3. LETTERS TO FRANCIS XAVIER LIBERMANN

Francis Xavier Libermann, oldest son of Doctor Samson Libermann and nephew of Father Libermann, was born at Illkirch, in the diocese of Strasbourg, Alsace, on June 21, 1830. He went to Amiens as a young man and there began his classical studies. These he continued at Notre Dame du Gard, where Father Libermann had established his senior seminary. He became a member of the Congregation of the Holy Ghost and the Immaculate Heart of Mary, making his Consecration to the Apostolate in 1853, one year after the death of the Venerable Francis Libermann. He was ordained to the priesthood in the same year. He later occupied important posts in the Congregation such as that of Visitor of its works in South America and Director of the senior seminary. He died on July 23, 1907.

Father Libermann replies to the boy’s scruples about an allegedly lukewarm Holy Communion.

Letter One    Holy Saturday, 1845    Vol. 7, p. 98

Dear Francis [aged fifteen]:

[Lack of Sentiments is Not the Same as Lukewarmness]

I don’t want to keep you waiting too long for a reply, for you are troubled.

You are quite wrong when you worry about that Communion of which you wrote to me. It was not a case of true lukewarmness. You desired to make a good Communion and made great efforts to express to Our Lord the sentiments
that truly existed in your soul, but you were unable to do so for reasons which you don’t know. But the truth is that your will belongs to Jesus and this is already something worthwhile. Suppose even that there were something to that alleged lukewarmness, even then it was not your fault, since you did not want it and did not consent to it. So you are wrong when you worry about it and you exaggerate especially when you compare yourself with Judas!

Let us have a look at that comparison of your soul with that of Judas, and after that, let us compare your soul with one that is lukewarm and we shall see that you have no reason for tormenting yourself. Such worries are useless. They do harm, they bring discouragement and there is the danger that they might lead to scrupulosity, which is one of the worst evils that can afflict a soul which is desirous of progress in piety, for it brings such a soul to a standstill. You ought therefore to avoid it and always entertain thoughts of confidence.

[You Did Not Act Like Judas]

Now about that comparison of yourself and Judas. This cruel man gave a kiss to his Master. Why? To harm Him and deliver Him. You received the Savior to please Him and possess Him in your poor soul. Judas gave a treacherous kiss. You received the Divine Jesus with a heart that was full of good desires toward Him. Judas gave a kiss, a traitor’s kiss to get money. You received Him in order to be filled with His graces. Judas said nice words to the Savior, but his intentions were despicable. You had excellent intentions which were very pleasing to Jesus, but you were unable to express them; you had no feeling and yet those desires were present in your soul. Judas did not care about His Savior. You love Him so much that the fear of having displeased Him makes you sad. This trouble and worry
could only have sprung from the thought that you had offended Him.

Don’t worry my boy! You did not offend Jesus; you did not lose His divine friendship; our kind Savior loves you. The only thing missing in you is the feeling, but your soul really loves Him. Judas realized what a horrible crime he was committing; he knew what pain he was causing to His Savior; he knew he was betraying Him. Now you, if you had thought that you were committing the smallest sin in that Communion, you would not have wanted it for all the world. Well then! Are you a Judas? No, dear boy. You are a beloved child of the divine Jesus and you are afraid that you might have offended Him. No, surely you did not offend Him; that very fear has given pleasure to Jesus.

However, I would rather have you possess peace and confidence. You are a child of Jesus, a beloved child. Don’t entertain all those fears in regard to a lovable Father. Love Him and be full of trust in Him. This is very agreeable to Him. Even if you had committed all the sins in the world, a minute of love would erase them all. But no, there was no sin in your case! You saw the phantom of sin and it frightened you—a grimace of the devil. Don’t let him disturb you. Act like children when someone makes faces at them and scares them— they take refuge with their mother.

[Portrait of a Tepid Soul]

And now let us compare your soul with one that is tepid. I am confident that you will not recognize your portrait in the picture I’ll draw of a tepid soul. Don’t become anxious when you see in yourself some of the traits that belong to such a soul. All you have to do is to try to get rid of them.

