Led by the Spirit of God (Rom 8:14)

It was the year 1831 and Francis Libermann was 29 years of age. He was told he would have to leave the seminary of St Sulpice and look for a position elsewhere. His theological studies were completed satisfactorily enough, but he could not advance to Holy Orders because of his health. "As for the world," he said, "I cannot go back to it. God, I hope, will provide for me...I am happy to have no resources but God alone". This approach disarmed the seminary council, who arranged to look after him "for as long as it pleases God". They dispatched him to the nearby seminary of Issy-les-Moulineaux, where he was put at the bursar's disposal as a combination of messenger boy, garden cleaner, wood polisher and provider of other petty services. He was permitted to wear the soutane. There he began a series of multiple contacts with seminarians and directors of the seminary, but also with the house-staff, including the door-keeper, his best disciple, and the sick in the infirmary, whose companionship he shared in his epileptic seizures. His reputation spread rapidly. "Where does his great virtue come from?" Fr Pinault, one of the directors, who knew him particularly well, expressed it thus: "He knew what it was to love and to be loved; the hand of God was on him."

He was to stay there for six years. A seminary director said about him: "God wished to give St Sulpice a model to reform it. That is why he kept Mr Libermann there so long".

Bonds of friendship and then of trust were born from this network of relationships. He gradually became the spiritual director of many of the seminarians and also of the teaching staff, even of the young bursar, his "employer". He became the driving force behind the "prayer groups" in the seminary. His letters were preserved for their value, as well as the meditation notes he composed for feasts. They were recopied and passed from hand to hand. He excelled in this genre - written conversation - for which he was supremely gifted. With a flow of written words he communicated to others the enlightenment that came to him directly from the Holy Spirit. His written style was both vigorous and awkward (he only learnt French at twenty years of age, and that in the St Sulpice milieu!), always a vehicle of hope and peace. During these six years, Francis Libermann rubbed shoulders with the spirituality of the French School, Fr. Olier's in particular, of which he was a superb commentator for the seminarians. There is no doubt that he experienced the influence of the Sulpician thought and style. But he was a mystic before everything else; he spoke from experience when he elaborated on the spiritual ways or when he asserted that he received clarifications for others. His method was existential; that is why it remains relevant.

If We Live by the Spirit, Let Us Also Walk By the Spirit
(Gal 5:25)

We have a letter of Francis Libermann's dating from this period addressed to an unnamed person. It was destined to become a veritable circular letter to people whom he directed, for it indicates the heartbeat of Libermannian spirituality, namely, docility to God’s Spirit living within us. Who better than he could reveal this secret, since it sprang from his own life?

"All you have to do is keep yourself docile and pliable in the hands of the Spirit of life, he whom our Lord and good Master has placed in your soul to be your all. He must be the principle and unique source of all your affections, all your desires, all the movements of your soul. He must be the driving-power of your mind and the guide of your soul in the various movements he implants there. It pertains to him alone to give you any impetus or impression whatsoever, as it also pertains to him to have that impetus or impression carried through. If you mix up your own violent activity with it you will only spoil everything." (LS I 366)

Different steps in the development of the interior life overlap, yet this indicates a new one. To the extent that people hand themselves over to God generously, the Holy Spirit will take
over in them and give them strength along the route of
conformity to Christ and apostolic commitment. The entire
spiritual life then becomes centred on the forceful activity of the
sanctifying Holy Spirit and on the necessary conditions for
allowing oneself to be led by him.

In the course of these years, Francis Libermann experienced
the ever increasing absolute control of the Holy Spirit over his
life. His total surrender to God brought him imperceptibly to the
total commitment of his person to the Person of the Holy Spirit.
He invites many of his correspondents to have the same
experience, teaching them the science and art of allowing oneself
to be led by the Spirit. He speaks with the enthusiasm and
conviction of one who sees, "as seeing him who is invisible".
(Heb 11:27)

He was obviously teaching others with firm assurance the path
that led him to this docility to the Holy Spirit. Little by little, and
always increasingly, he taught them "to walk under the Spirit's
impulse". In the hearts of those who "handed themselves over"
to Love, the Spirit becomes the unique source of love of God and
love of people.

From the day of his baptism Francis Libermann, wanting to
love God with his whole being, turned towards the service of
others. The living power of the Spirit brought him to love God
and people with the heart of Christ.

"After our baptism the Holy Spirit dwells in us in a living and
life-giving way. He is there to become the principle of all our
souls' movements. Whether we are changed and influenced by
him depends on ourselves, whether to follow more or less his
holy impulses. This will happen according to the more or less of
grace within us and according to the more or less of good
dispositions we have. The more the Holy Spirit becomes the
principle of the activity of our soul, the more he will influence its
feelings and attitudes, the more his life will be perfect in us and
the more we will be holy." (CSJ 82)

The witnesses who testified about the first years of his
Christian life repeated without exception that he was a man who
carried out menial services in all circumstances, constantly
available. It is not easy to be the messenger-boy of a big group
of young men, among whom his infirmity made him stand out.
What was remembered afterwards was his pleasantness and his
smile.

