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## The Holy Spirit in the Writings of the Venerable Father Libermann

Francis X. Malinowski C.S.Sp.

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## THE HOLY SPIRIT IN FRANCIS LIBERMANN<sup>1</sup>



### Francis X. Malinowski, C.S.Sp. (R.I.P.)

Francis X. Malinowski, C.S.Sp. (1921-2006) had a 25-year tenure at Duquesne University (1967-92), part of which as chair of the theology department. After studies in Fribourg University, Switzerland, he was ordained priest in October 1950 in Chevilly, France. He taught sacred Scripture at St. Mary Seminary in Norwalk, Conn. (1959-67), was visiting scholar in Heidelberg, Germany (1969) and Cambridge University (1973), receiving the doctorate degree in New Testament studies at Duke University in 1973. Malinowski had deep reverence for Father Francis Libermann and wrote Newsletters and insightful monographs on his spirituality. He is buried in the Spiritan graveyard at Holy Ghost Prep School, Bensalem, Philadelphia.

*...the Spirit that caused  
Jesus to be completely  
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to his Father.*

### Introduction<sup>2</sup>

Libermann's genius<sup>3</sup> anticipated the conviction emerging in the Church today that the Spirit breathes not just in chapels and churches, but in the streets and in human beings. Daily living becomes the extended chapel in which prayer and daily life are intimately joined. His doctrine of the Holy Spirit as the *architect* and *builder* of the spiritual life is simple: in prayer and apostolic life we rely on the Holy Spirit in everything, always; the Spirit does the rest. Paul's celebrated dictum, "If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit" (Gal 5:25) provides the inspiration and framework for Libermann's teaching. This article presents Libermann's teaching in two parts.

**PART I: LIFE OF THE SPIRIT.** Faith in the mystery of the Holy Spirit in us determines the intensity of our response to his action.

**Part II: LED BY THE SPIRIT.** The indwelling Spirit integrates prayer and apostolic activity into one practical experience which Libermann calls "practical union."

### PART ONE: LIFE OF THE SPIRIT

#### A. *The Spirit of Holiness*

Libermann was familiar with the prayer, "*O Jesu Vivens in Maria*" (O Jesus living in Mary), from his early years in Paris when preparing for the priesthood in an environment steeped in the French School traditions. In explaining it<sup>4</sup> he stressed the invocation "*in Spiritu sanctitatis tuae*" ("in the Spirit of your holiness"), that is, in the Spirit that caused Jesus to be completely holy, completely devoted to his Father. The Spirit as the cause of holiness recalls the primordial meaning of holiness which defines God (Isa 6:3: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord") and purges away what offends God. The invocation affirms that the Spirit's action is ordained towards bringing about adherence to God and separation from all creature preference, both essential to holiness.

It seems to me that in this life all the activity of the Holy Spirit has our holiness as its goal; and consequently, he is able to be in us a Spirit of holiness, which is about the same thing as a

Spirit of separation from every creature in order to be united with God, plunged into the bosom of God, and having no other life than his.<sup>5</sup>

Libermann calls the Spirit the author (originator) and consummator (finisher) of holiness.<sup>6</sup> In the process of holiness, the Spirit is “terrible” in the sense that he works moral purification which cannot be done without pain. This is essential for the establishment of God’s reign in us.

The means Jesus uses to establish us in his life and holiness are terrible. You can imagine what force is necessary to uproot us effectively from ourselves and as it were despite ourselves... The shock is terrible and the jolt frightening. But this flesh succumbs, it is beaten down and the Spirit of Jesus gradually takes control of us to the detriment and on the ruins of every hostile power.<sup>7</sup>

No doubt Libermann’s Jewish upbringing<sup>8</sup> left in him deep convictions of how awesome the reality of God is, and how God’s being can only be holiness, that is, holiness proper to God alone. Man unless invited and drawn by God’s Spirit, cannot approach this Holy Being, and when he does it’s only because he has been made ready through a purifying and painful experience. However, there is a positive side to painful moral purification. The Spirit dwells within the believer, not as an antagonist, but as an intimate friend, whose presence radiates sweetness and love. “All that trickles down from the divine Spirit is sweet [*doux*], gracious [*suave*], unassuming and humble.”<sup>9</sup>

