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**CONCERNING
FATHER LIBERMANN'S
COMMENTARY
ON ST JOHN'S GOSPEL**



CONTENTS

Preface – Concerning the Commentary on St John’s Gospel: Research and Animation Centre	5
Father Libermann’s Preface to his Commentary	8
Knowledge of Judaism and Spiritan Spirituality: by Roger Le Déaut, CSSp	10
Father Libermann and the reading of Sacred Scripture: by Claude Tassin, CSSp	22
Realistic expectations of Libermann’s Commentary on Saint John: by Michael Cahill, CSSp	39
THE MARRIAGE FEAST AT CANA in the Commentary on St John: by Félix Gils, CSSp	45
Father Libermann’s commentary on Chapter 10 of the Gospel of saint John, THE GOOD SHEPERD: by Felix Porsch, CSSp	66
Father Libermann’s Commentary on Chapter 1 of the Gospel of saint John, THE CALL OF THE DISCIPLES: by James Okoye, CSSp	88
Spiritan Bibliography 1986	96

FATHER LIBERMANN'S COMMENTARY ON CHAPTER TEN OF THE GOSPEL OF SAINT JOHN THE GOOD SHEPHERD

by Félix Porsche, CSSp.

PRELIMINARY NOTE

In what he has to say concerning the tenth chapter of Saint John, Father Libermann follows the same procedure both in method and in purpose as in the rest of his Commentary on Saint John. He does a "spiritual rereading" of Saint John's text, with a marked tendency to update, so as to be of help to pastoral work. This being his purpose, it would be wrong to expect to find exegesis of the modern sort, using the methodology of historical criticism, even though asides on the Jewish background and customs and the culture of the times are not completely missing. Libermann is quite awake also to the nuances of structure and grammar. It needs to be said, in these preliminary remarks, that Libermann sees the Johannine text as being the speech pronounced by the flesh-and-blood Jesus, and not at all as a compilation by the evangelist or a restating of the theological belief of the Johannine community. What Libermann wrote must be read in the light of these preliminaries. It is for the reader to adopt these perspectives and put aside preoccupation with historical criticism.

THE PURPOSE OF THE PRESENT STUDY

Our present work cannot have for objective to restate in detail the contents of Libermann's commentary. It will be appreciated that a reading of the Commentary text cannot be dispensed with, for it is very dense and complex in some places. Our purpose is rather to bring out the predominant

trends, the principal ideas, the main characteristics of the theology and the method. Of course these things are the same in Chapter Ten as in the rest of the Commentary. They need but a short restating here. Our principal purpose is to bring out the special quality of Chapter Ten.

I. THE METHOD AND GENERAL TENDENCIES OF THE COMMENTARY

It may be stated with regard to method that in general Libermann *picks out and makes an up-to-date application of particular aspects and builds up an allegorical exegesis*. This procedure is not of course peculiar to Libermann, having been used all down the ages to bring the text up to date. The same tendency may well be seen in St John's text itself. What has been done is to take up certain aspects of the introductory parable (Vs. 1-5) and give them a meaning. One must remember that Chapter Ten, with its shepherd motif, was well adapted to up-dating and allegorical interpretation and even attracts it. It is, none the less, astonishing to discover the force with which Libermann makes the modern applications. These serve his pastoral preoccupations before all else. Often his own personal experiences are brought into the Commentary, and for this reason a complete understanding of the Commentary would presuppose an acquaintance with his writings and his situation at the same period of his life. This tendency towards modern application is already implicit in the nature of Chapter Ten as "**a fine lesson for the pastors of his Church, that is for shepherds of souls**".

A strong tendency to speculation in dogma is also characteristic of the Commentary. Indeed it is so strong that some extensive passages of the Commentary might reasonably be called a treatise of dogmatic theology. In such passages it is not surprising that the theology of the manuals and the opinions of those times – notably from the French school – should be reflected. One might anticipate this. It applies in particular to teaching regarding the Trinity, Christ and Grace. These three take up much of the Commentary, in fact more than half of it.

It should also be said that the very text of St John itself evokes this sort of thinking. John puts far greater emphasis than do the Synoptists, if only in a generalised way, upon the oneness of Jesus with the Father, of He-who-is-being-sent with the One-who-is-sending. The nature of Chapter Ten is characterised to an even more marked degree by this tendency.

A further characteristic of Libermann's interpretation is *the reading of the text as applicable to the individual* and this linked to a spiritual outlook on humankind. From one end of the text to the other the relationship of the individual soul with Christ, who is Lord and Master of it, holds the center of attention. The church aspect holds but a secondary position despite its being the main focus for St John. Even in those instances where Libermann writes in the plural (sheep; souls), he is still preoccupied, when one takes a close analytic look, with the individual person or better the individual soul.

