

2. LETTERS TO MR. DELASORNE, SEMINARIAN

Father Delasorne, who later became archpriest of Abbeville, had known Francis Liberman intimately during his seminary years. In communicating Francis' letters to the Spiritan Motherhouse, Father Delasorne added: "Libermann draws his own portrait in his writings."

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Libermann invites him to a visit.

Letter One Abbeville, August 24, 1835 Vol. 1, pp. 226 f.

Dear Confrere:

May the peace of our Lord Jesus Christ fill your soul and keep you during the holidays, as at all other times, in the most pure, holy and perfect love of God.

I had intended to pay you a visit and this would have given me great joy. But I have so little time that I am not able to fulfill my promise, no matter how much I desire it. I have only two weeks' leave of absence from the seminary and have already spent some time waiting in vain for Mr. Roussel at Amiens. May I ask you therefore to come to Eu? I am leaving from Abbeville tomorrow and will go to Eu where I shall remain for several days. Please do your best to come and see Mr. Lebeuf and me. Do it for the love of God and the great charity you have for me. Why not spend a few days with us? Make up for my inability to pay you a visit. I eagerly wish to receive a visit from you, for I want to see with my own eyes the numerous graces which the good Lord has given you during the holidays. We would also have an opportunity to encourage each other to pre-

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serve peace and to be faithful to God's grace. What an abundance of grace He bestows upon you!

You will do well not to stay at the home of Mr. Lebeuf, for this might embarrass his parents. . . . God be with you and Mary also, dear confrere. I say no more, for I hope to see you soon and to greet you in the most holy love of Jesus and Mary, in which alone all the powers of your soul ought to be consumed.

Your poor servant,

FRANCIS LIBERMANN, ACOLYTE

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Even during the holidays God should remain the sole object of our love. Perfect union with God and faithfulness to grace.

Letter Two Issy, September 19, 1835 Vol. 1, p. 230

Dear Confrere :

The holidays are passing and like everything else will come to an end. What shall we have gained by giving our hearts over to dissipation, to the love of earthly things, to pleasure and self-satisfaction and to all the vain and wretched things which so readily entice us? What foolishness and weakness we show when we leave God and waste our time on trifles! God alone should be our sole inheritance, our only joy and our only love.

Keep a careful watch over yourself lest, in the midst of distractions and recreations, which you must take as a matter of conscience, you allow your heart to fall in love with them and to become attached to them. There should be no

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vacation nor recreation for your heart; for your heart must continue to increase constantly in the love of God and in renunciation to earthly things, natural pleasures and satisfactions.

You should be particularly on your guard against that indolence and indifference into which we so easily fall when nothing stimulates and prompts us to serve God properly. Vacation time is very dangerous, especially for those who are not yet well-experienced and fully established in the interior life. This is so because, unless we are completely detached from all creatures and self and have made very great progress in self-denial, we let the relaxation we are obliged to take divert our attention more or less from God.

As long as we have not attained to that complete detachment we are powerfully drawn to weakness and tepidity. We are unable to protect ourselves against this enticement except by a strong and uninterrupted application of our soul to God, in other words, by that "perpetual prayer" spoken of by Holy Scripture.

By that application we seek to find God in everything and to live for Him alone. God's grace then comes to our assistance and draws us completely to Himself.

As soon as we take part in the exterior pleasures of the senses, our soul necessarily forgets to seek God alone and it falls back immediately into its natural weakness and laxity. This happens because we have not yet reached that high degree of love which places us above all creatures and prevents us from seeing anything but God alone. In the latter case He is exclusively and definitively the sole object of all our desires and affections.

[Perfect Union With God]

When we have thus completely broken with all creatures, denying ourselves entirely every pleasure and satisfac-

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tion and all self-love, we withdraw within ourselves in close union with God. Our soul is then like a most pure and holy sanctuary where God constantly abides and where we rest unceasingly on His bosom in the sweet delightful sleep of His holy love. External things no longer disturb us in the least. We converse with men; we perform the same tasks as others; we play, we laugh, we talk with others, go for walks, take part in all exercises and recreations of vacation time without any trouble. We do not forsake our soul's union with God in the midst of all those things because we are not attached to any of them and do not pursue them for our own satisfaction. We are indifferent to everything; we do everything only in and for God. And thus we spend an excellent vacation, and distract ourselves perfectly; for this sort of life costs us no effort; there is no contention of spirit.

