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### 10. The road to Rome: fear of the unknown

Christian de Mare CSSp

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## The road to Rome: fear of the unknown

*To Samson Libermann<sup>1</sup>*

*Libermann had left Rennes on the 1<sup>st</sup> December 1839, despite the lively opposition of Fr. Louis de la Morinière<sup>2</sup>. He decided to go to Rome with M. de la Brunière to throw light on their project, the "Work for the Black People". He only passed through Paris to see M. Pinault. He arrived in Lyon on December 7<sup>th</sup> and on the 8<sup>th</sup> he made the pilgrimage to Notre-Dame-de-Fourvière, where he found peace and strength. Four days later, he wrote to his brother Samson, a medical doctor in Strasbourg, to bring him up to date on his situation. This important letter reaffirms how determined he was to obey the will of God, by taking this extraordinary decision which would lead him into the unknown. In "Notes et Documents", Fr. Cabon corrects the date of the letter from 10<sup>th</sup> December, given in "Lettres Spirituelles", to 12<sup>th</sup> December.*

Praised be Jesus and Mary!

Lyon,  
12 December 1839

Mr dear brother and sister,

You must be surprised to receive a letter from Lyon. This is indeed strange and I myself would not have expected it a year ago. Give your mind and your heart to Our Lord and neither judge nor examine things according to the spirit of the world, otherwise you will suffer great grief because of me. But if you see things in God, you will have no trouble finding peace and calm, and you will end by experiencing true interior joy. I should like to tell you exactly how things stand, but the good

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<sup>1</sup> N.D. I, p. 672 & L.S. II, pp. 299-303

<sup>2</sup> The Superior General of the Eudists

Lord doesn't want it yet; so I must remain silent for a while and leave you in a state of uncertainty.

I have left Rennes forever. This is most imprudent, if not sheer folly, according to those who judge things in worldly ways. I would have enjoyed a certain security if I had stayed there, but it would be dreadful for me to look for an easy time on this earth and to be honoured and esteemed! Dear friends, remember one thing: this world passes away and our life spent in it lasts but an instant. When our flesh is rotting in the grave, it will mean nothing at all to have led a comfortable life on earth; our eternity will not be any happier for it. Those who seek only happiness on this earth seek their own comfort and sensual pleasure; but a Christian who is totally committed to the service of God must consider both comfort and discomfort, honour and humiliation as things that are indifferent and inconsequential. Why seek to have an easy life upon earth unless it be because of self-love? Let us give ourselves to the love of Jesus, and not to the love of ourselves. What does it matter if I am overwhelmed with all sorts of setbacks provided I belong to God and serve him as he wishes? And what could be better for living this life of love than crosses, privations, pains, and afflictions of all kind?

I have left Rennes. I no longer have any man or any creature on earth in whom I can place my trust. I have nothing. I know neither what will become of me nor how I shall even be able to live. I shall live a life which, by worldly standards, is despicable, forgotten, neglected and useless. A great number of those who loved and respected me will surely disapprove of my conduct. Perhaps I will even be looked on as insane or insufferably proud. I shall be despised and might even suffer persecution. And who on earth will give me even a little consolation in return? I am therefore a lost individual, an outcast.

This is the only way in which flesh can reason when it is left to itself; but do we want to remain men according to the flesh? If

there were nothing in which to place our hope except in mud and dung, filth and human rottenness, we would indeed be miserable!

My dear friends, let us rejoice that we have a Father in heaven, a loving and loveable Lord Jesus as well as a wonderful Mother. They will never abandon those who give themselves completely for their glory and their love. So have no fear whatsoever on my behalf; I am the happiest man in the world, because I no longer possess anything but God, Jesus and Mary; I am already in heaven, while still living on earth! If God wants me to lead a hard and painful life, so much the better; I know he will give me his strength and his love and that is all I need. My only hope is in Jesus and Mary; it should be the same with both of you.

But even with all this verbiage and I still haven't come to the facts! All I can tell you at this time is that you mustn't worry about me. Consider me as one dead and buried; pray God for the good of my soul and for the accomplishment of his most holy will. I can't tell you at present what the good Lord is asking of me; I shall just say that I will continue the work which He, in his goodness, is asking me to do and that I will put all my trust in him.

I believe that the time for explanations has not yet arrived, so don't be angry with me on that account. It is his will that I remain silent. In any case, such things ought not to be disclosed in a letter. I shall give you news later, but it may be quite some time before I can write. Don't worry if I make you wait. I hope to be able to see you some time within the next two years, so rest assured and give yourselves more and more to God. Live with fervour and love, as true children of Jesus and Mary, in whose love I am wholly yours.

*Francis Libermann, acolyte.*

P.S. All my love to the children. Tell Marie not to be upset because of this letter. Let her pray often to Our Lady, asking her especially that I may be able to visit you within the next eighteen months or two years. Meanwhile, I would be so happy if she tries very hard to become a better Christian each day.