II. THE CONTENT

As to contents, Libermann deals with many themes which although they are indeed furnished by St John's text allow one to get an understanding of his personal viewpoint. Themes are dealt with in part as being dogma, in part as being pastoral or spiritual teaching. Alongside a treatment of the major themes of the Trinity, of Christology, of Ecclesiology, of Grace (the collaboration of God and man), of the Holy Spirit, of the relationships between miracle and faith, of the mode of operation of the sacraments there is, naturally, and above all else that of shepherds, good and bad. To accompany his discussion of this last topic Libermann inserts an account of good spiritual direction which he addresses to all who are called to lead or who are put in charge of others in their spiritual lives in the function of spiritual direction.

I shall try in what now follows to gather under one heading the more important of Libermann's ideas about the more significant themes. I shall try to spell them out and comment upon them in a critical fashion but repetition and cuts cannot be completely avoided.

1. JESUS, THE ONE TRUE GOOD SHEPHERD AND OTHER PASTORS

a) *The Christo-centric perspective.*

In keeping with the dominant perspective of Chapter Ten, the interpretation Libermann gives to the text is *christological*. It is Jesus who alone is the true Shepherd who brings about the salvific will of the Father here in the world. Apart from Him, there cannot be genuine pastoral care. Here we have the key concept which runs like a scarlet thread throughout the length of both texts, that of St John and that of the Commentary.

Libermann is not however entirely consistent in this respect, because led by his pastoral preoccupation, he shifts the balance in what St John is saying. If the role of the evil shepherd and the hireling in St John exists to throw into relief the genuine true pastoral care of Jesus, in Libermann's Commentary these characters take on far too much importance, as is demonstrated by the lengthy treatment given to this sort of 'shepherd'. Again St John speaks never a word about any Good Shepherd but Jesus, Libermann creates what amounts to a full '**Mirror of Pastors**' in which he lays down the ins and outs of what being a Good Shepherd after the model of Christ entails. As we have already indicated, what is in hand is no less than to write '**a thorough set of instructions for the pastors of His Church**'. It is certainly not primarily nor exclusively a self-presentation done by the Good Shepherd Himself.

We have to grant it to Libermann that he does not conceive of the activities of other good shepherds save in the closest possible union with Jesus, who alone is the Good Shepherd. In this he keeps faith with his Christological – or better Christo-centric viewpoint. Despite this, Libermann's interpretation does not correspond here with the basic concept of St John's text, even if we see quite unmistakably why Libermann takes this line, driven by spiritual and pastoral preoccupations. For us there is a great advantage in this, for if we did not have it we should be deprived of abundant explanations of what it is to be a pastor in the Church, explanations that light up the way for us. Moreover Libermann is not the only one in these straits, for down to our own day, Chapter Ten has always been interpreted throughout the history of exegesis as a '**set of instructions for the pastors of the Church**'.

Libermann develops his thought with logic and method as he goes along. He lays down at the outset a principle that gives him liberty to use this text with regard to other pastors: *the principle of one-ness*. Because good pastors are in union with Jesus, all St John has to say with regard to Jesus, is validly applied by analogy to them. We shall have to come back to this soon in detail (cf. No 2).

b) *Jesus the one true shepherd.*

Texts that refer to the uniqueness of Jesus' office as shepherd are, as one might expect, very common. As these always have the same basic meaning it will be enough to quote but a few of them. We may note, too, that in Libermann's phrases dealing with the oneness of Jesus' office, he does not distinguish strictly between the image of the shepherd and that of the entry (door). Rather he mixes them together. **'There is but the Divine Shepherd who can call every sheep by its name'** (480, 1st edition) Our Lord **'the only entry to the supernatural, the sole means by which supernatural work may be effected'** (475): **'The Master of the sheepfold alone is the one who can move the sheep that are his, to seek pasture or to work for His glory'** (482): **'Each soul is closed and Jesus Christ is the only way in to souls'** (487). In another passage Libermann explains in detail why it is that Jesus is the 'One true shepherd': **'... not just that he is the only one who possesses a flock that belongs to him, but also that he is the only one who pastures his flock without ever drawing profit from it as other shepherds do, but to increase it, to fatten it and to strengthen it'** (495).

In all this it is presupposed that whatever he does, Jesus is always in complete dependency upon his Father with whom he is one being. Libermann deals extensively with this in his explanations of dogma, notably in the commentaries on Verses fifteen and thirty.

2. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE GOOD PASTOR AND OF HIS ACTIVITIES

As we have already mentioned, everything Jesus has to say about Himself applies, according to Libermann, equally

well to the pastors of the Church, through whom Jesus carries on his pastoral work. **'Our Lord carries on his pastoral work through him who comes in through Him and by him He acts as shepherd, . . . and everything He has to say here applies in very truth, not just to what the Adorable Shepherd Himself did, but also to all that He does through all those who enter the sheepfold through Him. Consequently all He has to say about Himself, happens equally to them, save that what they achieve is not theirs either in its origin or its end and even to a large extent in its means or how it comes to be. All these things belong to the shepherd who is sovereign and unique'** (477). In this description of the relationship of the other pastors to Jesus we see yet another characteristic of Libermann come to the surface: his anxiety to make clear in minute detail the subtlest of relationships and to stay within the bounds of dogmatic orthodoxy in doing so.