But in one particular circumstance the love of God urged him on,
the Spirit of holiness directly inspired him. This was the discreet
apostolate of the seminary associations, whose young members
he inspired to holiness. "This year," he wrote to a friend, "we
have to set fire to the seminary." It was an obvious allusion to
Jesus' words, "I have come to cast fire upon the earth". (Lk
12:49)

He was a member of two associations, that of the Holy Hearts
of Jesus and Mary at St. Sulpice, that of the Holy Apostles at
Issy. The records of these associations have recently been
discovered. Whenever Mr. Libermann is mentioned, it is always
in terms of the greatest admiration. He presided over many
meetings. "When he was present," wrote Mr. Levavasseur, "his
words were an inspiration, our hearts were enkindled... We
finished the recreation period more fervent than after mental
prayer." (ND I 332) No great plan of campaign; just some
general principles, and submission to the Spirit of Pentecost,
whose fire would soon spread.

He wrote about it to Mr. Dupont, one of his closest disciples.

"To put fervour into the seminary, always follow the broad
principles without ever deviating from them. The first thing, and
most important of all, is your own sanctification...(Let us take a
comparison.) You have a stove in the room where spiritual talks
are given. The stove is lit with the intention of heating everyone
who happens to be in the room; he who lights it has that
intention. Nevertheless the fire heats nothing but the stove itself
at first. Once it is hot it heats the room.

"Apply that to this work. Our Lord grants you great graces, he
inflames your desire to spread fervour in the seminary. In order
to do that he must give heat to yourself, and this fire of divine
love that he wants to put within you will not be only for yourself.
His idea is that the whole seminary become fervent. But you
have to receive it for yourself first, this divine fire, and be
warmer than the others... I will continue the comparison. If the
room was enlarged and filled with more people, and the ordinary
moderate heat did not suffice to heat the room, would we leave
the room unheated? On the contrary, we would have to put more
fire in the stove. Then the stove, even if somewhat on the small
side, could yet produce decent results. Do likewise. Pray the
Master of the divine fire to put more fire into your souls. Be
more fervent, more zealous, more filled with God, and you will be certain of good results." (LS II 491)

The apostolic method is clear. Be more filled with God and you will allow his love at the same time to flourish in you and to radiate around you. It will reach first of all those in the immediate vicinity to you by God, and those people in Christ (he says "the kingdom of God") whom his Redemption wishes to reach invisibly by means of you. In this way you will act "for the holy name and the greater glory of God".

He explained the general plan they had to Guy Leray, a young Eudist, a few days before the students returned to the seminary.

"The meetings are held in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore their sole end must be the greater glory of God and their sole foundation the greater holiness of those who come together. The more those who take part are single-minded, holy, faultless and filled with the love of our Lord Jesus Christ, the greater the good Lord will find joy and ease in being among them, and the more the work they undertake in his holy name and for his greater glory will be perfectly accomplished. His blessing and graces will be showered on it with greater abundance and a kind of profusion.

"You see what this amounts to. If we were all saints, great saints, we could accomplish what we wish for the seminary. What conclusion to draw from that? This, that we must strive to become saints, great saints, and take the most appropriate means of achieving this blessed end. The best means seem to be these: great union between the members, a union of mind and heart. We must love one another affectionately and closely, so that we can share the graces and love of God that are in our heart. These will follow from the continual sincere prayers we say for one another.

"This union must be pure, with no place for natural feelings that can infect the heart of a servant of God and poison his prayer-life. If we allow ourselves to be trapped by these natural feelings we will be good for nothing any more. Instead of advancing us in perfection our companion would hold us back and there could be a lot of hurt on both sides.

"This union and heartfelt mutual charity must, therefore, be grounded in the greatest internal and external self-denial, in the purest and most perfect love of God and in the burning desire to serve God with the fullness of our soul.

"We will profit by every circumstance to share the one great desire we have, to come to the greatest evangelical purity and holiness. By means of this understanding I feel that we can hope to do some good in the seminary, because we will be rooted solely in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, gathered together through his love and in his name. Not only will we do good in the seminary, but each of the group will begin to reap ample fruits of heavenly graces and blessings for himself.

"Therefore I suggest that we select only those who are determined to serve God from the fullness of their soul, those who aim at the same end, namely, complete and entire self-denial in all earthly objects and self-love, those who try to live this prayerful life fully in God. Above all they must have a docile mind detached from their own senses and will. But let them be humble, gentle and simple, with an outlook not different from that of the other members.

"Furthermore, an ardent zeal is desirable, based on pure love of God and detached from all self-love, a prudent, humble, peaceful zeal. You must remember the end for which we try to meet, namely, the greater perfection of all the students who compose the seminary." (LS I 131)

This long letter is particularly significant. Starting from the local situation he succeeds in describing an apostolic community! The seeking after an interior life has sometimes, without sufficient consideration, been taxed with individualism. In point of fact, Francis Libermann views union with God as reaching out to the service of men and women. This entails above all the greatest service one can render them, that of guiding them to the source of life. The poor one of Yahweh, the "servant" (Is 42:1), becomes the instrument of God's glory.

"If anyone among you does not love his brother he does not love our divine Master and beloved Jesus. More than that, Jesus' life is not in him; for if Jesus' life was in him he would have the very desires, affections and love that are found in Jesus. It is not he who would love but Jesus who would love him." (LS I 443)

Here again Mary is closely associated with the Holy Spirit's action. She is "spouse" of the Holy Spirit in such a way that the more Mary is present the more the Spirit is active, and the more he is active the more she is present. At Cana Mary, "inspired by the Holy Spirit, her spouse," acted "as witness" over her Son's
heart.

