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### 04. Libermann's spiritual growth after his baptism

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## Libermann's spiritual growth after his baptism

*To Jérôme Schwindenhammer<sup>1</sup>*

*This is a letter of encouragement sent to Jérôme Schwindenhammer<sup>2</sup>, brother of Ignatius Schwindenhammer, who would later succeed Libermann as Superior General. Jérôme has been greatly tempted and Libermann sets out to encourage him by revealing some of the problems that he had to get through. "on condition that you never repeat this to anyone." The importance of such a letter is obvious. Fortunately, Jérôme disobeyed Libermann and kept the letter, although he had been told to burn it.*

*It was written on 3<sup>rd</sup> August, 1846 and it is included at this point, during Libermann's time at Issy, to show that during the five years he was there, he remained very close to God through what was called "affective prayer"<sup>3</sup>. Without doubt, these are the most intimate revelations of Libermann on the work of grace within him and his spiritual evolution after his baptism.*

*This letter was first published in "Lettres Spirituelles" before Fr. Cabon reproduced it in "Notes et Documents". The letter is reproduced here in its entirety.*

J M J.

August 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1846

To Jérôme, my very dear brother,

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<sup>1</sup> N D VIII pp. 202-204

<sup>2</sup> See Index

<sup>3</sup> Libermann writes very well about "affective prayer" in *Ecrits Spirituels*, pp. 163-205.

I understand your temptation. It is based totally on that same way of thinking which gave you all your other temptations and which has no imaginable foundation. I want to help and encourage you in the battle against the enemy, so I will tell you something about myself, on the understanding that you will not repeat it to anybody. I have already talked to you about my present state and I have said nothing but the truth, but I will now add a little about my past, so as to help you overcome your present temptation.

I have never prayed about the virtues, not even the virtues of Jesus and Mary, neither have I ever been able to draw conclusions or resolutions from my prayer to practise particular virtues. Nor have I ever reflected on the virtues to learn what to do or teach. I sometimes put this down to the disorder in my nervous system and at others, to my natural incapability. I am conscious that my mind has developed certain strengths and that my judgment has grown in breadth and rectitude, but that is solely due to the grace given me to fortify what was weak and correct what was false. I am so convinced of this fact that even if I lost my faith, I would never be able to deny the existence and the working of grace in my soul.

Whenever I talked about virtues and perfection, there was no preliminary meditation, but as I spoke, truth became apparent and developed as I went along. At these times, I felt my mind enlightened and my will strengthened and I got the impression that I wasn't speaking, but that God was using me to help others. I was still worried about my own salvation, but had no doubt that God would have pity on me. I acquired nothing by my own efforts, neither for my intellect, my will or the growth in virtues; it was God who gave me everything. He dragged me along without asking my permission and with a strength that I have never observed in any other person so far.

At first, I was very lax, very indifferent as regards the supernatural life. The Lord helped me to stand up to my father, who wanted me to renounce my faith, but I renounced him rather than the faith. After that, the good Lord came uninvited to draw me out of myself and held all my faculties captive for about five years. During these years I never gave a thought to cultivating one virtue or another but I just wanted to be with Him, which was a very easy thing to do. Throughout that time, I knew almost nothing about the things of the spirit.

So you can see that your ideas about me are wide of the mark. It is Jesus who acts and does everything in our souls. It is metaphysically impossible for a man to acquire a supernatural virtue by his own efforts. Perhaps somebody could pretend that this was so, but they would never be able to keep it up.

It would do no harm to talk with M. Plantaz about the spiritual life, but don't correct him unless he asks you to do so. Never deliberately invite him to reveal his inner life, but if he does ask for your reactions, you could tell him what you think.

Go to Holy Communion twice a week in addition to Sunday. Try to forget yourself; do everything simply, calmly and with trust in God and Mary. During this period of initial preparation on your own, you will get all sorts of temptations. What you need to do is to make use of them for your own benefit. Don't let them influence you or any part of your life. As soon you are able to get down to work, things will become easier for you.

Yours in Jesus and Mary,

*F Libermann*

NB. You must burn this letter three days after you receive it.