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### ***B. The Indwelling Spirit***

The source of Libermann’s spirituality lay in the mystery of the Spirit’s indwelling of the baptized Christian who was made for holiness, “that he [the Spirit] may establish in us his own life of holiness.”<sup>10</sup> He describes the Spirit’s indwelling in various ways, closely synonymous<sup>11</sup>:

1. The Spirit *resides in* us, makes his home within us, which evokes intimacy and familiarity. “Remain quiet and peaceful near the Holy Spirit...who resides in you and wants to be there in everything.”<sup>12</sup>
2. The Spirit *dwells in us as in his sanctuary*. “The same Holy Spirit who did such great things in them [the great saints]

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*Our soul, for its part,  
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is in you, making his sanctuary there to produce the same effects in you.”<sup>13</sup> “Sanctuary” points to the holiness of the place of his indwelling because he himself is holiness.

3. The Spirit can be found in *the deepest recesses* of our being—not in my brain, my physical heart, my will, my hands, my feet, etc., but beyond body, intellect, and will. That beyond is “me,” what individualizes me, what personalizes me. Libermann calls it the interior of my being, the interior of my soul, the “still center” (*le centre*)<sup>14</sup> of my whole being. The Spirit and sweetness [*douceur*] reside there, because there precisely is where the love of Jesus is found, radiating out into my soul and body. It is the place where we receive Jesus’ sanctifying self-communication which is the work of the Spirit.
4. The Spirit *reposes* in our soul: “Remind yourself that the Holy Spirit reposes in your being...”<sup>15</sup> This describes the Spirit’s peaceful contentment to be there, recalling Libermann’s teaching of sweetness [*douceur*] and peace as the essential environment for the perfect working of the Spirit in us. Libermann obviously alludes to the Last Supper scene of the Beloved Disciple resting on Jesus’ breast: “Jesus dwells in the deep interior of our soul and, being master of all our powers, keeps them resting in himself ... Our soul, for its part, resting thus on its Well-Beloved, gives itself over to him completely...”<sup>16</sup>

Such descriptions of the Spirit’s presence in us reveal Libermann’s preoccupation with the Spirit. He was speaking from the heart and from his own experience. His contemporaries “...venerated him as a saint ... a man animated by the Spirit of God.”<sup>17</sup> As one person said, “I cannot doubt that this holy man [Libermann] was animated by the divine Spirit.”<sup>18</sup>

### ***C. The Spirit’s Purposes***

(1) Jesus, when addressed as good, promptly replies that no one is good except God (Mark 10:17-18). The Old Testament affirms that God must be loved without reservation, exclusively. The Book of Revelation (4:8-11) portrays the heavenly beings proclaiming God’s absolute claim over all creation and history. Libermann remained true to his Jewish roots, declaring a short time before he died that God is all, man is nothing. A. Gilbert, C.S.Sp. considers this statement of Libermann a summation of his life and teaching, bonding them together: “Such is the definitive interior experience, such is the definitive message of Francis Libermann at the threshold of the eternal face to face: God is all.”<sup>19</sup>

Francis X. Malinowski,  
C.S.Sp.

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Rooted in biblical convictions, Libermann taught that the Spirit's influence affects everything we think and do. The Spirit is to be our unique life, "*the soul of our soul*," an expression he liked.<sup>20</sup> This stresses the Spirit as the constitutive principle of supernatural life in us as well as the promoter and sustainer of that life.