"This marriage-feast represents the Church of Jesus Christ, where souls are espoused by the Holy Spirit. Mary prays and obtains strength, joy and consolation for those who are admitted to the wedding-feast. On the other hand, she procures the joy of the divine spouse by the fidelity she inspires to all his wishes." (CSJ 64)

A fundamental attitude for allowing the Holy Spirit to act freely is that of humility and trust. This attitude places us in dependence on God in serenity, cheerfulness, freedom of spirit. Nisi efficiamini sicut parvuli ("unless you become as little children") is a Gospel theme he proposes to all his correspondents, young men and women, religious women and priests: to be as a child firmly holding its father's hand and looking to him for everything, totally "dependent".

"Try to keep your mind always free, cheerful and open... This openness of mind and heart is indispensable for acquiring a true interior spirit. It is essential that you be open, simple and gentle with everyone... Go your way cheerfully, simply, without dissipation, but without strain or inhibition, without a thought of being judged well or ill, of pleasing or displeasing, without wanting to appear important, to attract people's esteem or goodwill. God alone, have God always in view, and your mind will enjoy that freedom. In the course of conversation, observe moderation, peace, gentleness, not centred too much on yourself. Forget yourself completely. In fact, every time you start thinking about yourself you will become complicated. Once recreation is over, think no more about what you have said and done... If an indiscreet word escaped you that may have displeased a confrere, do not bother about it; humble yourself before God in all tranquillity and think no more about it... Yes, forget yourself as much as you can, so that your mind and heart may be taken up with God alone." (LS I 75)

Do Not Grieve the Holy Spirit of God
(Eph 4:30)

To die in order to live: Francis Libermann explains to his close friend, Ignatius Schwindenhammer, how this death to oneself is lived out when one is willing to be led by the Holy Spirit.

"So that all the powers of our heart can be encircled, enfolded and filled with the Spirit of Jesus, we must be dead to ourselves and to all things. This is our great employment, to die to ourselves. I think I remember saying this to you before. All we have to do, all our soul must apply itself to, is to be disposed - using the assistance of the very strong grace within us through the good Master's mercy - to follow the Holy Spirit's impression and movements.

"The Holy Spirit wishes to be the soul of our soul. It is up to us to make him absolute master of that poor soul, so that he can
share his life and activity with it. We must let him act in us as the body lets the soul act; the soul moves it as it thinks fit and as it wishes. The only difference is that our body has no choice in receiving and following the impulses the soul gives, while our soul must voluntarily receive and follow the holy impulse of this divine soul, the Spirit of Jesus. Now, our soul must be dead of itself and in itself, as our body is. What happiness and holiness would be ours if this were the state of affairs, if our soul had no more tastes except those that the divine Spirit gives it; if it had no desire, affection, activity or movement other than what it receives from the Holy Spirit; if we loved absolutely nothing, if we boasted of nothing, if we entertained no pleasure or satisfaction, if we had neither life nor volition except in him and through him? Then nothing would place obstacles to our soul’s perfection and sanctification. On the other hand, by our own desires and affections, our self-will and activity, we confuse and upset the action of divine grace within us, we oppose it constantly, we remain forever within our own life.

"This, then, is to be your whole line of action. Do not work agitatedly, do not make efforts to unite yourself more or less perfectly to God. The uniting of our soul with God is our Lord’s work, and not ours. The Spirit must work in our souls, more or less perfectly according to God’s plans for us and according to our fidelity in corresponding. Without him, all your work and effort will be useless, even harmful, because the more you labour to affect this union with God the more there will be of your own activity; and the more there is of your own activity the less there will be of the Holy Spirit’s activity. And yet he alone can affect this union in its different degrees, while our own activity and efforts are worthless.

"Maintain a great attitude of gentleness and humility in your mind. Never let it become either bitter or rigid. Remember the words: Attingit a fines usque ad finem forter, et disposuit omnia suavitius. Wisdom reaches mightily from one end of the earth to the other, and she orders all things well." (Wis 8:1) (ND III 102)

"The form of God will appear in the soul". Little by little the Holy Spirit, whom the liturgy of the Dedication of a Church compares to a sculptor, will achieve God’s eternal plan for a particular person.

"When we enter upon this way of pure faith disengaged from the senses, we see ourselves as a heap of misery. For all that, we must not become upset or agitated but wait until it pleases God to deliver us. If he does not deem that opportune, then we content ourselves with being poor people before him; we know that nothing we do is worth anything, yet at the same time he will do everything in us. In this way, we gradually come to act no more by our own movements; the Spirit of the Lord then does everything in us, and we acquire supernatural strength in all our activity. Nothing can stop us, our activity becomes wholly divine, for nothing more of ourselves is found therein, and the Spirit of the Lord is its sole instigator, at least in great part.

"We do not see all this at first. We consider ourselves lukewarm or bad. Still, there must be no worrying on our part but always the intention of persevering. The light will come before long and the form of God will appear in our soul." (LS I 414)

"'Be holy because I am holy,' said the Lord. To be holy is to enter upon a communion of life of sonship with the Father, through Jesus, under the action of the Spirit of love.