A tepid soul is indifferent toward God as an evil-minded child is indifferent toward his father. You are not indifferent. The proof for it is that you are greatly distressed and are
SPIRITUAL LETTERS OF FRANCIS LIBERMANN

seeking a remedy for your want of sensible devotion. When I ask you, "Do you love your father?" you answer, "Of course." Do you have the sentiments in regard to your father that you wish to have toward Our Lord? Wouldn't you rather displease your father than do something that would be displeasing to Jesus? You love Jesus more than your father and yet your love of your father is real; you are far from being indifferent towards your father. This shows that you are not indifferent either to Our Lord.

A tepid person seeks only his own pleasure in all things and pays no attention to the fact that he may or may not displease the Savior. If a tepid person finds what he wants he asks nothing more. Are you like that?

A tepid person unhesitatingly commits a great number of venial sins and sometimes exposes himself to mortal ones. Are you like that?

A tepid person is negligent; his mind is in a flutter; he seeks only how to amuse himself. Are you like that?

A tepid person is incapable of making a sacrifice to please God. Are you like that?

A tepid person has no zeal for his own sanctification, is little occupied with the service of God, is content with avoiding evil, especially something grievously sinful, but he does not seek to do good. Are you like that?

A tepid person is weak and inconstant; he has great faults and makes no efforts to overcome them. If, occasionally, he makes a good effort, he does not keep it up and soon becomes inactive once more. He seeks his rest and is weak every time the question of doing something that is pleasing to God arises, but is full of energy for actions that will give him personal satisfaction. He has no strength to make the smallest sacrifice for God and abandons himself to his evil propensities without offering resistance to them. You, on the contrary, though you may sometimes commit a fault,
you don’t “let yourself go.” A tepid person loves himself; everything seems burdensome to him when it concerns God; everything is light when it gives pleasure to himself.

You are not tepid, dear boy; you are merely wanting in sensible devotion; and this means nothing. Persevere always in your good disposition, in your fervent desire to please God; be faithful to your pious exercises, just as if you were animated by sensible devotion.

Moreover, this absence of sensible devotion will not last and, perhaps by the time you receive this letter, you will no longer have that insensibility. Always remember that true love for God does not consist of words or feelings but of a sincere will to please Him. Do not stay away from the sacraments, but approach them as before; you need them more in your present circumstances.

Watch over your fits of impatience. Do your best to prevent others from noticing them; do not give outward expression to the unruly sentiments that spring up in your heart, and do not manifest them in gestures or behavior. In this way, the storm [of impatience] will calm down by and by. Turn to your books as soon as you can. Once you are occupied with them, calm will reign again in your soul. Adieu, dear boy. I will pray for you.

Your uncle and friend,

Father Francis Libermann
He encourages him to persevere in his vocation to the priesthood.

Dear Francis [aged fifteen]:

You are probably worrying a little because I did not reply to your latest letter. I didn’t read it all at once because your letter arrived just when I was leaving for Paris and when I returned it had slipped my mind. Fortunately, there was no particular need for an immediate reply.

God will reward your good desires, dear boy; He will fill you with graces and overwhelm you with blessings. Persevere in your vocation to the priestly state; apply yourself to acquire the virtues that are necessary for so holy and sublime a vocation.

A priest who lacks the priestly spirit, the spirit of his vocation, is but a skeleton, a ghost; he is good for nothing. Begin, therefore, to uproot your vices, evil inclinations, and natural defects. Be modest, humble, gentle, fervent, mortified, faithful to God’s grace, and full of desires to become strong in the Christian virtues.

It is too soon to occupy your mind with your vocation to the missions. This question doesn’t have to be examined until you have received the subdiaconate, or at least not before you have begun to study theology. So you still have ample time to think about that.

I leave you now, dear boy, trusting that Mary, our good Mother, will protect you and obtain for you the graces that form a good and holy priest.
LETTERS TO FRANCIS XAVIER LIBERMAN

Don't be afraid to write when you feel the need to do so; your letters always give me pleasure as long as I see that you want to belong to the Good Lord.

Adieu, dear Francis.

Your Uncle,

FATHER FRANCIS LIBERMAN

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Father Libermann teaches his nephew how to meditate.

Letter Three  La Neuville, December 13, 1845  Vol. 7, p. 415

My dear Francis [aged fifteen]:

I have been so very busy since I received your letter that I haven't found time to reply to it. I bless God for giving you such good desires and I can only encourage you to apply yourself to mental prayer. This, in general, is the method you could follow to accustom yourself to that practice.

