

XI. LETTERS TO CAROLINE LIBERMANN

Caroline Libermann, second eldest daughter of Dr. Samson Libermann and niece of the Venerable Libermann, was born at Illkirch near Strasbourg on May 15, 1827. She was educated at the Notre Dame Convent at Strasbourg, and at Louvencourt, entered the Congregation of the Holy Hearts and took the name of Sister St. Agnes. She later joined her sister Pauline (Sister St. Leopold) at the convent at Dunkirk. Venerable Francis Libermann visited his two nieces there in 1851, one year before his death. Caroline died at Dunkirk on October 16, 1867.

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*Letter One*

*Rennes, 1837*

*Vol. 1, p. 371*

Praised be Jesus and Mary!

My dear child: (aged 10)

I am writing this little letter to you in order that you may place your trust in Jesus and Mary and love them with all your heart. I hope that you are still persevering with the holy thought of consecrating your self entirely to their service. Be courageous and patient, dear child of Jesus and Mary. Consecrate yourself from this very moment to their love. Promise them that, if they give you the grace to withdraw from this corrupt world which is not meant for you, you will love them with all your heart. You must be patient for a few years more. I hope that, in time, your bonds will be broken and that you will attain the object of your most ardent desires.

I have high hopes of seeing you here with me in the city of Rennes. I would be able to place you in a convent of very

fervent religious. This Congregation was established by our Founder (St. John Eudes), so that if you were there you would then become "my dear Sister" instead of my niece. But it is not this that should give you the greatest pleasure, but rather the thought that you may begin to hope that the good Lord will hear your prayers.

In the meantime continue to be very devout, do not frequent the world, and do not make friends with worldly people. Take no part in the world's amusements and pleasures. If you are faithful, my dear child, God will overwhelm you with His graces and favors, and the Blessed Virgin will look upon you as her cherished child. It is far better to possess Our Lord's favor than to be loved by the world. Henceforth you must aspire to please Jesus only. He wishes you to consecrate yourself entirely to Him. Rejoice with all your heart, dear child of Jesus and Mary, for your joy should be very great. This divine and all-lovable Jesus has looked favorably on you. And what did you do to please Him? Nothing. It is His great love for you that has caused Him to choose you to be His spouse. Is not this a great kindness on His part? Be faithful, then, and keep yourself from stain. Avoid sin as the evil most to be feared in this world, as the greatest misfortune that can befall you, because by sin you displease Our Lord Jesus. Lead a retired life, and do not make social visits. Since, however, this will not suffice unless there is order in your life, here is a rule that you may follow :

As soon as you awake in the morning, give your heart to Jesus and Mary, and ask of them the grace to love them more than the day before. Have a fixed hour for rising and when the hour strikes, get up immediately without delay, in order to please Jesus, our good Father, and Mary, our dear Mother. Dress promptly, and then kneel down and offer yourself again to God and recite an Our Father, Hail Mary and Gloria. Then finish your toilet and say your morning prayers unless there

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is some job you have been told to do in the house. If so, do this work peacefully and then say your prayers. You would do well to assist at Holy Mass every day and I ask your mother to give you permission to do so.

I sent you several books of devotion last year. You should do a quarter hour's reading both morning and evening from one of these. Your mother will I hope allow you to do this. Take a life of a saint and read it through from start to finish. Do not read different extracts from the life but always continue your reading from the place where you stopped the previous time. Never omit your daily recitations of the beads. Have a great devotion to the Blessed Virgin. Pray every day to the good Lord to give you the grace of entering a religious Congregation and of remaining free from sin. Ask the Most Holy Virgin to obtain that grace for you.

Be obedient and docile always to the commands of your mother. Be kind and charitable to your brothers and sisters and to all others. I mention particularly your brothers and sisters because you have more opportunities of failing in kindness and charity towards them. Yield to them in everything and do everything you can to please them. Never become impatient with their little faults but bear them with calm. Do not be too ready to correct them lest this serve only to irritate them. If you wish to reprimand them for some fault, pray first for them to God and the Blessed Virgin, and gently advise them not to commit such faults again.

If it should happen that they become angry with you, there is no reason why you should also become angry. On the contrary, you must try to calm them by your gentleness. Don't think yourself better than others and never set yourself up as superior to them. They, unlike you, are not meant to be religious some day. One who intends to become a religious must be incomparably more pious and more perfect than others. Humble yourself before God because, although He deigns to

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give you the grace of a vocation to the religious state, you are still so imperfect.

Go to confession as often as your confessor will allow you and prepare for it in a holy manner. Examine your conscience peacefully before God and avoid becoming anxious and troubled. Stir up your sorrow, but always without worrying. If you have any sorrow or trouble, write to me. Prepare well for your First Holy Communion if you have not yet received it. After your First Holy Communion receive as often as your confessor permits and prepare for it with great fervor. After Communion make some good resolutions and persevere in them.

Adieu, my dear Caroline, be faithful to God. This alone I desire.