'Be holy, my dear friend, because the Father of our Lord is holy and because his Spirit, who must live and act in you, is holy. Enter fully into the plans of holiness that our Master has for you. Your life will not be your own any more, it will be that of Jesus Christ’s Spirit within you. To achieve it, Jesus must be the sole light of your mind, the sole driving-power of your will and all your activity, the sole desire of your heart, the centre and principle of all the affections of your soul. There must be no suggestion of anything foreign to this Spirit of holiness and love in you. Your soul must experience no feeling, sensation or impression whatsoever, it must have no life, except in this Spirit and by this Spirit of Jesus’ love. Then you will be able to say that he lives in you and is your life; if he is your life, your life will be one of holiness, since he contains all holiness in himself, his life is holiness itself." (LS I 301)

The Fruit of the Spirit is Love
(Gal 5:22)

The Holy Spirit who is active in the deepest recesses of the heart is also the Spirit of Pentecost. He breathes in the Church,
distributes his calls and charms and spreads love among human beings as sign and fruit of his presence. "Jesus must be loved in people as fruit is loved in its shell," says Francis Liberman. "Have an 'active' charity, that is to say, a real supernatural affection which makes you ready to please people. This will make you thoughtful, gentle and humble, it will enable you to put up patiently with the faults of others...and have a 'negative' politeness." "Do not reverse that order," he said to a young man of a well-to-do family, "as worldly people do who have an active politeness and a negative charity: their heart is not with their lips." (LS II 565)

He outlines the respective roles of the Spirit of God, the soul and the human heart and mind in a fine extended metaphor.

"The following may help you for your manner of acting in general. A ship has its sails and its rudder. The wind blows into the sail and makes the ship move in the desired direction. It advances by means of the sails and takes a general direction. Nevertheless, this direction would be too vague and could even put the ship astray. That is what the rudder is for; it steers the ship exactly in the direction it should take without going astray at all.

"Your soul is the ship, your heart represents the sail, the Holy Spirit is the wind; he breathes into your will and the soul goes forward, forward to the end God destined for it. Your mind is the rudder that must prevent you from straying outside the straight line determined by the divine goodness, as could happen from the strength and liveliness given to your heart." (ND VII 148)

He wrote to a friend: "In order to request that Jesus come and live in us, it suffices to ask that his Holy Spirit dwell in us to establish Jesus' life there, to make us live by Jesus' life; for the Word of God only lives in us through his Holy Spirit dwelling within us." (ND II 463)

He often repeats the conditions for this life in the Spirit: recollection and self-denial, in an atmosphere of gentleness, trust and peace. He defined recollection as a habit of presence to God and presence to oneself: presence to God practised as an exercise in time of solitary prayer and as an act throughout the day; presence to self, which presupposes that a person remains habitually master of his reactions, of his natural violence; finally the Gospel radicalism of self-giving: "Let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me." (Lk 9:23)

"By means of this perseverance in gentle patience, our soul becomes strengthened little by little in the service of God and relies on him alone, abstracting completely from itself in order to live in God alone and in order to surrender completely to his guidance. This is the beginning of that loving hope which consists in a humble, peaceful, loving surrender into our Lord's hands, to whose care we leave ourselves and all our concerns. This hope is never confounded; it is made living by the divine charity poured forth into hearts by the Holy Spirit." (LS II 273)

For everyone, lay or consecrated, presence to God is lived in the midst of daily work or leisure.

"Our genuine sense of the presence of God ought to consist in this that our desires and affections are uniquely centred on him. If we love him thus with all our desires, all our affections and all the willing of our soul, we will never lose his sacred presence. We will live before him, even when we are not thinking of him. A person who perseveres continually in the single-minded desire to be pleasing to God in everything, and never seek his or her own satisfaction, is in continual mental prayer, even at those moments when the mind is obliged to deal with things not directly connected with God, like study or recreation. I think that is the meaning of the Gospel injunction: Oportet semper orare et non deficere (They ought always to pray and not lose heart.)" (Lk 18:1: LS I 163)

On the day preceding great feast Francis Liberman was accustomed to prepare a meditation for the prayer-groups or "bands of piety" of the seminary. On the vigil of Pentecost he circulated the following reflection, which found its way later into the Supplement to the Spiritual Writings. The conditions he lays down for life in the Spirit are those he lived. This is his finest summary on the subject.

"If our Lord gives us his Holy Spirit, it is not so that, even partly, we may live according to our own spirit. He ought to be our leader, our love, our all. Since the quality proper to this Spirit is to be God's love, it follows that everything in us must proceed from this love, be accompanied by it and go straight to God. He has been given to us to become the life of our soul...

"If we wish to hear and see him and advance under his direction, we must attend to his inspirations, keep our glance continually turned towards him, practise interior silence, that is,
of all our passions and of all our soul's faculties, avoid excessive interior activity... We must wish to know no other wisdom or prudence than what comes from the Holy Spirit, and by this interior path avoid all natural efforts to become united to him...