We wish to add at least a few more of the many texts that deal with the relationship between Jesus and the pastors of the Church. **'So it is then true that everything Our Lord is going to have to say about Himself is to be applicable to pastors who go in through Him who is the entrance. Otherwise we should have to conclude, from what He says, that every other pastor is but a thief and no true pastor. This is not true. . . . but Jesus in them is the shepherd to whom the sheep belong, and they cannot achieve anything alone, nor may they themselves profit by the sheep'** (478). **'Through an admirable benevolence of this Divine Shepherd towards his sheep, he gives those who work in His name His life and His pastoral outlook, through His power and through the Holy Spirit, so that Jesus, in and through His priests, achieves the same effects He Himself did in His life'** (481).

The obligation – the necessity even, of staying in touch with the One true Shepherd arises from pastoral work. **'Those who take the place of the Sovereign Pastor must turn to Him who is our Master, and work with Him every time they reach out towards souls as pastors. Then the Holy Spirit unlocks the souls for them and they are able to enter and contact them perfectly. Yet the Holy Spirit will open souls only when he sees Our Master in the pastor, in his approach and in his conduct. The Supreme Pastor alone to whom the sheep belong is allowed to go in and to**

be received' (479). This is how Libermann sees the great principles that may be expressed thus – **'All true pastors are but representatives of the One Pastor and should give the sheep the same example as He'** (483).

Two aspects are to be discerned in pastors. **'At one and the same time they are shepherd and sheep. There is but One alone who is uniquely Pastor; Our Lord. All others are His sheep. In what touches their own salvation, they are sheep; in the role of caring for the behaviour and the conduct of others, they are pastors. Yet still in this caring for the salvation of others there exists their membership of the flock, because if they fulfill their role of pastor as they should, they find their own salvation'** (488; cf 475). The two things exist together in an inseparable way. For the shepherds themselves there is no other way in, save Jesus, through whom they find their way in to salvation. **'From this can be seen how great the necessity is that pastors act perfectly in their role, for if they should not go in through the correct entry, they lose just as greatly for themselves as for the souls entrusted to them'** (489). **'From this we can see the refined purity of intent pastors of souls should bring to their pastoral work, how great their faith should be and how it should be the core of all their activity. It ought to be purified of all self-interest and selfish motivation'** (479).

In the phrase St John uses as an image of the life of the believer (Verse 9: he will go in; he will go out; he shall find pasture), Libermann finds the **'three great pastoral tasks'** expressed.

And he will go in. This describes the business he should occupy himself with for souls and for their spiritual direction: to heal their sicknesses, strengthen their weaknesses, have them surmount their fears, take advantage of what is good in them to have them progress and undertake whatsoever has to do with the direction of the soul so as to settle them upon the true path to perfection. . .

'And he will go out'. This is an image for ruling over and directing everything to do with the exterior life of souls, arranging whatever is needed for the practice of virtues and whatever occupation may usefully be their work. . . This going out covers also the function of defence against all enemies and shielding them when they are attacked. It is the constancy of care that the pastor

has. To serve these purposes he goes in front of his sheep. . .

'And he shall find pastures' 'et pascua inveniet'. The third pastoral function is the feeding of the sheep. . . (490).

Because the great objective of the shepherd is to act so that 'souls may have life', he has to make use of every means that there is: 'a good shepherd endures whatever injury, takes all possible precautions, goes to any length to prevent a soul being lost. For this purpose he has such patience, such endurance, such gentleness, such prudence that they are unrivalled. There is no sacrifice he will not make for this. All the more when it is a feeble soul that is in question, he extends every consideration and is ready to put up with whatever happens rather than take the least step that would risk the loss of such a soul' (493).

This devotedness to the flock should know no limits. Real shepherds 'are ready to push their zeal for the Sovereign Pastor's sheep to the point of the sacrifice of themselves, of all they have and of their very life should the need arise' (498 and 500).

We may well join Libermann after this description of a good pastor in exclaiming 'How hard it is to be a good pastor! Hard, for it is hard to be free of self and filled with Our Lord, the great shepherd of the pastors of the sheep' (493). And yet still 'What happiness for true sheep to possess genuine pastors in whom the One Great Pastor is alive!' (480).

Libermann, in addition to these essential traits of the good pastor, lays down an important qualification for the true good pastor '*pastoral know-how*.' What he understands by the term is a capability for 'perceiving and understanding all that is going on in the sheep. That is how he guides and leads them according to their needs and what is of use to them' (505). Here once more it is Jesus who provides the great model no one can match (cf No 4).

