

**XII. LETTERS TO THEODORA LIBERMANN  
(SISTER MARIE-THERESE OF JESUS)**

Elisa (Marie-Elizabeth) Libermann, daughter of Dr. Samson Libermann and niece of the Venerable Libermann, was born at Illkirch near Strasbourg on October 27, 1831. When she was seven years old, her godfather, the famous convert from Judaism Father Theodore Ratisbonne, gave her the name of Theodora to replace that of Elisa.

Theodora did her studies at the convent of the Sisters of Louvencourt, and returned to Strasbourg in 1848. In July 1852, she entered the Novitiate of the Sisters of the Sacred Hearts, to which Congregation her sister Caroline already belonged. She took the religious name of Marie-Thérèse of Jesus. It is noteworthy that she began her religious life after the death of Father Libermann in 1852. She died on October 23, 1919.

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*Letter One*

*February 1843*

*Vol. 4, p. 121*

J. M. J.

Dear Theodora: (aged 12)

I was charmed by the beautiful letter you sent me and very pleased to see how well it was written. There were misspellings but these were few. You are making progress, so have courage, things are going well. I feel certain that with patience and courage you will be at the top of your class. Since a Christian child should do everything for love of God, work for the love of our good Lord, and not to be first or one of the first. When you work in order to learn what you are ex-

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pected to know, you are doing what is pleasing to God. He gave you intelligence, not that you might let it remain in ignorance, but that you should educate and instruct it. Besides, think of the pleasure you will give your mother and father if you learn well and are successful. In giving them pleasure you are doing something that is pleasing to God. You know well that the Gospel tells us that the Child Jesus did all He could to please the most holy Virgin, His Mother, and Saint Joseph, who was only His fosterfather. You must imitate the Child Jesus and offer your labors to Him.

Your outbursts of excitement and temper are due to the vivacity of your temperament, but this does not mean that you are excused before God. You must ask His pardon each time you yield to these outbursts. Invoke the Blessed Virgin often and ask her to obtain patience for you. When you have given in to anger, you should impose some penance on yourself, such as saying a decade of the beads or an Our Father and Hail Mary kneeling before the crucifix in the drawing room, or reciting the Miserere or other prayers. After that go and beg pardon from the one you have offended by your loss of temper, and now and then at night tell your father about your fault. You will find that the Good Lord will hear you and you will get rid of your fault gradually. Do not be discouraged if you happen to relapse into that fault. Rise up, ask Our Lord's and Our Lady's pardon, make good resolutions, and you will be heard.

If you allow yourself to become discouraged after a fall, you will fall all the more frequently, and will in the end give up all thought of correcting yourself. You will then be like the man who does not see what is before Him and falls into the mud. Do you think that he will stay in the mud? Of course not. He will quickly get up, clean himself as best he can, and then walk on, but now using greater precaution. That is what you must do. In moments of passion, you do

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not see clearly. Your mind is excited and cannot fix its attention properly, and thus you become angry and fall into the mud. You must rise quickly, that is you must calm yourself, clean off the mud by asking pardon from God and from the one you have offended. If the man falls a second and third time, he always gets up and cleans himself as he did the first time. How foolish we would consider him if we heard him say: "I am always falling, I already have fallen three times, I don't want to get up any more" and if he then chose to remain stuck in the mud.

You would be like this foolish man, if you allowed yourself to become discouraged. Each time you fall you must be determined to get up, correct yourself, and ask pardon.

Adieu, my dear child. Pray to the good Lord for me, I will not forget you.

Your uncle,

FATHER FRANCIS LIBERMANN

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*Letter Two La Neuville, November, 1845 Vol. 7, p. 408*

My good Theodora: (Aged 14)

It is a quarter to ten, but I must write these few words to you before going to bed, even if tomorrow I shall suffer for it by an attack of migraine.

I have heard that you were very upset at the news that Caroline was to enter the convent. I understand perfectly well, my dear child, that your sensitive soul suffers and grieves at the thought that you will thus be separated from a sister you love so dearly; but what can we do when God's will becomes manifest to us?

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Re-awaken in your heart all the sentiments of faith which God's mercy has placed there. Console yourself with the thought that your dear sister, by taking this courageous step, makes herself pleasing to the God of greatness and goodness, Whom you love sincerely. Let you also make an act of courage and generosity. Offer to God the sacrifice of this well-beloved sister. You will be rewarded for it by a new outpouring of His graces and favors. If your poor heart is still aching and your soul sorrowful, go to your beloved Jesus and offer Him your heart. Offer Him your aching heart which is still bleeding from the painful sacrifice it has made.

Show that you are a true child of God, a worthy and dear child of Mary. It is precisely because Caroline is dear to you that you must make the sacrifice of her to your sweet and lovable Jesus. He asks you to make this sacrifice because of your tender love for Him. Mary, the beloved Mother of your soul, asks you to make it with a heart full of fervor. Have courage then, dear child, and generosity and greatness of soul. Show Jesus and Mary that you love them and that you are capable of doing something that is pleasing to them no matter how much it costs you.

You are afraid that Caroline may have been impelled by some fancy or caprice. But, my dear friend, in this matter you should trust the decision of her wise and experienced directors. Do you think that the "little Mamma" would have accepted her, and that her aunt, Madame St. Alexandre would have been satisfied, if they had not judged that what she did was in conformity with God's will.

You can see then, my dear friend, that you are mistaken. You judge things according to the sentiments that well up in your own heart. It is your loving heart that makes those objections but your good judgment has no share in them. Be at peace my dear child; if Caroline is where God wants her to be, she will find there her greatest happiness. If, on

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the contrary, she had failed to listen to the voice of God calling her, she would be unhappy, very unhappy, her whole life. Would you want her to jeopardize a lifetime of happiness? Would you want her to expose herself to the dangers of the world, and run the risk of remaining in it against God's will, and so being always unhappy? Of course not. This would make you shed bitter tears.

Be calm and contented; God is guiding your dear sister, Mary is watching over her, and she will not be unhappy in religion. You are making a great sacrifice but you do it for the happiness of your beloved sister in this world and the next.

Do not worry about Caroline. If God has not actually called her to the convent, the steps she has taken will not matter. If she is not meant for religious life, she will certainly not remain in it. In giving it a trial now she will know much better how to judge the matter when your father comes here in March. You see then that you have no cause for worry just now. If God wants Caroline to be a religious, you will be the first to say that she ought to remain in the novitiate. If God does not want it, she certainly will not remain. Therefore, be at peace, and pray fervently to the Blessed Virgin that all may come about according to God's good pleasure. For your own part, try to be good and very fervent so that your prayers may be heard.

Adieu, my good Theodora. If it is at all possible I shall come to see you next week. I would like to have seen you yesterday, but I looked everywhere on the playground among the children for you, and not seeing you there, I presumed that you were in class. Besides, I did not know at that time that you were suffering so much sorrow. I shall do my best to make reparation for the suffering I might have caused you. Adieu!

Your uncle,

FATHER FRANCIS LIBERMANN