"All of this must take place in complete peace and tranquility of soul; in this disposition we must wait for whatever he will please to show us and have us accomplish, always prepared to follow and never precede him." (ES 79)

The passivity he preaches is an active disposition of love. "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us," (Rom 5:5) He has been given to us in such a way that it is enough to let ourselves be led by him. "For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God." (Rom 8:14) The passive verb indicates sufficiently that it is less a question of activity and movement than of allowing God to act in us and move us. Images are multiplied to express the idea: to be like a child who looks to its mother for everything, the clay in the hands of the potter, the statue in the hands of the sculptor, the anvil before the blacksmith. God's moment must be awaited, we must allow ourselves to be led, practise patience in trials, advance no further than grace impels, adopt God's rhythm: his ways are not our ways.

"Moderate your exterior activity in some small way so as to keep your soul in perfect stillness and remain all the time in tranquil interior attention to the grace of the Holy Spirit, who is within you." (LS I 74)

Free time for solitary prayer is clearly indispensable. He dilates at length on its forms and qualities. After prayer of affection, this is now prayer of simplicity. It consists in a peaceful rest, in which one is disposed to receive enlightenment from God and act under the guidance of his Spirit. "Pay particular attention to adoration; if it is fervent, everything will be fervent." "The more the activity of the Holy Spirit is in your prayer, the more fervent it is." Little by little, with time and perseverance, mental prayer will influence life. Life, more pregnant with God's Spirit, will in its turn influence mental prayer. There is reciprocal activity, in which Fr. Libermann invites us to bring our state of prayer into our activity: "Go to God as you are during the time of mental prayer".

"We must not pray by our own strength and desires. We must allow the Holy Spirit to ask in us and through us, surrender

ourselves fully to his movement and guidance." (ND 1501)

"Our soul is only a capacity, it has nothing of itself and in itself. It must fill itself in God, and that by the union of mental prayer. Consequently, it must receive rather than take. Therefore the perfect state of prayer consists in this that the powers of our soul are united to God by a contemplation of silence, rest, expectation. If that is true, its cooperation consists in being open to God's gifts and receiving them. It would also consist in being disposed and ready, by God's grace, to be united in that way to him, in order to receive his gifts.

"I feel that this is how things are, unless I am mistaken; the latter is very possible, for I know that I am indeed an ignoramus." (ES 217)

Filled With the Holy Spirit
(Acts 2:4)

In a letter to a seminarian who was to become a missionary in Indochina, Fr. Libermann exalts the greatness and beauty of this life in the Holy Spirit, which blossoms into "love for God and love for people".

"When the divine Spirit acts within us our soul is burning, and, in the midst of this fire, it is as it were borne along and united to God without trouble, upset, agitation or friction, with no movement of self-love. On the contrary, it experiences a movement of self-abasement, not only before God, but within ourselves and before all creatures. How happy we are when we find ourselves under the divine Spirit's power, completely under the influence of Jesus' Spirit of love. Everything becomes love within us: all our action, even the slightest movements of our soul, and still more all its deeper movements and activity; all is love. It is love for our God, before whom we never cease to fall prostrate in our nothingness; it is love for all human beings, without bitterness towards anyone or judgement of them. Our mind is calm, not worked up against people who hurt us, who thwart, persecute or torment us in any manner whatsoever. Good people and bad, people who think like us or not, nobody can take our mind from its repose in God or draw our displeasure, whether rightly or wrongly.
"I tell you these things, my dear friend, so that you can distinguish within yourself what comes from the divine Spirit and what from your natural activity, which would damage Jesus’ life in your soul.

"I will give you still another rule that will enable you to distinguish our good Master’s movement from your own activity. When Jesus acts by his Spirit he gives impulse to the will and thereby activates all our powers. Our mind is sensitive to our Master’s action, but the movement is not directly impressed on the mind. Thus the divine Spirit acts uniformly; his action is strong and smooth, involving no agitation and, moreover, tending to union with our Lord." (LS II 599)

The criteria for discernment of the Spirit are, therefore, fervour of will and humility of heart, a combination of gentleness and strength, peace replacing agitation or preoccupation and, above all, loving surrender to the Father’s will, which is always welcomed in the desire of loving him and making him loved. Everything that leads to discouragement is displeasing to God. "A person belonging to our Lord should have joy of heart and serenity of mind." (Letter to Pauline, his niece; ND IV 430)

"I am the way, and the truth, and the life." (Jn 14:6) Francis Libermann comments at length on these words, showing how Jesus lived them out through the activity of his Spirit.

"Make sure you pay attention to our Lord’s word, Ego sum via, ‘I am the way’. Your interior eye, that is, your mind, must always be peacefully directed towards Jesus living in your soul. You must go to the Father through this divine way of Jesus alone, a way which is not hard to find and not far to seek. It is at the bottom of your soul; you have simply to remain there and you will go straight to the Father. Jesus has left you his Holy Spirit to guide and lead you into this heavenly way. This divine Spirit turns your soul and directs it in that way. Be docile, for if you want to proceed alone you will stray from the way. Only the Holy Spirit knows it and can enable you to take it.

"Our Master adds: Ego sum veritas, ‘I am the truth’: a wonderful title, beyond all explanation. Jesus is the truth. Consequently, by keeping to the way which is himself, through the grace of his divine Spirit, we possess the sovereign truth. Once on that way, a person has already arrived. What more could we need? Remain in peace then in this wonderful way which is within you. Since the way is within you, in your inmost depths, stay there. This is and always will be all truth within you.

"The truth will be the light of your mind and the love of your heart. Remain very close to this dear adorable Lord who dwells in you and who is all truth in you, and then he will be your life.

