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Father Libermann's Preface to His Commentary

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IMPORTANT NOTE BEFORE READING THESE PAPERS¹

by Father Libermann

May God alone be praised and glorified in everything through his blessed Son and his holy Mother Mary!

During the time I was in Rome², I led a very retired life and had nothing to do. So as not to remain thus doing nothing, I tried to find a pious occupation that might be useful for the salvation of my soul and for my spiritual progress, which I badly need. I thought I could not do better than choose the divine word, on which I proposed to meditate and write down my reflections.

Since what touches me most in the whole of Scripture is the word of Our Lord Jesus Christ in his holy gospel, I chose the holy gospel, and I preferred that of St. John, by which I have always been strongly affected, because our divine Master is speaking there almost the whole time, instructing us about the most profound, the most interior truths, and those best able to touch my soul.

The way I go about reading this holy and adorable word is to try to penetrate to the most simple and intimate depth of our divine Saviour. I never take an oblique meaning, but try to go straight to the heart of what Our Lord meant. I try to be aware of everything and to get within his mind to read his divine thought there rather than the literal meaning of the

¹ We have reprinted here only a few paragraphs from his preface.

² Francis Libermann arrived in Rome on 6 January 1840 and returned to France on 8 January 1841. He began the St John's Commentary at the beginning of September and stopped in the middle of November, leaving it unfinished – ten weeks to write 700 pages on the first 12 chapters, in his poor attic in the Vicolo del Pinacolo, using for what he called his "pious occupation" a few schoolboy's copybooks, and writing with hardly any deletions, in a climate of contemplative prayer. The original is in the archives at Chevilly.

words. I think that I derive more benefit from this approach. . .

The one who has written these lines has studied only a little elementary theology, such as is found in the French seminaries; and even then he did not cover the whole course, and he has not opened a theology book for the past ten years. In fact he has completely forgotten what he studied in the course. He has hardly ever read the Sacred Scriptures with commentaries, and the little he read of the commentaries, he read so rapidly and so long ago that he cannot possibly retain the least memory of them.

At the time of writing these reflections, he has no commentary, so that all he is doing is meditating on the words of Our Lord in a small Latin NOVUM TESTAMENTUM, as he knows no Greek. All of this will show that he is not a man well versed in the science of theology. Far from it! . . .

I hope that God in his goodness and mercy will not allow harm to come of it to anyone, but that his holy name will be glorified in this as in everything, on earth as in heaven, by his angels and saints, through all eternity. Amen.

Francis Libermann