As the texts we have quoted show, Libermann has an esteem beyond the ordinary for the dignity of the priest and for his pastoral office. That he should have an image of the laity as greatly dependent upon the priest is an attitude springing from the climate of his times. We should call it, today, a paternalistic attitude. Those who are genuine sheep

are **'habitually ever so happy to obey their shepherd and to follow after him'** (485). It is possible however that that word **'habitually'** brings in a limitation and it is **'his office that raises him over his sheep'** (489). What is more, Libermann deals most insistently with that respect and delicacy the directors of souls ought to have towards those who are put in their care. What is needed is **'to enter souls spiritually: souls have to be revealed to their pastors and after that he has to direct and to pilot them'** (474). The *conditio sine qua non* for the guidance of souls as a true pastor, is oneness with the Great Pastor, for His is the only voice they will listen to. **'When it is a case of speaking to and directing a soul in divine things, to the glory of God and for their salvation, there is but one voice that can make itself heard, that of the great shepherd. There is no human voice, powerful though it be, capable of making souls understand eternal truths in that way that fixes sentiments of faith and of love. . . . and from this it follows that should a pastor wish to speak to souls and make them docile to grace, he must fill himself with the Spirit of Our Lord and thus speak in the Spirit of his Master. Good souls will recognise that voice they know so well and will let themselves be guided and lead very easily'** (479; cf 473 and 480 ffg).

3. EVIL SHEPHERDS AND HIRELINGS

It is a little surprising to add up the total and to see the space Libermann gives to the texts that describe the evil shepherds. We may well ask ourselves if his thoughts about this are not maybe a reflection of disappointing experience. Whatever it is, whereas in St John the evil shepherds have but a quite subordinate place – to throw the good into high relief – in Libermann there is a very lengthy development of the topic. He makes a distinction between false and evil shepherds **'who are not shepherds in fact'** rather are they thieves (498) and the hirelings **'an additional category of blameworthy shepherd, who are not thieves, who do come in the name of the true pastor, but who are to a greater or lesser degree unworthy. . .'** (497).

a) *False shepherds* are the ones who do not gain entry through Jesus, the door, but by some other way. They dis-

charge the duties of a pastor from a human and natural standpoint and from human and natural motivations (475). The evil shepherd is motivated **'not so as to lead and keep possession of his sheep, but for personal satisfaction and his own benefit. In each instance where the pastor has but a purely worldly outlook and manner of doing things, he is but working for himself'** (475). This is the gravest of the reproaches Libermann makes to evil pastors: they act **'solely on the natural plane'** and for their **'personal satisfaction'** and for their **'own good'**. Libermann goes so far as to say that the evil shepherd **'devours the lambs instead of feeding them'**, he **'neglects them and allows them to stray'**, he works **'solely to draw his profits even though they do not belong to him'** (497). In the explanation he offers of Verse ten, Libermann includes a long list of the vices of the evil shepherds. Their activities are motivated by the desire for self-satisfaction, to profit for their own interest from the sheep they direct, all else being neglected. . . **'The evil shepherd is preoccupied with self-satisfaction, with his own pleasure, with looking after his own interests, with contenting his vanity and his pride. . . His power is exercised with violence. He strikes that sheep which does not obey, aware only of the insult he feels and not of the harm he may be doing. . . He has his preference for this one or for that, according as his feelings urge him, and he tries to satisfy his desires. . .'** (494).

The results of these attitudes are disastrous. **'The losses that are entailed for souls, when entry is not made by the door (that is the true way) are many and very grave. The danger involved for oneself is immense, besides the wrong there is in the very act of discharging priestly office and the pastoral ministry in but a human way and as though living only for one's self.'** A pastor like that **'cannot fail but lose himself'** (489). Neither can he provide the necessary feeding for the flock, **'for it is sure that he who will behave in total independence of Our Saviour has nothing in his soul fit to feed another. And how is it possible to give what one does not possess? So, it is of the greatest importance that what is offered is not drawn from one's own self but from the bottomless resources to be found in Our Lord'** (491). There exists also the case of the pastor who is **'motivated "half-and-half", half by faith and half by human motives'**, so that **'the fodder he puts**

before the sheep is deficient'. Libermann adds the following astounding remark then: **'this is what comes to pass with the majority of pastors'** (491). In the hands of such pastors **'souls remain sterile and withered'**. Despite these deficiencies, should **'their preaching sometime produce an effect upon a soul, it is more of a miracle that God Himself brings to pass upon the occasion of the worthless word that had been offered them. He is doing what in other days He did through Moses, He has living water spring from dried up, solid rock'** (491).

b) *The hireling.*

In his interpretation of Verse 10, Libermann is again very severe with regard to the hireling. St John, it is true, has already described the hireling with firmer traits than the thief, yet the cause of Libermann's giving a more detailed and filled-out picture is to be sought in the fact that he discovers in the hireling the typical example of pastors (who are) **'careless, weak, half-hearted and unmoved when it comes to saving a soul; they are full of drive and enthusiasm when their own interest is at stake'** (499). **'The hireling is careless and fearful, hesitant lest he have to put up with something for the good of the flock. He lets it feed as he should and watches it for its Master, in so far as this pleases and contents him himself, but he will not inconvenience himself, save if it pleases his self-respect or some other inclination. When the case arises of putting something that is dear to him at risk, like relatives, friends, possessions, goods, reputation; then he would rather let the sheep suffer and cover up for himself'** (499). These are truly harsh words rooted in Libermann's experience of life. He adds, **'among the crowds of pastors who oversee the flock of Our Lord Jesus Christ, there is perhaps but a minority group who are thieves and robbers, yet how numerous are the hireling workers who feed themselves in the working hours when they are shepherding the flock of the Good Shepherd'** (499).