[Preparation]

First, the night before, read something pious in a good book, the one that is best suited to your inclination and your needs, for example, something on the practice of the virtues, or especially something that describes the life and examples of our Lord Jesus Christ or the Most Holy Virgin. In the evening, go to sleep with those good thoughts in mind; in the morning, while rising, recall to mind some of the devout thoughts that will be the subject of your meditation.

Having finished your morning prayers, put yourself in the presence of God; reflect that God is everywhere; that He is in the place where you are, that He is, in a very special

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manner, in the depths of your own heart; adore Him. Then consider how unworthy you are to appear in the presence of His infinitely holy Majesty because of your sins, and humbly ask for His pardon; make an act of contrition and recite the Confiteor. After this, acknowledge that you are incapable of praying properly by your own efforts; invoke the Holy Spirit; beg Him to come to your assistance and teach you how to pray, how to make a good meditation, and say the Veni Sancte (Come Holy Spirit).

Then begin the meditation proper. It contains three points; namely, Adoration, Consideration, Resolution.

**Adoration**

Begin by paying honor to God or Our Lord or the Blessed Virgin, according to the subject of your meditation. For example, if you are meditating on a divine perfection or on a virtue, pay honor to God who possesses that perfection to so high a degree or to Our Lord who so perfectly practiced that virtue. For example, when you are meditating on humility, consider how humble Christ was; He was God from all eternity and yet He lowered Himself, becoming a child, being born in a stable; He obeyed Mary and Joseph for many years; He washed the feet of His apostles and suffered all sorts of insults and ignominy on the part of men. Then express to Him your admiration, your love, your gratitude. Arouse in your heart the will to love Him and the desire to imitate Him.

You could in a like manner consider the virtues of the Blessed Virgin or even of some other Saint. See how they practiced those virtues and tell Our Lord how much you wish to imitate them.

When meditating on a mystery of Our Lord, for example, on that of Christmas, you can represent in your imagination
the place where this mystery took place and the persons who were present; you could imagine the crib in which the Savior was laid; imagine the Divine Child Jesus in Mary’s arms and St. Joseph at her side, the shepherds and the Magi who had come to honor Him; and you can then unite yourself to them in adoration, praise, and petition.

You can also make use of similar representations when you meditate on the great truths such as hell, judgment, and death. Imagine, for example, that you are at the moment of your death; the persons who are around you: a priest, your parents; the sentiments which you would have; and produce then affections toward God: sentiments of fear, of confidence, etc., which you would have at that hour. After you have occupied yourself with those affections and sentiments as long as you have a taste for them and are usefully occupied with them, you can pass to the second point, which is consideration.

Consideration

You will now quietly reflect on the principal motives that should convince your mind concerning the truth on which you are meditating; for instance, the need of working for your salvation, if salvation is the topic of your consideration, or the motives for wanting and practicing a particular virtue. For example, if you are meditating on humility, you could consider many reasons for being humble; first, the example of Our Lord, of the Blessed Virgin, and of the Saints; further, that pride is the source and cause of all our sins, whereas humility is the foundation of all the virtues; and finally, that you have nothing to be proud of. What have you that you have not received from God? Life, continued existence, health of mind, good thoughts, everything comes from God. Hence you have nothing to boast of; on the contrary, you have good reason to humble yourself when
you reflect how often you have offended God, your Savior and Benefactor.

In regard to those considerations, don't attempt to pass in review all the motives for convincing you of a particular truth or for practicing a special virtue, but be satisfied with a few that appeal more to you and are more suitable to help you in the practice of that virtue. Make that consideration very quietly without fatiguing your mind. When a thought no longer impresses you very much, pass on to another. Mingle with those thoughts some pious affection toward Our Lord and desire to please Him; from time to time address a short prayer and aspiration to Him to express your good desires toward Him.

When you have considered the motives in that manner, re-enter into your own conscience and examine carefully how you have conducted yourself until now in regard to the truth or virtue on which you have meditated; recall the faults you have committed, for example, against humility, if humility is the subject you have chosen, in what circumstances you commit those faults and what means you can employ to avoid a recurrence of them. Then pass on to the third point, namely, the resolutions.