All you have to do is keep yourself docile and pliable in the hands of the Spirit of life, whom our Lord has placed in your soul to be your all. He must be the principle and unique source of all your affections, desires and movements of your soul; he must be the driving-power of your mind and the guide of your soul through the movements he implants there.<sup>21</sup>

There is a "totality" in Libermann's conception of the Spirit in us: his operations determine all of ours. His mastery is to become so "natural" that the movements of our being are in harmony with his sanctifying influence just as our bodies are in tune with our soul's faculties. "Let the Holy Spirit act in you as our body lets our soul act... the only difference is that our body is compelled to receive and follow the soul's impulses, while our soul ought to willingly receive and follow the holy impulse of this divine soul of the Spirit of Jesus."<sup>22</sup> Hence he could write, "The supernatural life becomes somehow natural (ES 554).

*...your life will no  
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Jesus Christ...*

Enter fully into the designs of holiness that our great Master has over you... Abandon yourself fully to this Spirit of sovereign holiness and not only will he live fully in you, but your life will no longer be yours, it will be that of the Spirit of Jesus Christ who will be all things in you.<sup>23</sup>

Libermann wrote the above passage just after arriving at Rennes to take up the job of Novice Master for the Eudists. No doubt, he was full of excited anticipation, feeling, for the first time, perhaps, that he was no longer a servant kept around out of pity but was now "earning" his keep. The text sums up the kinds of spiritual themes found in his previous letters, themes suffused with the enthusiasm of the new convert, the insight of the novice who has just glimpsed the beckoning world of holiness.

(2) Libermann was exposed to the spiritual writings of J. Olier (1608-57) and Jean Eudes (1601-80), who were influenced by Pierre de Bérulle (1575-1629) but whose works were unavailable to Libermann, and to the tradition they left behind in Saint Sulpice and Rennes. They pointed to the permanent significance

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of Jesus' life experiences which were the experiences of God's Son.<sup>24</sup> What Jesus experienced was meant to benefit others.<sup>25</sup> "He establishes his life in us in all the states and mysteries he lived and lives now in the eternal bosom of the Father" (CJ at 6:57). The prayer, *O Jesu Vivens in Maria*, originating in the same tradition, contains that teaching: "*veni et vive in mysteriis tuis*" (come and live in us in your mysteries), asking Jesus to let us share in his mysteries so that he may live in us in the Spirit of his holiness. It is the life of Jesus that Libermann wants to see reproduced in us through the Spirit. The Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus,<sup>26</sup> he witnesses to Jesus, he leads to Jesus, he imparts the life of Jesus himself.

These mysteries are meant to be assimilated by the believer who gives the Spirit opportunity and license. Then the Spirit establishes in him the life of Jesus with its sweetness [*douceur*] and loving dedication. The work of the Spirit in the mysteries of Jesus cannot be ignored and relegated to a piety of another age. The New Testament isn't saying anything different: see, e.g., Phil 1:8; 2:5; 2 Cor 3:18; 4:10-11; Col 1:24; 2:9; Eph 3:16-19, etc. Jesus in exhorting us to learn of him because he is meek [*sweet?*] and humble of heart (Matt 11:29) is not so much inculcating attitudes we should foster as *revealing who he is* for others.

Our Lord has sent us his divine Spirit to be our whole life and to effect in us the perfections and holiness he worked in our Lord himself. Notice, friend, God's goodness - his miracle of grace and love - in sending us such a great Teacher to reveal the marvels the Father endowed his Beloved Son with and to bring them about in our souls!<sup>27</sup>

(3) The Spirit by means of these mysteries molds us in Christ's image. We become what we see and hear, what we keep in our hearts. "And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, being changed into his likeness from degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit" (2 Cor 3:18).<sup>28</sup> "The Holy Spirit would act in us according to the full force and to the full extent of grace, and our interior would be a perfect image of the interior of our Lord Jesus Christ."<sup>29</sup>

*...our interior would be a perfect image of the interior of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

In this way the power of the Spirit is engaged. The Spirit, as Scripture asserts, is associated with *power* — in fact, rarely a text or context exists in the Bible in which Spirit and power are not associated. Felix Gils, C.S.Sp., in his paper on the