In Verses 12 and 13, Libermann fleshes out the portrait of the hireling with some detail and comments **'the hireling considers he has not done wrong, for he is guilty of nothing that would kill a sheep confided to him, but his failing is by omission and that makes him straight off a worthless shepherd who runs down his great Master's flock'** (502).

4. SHEEP, THE IMAGE OF THE BELIEVER

After the portrayal of the good and the evil shepherd Libermann gives us a description of the believers in detail, particularly in explaining the words *sheepfold* and *sheep*. His explanations cover many facets: call, development towards belief, the growth of faith, the importance of grace, spiritual direction. It is not possible to deal here with all of them. Some have already been touched on above. Overall one might say that Libermann's viewpoint is to individualise and spiritualise. Whereas St John's writing is first and foremost from the point of view of Church (ecclesiological) when he writes about the sheep and the sheepfold, what Libermann is dealing with throughout his work is the individual soul.

The sheepfold is, indeed, **'the unity of all the believers'** yet it is a **'completely spiritual and supernatural sheepfold, the sheep being the souls considered on the plane of, and in their existence as, spiritual and supernatural and it follows that the approach to them should be spiritual and supernatural'** (474). Libermann explicitly writes: **'what is in question here is not just a way in for believers in general, the totality of faithful, but more specifically the individual approach to souls that belong to God, in other words the approach on the supernatural plane to pilot and to direct, etc. . . .'** (487).

This is why all the details are given an interpretation that fits in with this overview of things as spiritual. In St John, to be 'in the fold' means 'to have life', in the special sense he gives to that term. In Libermann a soul is 'in the fold' **'when it lives (*rester*) interiorly, having in itself the dispositions and the life of its Divine Shepherd'** (481). Sheep are attracted by the teaching and the actions of the shepherd but primarily **'he draws them to himself in their lives by that interior attraction which he ceaselessly keeps up in what they are doing. . . . He leads them by the unceasing allure that makes them keep up their forward progress'**. The true pastors behave in the same fashion **'moved by His Spirit and His Strength'** (482).

5. THE VITAL IMPORTANCE OF GRACE IN THE JOURNEY OF FAITH

The topic of grace is closely woven into that of the sheep. The necessity, the importance and the primacy of grace are endlessly repeated and underlined by Libermann. If true sheep follow the shepherd it is solely under the action of grace. **'It is not their reason, nor their leanings nor is it anything save the grace from their Shepherd who moves ahead of them and draws them after. It is His grace, His voice sounding interiorly in them that they hear and it is His divine example they follow'** (483). Grace creates a kind of relationship and identity between sheep and Shepherd. The result is that they freely come along after him. **'Souls sense interiorly that it is the voice of the Divine Pastor when they are in fact true sheep, for if that be the case they already have the habit of listening to that Voice speak in that way to them, speak interiorly. . . . that Voice of the Pastor. . . . fits ever so well their dispositions, their supernatural longings and all they experience in themselves, that they easily understand that the attraction by which He draws them along, is truly the voice of the Pastor'** (483). What there is, on the other hand, is a strong rejection of the evil shepherd on the part of the true sheep. **'That rejection of and distancing from pastors who are not recognised or are but human, which souls experience. . . may well be called a genuine spiritual fleeing,** (484). When he is commenting on Verse four, Libermann writes of **'distaste, distancings, withdrawals, oppositions, stand-off-ishness and pain which the good souls experience'** (485). In this he shows himself to be a real master of spiritual direction. It can be appreciated too that such observations are no fruit of study but come of practical experience.

While he underlines the importance and the primacy of grace, Libermann does not leave out man's co-operation. Here he shows his careful orthodoxy. He gives us a real treatise on grace, complete with all the academic distinctions, dealing in particular with the question of predestination. (See pages 529-534). He describes in minute detail that whole wayfaring of faith under the impulse of grace (533). In the spiritual life, the decisive grace is perseverance. **'What gives the distinctive and determining characteristic of the sheep is perseverance'** (532).

6. PASTORAL KNOWLEDGE

Pastoral knowledge is of great importance for spiritual direction and for pastoral work, according to Libermann. What is in question here is a specific knowledge, a pastoral science, which Libermann describes at length in commenting Verse 14. **'This knowledge is no everyday or common acquaintance, it comes from a divine and adorable wellspring. It is not that acquaintance that one man has with another, it is a divine knowledge. . . . a knowing in love. . . Our Lord compares it with the knowledge his father has of him because that knowledge the Father has of the Son is brimming with love and obligingness. Again this knowledge may mean the knowledge in love that the Father has for the Son of Man, which in Libermann's case means Jesus in his humanity. Now this knowing in love is rather the shepherd's loving knowledge, because it flows from the one above to the one who is below, from him who is giving life to him who receives it. The love of the Son of Man for his Father in heaven, is reciprocally the love of the lamb for the shepherd, a love of docility. . . (503).** In Libermann's thought there are two essential qualities of divine love. It is interior and it is a reality, and pastoral knowledge ought to be like that too. What Libermann has to offer in explanation here is rather speculative and theoretical. (cf 504 sq).