Resolutions

It is at this point that you should gather the greatest fruits of your meditation, namely, by making good resolutions. Remember that it is not enough to say, "I will not be proud, I will not say any words in self-praise, I will no longer be ill-tempered, or I will be charitable toward everybody."

No doubt, such good desires show good dispositions, but you must do more. You must ask yourself in what circumstances of the day you run the danger of falling into that fault which you intend to avoid, in what circumstances you will be able to practice this or that act of virtue. For example,
having meditated on humility, you will recall that when you were questioned in class, you felt much self-love, a lively desire of being esteemed by others; so you will resolve that when you are questioned you will quickly recollect yourself to make an act of interior humility, to say that you renounce with all your heart all those sentiments of self-love that might arise in your soul. Or if you notice that you have been somewhat dissipated in this or that circumstance, resolve either to avoid that occasion if that be possible, or to recollect yourself a little when you foresee the possibility of becoming dissipated. If you notice that you didn’t like this or that person very much, resolve to look him up and to be very friendly to him, and so on.

But, since in spite of all your good and beautiful resolutions you will not succeed unless God comes to your assistance, take care to ask Him urgently for that grace. Do this after you have made your resolutions and while you are making them, asking Him to make you faithful to them. Do this also from time to time throughout your meditation. In general, do not make a “dry” meditation, a mere exercise of the mind, but put your heart into it and let it pour itself out before the Good Master, as the heart of a child expands before his tender-loving father.

To make these petitions more fervent and more efficacious, you could lovingly tell God that it is for His glory that you are asking the grace to practice the virtue on which you have meditated; that it is in order to accomplish His holy will as the angels are doing in Heaven, that you are asking for His help to be faithful to your good resolutions; that you ask this in the name of His Beloved Son, Jesus Christ, who died on the Cross to merit all those graces; that He promised to hear all those who pray in the name of His Son; and so on.
SPIRITUAL LETTERS OF FRANCIS LIBERMAN

Recommend yourself also to the Blessed Virgin. Pray that your good Mother may intercede for you, she is all-powerful and the Good Lord grants her all she asks for us. Pray also to your Holy patron and your guardian angel. Their prayers will not fail to obtain for you the grace, the virtue, and the fidelity to your resolutions which you need.

[After Meditation]

From time to time during the day, recall your good resolutions in order to put them into practice, or to consider whether you have properly observed them, and renew them for the rest of the day. From time to time raise your heart to Our Lord to re-awaken the good dispositions you had during your morning meditation. In this way you may be sure that you will profit greatly by that holy exercise and that you will make great progress in virtue and love for God.

[Distraction]

In regard to your distractions in your prayers, don't worry about them. As soon as you notice them, reject them and peacefully continue your meditation or your vocal prayer. It is impossible for us never to have distractions. All that the Good Lord asks is that we be faithful to return to Him, as soon as we notice that we have become distracted. By and by, those distractions will diminish and our prayer will become easier.

These, dear nephew, are the instruction which I believe to be suitable to make it easier for you to meditate. Mental prayer is indispensable, it is the great means used by all saintly souls in the pursuit of holiness. I hope that, with the help of grace, it will be as profitable for you as it was for them, and that your good will shall be rewarded by the graces of the Divine Master.

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I remain your most devoted friend and uncle,

Francis Libermann

priest of the Holy Heart of Mary

P.S. Tell Marie that I would have written to her also if I had not been told that she would write very soon. So I prefer to wait a little longer. The method of mental prayer I have described above will be useful for her. You will do well therefore to pass it on to her.

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Libermann reassures his nephew about the condition of his soul. The reasons for the variations in his counsels. The danger of too much systemization of spiritual life. Concerning pride.

Letter Four Paris, May 4, 1851 Vol. 13, p. 130

Dear Boy [aged twenty-one]:

[You Are All Right Before God]

Don’t worry about the state of your soul. This is my answer to your first problem. You have no reason at all for being anxious about your spiritual condition. I declare most positively and with full assurance that your soul is in good condition and by this I don’t mean merely that you are in the state of grace, but I proclaim that you are all right before God. I understand your fears which may have arisen because of apparent variations in my counsels. I am glad that you have drawn my attention to it, for I would not have thought of speaking about it if you had not mentioned it.
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In reality I have never varied for one instance in my appraisal of your interior. It is easy to know you, for your impetuosity always affects your conduct so manifestly that no mistaken judgment can be made about it. I have followed you closely for a long time. To the best of my ability, I have followed all the movements of your soul while I was with you and, to the extent that a man can be certain of anything, I am certain that I know the mental and moral workings of your soul. I have carefully noted the interrelation and order in which your activities have developed.