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Cana episode in John's Gospel,<sup>30</sup> offers a useful resume of the biblical meaning of the Spirit as "*dynamis*" (= power) but does not do justice to its full connotation when he restricts it to mean "strength." The Spirit's "*dynamis*" not only "strengthens" the Christian to preach boldly and believe without fear, but also dramatically changes those on whom the Spirit pounces (see Judges, 1 - 2; Samuel, *passim*). The Spirit can be gently received, like oil poured out (Tit 3: 6), but can also be sensed as a "violent" agent (Acts 8:1 6, 39; 1 0: 44; 11:1 5), as it were. "The Spirit of Jesus Christ is strong and powerful; once in a soul, he takes hold of it and dominates all its acts, thoughts and feelings"<sup>31</sup>; "...being thus abandoned into the hands of his Holy Spirit, he takes hold of your soul and possesses it to such an extent that he becomes its whole life."<sup>32</sup> However, by constricting his movements and blocking his illumination, we keep the Spirit, who ought to fly free like a dove, a caged prisoner anxiously waiting release.

The Spirit would like to act, but you bind his arms and legs by your indecision and fears. Take a look at the love with which he pushes you, and you keep him from acting! Give him liberty, and you will see the great things he will work in you...<sup>33</sup>

How do we "set free" this holy and powerful Spirit? Libermann doesn't say that we "use" the Spirit, that we "move" him, rather we let him be the Spirit of holiness, "delivering ourselves tied feet and hands to his [Jesus] divine Spirit,"<sup>34</sup> for only he has the power to create that divine reflection shining on Jesus' face (2 Cor 3:17-18; 4:6). In a word, which Libermann likes to repeat, we cannot effect the supernatural, which holiness is. "It is metaphorically impossible for someone to practice supernatural virtue by the efforts of nature. One could feign them hypocritically, but, seriously, that's hardly possible."<sup>35</sup>

That's why he was wary of spiritual writers. How can they know the interior soul and its divinely-fixed destiny?<sup>36</sup> "God gives to each one interior grace by which one ought to unite oneself to God. This grace God gives diversely according to the character, spirit, and natural manner of being of each one. Hence, each one has his way, his direction for going to God..."<sup>37</sup> Logically only the Spirit knows and only the Spirit has the power to accomplish this. Libermann compares the new creation in the Spirit with the old creation: God created the first out of nothing; he does the same for the new and last creation, and that is what he prefers to do.

When God wanted to create the universe, he worked with nothing; and look at the beautiful things he made! Likewise, if he wants to work in us in order to operate things infinitely superior to all the natural beauties that have come from his hands, he doesn't need us to be unduly concerned to help him..."<sup>38</sup>

It is impossible to appropriate to oneself the presence and sanctifying action of the Holy Spirit. He is always the Gift.<sup>39</sup> Libermann felt complete helplessness in the matter of holiness, which he wanted above all. This was highly intensified by his epilepsy. He coped with debilitating and humiliating fits through an unwavering confidence in the Holy Spirit rather than in useless muscular efforts.<sup>40</sup> He lived his frequent exhortation: "Wait peacefully until it pleases our Lord to communicate with you; for this is not something that one takes, but something that one receives."<sup>41</sup> Hence, it's simply a question of letting the Spirit be who he is, the Spirit of holiness: "...if he is your life that will be a life of holiness, since he has in himself all holiness and his life is holiness itself."<sup>42</sup>

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Libermann insists that the Holy Spirit incessantly knocks at the door of our heart. The Holy Spirit makes the initial overtures, sustains the movement towards holiness, and he knows how it is to be done. "It is the Spirit who must work in our souls, more or less perfectly according to God's plans for us and according to our fidelity in corresponding."<sup>43</sup> He wrote five years earlier, in the same vein: "Jesus left you his Holy Spirit to direct you and lead you in this celestial way [Jesus as the Way]. It is this divine Spirit who turns your soul and directs it in this way. Be docile, for if you wish to go it alone, you will stray from this way. Only the Holy Spirit knows it and only he can make you walk in it."<sup>44</sup>

## **PART TWO: LED BY THE SPIRIT**

### ***Discerning the Action of the Holy Spirit***

Libermann teaches that we are led by the Spirit toward holiness in accordance with our human nature. It is not an operation of the Spirit in which we have no part. Holiness, like human maturation, does not happen without our cooperation, without our sustained intention to be united with God in all we do and experience ("...divine grace, sown in the soul as a seed of life, does not develop without our fidelity and cooperation" ES 387). He manifests his energetic presence through *our experience*.