7. THE ROLE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

It is rather unusual to find reference to the Holy Spirit's work in the section of the Commentary dealing with Chapter ten. Often enough Libermann comes to mention the Spirit's rôle. In the explanation of Verse 3 Libermann gives quite a surprising meaning to the word porter (ostiarus). Jesus is **'the entrance to souls. Yet this divine entrance cannot be opened by us on our own (we, the pastors). It is Jesus' divine spirit who is the keeper of the door, it is He who gives entry through this divine door'** (478). It is the Spirit that opens souls to pastors, **'so that he may go in and become perfectly in touch with them. But the Divine Spirit opens souls to them only when He sees in the pas-**

tor the presence of Our Lord, in their way of making their approach and in how they behave' (479).

Pastoral work presupposes that the pastors be filled with the Spirit, for the true believer listens only to the voice of Jesus, which is recognised by His Spirit and through (the action of) His Spirit. **'And so, should a pastor wish to speak to souls and make them docile to grace, let him fill himself with the spirit of Our Saviour and thus speak in the Spirit of his master' (479).** It is only that priest who is **'filled in holiness with the pastoral life and with the spirit of its source, who acts only by Him and in Him, that is aware, by a supernatural virtue, of the state of a soul' (481).**

If these thoughts apply in the first instance to the action of the Spirit in pastors and to their work in the apostolate, Libermann speaks subsequently, and in other places, about the import of the Spirit for the believer; notably in the explanation of Verse 27. A true believer is he who lets himself be guided by the Spirit. Others have the spirit of the demon or of the flesh, **'who tend always to set themselves against the Divine Pastor and are all the time working against what the Holy Spirit is doing in His flock' (529).** As against this, the Holy Spirit, in **'genuine members of the flock'**, brings to life **'a docility and an openness'.** **'It is the Holy Spirit living in them, His divine grace attracting them and making them move towards their pastor, who enlightens their mind and has them relish and rejoice in everything that comes from their pastor' (529).**

There are other, more detailed things that Libermann has to say about the Spirit to be found in the dogmatic sections where he is dealing with the Trinity (548 ffg). The Spirit is described there as **'the existing and substantial breath of life that passes from the Father to the Son and from the Son to the Father'.**

8. FAITH AND MIRACLE – THE MOTIVES OF NON-BELIEF

In his commentary upon Verse 25, Libermann treats the **'works'** of Jesus as he would miracles. He takes them to be evident proofs of the divinity of Jesus. From that he deduces the inexcusable unbelief of the Jews. **'The Jews have therefore no further reason to put forward to Him in sup-**

port of their not believing, nor to prove that if they have not recognised Him it would not be their fault' (527 ffg.; cf. 537 and 542 ffg. concerning Verse 32 and Verse 37 ffg.). Libermann sees in the miracles of Jesus **'the proof that is best capable of convincing and of giving the greatest certitude to no matter who, of the truth of His divine words'** (543). Even St John would seem to have been of a different conviction about this, as is demonstrated by the story of St Thomas (particularly John 20; 29. See also John 4; 48.). Libermann strays simply because he confuses 'work' with 'miracles'. But Saint John, by the word 'work' does not solely intend 'miracle', which moreover he calls 'sign', but all that Jesus does and His whole comportment. In Verses 25 and 37 and following, faith based on Jesus' word alone and faith based on other experience of Jesus find themselves in opposition. But these finer distinctions are of a more recent date; one cannot ask them of Libermann.

9. FAITH AND SACRAMENT

Astonishing as we may find it, Libermann succeeds in arriving at a discussion of sacraments. Jesus instituted the seven sacraments so that the sheep might have life in abundance and to make provision for their being fed spiritually. **'He (Jesus) instituted the seven sacraments which are channels along which divine life is brought to them unfailingly; there they receive the beatitude which comes from that life. (This He did) to help them and to assure them of that divine feeding He still prepares daily for them, seated at the Father's right hand.'** (496).

However, Libermann, moved by his unfailing care to be orthodox, warns explicitly of **'a gross blunder and a heresy the Church has condemned'**, that is, to hold that a bad shepherd may not serve, by means of the sacraments, as an instrument to bring life. For the sacraments are effectively **'unfailing canals along which Our Lord brings His grace to His sheep; the Divine Pastor Himself gives what these sacraments signify, as soon as they (the bad shepherds) make use of a sacrament.'** (496). Yet had shepherds may cause harm to the sheep because they keep them far from the sacraments, and steal from them the grace there is in getting ready to receive the sacraments.