[My Advice Changes According to the Changing Conditions of Your Soul]

I feel sure, then, that I have known you in the past and still know you now as you truly are, and I repeat that my judgment in regard to your interior has never varied. My counsels, however, must have varied in regard to the method to be used in your combat against nature in order to permit you to be faithful to grace. Don't imagine that I had forgotten or disapproved what I had told you in the past when I gave you new and different advice. To the best of my knowledge, I have never done so. I doubt even that I've ever contradicted at one time what I had said at another. Nevertheless, I would not be surprised if it did happen, for every time I spoke to you I was concerned only with the problem of that particular moment. The change that I noted in you at that moment might have demanded a method that contradicted one I had counseled before. But I must say that I don't really know whether anything like that ever occurred.

It is easy to realize that changes do occur in your interior life although you remain fundamentally the same. You have a very passionate nature and it is often in great ferment.
In all probability this condition will last for some time until your soul has reached a more settled state. Now those variations in you demand a diversity of counsels although my direction remains fundamentally the same, just as your interior does not undergo any fundamental change.

The passions of the soul develop variously according to the diversity of internal and external (called also intrinsic and extrinsic) circumstances. Now one, then another defect, can become dominant, this or that defect assumes a different form or various defects form new combinations. This reason explains why you receive a diversity of counsels. What is said to you on the occasion of one direction applies to your state of soul at that time. Thus if, at one time, I told you to pay attention to your irritability "because your pride was not active," I meant that pride was not preponderant at that time and that it manifested itself only in a secondary and accessory way. At a later date pride might have been more preponderant and I would then have given you the opposite advice. Eight days later, I might have said to you to pay more attention to pride, because your internal disposition had changed. Hence every advice is intended for the various momentary dispositions of your soul.

You are mistaken if you think that I told you that your present state could become your true state of soul and thus remain permanent. The contrary is and has always been evident. You are probably confusing the general state of your soul with your state of mental prayer.

Regarding the latter, it is possible that you might remain in almost the same state, but this is not certain. I might have said this also in regard to your natural activity, but I could not have said it concerning the whirlwind of passions which presently cause you so much trouble. It is certain that you are undergoing a trial, I mean in regard to that
ferment, and also in respect to dryness in prayer and the worries that result from it.

In everything that regards your spiritual direction, listen with simplicity and don’t make a study of it. Never compare one direction with others received before. Take the advice given for the time for which it was intended and act according to it without after-thought. Don’t listen to your worries. They are merely a temptation by which the devil tries to destroy God’s reign in your soul. Remain docile and flexible in the hands of your directors. I assure you that your soul is in good condition and I am certain of what I say. Trust me and Father Schwindenhammer, and you can be certain that your soul is pleasing to God and will constantly please Him more. I say “me and Father Schwindenhammer,” for we both take God’s place for you. Walk with faith and bow down your reason. Herein lies the fundamental principle regarding the life of your soul. So do your best to remember this maxim.

[Beware of Too Much Systemization in the Spiritual Life]

Now let us speak about Courbon, and let me tell you what my experiences with him have been. During my long seminary days I passed through many phases of mental prayer. I was first in the state of “affective prayer”; I went by most ordinary steps as well as by those that were more intense. After that, I passed through the state of mental prayer which Courbon designates as “the Presence of God,” “Pure Faith,” etc. In a moment of trouble that was somewhat similar to yours—though also slightly different—my director gave me [the book of] Courbon to enlighten me regarding my way of mental prayer. Well, I found that the description given by Courbon was totally incorrect; that is, I did not find in his work any description of my different states or of the transitional stages leading me from one to another, or of
the preparations for those various ways of prayer. And what applied to me did not apply as classified by Courbon. For instance, he puts certain phenomena in one state of mental prayer and others in a different state whereas I found those effects simultaneously present in myself and there were also other discrepancies.

