

10. LETTERS TO FATHER PIERRE LE BERRE

Pierre Marie Le Berre was born in 1819 at Neulliac in the diocese of Vannes. He was ordained a priest in 1844 and entered Libermann's novitiate in 1845. After sailing for Africa in 1846, he became superior of the mission of Gabon, Vicar General to Bishop Bessieux in 1859, and Vicar Apostolic of the Two Guineas in 1877. He died at Sainte Marie, Gabon, in 1891.

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*Be gentle and kind even toward those who treat you ill. On tolerance.*

*Letter One      Amiens, August 9, 1847      Vol. 9, p. 247*

Dear confrere :

I see in your letters that what troubles you most is the fact that you have to busy yourself with material affairs. Have confidence! This will not last. It is necessary in beginning a foundation to attend to material questions, but once the work is organized there will be less need for such business.

Don't lose courage in spite of the fact that you have not yet achieved anything. You have laid the groundwork. You will sow the seed and God's goodness will soon show you fruits. Courage and patience! This, I hope, will come—and come before long.

*[Charity and Kindness are Due to All]*

While engaged in learning the language, try to retain the spirit of piety. Maintain your soul in peace; be perfectly united with your confreres and never worry about yourself.

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Preserve peace with outsiders, act with simplicity towards the poor French [officials] who have no religion. Have compassion on them and don't be angry with them. Forgive them when they put obstacles in your way.

If they treat you harshly, speak to them with gentleness and kindness. If they accuse you, despise you, or misinterpret you, don't feel embarrassed on that account in your dealings with them. You should be on your guard against such embarrassment, which priests easily feel in respect to men of the world who do not share their thoughts and opinions, who dislike and despise them. Such embarrassment produces a certain stiffness and timidity that makes them act sulkily and assume a sly and haughty attitude. This manner of behavior produces very bad impressions and estranges those persons from our holy religion.

### [*On Tolerance*]

We ought to love all men, regardless of their feeling about religious principles and about us. We must leave to them the liberty to think and do what they please. If we had the power to force their consciences to be pure, their wills to be good and their minds to believe the truths, evidently we ought to use that power. Our charity toward men would then make it a duty. But no man on earth is ever able to force to the least extent the consciences, wills, and intellects of his fellow men. God has not desired to force them. Why then should we desire such a thing? God allows men the freedom to discard Him and act against Him. We should not wish to force them nor should we become angry with them. On the contrary, we must refrain from anger and sympathize with their misfortune because we see them in such evil straits. And our sympathy should prompt us to love them, to be free and open with them, to talk with them about all sorts of things that please them, trying to win their

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friendship, and being always pleasant in our relations with them . . .

Entirely yours in Jesus and Mary,

FRANCIS LIBERMANN

priest of the Holy Heart of Mary

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*What to do when one is upset by the behavior of others. Be submissive to your superiors with respect to your work. Obedience and difference of opinion.*

*Letter Two    Amiens, November 23, 1847    Vol. 9, p. 355*

Dear Confrere:

It is a source of consolation for me to see that the Spirit of God assists you and that He continues to live in your soul. Don't be surprised that you experience troublesome emotions from time to time, for who does not suffer temptations? Such temptations and disturbances are profitable to us because they put us on our guard against our weaknesses, preserve us, and strengthen us more and more. Have courage and trust in God, and all will go well.

*[How to React When the Behavior of Others Upsets You]*

You tell me that you still lose your peace of mind from time to time and that you are aroused by the least move or manner of acting of a superior or confrere. To this I reply, as you expect, that you ought to look upon such feelings as upon temptations. Raise your soul to God, without excessive violence or efforts; try to calm yourself and keep your soul in peace before God; distract your mind, turning its attention away from the thought that upsets you. When you have

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regained calm, act towards the superior or confrere as if you had never experienced any momentary bitterness or agitation.

*[God Wants You to Do the Work Your Superiors  
Assign to You]*

You tell me, secondly, that one of the things that disturbs you most is the thought that occupation with temporal affairs is not part of our work in the missions. I find it difficult to give you a satisfactory reply because I don't see precisely what is the object of your complaint. However, Father Gravière, who was sent to you by the Bishop, must have instructed all of you in regard to the impetus that should be given to the mission and the course that ought to be followed. Moreover Father Bessieux will arrive very soon. In all probability he will bring you the present letter. At least, you can expect him in the near future. Hence you can be at your ease. Measures will be taken so that things are ordered according to God's designs. If you notice that the superiors require no changes in what you are doing, you will be certain that God approves your way of doing things. If they introduce changes you will have even more reason to be calm and peaceful. And in this case you need no advice for your soul.

What should you do? You have judged rightly: you must recollect your soul very peacefully in God's presence in order to cast out all bitterness, trouble and vexation. Having restored liberty and calm to your mind, do then with simplicity in God's sight whatever you have been told to do.

If Our Lord were to ask you, "Peter, what are you doing?" It would be enough that you could answer Him, "Lord, I am doing Your will." If He asks, "Why do you do this or that?" you can be perfectly at ease, since you are able to reply, "Lord, I do it because it is Your holy will."

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This is all you have to reply to all the thoughts that might cause vexation to your mind when you happen to be doing what you have been told to do. Your intention of making your mental anxieties known to your superiors is excellent, for you will thus more easily obtain freedom of mind and restore peace to your soul.

*[To Be Obedient is Not the Same as to Agree with  
Your Superior's Opinion]*

When your Superior asks your advice regarding any matter whatsoever, give it to him. And don't content yourself with a bare statement of your advice, but explain the reasons for your opinion, for giving advice without explaining the reasons for it is equivalent to saying nothing or almost nothing. Hence by the very fact that you are asked to give your advice you are asked for the reasons on which it is based. Obedience and charity compel you in this instance to explain your opinion and even to show how difficulties that might be placed in the way of your plan could be overcome in the event that you realize fully that those difficulties would diminish the value of your advice. Obedience has nothing to do with disagreeing with the opinion of your Superior and explaining why you differ.

Here then is how you ought to act in such circumstances. When you examine a question with someone else, you should forget who you are, as it were, and who it is who is speaking to you about it. You must act as if you were all alone examining the question. You would then have to consider that matter, looking at it with your own mind as sustained and enlightened by grace, in order to determine the proper choice. Now this also is the way you ought to act when asked to give your advice.

Consider the object of the inquiry and state simply what you think about it. If the other person insists on his point

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of view and argues against you, continue to act in the same way: examine the difficulties and the other's arguments, forgetting both yourself and the one to whom you are speaking. Reason calmly in God's presence and state simply what you think about the matter. If, in the end, a decision is made that goes against your own opinion, act as if you had never entertained a different viewpoint. Forget your own judgment about it and act, approving things in conformity with the judgment that was reached by the others. Do all this calmly in God's presence.

The love of the Cross is a great grace of God which will make you strong against your own self and against the powers of the Enemy. It will bind you more surely and more closely to God than any other thing and give you constancy and perseverance in all you undertake for His glory.

Regarding your former acquaintances, forget them little by little, with the exception, of course, of your relatives, for you are obliged to write to them. Think of them at the time when you are going to write to them and give them news. It is useless to think of them at other times if such thoughts tend to upset you.

*Adieu*, dear confrere.<sup>1</sup>

Entirely yours in Jesus and Mary,

FRANCIS LIBERMANN

priest of the Holy Heart of Mary

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<sup>1</sup>A marginal note of Father Le Berre adds: "Our venerated Father Libermann used to say that lack of charity in a congregation is worse than the plague. One bad man would be enough to wreck the whole congregation."