We are full of love for God alone and this love produces in us those wonderful effects that are for us a source of grace of inconceivable blessings and happiness. A stream of peace and love flows through our soul; and the Holy Spirit accomplishes such great and beautiful things in it that the angels are filled with joyful admiration.

Those things may appear to you as nothing but idle fancies or you might at least say to yourself that, in order to act that way, we ought to be like St. Francis de Sales. You are mistaken! It has been my consolation and joy to see one of your confreres (Mr. de Brandt) fulfill, so I thought, that blessed state of interior peace, constant union with God, and total detachment during vacation. We must endeavor to attain the same. Let us die to all things and to self and live henceforth for God alone. You know very well what we ought to be in order to be agreeable to our Lord Jesus Christ and be worthy of Him. Fill your soul with this thought. Enter into the depths of your interior and ever remain therein.

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If you do this, your joy will be complete and the peace of our Divine Savior will inundate your soul and make of it a vessel of predilection and love to His Father. For, as long as you remain withdrawn into your interior, you will always find there the Holy Spirit. He will raise and transport you to the summit of that mountain of love which our Divine Savior built for His chosen ones. He will fill you with His graces, His knowledge, His beauty and His happiness. You will acquire the holy custom of listening to His voice and will be faithful to His graces. Pardon me for making that singular remark. You understand what I want to say and see what ought to be done.

Let us beg our divine Savior to give you the strength that will enable you to fulfill all the good desires you have conceived or rather those which He has formed in you and continues to inspire.

It would be a great pleasure for me if I saw that you are what you should be upon your return to the seminary. May the most holy name of our Lord Jesus Christ be blessed and glorified

[*Faithfulness to Grace*]

May our Lord realize in you all that He has caused you to conceive so frequently in your heart. How grand and beautiful your soul will be in His sight if this be granted you! It will be pure, holy, lovable, full of love, beauty, splendor, light and glory, and all these will flow from the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Don't you ardently desire to attain all those good and beautiful things? I hope you do. Moreover, I feel certain that God in His mercy wishes to overwhelm you with His gifts and His favors. He is accustomed to bestow them only on a small number of chosen souls, namely, those whom He draws away from earthly things in order that they may live only by and through His own life, a life of detachment, holiness and love.

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Be faithful then dear confrere. Be faithful to all the graces and favors God bestows upon you. Nurture those noble desires in your soul. Pray unceasingly for their fulfillment and act in practice as if you already possessed all those graces, that is, act as the greatest saints have done. They denied themselves in all things; they sought nothing but God; the eyes of their soul were constantly fixed upon Him. He was the sole object of their love, the only food of their soul, the almighty strength of their will, and the great purpose of all their desires.

The same Holy Spirit who produced such wonderful things in the saints is also in you. He takes up His abode in you as in a sanctuary, desiring to accomplish the same results. The success of His efforts depends upon you alone. Remain in interior calm. Silence every passion and deaden all self-love. Pay attention to His graces and impulses, so that He may have full freedom of operation in you. Put aside every sentiment and movement of self-love, every natural desire, craving, enjoyment and love, and everything that could become an obstacle to His action. May you desire but one thing with all the ardor of your heart, namely, to live solely by His life and to be absolutely faithful to His call. You can then rest assured that He will work the greatest marvels of His grace in your soul.

Be strong and courageous. Having a right to aspire after those great things, would you cowardly desire to live in want and littleness and allow yourself to be dragged through the mire of sensible and natural affections? Let such a conduct be far removed from you. God has drawn you to Himself and He will never release you. You yourself have chosen Him for your inheritance.

It would be the height of folly to abandon God with His grandeur and riches, to forfeit the glory that is destined for you in Heaven. He belongs to us; we belong to Him, as is

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said in the Scripture: "My beloved to me and I to Him." What more do we need? If we belong to Him we possess all imaginable riches. Let us then belong to Him, entirely to Him, and to Him alone, so that His most holy will and designs of mercy and love may be accomplished in us.