That reading of Courbon completely upset me and my director told me to put it aside. Later, when I had attained a stable state of mental prayer, I read Courbon once more, at least in part and I saw clearly that all those neat and detailed theories about mental prayer were inexact and that they were more harmful than useful. It is true that God’s grace adjusts itself to our nature and hence there is a general development and there are general rules that are applicable to what the various temperaments have in common. But in regard to details, we would go astray if we attempted to lay down very rigid and clear-cut rules, for it is not possible to find even ten souls that are perfectly alike.

There exists an extreme variety in the modes of mental prayer. We can make magnificent plans and these might seem most exact and reasonable as long as we do not apply them to actual cases, but in reality they are not correct. I think it is useless to insist further. Consider that the rules given by Courbon are of no value to yourself. Go your way in peace and with simplicity, trusting in God’s guidance and goodness.

Remain humbly before God in your mental prayer; have the sincere will and desire to unite yourself with Him; abandon yourself to His mercy and be ready to sacrifice yourself completely for His glory. From time to time express that disposition of your soul to the extent that you easily do so. Such an expression doesn’t even need to be formulated in words. Bear patiently your state of inability to pray and remain peaceful, without amusing yourself with the question whether you possess the marks that show that you are
called to this or that state of mental prayer. Such reflections are more than useless; they are in fact most harmful and are certainly not in keeping with God’s will. Those calls to this or that state of mental prayer and the signs described by Courbon are unreliable. Follow honestly, humbly, and simply what I have told you and I shall answer for all the rest.

[Don’t Lose Courage]

In regard to your second problem, namely that of perseverance [in grace], you are like the servant of the prophet Eliseus! Seeing the Syrians encamped before the city, he cried out: “Oh! my father, we are lost!” The prophet then gave to the servant the vision of an army of angels ready to fight for him and he felt reassured. It is quite certain that there are more favorable than adverse factors at work in you, for otherwise you would not stand up as you do in the midst of all your worries and agitations of mind. Now, won’t those factors that are now in your favor also be with you later when your trial will be over and your soul will have acquired greater calm and stability?

[Concerning Pride]

At the beginning of your trial, I felt uneasy because I was afraid that the pride whose roots I had noticed in you might take a new development and, penetrating into the depth of your character, that vice could add extreme violence to your trial; this would have been very dangerous for you. I have watched you closely in the meantime and have seen that your interior dispositions have taken a favorable turn. My fears have thus disappeared, and, after reading your letter, I see no more reasons to be concerned.

You have pride, but it hasn’t permeated your character. You have an ardent, active, impetuous, irritable character,
but it cannot be said that you have a proud character. There is an enormous difference between "having pride"—even much of it—and "having a proud character." He who has a proud character faces more or less serious difficulties, but even he doesn't have to despair.

I have seen a person who had such a proud character in a condition that was similar to your present state, but the trial of this person was ten times more violent than yours because he had a proud character. The state of mental prayer of that person was in every respect like yours before the time of his great temptation, but was infinitely worse than yours during that time. I must confess that I was very anxious, for at that time (fifteen or eighteen years ago) I did not yet have enough experience in the things of God. Well! this young man emerged victorious from his trial. He became an excellent priest and perserveres in piety and fervor; and although he has always been placed in circumstances that are apt to foster pride, he has become very humble.

Your difficulties are infinitely smaller, for pride has not been woven into your character and from this you may draw great comfort and confidence. Pride causes the harm you so greatly fear only when it is imbedded in the character. If this is not the case, it rarely leads to such excesses. This does not mean that such a person is not capable of excess; but God's grace operates in a Christian soul and he doesn't need extraordinary grace to resist the temptation.

Now about yourself. Let me tell you that you are not in such a danger, for you certainly do not have a "proud character." If pride now manifests itself somewhat forcefully, it is because your passions are in ferment. Calm will return at a later date; you will still have to repress thoughts and feelings of pride like anybody else, but no more than others. You need to be watchful at the present time because of the excitement, or rather the ferment, of your passions; and you
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will need watchfulness again when you will become a man, that is, when you will begin your functions after your novitiate.

Pride plays its usual role in the beginning, in an ordinary and very general way, but without leading to anything serious. I am convinced that this will be so in your case also. It is even possible that pride plays a lesser role in you than in many others. For you expect to meet with a certain amount of success and so you will have no surprises that otherwise would incline you to pride. Moreover, you expect to be attacked by that vice; it is a great advantage to be thus prepared for the attack of the enemy.

