

Letter to Mr. Fréret, Seminarian

Mr. Fréret was a seminarian at St. Sulpice, who later became pastor of Conteville, near Amiens. Only one letter addressed to him has been preserved. After Francis Libermann's death, he wrote: "The things that impressed me most in him were his interior spirit, his sublime knowledge of Holy Scripture. . . . What struck me most were the words of fire that fell from his lips when he spoke of the 'good Lord.' His heart was then so full of love that his voice faltered." ¹

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Nature can be overcome only gradually. Therefore, constant restraint is necessary. "Let the dead bury their dead."

Illkirch, September 4, 1831 Vol. 1, p. 323

Dear Friend:

*[Don't Expect to Overcome Your Evil Inclinations
With a Single Effort]*

May the peace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you, and may His love grow unceasingly in your soul. I did not remember the advice which I gave you and about which you speak, namely, "that you must restrain yourself, and that you have nothing else to do during your vacation"; but I find that you are right in paying close attention to it.

This principle appears to me extremely important at all times for anyone who wishes to lead a truly interior life, wholly in God. We cannot succeed in uprooting all our natural inclinations and desires with a single effort. We

¹Notes et Documents, vol 1, p. 323.

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must aim at this with all our strength, and propose nothing less than the complete destruction of every kind of natural desire. We must take the strongest and the most comprehensive resolutions on this point, ardently desiring before God the death and entire destruction of all natural life, and tending in everything to be united with God, and to live only of His life. In this manner, all our affections, all our actions, desires and thoughts, will tend to take us away from creatures and unite us to God alone. This is the only resolution worthy of us, and the only object of our soul in its supernatural life.

*[The Persistence of Such Inclinations Does Not Necessarily
Imply the Will's Consent]*

But as long as we have not succeeded in completely vanquishing our flesh with all its powers, it will continue to molest us with its ignoble affections, its vain desires, and its levity. It will always try to fill and permeate our senses with them, and through them all these abominations will affect our innermost soul. That is the reason why we often believe that the will itself seeks all these follies, or, at least, first gives its consent to them. This usually happens to such as have not yet made great progress, because their will is still too much under the influence of the senses, and their soul is too much permeated with them. Sometimes it is the want of experience that makes us believe so; and, for the same reason, we are unable to distinguish things so closely allied and so difficult to distinguish.

[Self-Restraint and Confidence in God]

But what should we do in so painful and dangerous a situation? We must entrench ourselves near God in our interior, by the desire of enjoying Him and living only for Him, in Him, and according to His sole good pleasure. But this will not suffice; we must, moreover, moderate and

check the movements of the flesh that wish to steal into our interior; we must restrain ourselves continually. This restraint must be accompanied with an affectionate trust in God and contempt for the enemies of our soul—a contempt full of the love for God, of confidence in Him, but also full of humility and distrust in ourselves. If we proceed in such a way, we shall arrive, I hope, at the point to which God wishes to lead us; that is, to the interior life of contemplation, of love, of peace, and of annihilation before Him.

What a treasure this interior life is! What happiness, not only in its possession, but also in working at its acquisition! But we must act earnestly, and not go at it in a half-hearted way. Our kind Lord Jesus accompanies and supports us. Let us keep Him constantly in view, and consider Him unceasingly in all the circumstances of His life. We always find Him in a state of adoration, love, humiliation, and union with His heavenly Father. It could not be otherwise for Him; but we, poor wretches, cannot take a step without its being disputed, for our enemy is within our soul.

Let us not be discouraged on this account; our well-beloved and all-powerful Jesus will be ever with us; and if He fights for us, who can do us any harm? He is not only with us, but He dwells within our soul. We must, therefore, retire into His presence, and look upon Him with a spirit of gentleness, humility, annihilation and love, for the purpose of asking Him to draw us fully to Himself, to preserve us from being corrupted by the impurity of our wretched flesh, and from abandoning Him through the levity of our nature.

[*Become a Saint of the First Order*]

I see that I am writing a somewhat mystic letter; but it is written, and it will have to do. I would only add that it is very necessary for you to be an interior man, and to aim at

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the most perfect self-denial in all things, because if you do not constantly endeavor to become a saint of the first order, you will remain a very poor wretch indeed. Your character and natural disposition incline you directly toward laxity and that kind of nonchalance and indifference which would infallibly make you a priest of the "common of the saints"—a man who might fulfill the bulk of his duties, but who would love earthly joys and would try to satisfy himself, by leading, in the eyes of God, a natural and indifferent life. For this reason you must keep yourself firmly united to Our Lord, who is in your soul.

Be an interior man, a man of God; and His grace will rain down upon you; you will run no further risks on account of your flesh. At present you are still tortured a little; later, when you have conquered yourself, you shall be above everything, and your enemy will no longer be able to attack you at his pleasure.

I hope to meet you next year full of life and of love; not full of life and the love of creatures, but of the holy life and the heavenly love of Jesus and of Mary. I really think that you have worked a little in this direction in the past; but you cannot doubt that a great deal is still wanting in you, because you have not labored vigorously enough. I hope that God will achieve during this last year what He has begun with so much kindness and mercy. May His most Holy Name be forever blessed, praised and adored.

[*"Let the Dead Bury Their Dead"*]

You are acting very wisely in not busying yourself with the affairs of your sisters. Let "the dead bury their dead." If they come to you for advice, give it to them in all peacefulness, but don't become anxious about those things and don't run after them. If they speak to you about "their dead," leave to them the care of "burying them," i.e., don't

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get mixed up in worldly affairs. Do this very gently and very kindly, but nonetheless very firmly.

God be with you and Mary also. Best regards in their most holy charity.

Your confrere,

FRANCIS LIBERMANN, ACOLYTE