10. SYNAGOGUE AND CHURCH - THE PICTURE OF THE JEWS

Chapter Ten contains, along with Chapter Eight, the bitterest reproach the Johannine community has against the Jew (the Pharisee). The stance of Libermann, himself a convert from Judaism, is therefore of particular interest. The overall impression one gets from reading his argument can be summarised something like this: the severity of his condemnation is a shock, so is the negative attitude derived from the gulf between Libermann and Judaism. Libermann speaks of the Jews as of enemies and foreigners, something the Evangelist did too. His bann is aimed above all at the Pharisees, **'the shepherds of the Jewish people'**.

a) *Synagogue and Church.*

Libermann, when expounding Verse 16, arranges the relationship of Church and Synagogue in an interesting way. In the past the Synagogue was **'the sheepfold where the sheep lived'**. He speaks even of **'the Church of antiquity enclosed within the Synagogue'**. **'Broadly speaking, there were no sheep but those that came from it, or which were approved of by it'**. But Jesus set up a different **'fold that is for all, that did, it is true, spring from the first, but has its own existence; is not below the former one. They were, together, a single fold, ruled and led by the one same pastor. The old sheepfold - too small to hold so many sheep - has been destroyed'**. (508).

In Verse 16 where Jesus is speaking about other sheep who are not of His fold, but who listen to His voice, it is something He does so as to **'underline the contrast that this brings out with those who ought to be His sheep by birth, who belonged to the ancestral fold but were not attentive to His voice, nor profited from His goodness and His favour. They have become lost sheep; they were no longer belonging to the Divine Pastor'**. (510). In deciding the relationship of Israel, the ancient fold, with the new one holding Jew and gentile, Libermann pictures the old one in a description that is astonishing in the mouth of a Jew, a description that shocks by its implications. **'In the Old Testament which was a sheepfold but one only of external practices, granted that what marked off the people of the law of Moses from all others were but external practices.**

What was the badge of the Israelite sheep were but external observances. For example they had circumcision as the brand and the badge of their being sheep. . .' (511). What Libermann is most concerned with here is doubtless perceptible differences, **'that marked the sheep that was Israelite'**, because he adds explicitly that (it was) **'these practices joined up with faith that formed the Israelite sheep'**. But for him faith is no distinguishing criterion as between Jew and gentile, since faith was to be found also among the gentiles **'who had faith in the One God and kept the natural law as did Job, Naaman, Jethro and others'** (511). They too were sheep **'but not belonging to the fold God established in Israel, which, finally, really was the unique fold. The faith these sheep drawn from among the gentiles had, was the same one Israel had; but in them there was not the distinctive mark the Israelite sheep had, that is, circumcision and the keeping of the Law'** (511).

To the **'imperfect oneness (that existed) in the former fold'** Libermann opposes the essential badge of the new fold, perfect union in the spirit. **'In these days, the essential unique badge of the sheep would be the soul, a mark stamped by the Holy Spirit, a badge that would bring into oneness the entire fold and would make all the sheep docile and easily led by one shepherd. It is the New Church the Divine Shepherd will form, in which will reign a perfect unity of faith. This is what the sheep will form.'** (512). Libermann sees a difference between the Old and the New sheepfold in more than a lack of unity. There exists a difference too in how the shepherds are looked upon. **'To the mind of the Jew, there existed more than one pastor, as there was more than one fold'**, and Libermann refers to the prophets and Moses.

In the way he elaborates the theme of oneness Libermann speaks harshly about people who **'construct a faith to their personal tastes, with no fear of cutting themselves off from that of the fold, or who do not want to submit to the leadership or direction of the entire flock'**. He goes on: **'such people are truly misfortunate. They leave or cut themselves off from the fold that is the only one for the sheep that belong to God. What is more, they withdraw by their own will from the power of the Sovereign Shepherd, formally stating by their action that they no longer belong to the One Only Shepherd'** (513).

b) *The picture of the Jews.*

Libermann recognises from the outset that the fold holds as one the faithful souls from both the Old and the New Testament. In the same way what Jesus' **'discourse says is applicable to the priests of the New as to the doctors and leaders of the Old Testament'** (473). In Jesus' day the pastors of the Jewish people were the Pharisees. Libermann identifies the Pharisee with the thief and the robber, for **'they do not approach the sheep through the only entry, that is the way of belief in Christ and under His command.** (488). The thief steals **'secretly and by deceit'**, the robber **'by force and openly'**. Here are the two ways of stealing used by every false pastor and **'the Pharisee ceaselessly used both'** (475).

In Libermann's judgement, the Pharisee had **'every failing fit for false pastors. They absolutely did not want to come in the name of the True Shepherd, they utterly failed to recognise Him, they wanted to follow their own ideas in all things, so that they were thieves and robbers'**. In his commentary on Verse 6, Libermann accuses them above everything of exaggerating their abilities and not knowing their own limitations. **'So far were the Pharisees from holding a poor opinion of themselves, that for them it was quite impossible to look upon themselves as false shepherds. So little did they see the evil motivations that guided them in their leadership of the flock given to them, that they had no idea of what it was Our Lord was saying to them. Above and beyond that, they lacked the slightest idea of what the duties and job of a pastor might be. They pictured themselves at the head of God's People and thought but of taking advantage of their position for themselves, as though it was for them the sheep had been created, whereas it was they who had been put there for the good of the sheep who belonged to the Sovereign Pastor'** (486). Libermann blames the Jews in general for always hearing God's Wisdom speak, comprehending nothing of what fell from His lips (525).