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C.S.Sp.

*The Spirit cannot be discerned unless the noise of agitation, restlessness, anxiety is muted.*

*Hearing the voice of the Spirit is recognizing the Spirit as the source of desires, impulses, inclinations, affections, feelings, attractions...*

There is no neon sign indicating that our experience is the result of the Spirit's action. We must exercise discernment to judge its origin, for we cannot know the Spirit's action except by the effects we see in ourselves (CJ 123).

The Spirit cannot be discerned unless the noise of agitation, restlessness, anxiety is muted. "Let your interior be in silence before him, the Spirit cannot be heard when we are in interior commotion."<sup>45</sup> Consistently Libermann refers to the "voice" of the Holy Spirit that can be heard in the depths of the soul, which we recognize by the effects we experience (CJ 123). This "voice" discerned within our interior is "sweet" ("*douce*"), "adorable," "celestial," "divine," "lovable" (CJ 123). It is the Spirit who is instructing us. These "divine instructions" are "powerful and efficacious"<sup>46</sup> and they especially reveal "the marvels the Father has endowed his Beloved Son to be also accomplished in us."<sup>47</sup>

Libermann is not talking about "hearing voices" as we say of some people who say they do. He speaks metaphorically (see CJ 123). Hearing the voice of the Spirit is recognizing the Spirit as the source of desires, impulses, inclinations, affections, feelings, attractions, insights, zealous energy, impressions, enthusiasm, intentions, sentiments, dispositions, etc., which "tend towards God in all things and aim continually at union with our Lord in whom alone we find the life of our soul, which life is his Holy Spirit."<sup>48</sup>

When we desire a spiritual good, we can tell its genuineness as coming from the Spirit when we experience a wanting that stands the passing of time, that is accompanied by a certain gladness, sweetness of soul, a sense of unworthiness to be so graced, readiness to pay whatever price necessary, even experiencing rejoicing in the midst of obstacles, contradictions, resistances, misunderstandings, feeling a certain contact with the divine world. We run towards the goal of our desires and wants, like Mary in haste to see Elizabeth. We are preoccupied, the desire continuously on our minds, constantly warming our hearts, raising us above our pride and selfishness. Mary's first lines in her *Magnificat* capture the mood, rejoicing in God her Savior when great things were done to her. Something like Jesus' anxious desire to set the world on fire or his passionate anticipation to eat a last Passover with his disciples. There is released zealous energy, enthusiasm, excitement for the apostolate, joy in believing and loving, supported by hope and expectation of immediate fulfillment.

Libermann often returns in his letters to “*rules of discernment*,” that is, how do we know that what we want or would like to do is from the Holy Spirit or from our own wishful thinking. He stresses the role of the heart as the recipient of divine impressions and inclinations, but cautions against the excitement of the mind and imagination.

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An attraction triggered by nature exalts the mind, agitates and preoccupies it, distracts from God, and inclines to self-love. God’s attraction is peaceful, inclines less to the mind than to the heart, fortifies the will and makes it more faithful to God. The soul is in this case humble before God, joyous, happy, and desirous to be faithful to its vocation for which it prepares itself peacefully.<sup>49</sup>

*If you let yourself be troubled, agitated and anxious, the Holy Spirit will not be able to act in you like he wishes...*

