depths of your heart and tear out the very last root of evil which you find in it. Learn from Our Good Master to be meek and humble of heart, for these are two essentials in which you have been wanting.

[Do Not Yield to Discouragement]

Don't be angry because of the severe language I am using in this letter. Listen to my words with humility and be on your guard against attributing wrongs to others, for the truth is that the whole of the evil is found in your own heart.

Avoid imitating those who see motes in the eyes of others and fail to see the beam in their own eye. Realize that the superiors who appear so reprehensible to you have not sinned as much against the Gospel as you have by yielding to irritation for such a long time.

I feel sure that your heart would bleed with sorrow if it pleased God to show you clearly, in a divine light, what your conduct toward your former directors has been. You find their conduct so disgraceful simply because you see it through the eyes of passion and wounded self-love.

Don't become discouraged when grace reveals to you the evil you have done. May it be for you a motive to be more faithful in the future. I feel confident that this will be your reaction, and I promise that I shall not cease praying for such a happy result.

Your poor and afflicted servant,

FRANCIS LIBERMANN, Superior