"When he is the light of your mind and the love of your heart, and when you have yielded yourself into the hands of his Holy Spirit, he will captivate your soul and take complete possession of him, he will become its life. Then, my dear friend, you will begin to live properly, for Jesus is authentic life. This is what Jesus meant when he said, Ego sum via, veritas et vita." (LS I 367)

"O Jesus, living in Mary, come and live in us in your Spirit of holiness." Libermann explains the opening of Fr. Conden’s famous prayer in these terms:

"In order to request that Jesus come and live in us, it suffices to ask that his Holy Spirit dwell in us to establish Jesus’ life there, to make us live by Jesus’ life; for the Word of God only lives in us through his Holy Spirit dwelling within us. So in this prayer we are not asking him again to live in us with his Holy Spirit, but with his Spirit of holiness. This indicates his apartness from every creature, his horror of everything that would separate him from his heavenly Father, and his distancing himself from it; it indicates his life as totally consumed in his Father, a life in which his Father’s holiness was his. We ask him to come into us in this spirit, so that he will reject, expel and destroy from our soul every life foreign to the Father’s life in him and his life in his Father. We ask that through this Spirit of holiness he would purify us of everything that is incompatible with God, that he would set us apart from all creatures, withdraw all our affections from every created object and from ourselves and unite them with his own, which are all centred in his heavenly Father, that he would consolidate his own life of holiness in us." (LS II 516)

This is an ideal hard to reach. But the saints allowed God to realise it in them. We too must be clear that God will work his "marvels of grace" in us as well.

"It is vital that in our thinking, feeling, relishing of things and acting there be no movement in our soul independent of the impulses of the Holy Spirit within us. It is essential that the natural man die and that only the spiritual man remain alive in
us. It comes back to what St. Paul said: *Vivo, iam non ego, vivit vero in me Christus.* "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Gal 2:20). I well know that human beings are not capable of coming to that stage in the strict sense, it is the lot of the elect in heaven only. But we must strive towards it as much as we can, in order to share as perfectly as possible in the graces that our Lord Jesus Christ freely gives us in the holy Eucharist." (LS I 85)

"The same Holy Spirit who did great things in the saints is within you. He has made his dwelling there as in his sanctuary, in order to produce the same effects. Whether he will succeed depends on yourself. Maintain a calmness within, watch for his graces and movements in order to let him act in all freedom within you. Shun every feeling and movement of self-love, whim, self-satisfaction, natural pleasure and liking, everything that could become an obstacle. Let your only desire - but the strongest one - be to live wholly by his life, totally faithful to his voice. Then you may be sure that he will work the greatest wonders of his grace within you." (LS I 128)

"Whoever loses his life will preserve it," Jesus says (Lk 17:33). Francis Libermann insisted regularly on the necessity of "losing oneself totally"."

"Remain tranquil and peaceful in the presence of the Holy Spirit. He wishes to inspire all your activity, interior and exterior, and all your hopes. Stay calm in his presence, do nothing by your own ever-agitated spirit. Bring it finally to silence before him who resides in you and wishes to be everything for you. Forget yourself completely and lose yourself. Note those last words." (ND I 416)

The same Spirit who fills us with the love of God gives us great charity and a great understanding of human beings. The compassion God has for us the Holy Spirit impels us to have for others.

"Our fallen, human nature has to be watched constantly, full of malice as it is and always prone to see evil in others and punish and loathe it, while we are quite prepared to excuse ourselves in our own cases. The grace and light of the Holy Spirit do the exact opposite. This divine Spirit is all charity. He does not criticise or lead us to criticise. He makes us look at ourselves and our bad points, he inclines us to believe good more easily than evil. When he makes us see evil in our neighbour, it is not with the horror, disgust, pain and loathing that we normally feel about people in whom we see evil. On the contrary, we experience a loving compassion that tends to remedy the evil of our companions gently and smoothly.

"It should not be too much trouble to experience special compassion, affection and tenderness for people in whom there is evil, and especially for those in whom the evil proceeds from illusion. We have only to glance at ourselves. How wretched we are! God has been good, tender and compassionate towards us, and we refuse to be the same towards others!" (LS III 299)

Finally, the Holy Spirit gives gifts and particular attractions within the Church. "No one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit." (1 Cor 12:3) He is, therefore, the soul of the apostolate.

He addressed this message to Fr. Luquet, who was to become apostolic vicar of the Paris Foreign Missions Society later on, and who was to write about Fr. Libermann: "I never knew a priest who seemed so consumed with holiness as Fr. Libermann".