Discernment proves itself effective when we respond to these experiences without worry or haste, but in sweetness [*douceur*] and fidelity, conscious that the Spirit is leading us. Libermann believes that the Holy Spirit is prevented from doing “great things” in us because we indulge in “negative feelings,” which keep us agitated, uneasy, ill-tempered. “If you let yourself be troubled, agitated and anxious, the Holy Spirit will not be able to act in you like he wishes...”<sup>50</sup> Resisting them brings on effort, vigilance, self-contemplation. These are not the supernatural. Libermann warns against thinking we can overcome them by muscular effort. He points out a better way that respects the primacy of the Spirit who powerfully achieves holiness without our anxious effort and distracting vigilance. And this “*better way*” is Prayer, which he calls “*Oraison*.” We expose ourselves to the Spirit, consciously, yes, but it is really the Spirit who leads us to this prayer-exposition of ourselves.<sup>51</sup> “The union of our soul with God is the work of our Lord and not ours; it is the divine Spirit who should effect it in our souls more or less perfectly, according to the designs of God on us, and according to our fidelity in responding to them.”<sup>52</sup>

*Francis X. Malinowski, C.S.Sp. (RIP)*  
*Edited by James Chukwuma Okoye, C.S.Sp.*

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>I have abridged the late Fr. Malinowski's, *The Holy Spirit in Francis Libermann*, to about 20% of the monograph. The interested reader may want to consult the original in the online *Spiritan Collection* [Okoye].

<sup>2</sup>The following abbreviations are used in this paper when referring to Libermann's writings: LS (*Lettres spirituels*, 4 vols.); ND (*Notes et Documents*, 13 vols. with Appendices to vol. 9 and vol. 13 and Complement Volume); CJ (*Commentaire de Saint Jean*, 2nd ed.); ES (*Ecrits spirituels*); ESS (*Ecrits spirituels Supplement*).

<sup>3</sup>Pierre Blanchard, *Le Venerable Libermann* (Paris: Desclée et Brouwer, 1960), calls Libermann "...this man of God who is a genius, the genius of spirituality, the genius of missionary expansion" (vol. 1, p. 9). Paul Coulon, in *Libermann: 1802-1852: Une Pensee et une Mystique missionnaires*, 1988, p. 133, considers Blanchard's work indispensable for a deeper knowledge of Libermann and "the most important work done up to this time on Father Libermann."

<sup>4</sup>Libermann knows the prayer has a history going back to Charles de Condren (1588-1641). The version of the prayer Libermann knew and commented on (LS 2.506-22, Apr 1841, to Eugene Dupont; ND 2.456-6.7) was a revision of de Condren's original which lacked "in Mary" (as in "*Jesu vivens in Maria*") which was added later by J. J. Olier (1608-1641).

<sup>5</sup>LS 1. 279, Aug 1837, to Paul Carron, seminarian; ND 1.483.

<sup>6</sup>See ND 10.568: *Règlements* 1849; LS 1.52, 1834, etc. Libermann is frequently "Trinitarian" in his description of divine activity in human beings, referring also to Jesus and the Word as author and consummator of all holiness: LS 1.60 (Word), LS 3.339 (Jesus), ES 407 (Jesus).

<sup>7</sup>LS 2.396-97, 1839, to a Eudist seminarian; ND 1.453.

<sup>8</sup>Blanchard, *Libermann*, underlines this in referring to Libermann as "an authentic representative of the people of Israel" (1.24). Michael Cahill, C.S.Sp., *Libermann's Commentary on John: an Investigation of the Rabbinical and French School Influences*, 1985 however asserts that, as regards the *Commentary on John*, his Jewish education had little impact on his interpretation of John. Recent Spiritan scholarship tends to dissent from Cahill's position, but has hardly given Cahill's work satisfactory consideration.

<sup>9</sup>LS 2.468, Feast of St. Dominic, 1840, to M. Luquet; ND 2.124.

<sup>10</sup>LS 2.516, Apr 1841, to E. Dupont; ND 2.463.

<sup>11</sup>Note the testimony of the New Testament: "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God" (1 Cor 6:19). "By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his own Spirit" (1 John 4:13).

<sup>12</sup>ND 1.416, Jan 1838, to M. R. V.

<sup>13</sup>LS 1.128, Sept 1835, to M. Delasome, seminarian; ND 1.230.