As for the rest, don't grieve if you do not *feel* that vivifying ardor which His love and grace always produce in our souls. It is not necessary to *feel* such things. I believe that you have no reason for complaint if you vigorously deny yourself in all things, remain peacefully in His presence, and are ready to follow His holy will always and to the exclusion of everything else. You know what I am tempted to add, for I have repeated it so often to you: Maintain yourself in peace before God; be a truly interior man and never worry about anything on this earth.

[Your Early Return to the Seminary Would Be Most Welcome]

I am sorry to hear that you will not return [to the seminary] before the opening of the classes. If Father Telles had told you to act thus, I'd have to remain silent, but, if you consulted a priest in your home town, I think that you made the wrong decision. No matter how wise and pious he may be, such a priest cannot know everything relevant to your own good or the good of the seminary, which seemed to demand your return for the "little holidays." There is but one spiritual director in the seminary of Issy who knows its spirit and conditions and he alone is able to make a wise judgment in such matters. However, don't worry about it. May the Holy Name of God be blessed in all things.

I spoke last week to Father Carbon about the seminar-ians in Paris. He told me that he would be very glad if they came a few days earlier in order to be at hand to receive the

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newcomers, and he charged me to tell them that this would give him great satisfaction.

Act in this matter according to the wisdom that God will give to you. The thing that is most important is that you return with the firm determination to live for God alone and that you will inspire everyone to live in the greatest fervor. We must kindle a fire [of divine love] in the seminary this year! May the conflagration burn and consume all its members.

God be with you, and our Lady also, dear friend. Best regards in the most holy charity of Jesus and Mary,

FRANCIS LIBERMANN, ACOLYTE

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Advice to a soul overwhelmed by spiritual consolations.

Letter Three Rennes, January 10, 1838 Vol. 1, p. 399

Dear Confrere:

[To Be With Jesus Is a Sweet Paradise]

May the love of Jesus be the life and the food of your soul. This love is an abyss that must swallow up all that exists in us and depends on us. Throw yourself blindly into the arms of the Well-Beloved of your soul. Let Him encompass and penetrate you, communicate to you His substance, which is all love and delight. Let Him fill you so that you no longer see or understand, or have any taste save through and in and with His holy love.

I have but little advice to give you in regard to your present state. When the Great Master has taken hold of a soul

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He should be allowed to act as He pleases and there should be no interference with His work lest it be spoiled. Abandon yourself completely to His divine grace. Be faithful, place yourself in His hands, permitting Him to do with you according to His wishes and according to the most holy and lovable will of His father, which is a will of love. In a word, yield unreservedly to the designs of Divine Love.

There is one thing to which you ought to give special attention, namely, that of purifying your interior more and more from all earthly affection, from all attachment to self and selfish interest. Tend unceasingly toward your lovable Jesus, but don't tend toward Him through your own effort. Ask Him to draw you to Him and yield to His attraction. When I tell you "to tend toward Jesus," I mean that you should aspire after Him alone, occupy yourself with Him alone, and pay attention to Him alone. The more you thus tend to Him the more will your life be purified from all its imperfections, poverty and wretchedness. Carefully avoid saying to yourself, "I am now going to fill and satiate myself with love for my Jesus." Say rather, "I am going to lose sight of myself, forget myself and all creatures; I am going to have Jesus alone in my soul and belong to Him alone."

[*Jesus is Purifying Your Senses*]

If at this time our Lord makes Himself felt in your soul and acts strongly upon your senses, it is because He desires to purify these "wayward" senses, be faithful and watchful. Do not try to get enjoyment, but seek to be purified. I mean don't rejoice because you experience great delights or plainly see the way of God's love operating in your soul. That way is not the most perfect, but it helps considerably to sanctify your soul; and if you are faithful, the next state will be very sanctifying.

