

21. LETTER TO FATHER MARTIN DUBY

Martin Duby (1823-1890) entered the Congregation in 1847 and was ordained a priest in 1848. The following year he left for the African Mission, where he spent most of his life until his death in 1890.

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Defects of a superior. Timidity, lack of self-confidence, and impetuosity.

Paris, May 8, 1851

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Dear Confrere :

You are easily satisfied! You merely wanted me to tell you whether I received your letter of March 7th; but, my beloved confrere, I am not going to content myself with a statement to the effect that I received your letter; I want to have a chat with you.

Your letter was most interesting. The details serve to trace the various phases through which you have passed during your stay in the mission. You have undergone many troubles and difficulties but this was to be expected, for there was still something wanting in your character. Those troubles were needed for the good of your soul and the benefit of your future ministry. God is good; He apportions all things, not according to our tastes, but in line with His merciful designs in our regard.

I formerly noticed three faults in you and knew that they would give you trouble during the first years of your ministry, but at the same time, I foresaw that they would be corrected through practice and difficulties encountered in dealing with people. These faults were the following :

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[*Timidity*]

A timidity which made you be too reserved in your words and actions and caused you to close your soul too easily in your relations with persons who failed to take account of your shyness. I learn with great pleasure that it has pleased God to make that fault disappear. In fact, it received its deathblow when Bishop Kobès made you Superior. There is no better remedy against timidity than being given a responsible job and being forced to meet a lot of people. Hence your principal defect, which is probably the source of all the others, has been overcome.

You seem now to be afraid that it might reappear, but I think that you have no reason for fear at all. It is possible that some traces of it might be preserved but this is not an evil; on the contrary, it will help you to remain modest and humble.

[*Lack of Self-Confidence*]

Your second fault was that you had too low an opinion—too great a distrust—of yourself. This, together with your natural shyness, easily disturbed your mind. But since timidity, which to a great extent was its source, is now overcome, this fault has been weakened in its foundations. Moreover, the office of being superior is likewise an efficacious remedy for this second fault. Obligated to make decisions and take action, you will gradually forget yourself and acquire the kind of daring that is needed for making decisions. The traces of that defect which might still remain with you will prove very useful, for you will thus be more flexible and less categorical in your decisions and will listen more readily to the advice of your confreres.

You should be on your guard against hesitation and vacillation. You must dare to do things, while preserving modesty

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and humility. Neither should you follow every counsel given you by your confreres. You should listen to them and, depending on its value, follow, modify or even reject the advice, but at the same time do everything in a gentle and fitting manner. Moreover, on this point the experience you have had of the effects produced in you by the inflexibility or impetuosity of your superiors will safeguard you from similar faults. You'll learn not to repeat what has hurt you in the past. On the other hand, you should not yield when your opinion is the best, nor should you ever take refuge in evasion.

[Impetuosity]

The third fault was a certain impetuosity of mind that inclined you to precipitation. This fault resulted from the other two defects, at least in regard to its effects. Your mind was quick to react; it functioned with sudden leaps in its reactions to the impressions it received. And so, because of the two first faults, your action was often ahead of reflection and too lively. I don't know whether I ever explained this sufficiently to you during the novitiate, but I remember that I spoke to you about it.

All this didn't worry me, for I was certain that it was merely of a passing nature. Now that the first two faults have disappeared, you will easily rid yourself of the third, or at least diminish it considerably and to such an extent that it will no longer cause you difficulties.

[Sundry Counsels]

Let your mind surrender to the spirit of Our Lord Jesus Christ for the salvation of souls, with all the fervor of your heart.

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Be gentle and gracious in your actions and preserve peace of soul. When you make a mistake, avoid worrying about it and put all your confidence in God, in Jesus, and in Mary.

Avoid making your confreres too conscious of you as Superior. Be both firm and gentle at the same time. But maintain the observance of the rule. Without it, laxity will enter into your community. Moreover, there will then be no permanent union between confreres and they will even have to suffer.

[*News Items*]

Good Father Ronarch went to his reward on March 23. He died in his family. Last fall he wanted to go to his home town and most reluctantly I gave him permission. I didn't like it, for I foresaw that he was going to die. But I was afraid of hurting his feelings and thus giving the devil a chance to tempt him. His temper had become quite gentle during his stay at Notre Dame du Gard. He has died a holy death.

Father François has departed for the missions. It had become impossible to keep him here. He was, as it were, homesick for the missions and this homesickness had become a serious illness. If he had been forced to remain here until the end of the year, I don't know what course this strange moral and physical illness would have taken. I've sent him to Bourbon. He is very sorry that I didn't appoint him for Guinea. Later perhaps.

Adieu!

Entirely yours in Jesus and Mary,

FRANCIS LIBERMANN, Superior