<sup>14</sup>LS 1.386, Jan 1838, to M. Tisserant, seminarian; ND 1.415. As in any divine action "*ad extra*" Libermann can attribute it variously: "... tranquil and effortless attention to *God* who resides in the core [*le fond*"] of our being" (LS 1.99, Aug 1835, to unknown seminarian; ND 1.206). "...God reposes in the depth [*le fond*"] of our being, he dwells in our innermost being [*l'intime*]... at the source of all our faculties, communicating to them a totally spiritual life and peace" (LS 1.297,

Sept 1837, to M. Gamon, seminary director; ND 1.394).

<sup>15</sup>LS 2.106, Oct 1838, to M. de Goy, seminarian.

<sup>16</sup>LS 2.594, Dec 1841, to E. Dupont, seminarian; ND 3.83. But we can also think of the Song of Songs as P. Blanchard does (vol. 1, p. 134).

<sup>17</sup>ND 13 Appendix 20, from Marie-Madelaine-Victoire de Bonnault d'Houet, foundress of the Faithful Companions of Jesus.

<sup>18</sup>ND 2.425, from M. de Brandt. "I kept these letters [from Libermann] as relics of a saint...." (ND 1.113, from Dom Salier); Pope Gregory XVI predicted after meeting him "*sara un santo*" (he will be a saint. ND 2.55, from M. Drach).

<sup>19</sup>Alphonse Gilbert, *Le feu sur la terre* (Le Sarmont: Fayard, 1985), 239-40). We find similar statements in his St. Sulpice-Issy period: "God alone, God alone, and always God alone!" (LS 1.53, Jan 1836, to M. Mangot; ND 1.274). "God alone, nothing more, nothing less" (LS 1.160, Apr 1836, to M. Mangot; ND 1.272).

<sup>20</sup>LS 1.442, Mar 1838, circular letter to seminarians; ND 1.455. LS 1.459, Apr 1838, to M. Aubriot; ND 1.462. LS 3.14, Jan 1842, to Ign. Schwindenhammer; ND 3.102. He also described Jesus in the same way: LS 2.112, Oct 1839, M. Clair; ND 2.198. LS 3.267, Jul 1843, to Mlle Guillarme; ND 4. 258.

<sup>21</sup>LS 1.366-67, Dec 1837, a circular letter to seminarians; ND 447. See LS 1.214-15, Oct 1836, to F. Liévin; ND 1.222.

<sup>22</sup>ND 3.102, Jan 1842, to Ign. Schwindenhammer, deacon.

<sup>23</sup>LS 1.301-02, Sept 1837, to Paul Carron, seminarian; ND 1.484.

<sup>24</sup>Libermann reflects a Berullian influence that came to him through Olier, Eudes and others: "It is vital to realize that the divine Incarnation of the Word in the holy humanity is not a transitory act of the divinity, nor a passing operation of the Holy Spirit, but will be henceforth an act which will last for all eternity" (CJ 648).

<sup>25</sup>Perhaps the earliest expression of this is in the confessional statement in I Cor 15:3: "...he died for our sins." John's Gospel accents heavily that whatever the believer receives is first the perfect possession of Jesus. We receive light, truth, life, resurrection, sonship, the Spirit, the bread of life, etc. because Jesus possessed them first.

<sup>26</sup>Using "*Spirit*" or "*Spirit of God*" or "*divine Spirit*" (which are favorites of Libermann) highlights God-being; the "*Spirit of Jesus Christ*" highlights the mysteries of Jesus in which the Spirit played a full role, but also emphasizes that the Spirit comes from Jesus, belongs to Jesus, and brings all things to him. Statistically, "Spirit," "Spirit of God," "Divine Spirit" predominate in volume 2 of his letters and the Commentary on John, a period identified with or close to Libermann's painful Rennes experience (1837-1839). It was a time when he had nothing else to rely on than the Holy Spirit.

<sup>27</sup>LS 2.407, 1839 to a seminarian; ND 1. 453 suggests 1837 as the date.