During your novitiate and at the beginning of your [priestly] labors you’ll continue to pay attention to what is useful to combat pride, you’ll be ready to struggle against it. And once you have become accustomed to a function and meet with successes of any sort, you will no longer be impressed by them. One becomes accustomed to everything. Hence the [priestly] activity [instead of feeding your pride as] you fear, will be of great help to you in certain respects because, being occupied with your work, you will more easily forget yourself.

To sum up: you must watch over your pride and fight against it, but yours is not more formidable than that of others. You want to combat your pride by contrary action but this method is worthless for you and it is not always the best means. I shall state even more generally that it is not the best way to fight pride. You abhor it. This is a defense and a foundation for humility. What you ought to do in your combat against the movements of pride is to deaden them, to calm your agitation if it is present and to reject those movements purely and simply, either by thinking of something else, or by performing an act that contains a movement of humility, abnegation, of oblation of yourself to God.

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Moreover, as I almost forgot to tell you, your fears are exaggerated when you imagine that you "are on the edge of a precipice." One does not cast oneself so readily over a precipice. It could happen in times when an erroneous doctrine is rampant. Then there would be real danger, but in our time I don't see what you have to fear from that source.

[Doubts About His Vocation]

In regard to your vocation, I'll say just one word. In all that you have told me there is not the least sign that you have no vocation. Moreover, considering your state of agitation, it is not astonishing that you should have doubts about it. Don't reason endlessly about this matter, for that would only cause trouble and temptation. Don't give the devil another point on which to cause you anxiety. When doubts come into your mind say to Our Lord: "My God, I am told in your Name that You want me here. I will remain here for the love of You even if I am destined to perish." If the enemy were to succeed in getting you to leave, he would quickly get the better of you.

Regarding your liking for study, allow God to lead you and follow that taste, taking ordinary care to prevent your love for study from degenerating into a passion. I shall say more about this when I see you at [Notre Dame du] Gard. I don't know how soon that will be.

[Trust the Judgment of Your Director]

Finally, concerning the last point: no matter what you say about your interior miseries, I'm telling you that they are not extraordinary in any respect. You are not like a man who is on the way to becoming obdurate. Stop worrying and trust in God's mercy. Realize that you are a poor judge of your interior disposition while you are in that
violent condition. Hence you should, at the present time, have more confidence than ever in your spiritual guides.

So I tell you in all truthfulness that you need not have fears for yourself—for the present or for the future; I mean, you need not have any other fears than those that all men ought to have. All the evil that is in you is counterbalanced and remedied even on the natural level; and [moreover] it is certain that grace is very strong in you.

Father Schwindenhammer and I are in perfect agreement on all those points and he, who follows you so closely, goes even a little further than I in judging you favorably. So feel at ease, go your way simply and avoid preoccupation with your interior.

As for zeal, don't rack your brains about that. It will manifest itself fully in due time. This is not the time when you must expect to feel it. This is the time for study, for laying the foundation for your interior development. Moreover, how can you expect to feel zeal while you are interiorly disturbed? I would be very sorry if zeal did show itself at present, for your agitation might then become much greater.

I didn't have the time to read [all of] your enormous letter. It is possible that I have not explained well the details regarding pride. I wrote the last part before going to bed while I was tired and getting sleepy. Perhaps I did not explain everything enough. If any difficulty remains write to me.

Entirely yours in Jesus and Mary,

Francis Libermann, Superior

I continue to feel uneasy about Henry. Pray and offer your sufferings for him.

Letter Five       Paris, October 12, 1851       Vol. 13, p. 307

Dear Boy:

I don't want to keep you in your state of perplexity and add to your anxiety; so I answer immediately though briefly, as you yourself have suggested:

First, two general remarks:

[Avoid Excessive Self-Scrutiny]

1. Don't seek to analyze the interior prompting which you mentioned. Since it is a good one, it is useless for you to seek to know it thoroughly, especially since I'll indicate your line of conduct.

