

XI. LETTERS TO DR. PAUL DRACH

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Dr. Paul Drach, famous convert Jew, a great scholar and writer who eventually became librarian of the Propaganda in Rome, was one of God's special instruments in bringing Francis Libermann into the Church.

At a later time Dr. Drach introduced Father Libermann to Pope Gregory XVI, who put his hand upon Libermann's head in blessing; after which the saintly Pontiff was heard to say: "He will be a saint."

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Thoughts on the Diaconate. News about his work and family.

Letter One

August 11, 1841

Vol. 2, p. 494

J. M. J.

Dear Sir and Friend:

I am glad that I can send you this letter through the good offices of Father Dietrich, professor at the Seminary of Strasbourg, for I think that it will give you great satisfaction. This priest is very talented and he wants to get acquainted with you, for he has often heard others speak about you. He has treated me with much kindness.

[*Thoughts About the Diaconate*]

I have nothing but good news to tell you for the present. The good Lord has overwhelmed me with graces and favors beyond—the infinitely beyond—what I deserve. I received the diaconate yesterday, on the Feast of Saint Lawrence. "What shall I render the Lord for all that He has rendered to me?" How poor, feeble, and wretched I was when I left Rome

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and crossed the sea to come here! And now Our Lord has enriched me with His gifts and graces.

“I am unworthy of all the favors and all the goodness you have had for your servant” [Gen. 32,11]. I could never have believed that such things would come about. I assure you that it was difficult for me to believe them even on the eve of my ordination. But now I do believe, for I am most vividly conscious of the grace that was bestowed on me. I never understood what the diaconate was. It is necessary to receive this sacred *character* in order to understand it a little.

It is not enough, however, to have received that order to possess its rich treasure. I must make it bear fruit; I must not go and bury it as was done by the wicked servant. You know better than anybody else how little I am able to do for God’s glory. Please pray Our Lord to finish what He has so wonderfully begun and to make that which He has sowed bear fruit.

I assure you that I am ready to do everything, to sacrifice all things for the love of our adorable Master. I know that I must no longer rest nor withdraw, but that I must labor for the salvation of souls and glorify Jesus Christ as much as is in me to do. I fear that, in spite of so many favors, I may remain a useless vessel in God’s Church—a vessel adorned with pearls and precious stones, but which will be broken in the end and cast on the dunghill, after it has been shorn of all its precious adornments; for nothing that is useless should be kept in the House of our great King!

I hope, nevertheless, in the mercy of Our Lord, and put the greatest confidence in the most Blessed Virgin who will sustain and strengthen me and obtain for me the grace to bear fruit for the glory of her Son.

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[*News About His Work and Family*]

The affairs of the missions are proceeding well, as I explained in my letter to His Eminence [Cardinal Fransoni] which, no doubt, you have had the kindness to deliver to him.

In a few weeks, four young priests will join me to spend this year in our novitiate; another is already in his mission.

Please extend my respectful homage to His Eminence, and to His Excellency Bishop Cadolini, and tell them that I am firmly resolved to labor from now on with all my power. I also beg them most humbly to continue to favor us with their kindness and to assist our poor little society which wants to devote itself to the glory of God in the missions. Everything seems tranquil and favorably disposed at present, but this will surely not continue and we can expect small crosses very soon.

My brother [Dr. Samson] and all his family are well; he sends you his greetings. Nathanael, [i.e. Samuel, one of Libermann's brothers, later baptized in Paris and who went to the U. S. A.] married in America. He married a French woman who was born at La Ferte; I am afraid that she might be an adventuress. He told me nothing about the marriage and has not written to me since. I don't know what to make of it.

This should suffice for the present. I am afraid I have bored you by this letter written so badly both from the moral and material standpoint. I think, however, that you will not be offended but will rather imitate the example of God himself "who looks at the heart."

I am certain that you believe and will continue to believe that I am most respectfully and sincerely attached to you, and remain,

Your most humble, affectionate and obedient servant,

FRANCIS LIBERMANN, deacon

Libermann expresses his disappointment about the transfer of his work from Alsace to "the interior of France." First beginnings of his congregation.

Letter Two La Neuville, December 10, 1841 Vol. 3, p. 64

J. M. J.

Dear and Honorable Friend :

I have wanted for a long time to write you and send news that, I believe, will give you much pleasure. . . .

You learned from my last letter that I was ordained a deacon in Strasbourg. I thought at that time that I would remain there and would be ordained to the priesthood at Christmas. I had even begun to take steps to get in touch with a priest of Germany. But the good Lord decided otherwise. Several Fathers who are interested in our poor project in behalf of the Negroes, did their best, without my knowledge, to have us establish ourselves in the interior of France, not far from Paris. They spoke about me to the bishop of Amiens, who was very favorably disposed to their requests. He said that he would gladly see the foundation of such a work in his diocese and would be very happy to see subjects enter this new congregation. He offered to ordain me a priest during the Ember Days around the Feast of Saint Matthew. It was with great sorrow that I resolved to leave Strasbourg, for I was hoping to be of some use to the clergy of Germany, which has a bad reputation, and I also thought that I would get some vocations from that country.

On the other hand it seemed quite clear that our stay in the interior of France would be better for us. I therefore consented, although it was hard for me, for I believed that God

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had manifested His will. I therefore came to Amiens and was ordained on the eighteenth of September.

I had the happiness of saying my First Mass on the Feast of Saint Matthew. From then on I have gone daily to prostrate myself before the throne of the Most Holy Trinity to offer the homage of the whole Church, to offer the Most Holy Sacrifice for her and ask for the graces and help which she needs. What an intercessor! But I have the Sacred Victim with me and, with Him, one is always heard.

I have been in Amiens since September 18. We are four in all. Four more priests were expected to join us but one became discouraged at the instigation of an ill-intentioned person who made him dislike us; the three others were refused permission to join our society by their bishops. This is our greatest difficulty at the moment. . . . I feel almost sure, nevertheless, that two of those three who were refused their *exeat* [permission] will come a little later on. They are solid men whose vocation seems quite certain and their bishops have merely postponed their permission in order to test them. . . . Several others have asked to enter. . . . You see that we are proceeding slowly but we are not without hope! I have great confidence in the most Blessed Virgin who has already done much for us. Moreover, prayers have been said for us for a long time by the Archconfraternity of Our Lady of Victories.

We have rented a country house that belongs to the diocese and live like hermits. We have a nice garden and plenty of room for walks and recreation. . . .

The bishop has granted us permission to have a chapel and we even have the happiness of having the Blessed Sacrament. This is a great consolation for us. The good Lord has seen to it that we got all that was necessary to furnish our house. . . . What a joy to think that the Lord is in our midst! There is nothing luxurious in the poor little palace He has deigned

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to accept but at least everything is kept very clean. If it pleases Him to accept our desires for the salvation of the poor souls who are lost in such great numbers and who cost Him so dearly, we shall, I hope, try to serve Him most faithfully, if He deigns to grant us that grace.

But I am longwinded! I am afraid of boring you and stealing time from your important occupations.

Please assure His Eminence, Cardinal Fransoni and Bishop Cadolini that we will always be docile children, ready to obey their least wishes, and that we will always be ready to defend the interests and honor of the Holy See, if God judges us worthy. Tell them also how things are going with us.

We are still very weak, but I hope that when we are a little better known we shall get vocations. People always distrust what is just beginning and what has not yet given proof of viability. . . .

With fond regards, dear and honorable friend, and in the love of the Heart of Mary, I remain,

Your servant,

FATHER FRANCIS LIBERMANN