<sup>28</sup>See the attitude of Mary when confronted with the mysteries of Jesus: Luke 2:19, 52 (keeping in her heart the mysteries of Jesus she witnessed). The early Church's interpretation of Mary's inner life is surely meant to be a "canonical" attitude in the sense that the early Church proposes it as normative for us.

<sup>29</sup>LS 1.66, Sept 1834, to M. Leray, seminarian; ND 1.199.

<sup>30</sup>"The Marriage Feast at Cana in the Commentary of St. John," *Spiritan*

*Papers*, 20 (December 1986), 45-65.

<sup>31</sup>ND 12.361, Sept 1850, to M. Libmann.

<sup>32</sup>LS 1.368, Dec 1837, a circular letter to seminarians.

<sup>33</sup>LS 1.222, Sept 1836, to his brother Samson; ND 1.168-70.

<sup>34</sup>LS 2.44, Jul 1838, circulated letter to seminarians; ND 1.448.

<sup>35</sup>ND 8.204, Aug 1846, to J. Schwindenhammer.

<sup>36</sup>“Don’t read much and don’t put your confidence in what you read, but in the Spirit of our Lord who dwells in you, to whom you must unite and entirely abandon your soul’ (LS 2.382; 1839, circular letter to seminarians; ND 1.452); “Retain this principle well: you should not read spiritual authors in order to learn the theory of the interior life (LS 2.588, Dec 1841, to M. Lannurien, seminarian; ND 3.73). Blanchard confirms Libermann’s thought when he says, “The position of Libermann in spiritual matters is firm: rejection of systems and fidelity to the interior experience of the Holy Spirit” (1.204).

<sup>37</sup>ND 11.546; Mar 1849, at a clergy meeting.

<sup>38</sup>LS 1.295-96, Sept 1837, to M. Gamon, seminary Director; ND 1.394. “God wants to create his new spirit in you; he wants to make a new creature in you, and in the same fashion he created the universe, by his will and by his sole good pleasure” (LS 2. 290, Oct 1839, to M. Carof; ND 1.461).

<sup>39</sup>Catholic tradition has always insisted on the Holy Spirit as “*Donum Dei*” (Gift of God). This is richly developed in St. John Paul II’s Encyclical, *Dominum et Vivificantem*, 1986.

<sup>40</sup>Gilbert, *Le feu sur la terre*, 132 emphasizes the “passive” character of Libermannian spirituality and for support calls upon two sympathetic commentators of Libermann, viz., P. Blachard and Père Liagre.

<sup>41</sup>LS 2.490, Dec 1840, to E. Dupont, seminarian; ND 2.176.

<sup>42</sup>LS 1.302, Sept 1837, to Paul Carron, seminarian; ND 1.484.

<sup>43</sup>ND 3.103; Jan 1842, to J. Schwindenhammer, deacon; LS 3.15.

<sup>44</sup>LS 1.367, Dec 1837, circulated letter to seminarians; ND J.447.

<sup>45</sup>LS 1.294, Sept 1837, to M. Gamon, seminary director; ND 1.394. “...An essential point, in the spiritual life, is preserving peace of soul in order to hear our Lord” (CJ 343).

<sup>46</sup>LS 1.447, Mar 1838, to several seminarians; ND 1.455.

<sup>47</sup>LS 2.407, 1839, to an anonymous seminarian; ND 1.453.

<sup>48</sup>LS 1.532, Jun 1838, circular letter to seminarians.

<sup>49</sup>LS 3.499, Aug 1845, to Marie Bouchet; ND 7.279. Some other advice: “When God gives you a desire, it will always be with suavity. If he draws you to himself in all sweetness [*douceur*] and peace, allow yourself to be drawn ...” (LS 2.392, 1839, to a seminarian; ND 1.453).

<sup>50</sup>LS 1.171; May 1836, M. Mangot, future sub-deacon; ND 1.273.

<sup>51</sup>Blanchard commenting on Libermann’s passive-like spirituality says: “We are here at the very heart of the religious experience and spiritual doctrine of F. Libermann” (1.301).

<sup>52</sup>ND 3.103, Jan 1842, to Ign. Schwindenhammer, deacon.