"Let everything be supernatural in you and come from the Holy Spirit. Now everything issuing from the Holy Spirit is gentle, mild, simple and humble. Strength and mildness, that is divine activity; it also summarises all apostolic action. When I tell you to distrust yourselves and let others act according to their insights and attractions, I mean to speak of people committed to the good God, who act on pure supernatural principles. In relation to that, I am happy to quote an important passage of St. Paul to the Corinthians. All those who do good in a spiritual, supernatural way do so by a grace of the Holy Spirit: *Nemo potest dicere: Dominus Jesus, nisi in Spiritu sancto* (1 Cor 12:3). Consequently we must not annoy people because they do things differently. *Divisiones vero gratiarum sunt: 'Now there are varieties of gifts', but the Spirit communicating them is the same. It follows that the various spiritual tastes and attractions must be respected, and should in no way detract from spiritual union. The latter is nothing other than God's charity in our souls and the sign of the Holy Spirit's dwelling in each one of us. He is the one principle of all the attractions." (LS II 468)

Francis Libermann was now totally under the guidance of God's Spirit, the sevenfold Spirit: filial fear of grieving the Lord or offering him resistance ("to fear with love, through love"); strength mingled with gentleness to sustain the interior combat;
filial piety towards God; knowledge of the created world and of creatures, which blossoms into continuous praise and thanksgiving; counsel to discern life’s orientations (“a grace that is purely for others”); understanding of the Word of God in order to fathom it and give witness to it; wisdom, which enables us to relish God and glorify him. The fruits of the Spirit are manifest, such as they are, and enumerated in the letter to the Galatians: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.” (Gal 5:22)

"May the Holy Spirit fill your soul in order to be your consolation, your joy, your strength, your light and your love. Our good Lord sent us his divine Spirit in order to be our life, to bring us to the perfection and holiness he was the source of in our Lord himself. Notice what goodness this is on the part of our God, what miracle of grace and love, to send us so great a Master to instruct us in all the wonders that the Father placed in his beloved Son, in order to bring them about in our souls too. What holiness can be ours if we are faithful in listening interiorly to the divine Spirit, if we are docile in following his movements and assiduous in obeying them, if we give him full freedom to establish his life in our souls.

"It is beyond belief. But all this must take away our pride and drive us to abase ourselves in humiliation before God; at the same time it should carry us away in love towards the Blessed Trinity, for that is our God’s great mystery of love." (LS II 407)

As the first Easter gave rise to the first Pentecost, each Eucharist imparts a fullness of the Holy Spirit to us for our life and apostolate. This is drawn from the great mystery of Jesus’ love for us. It is well known that all great converts from Judaism are passionately devoted to the Eucharist.

"I cannot let this occasion pass without saying a word on our Lord Jesus Christ’s immense love for us. Just see this love in the Blessed Sacrament and it will astound you. When this devouring fire comes to us, you might think it would reduce us to cinders, but no, it does not. In the greatness of his love, he desires to transform us and change us into his very love. He wishes to make us one with himself in his Father. The Father is in him, Jesus, and then Jesus comes into us so that we may be consumed into him and into his Father, who are one.

"I believe that this great consummation of our charity, which will only be accomplished in heaven, should have its finest beginning here - below in the Blessed Eucharist, masterpiece of our Lord’s union with his holy ones on earth. He made sure that we would be in perfect union with him all the time by giving us his Holy Spirit, who achieves all holiness. But in the Blessed Sacrament he imparts to us such a fullness of the Holy Spirit and such a great gift of union and love that we would certainly die if we saw it clearly. I think I can understand why our Lord wished to hide himself in this sacrament. If he had shown himself sicuti est, such as he is’, it would be impossible to go on living after receiving him...

"All of this should give us a little glimpse of what we should be after receiving holy Communion so many times, to what extent our heart should be united to God and surrendered to him. This is the attitude to watch. If we have completely surrendered to him, being thoroughly single-minded and detached from all trace of self-love, earthly desires, love of our ease and pleasure and all those other miseries, we would soon see the unheard of and unthinkable prodigies of Jesus’ love in the Blessed Sacrament." (LS I 51)

As for the spiritual director who accompanies people on this exalted step in their prayer life, he must discern and support the Holy Spirit’s action and take great care not to take the Spirit’s place. His only job is to help these people to remove the obstacles, for "it is up to God to lead them." (LS II 310) He more than anyone else must be "passive" under the powerful action of the Spirit of God, who fashions saints. Francis Libermann wrote to one director:

"What means should a director use for coming to know God’s general line of action in a soul, either for its state as a whole or for its particular attractions? It must be the light of God alone, which he should receive in prayer and in continual union with our Lord. St. Paul’s remark is very applicable here: ‘What person knows a man’s thoughts except the spirit of the man which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God’ (I Cor 2:10-11). If we are united to this divine Spirit, he will enable us to penetrate into the depths of the divinity, when that is useful for the salvation of souls."

(LS II 311)

"In all this, place your trust in God alone. Acknowledge your poverty and powerlessness before him. Look to his great mercy for everything: Spiritus ubi vult spirat, ‘The wind blows wherever
it wills" (Jn 3:8). It is our job to try to bring people to God and bring them to the greatest perfection of the Gospel; but we must be sure not to count on our own words and deeds. If we succeed, we may rejoice before God that he has been pleased to draw one human being to himself and we will wait until he is pleased to answer our prayers. In all things, God's holy will must be the sole object of our love." (LS I 102)

_Christ Has Set Us Free_  
(Gal 5:1)

"Give full freedom to the Holy Spirit." Seeing Francis Libermann's emotional emphasis on this point, one senses that the moment had arrived for him "to cross the threshold". Some people refuse to make the definitive gift of themselves whereby they would place the rudder of their lives into the hands of the Spirit of God. These people may continue certainly to serve God and can do much good, but, since they have not been able to resign themselves to the complete sacrifice, they will never take flight along the way of holiness; as a result, they will never fully realise the vast, redemptive possibilities to which Christ invites them.

