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### 18. Social Problems and the Justice of God

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## Social Problems and the Justice of God

To M. Gamon<sup>1</sup>

*This is another letter to Fr. Gamon, a Sulpician friend of Libermann. It was at this time that the February Revolution took place, with the expulsion of the King, Louis-Philippe, the definitive abolition of the royalty and the installation of the Republic. On 4<sup>th</sup> March, Citizen Victor Schoelcher was named "Under Secretary of State, with special responsibility for the Colonies and measures to abolish slavery." On 5<sup>th</sup> March, universal suffrage was introduced. To all Fr. Gamon's queries about the February Revolution, the Church, the clergy and social changes, Libermann replies that we have to move with the times.*

Amiens,  
20<sup>th</sup> March, 1848

My very dear confrere,

I understand that M. Aurine's <sup>2</sup> delay in coming was the result of events subsequent to his last letter. He could perhaps have come without difficulty and all would have been well. However, since he has it put off, it would be better now if he waits until May. Here are my reasons:

1. The very uncertain state of affairs caused by the Revolution means that it is probably wiser to wait, maybe for a month to six weeks, to see how things turn out.
2. The financial situation. Although we have not been affected so far, we are in rather a tight spot, as the funds we have been expecting have not yet come through. We might have to join both houses together in

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<sup>1</sup> N.D. X, pp. 145-151

<sup>2</sup> A candidate for the missionary life in the Congregation of the Holy Heart of Mary; he left at the end of his noviciate.

Gard. Happily our provisions are sufficient; we have enough wheat, dry and fresh vegetables, otherwise we would have been in real trouble. Also we have enough cider and wine until the next harvest. If we do have to unite the two communities, I would like to see how things work out before getting M. Aurine to come. On the other hand, if he has enough money to manage for the moment, or if he could be ordained at Holy Trinity and thereby get Mass Intentions, he could come with no bother. Otherwise, I may write to you before May or even earlier, saying that he can come.

I told you at the beginning of this letter that we have been very tranquil here. Our workers confined themselves to breaking a few windows of public buildings and street lights, but they did no damage to religious houses. It was an accident that stones were thrown through the windows of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. Some misguided men did that while everyone else was shouting "No, no, not the Brothers!" So the disturbances here have been minimal. The clergy can move around freely, greeted by all. I've been out and seen this for myself.

You ask me what I think about our revolution. I think it is an act of divine justice enacted against the fallen dynasty which looked only to its own interests rather than those of the people confided to its care. This establishment rode rough-shod over the interests of God and the Church which were to look after the good of the people. M. Guizot, even though he was a Protestant, shared the same idea. Even what was done in the interests of religion always had the ulterior motive of looking after the establishment itself.

It was the same for all the Sovereigns of Europe. All of them, in their pride, made themselves higher than God and treated the Church as a slave. They increased the sufferings of their

peoples and did not hesitate to demoralise them in the interests of their own power and their march towards absolutism. I believe the echoes of the revolution in France will hit them as well and bring down a good number of them. The dictator of Russia will not be spared.

Perhaps you find my language rather strong. I can assure you that I'm speaking very calmly and after reflection, looking at the situation through the eyes of faith and using the same sort of language as Jesus did. Nobody should wish for evil and disturbance; but if God chooses to correct the evil done to the Church in matters of faith, and the spiritual and material harm done to the people, I would bless Him for it. But that is not how I see it: I see divine justice at work in overthrowing the pride of men and we can but rejoice when that happens.

This same act of divine justice strikes our leading politicians as well. Through their plots and terrible behaviour, they sacrificed God and the human race to their own interests, and brushed aside the faith and the way of life of the very people they were meant to be governing. Justice and humanity would be ignored by practically every government if their own interests are threatened, even if it is for something of minor importance. Is it not right that the hand of God be raised against all these criminals, who only give justice to those they fear? They are strong with the weak and weak with the strong; they pitilessly sacrifice the one and pander to the other. Think about all the wrong done in recent times against the Church, justice and truth, in France, England, Austria, Russia, Bavaria, and even in Prussia. It is hardly surprising that the vengeance of God is now making itself felt. I worship divine justice. Let us implore our Saviour to show his mercy to his Church and his people.

I've been keeping in touch with the state of affairs in the world for the last couple of years and my heart has been crushed by the dreadful injustice and bad faith of all these men and the

wickedness they have imposed. In spite of the uncertain future, I still feel very grateful towards God that he has at last shown his hand. He has turned upon these men in their bloated pride and reduced them to nothingness.

Another category of men who have been blown away by this tempest is that middle-class aristocracy which make up the legal system; they have done great harm to the Church, refusing her any semblance of justice and sweeping aside the interests of the poor. These men have sacrificed their souls and their country for their wretched egoism and completely personal profit. The anger of God, or rather his justice, has swept aside, in its turn, these puffed up monsters. All of them, great and small, have been thrown down in France and the same fate will probably catch up with them in the rest of Europe.

At last, this great and incomprehensible justice of God has squashed the major crime that this entire and perverse world has committed, doing its best to replace the worship of God with the worship of gold. Money was their God and their religion was industry, carried to the wildest extremes. France and the whole of Europe were lost and utterly corrupted by their love and esteem for gold. Any other feeling was quickly blotted out from their hearts. God has now destroyed their idol and many have been ruined in the process. It is the hand of the Lord that has struck them! Their temple has been destroyed; God breathed upon it and it crumbled.

But what is going to replace it? Who can tell. What I do know for sure is that if the Republic is as faithful as the other governments were unfaithful, then it will prosper. If it is unfaithful it will fall, just as happened in 1789. Unless evil men take over the Republic, it will be a success, but if the opposite should take place, then it too would fail. From the divine point of view, it will not survive because it will have sinned more

seriously than its predecessors, falling into even greater abuse, so that God could not bless it. Looking at it from a human perspective, it will be doomed to failure, because there can be nothing stable in such things. Perhaps there will be a period of suffering, maybe even great hardship, but this will not last too long. If the Republic follows the right path, it seems to me that justice and truth will thrive more than before and our faith will prosper.

But who will prevent the people from being misled by evil men with their own agenda? Only God. But will he? I cannot answer that. If during the upheaval he has just set in motion he has mixed his mercy with his justice, he will preserve his people from the threatened evil; but if it is an act of total justice that he intends, we must bow our heads and humbly submit to his will. (...)

You ask me if the clergy should take part in the elections. I believe they should; they owe it to God, to the Church and to France, and tomorrow morning, I am going to have myself put on the voting lists along with all those of us who are eligible. If every priest in France does the same and encourages others to do likewise to ensure a good choice for the Legislature of the Republic, then we will have a solid Constitution and a sound Executive. What blessings will ensue! How many souls will be saved as a direct result of this choice! I know that elections are not an ecclesiastical affair, but we must realise that things have changed. The problem with the clergy in recent years is that they have remained stuck in the ideas of the past. The world has changed and our human enemies are busy repositioning their artillery in new places to suit today, while we cling on to what has gone before! We must catch up with them, whilst always holding on to the spirit of the Gospel. We must attack this artillery in its new positions and not go looking for in places where it is no longer to be found.

Wanting to cling onto the old days and sticking to the customs and spirit of bygone times will make all our efforts worthless and the enemy will reinforce itself in the new order. So let us welcome the new ways with openness and simplicity, bringing to them the spirit of the Gospel. In this way, we will sanctify the world and the world will join itself to us.

Yours in Jesus and Mary,

*Fr. Libermann. Priest.*