In general, avoid examining your soul too closely. Remain calm, and peacefully abandoned to God's goodness. Follow like a child the direction that is given to you and you cannot go wrong. This is the general rule. I think that the attraction is fundamentally good and that it comes from God's grace. However, your nature, which is well disposed at this moment because of the influence of that grace, has added its own contribution either by way of the imagination or by a too natural activity of your mind. But I repeat that it is useless for you to clear up that point. It is sufficient that I take account of it in order to suggest the line of conduct you should follow.
SPIRITUAL LETTERS OF FRANCIS LIBERMANN

[Simplicity]

2. In regard to the conclusion you should draw from it about your vocation, here is what I want to tell you. The spirit of our Congregation is a spirit of simplicity, which consists in an interior disposition of the soul, the practice of virtues, in habits and ways of dealing with our fellow men. I don’t think that you’ll have very great difficulties to overcome in order to attain that virtue in all those things. Proceed with freedom of spirit and with confidence in God and Our Lady.

[Rules for Study]

In regard to your studies and the things you may be able to do for the glory of God—don’t become preoccupied with those things. God has His own designs. He will accomplish them and I am firmly convinced that He will give you the grace to be faithful to them. All you have to do is to abandon yourself to His divine guidance and the direction of your superiors. What lies beyond that does not concern you, it is not your affair. Walk with freedom and simplicity before Him: "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof!"

What line of conduct should you follow? Submit your program to Father Schwindenhammer and let him modify it if he considers it useful. Your part in all this consists in obedience:

1. Ask your Superior to tell you what topics you ought to study and determine the amount of time you will devote to each. Tell him what you are doing, let him then work out a rule for you and do not ask for particulars.

2. Speak about the function of sacristan, but do not ask for that position. I don’t want to give my own advice, and I hesitate regarding that matter, for I have not examined it.
3. Don't get lost in accidental questions, especially those that have no relation to the courses you are presently studying. I call accidental those, for example, that are brought up by an objection made in class, by a discussion that took place during recreation, and so forth. When you find time to go more deeply into such a question, speak about it to your director and follow his advice.

4. When giving answers in class do it with simplicity and openess. State what you know and in the way you know it, neither less nor more. Take a modest tone but also avoid affectation. In a word, act with simplicity.

5. When you need an additional explanation, ask for it. If necessary, press your point, but it might be well to keep to the scholastic form, for in this way you will perhaps more easily control your impetuosity and the other faults that flow from it. Listen to your interlocutor until he has finished and do not interrupt him. This is a work of patience!

Do not interrupt the discussions of your confreres [in class]. It is the function of the professor to attend to them. It belongs to you to listen until the professor questions you. Once more, then, exercise patience as well as humility. In your discussions, don't let yourself be carried away and don't be too dogmatic. Here again, you have to fight against your impetuous nature. Sometimes you will win; at other times you will lose. Don't be frightened by that; continue your way. God's grace is with you; it will not abandon you; don't be afraid, but, have confidence. Your faults will serve to keep you humble. This is what you should aim at, profiting by your faults.

6. When the professor asks you to solve a difficulty, answer by virtue of obedience but answer modestly, saying for instance, "it seems to me," or "perhaps we could say that," . . . And don't worry about what your self-love might tell
you afterwards. Despise it, forget yourself, abandon yourself to God and to the Virgin Mary.

7. Avoid as much as possible all discussions during recreations.

8. I forgot to tell you that when you are attacked by a fellow student, don't enter into a discussion with him, but address your answer to the professor stating it in a modest way as suggested above. In class you have only the right to talk to the professor, unless he directly puts you into relation with a confrère. He then orders you to speak to the latter and you must obey with simplicity, but observing the rules I have given above on the manner of discussing things.

Thus, through the rules mentioned under numbers 1, 2 and 3, you block the impetuous movements of your nature regarding a too natural attachment to study. You cannot use means that cut it short or cut it out entirely, for that would be to act against God's holy will. But you must attain the detachment in question by conforming yourself to what obedience prescribes.

Rules 4-8 will regulate the activities that are necessary in your studies and which, I repeat, are commanded by God's holy will; they will repress the vices and faults which your nature might mix with them.

Keep in mind that vices, faults and attachments are not removed by assault. God's grace usually proceeds with gentleness; follow it. With patience, humility, abandonment to God, obedience, and perseverance, we can always win out. Have courage; you have no reasons to fear for your spiritual future. Follow God step by step. He is with you, be sure of that!

Entirely yours in Jesus and Mary,

Francis Libermann, Superior