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Everything that at present takes place in you has no other purpose than that of purifying your senses; accept it all with this desire of purity and sanctification. Helpful in this process is a spirit of renunciation and living in our Lord with the sole desire of serving His glory and the fulfillment of His Father's will. If this state is followed by another, you will then preserve perfect peace and grace of your Master, who will be able to operate in accordance with the wishes of His heavenly Father. Shun vanity, self-esteem and similar faults to which you are inclined. They are dangerous.

You are right, I think, in saying that you ought to remain in constant repose before and in God, allowing Him to do in you what He sees fit, to work whatever He pleases, and that you should abstain from anything that would interfere with the action of the grace.

I should have liked to talk to you about all this in order to obtain more detailed knowledge regarding your interior. You fail to explain what is the disposition of your soul in those circumstances or how God operates in you. But let not this trouble you. Don't worry because you do not like to explain this state; such repugnance is quite natural. Write frequently and explain things in spite of your repugnance, but do all this in peace and gentleness and without making sensible efforts. And if you find it impossible to explain things, don't worry at all. God will not fail to guide you, and under His guidance you will not run the risk of going astray. Merely permit yourself to be carried along and do not interfere with God's action. Mistrust yourself but preserve peace.

Entirely yours in the most holy love of Jesus and Mary,

FRANCIS LIBERMANN, ACOLYTE

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Forget yourself in the love of God. Don't be unduly attached to sensible favors.

Letter Four Rennes, March 10, 1838 Vol. 1, p. 399

Praised by Jesus and Mary

Dear Confrere :

[*Self-Forgetfulness in the Love of God*]

May the peace and the love of our Lord fill your soul. Try to advance in all peace and gentleness in the path of the most holy love of our divine Master. Let your soul be constantly turned toward God and fixed on Him alone. Forget everything around you, and especially forget yourself. You know how important this is. As long as your soul is turned even a little toward self, your heart cannot be pure. And as long as your heart is not perfectly pure, God's love cannot be the only life of your soul. Yet this is what must be accomplished.

What, in fact, is our life but the love of Jesus? Remain in lowliness and poverty before the sovereign Lord of your soul. Seek only to remain united with this all-lovable Lord by the divine love which He deigns to pour into your soul. May this love live and reign in you. This I desire for you with all my heart and this I hope our most amiable and kind Master will grant you in His infinite bounty.

While seeking that heavenly gift of divine love, remain in your littleness and in perfect self-forgetfulness. Mistrust yourself constantly in the presence of Jesus. Be reserved in using the gifts He deigns to grant you. Be even timid in their use and never allow yourself to relish those gifts or to make them an object of enjoyment. Hence, when divine graces are showered upon your soul, do not cling to them in order to relish their sensible consolations, but pass on through those torrents in order to unite yourself with the

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divine Master by a faith that is pure and detached from all creatures. Swim in this river of love but do not [try to] remain in it. Think only of the divine Object which is its source. Cross the river in order to reach the divine Source and do not seek your delight amidst these waters, however sweet and pleasant they may be.

[Don't be Unduly Attached To Sensible Favors]

Moreover, do not attach too much importance to those sensible favors and graces. Pay no attention to them, as I have just told you, but aim only at union with God by means of a most perfect abnegation, complete self-forgetfulness, and a constant recollection of your lowliness and abjection. Be lowly and abject in God's sight and in the eyes of men, in everything and everywhere. However, avoid performing external actions for the purpose of abasing yourself in the eyes of men. Be satisfied with having this disposition to abasement interiorly. Think nothing of yourself and do not desire to be esteemed either in your own mind or in that of others. Unite yourself to God in this fashion, living only in and by His love.

If it pleases God to deprive you entirely of those sensible graces, do not worry or ask yourself why He took them away. Be satisfied then to be united with Him by a faith pure and free from all sentiment, by a constant desire and intention of living for Him and in Him alone. Likewise, do not worry when you do not directly think of Jesus and Mary. This is unimportant; you are united to them just as well as when you are thinking of them. And everything that God bestows upon you interiorly has Jesus and Mary at its source, Jesus first and then Mary.

May this divine love of Jesus and Mary, therefore, live in you.

Entirely yours in this dear love,
FRANCIS LIBERMANN, ACOLYTE