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### 05. Spiritual help that respects the gifts given to each individual

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## Spiritual help that respects the gifts given to each individual

*To M. Luquet<sup>1</sup>*

*By the end of July 1840, Libermann had finished writing the Provisional Rule. Here he replies to a letter from a M. Luquet<sup>2</sup>, a student at Saint Sulpice who cannot decide whether to join the "Work for the Black People". He feels more attracted to the missions in China where his friend, M. de la Brunière, is going to work. He also has some relational problems with other seminarians, particularly M. Le Vasseur whom he assists in running the "Bands of Piety" (founded by Libermann).*

*In this letter, Libermann uses all his experience as a spiritual director and leader of men to explain that each person is different in his nature and his way of acting. He quotes the first letter to the Corinthians (Chapter 12) to show how these differences are an image of the Blessed Trinity. Below, we reproduce most of this letter.*

August 4<sup>th</sup>, 1840 (Feast of St. Dominic)

My dear brother,

I was very relieved to receive your letter because I feared that you were facing a big temptation, but I now see that Our Lord has protected you from it. My fears were based on the reasons that I talked about in my last letter. In such circumstances, I think it would be better to refer to M. Pinault rather than write to me. But if you want to write, it is still preferable to talk first with M. Pinault, because it is best not to remain too long upset by this sort of problem without seeking some advice.

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<sup>1</sup> N.D. II, pp. 123-127

<sup>2</sup> Consult the index

With things as they stand, I see no difficulty in your paying a visit to M. de la Brunière; he should know the state of affairs at the seminary.

When I saw M. Le Vavasseur during the holidays, I found him rather too timid. I felt that he wanted to manage people to an excessive degree. I am surprised that you were worried about this; it seems to me that the way you are following is now sufficiently clear, and since M. Pinault gave the same advice, you have nothing to fear.

The way you are relating to others is good, but do not judge them, do not condemn them and do not try too hard to bring them round to your way of thinking. In our relations with God, we must avoid wanting to convert others to our way of thinking and acting. Rigidity in this area can have unfortunate consequences. God has his plans for each person: he distributes his graces in different ways, and however hard we try, we will never succeed in changing others. If we did succeed, it would be to their detriment. I think you know what I mean by "rigidity", because sometimes you have shown signs of this tendency in yourself. This caution must not prevent us from acting; but such action must be typified by peace, gentleness, and moderation, even when we meet with resistance or come up against opposition.

Everything must be supernatural in you and flow from the Holy Spirit, but remember that whatever comes from Him is calm, gentle, modest and humble. The work of God can be summed up as something both strong and gentle and the same approach must typify our apostolic work. When I say that you must beware of yourself and allow others to act according to their own visions and attractions, I am talking of those who belong to God and who base their lives on supernatural principles. Paul talks along these lines in his letter to the Corinthians. He says that all those who do good in a spiritual and supernatural manner do it through the grace of the Holy

Spirit: "*Nemo potest dicere "Dominus Jesus" nisi in Spiritu Sancto*".<sup>1</sup> So we must not criticise people because they do not act otherwise.

"*Divisiones vero gratiarum sunt*": Graces are shared out differently, but the Spirit who gives them is the same. So we must always respect the variety of spiritual preferences and attractions that people have. They will not harm our unity, which is nothing less than the love of God in our souls and the sign of the presence of the Holy Spirit. He is the source of all these different attractions.

Saint Paul continues: "*Et divisiones ministracionum sunt* ».<sup>2</sup> He talks of the sharing of graces and spiritual gifts, which have to be distributed to different people. We are asked to be the servants of these people, to help Our Lord in the distribution of the graces that he wishes to share with them. Now this gift of administering graces and favours is done in many different ways, but Our Lord is the same in each one of us and it is He who distributes his graces through the hands of his servants. So we must avoid criticising the way that others act in distributing these supernatural gifts.

This passage from St. Paul is full of sound advice that can bring peace and encouragement for those who are working together for the glory of God. We should examine ourselves to see if our conduct is concealing some fault that is causing difficulty. If this is not the case, we must carry on in peace, love and humility and while retaining some measure of wariness as regards our miserable nature, it must not be allowed to disturb our calmness and freedom of action.

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<sup>1</sup> "No one can say "Jesus is Lord" except under the influence of the Holy Spirit" (I Cor 12.3).

<sup>2</sup> "There are varieties of service, but the same Lord". (I Cor 12. 4-5)

I cannot comment on the grace that the good Lord has given you because I do not have enough information about it. I hope that it will bring you peace of soul and that it will strengthen you against temptations and interior suffering. Wait quietly before the Lord and do not worry. If God does preserve you from these temptations and sufferings, it will teach you to live in fear and humility. Work hard at making yourself more gentle, supple and flexible; it will be a good protection against all temptation. But do it in peace and without any anxiety.

Please ask M. Pinault if he has received the three notebooks<sup>1</sup> that I sent him. They run to 140 pages. Let me know in the next letter that comes from Paris. I will send him the last two notebooks which are now complete when I get a chance.

Tell him that if M. Douai can come to Rome during the holidays, he can probably stay in the Charterhouse. The Prior seems to me to be a man of God. He has reformed several houses of his order here in Italy. He asked me for news about this business because I had already spoken to him about it. He told me that he would like to meet this gentleman because he could do nothing otherwise.

If there are any remaining mass intentions in Paris, it would be good to send them to this good Prior. He told me yesterday that he does not have any and that they are not very well off.

Yours in Jesus and Mary,

*F. Libermann, acolyte*

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<sup>1</sup> This most probably refers to his commentary on the rule.