Libermann remarks, however, at Verse 24, that there were some among them who had doubt and were conscience-stricken after the argument. Their failing in faith and their poverty of good dispositions stopped them seeking a clearer understanding and lead them to misunderstand once again the

answers given by Divine Wisdom (525). The Jews had, in the first place, a false idea of the Messiah. **'They want to know if He is the Messiah, but they were anticipating finding Him according to their own human ideas. . . . their misfortune was to have lost all true conception of their Messiah and they had notions about Him that were quite different from what He really was'** (526). The final reason for their uncertainty and for their refusal is their lack of belief. **'Their doubt arises from their lack of faith and from no other cause'** (527).

Libermann puts this doubt and lack of faith down to their **'bad disposition'**. Because of that they do not belong to Jesus' sheep and are unable to understand His voice. **'If they do not want to believe that He is the Son of God and the Son of God the Father, it is not because of wishing to be good, fear of offence offered to God by the adoring of a man, as they seem always to show in proposing valid pretexts for persecuting Him. Yet it flows from the fact that they do not belong to the count of His sheep. For him they had neither the feelings nor the attitude of lambs. This is why they did not believe and paid no heed to what He was saying'** (528).

Linked to the lack of faith of the Jews Libermann talks about miracles once again, as being proofs of the divinity of Jesus. He does allow that because of the gravity of the question it is possible that the Jews might not have been able to have faith in Him, might even have been under an obligation not to believe in Him, but as people who were witnesses to the extraordinary miracles Jesus did, they should have believed, had they been well disposed. **'From this it follows that the Jews were without excuse for not believing. . . .'** (543). By this harsh condemnatory judgement on the Jews, it has to be allowed that Libermann fits well into the trend of Saint John's Gospel. Saint John too sees the cause of the Jews unbelief in their lack of faith and he also, as Libermann does, is unable to propose another reason for this save to say that the unbelieving Jews did not belong to the Father's chosen sheep. (Cfr John 6, 36-47; 63-65). And still the truth of history is one thing and the interpretation of Saint John and Libermann is quite another: even one who is an evangelist had not the warrant to look at the Church's enemy in a bad light, even at the case of their ancient brothers in the Faith.

11. DO RABBINICAL OR JEWISH INFLUENCES OCCUR IN CHAPTER TEN?

Are there indications in his Commentary upon Chapter Ten that support the attribution to Libermann of a knowledge of Jewish and Rabbinic tradition with regard to theological concepts and methods of interpretation? Michael Cahill, in his thesis, has carried out detailed research on this question. I can but stand by him in his opinion that 'indeed there is scarcely anything to distinguish Libermann, the born Jew, from other commentators who were Christian'¹ Perhaps the explanations by Libermann concerning the pagans (gentiles), Noah's sons, '**who had faith in a single God and observed the natural law, like Job, Naaman, Jethro and others**' (511 and 513 referring to Verse 16) may go back to his personal acquaintance with the laws of Noah. And yet this broad idea is but a commonplace of exegetical tradition, (cfr. Acts 15, 20-29).

In the commentary on the Dedication (encaenia, Verse 22) Libermann has a surprising opinion '**that the Jews had bonfires in celebration of the rebuilding and the dedication of the Temple in the days of the Maccabees. It is probable that the principal one of these fires was set in Solomon's Portico**' (524). There is no witness to this in history and it is not to be found, according to Cahill, either in Jewish commentaries or in Christian ones, or in Jewish or Rabbinic writings. We are not able to find out now where Libermann got this tradition from.

It is surprising and very enlightening, on the other hand, that Libermann has no recourse to Hebrew in the explanation of the name 'Christ' which he quite correctly derives from the Greek, but with no reference to the Jewish background (in Verse 25. p. 526).

The result is that in Libermann's Commentary upon Chapter Ten there is nothing that may not be found in any Christian Commentary.

¹ Cahill, Michael: Libermann's Commentary on St John. An investigation of the rabbinical and French School Influences.

CONCLUSION

It is my opinion that from a purely exegetic point of view it has to be said that Libermann is not in the first place interpreting the text of Chapter Ten, nor the intent of the Evangelist. This is despite an astonishingly precise and vigilant attention to the nuance of the grammar and the vocabulary of the Vulgate. Rather does he take this text as a springboard to launch his personal ideas and thoughts on the theme of 'Shepherd and sheep'. His thoughts, it is true, are both rich and profound, displaying an exceptional intuition and great experience. He is led by his care for what is pastoral and spiritual before and above all else.

We learn to understand, thanks to the Commentary, his distinctively personal attitude touching upon many problems to do with spiritual direction and the pastoral care of souls. We also have a long look at the bases in theology for his own spirituality.

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