Your uncle,

FRANCIS LIBERMANN

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*Letter Two La Neuville, February 16, 1842 Vol. 3, p. 144*

J. M. J.

My good and very dear Caroline: (aged 15)

I wish I had more time to impart to you my great desire for your sanctification, an object that is dearer to me than you can imagine.

My heart is filled with grief and I am full of compassion for you when I see you struggling against the world and its vanities. You are afraid that you will not attain to the blessedness of heaven. My dear child, I feel keenly the pain such thoughts must cause you, living as you are in the vain

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and corrupt world. Such fears are a great grace given by God to safeguard you from the world and its false attractions. Remember that I told you that if you refuse to love the world you will save your soul. Yes, I repeat these words without fear of being mistaken and confident that they are true.

I have only one fear in your regard, namely, that you might come to love the world with its pleasures and vanities. This is the one bulwark the enemy desires to build in our soul in order to oppose God's grace. Oh, my dear friend, do not allow that enemy of God to win a victory over you. When I think of the interior state of your soul and consider the profusion of natural and supernatural gifts with which the good Lord has filled it, and then, on the other hand, when I see the efforts of the enemy who is doing all in his power to thwart God's merciful designs in your regard, and the risk you run of growing weak and allowing yourself to be led astray by the illusions of that dangerous enemy, I feel like shedding torrents of tears.

Be very prudent, therefore, my dear child, and do not cast your God-given pearls before swine. Do not surrender those graces and gifts of God to the demon and the world. Do not be satisfied with a lower degree than that which God desires for you. Do not use the natural gifts which divine goodness has given you to please the world and to foster vanity and self-complacency. Do not allow the supernatural graces of faith, purity and simplicity of heart to be trodden underfoot by the demon, but use them for your own sanctification.

You are afraid that you might lose your soul. Your only ambition seems to be to *save* your soul, and you are not concerned with becoming a saint. But, my dear child, I look further than that. I hold firmly that, in spite of the fury of His enemy, God will sanctify you. I go even further and say that you will never be able to remain midway between

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the world and God. You will either surrender to the world and be lost, or you will surrender to God and become a saint. Make your choice, my dear child; it is a matter of life or death for you.

My good child, give yourself to Jesus! I don't know if I am a prophet, but the most tender love which the good Master gives me for your soul leads me to believe that you will be faithful to your God, that you will give yourself generously to Him, and that you will trample underfoot the world, the flesh and the devil. Be generous in renouncing Satan, his pomps, and his works.

Why be so weak when Jesus loves you and Mary looks upon you as her beloved child? What can the world give you but amusements, pleasures, vanities, ephemeral things that barely touch your soul and leave in their wake interior pain and trouble, and, at the same time, cause you to lose Jesus and Mary. You become for Jesus and Mary a cause of sorrow, and even perhaps an object of horror. If, on the contrary, in order to live only for Jesus and His holy love, you despise the world with its foolish and deceptive vanities, you will sanctify yourself and will enjoy even in this life a happiness which surpasses all that you can imagine, or you do not yet realize what it means to love God and the happiness that comes from this love.

In saying this I do not mean that you are obliged to enter a convent. It would be possible for you to live a good life in the midst of the world. Still, I know that you have very great difficulties and that, because of your temperament, you will always be in danger of being carried away. That is the reason why I say quite frankly that, henceforth, I wish most earnestly to occupy myself before God with your sanctification. I will not be satisfied with obtaining your *salvation*, but I will ask Our Lord to fulfill His merciful designs in your regard. His designs are much greater than you imagine.

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If you do not become a saint, you are wanting in what God demands of you. You are still far removed from that sanctity, but have courage and strengthen your resolve. Be faithful to God's grace and you will succeed. God will demand sacrifices from you, the first being that you renounce your craving for the world's vanities and its insipid satisfactions. Remember what He said: Whoever leaves father and mother, brothers and sisters, his own well-being or anything else, for love of Him, will receive a hundredfold in this world. That means that he will receive the riches of grace in greater abundance, and a happiness that is incomparably superior to anything that he would have enjoyed from the earthly things which he has relinquished for love of God.

Although I am convinced that God wants you to enter religious life, I am resolved never to speak about which Congregation you should choose. Henceforth, I shall pray to Our Lord and the Blessed Virgin for this intention. I do not wish to discuss the question with you, because you are not yet capable of appreciating the riches of divine mercy which you will find in that life. And so I will treat of the matter with Our Lord and His most holy Mother. If I obtain for you the grace I am asking, then you will surely speak to me about the matter and I shall discuss it with you.

For the moment I shall content myself with asking you what benefit you can expect from the world which is so foolish and proud. You might receive some vain flatteries, but at the same time you will meet with indifference, contempt, contradictions, meanness, and even worse. You will have innumerable heartaches, and will experience the jealousy and envy of others, or you will feel jealous and envious of them. I have not time to enter into details, but say simply that your life will then pass like the experience of a person in a dream. Days and years will pass away amidst boredom and sadness, and with little consolation, and your life will

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lack that generosity and happiness which is a preparation for a blessed eternity.