"These souls remain forever divided between God and creatures. They never possess unstinted generosity, they do not take flight in the ways of God, although they walk therein. Yet they do much for the love of God, they serve God and work for his glory, but their love is often mixed even though, for all that, it remains good and true." (ES 229)

Experience confirms the solid foundation of that quotation. Every word is well chosen and reveals an exceptional knowledge of human weakness.

"They need a good director at that moment, and perfect obedience still more." (ES 228)

"The general run of people who wish to serve God, no matter how good they are, are in absolute need of being directed." (ES 354)

What is lacking? Sometimes very little: that last attachment to oneself, one's reputation, one's job, one's interests: an emotional bond one refuses to break; an unadmitted false fear of totally surrendering to God; a subtle resistance to yielding to God's ways, which are always mysterious; a negligence about remaining alone with him in prolonged prayer so that he can "illumine the eyes of the heart".

"You could never have it both ways. You could never be half for God and half for the world. You must decide once and for all and take sides; with the character you have, you would never steer a middle course. But there is no reason, all the same, for getting painsed or upset. On the contrary, you should rejoice in the necessity to give yourself completely to God and sanctify yourself. O my dear friend, how great and wonderful is God's mercy towards us; he loves us with a love that has chosen us." (LS II 102)

"To cross the threshold" is the famous expression of Fr. Lallemant to indicate the final thrust in coming to true freedom. "Christ has set us free." The final struggle resembles at times that of Jacob with the angel, until the moment of a jubilant, complete self-surrender into the hands of God. "Thou layest thy hand upon me." (Ps 138:5) Francis Libermann's breathless style of writing when he deals with this subject reveals the importance of what is at stake: the fashioning of saints of God and great apostles of Jesus Christ.

_The Counsellor...Will Teach You All Things_  
(Jn 14:26)

The Paraclete, he whom we call to our side, the consoler, the defender, the advocate, the gift of God most holy, the source of living water, fire, love that recreates all things and renews the are "the two hands of God", according to St Irenaeus' lovely image. The Spirit of Jesus leads us to unity of heart with Jesus, so that his Love may triumph and shine through in us.

"The whole ardour of your desires ought to be in your will and your heart; your mind ought rather to receive than to act." (LS II 259)

As Pierre Blanchard wrote in an article in _La Vie Spirituelle_, February 1953, "this last statement uncovers the secret of
Libermannian spirituality by highlighting the principle that governs it: passivity”. Fr. Liagre, one of Fr. Libermann’s shrewdest commentators, particularly in a long, drawn-out parallel between Fr. Libermann’s teaching and that of St. Therese of Lisieux, wrote: “Libermannian spirituality is basically a spirituality built on passivity”.

In point of fact, it has been the people most “passive” before God who have been most active among people. Throughout the history of the Church, and in our day too, the greatest saints of the apostolate, those who leave behind them a solid and lasting imprint, those who are the most enterprising because they are the most zealous, are those who, in whatever state of life they find themselves, have allowed the Spirit of God to be their strength and to use them for the mission of Christ. Another famous convert Jew, Bergson, wrote: ”The soul is active and is acted upon...The mystics are passive with regard to God, active with regard to people.” (The Two Sources, p. 248)

Francis Libermann epitomises this in a moving prayer:

"O most holy and adorable Spirit of my Jesus, let me hear your gentle voice. Refresh me with your precious inspiration. O divine Spirit, I wish to be before you like a light feather, so that your breath may carry me where it will and I may not offer it the least resistance." (CSJ 89)

I hand myself over to God's disposal

that he may do with me as seems good to him;

in life and in death,

in time and in eternity

all for him alone!

CHAPTER FIVE

You Have Laid Your Hand On Me (Ps 138)

In 1837 the Superior General of the Eudists asked the Sulpicians in Paris to find him a novice master to reconstitute his noviccate in Rennes. "Take Mr. Libermann," they said, "he is a cleric in minor orders but will be as useful to you as a priest." Francis Libermann, on the advice of his spiritual director, entrusted himself to Providence and accepted the position.

Alas! a move was made first to prove his virtue by placing him in the rank of a novice. "I am not the novice director," he wrote. "On the contrary, I am the last of all." Another ambiguity was that the "last of the novices" had to give spiritual talks to his companions, who were priests and deacons; he had to "form their consciences". He saw himself criticised and contradicted; he was whose every word the seminarists at Issy hung now seemed unable to touch hearts. His best friend opposed him, nervous tension wore him out; once again he fell down in an epileptic fit at the start of a talk.

It was failure of a particular kind. It must be looked at closely to see what final purifications lie in store for an apostle, what night of the spirit before the dawn of permanent union with God, what instrument God uses for an extraordinary mission.

What had happened? Did he encounter mistrust or hostility? Did his extreme sensitiveness dramatise difficulties that were simply pedagogical? Did his intuitions influence his judgement? Was it simply that his dreadful sickness - back with him in full strength - wore him down? All these human factors no doubt played their part but the evidence is that God once more had "laid his hand on him." (Ps 138) He, the spiritual director with a reputation, saw himself questioned, contradicted by the few novices and the superior himself, slighted by one of his dearest disciples. He seemed unable to touch hearts. He felt useless in God’s Church, even doing damage. And yet it would become