In the convent you will also meet with sorrows and crosses, but you will be there in order to sanctify yourself for the glory of God. Jesus will be with you to console and strengthen you. All these pains and crosses will be instruments in His hands which He will use to sanctify you, and your eternal glory will be great.

Adieu, my dear niece. I am, with all the tenderness of the charity of Jesus and Mary,

Your uncle,

FRANCIS LIBERMANN

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*Letter Three Paris, November 4, 1851 Vol. 13, p. 367*

My dear Sister (St. Agnes) :

May the peace of Our Lord fill your soul, may it guard your mind and your heart and unite you to Jesus, your divine Spouse.

My dear child, do not be fearful and anxious, you will never be separated from Jesus. You have given yourself to Him, He has accepted you as His bride, and He will not repudiate you. May your heart be always strong and calm in the midst of tribulations. Jesus is with you, He is for you, and it is He that sustains and strengthens you.

I have watched with great consolation the dispositions of your soul during the crisis through which it has pleased God to allow your beloved Congregation to pass. I see God's hand clearly in all this, for, knowing you as I do, I could not understand how it was possible for you to remain calm during

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that painful time. It proves that the good Master is giving you His support in a special manner. Viewed in this light, as well as from other points of view, it is evident that that cross is in reality a favor granted to you and to the whole Congregation. It will result in great graces for the religious life. Be assured that divine goodness will not abandon you. Take advantage of God's kindness to forward your sanctification.

The type of shock from which you suffered is always accompanied by very great graces. It is in such critical moments that we learn to put into practice that humility of heart so warmly recommended by the divine Savior. We realize that we depend on Him alone, and this interior dependence becomes a habit with us. We come to appreciate the nothingness of all things human, and detach ourselves from all things in order to live solely with and in Jesus.

That tranquility of mind which God has been pleased to grant you will enable you quite naturally to arrive at total abandonment to His holy dispositions. Adopt therefore these sentiments of interior humility and place yourself in complete dependence on your divine Savior concerning your own interests and those of the entire Congregation. Christ is your Master. Allow Him to do with you and your dear Sisters all that His divine goodness judges proper. Be perfectly submissive to all His wishes.

I am not surprised that your imagination has prompted you to become troubled and anxious. The good Lord will give you the grace to overcome these imaginings and to remain peaceful and submissive, humbly abandoned to Him, and filled with love for whatever He may desire to do. Avoid speculation about what the future may bring, and refrain from considering what you will do or what might happen to you in this or that eventuality. Live for the present moment and remain in God's presence with a humble heart.

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Since the affairs (concerning the Convent) of the Sacred Heart have failed, do not occupy your mind any longer with this question. If another plan is suggested, remain at peace and allow the good Lord to act.

Your plan to follow your good Mothers everywhere is excellent and worthy of a child of God. It is exactly what I should have expected of you and I am grateful to the good Lord for having inspired such sentiments in you. However, since I am confident that God will not abandon His servants, I am convinced that that plan will be executed. I trust that He will preserve the community as it is at present by coming to its assistance with unexpected help, and I have no doubt that He will give it new graces to increase its fervor. God usually gives great graces after severe trials. If, however, it is not in God's designs to keep you together in His Holy Name, you and your sister must be without fear and must trust in Him. He will not abandon you, that is certain. In no case will you and your sister return to the world.

Regarding the feelings that have been aroused towards Father de Brandt, you ought to realize, poor children, that it is only a case of nature crying out. Do not attach any importance to such cries, and merely avoid talking about it. Recall the example of your Divine Spouse. The Pharisees constantly persecuted Him, the soldiers tore His flesh, they crucified Him with diabolical malice, but Jesus remained silent. He loved them and pitied them. Father de Brandt may have made mistakes; he may have done harm to your community, but his intentions were good. He desired to help you and was firmly convinced that he was doing you a great favor, and he was sincerely attached to you. He erred, but believe that this is causing him great sorrow. He deserves your affection and compassion much more than the Pharisees and the soldiers merited the love of the

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Savior. In any case, do not worry about the thoughts that enter your mind with regard to this matter. They are spontaneous movements of nature and your will rejects them.

Concerning the confidence which your good Mothers have in him, there is no need to worry, since it will not lead them to commit themselves to anything that they have not carefully examined. On the other hand, I am delighted to see that your dispositions towards them are so exemplary. Continue thus to be a consolation to them.

You may follow the method prescribed by the Jesuit Father for the confession of your faults. Treat yourself with mildness in the confessional as everywhere else. State things with calmness, moderation and mildness. The decision of the chaplain regarding the Ember Days of September is correct. In all cases of doubt you must obey the decision of your Superiors.

Your very devoted and affectionate uncle,

FATHER FRANCIS LIBERMANN